

Who are we?

June 2023 (4 June - 1 July)



Our theme this month 'Who are we?' is all about identity. As humans we try to understand what our purpose and meaning is all about, especially since we never asked to be born. Often we feel like strangers in time seeking direction. We project various personas, but do we ever find within ourselves the real person?

The Bible suggests we start by looking beyond ourselves and the creation. Seeking God is the first step to knowing ourselves, for we are made in the image of God. By doing so we discover the designer is in search of us.

We are going to take our daily readings from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In this letter Paul suggests that the Church, the community of believers, are in fact God's chosen way of helping humanity discover their true identity. Paul reflects upon four key issues. Firstly, the nature and character of God. Secondly, the key principles that make up the message believers should be sharing. Thirdly, how this message is have an impact on their lives, and finally what is the wider vision for the creation and the world in which we live.

A note from Albert Bogle:

In May 1989 just a few weeks after my father's death I attended a conference at St Ninian's Crieff which has had a profound effect on my ministry. It was led by Tom Smail. Tom had been instrumental in the growth of the Charismatic Movement in the early 70s. His morning Bible readings were based around the book of Ephesians. His profound and practical teaching on the book of Ephesians has never left me. During that week he explored the book of Ephesians suggesting that Paul was answering four basic questions about the church.

1. What kind of God do we serve?
2. What kind of Gospel do we proclaim?
3. What kind of people have we to become?
4. What kind of world are we being called to live in?

During the four weeks of June I would like us to return to the book of Ephesians and together with our writers take one of these question each week and seek to find answers to them in the text of Ephesians.

SETTING THE SCENE: A visual motif for each week. An optional additional focus point for preparing worship services or multimedia inspired by the material.

SEEDS TO SOW: Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

Each week of the 4 week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

What kind of God do we serve? (4 June)

During week 1 we have drawn out seven attributes of God's character that allow us to encounter his nature and see it reflected in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Knowing the God we serve allows us to be confident that we can have a relationship with our creator and redeemer. Calvin in the opening paragraph of his Institutes suggests to know ourselves we must first have knowledge of God. In our studies this week we are suggesting — when we realise the nature of God we may be surprised at the power we have to be agents of change all around the world.

SETTING THE SCENE: HANDS TOGETHER IN PRAYER

SEEDS TO SOW: IF THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS A PHYSICAL SEAL, WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE? (See *Ephesians 1: 13*)

1. Ephesians 1: 5, 9
 2. Ephesians 1: 4-7
 3. Ephesians 1: 4
 4. Ephesians 1: 6, 9-10
 5. Ephesians 1: 11-14
 6. Ephesians 1: 7-8,17
 7. Ephesians 1: 18-23
1. **God's pleasure.** God takes great pleasure in his creation and he takes great pleasure and delight in Jesus (see verse 9 and also Matthew 3: 17). If God delights in his creation — taking pleasure and enjoying the good things in life is not a sin. Perhaps we need to delight more in each other as God delights in us?
 2. **God's freedom.** The key to understanding freedom in God's economy is to realise that his will is his freedom. We exist out of that love. We have been called into existence, by the choice and will of a loving God's freedom. Ponder what it means to be loved into existence.
 3. **God's holiness.** We have been called to reflect God's holiness. Reflect upon 1 Peter 1: 16. We are called to be set apart for God's use in the world. We are not to be outside the world but in the world to reflect God's glory.
 4. **God's love.** Our knowledge of God's love is found in our knowledge of Jesus. John 3:16, Jesus is God's love in action towards his creation. This is a powerful, life changing thought which when believed will change our perspective and outlook on life.
 5. **God's glory.** God's glory is revealed in our lives of faith., Could link to Exodus 34: 29-35, the Glory of God revealed on Moses.
 6. **God's wisdom.** True wisdom starts with knowledge of God revealed to us in Jesus . This is revelation (see verse 17). Knowing Jesus gives us a deeper knowledge of ourselves. True wisdom is found in humility (Romans 12: 3).
 7. **God's power.** Recognising the incomparable resurrection power of God. The power to see what is not there yet. With him all things are possible (see Matthew 19: 26).

What kind of Gospel do we proclaim? (11 June)

If we begin to recognise the height and depth of God's being we are brought to the place where we ask, what kind of Gospel are we called to share with the world around us? During the next seven days we'll share seven aspects of the Gospel that in turn will transform the world around us.

SETTING THE SCENE: **OPENING A GIFT**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE A PEACEMAKER? WHAT ARE THE COSTS INVOLVED?**

1. Ephesians 2: 8-10
 2. Ephesians 2: 4
 3. Ephesians 2: 13-16
 4. Ephesians 2: 14
 5. Ephesians 2: 19-22
 6. Ephesians 2: 22
 7. Ephesians 2: 6-7
1. **Gospel of Grace.** Grace is the gift that is never deserved. If we are owed it there is no grace in it. When we have been graced we have a debt of gratitude to live out.
 2. **Gospel of Regeneration.** But God, all is lost, but for God. It is the rich mercy of God that can regenerate — remake, bring back to life. God was regenerating people long before Dr Who was ever re-generated. To re-generate is to restore power and purpose. Baptism is the outward sign of that work of regeneration that loving mercy of God. We need to look upon our regeneration with great expectations.
 3. **Gospel of Reconciliation.** (See 2 Corinthians 5:18.) God has reconciled Jews and Gentiles to one another and to himself.
 4. **Gospel of Peace.** We are called to be the peacemakers. To seek out reconciliation. He has brought about peace in our divided identities. The Gospel, the cross, absorbs our hostilities.
 5. **Gospel of Unity.** The gospel of peace leads to a people of unity. Built up together into a Holy temple.
 6. **Gospel of Mystery.** The mystery of God dwelling with us. (See also Revelation 21:3). The Spirit dwelling in our lives.
 7. **Gospel of Revelation.** What a mystery. Our grace filled lives have an eschatological purpose. To show the incomparable kindness of God towards sinners.

What kind of people are we becoming? (18 June)

When we begin to understand the transformational content of the gospel message it leads us to consider the kind of people this gospel creates. What's kind of people are we becoming?

SETTING THE SCENE: **A MIRROR, A GLASS OF WINE, AND LOAF OF BREAD**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT DOES THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST MEAN IN OUR LIVES?**

1. Ephesians 3: 14-21
 1. **A people of power.** This is the power that comes from the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Now we are called to inherit and inhabit the power of God. This is what the act of Communion points to — is a sign of — to receive the power and presence of Christ in our lives.
2. Ephesians 3: 14-21
 2. **A People of Faith.** Faith is a gift from God. It comes to us through the presence of Christ in-dwelling the community of God. Faith is a gift to upbuild the people of God (see also 2 Corinthians 12: 19).
3. Ephesians 3: 14-21
 3. **A People of Love.** Love is the outward demonstration of the Spirit of God in-dwelling the individual but also the community. Love generates the power of God.
4. Ephesians 3: 18-19
 4. **A People in Communion.** It is in Communion with others that we are filled with the fullness of God. There is much for us to reflect upon as we consider the place of presence, unity, and humility, within the experience of communion.
5. Ephesians 3: 18-19
 5. **A People Overflowing.** The fullness of God takes us past knowledge. Our knowledge, as we are told in 1 Corinthians 13, is incomplete. the power of love is that it trumps knowledge every time.
6. Ephesians 3: 20
 6. **A People of Expectation.** Here Paul invites us to be a people of expectation. The problem with most of us is that our understanding of God is too small. How different would things be if we started to expect more to happen?
7. Ephesians 3: 21
 7. **A People Reflecting Glory.** We don't think enough about glory. Glory is joyous and extravagant. Precious and full of wonder. We are all these things and more.

What kind of world are we being called to live in? (25 June)

We have moved from asking 'What kind of God do we serve?', to 'What kind of gospel do we proclaim? Then we asked 'What kind of people are we becoming?' Finally, we ask what kind of world do we live in? We ask this question because we need to be aware that there is a Spiritual dimension to life. There is another dimension beyond the physical. The scripture teaches us that there is struggle going on in our lives between the forces of good and evil. Paul in the last chapter of Ephesians invites us to be aware of the struggle and to put on God's spiritual clothes of protection.

SETTING THE SCENE: **STURDY PAIR OF MUDDY BOOTS**

SEEDS TO SOW: **ARE WE WEARING THE RIGHT SPIRITUAL CLOTHES FOR THE RIGHT WEATHER?**

1. Ephesians 6: 10-14
 1. **Standing Firm.** Paul encourages Christians to stand firm when evil comes across your path. This is an opportunity to highlight the dangers of the occult and to stand firm against spiritual darkness, wearing the armour of God.
2. Ephesians 6: 14
 2. **Belt of Truth.** Truth is like a belt that holds our integrity together. Once truth has gone there is no true understanding of reality.
3. Ephesians 6: 14
 3. **The Breastplate of Righteousness.** The breastplate of righteousness is all part of the defence to seek justice. Justice is at the heart of the Christian. The breastplate is all about protecting the heart.
4. Ephesians 6: 15
 4. **Shoes of peace.** Shoes allow us to go over stony ground. Peace-shoes enable the difficult pathways to be overcome. Peace will always, in the end, overcome hostility. Every struggle has an ending.
5. Ephesians 6: 16
 5. **Shield of Faith** Taking up the shield of faith. Faith protects us from the fiery darts of doubt. So much gets hurled at us. Faith allows us to say 'I believe' and the evil cannot stay in the same room as faith.
6. Ephesians 6: 17
 6. **Helmet of Salvation.** The helmet of salvation reminds us that we need to protect the way we think. Salvation is a great concept. It is all about reassurance. Wearing the helmet gives us the courage to stand and protect our thoughts.
7. Ephesians 6: 17
 7. **The Sword of the Spirit.** The sword of the Spirit is surely the word of God. We are told it is sharper than any two edged sword. Believing that God's wisdom continues to be available to us.