

Who am I? Exploring identity in scripture and prayer.

- a) This resource helps you to reflect on some important questions in your own time and at your own pace using the Bible and creative activities.
- b) It can be adapted for both individuals and groups to suit your needs.

Be still and know that I am God. Psalm 46:10

Opening prayer



A candle or candles may be lit.

Ask God to help you let go of all that is weighing you down or is distracting you from being fully present. Be still and begin to listen to the Spirit in the silence.

For Individuals

I come before you Lord,
just as I am,
nothing more, nothing less.
You made me in your image
and loved me into being.

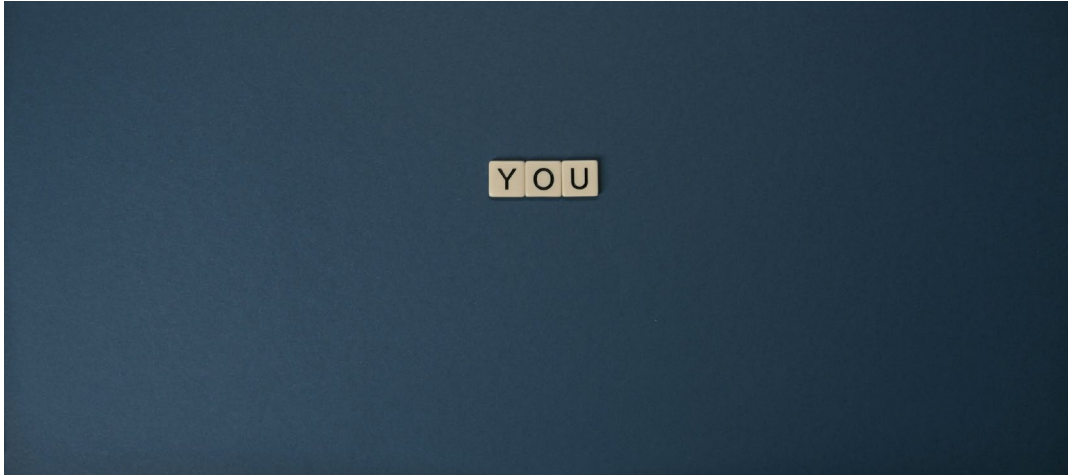
So be with me now
just as I am,
nothing more, nothing less.
I thank you God for this time
to dwell in your presence.
Amen.

For Groups

We come before you Lord,
just as we are,
nothing more, nothing less.
You made us in your image
and loved us into being.

So be among us now
just as we are,
nothing more, nothing less.
We thank you God for this time
to dwell in your presence.
Amen.

Pause to reflect briefly.



In this retreat we offer you some questions to explore:

1. What do you feel about your identity – in your life so far?
2. What has stayed the same and what has changed?
3. How do you feel about your faith and relationships with God and with those you love?
4. What insights can you offer to other people in your church about the changing nature of identity, the need to belong and how to be true to ourselves?

These questions underpin the different activities we provide.

Identity and ourselves

Either on your own or in twos or threes, discuss the questions below:

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. How has your view of yourself changed as you have grown older?

Reflecting in a Christian context - *this can be shared as a group or read individually*

Matthew 16:13-16

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Throughout our Christian discipleship, we express our identity in who we say we are, what we believe and what we are called to be and do. As our life unfolds, our identity can respond to change and experience, even when we do not always see what we are called to be or do, or when our calling takes us into difficult and challenging times. Yet basically, we are always 'us', made in God's image and held in God's embrace.

We may express different aspects of our identity in different situations. Changes in our sense of self can be positive and enriching but can also be difficult and painful depending on what life throws our way. We can be challenged to the core, creating doubts and fears in us but also, prompting hopes, dreams and new beginnings.

As we get older, life continues to call us to question our identity and our faith:

1. What has happened in my life - have I done what I wanted to do?
2. What are my joys and disappointments?
3. What are my gifts and griefs?
4. Where and when am I most 'me'?
5. What is unresolved?
6. How would I describe my faith now?
7. What is my purpose now?

These questions and many others frame our identity and give us meaning. They are part of our innermost being and shape us and our faith daily.



Activities

The following offer a range of activities from which to choose.

Participants decide which one(s) they would like to do depending on how much time they have, materials available and the type of venue in which they are meeting.

Group discussions are best when there are at least three people contributing. Some activities can be done at home or over a longer period of time.

Group discussion (allow 30 minutes to an hour)

1. Who and what have shaped your identity over the years?
2. How has your identity changed in relation to:

Your relatives.
Your church.
Your work.

Your friends.
Where you live now and where you previously lived.
Your hobbies, networks and other connections?

Old Testament passage on the theme of identity (allow about 30 minutes)

Psalm 139:1-18

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ I try to count them - they are more than the sand;
I come to the end - I am still with you.

Questions for discussion

1. What does "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" mean to you as you grow older? (v.14).

This Psalm describes one person's close relationship with God.

2. How do you respond to this?

3. What words or images in this psalm speak to you about who you are at this stage in life?

4. How would you rewrite this psalm to reflect your own relationship with God?

New Testament passage on the theme of identity (allow about 30 minutes)

Matthew 12:46-50

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ⁴⁸ But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!" ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Questions for discussion

1. Imagine you are in the crowd of people listening to Jesus.
2. Everyone is eager and expectant. What will he say? What will he do?
3. What brought you here?
4. What would you like to say to Jesus? And Jesus to say to you?
5. How do you feel about the way Jesus responded to his own family and that whoever does his Father's will is his family?

For reflection:

1. Think about your relationship with Jesus.
2. How could you show Jesus what he means to you?

Quotations and reflections for individuals and groups (allow 30 minutes)

Read the three reflections quietly first.

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

Mahatma Gandhi

There is no freedom like seeing myself as I am.

There is no freedom like looking at myself as I am and saying "Yes – that's me!"

There is no freedom like taking myself in my arms.

Only in that embrace will I understand my wounds.

Only in that embrace will I experience healing.

Only in that embrace will I come to know my true self.

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I will not die an unlived life.

I will not live in fear of falling or catching fire.

I choose to inhabit my days to allow my living to open me,

to make me less afraid, more accessible,

to loosen my heart until it becomes a wing, a torch, a promise.

I choose to risk my significance,

to live, so that which came to me as seed goes to the next as blossom,

and that which came to me as blossom, goes on as fruit.

I Will Not Die An Unlived Life © 2000 by Dawna Markova

Question for group discussion

1. Where or to what is your heart drawn in these reflections?
2. Which reflection is inviting you to spend more time with God in prayer?



Art and craft exploration (allow 30 minutes to an hour)

This activity enables creative use of the imagination in thinking about our identity.

Using paints, pencils, collage, fabric, poetry, prose, calligraphy or whatever creative materials you wish to use, make something that reflects who you are, how you feel or want to be described at this time - it can be abstract or representative. Let your imagination do the talking.

When you've finished this activity it can be shared in prayer at an appropriate time, or for displaying as part of a prayer focus in worship if the group would also find this helpful.

Or you could do this activity over a number of days or weeks if you enjoy the creative process, or if you want to produce more than one type of creative resource.

Some groups like to have a display or dedicated arts festival open to their church members and the general public when there are enough works to exhibit or during a particular season.

Spiritual portrait (allow 30 minutes)

You don't need to be an artist for this activity; you just need a little imagination!

Imagine a portrait artist has been commissioned to paint your portrait in three sittings.

They have been asked to capture your likeness as you wish to be portrayed in front of:

God

Your family or friends

The rest of the world.

1. What would you like the artist to reveal about you and to express in this portrait?

Think about how you reflect yourself in different situations.

2. What would please you in the finished portrait?

Reflect on what this shows you about yourself, your spirituality and relationship with God.



Social action group discussion (allow 45 minutes to an hour)

1. Discuss what you think about general attitudes towards either younger or older people in society, and in your own experience?

You could share relevant articles online, from a newspaper or magazine.

2. How can you share and celebrate the diversity of people and different generations in your community and/or church?

Think about what you would need to do and who would need to be involved.

3. How can you, as a group, make this happen?

4. Or do you first need to create a focus group?

5. What are the benefits of celebrating the diversity in your community and/or church?

Taking positive action.

6. What would you like to say, and to whom?

7. What action can you take? Where, and how?

8. How can you, as a group, make this happen?

As a group, you may wish to meet again to review progress on this social action.

If after this session you would like free and further information about taking social action on other issues in your church or local community, then go to:

Turning Tables: A Toolkit for Scripture and Social Action

This resource is designed to help adult Catholics across England and Wales to understand and engage with their faith, Scripture and social justice in practical ways.

www.godwhospeaks.uk/turning-tables-a-toolkit-for-scripture-and-social-action/

Closing prayer and reflection



A candle or candles may be lit, or they may still be burning from the opening prayer time.

Now make time to still yourself before closing the session.

If in a group, ask everyone to still themselves before closing the session.

As this session draws to an end let us pause in silence to be with God.

Let us think back over this session...

Hold what you want to remember close to your heart.

Where did you most feel alive?

Where did you most desire God?

Hold the silence for a few moments.

Give thanks to God for drawing us into his love.

Reflect on the following text:

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.
Ephesians 5:1.*

Let us go now in peace,
to love and serve the Lord.
Amen.

The candle or candles are blown out.