

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Finding Faults

Who or What Defines Who You Are?

by Paul Asay

What Happened

The Fault in Our Stars, based on the young adult novel by John Green, was the No. 1 movie in the land a few weeks ago, making \$50 million and causing moviegoers to weep and sniffle through most of the movie. It's the best thing to happen to the tissue industry since *Old Yeller*.

However, *The Fault in Our Stars* wasn't all about young love torn apart by cancer. It talks about commitment, optimism through hardship, the importance of dreaming in the midst of the direst circumstances. It also offers a message about how we do, and should, define ourselves.

"What's your story?" Augustus Walters asks cancer-riddled Hazel Grace. "I was diagnosed when I was 13," Hazel begins, but Gus breaks in, "No, no, no. Your *real* story." He doesn't want to know about Hazel's cancer. He's already heard something about that. He'd like to know who Hazel is as a person—what she loved to play as a kid, what her favorite foods are, what her hopes are, her fears, her dreams...

When you have cancer, the movie suggests, you come to be defined by your disease. For some people, the fact you're sick almost seems to be the only thing that matters. Who you are, or who you would like to be, isn't as important as what you have.

Yet it's not just those who are sick who sometimes can let something else, or someone else, define them. Sometimes, our identities to the outside world also are tied far more to what we have than who we are. We're often defined by our looks, skills or friends. Sometimes we can be accepted or shunned based on those things. We can become simply members of a group or clique, not individuals who may differ significantly from how we're perceived.

Sometimes we can let other people define us, too. Many studies have shown that if we're told often enough that we're dumb, we won't do as well in school. If we're told repeatedly that we're no good, we'll live down to those expectations. Sometimes we'll be afraid to tell our own friends about certain types of music we like or subjects we enjoy for fear they'll think they're dumb. A few people might even downplay their faith.

Talk About It

How would others define you? Do feel that people associate you with a particular group or clique? How do your parents see you? Your friends? How accurate do you think those perceptions are?

How would you define yourself? How different is your self-perception from the way others define you? If you could rewind your life and begin again, would you be a different person today? How different? What's something that even your closest friends might be surprised to learn about you?

Who in your life has the best handle on who you really are? How did he or she come to know you so well?

What the Bible Says

When it comes to knowing who we truly are, no one knows us better than God.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5).

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether” (Ps. 139:1-4).

God made us, so He knows us; but He also made us for a purpose.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).