



RESOURCES

Mark



St Philips

CONTENTS

This series is called KINGDOM PEOPLE.

We'll be looking at the first 9 chapters of Mark's gospel and the series will take us on a journey of discovering who Jesus is and who God says we are; we'll see that the Kingdom work of Jesus reveals to us the character of God; we'll think about the enemy's opposition to the Kingdom and our authority in Christ as Kingdom People to rebuke and defeat him; and we'll learn that walking in great authority and power is not about finding a formula but about intimacy and sacrificial love.

Timing: 20-40 minutes, then leading into prayer/ministry

Buzzgroups: Groups of 3-4 work best, there are feedback notes for the speaker

Illustrations: Where relevant, suggestions are made but speaker's own stories are preferable

Approach: Use these resources to curate and steer group discussion, rather than seeing this material as a talk to delivery straight.

Trust the group discussion to create an environment for mutual growth, deepening relationships and intimate encounter with the Spirit. Feel free to tailor and pitch the talk as best suits your group.

"Go Deeper": Suggestions for deeper exploration are noted.

Ministry notes: Follow the Spirit but suggestions are included if desired.

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WEEK 1

SPIRITUAL ADOPTION & OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Introduction

Intro Exercise Part 1 (6 minutes): Individually reflect about who you are. Explore how you perceive yourself. (2 mins).

Now, get into pairs and describe to the other person how you perceive *them* and vice-versa. (4 mins - 2 mins each).

This exercise explores the difference between how we are perceived by others vs how we perceive ourselves.

In most cases there was probably a difference between how you viewed yourself and how the other person viewed you. For many of you the person you were paired with probably described you in a more positive light than you would describe yourself.

Intro Exercise Part 2 (2 minutes): Now, individually again, imagine how God perceives you.

Something to consider: if your partner saw you in a more positive light than you see yourself....what about God? Do you think God sees you in an even more positive light or less positive? Did your partner see you in a more positive light because they don't know you as well as you do? Maybe. But then, by the same reasoning God, who knows you better than you know yourself, should see you in an even less positive light than you see yourself. So, when you imagined just now how God perceives you, did you think positively or negatively? Perhaps a mix of both....?

Our sense of who we are, our identity, is often made up of a mix of how we see ourselves, how we think others see us and how we imagine God sees us. The problem is that a lot of the time our sense of identity can be wrong. We don't live in our true identity.

Our true identity is not how we perceive ourselves, how others perceive us or how we think God perceives us. Our true identity is how God actually sees us – who He says we are.

In this session we will think about our true identity in Christ as adopted children of God. We will discover that identity is about **love, intimacy** and **worth**.

WEEK 1

SPIRITUAL ADOPTION & OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Read: Mark 1:1-13

The gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism are key passages on identity. Mark opens with a statement about who Jesus is - the "Son of God" - v. 1. Then, v. 11, we read the stand-out verse on Jesus' identity: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Before Jesus had done anything in His ministry, the Father bestowed identity on Him by telling Jesus that i) He is His Son, ii) that He is loved, and iii) that He is pleased with Him.

Buzzgroups:

Discuss in groups of three (4 minutes): In what do you find your identity? (Encourage people to discuss this honestly).

Feedback (3 minutes): try to explore what defines us: family, nationality, work, hobbies, money, possessions, approval from peers etc. NB: none of these things are bad in themselves, but there are dangers in investing our identity in them. (Take time together to explore why?). This session is all about our true identities being found in God's love revealed in Christ and in being part of God's family.

"Who am I?" is one of humanity's deepest questions. We are bombarded with messages about identity. (Examples/personal story?). But in this passage God offers us a deep insight into who we really are - our identity is rooted in Jesus' identity.

1 John 3 - See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! God alone defines who we are and He has bestowed on us the very same identity as His own Son! So everything the Father says about Jesus in Mark 1, He also says about you: i) you are His son/daughter, ii) you are loved by Him, and iii) He is pleased with you.

1. The Father's love

Jesus' identity is established on the Father's love for Him - v. 11. Before anything else, Jesus is loved. That is significant for us because, like Jesus, our identity is also revealed in the Father's love for us. Question: Who are you? Answer: You are His beloved.

As Jesus' identity was bestowed on Him before He had done anything to 'earn' it, so our adoption was confirmed before we did anything to 'deserve' it - because the Father always planned to have us as His family. Eph 1:5: "In love He predestined us for adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will." In love the Father chose us.

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God's love, therefore, does not require us to be good enough or to prove our worth. We do not have to, nor can we ever, earn it. It is unconditional.

Buzzgroups:

Discuss in groups of three (4 minutes): What does it mean to you to be loved with an unconditional love?

Feedback (3 minutes): try to explore the fact that many people (if not all - including Christians) find a love that is unasked for, unconditional, underserved and unlimited hard to accept. Human love so often comes with strings attached, makes requirements of us or is transient. It therefore robs us of security rather than confirms it. God's love is a perfect love that casts out all fear and bestows identity. We do not have to earn it. We are just loved. Loved into a new identity.

Much of our own personal sense of security comes from our identity. Having an identity crisis is always accompanied by a sense of insecurity. (Personal story here?). As Christians, we find our security through our identity as God's dearly loved children. It is an identity that is founded, not on our own activity, goodness or acceptability, but on the Father's gracious and unconditional love for us. Accepting this unconditional love is essential to walking in our adoption.

2. Our adoption is an open door to intimacy with the Father

Children have access to their parents that no-one else enjoys. Tim Keller has noted that the only people who get to wake a king in the middle of the night are his children. As sons and daughters, we get unlimited access to our Father.

We often use the phrases "Our Father" and "Father God" when we pray but their familiarity can dull our senses to their implication: as God's children, we get to be fathered by God.

Abba has given us a privileged position: unlimited access and unlimited intimacy. God is awesome, majestic and powerful but this whole thing is about outrageous intimacy!

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Buzzgroups:

Discuss in groups of three (4 minutes): What does it mean to you to be fathered by God? What does/might intimacy with Abba look like for you? How can you encourage each other to pursue deeper intimacy with Him?

Feedback (3 minutes): try to encourage a conversation about the following: being fathered by God means that we get to receive love from Him, we can rest in Him, hear from Him, be healed by Him, share our desires with Him, enjoy the peace and safety of His presence, be shaped by Him. Share encouraging ways of finding time with God. Perhaps commit to journeying with each other into deeper intimacy with Him.

3. Adoption bestows on us a new status

Unconditional love is the only love that has the power to transform. The Doctrine of Adoption articulates a love that literally transforms, or changes, our status.

In the ancient world (as today), adoption meant that a child received all the privileges and rights of the father's own children. They shared the family name, status, goods, dwelling places and inheritance.

As God's adopted children, we enjoy a new status...and status refers to identity. We are entitled by right to an inheritance. We are co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and inheritors of salvation (Heb. 1:14)! Everything the Father bestows on Jesus in Mark 1, we inherit as His adopted beloved.

The Spirit and our inheritance

One key aspect of this inheritance is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. As the Father confirms Jesus' identity He baptises Jesus with the Holy Spirit - v. 11. The Spirit is an essential component of God's declaration over Jesus of His identity. The Spirit is, therefore, directly linked to identity.

As God confirms our identity so too are we baptised in the Spirit - and it is the Spirit who guarantees our inheritance. Eph 1:14 - (the promised Holy Spirit), who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance... After Jesus was baptised with the Spirit Mark reminds us that Jesus will then baptise us in the Spirit - v. 8. Jesus is the Spirit-Baptiser. It is in Jesus that we receive the Spirit and have our identity.

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4. Walking in our identity: the importance of worth

Intimacy with Abba is the key to walking in our identity. The enemy will do all that he can to impede this intimacy so that we do not walk in our identity. Encouraging us to have a low view of ourselves is a major way in which he does this. (Wonder - rhetorically - how many people in the opening exercise had a low view of themselves?). A low view of self will always stop us from walking in our identity because it makes us feel that we don't deserve Abba's love. But love is the basis of our adoption! We can enjoy intimacy with God and be loved by Him because He says we are worth it...and there is nothing that the enemy can do about that!

Conclusion

Our adoption in love confers on us an identity as children of God. Because of who Jesus is, and what He has done for us, this identity gives us a remarkable inheritance. The Spirit is both the seal (Eph 1:13) and the guarantee of that inheritance (Eph 1:14) and it is with the Spirit's help that we come into deeper intimacy with the Father and a greater awareness of what our new status means for our lives.

Prayer/ministry

Ministry is most effective when it flows from conversations within the Home Group during the evening and the Spirit's witness. That said, here are some suggestions:

- Pray into the area of identity and knowing the security that the love of God brings.
- Pray into the area of low self-esteem by asking for an increase in intimacy.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you all a fresh revelation of your identities in Christ and the inheritance into which you have been adopted.