

Express yourself! Summer 2026 Connect Study

July and August Connect Questions for personal study or for meeting up with others for informal, open ended prayer and reflection.



Introduction:

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean losing your identity. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean sanding off all the quirks and rough edges. Being a Christian doesn't mean 'fitting in'. Being a Christian means be 'fitted out'! Fitting out a new life with everything that you truly are.

God does not ask us to blend in and keep our heads down. God does not invite you to lose yourself in something bigger, but rather to find yourself as part of something bigger. Bringing all those quirks and rough edges to contribute to more than the sum of our parts. Through expressing our true selves to God and one another we uncover who we have always been at heart.

This summer as a community we are exploring the many different ways we express ourselves — through food, music, art, sport, festival and celebration.

God does not ask for conformity, God asks for generosity. God does not ask for timidity — God asks for tenacity. God does not call us to be insular — but urges us to look out. Expressing ourselves through the things we love is not a reward for being a Christian — it's what it IS to BE a Christian. The expression — of compassion, of kindness, of love, of

imagination, of care, of art, of adventure, of effort, — are not incidental, they are a human being fully alive! So this summer — all you've got to do is express yourself!

A note about format:

Rather than creating an extended Bible study over the summer, while many Connect groups take a break, we have instead created a short Biblical focus for each of the 9 weeks of our summer themes. Each week also has an optional book and film you may wish to explore.

These can be used for personal study — perhaps this summer you can take a journal with you and reflect each week on these prompts wherever you go? Or they can be used informally with friends, families, congregations and others groups getting together in summer configurations. Perhaps you are running a summer cafe church and you could use these questions to shape group discussions? Maybe your Connect group wants to keep meeting over the summer but in a shorter/more irregular format with people coming and going — you could use these questions as opportunities to dig into our themes while also having a lighter load to enjoy catching up with one another!

Week 1 You are what you eat! — Food (begins Sunday 5 July)

"You are what you eat." We've all heard it, but what are we actually hungering for? In a world full of temporary satisfactions, what is the ultimate pursuit that actually fulfils our souls? We hunger for more than physical sustenance; we hunger for connection and ultimate meaning.

Scripture Focus: John 6:25-35

- **Core Discussion Question:** Jesus calls Himself the "Bread of Life." What are the temporary "foods" (success, approval, material things) we often pursue to define our identity, and how and why do they leave us hungry?
- **Books:** *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis and *The Prodigal God* Timothy Keller
- **Film:** *Chocolat* (Exploring how food, community, and breaking bread together can transform a rigid culture)

Week 2 Gameface! — Team Sports (begins Sunday 12 July)

From World Cup Stadiums to local five-a-side pitches, sports show us peaks of human striving and endurance. But the greatest moments aren't just about winning — they are about respect, sacrifice, and teamwork. Individual glory is hollow and team sports remind us that we are intended to find our identity in community, bringing out the best in each other and honouring one another.

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 4: 25-32

- **Core Discussion Question:** Paul tells us we are "members of one another." How does a "team sports" mentality change how we treat people we disagree with or view as opponents in daily life? Why does striving **with** and **against** others shape our identity?
- **Book:** *The Infinite Game* by Simon Sinek (Shifting from beating others to building long-term community)
- **Films:** *Chariots of Fire* or *The Boys in the Boat* (Classic stories of human striving, sacrifice, and honouring a higher purpose)

Week 3 Secret Chords and a well known chorus — Music (begins Sunday 19 July)

Ever had a song give you chills, completely change your mood, or move you to tears? Music speaks a language our body, soul, and spirit all understand at once. We are 'triune beings' (body, soul, spirit) and music resonates across every layer of our existence, harmonising us with the Divine and each other.

Scripture Focus: Ezra 3:10-13

- **Core Discussion Question:** In Ezra, the people's praise was a mix of shouts of joy and weeping. How does music help us express the complex, beautiful, and sometimes painful layers of our human identity as we strive to know ourselves and to know God?
- **Book:** *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* Jeremy S. Begbie
- **Film:** *August Rush* (Beautifully capturing how music connects the physical world to something deeply spiritual)

Week 4 A lamp to our feet — Running with God (begins Sunday 26 July)

Submitting to the training session isn't easy, whether you're a runner on the track or a boxer in the ring. It requires focus, restraint, and an eye on the prize. Character and identity are similarly forged through action and discipline. In the 'spiritual gym' what are we training our souls for?

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

- **Core Discussion Question:** Paul talks about training his body so he won't be disqualified. James K. A. Smith describes ritual, praise and liturgy as "a "hearts and minds" strategy, a pedagogy that trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get hold of our heart and "aim" our love towards the kingdom of God." What is one daily spiritual discipline, practice or habit that helps (or could help) "train" your identity to become more like Christ?

- **Book:** *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
- **Films:** *Brittany Runs a Marathon* or *Creed* (Stories about finding inner identity and self-worth through physical and mental discipline)

Week 5 Coming face to face with God — Art (begins Sunday 2 August)

God is the ultimate Artist. When we create or appreciate art, we are mirroring the divine imagination and catching a glimpse of the Imago Dei (image of God). When an artist paints a self-portrait, they look deep into a mirror. When we look closely at humanity, do we see the brushstrokes of a personal God?

Scripture Focus: Isaiah 55: 1-5

- **Core Discussion Question:** Isaiah paints us a vivid picture. It's thought-provoking to consider that despite the visual and vibrant language in much of the Bible it contains no images itself. Why do you think this is the case? Why do we need to draw the pictures anew each time?
- **Book:** *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* by Makoto Fujimura
- **Films:** *The Portrait of a Lady on Fire* or *Loving Vincent* (Exploring identity through the intense, transformative lens of art)

Week 6 A heavenly party — Festivals and celebrations (begins Sunday 9 August)

*Human beings love to celebrate! Festivals and family traditions allow us to pause time and remember our history. This week, we are looking at the dramatic story of Joseph to see how God weaves our personal highs and lows into a much bigger celebration of rescue. Identity is historical and relational. Through shared stories and festivals, we remember **who we are** and **whose we are**. Our faith is built on a long tradition of festivals. Are we living out the 'heavenly party' as Michelle Guinness memorably describes it!*

Scripture Focus: Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22 & Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Genesis 45:1-15

- **Core Discussion Question:** Joseph went from the favourite son to a pit, to slavery, and finally to a palace. How and why do our life's "chapters" — even the painful ones — become part of a story worth celebrating when God is in control? And how do festivals give us spaces to process existential questions about our identity?
- **Book:** *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen (Centered on celebration, homecoming, and identity)
- **Film:** *Babette's Feast* (A stunning film about how a grand feast can heal a fractured community and reveal divine grace)

Week 7 Unity through diversity (begins Sunday 16 August)

The ultimate power of Christian identity is that we don't have to be clones with identikit tastes and values to be close. We are the "one in the many" — a beautifully diverse body with Christ as our head. It takes all of us in our rich humanity to reflect back the 'Imago Dei' (image of God).

Scripture Focus: Romans 15:1-6

- **Core Discussion Question:** Paul calls us to accept one another just as Christ accepted us. Why and how is true unity harder — but much more beautiful — than simply hanging out with people who are just like us?
- **Book:** *Being as Communion* by John Zizioulas
- **Film:** *Remember the Titans* (A powerful look at overcoming deep diversity conflicts to find a unified identity and brotherhood)

Week 8 Everyday glory — Work (begins Sunday 23 August)

There is glory in the grind. The work of our hands, our daily endurance, and our ability to withstand life's storms show that we are made of strong stuff. Human beings are resilient because our existence is sustained by the eternal rock of God's love. Our daily work has cosmic significance.

Scripture Focus: Isaiah 51:1-6

- **Core Discussion Question:** Isaiah tells us to "look to the rock from which you were hewn." When life feels fragile or exhausting, how and why does knowing your identity is cut from God's eternal strength give you the power to endure? Are there family members or dear friends that inspire us not to give up — knowing their struggles and how they survived?
- **Book:** *Every Good Endeavour: Connecting Your Work to God's Plan* by Timothy Keller
- **Film:** *The Pursuit of Happyness* (A profound story of human endurance, work, and parental love amidst immense hardship)

Week 9 Expressing God's love in the world! (begins Sunday 30 August)

How do we take everything we've learned about our identity and express God's love to an expectant, waiting world? Our fully realised identity as persons made in the image of a Triune (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) God is realised when we pour out His love into our diverse communities through Communion and care.

Scripture Focus: Psalm 105: 1-6

- **Core Discussion Question:** Sometimes we talk of the church being Christ's "hands and feet" to a watching world. Why is our interaction with others such a powerful

testimony to those outside the church? What is one specific, tangible way we can move from **inward reflection** to **outward action** as Christians in our communities and among our friends — those who never profess faith, but who never deny it either?

- **Book:** *The Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren
- **Film:** *A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood* (Showing how a single individual radically expressed God's personal, attentive love to a broken world)