

who might you be?

An inspiring vision of
renewed humanity in Christ



Bible study Booklet

Who Might You Be? - A Renewed Vision of Humanity In Christ Jesus

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Who are you?

It's not an easy question, is it? After all, our sense of identity comes from a variety of things: our relationships, our past, our reputation, our affiliations, our abilities, our responsibilities and our loves, to name a few. However, while it's not an easy question, it is an important question. The Christian author, Kenneth Boa, writes: "We cannot consistently behave in ways that are different from what we believe about ourselves." To put it simply, who we think we are dictates how we live.

If we think of ourselves as incapable, we are unlikely to live boldly. If we believe ourselves to be unlovable, we are unlikely to pursue deep relationships. If we regard ourselves as powerless, we are unlikely to champion what is right and good. Conversely, if you think you are accepted, you are more likely to be open and generous. If you are confident of victory, you're more likely to persevere through challenges. If you believe you can have integrity, you are more likely to work hard and speak truth. Who you think you are – your identity – determines how you live your life. It impacts your work, your relationships, your character, your joy, your faith, hope and love.

Given this, if Christians want to live the lives Jesus has called us to live, *first we need to know who he is changing us to be.*

Over the next 6 Sundays and weekly Bible studies at St Matt's, we encourage you to consider your identity. Not in light of your job, your family, your possessions, past or character, but in light of Jesus Christ, who has given us new identities in him. Despite your insecurities, doubts, failures and achievements – *who might you be?* Because of Jesus, who might you be now, and who might you become?

Note to Bible Study Leaders: There may be too much material for your group to cover in a single study. Make sure you plan ahead, determining which questions you will cover and which you might skip. Also, despite the lengthy studies, don't skimp on prayer. Just as God gave us a new identity, we depend on him to convict us that this identity is true.

NOT INSIGNIFICANT: You might exist for a reason.

(Psalm 8, Genesis 1:26-27, Hebrews 2:5-11)

Group Warm Up (as you wait for people to arrive): Choose three words to describe yourself.

Discussion: Where do people typically find their significance in our culture? What makes us feel valuable?

Introduction: *Foundational to our Christian identity is knowing our significance as human beings, as revealed in God's Word. During this study we will look at several passages that help us grasp how significant we are and what makes us significant.*

Pray for insight into Scripture and to encounter God, not just to gain head knowledge. Pray that what we learn will be for his glory, not our own.

Read Psalm 8 together.

In smaller groups, answer the following questions:

- What do we learn about God in Psalm 8?
- What do we learn about God's relationship with humanity?
- Verse 4 asks a question. What is it and how do verses 5-8 answer?
- In what sense do you think as members of mankind we've been "crowned with glory and honour?"

Come together and compare the answers your groups came up with.

Read Genesis 1:26-27. Together, answer the following:

- What do these verses have in common with Psalm 8?
 - How do Psalm 8 and Gen 1:26-27 clarify each other? (If helpful, consult the quote below.)

"The statement at the start of the Bible... that God made man in his own image, so that humans are like God as no other earthly creatures are, tells us that the special dignity of being human is that, as humans, we may reflect and reproduce at our own creaturely level the holy ways of God, and thus act as his direct representatives on earth. That is what humans are made to do... God's image [includes] setting them to rule creation as his representatives and deputies."

– J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Illinois: Tyndale House), 1993, p71.

- What do Psalm 8 and Genesis 1:26-27 teach us 1) about our significance, and thus 2) about our identity?

Psalm 8 presents a glorious significance for all humanity. But the writer to the Hebrews goes further. **Read Hebrews 2:5-11.**

- Having quoted Psalm 8, what problem does the writer to the Hebrews raise (see end of v. 8)? Why might this problem be the case?

- How does Jesus share in our human identity? And more importantly, why? (See also Hebrews 2:14, 17, 18).
- If being created in the image of God makes all humans significant, how does the work of Jesus give those he saves even greater significance? (v10, v11a, 11b. See also, 1 John 3:2.)
 - What might “glory” entail in verse 10?
 - What might be the significance of being called Jesus’ brother or sister?

Application

- What have you learnt that has been new or has stood out to you?
- How might these truths set you free from trying to find your significance elsewhere?
- How can we ensure that learning these incredible truths about ourselves isn’t just a narcissistic exercise? For ideas, consider the start and end of Psalm 8, and the quote below.
- In light of this study, answer the question: Who might you be?
- What verse could you memorize this week to remind yourself of your identity?
- Additional activity: Read the following quote, then discuss/consider: How might the significance of all humanity, and Christians in particular, change the way you relate to others?

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour’s glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ vere latitat—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

- C.S. Lewis, ‘The Weight of Glory’, first published in THEOLOGY, November, 1941.

NOT WHO I WAS: You might have a clean slate and endless possibilities.
(Ephesians 2:1-10, Matthew 9:9-13)

Group Warm Up (as you wait for people to arrive): If you had a biography, what would the title be?

Discussion: How much did *a desire to change* impact you as you decided to give your life to Jesus? (If a desire to change was not significant, what was significant?)

Introduction: *We often ground our sense of identity in our past – what we have done and what has been done to us, both positive and negative. But as we see today in God’s Word, his understanding of what makes us who we are is emphatically different.*

Pray for insight into God’s Word, and particularly for belief in his power and desire to change us.

Read Matthew 9:9-13. (OR: Break into two groups. Group 1 read Matthew 9:9-13, Group 2 read Luke 5:27-32, answer the following questions, then come back into one group and compare highlights.)

- Who was Matthew? What do we know about him? How might people have viewed Matthew? How might Matthew have viewed himself?
- Jesus commands Matthew/Levi to follow him. What stands out to you about his response? Why might he have responded this way?
- The Pharisees think that because Jesus eats with “sinners” he is approving of their sin. How does Jesus’ response contradict this? What do we learn about Jesus’ ministry from this story?
- How does Jesus give Matthew a new identity? Compare Matthew’s old identity with his new one.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

- Eph 2:1-10 is like one of those “Before and After” infomercials. Write down or draw images to answer the following questions:

Who were we? What were distinct features of our old identity?

Who are we? What are distinct features of our new identity?

- Do you agree with Paul’s description of the “before Christ” self, or is his view too pessimistic? Why?
- Why does God change us? (See v5, 7, 10.)
- How does God change us?
- This passage gives us a clear picture of ourselves (both before and after), but it also reveals much about our God.
 - What do we learn about God, and – given we are made in God’s image (see last week) –
 - what implications does this have for living as God’s representatives in the world?

Application

- When you consider verse 10, how does it make you feel? What might be these good works Paul speaks of?
- Can you share ways in which you have experienced the transformation described in Ephesians 2:1-10?
- Read the following quote, and then discuss the following questions:
 - Does Groeschel’s description resonate with you? If so, in what ways?
 - How would you use Ephesians 2:1-10 to encourage a believer who feels described by Groeschel?

“Chances are good that you are like most of us. You attempt to draw worth or value from the wrong places. You are inclined to believe what others say about you over what God says about you. You say you believe one thing, but privately live out of a double-standard set of beliefs. If you call yourself a Christian, you probably hope to live a life pleasing to God but often find yourself living to please others or yourself.”

- Craig Groeschel, *Altar Ego* (Zondervan, 2013).

- How could Eph 2:1-10 be used to encourage a non-believer struggling with:
 - Guilt?
 - Despair about their future?
 - Their sense of self-worth?
- In light of this study, answer the question: Who might you be?
- What verse could you memorize this week to remind yourself of your identity?

NOT AN OUTSIDER: You might belong to something epic.
(Ephesians 2:11-22, Matthew 15:21-28)

Group Warm Up (as people arrive): Do you identify with/"go for" any particular sports teams? Why do you think people feel so strongly about "their" team?

Discussion: Read and discuss the following quote. Do you agree or disagree? What stands out? What does it make you think of?

"Though our culture values autonomy and treats privacy like a fundamental human right, the hunger for true community remains. After all, nearly one in five adults admits to being lonely (whether or not they're in church). Our broken families have not killed our desire for family, but reconfigured it. We seek belonging from urban tribes that flow in and out of our lives. We long for a place where we can be known and loved, challenged and encouraged. And yet, many of us don't consider that the church could be such a place."

- Jon Tyson, Sacred Roots (Barna Publishing, 2013), 66.

Introduction: *So much of our identity arises from our sense of belonging – from our relationships and affiliations. We think of who we are in terms of nationality, hometown, the school we went to, our circle of friends, not to mention the families we were born into and the families we've made. God recognizes our desire to belong, but enables us to be included in something far greater than we might otherwise settle for.*

Pray that God will give insight into his Word, and pray that we'll be able to find our identity in Christ.

Read Matthew 15:21-28. This is an easily misunderstood passage. To correctly grasp it some context is helpful. Jesus has just clashed with the Pharisees and other Jewish teachers from Jerusalem over what makes someone "unclean." The Pharisees emphasize rituals, but Jesus emphasizes that the *heart* is what makes someone clean or unclean. The interaction with the Canaanite woman gives Jesus an opportunity to illustrate his point.

- What does the woman want? Given Jesus has healed many people previously, why are his disciples so unconcerned for the plight of this woman?
- According to verse 24, why won't Jesus help her?
- Jesus is particularly harsh in verse 26. He suggests that the people of Israel are the "children" of the house, and other people, who don't follow the law and rituals of Israel, are the dogs. How might the woman's response in verse 27, and Jesus' in verse 28, have shocked Jesus' prejudiced disciples?
- What does Jesus teach his disciples here about God and belonging?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. [Larger Bible studies might consider breaking into smaller groups to discuss this passage, and then report back.]

- What features does Paul note to describe the Gentile’s “before Jesus” reality in verses 11-12?
 - What words would you use to describe such a person’s identity?
- Verses 13-18 magnificently explain the work of Jesus in changing us from outsiders and strangers to people who belong. Note each of the things Jesus does for us in these verses (look for the verbs – Paul lists around nine different things!).
 - Discuss the things Jesus has done – what do they mean?
 - *How* did he do these things?
- In verses 19-22, Paul describes our new collective identity in Christ, using a combination of metaphors.
 - Why do you think Paul uses multiple metaphors here instead of just one?
 - What insights do we gain into our new belonging through each metaphor?

Application

- The work of Christ aside, what affiliations/relationships give you your sense of identity?
 - How is belonging to God’s people – as described in Ephesians 2:19-22 – superior to any of these other affiliations?
- Do you *feel* like you belong to the people of God? When is it most apparent to you?
- How might the truths of this passage impact how we approach and experience going to church?
- Can you think of non-believing friends or family who want to belong to something significant? How could these truths be used to encourage them?
- In light of this study, answer the question: Who might you be?
- What verse could you memorize this week to remind yourself of your identity?

NOT FORGOTTEN: You might be God's adopted child.

(Romans 8:14-21, 35-39; Mark 14:32-36)

Group Warm Up (as people arrive): 1) Choose three words to describe yourself. 2) Do you think others would choose these words to describe you? Why or why not?

Discussion: Is it healthy or unhealthy to let our identity be influenced by what others think of us? What benefits or problems might exist?

Introduction: *Perhaps more than anything else, our sense of self is dictated by what other people think of us. We crave approval, respect and love, and measure ourselves by the degree to which we get these things. The thought of being forgotten or despised is an enormous blow to our self-image. But constantly feeling the need to earn approval and love leaves us on an exhausting treadmill of insecurity. Fortunately, because of the new identity we have in Jesus, the Christian is forever free from the need to earn love and approval.*

Pray that through his Word, we will know God's love for us tonight, not just as head knowledge, but as truths that reside deep in our hearts.

Read Romans 8:14-21. Some context: Paul refers to those who live by the flesh and those who live by the Spirit. The latter group are those who have been saved by Jesus, and are now being transformed by God's Spirit, who lives in them (see 8:1-4).

- Compare the "before and after" identities described in verses 14-15. What roles does the Holy Spirit play in our transformation?
- Paul's enthusiasm overflows at the end of verse 15: "And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." Is Paul repeating the point already made, that we are God's children, or adding something new?
- **Read Mark 14:32-36.** What does Jesus' prayer have in common with how Paul says we can now pray?
 - In light of the clear parallel from the Garden of Gethsemane, what bold suggestion is Paul making?
- Read the following quote. What stands out to you?

"Paul says that the Spirit prompts us to cry out, "Abba, Father!" ... Stop and think about what this means. The One we are addressing is the sovereign creator, sustainer, and ruler of the entire universe. We, on the other hand, are dependent creatures who were dead in our trespasses and sins, and were enemies of God. How can we dare to address this sovereign and infinitely holy God as our Father? It is because we are in Christ, united to him in his sinless life and sin-bearing death. Christ is the one true Son of the Father, but because we are in him, God makes us his Sons also."

– Jerry Bridges, *Who Am I?* (Cruciform Press, 2012).

- What does the family language that Paul uses here add to your understanding of your new identity? What ideas or emotions does it evoke?

In the following verses of Romans 8, we can note at least two major implications of our adoption to “sonship.” Firstly, we see in verse 17 that as God’s children we are God’s heirs.

- As heirs of God, what inheritance might we expect?
- How do struggles and the suffering of the Christian life fit into our future inheritance?

The second implication of our adoption is drawn out at the end of the chapter. **Read Romans 8:35-39.**

- Summarize the point Paul is making in these verses.
- How can Paul be so confident that the Father and the Son will maintain their love for us?
 - Look at the end of verse 39. Why do you think God’s love for *us* is located in Christ Jesus?

Application

- Which do you find it harder to believe, that God has adopted you and has a glorious inheritance for you, or that nothing can separate you from his love?
- How might your life be different if you were more convinced of God’s unshakeable love for you as his adopted child?
- Is the promise of God’s love in Scripture too abstract to encourage a non-Christian, or does it remain powerful? How can we make God’s love more real for people?
- In light of this study, answer the question: Who might you be?
- What verse could you memorize this week to remind yourself of your identity?
- Additional activity: Read the following quote, and then answer the following:
 - How might it be liberating to know that God’s love for you overflows from his love for Jesus?
 - How can we practically remind ourselves and one another of God’s love for us, secured by Jesus?

Because we are performance-oriented by nature we tend to subjectively feel God's displeasure more than we do his loving, fatherly care. This means that, in order to experience the reality and full meaning of our adoption, we must also keep in mind our identity in Christ. This is how we counteract our own tendency to focus on our performance as a measure of God's acceptance. We must remind ourselves that God loves us, *not because we are lovable*, but *because we are in Christ*, and the love which the Father has for his Son flows over to us because we are in him."

– Jerry Bridges, *Who Am I?* (Cruciform Press, 2012).

NOT DEFEATED: You might have a life-transforming destiny.

(Romans 8:17-25, Philippians 3:7-21)

Group Warm Up (as people arrive): What is something coming up in your life that you are looking forward to?

Discussion: Read and discuss the following quote:

“I am convinced that one of the greatest needs of the modern western church is to build up an anticipation of the new heavens and new earth.”

– Don Carson, Next Level Conference, 2016.

- Do you agree with Carson? Why might he think the western church so badly needs this anticipation?

Introduction: *You may remember from a few weeks ago, in Ephesians 2:12 one of the ways Paul describes our “before Jesus” selves is being “without hope.” In such a short statement, it’s easy to miss what a terrible thing Paul is saying. Yet so many people live without hope. Hopelessness might manifest itself in different ways: in despair over the future, or in pathological efforts to distract oneself from things that they feel they have no control over. Whether they acknowledge it or not, both are defeated people. But with new identities in Christ, we are people of hope. We have a certain hope in an eternal destiny that enables us to live victoriously, despite our present circumstances.*

Pray for good discussion, and that through his Word and the truths in it, God will wean us away from our contentment on earth.

Read Romans 8:17-25. Last week, we looked at part of this passage to consider our adoption as God’s children. This week, we are focusing on the hope our adoption brings us. (Note: in the New Testament, “hope” is not wishful thinking, but confident expectation.)

- The New Testament writers see suffering as an inevitable part of the Christian’s life. Given that harsh reality, why is Paul so confident and joyful here?
- Why should hope be such a significant part of our new identity?
- How do we see some of the value of suffering in this passage (esp. vv24-25)?
 - While human suffering is never *fully* explained in Scripture, based on this passage, why might God allow his children to suffer?
- *Optional:* Consider again the incredible truths from Romans 8:31-37. What does Paul mean when he says we are “more than conquerors”? Given the victory won for us, how might these truths change the way we live?

Read Philippians 3:7-21. Despite not using the word, this passage teaches us a lot about Christian hope.

- Take a few moments to read silently through the passage again, looking for times when Paul anticipates something in the future. What does Paul hope for?
- Work through the passage again. How does Paul's hope impact the way he approaches his life?
- Compare the two different ways of living in verses 17-21 (and especially 19-20).
 - What might it mean in practice to set one's mind on earthly things? What about on our citizenship in heaven?

Divide into 3 groups. Have each group read one of these passages, answer the questions together, and then report back to the larger group.

- Matthew 6:19-21, Colossians 3:1-4, 1 Peter 1:3-5.
 - What point is the speaker/writer making?
 - What do we learn about our future?
 - How might this future change the way we live now?
- After coming back together, answer the following: Why do the New Testament writers spend so much time writing about the future and about our hope?

Application

- Can you think of a Christian you know who has been made distinct by their confident hope? What stands out about them?
 - What would a person who has grasped their eternal hope look like?
- Would people describe you as a person of hope? Why or why not?
- How might you live your life differently, if you more fully grasped the life-transforming destiny you have in Christ Jesus?
- What could we do to remind ourselves and each other of the hope we have in Christ?
- In light of this study, answer the question: Who might you be?
- Additional activity: Read the following quote and discuss:

"I grew up in the 1930s Great Depression when many families struggled to make ends meet, and in an area where old-fashioned country gospel music was popular... [T]here was one consistent theme that ran through those songs: hope. Because life was so difficult for so many believers, they tended to look forward with hope to their eternal inheritance, and that hope was reflected in their music -- hope that God would help believers "make it to the end," and then usher them into the joy and blessing of his loving presence. Today, with our far more affluent culture, we have virtually lost sight of our eternal inheritance and the importance of hope. Yet God intends for part of our identity as those "in Christ" to be the recognition that the realization of our identity will only come when we receive our eternal inheritance."

– Jerry Bridges, *Who Am I?* (Cruciform Press, 2012).

NOT USELESS: You might always have a reason to get out of bed.
(Galatians 6:7-10, Titus 3:1-8)

Group Warm Up (as people arrive): Would you rather be too busy or not busy enough?

Discuss: Why does our society place such high value on what we *do*?

Introduction: *It's hard to find people who don't define themselves by what they do. Whether it's our role in our families, our career or simply our hobbies, these are what so often determine who we think we are. God doesn't contradict this desire to act, but instead, having made us new in Christ, he gives us a more significant purpose to work towards than we could find on our own.*

Pray that in this last study, we'll be struck again by our need for Jesus in all aspects of our lives, and particularly in our understanding of who we are.

Read Titus 3:1-8.

- Once again we see a “before and after” comparison. What are the traits of the first group (v3)? Can you suggest anything in common between these traits?
- How has God granted us a new identity? Why has he done so?
 - What aspects of this new identity are noted here?
- How should we live as saved people? (Verses 1-2, 8. See also, Ephesians 2:10.)
 - Based on Titus 3, what might it look like in practice to do good?

Read Galatians 6:7-10.

- How are we encouraged to do good?
- What is doing good contrasted with?
- Why do you think Paul puts a priority on doing good for other believers?

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10, and Matthew 5:14-16.

- According to these passages, what is:
 - Our identity?
 - Our purpose? How does this purpose measure up compared to other reasons we might have for the work we do?
- How might these passages clarify what it looks like to do good?

Finally, read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

- As we consider the call to do good, it is easy to feel as though some Christians are more useful than others. How does this passage contradict this idea?
- How does verse 18 encourage you as you consider what you offer in God's service?

Application

- Is it appropriate for some of our new identity to be derived by what we do in God's service? Does this diminish the reality that our new identity is established in and through Jesus Christ?
- Read the statement below and answer the questions:
 - Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
 - Can you think of examples that contradict it?

"The Christian calling to do good transcends occupations, life stages and ability levels. No matter who we are, no matter where we are, there is always good we can do, to the praise of our Saviour."

- What opportunities to do good do you have in your current circumstances? How can these good deeds be done to the praise of God?
- Take some time to consider the members of your group. How do you see God equipping and/or using each of these people to do his good works in the world? Write down your thoughts and give them to that person, or share them with one another. [If group is large, consider breaking in half or smaller for this activity. Obviously, you should make sure no one is left out!]
- In light of this study, answer the question: Who might you be?

Series Summary

- What has most stood out to you about your new identity in Christ?
- What lies that you have believed about yourself have been exposed?
- What steps can you take to ensure that who you think you are is who you are in Jesus?