

Growth Group Study – Identity

Bible readings: Deuteronomy 7:6–9 & 1 Peter 2:1–10

10 3 2019 – John Malcolm

Identity

How far back can you trace your family tree?

Who is the most interesting ancestor in your family line?

Have you or any of your family done a DNA test and if so what did it reveal about the people groups/countries where you ancestors lived?

The minister told the stories of Bill Griffeth and Catherine St Clair whose DNA results respectively revealed the father they had grown up with, thinking he was their biological father, was not their true father and that their mothers had secretly conceived them by another man. This discovery significantly impacted them and shattered their sense of identity. Because they did not know their real father, they felt like a stranger to themselves, no longer knowing who they truly were. (BBC Podcast, *DNA, me and the family tree*. Catherine founded Not Parent Expected support groups <https://www.npefellowship.org/> and Bill wrote a book *The Stranger in My Genes* <https://www.cnbc.com/bill-griffeth/>)

How do stories of your parents or grandparents, their language, idiosyncrasies or genes shape your identity as a person?

Identity is the foundation on which our individual uniqueness rests. Identity secures that which satisfies the deepest longings of our lives. The ground of our identity ... directly influences the questions of purpose and significance in our quest for meaningful existence. (Terry Wardle *Identity Matters* Leafwood Publishers)

Why is identity important to people?

Who helped shaped your identity?

Read Matthew 23.9, John 1.12, 8:44, Galatians 3:26 & 5.19-23

Who are the two fathers spoken about in these verses?

What are the characteristics of these fathers?

How does the identity of these fathers' impact on the family traits of their children?

Suppose a person could order a spiritual DNA test, what might this reveal about their spiritual father?

Read Romans 7:21–25 Romans 12:2 & Ephesians 4:22–24

The minister stated, *Christians have an identity problem and live with the tension of conforming to their new identity while not always letting go of the old identity.*

Why do you think some Christians struggle with this tension?

Given the glory of the new identity in Christ, why do we find the old identity attractive and sometimes slip back into these old ways?

Chosen

Over the next month we are looking at our new identity as described by Peter “*But you are a **chosen people**, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, **God’s special possession**, ...*” 1 Peter 2:9, and individually considering each of the phrases he uses to describe our new identity. Today we consider what it means to be a **chosen people**.

What do we know about Peter and his relationship with Jesus that would give him confidence to say these things?

We meet Peter as a fisherman and leave him as a key leader in the early church. How did his identity change through knowing Jesus?

Read Mark 13.1-2 & 1 Peter 2:4–10

Which Old Testament image Peter is drawing on?

Given the temple (central to the spiritual/national identity of the Jewish people) was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD with the stone walls toppled, what is the importance of this new spiritual temple with Christ as the cornerstone?

Read Joshua 24.15 & Romans 11.29

CS Lewis wrote about his conversion to Christianity as a long journey of wrestling with his thoughts about life and God. He mentions a moment riding on a bus in which he strongly felt God gave him freedom to choose whether or not to follow God. Have any of your group had a similar moment/awareness of free choice – if so describe your experience to the group?

The minister suggested *our humans can be fickle and often waver in our choices*. How does this differ from when God makes a choice?

Read John 1:12

Human rights vary from generation to generation, from nation to nation, and from democracy to dictatorship – what right does God give us and what do you think that right entitles us to?

The minister suggested *if we look in a heavenly mirror we would see our reflection as God sees us, but if we look at ourselves spiritually through an earthly mirror it could distort our image much like a fairground hall of mirrors*. If God has chosen us, how might that influence our identity and how we see ourselves?

People

Read Genesis 18.18, Matthew 28.19 & John 3.16

Why do you think Peter refers to us as chosen people rather than a chosen person?

Read Matthew 18.20, John 17.20-23 & 1 John 1.3

The minister stated *we cannot learn our true identity in isolation but need to develop this within Christian community*. How does being with other Christians help us understand our new identity in Christ?

In our natural family we learn about our family history, our expectations of behaviour, our place in society and hopes for the future. As the oldest, middle or youngest child there may be expectations of us. How might being with our spiritual family help us learn and live out our spiritual identity.

The bible uses a variety of images, living stones in a building, parts of a human body, children in a family. How do each of these help us understand who we are in Christ?

How can we help others in the family learn about their new identity?

Sometimes a criticism can have a negative effect on our self-image and how we view ourselves, while a complement may encourage us to stretch ourselves and so develop our identity. Who should we allow to speak into our lives (or listen to) regarding our new image in Christ?

For reflection:

Consider these aspects of your identity in Christ and reflect on how they might shape your spiritual self-image. ***Chosen, Holy, Called, Free, Forgiven, Blessed, Redeemed, Child of God, Heir, Fruitful, Righteous, Loved***