Our Identity

*So what has God in the Bible said we are?*

We are God’s adopted children

By putting our faith in Jesus, we are sons and daughters of the most high God (Galatians 3:26; John 1:12). That is our identity.

We who once were far away from God have been brought into His family. We’re adopted as God’s children, given a whole new identity and can enjoy a Father-child relationship with him.

We are sons of God in that we are God’s image bearers- we were created in his image to reflect Him.

* Genesis 1:27 “So God did just that. He created humanity in His image, created them male and female.”
* Gen 9:6 “… for in the image of God has God made mankind.

In the Genesis passages being made in the image of God means representing God in the world. However, in the New Testament, we see Jesus described as the image of God- the one who allows us to see God directly. Where we try and fail to represent God, Jesus is so perfect an image- so true a representation- that through him we can encounter the fullness of God.

As God’s image-bearers, we have intrinsic dignity and value because of the image we reflect. Most of us struggle to completely grasp our inherent dignity. Failing to believe this truth is often a result of a deeply rooted sense of inadequacy. To fight against the lies of inadequacy, we need to remind ourselves that we are valued by the only one who matters.

Our worth is not defined by what we think of ourselves, what we think others think of us or what we do. It is not based on how well we’ve kept our revision schedule, our performance in exams or the results we will receive. We don’t find long-lasting and enduring significance in our accomplishments or our intelligence. We’re set free from working to define who we are. We find eternal value, meaning, worth, and hope in being a child of God.

* Our Identity as workers

God’s story of work is the key to understanding our own work. When I refer to ‘work’ I mean our vocation- what you are currently doing just now.

**Firstly, let’s think about our identity as workers in Creation**

It’s crucial to understand that the story of work doesn’t begin with us. It begins with God. God is a worker. The Bible begins with His work. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) In the first two chapters of Genesis, we’re told seven times that God created; twelve times that he made something. And all of this creating and making is summarised as God’s work: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.” (Gen 2:2)

Like the rest of creation, we are the work-product of God. But uniquely in all creation, we’re made in the image of God. We’re given work to do, and not just any work: work that reflects the very nature of God. And God says to human beings to rule over the world as His representative, His image bearer. And it’s only at that point that God declared His work very good, and rested.

Adam and Eve’s job, as God’s representatives, was to take what God had begun and carry it on- to show off His glory. The point wasn’t who they were revealed to be through their work; it was who God was revealed to be through their work. As His image-bearers, their work was to show off the goodness and magnificence of God’s character and is an act of worship to Him.

**Moving onto The Fall…**

However, as we know Adam and Eve fell down on the job. When Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden, they’re still accountable to represent God; they are still his image-bearers so they still must work- they’re not relieved of this responsibility. But the conditions of their work have radically changed: the world where they work is now cursed because of their sin.

In Genesis 3:17-19, we are told of three things which happen to Adam and Eve’s work, and to ours, because of the Fall.

1. Work becomes *toilsome*. “**Through painful toil you will eat… all the days of your life**.”

This is so our experience of work that it’s hard to imagine what work must have been like before the fall. After all, even work you love to do has at least some aspect to it that’s tiresome, tedious or even painful.

1. Work is *futile*. Even though Adam will painfully toil in the ground his whole life, the cursed ground under his feet “**will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field**.”

Adam’s aspirations of work will now constantly surpass reality. So we’re tempted to give up on work entirely, grow cynical or even opt out. But that’s not really an option….

1. Because work which before was a free act of worship has now become a *compulsory* act of survival. **“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken.**” (v19)

It’s not that work has now become bad. It’s not that work is punishment. It’s that in a fallen world, toilsome, futile work is relentless.

The problem with our work is that we’ve lost the connection between God, work, and worship. Sometimes it’s that we degrade our work and don’t see it as worship of God. Sometimes it’s that we idolise work (and ultimately ourselves). But we must always remind ourselves that our work does not define us- it is an act of worship.

**And finally thinking about redemption…**

This was Jesus’s true work- to be the Redeemer. He paid the penalty for our sin through his death on the cross. And rose from the dead, so that all who repent and believe in him can be forgiven of their sins and redeemed from the curse. John 17: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” Then later in John 19 he said “It is finished!” (v. 30)

Because we’ve repented and believed, redeemed people can once again worship God through their work-because that work itself is God’s work product. Our work is important mainly because it shows off God’s work in us. But we will never understand the story of work correctly unless we understand that while people are redeemed, work is not. The gospel doesn’t change the conditions of your work; It changes the condition of your heart. For Christians and non-Christians, work remains futile, toilsome and compulsory.

We are redeemed people who repent of idolatrous attitudes toward work, because our identity is no longer in work but in Christ. The gospel changes what our hearts are set on, because our identity and security is now in Christ.

**Restoration**

But the day will come when the conditions of work will change once again. It will be no longer toilsome. No longer futile. No longer compulsory. Instead, work in the new creation will be satisfying and fruitful and will be restored to its proper context. Work will once again and forevermore, glorify God.

**Nathanael- think practically about our identity as a worker.**

**Session 2: Making the most of the exam season**

Exam term creates opportunities, opportunities to glorify God and enjoy him. Over the next 30 mins or so, we are going to think about how you can use your exam term for exactly that purpose. We have 5 points which we hope will help you to really make the most of the term ahead- not just survive it!

Read Philippians 4:1-9

**1. Exam term provides opportunities for fellowship**

In the first 3 verses- Paul reveals his deep affection for the Philippian believers- He calls them his ‘brothers and sisters’ and ‘dear friends’ –he longs to be united with them in fellowship.

Fellowship with one another is so important as we are all part of God’s family.

Fellowship can often provide a powerful remedy for stress and anxiety during exam season. Interaction with loved ones, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ helps relieve the pressures of stress. Even in your busyness, stay committed to church where you meet with brothers and sisters in Christ and have fellowship with them. This is where you can share and support one another and point each other to Him.

**2. Exam term provides opportunities to rejoice**

4Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Rejoicing is a common theme throughout this epistle. We are to rejoice IN the Lord- this is where our joy exists. Our joy is IN the Lord.

Who is the Lord? He is the great examiner, the judge of the world. Exams judge us don’t they?... by showing what we really have been doing all year. When the lord returns, our hearts will be examined and we will be judged. But our assurance is that even though we deserve to fail his exam, he has swapped papers with us. He has taken our rubbish one for himself and given us his perfect one. We have already 'passed' the biggest exam of all, without even taking the test. Christ has done it all!

So turn your anxiety for an exam into praise for the Lord and rejoice! Rejoice, knowing that that ultimate exam has already been completed and the examiner has already given you a first.

**3. Exam term provides opportunities for gentleness**

*5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

Remember the Lord is near. When we realise he is near, we live for him and don’t need to prove ourselves. Let him transform you into an example of purpose, faith, patience, love. Stress can cause us to be irritable towards others but know the Lord is near and let that bring gentleness, calm and generosity in our relation to others.

Exam season provides so many great opportunities to serve others! So many of your friends will be stressed, overworked, anxious. Your attitude towards exams can communicate that God is sovereign over your exams by letting your gentleness be evident to all and not getting super stressed and irritable.

**With the people around you, think of practical ways that you can make the most of opportunities for fellowship, rejoicing and gentleness. There are a few examples on the handout to start you off.**

**Take a few mins to do that.**

CONCLUSION-

God created us, made us in his image, made us His children which is our true identity. Our identity transcends our work and if we do not derive our identity from our relationship with God, our work will tend to shape and define us. Let’s not buy into worldly thinking that claims our identity comes from *what we do* to make ourselves something instead of *what Jesus has done*.

So make the most of your exam season by grasping opportunities for fellowship, rejoicing, gentleness, prayer and remind yourself of all the good things you have been given through Christ.