

## Grand Designs. Sermon series on identity - Well-being & Wholeness 2024



The search for **identity** and with it **belonging** (what is my 'tribe?') is a preoccupation for many people in the 21st C. Exploring 'who I am' is a great question for followers of Jesus but the answer may well be different to the prevailing spirit of our age. Genesis tells us we are made in the image of God and that our human identity is rooted in a relationship with God as Father. We are intended to have an unbroken spiritual union with Him and our identity springs out of that inner life rather than from the feedback of the external

environment. **It's a counter cultural idea that our identity is rooted in a relationship with another and a facet of our relationship with God rather than something that we 'own' and can shape.** Lost at the fall, a new and healed identity is one of the things Jesus came to restore. **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 1 Corinthians 5 : 17.**

Our sense of identity can have a profound affect on our sense of personal value and calling, our ability to overcome life's challenges and our mental and emotional health. Over these three weeks we will be looking at three aspects of the rich identity that God gives to all his people and look at how it helps us to deepen our relationship with God, work out our personal sense of identity and find wholeness, peace and purpose in the world. Over the three weeks we will look at what it means to be first of all a child of God but with human parents! Secondly what does it mean to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God in the 21st century culture, and thirdly what does it mean to be a friend of God. There are many other aspects to our identity of course.

**"Understanding your identity in Christ is absolutely essential to your success at living the victorious Christian life" — Neil Anderson**

***" From all eternity, long before you were born and became a part of history, you existed in God's heart. Long before your parents admired you or your friends acknowledged your gifts or your teachers, colleagues and employers encouraged you, you were already 'chosen'. The eyes of love had seen you as precious, as of infinite beauty, as of eternal value." — Henri Nouwen***

## CHILD : 1 JOHN 3, JOHN 1: 2, GALATIANS 3

*"... to all who did receive him who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Jn 1:2*

**1 John 3** explores the idea of being children of God, an idea which is full of mystery, challenge and the promise of renewal. **Romans 8** tells us that it is a work of the Spirit to reveal that identity to us, and its consequences in our lives (we are freed from slavery to fear and a witness to creation itself of its glorious future). **Galatians** speaks of the tug of war over our identity as children of God, looking back over Israel's history and reminding the early church of its identity as children of 'the promise' but with a history rooted in slavery.

There is no influence more profoundly shaping to our sense of identity than our family of origin. Scripture seems to acknowledge that there is a very real challenge for believers to live out of the new identity, family characteristics and privileges that God gives, recognising that there may be a pull back to the 'old nature' that comes from our human family and other surrounding spiritual, emotional and physical pressures.

**This would be born out by many psychological studies and also our own self-understanding and memories of our childhood. How do we hold together the idea of being born again as a child of God and the reality of our human inheritance and experiences?**

1. What does it mean to be 'born of God'?
2. What are some of the family likenesses that we inherit from God as our heavenly father?

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3. What does the bible teach we all inherit from our human parents?
4. How does our own personal family of origin affect our life now, including things like our marriages, self esteem,
5. What are some specific things you can identify in your own family history, customs and parental modelling that can see operating in your life, both good and bad? (Some of it may be great - hospitable, adventurous, loving, affirming).
6. Are there anythings from your upbringing that God has brought to light that you feel you need forgive, process, and heal from?
7. What are the promises of God about the new identity given to all those who are born of God?
8. How does that help us both celebrate and recover from our human parenting?
9. What are some of the keys to understanding, processing and ultimately finding freedom from negative traits from our family of origin?
10. For many the key of forgiveness has been important, how do we go on a journey of forgiveness without trying to excuse, gloss over or ignore things that might have been deeply painful and damaging to experience?

**Wholeness course covers this material and there are many books on this including Peter Scazzero's book Emotionally Healthy Discipleship.**

### How has your family of origin affected you?

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/how-do-life/202108/how-has-your-family-origin-affected-you>

*Do you have a personal testimony of healing and freedom around becoming a child of God?*

## CITIZEN : PHILIPPIANS 3: 1-14, JOHN 3:3, EPHESIANS 2: 18-20

*"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."  
Philippians 3:20*

Culture is powerful. Our identity can be deeply affected by the values of the surrounding culture with its message of worth based on looks, success and material wealth. We are all vulnerable to the comparison trap, the influence of prevailing opinion and the temptation to put our hope into success in the 'world's' terms. **Philippians 3** tells us that when Paul became a follower of Jesus the things he had previously valued had become like 'rubbish' to him. The culture of Jesus kingdom is an 'upside down' one, ruled over by a good and gracious king who judges the heart not the outward appearance and tells us that we belong and are of infinite value. Jesus followers are called to live counter culturally showing the world that there is another way to live, secure in the knowledge of God's perfect love, full of hope and willing to lay down their lives for God and others.

1. In terms of understanding our identity what would you say are some of the messages of the 'culture' of the world v kingdom of heaven?
2. Is it really possible to live with the values of a spiritual reality when the messages of the material world are so loud and insistent? What helps us to hear and live by these values?
3. How is our well-being and happiness affected by the values of the surrounding culture?
4. Why do we need to be born again to see the kingdom?
5. Paul talks about being 'fellow citizens' with the members of God's household, how can we help one another to become secure in our identity as kingdom citizens?
6. What rights, gifts or authorities are conferred on the citizens of the kingdom of heaven?
7. What is the identity of a citizen of the kingdom defined by?

*"The kingdom belongs to people who aren't trying to look good or impress anybody, even themselves. They are not plotting how they can call attention to themselves, worrying about how their actions will be interpreted or wondering if they will get gold stars for their behaviour."*

— **Brennan Manning**

*In the kingdom of God there are no second-class citizens.*

—**David S. Baxter**

# FRIEND : JOHN 15: 9-17, JAMES 2:23, JAMES 4:4, EXODUS 33:11

*The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. (Ps. 25:14)*

## **Friend: 'a person known well to another and regarded with liking, affection, and loyalty'**

Who we are friends with is a significant influence on our understanding of our own identity, and whether or not we have friends can be extremely influential on our wellbeing. Jesus was criticised for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 11:19), and he made a point of referring both to Lazarus (John 11:11) and his disciples (John 15:15) as his friends. For followers of Jesus the idea of being friends with God is core to our identity and brings with it blessings, challenges and opportunities. Do we see ourselves as friends of God? What are the features of this friendship and how can we pursue it? In John 15 Jesus speaks of a friendship that involves sacrificial love and radical obedience but also an extraordinary intimacy with God and the potential to bear lasting fruit and direct access to God in prayer: *'whatever you ask in my name'*.

1. Do you see God as a friend? Do you see yourself as a friend of God?
2. How is being a friend of God different to be a child or a citizen of the Kingdom?
3. Why do you think it's something that Jesus emphasised?
4. What impedes or helps a sense of friendship with God?
5. What has God done to enable you to be friends with Him? What are we called to do?
6. How secure is God's offer of friendship? (Matthew 25 records that Jesus called Judas friend as he arrived to betray him and hand him over to the Roman authorities.)
7. *"I no longer call you servants but friends for servants don't know what the master is doing"* Jn15  
Is friendship with God something that helps us to operate in the gift of prophesy?
8. How does friendship with God spill over into the culture of the church? What are our challenges and opportunities?

*Interesting stuff:*

**The science of why friendships keep us healthy:** *"A review of 38 studies found that adult friendships, especially high-quality ones that provide social support and companionship, significantly predict well-being and can protect against mental health issues such as depression and anxiety—and those benefits persist across the life span."* [American Psychological Association](#)

### **The Definition of A True Friend**

The tendency to desire what is best for the other

Sympathy and empathy

Honesty, perhaps in situations where it may be difficult for others to speak the truth, especially in terms of pointing out the perceived faults of one's counterpart

Mutual understanding and compassion; ability to go to each other for emotional support

Enjoyment of each other's company

Trust in one another

Positive reciprocity — a relationship is based on equal give and take between the two parties.

The ability to be oneself, express one's feelings and make mistakes without fear of judgment.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/owning-pink/201205/the-health-benefits-true-friendship>