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Presentation Transcript
Who Are You Really?
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Well, everything I'm going to say today just got said in the songs and the psalm. And I suppose some speakers might feel a little uncomfortable about that, but, to me, it's just nice to be in good company and on the same page.

I'm really glad to be here with you today – great group, good feeling here, a lot of good energy.

So what are we going to talk about today? Well, we're going to talk about *Who Are You Really?* Who are you *really*? We all form an identity. And that's based on perceptions and beliefs about who we are. So who are you? Who are you *really*?

It all starts, I think, with us thinking about this part of who we are. Then it moves, sometimes, to this part of who we are – our nationality, our ethnicity. Sometimes we define ourselves by what we do.

I had a thirteen-year-old girl come to my counseling office once, and I asked her, "If you wanted to tell me one thing about yourself that would help me get to know you, what would it be?" And she said, "I'm a gymnast." I mean, that's one way people do it.

I was driving down the street the other day in Albuquerque, and I saw a bumper sticker on the back of a pickup truck, and it said, "Fish fear me." So how would he identify himself? Frightener of fish – fish frightener. You know, it's really hard to find a scared fish – a picture – but I thought the eyes and fins – he looks pretty freaked out.

What would you say if I asked you, "Who are you?" or "Who are you really?" Well, there's a lot of ways. Sometimes we define ourselves by our performance.

I had a thirteen-year-old come to see me once, and I needed to know how she felt about herself. I gave her a survey. And the survey was longer than this, but it did have these five questions in it. Are you lovable? Were you lovable as a baby? Etc. And she could answer each one with a number – one through five. One was not at all – not at all lovable. And five was completely lovable. So here's how she answered this part of the

survey. (Shows PowerPoint slide) I asked her, “Why were you lovable as a baby, but not as a teenager?” And she said, “Well, I hadn’t made any bad choices yet.” So she defines herself by the choices she makes and how she performs. Right? Do you do that? Is that one of the ways you define yourself?

A lot of people go on how they look. James Dobson said that physical appearance was the gold coin of human worth. What does God say? He says that He looks on the heart, right? It’s *not* what’s on the outside. But we aren’t really at God’s level yet – most of us. We look at how we look.

Another one is intelligence. James Dobson said that intelligence was the silver coin of human worth.

Now, I had an autistic man – he’s 20 years old – coming to see me, and he was pretty down on himself. I asked him one day why he felt that way. And he said, “Because I’m overweight and I’m special ed.” And he said – now this is a guy that’s supposed to be disabled – “I can do something about the weight, but I’m always going to be special ed.” I don’t even like to tell that story, but we all know, I hope, that he left something out, didn’t he? There is something more than whether we’re intelligent or not.

Also, it’s what people tell us about ourselves – that’s one of the ways that we define our identity. We get a lot of feedback from family, from friends, from teachers, from employers. And that all kind of goes into the mix, doesn’t it? We rely a lot on what other people tell us.

But there’s more to us than just these kinds of things. So I want to call your attention today to a *deeper* core identity. Who are you *really*? Are you fundamentally good? Are you fundamentally bad? Are you lovable? Are you unlovable? Who are you *really*?

Before you had a chance to make any good or bad choices, before you knew what your gender was, before you understood your ethnicity, before you knew how to do anything – like gymnastics or scaring fish – before anybody *told* you anything about yourself, who were you? Who are you really?

So why would I talk about our identity at an activity like this? Well, because our identity has a powerful effect on what we can accomplish, on how we act, on what we believe, and on our faith – *very* important.

We tend to live up to our identity or live down to it, depending on what we think about ourselves. And because faith is an element in this – and I’m going to prove this to you – it can affect our eternal life – what we think of ourselves – our identity.

What does God think of us? That would be important to this group, wouldn’t it? What does He think of us? There are certain scriptures that seem to say some really *bad* things about us, like “*the human heart is desperately wicked,*” and like “*in my flesh dwells no good thing,*” and “*I was conceived in sin*” – that’s what David said – and Jesus said – He

started out a sentence to somebody once, and He said, “*You, being evil...*” and then He went on with His comment. That packs a wallop there, doesn’t it? So is that how we define ourselves? Well, I believe that the traditional view on this topic has missed the mark!

I was talking to a lady awhile back in my office, and she’s coming to see me because she has problems in parenting. She also knows that I’m a Christian and she goes to one of the local mega-churches. She asked me one time, “Do you know how babies sin in the womb? I know you believe that.” There’s a parenting program out on the market – a Christian parenting program. It starts with the fact that babies are born sinful. When they cry, they’re just being selfish. And it goes on from there.

When you think about scriptures like these, and you listen to people talk, believing that we are fundamentally, initially, flawed, I believe that there is a selective exposition of the word of God. They talk about the fallen nature, and they think that we’re all born rotten. Please don’t misunderstand. I’m not trying to convince anybody to believe my way about this. I’ve given up on that. But I was invited here and I’m happy to be here. So I do get to tell you what I think.

I believe that people are born innocent, not rotten. That’s what I believe. You get to decide if you agree. And if we don’t agree, then I hope we can still be friends, because, in the end, Christ is going to come back, and He’s going to tell us all how it really is. Right?

I’m going to make my point now. I’m going to tell you about some people I’ve met to support that point. The first one is – we’ll just call him The Rad Boy. What is rad? Well, rad stands for *reactive attachment disorder*. This boy...I met him when he was in his early teens and his mother was a meth-addicted prostitute. And he was taken away from her by the state when he was six years old and placed in a foster home, and moved to another foster home, and another foster home, and another foster home, and another foster home, until he was finally adopted by a couple. And while he was being transferred from home to home to home, he began to believe that there was something really wrong with him that nobody loved him. And he eventually came to the conclusion that he was bad. So his parents told me that he had incredible emotional regulation problems. He could not maintain stable mood. I asked them if they could give me an example. And they said, “Yes. Two weeks ago, in the middle of the night, he got up and took a butcher knife and stabbed the refrigerator fifty times – sometimes so hard, he penetrated into the refrigerator all the way.” I said, “Oh, I understand now.” So they were terrified – didn’t know if he’d do that to them.

That happened in the first session with his parents and then he came to see me the next week with them. Then, on his first session, when he was to come by himself, he came in crying. He sat down and he was wiping the tears away from his eyes, and I said, “Why are you so upset?” He said, “We were driving here and right on the bridge” – which is right close to my office – “I saw this street guy walking along, and I made my mom stop, and I got out and gave him all the money I had.” He said, “I had ten bucks.” I said, “Well, that’s a really nice thing to do. Why is that so upsetting to you?” He said, “That could be

me.” So let’s understand what that means. What does that mean for him to behave that way?

I’m going to take you to a story in the Bible. It’s a story about Jesus talking to one of the scribes. And the question came up, “What is the greatest commandment?” This is what the scribe said: “...and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Do you know what Jesus said to that guy? *When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”* Now was that scribe converted? Probably not. Was his mind enlightened by the indwelling Holy Spirit? Probably not. So how did that happen? How did he get close to the Kingdom of God.

If I told you the things that had happened to this boy in his life...I couldn’t tell you them here. It would traumatize some of you. It was *so* bad. He should have, according to all the psychological literature, no capacity for empathy whatsoever. And yet, he cares about the poor, which is the second highest value of God. So, if he was born rotten, how did that happen? How does it? How could it? Well, here’s a scripture – another one: “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask Him?*” Some of us zero in on this part (*If you then, who are evil...*), but I want to zero in on this part (*know how to give good gifts to your children*) today.

Do you know what the *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary* says about this? It says, “Bad as our fallen nature is” – so he’s on the other side, right? – “the father in us is not extinguished. What a heart, then, must the Father of all fathers have towards His pleading children!” Have you ever heard anybody say, “That boy is just like his daddy.” Well, so is The Rad Boy. Under the damage, there is mercy and understanding. Nobody could beat it out of him.

There is evil in all humans. Sometimes when people make an argument, they go too much to one side. I’m trying to stay in the middle here. But I think a lot of people are off on the other side – especially parents with a negative upbringing. So, there is evil in all people, but underneath that – before that – there is the identity of the Father. Did you know that about yourself? Did you? It’s there.

Okay. The next person I want to tell you about – the beautiful young woman. She came into my office – early twenties – conservatively dressed – no piercings, no tattoos (I don’t judge people on that. I look on the heart. Right? I’m just trying to paint a picture for you of what I saw when she came in and sat down.) In a few minutes I learned a couple things. I learned that she had a seventeen-month-old daughter out of wedlock. And I learned that she had had a hundred guys before she was nineteen. I don’t have a picture of what I looked like after she said that, but I suppose that I looked like I’d just been rapped between the eyes lightly with a ball-peen hammer, because she just didn’t fit my picture of that behavior. But I think I did manage to say something like, “Tell me more about that.” Here’s what she told me. She told me that she watched her father run around on her

mother all her life, and she didn't want her daughter to have to see that behavior in her. She knew promiscuity was a bad thing and she loves her daughter enough to know that that has to stop. That's good, isn't it? That's a good thing, right? Good that she knows that. In her therapy, she really showed no remorse about the sins that she'd committed. At some later point in the therapy, she divulged that she had seduced her best friend's husband. And after she told me that, she started weeping. She wept for a long time. And when she stopped, she said, "I just realized something. I'm a sexual predator." And she started crying again. And after she stopped, she said, "I hate that about myself." And I said, "Why?" She said, "Because it's wrong!" She'd never been to church – not a Christian. How does that happen? She wondered out loud, later in that session, if she'd ruined herself forever. She was taking full responsibility for all those bad choices she'd made and also the terrible consequences that she had drawn to herself. She expressed a lot of guilt and a lot of remorse. And do you know what? She changed her life. She doesn't do that anymore. I don't think it was repentance toward God. I think it was just a realization that there is something wrong about doing that.

So let's look at this scripture: Romans 2:14.

Romans 2:14 - *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature – by nature! – do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.* This girl was like that, I think. She didn't have any religious upbringing – never read any of the Bible – and yet had a sense of right and wrong just there – built in. Paul said:

V-15 – *They show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse, or even excuse, them.* She had a conscience.

What does that mean about *you* today? I think, before you had a chance to make any bad choices, you came with the law in your heart, too. I think you did. She knew she was doing wrong. She was motivated to stop. She wanted to stop *because she loved her daughter* – like God loves His children – like God loves you and He loves me. And she regretted the damage that she did to her friends.

Here's another scripture: *God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them.* I'm not just talking about *looking* like God. We come *hard-wired* to love our children. That's one of the ways that we're like Him. That's not just a theological statement either. They absolutely have proven that with hard science – that human beings come wired to love their children and to love and be loved by their parents – built in. Who else does that? God does! Right? They're learning so much about how the brain works now. They're learning that we are, in ways we never even understood before, innately relational beings. Our brain – our brain! – the shape of your brain *changes* when connected to other people's brains. I mean, if you're awake, and you're watching me, and you're listening to what I'm saying, I'm changing your brain – just a little bit. I don't know where it's getting filed in your brain – it might be the round file; it might be the "think more about it" file; it might be the "oh yeah" file – I don't know – but something's getting changed. That's how it works!

The human brain is designed for relationship. And relationship is really the only thing that can change a brain. Isn't that amazing? We worship a relational God, don't we? We're like Him in that. He made us that way.

“Compassion and love are to mental health like breathing is to life.” Daniel Siegel. So, is Daniel Siegel a rabbi? Is he a minister? Is he a theologian? No, he's one of the premier brain researchers in the United States. That's what he's learned from brain research. We feel and do our best naturally when we act like God acts. I don't know if he believes in God. I don't know if he'd agree with that statement, but we can, can't we? We're made for goodness. We're made for love. We're made for compassion. We're made for empathy. We're made to follow God, love God, obey God's law, and be loved by Him and protected by Him. So God's nature is so deeply imprinted in all of us that not even the devil has been able to get it out.

Here's another one: *God saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good.* If you know your Bible there, you'll realize that He had just created Adam and Eve when He said that. So, when He first created them, He looked at them, and He said, “You guys are good.” They were good, not bad, at first.

So, I'm asking you again, before you made any bad choices, before you had a chance to like anything, before you knew how you looked, before you absorbed any of the devil's influence into your life, who are you *really*?

This is an interesting scripture – Ecclesiastes 7:29:

Ecclesiastes 7:29 – *See, this alone I have found* – said Solomon – *that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.* Well, that might be an obscure scripture, except for the fact that *all* scripture comes from God and is good for instruction in righteousness.

Well, maybe he's talking about how we stand upright, unlike animals. No. There's the word – *Strong's* – it's translated *right* 53 times, *upright* 42 times and *righteous* 9 times. So, sorry, but no. We were created upright. When you were minutes old, in your mother's arms, had you broken any of God's laws yet? What's the definition of sin? Violation of the law, right? So you were upright. You were born righteous.

Here's what Luke says about it: He says, “*How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*” God specially designed you to be a *carrier* – a vessel, a receptacle – for the Holy Spirit. That's your destiny. You and the Holy Spirit are like carrots and peas – they just *fit* together – because you were made that way. Did you know that? You might have known it, but have you thought about it? Is it part of your identity?

So, in the beginning, things started out really good, but then, something happened in the Garden, right? God let the devil into the Garden. And he talked to Adam and Eve, and

they listened. And then, they made a bunch of bad choices, based on what he told them. They bought his package. And because they made those choices, they suffered huge losses. And they didn't handle them very well. And that kind of thinking has been passed down from generation to generation to this very day. Like Solomon said earlier, "We were created upright, but we've gone off on our own scheme." See how everything in the services today is in this?

Interestingly enough, I had a man come to me once, and he said, "I'm as mean as a snake. And I'm making my kids mean, too." How did he get mean? His father was mean to him. We pass it on down the line. Letting the devil into the Garden was part of a great plan, but it wasn't a part that we asked to happen, was it? Paul said, *The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope.* So, not willingly. We didn't ask to be subjected to the devil's influences. Verse 21: *And that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption – and we know how that going to happen. It's going to be through Jesus Christ. – and obtain freedom of the glory of the children of God, for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

I groan when I hear some of the stories people tell me about the way their parents treated them. I do. You know, when the angel comes down with the big chain – right? – and he's gone, what will be left? Well, there will be some bad habits, but there will also be the original stamping of the Father – our nature – the nature that God gave us, relational abilities that we have. The Holy Spirit will still be there. And at that time, we're going to be able to reach our full potential.

But in the meantime, we need help. Paul explains our dilemma. I want you to listen very carefully to the language that he uses here. *For I do not understand my own actions,* he said. *For I do not do what I want, but I do what the very thing I hate.* Do you think that he identifies with doing the bad things? Or do you think he's identifying with the fact that he doesn't like to do that? What's his real identity? Well, he's the good guy beset with evil, isn't he? *I know that no good dwells in me that is in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* Now, that word *flesh*, that doesn't mean your body. That's a different word. The Bible word for body is *soma*. This word is *sarx*, and it's not the same thing at all. *Miserable man that I am* – the actual translation is *wretched*, but it means *unhappy man that I am – who will deliver me – me – the identified me – from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, so that I, myself – the me. Do you have a me in you? You do, don't you? ...I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin.* Who was Paul really? Was he the flesh, or was he the part that wanted to follow God? Well, he wanted to follow God, and the bad part – pardon my creative use of language here – an add-on.

Even though we've been created good and have become deceived by the devil – kidnapped, held ransom – you know, Christ pays for us, right? – will God rescue us? Will He rescue us? Are we worth it to Him? Is there value?

Now, one of the goals I was taught, as a public speaker, is to be accessible at every level, so I'm going to talk about this in a way that some of you adults might not be used to hearing too much. But let's look at this scripture:

Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He. I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you. I will sustain you and I will rescue you. Will Jesus rescue us from our troubles that we cause ourselves, even to our old age? Yes.

Here's something David said: *Keep me as the apple of your eye and hide me in the shadow of your wings.* David knew that he was the apple of God's eye. And that's a term of delighting in, a term of lovingkindness. Did you know that God loves you that way? David did a lot of really bad stuff, didn't he? He did! But he knew that God loved him. Does He love you like that? Well, He does. Does He love you because of the bad, or because of the good?

This is something Jesus said. Even when we're really bad, even when we sit with our arms folded, closed to all possibilities, God is still willing to save us. And He gets emotional about it. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you! How often I've longed to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."* Isn't that interesting?

Back to this point. There are those here who are parents and there are those here who hope to be. Would you rather have your children identify themselves as rotten to the core or as a child of God? Well, that is the challenge that is before us.

At LifeResource Ministries, we talk about how to pass the faith to the next generation. And this identity thing is a big part. So how do we instill God's identity in our children? How can parents instill hope – hope of rescue, hope of salvation, hope of forgiveness – understanding the goodness of God in their children? How do we do that?

Well, it all starts right at the beginning – where the rubber meets the road – with a baby in a crib. Babies don't stay in a crib very long before they start having a need. It can be one of about three or four things. It's not complicated. They can be cold, they can be dirty, they can be hungry, or they can be lonely or bored. They cry, right? That's what they do. They express the need. They ask in the way that they've been wired to let us know that they need help. The thing that you have to understand about a baby is, they do not have time yet. Any of you who have four-year-olds, talk to them about the idea of day-after-tomorrow. So an infant... what are you going to get? They don't have that, so it's got to be right now, or they're really, really unhappy. And it doesn't mean they're selfish. It means that they have a need. And that's how God has given them to ask for help. And it can be a matter of life and death, because if they're not fed, they could die. Right? They're fragile. That's important.

So what do the adults do? Well, they respond. They take care of the baby. And the baby's needs are then satisfied. So let's take a little look at that. Baby's needs are satisfied. What happens. Well, the baby feels safe, the baby feels secure, the baby feels a sense of well-

being, the baby is emotionally regulated. Do you know what that means? That means that they're not upset anymore. They stopped crying and they regulate themselves. They get everything back together again. And their brain is integrated. What is that? Well, that is where both sides of the brain – you know, the emotional (the side you cry with) and the side that you think with – and the front and the back, and all that, and the body...all that's integrated together. And they're "hitting on all cylinders." Have you ever lost it – completely lost it? After you lose it, you realize you've said things that you can't take back and you wish that you could. It's because you weren't integrated. If you were integrated, you never would have said such a stupid thing. But you can't unring the bell, right? So, this starts all over again many times a day, doesn't it? And what is the baby learning from this? What does the baby learn when this happens many times a day – day after day, after day. Well, the baby learns to trust. Do you know what Jesus said in one of the psalms? He said to God, "*You made me trust you at my mother's breasts.*" Did you know that? He did. That is where faith begins. That's where it starts. And God wired *all* parents to be able to do this. It's natural. Everybody knew what you do when the baby cries.

I was on the plane on the way here, and there were some people with a baby about three rows in front of me, and the baby started crying. I was watching all these people's reactions. And everybody was getting irritated. Do you know why? It's not because they hate babies. It's because they couldn't do anything about it. And it's irritating, because you want to go and you want to take care of the baby.

In addition to what a baby feels, what are they learning? Well, they're learning, "I'm safe." They're learning, "I'm understood." They're learning, "When I ask, I will receive." They're learning, "When I'm in trouble, I'll be rescued," because not being fed is being in trouble to a baby, because they can't do it themselves and they don't get time. Right? "I'm loved. I'm good" – as in "*it was very good*" when God looked them – not like, "I'm the greatest," but "I'm good – nothing wrong with me. I'm okay." So here's what that looks like (PowerPoint slide) – the regulated, integrated baby. "Hey! It's all good!" That's what they feel like.

But there's another cycle that we see more and more common in today's world. The baby cries and the adults *don't* respond. When does this happen? Well, sometimes it happens when the adults are busy. Sometimes it happens when they're stressed – you know, an impending divorce. Financial problems make us not really attuned to our kids. Sometimes we're ignorant of our kids' needs, because we're not paying attention to them like we should, or we are too young to have a baby yet. There are a lot of reasons for that. But then, it can get even worse from there, because sometimes scary or hurtful things happen to babies. And that can happen because adults are angry, because adults are addicted, or because adults are narcissistic.

So the adults don't respond. What happens next? Well, you have an unsatisfied, frightened or injured child. And what are the results of that? Well, the baby feels unloved, worthless, hopeless – if it doesn't happen right now, all hope is lost. Baby feels a sense of being bad, baby is emotionally unregulated and the baby is not integrated. Okay?

So you remember when I said the boy – The Rad Boy – couldn't regulate his emotions? It starts right here. When that cycle goes around and around and around, the part of his brain that does self-regulation doesn't get exercised. You have a certain window where you can learn that within about the first year-and-a-half of life, and, if you don't get it then, boy, it's hard to learn it later. This is what else is learned through this. They learn that asking doesn't work. You don't get anywhere trying to get yourself taken care of by them, so you trust only yourself, which leads to, sometimes, narcissistic thoughts. People who are this way tend to meet their own needs with power, control, manipulation and charm. What would a parent who worked this way in the world...how would that work with them having a kid? That's where abuse comes from – all kinds of bad things.

I had a teenager say to me the other day – she wasn't honest enough to say when I drew her this picture – she said, "That's just how I am." So now the door's open to start working on that, right?

So what's the baby's state then? Well, it's anxiety. Anxiety is the apprehension of what's going to happen next. Where do you think that comes from? He wants us to believe that we're all bad. And when we don't take care of our kids at every level – *every* level – I'm not just talking about changing diapers here.... I had a young guy tell me, "I really miss my dad." I said, "Is he on a trip?" He said, "No, he plays video games every night." If we don't take care of our kids at *every* level, we do the devil's work. That's how it happens.

Now let's go back to the good cycle. "I'm safe. I'm understood. When I ask, I receive. When I'm in trouble, I'll be rescued. I'm loved. I'm good." What children learn when they're cared for is what God wants us to feel like as adults in our relationship to Him. If you feel this way in your relationship with God, it's all good! So, do you see the connection about how He does it? How it works? It's not magic. It's not something beyond our grasp. It's not a great mystery. It starts early. We're all better Christians when we have *this* as our identity – a child of God, full of faith and hope. And God built into humans the ability to transmit this to the next generation.

I had a sixteen-year-old come to my office, and she said that she was saying a lot of rude, mean things to people at school. She got a lot of feedback that she didn't care about people. She was smacking her siblings a lot. And she was a pretty athletic-looking girl. She could probably pack a pretty good wallop. And most of her siblings were younger than her, so I could see why her mom was worried. One of her siblings told me that she was a normal kid until after the divorce. About two years after the divorce, she started getting really, really mean. And I told her, "You did not start out this way. You became this way because of what happened to you, and you can get over it." One of her problems, in therapy, was that she hated to cry in front of me, because she felt like she was being a weakling. But she started to cry here. Tears just flowed down her face. I said, "What's that?" She said, "I'm not angry. I'm happy, because I didn't know that. I thought I would always be mean." But you know, once she began to believe that she didn't have to stay that way, amazing things started to happen for her. She started to think of herself in a different way. She, in her own mind, was the mean girl, but now she realizes she can change.

So back to our original question and to kind of rehash it a little bit. You are a person who has been messed around with by the devil big time. You didn't ask for it to be that way. You were born upright. God's law is a part of you in your spirit. You're born with the likeness of the Father. It's stamped all over you. And you are the apple of God's eye. You are also specifically designed to be a carrier of the Holy Spirit of God. And you were born with the relational nature of God so that God can draw you to Himself. And you were created to be loved by God and His family forever – a child of God! That's who you are *really*.