

Living Out Our True Identity



11 October to 15 November 2020

Dear Friends,

In January we started a journey in Ephesians under the title "Discovering Our True Identity". We found our identity is that we are in Christ. Paul reminds us that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, we are chosen, holy and blameless, predestined, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, lavished with the riches of God's grace, included in Christ, empowered with his incomparably great power, seated with Christ who himself is at God's right hand. A repeated phrase is that we are in Christ. Paul also talks about us being fellow citizens, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone.

As the letter progresses Paul talks a lot about unity, our being part of one body, Christ. Paul also talks about how we can live out our identity, bearing the family likeness of God, and as children of God he tells us how we can use every spiritual blessing to empower and enable our lives.

There is another aspect to living out our identity, and that is what we do Monday to Saturday at those times when we are not part of the gathered church. The left hand image on the front cover of these study notes depicts us gathered on a Sunday, in our mid-week groups, at celebrations. But the right hand image makes the point that for most of our week we are beacons of light scattered in the workplace, at the shops, in places of leisure, with family, etc.

This mini-series is based on LICC Frontline Sundays and encourages us to think about where we are on the frontline, and how we can live out our identity there. My prayer is that as we study this we will more deeply connect with our true identity in Christ, and others will be drawn to Jesus.

Grace and peace,



Neil Douglas

Using these notes

Although the notes are written in a format for small group use in a bible study, they are also just as usable for self-study so please don't be put off by the format. For example discussion questions can be used for self-reflection.

The notes are designed to be used whether you have heard the sermon or not.

The preacher may not read these notes when preparing the sermon; they will always bring what they feel God wants to say to us.

We do expect God will speak to us through the sermon though so I would encourage you to listen to in on the website if you missed it, and that is why the first question is always about the sermon.

The rest of the questions provide a way of engaging with the topic each week regardless of whether you have had an opportunity to hear the sermon or not, but please do try to listen to the sermon as it should enrich your study of the topic.

There are weeks where there are no notes, these are weeks where the preacher / topic is not part of this set. Please feel free to use these weeks creatively, or you may wish to devote them to extended prayer for the life of Ebenezer, our other communities, and God's vision for our future.

Date: 11 October

Theme: All the difference in the world

Key Readings: 1 Peter 1:1-2

Additional

Readings: Genesis 12:2-3; Jeremiah 29:5-7; Ephesians 6:10-18; Philippians 2:14-16

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Looking at the front cover of these notes, what strikes you about the images?
2. What do you think it mean for Abraham, and by extension Israel (and now the church) to be a blessing (Genesis 12:2-3)?
3. What makes us distinct as a gathered people of God, how are we different from the population? How does that help us 'stay red' together?
4. What are the specific places each of us is scattered in the week? How distinctively Christian are we in those places?
5. Read Jeremiah 29:5-7 (noting its relationship to the famous v11). How would that command have felt for devout Jews? How are Jeremiah's words relevant for us today?
6. How helpful do you find the term Frontlines (defined in Leader's Notes)? Why? Why not?
7. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. If frontlines suggests battles to you, then who is the enemy?
8. Read Philippians 2:14-16, if frontlines refers to the everyday places you are, what do the verses say about it?

Leader's Notes

In his letter to scattered groups of Christians in what is modern-day Turkey, the apostle Peter writes to them to ignite their imagination and inspire hope for the possibilities of their everyday lives in a complex world. Peter begins by using two pivotal words to describe the people of God and then he reminds them of a stunning truth. These two words – 'elect' and 'exiles' – helped the church know who they were. They, and we in the UK today, are a small minority in nations that, in the main, do not worship Jesus. The image of six 'red dots' in a sea of grey ones pictures this. Yet Peter is confident in what God can and will do through them. He concludes his opening greeting by joyfully celebrating the work of the Triune God in them, day by day – making all the difference in the world.

Frontlines (n): Frontlines are the everyday places where we live, work, study, or play and where we're likely to connect with people who aren't Christians.

Frontline has all sorts of connotations. For some, it reminds them of a battlefield and, whilst we would want to be careful about this, for some Christians keeping a Christian witness in their place is not easy. Others will have come across the term in their workplaces – classrooms, hospital wards, offices. Frontlines are everyday places where we live, work, study, or play and we're likely to connect with people who aren't Christians.

In practice frontline is a term that everyone can relate to – from school child to retiree. We are all the scattered people of God. We all have frontlines.

When you have finished with the questions why not find out what the frontlines for each member of the group is and then set aside some time to pray for each other in your frontlines.

Date: 25 October

Theme: Wherever we are

Key Readings: Genesis 28:10-22

Additional

Readings: Matthew 28:20

Questions from the sermon

- a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. When God met Jacob, God promised to build a new community that would be a means of blessing to the whole world, through Jacob (v.13–15). It's like God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 (discussed in Frontline Sunday 1). God's promise is still with us. If we see ourselves as people who inherit this blessing, how might it change our perspective on our everyday lives?
2. Look at all the assurances that God gives Jacob in these verses (v13–15). How would they have changed Jacob's understanding of his own life? Take a look at Matthew 28:20 (which sounds very similar). What difference can that make for our lives?
3. Have you ever experienced God's presence in an ordinary and everyday place? What happened?
4. Jacob marked the spot by setting up a stone pillar and pouring oil on it. How could you mark a place in your everyday life to remind you that 'God-encounters' can happen there too?
5. Use the frontline questions in the Leader's notes to discuss your frontlines.
6. Spend some time praying for each other.

Leader's Notes

Encounters with God are transformative, and they happen in the course of life with all its ups and downs. They happen in the places we find ourselves in regularly. They happen, too, in the places that we find ourselves unexpectedly. This particular encounter with God happens when Jacob is in serious conflict with his brother.

It's easy to rush over the central point of the story: God meets Jacob! We sometimes think we're most likely to meet God in 'holy' places: churches, chapels, prayer rooms, etc. but the Bible is clear: most of the time God meets people in the least likely places – ordinary, everyday places – and sometimes unexpectedly. God transforms the ordinary place into a holy place. When we go to our ordinary places 'in the name of Jesus', they become the touching points between heaven and earth. Jacob 'owns' the place and knows that it is significant, marking this ordinary place with a stone.

Frontline questions

- Tell us where you are on a typical week day.
- What do you like about it there?
- What's a pressure point there for you?
- What might be God's purpose for you there?
- How do you experience God's presence in that place?
- How can we pray for you?

Date: 1 November

Theme: Whatever we do

Key Readings: Colossians 3:15-24

Additional

Readings: Ephesians 1:1-14; Ephesians 2:16

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What difference does it make to do things 'in the name of Jesus' in our everyday lives?
2. v17, this seems to be in the context of our gathered worship. How can our worship be offered in the 'name of Jesus'?
3. Thinking about the things you've done today, how do you imagine doing these things 'for the Lord?'
4. One definition of a disciple is someone who is learning the ways of Jesus in their context at this moment. Whilst this isn't an inclusive definition, what advantages do you see in it?
5. We learn the ways of Jesus in our day-to-day lives, what are you learning about the ways of Jesus at the moment?
6. As you pray for each other, help each other to offer your everyday tasks and activities to God as you live and work 'in the name of the Lord'.

Leader's Notes

Paul's letter to the Colossians describes the kind of community God was calling them to be. But he makes clear that this was not inward-focused. Their daily lives were to be marked by love, kindness, and compassion in their places of work or activity, and in their relationships. The social conditions assumed in the passage aren't the same social conditions that most of us face today. However, the principles that flow from it are as applicable now as much as then. Commitment to Jesus as Lord is to be worked out in daily life, in relationship with others, and bound up in our service of Jesus himself.

Many Christians live unconsciously with a sacred-secular divided way of thinking about their daily lives. Some things are accepted as being important to God, and the rest is 'just life'. Paul will have none of that thinking – he uses the phrase 'whatever you do' in a worship context (15–17) and in an everyday work context (22–24). The idea of doing something in someone else's name is that you are acting as that person's representative. If that person is Jesus, that changes everything! It's this attitude to the ordinary joys and challenges of our everyday tasks and activities that can mark us out as Christians.

Q2 - reminding yourselves of Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2:16 may help with this question.

Date: 8 November

Theme: Whoever we are

Key Readings: Matthew 6:5-14

**Additional
Readings:**

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be a son or daughter of your heavenly Father? How easy or difficult is it for you to trust God as Father, why is that?
2. Sometimes we try to enlist God for our lives, our concerns, our causes. Praying “hallowed be your name” reminds us that we’ve been drawn into God’s family business. To what extent do you agree with that? Why?
3. What could be some of God’s kingdom purposes on your frontline? (v10)
4. (v11) What needs do you have on your frontline that keep you dependent on God? How easy or difficult is it to depend on God in this way? Why is that?
5. (v12) Thinking about your frontline, is there someone to forgive or someone you need to ask forgiveness for?
6. In a moment of silence each of you talk to God about anything you regret and repent of, and ask for his forgiveness.
7. (v13) Think about one pressure point and one kingdom purpose on your frontline. How are you tempted not to trust God for these things? What protection do you need from God in these situations?
8. Use the answers from Q7 to pray for each other.

Leader's Notes

The Lord's Prayer can be so familiar that we skate through it not stopping to think too much about what we are praying, and even less about what it means for us as God's people caught up in what he's doing in the world. The wonder about the prayer is that it starts with an assurance of our identity. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Whatever else you do with this study, do this - take joy in your identity as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father and explore how who you are connects to where you are and what you do, day by day.

Date: 15 November

Theme: Together we grow

Key Readings: Hebrews 10:19-25

**Additional
Readings:**

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Thinking back over this mini-series, what have you learnt about yourself? What have you learnt about each other? What have you been reminded of about God?
2. What has become clearer about the relationship between the gathered and scattered life of Ebe? What is more challenging now?
3. What has most encouraged you from the stories that you have shared with each other?
4. What would you suggest we change to better connect your Monday to Saturday life with our Sunday gatherings?
5. What could change in mid-week group to ensure that you keep encouraging one another to be fruitful in your Monday to Saturday lives?
6. What is the one thing you don't want to lose from this series?
7. Before you pray for each other could you ensure somebody will feedback to Neil and the Elders anything that they need to be aware of to help you with the answers to the above.

Leader's Notes

The Bible has so much to say about our relationships as the people of God; there are so many passages to choose from. But Hebrews 10 starts with God, not us. It starts with the good news of Jesus Christ and that seems a fitting conclusion to the series. Our lives are lived in response to that which God has first done for us through Christ.

As churches we help each other hold on to hope together by focusing on God, spurring one another to good works, and meeting together consistently. By drawing near to God, focusing on Jesus, we are renewed as we remind one another of our baptism vows – 'our bodies being washed with pure water.'

We also spur one another to good works. The word that translates as 'spur' or 'incite' or 'provoke' is a strange word to link with 'love and good works' but its strength suggests the importance of helping one another live our faith on our frontlines.

The writer to the Hebrews recognised that we can help one another by not allowing each other to give up – to keep the challenge before us and keep going. Our scattered and gathered lives are irrevocably connected. Together we remind one another of the core of our faith and its implications for the whole of life. Gathered church is where we are taught, guided, changed, challenged, equipped, encouraged, loved, and commissioned. Then our discipleship is lived out in our scattered frontline contexts.

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