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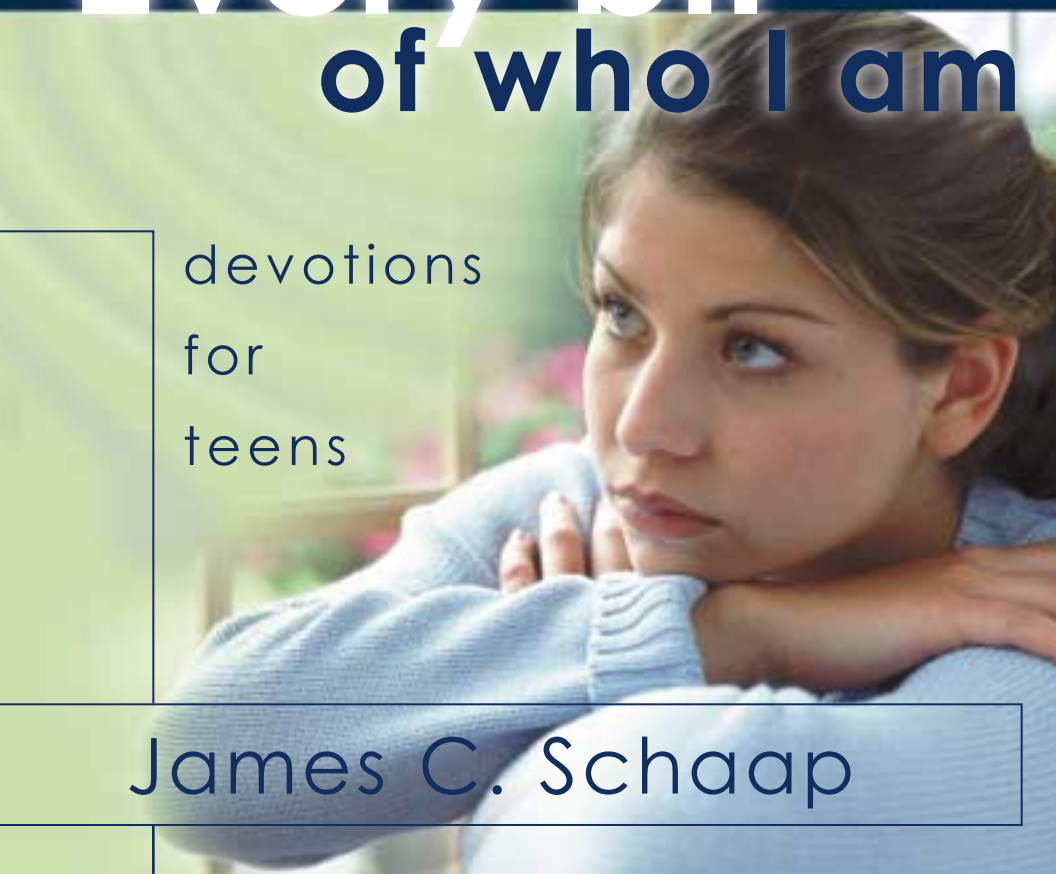
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Every bit of who I am

devotions
for
teens

James C. Schaap



Every Bit of Who I Am

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Devotions for Teens

James C. Schaap



Fleming H. Revell

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Every Bit of Who I Am

is dedicated to:

Matt Ruter,

who made it clear such a book would be useful;

Andrew Kuyvenhoven,

whose *Comfort and Joy* guided me wisely through the Catechism;

and a teacher from Ontario, Canada,

who met me on an elevator in a downtown Toronto hotel,

lowered her pointer finger, and said,

“You have to write more devotionals for kids.”

Thanks to all of you.

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Introduction: “Every Bit of Who I Am”

He looked professional in his sport coat and tie, his silver hair neatly combed. We introduced ourselves and both sat down in the small conference room on the campus of Arizona State University. He had a job to fill; I was applying.

Small talk? Maybe a little—I really don’t remember. What I’ll never forget is his first question. “Mr. Schaap,” he said, “if there was one thing you’d like me to know about yourself, what would it be?”

It wasn’t my way—and it still isn’t—to preach to people the moment I meet them. What’s more, I hadn’t been such a glowing believer for the last several years, even though I’d come back to the church after a couple of years away.

What’s amazing to me yet is that I didn’t really hesitate. Even though I understood that what I was saying just might end my chances for the job, I said what I did almost as if the words were written on my heart—because they likely were.

“I suppose I’d fall back on the old Catechism I learned as a kid,” I told him, looking him straight in the eye. “I belong in body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

The man with the silver hair was a public school administrator from the city of Phoenix. I was applying for a job as an English teacher. I knew that saying such a thing might not be smart, but what I’d blurted out, almost without thinking, was the best answer, the best truthful answer I could think of. I was claiming my identity.

“You’re hired,” he said.

We talked for another half hour, but he told me in less than two minutes that he wanted to hire me. This public school administrator—his name was Robert Sterrett and he’s now gone to live with the Lord—was a Christian. He wanted a Christian believer with a master’s degree in English, and the guy who’d stepped into his office that morning was exactly what he was looking for.

That story still stuns me because a hundred different scenarios could have played out. I could have found another way of answering the question “Who are you?” He could have been someone who hated Christians. He could have laughed. He could have winced. But he hired me.

Now if you believe that giving the same answer I gave that morning on the campus of Arizona State University is going to mean, for sure, that God will bless you with the job you wanted more than anything else, then I've got a bridge to sell you.

For some cosmic reason, the Lord God Almighty wanted the two of us to click, I guess, and we did. I got the job. For two years I taught high school English at Greenway High School in Phoenix, Arizona.

But there was a bigger lesson in that morning's conversation for me. I'd given the answer not because I'd planned it—I had no idea that he'd ask something like that. I didn't do it to impress him; after all, the odds were against me, given the way public education can be hostile to the Christian faith.

I'd answered the way I did because those words—"That I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ"—were absolutely and undeniably the best short answer I could give. And for me, then and now, they are dead-on true. That's who I was and who I am. I belonged and I belong. I knew it then and I know it now.

What I'd done is answered his question and given him my identity, "every bit of who I am," you might say.

That's what's at stake here in this book of devotionals: identity. Who am I? I don't know that there is a more fundamental question in life itself.

Who am I?

That's where I begin. That's where we begin. That's where it all starts.

"I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."

That's where we start.

Spitwads

For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

—Romans 14:7–8

Get soft paper—that lined stuff—get it wet and sloppy, roll it out of your mouth, and whip that blob up at the statue of Abe Lincoln. Or else take a dozen little ones and stick them against the ceiling like a colony of white ants. Spitwads were a ton of fun when I was a kid.

One day when I thought the teacher wasn't looking, I whipped one across the room, where it smacked up against the window and stuck like white mush.

Perfect.

Not quite.

"Jim," the teacher yelled. The clock on the wall stood still.

"I saw what you just did," he said. Then he said something I'll never forget. "You threw it," he said, "and you, a Schaap."

My father was the mayor of the small town where I lived. My grandpa, not that long before, had been the preacher in our church. What the teacher was saying was that he thought such barbaric behavior would never come from someone with such a holy family.

When I walked home that night I was really steaming. After all, I told myself, what did my spitwad have to do with my dead grandpa?

But with those words, the teacher taught me something very important: I was part of a family, part of something bigger. I wasn't a kid who could do what he felt like, whenever he felt like it. Why? Because I belonged to something, to a family.

We belong. The apostle Paul says so, and so does the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. We are not our own. I am named. You are named. We all are named.

We belong—not only to our parents, our communities, our churches, our schools. We belong, far more importantly, to our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am not my own. I belong. So do you.

Lord Jesus, thank you that we have names, families, and friends. Thank you even more for loving us, because we know that we belong to you first of all. We are children called by your name. Amen.

Q&A 1

What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

Friends

Q&A 1

... in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

—Romans 8:28

Emily wasn't sure exactly when the fighting began. But it seemed that the older she got, the worse it grew—Mom and Dad were constantly yelling at each other. Peace was almost worse. They wouldn't talk

to each other and the whole house seemed like a tomb.

One Saturday her father took her out for breakfast. He and Mom were breaking up, he told Emily. "Maybe you've heard us fighting," her father said, as if she had been deaf for the last five years.

At school the next day, Emily didn't want to talk to a soul. She didn't want to think about tomorrow or next week. Whatever came into her mouth came up like that sour stuff from a rancid stomach.

Two months later, at play practice, she saw her friend Sarah walk off the set, right in the middle of a scene. Emily ran after her.

"I'm quitting," Sarah said. "I don't need this hassle."

"You crazy?" Emily said. Sarah was a natural—great voice, great presence, quick to learn her lines. If she left, who would take her place?

And then Sarah looked at her in a way no friend of hers ever had. Her face turned into one big scowl, her eyes into slits.

"What's the matter? You hate the play or the director or something?" Emily said.

"I hate my dad," Sarah said.

The two of them walked away from practice—just the two of them. All of a sudden Emily understood what had put the hatred in Sarah's eyes. At home the two of them were going through the very same horror.

God can use the worst things, the Bible says, even the very worst, to bring some good. The day Emily talked to Sarah was the day God used Emily's worst nightmare to help her love someone else. Emily understood what Sarah was feeling very, very well.

God Almighty will do things like that. Some people call them miracles.

Lord, in the worst of times, help us to remember your promise—that you will never leave us and you'll use even the worst of times to make us stronger. Help us to never give up. Thank you that you will never walk away, even when we feel like it. Amen.