



a kingdom identity

(how to truly
be true to
yourself)



an 11 part sermon
and study series

A Kingdom Identity

How to truly be true to yourself

Dear church,

Who am I? It's *the* question. Do I matter? Am I worth anything? How do I know I'm a valid human being? How do I change? These are some of the questions we may find asking ourselves at various times in our lives. We live in a culture that chooses to answer these questions in lots of different ways. Some of us try and find answers through material wealth, job title or possessions. I am what I have. But what if you lose that job, house or bank balance? Who are you then? A nobody? Some of us measure it through our achievements, but can we really stand on our junior U12's track and field champion medal for the rest of our lives? Some of us build our identity around our preferences, I'm sporty, I'm a hobbies person, I'm gay, I'm nice, I'm a foodie, I'm a family man/woman. But all these things only say a small something about who we are, they are not close to a defining CV describing all of who we are!

All these ideas come from the cultural maxim "*look inside yourself, and then be true to who you are.*" Here's the thing, it's true - sort of. We should absolutely 'be true to ourselves.' We don't want to fake it as we go through life. We want to be comfortable in our own skin. The problem is that 'inside ourselves' won't reveal the most beautiful things about us. In fact, inside ourselves is a bit of a muddle. It also changes with the seasons of life.

So how do we find out who are and how do we become that person? These are the two BIG questions we're going to explore in this series.

It will be split into two parts. In part one we will go about answering the question - who am I? In part 2, we will get a little more practical and think about things that help us grow towards all we've seen in part 1.

Our prayer is that you would be able to 'be true to yourself' as you know who God says you are and is calling you to be. And then feel equipped to get going and get growing.

part 1

who am i?

1. Beloved Creation

Genesis 1 and 2



Introduction

The story of Adam and Eve is probably one of the most well known bible stories. It is an intricately woven Hebrew poem, “a poem of beauty and grandeur to the majesty of God the Creator!” Genesis 1 give us a zoomed out view of creation. It’s like standing at the base of the Himalayas and looking out. Genesis 2 zooms us close into the action. What we won’t spend time on here is process. There won’t be a 7 day vs 700,000,000,000 years debate. We will simply say, “in the beginning God.” He is the source, the start, and existed prior to all that is. We will focus on God’s creation of people, and his desire for relational intimacy with them.

Exercise

Close your eyes, imagine you are looking at yourself in a mirror. What do you think of the person you’re looking at? You don’t need to share your thoughts, but please write them down.

¹ Atkinson, David. Genesis. 15

Read Genesis 1

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Focus in (v10, 12, 18, 21, 25)

What is God's continued declaration of all he has made?

V26-31

What do you think it means to be made in the 'image and likeness' of God?

What does this say about who you are?

Has this ever featured in your thinking/emotional life when looking at yourself?

If God is who he is in relationship - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - "Let us make..." what does this mean for us in becoming who we are?

In verse 31 what is different about God's declaration over creation? What has changed since the last time he spoke in delight over it?

Read Genesis 2:4-9 & 15-25

What stood out to you here? What did you notice? Did God point anything new out to you?

V7 - What does this tell us about God's involvement in the creation of humanity? What does it tell us about God and what he thinks of us?

8-25 - How does God show his love for humanity?

What picture is being painting about what God thinks about you?

If you had to answer the question 'who am I?' According to Genesis 1 and 2, what would your answer be?

Application - This week spend sometime applying these truths about who God says you are to yourself as you look at yourself in the mirror.

2. Broken sinner

Genesis 3



Introduction

What a miserable study title you might be thinking? Yet if we're to truly be true to ourselves we have to understand that we are broken. Genesis 3 tells us a story of original brokenness. Humanity, represented by Adam and Eve, choose to disobey God. This is humans putting themselves in the place of God and choosing to try and do life their way. This is the state we find ourselves in and it is one we need saving from.

Exercise

Take a moment. Now ask yourself, do you find it easy to think of yourself as a 'sinner'? Why, why not?

Recap

What did we take from the last study about God's intention for humanity?

Read Genesis 3

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Focus in (v1-5)

How does the serpent act towards humanity? What seem to be its intentions?

Is God holding something back from humanity?

V6-7

What is the connection between seeing and sinning?

What is the significance of Adam and Eve knowing they are naked?

What would it mean for us to 'be naked' before God?

Why does sin make us want to cover ourselves before God? Does God want us to cover ourselves? (In an emotional/spiritual sense, we're not advocating nudist ideology!)

V8-9

What do you make of God walking in the garden? What is he doing there?

What does God calling out 'Where are you', say about his desire/search for us?

V10-End

What is the result of the disobedience?

How do we see this in the world around us?

How do we see this in ourselves? Is it ok to be a broken sinner?

Application - how can you acknowledge your brokenness before God this week?

(DON'T PANIC! We will look at facing, and dealing with, our brokenness in the weeks ahead)

3. Redeemed!

Col 1:13-14



Introduction

“The Bible says sin is in charge of us – and we are its slaves. Sin is keeping us from being all we could be in every area of our lives. It has robbed us of our freedom and our hearts are in chains. How to slaves get free? Someone ‘redeems’ them - pays the price to buy them back out of slavery and set them free. The Bible says Jesus redeemed us out of slavery to sin. How? He paid the price to get us back. What was the price? His life².” In this study we will unpack how Jesus’ death and resurrection mean we can live as forgiven, free, redeemed people. What wonderful Good News!

Exercise

Try to slow down your thinking and quiet your mind. Focus on your breathing. Spend a whole minute just focusing on breathing in and out. Now ask the Holy Spirit to show you what redemption looks like.

Read

Colossians 1:13-14 - *(Read it three times nice and slowly)*

² Lloyd-Jones, Sally. *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing*. 117

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Recap

How did everything end during the last study? How might that speak into this one?

Facts

Colossians is written by the Apostle Paul around 60AD. He is writing to refute heresy (false teaching) and encourage the church in the truth of who they are and all Jesus has done for them.

Focus in

What do you make of the word 'recused' being in the past tense?

What is the dominion of darkness?

What does being rescued look like?

What does Jesus' kingdom look like?

How does Jesus redeem us?

What effect should this have in our lives?

Why is forgiveness so amazing?

What does this work of God say about who we are?

Application

On a large piece of paper map out your life. Draw key events, moments you remember both bad and good. Look at your life. What has made you who you are up to this point? What has Jesus redeemed you from? How has your life changed?

Each morning this week choose to praise Jesus for rescuing you from the dominion of darkness and bring you in his kingdom.

Start praying for someone you know to be rescued and redeemed by Jesus.

4. Being Changed

2 Peter 1:3-10



Introduction

*The Velveteen Rabbit turned to the old wise experienced Skin Horse in the nursery, and asked, 'What is real?' 'Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick out handle?' The Skin Horse replied: 'Real isn't how you are made. It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.' 'Does it hurt?' asked the Rabbit. 'Sometimes,' said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. 'Does it happen all at once, or bit by bit?' 'It doesn't happen all at once,' said the Skin Horse, 'You become. It takes a long time... Generally, by the time you are Real most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes dropout, and you get very shabby...but once you are Real you cannot become unreal again. It lasts always.'*³

The process of 'being changed', 'becoming real' or as the bible calls it discipleship, is a life long adventure. It is the process of being 'loved real', loved into who we were created to be. Atkinson writes, "God is the real person who loves us into becoming real persons ourselves."⁴ The more we meet with Jesus and receive his love, the more truly ourselves we become. It's an adventure worth pursuing.

³ Williams, Margery. *The Velveteen Rabbit*.

⁴ Atkinson, David. *Genesis*. IVP. 40

Exercise

Think of one promise that God has made you. Now spend the next two minutes sitting with the promise. Ask the Holy Spirit to make it real and fresh to your heart again.

Read

2 Peter 1:3-10 (*Read it slowly twice through*)

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Facts

Peter wrote his first letter to encourage the Church from persecution outside of her community. His second letter however is a warning to the Church about people who are coming in and trying to turn them away from the discipleship journey with Jesus they've started on.

Focus in

What does it mean that God has given us 'everything we need for life and godliness'?

What are the precious promises God has given us?

What is 'partaking the divine nature'?

Why does Peter start with 'partaking in the divine nature' before he moves onto changes happening in the Christian's life?

How do we add to our faith, goodness.... etc?

What is the relationship between 'being with Jesus and adding to our faith...'? (Being and action)

What is the importance of remembering and thanksgiving in the life of discipleship?

Why does Peter seem to want people to be sure that they're really following Jesus?

Application

This week spend an extra 5 mins a day holding a promise of God and sitting in silence. Invite him to join you and speak to you as you do this. Then ask God what he is doing in you and how you can join in.

5. One who knows where they're going

Rev 21:1-8



Introduction

Hands up if you've never read Revelation because you don't fancy reading about the end of the world and being freaked out?! It's a common thing. However once you get passed the very strange imagery (which is not supposed to be taken literally but tell us a story), you arrive at a beautiful truth. Namely, God is on the throne of all history, time, space and what is yet unknown to us. We see the great Christian hope. One day all of God's people will gather before him and enjoy forever all that we long for now. Perfect peace, life, wholeness, satisfaction, and so much more. So it really is worth flicking to in your bible. Getting to know the end of the story impacts our lives and our discipleship right now.

Exercise

Ephesians 2:6 says that "...God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." Take a few minutes in silence to stop. Imagine being seated with Jesus in heaven right now. What do you see? What is it like? What is God saying to you?

Read

Revelation 21:1-8 (*Read is nice and slowly a couple of times through*)

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Facts

The Apostle John (the disciple Jesus loved) is having a vision whilst exiled on a Greek Island called Patmos and writes it all down (Rev 1:9-11). It is a painting of the end of the world and return of Jesus. In Rev 21, there is no more sea. Sea symbolised uncontrollable chaos in Jewish thought. Therefore no more sea, means no more chaos. All is at peace and all is well.

Focus in

What would it look like for chaos to be no more in the world?

Who is the bride John talks about and who is her husband?

What do you make of the world ending with a wedding and celebration?

What would it be like to live with perfect access to God all the time?

How do the promises God makes in v4 impact you?

If God is making 'everything new' what does that say about who he is and what he is like?

How does God want to bless you through this passage?

Why should we take judgement seriously? How should v8 motivated our lives?

Application

This week ask God to increase your hope in your eternity with him. Ask him to fill you with his love so that you can share that hope with others.

part 2

how do i grow?

6. Emotional Maturity

Psalm 69



Introduction

Growing and becoming our true selves is not just about right core beliefs. It is also about learning to face ourselves in God's presence. Most of us suffer from 'self-rejection'. We don't like all or parts of ourselves so we chose to ignore them or hide them away. Henri Nouwen writes that, "*self rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that declares we are loved.*" In other words we're choosing to believe someone else's view of us rather than God's.

So why don't we face ourselves? In short, we're scared it will be too painful. We don't know what we'll find. We don't want to become overwhelmed by emotions. However, we've learnt in part one that we are not unloveable, quite the opposite. So we don't have to hide away. Nouwen also writes that currently in the West we live in the most pain adverse culture in human history. We'll do anything no numb ourselves and not face ourselves. This posture leaves us emotionally stunted and because God created us as wholistic beings; body, emotions, soul and spirit - this also stunts our discipleship. Scazzero writes, "*It is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature*⁵." We can't truly be true to who we are if we never turn to face ourselves. This starts by noticing what we're feeling and allowing ourselves to feel it and display it, trusting in God's love and grace as we do so in order to heal and grow.

⁵ Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church*

Exercise

Think about facing yourself, what do you like about yourself? What do you dislike about yourself? Begin this time of study and conversation by asking God to help you begin to see yourself the way he does.

Read

Psalm 69

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Focus in

Why is David emotional?

Do you personally feel it's ok to display emotion publicly like this?

What do you like about their reaction? What makes you feel uncomfortable about their reaction?

Do you think that emotions are a good part of you?

Growing up, how were you taught to deal with your big emotions and feelings?

Do you think you still think like that?

Do you believe that God is ok with you showing your deepest emotions?

Do you ever feel safe to do so? What stops you?

Do you feel safe with God to be truly yourself and let him see all of you?

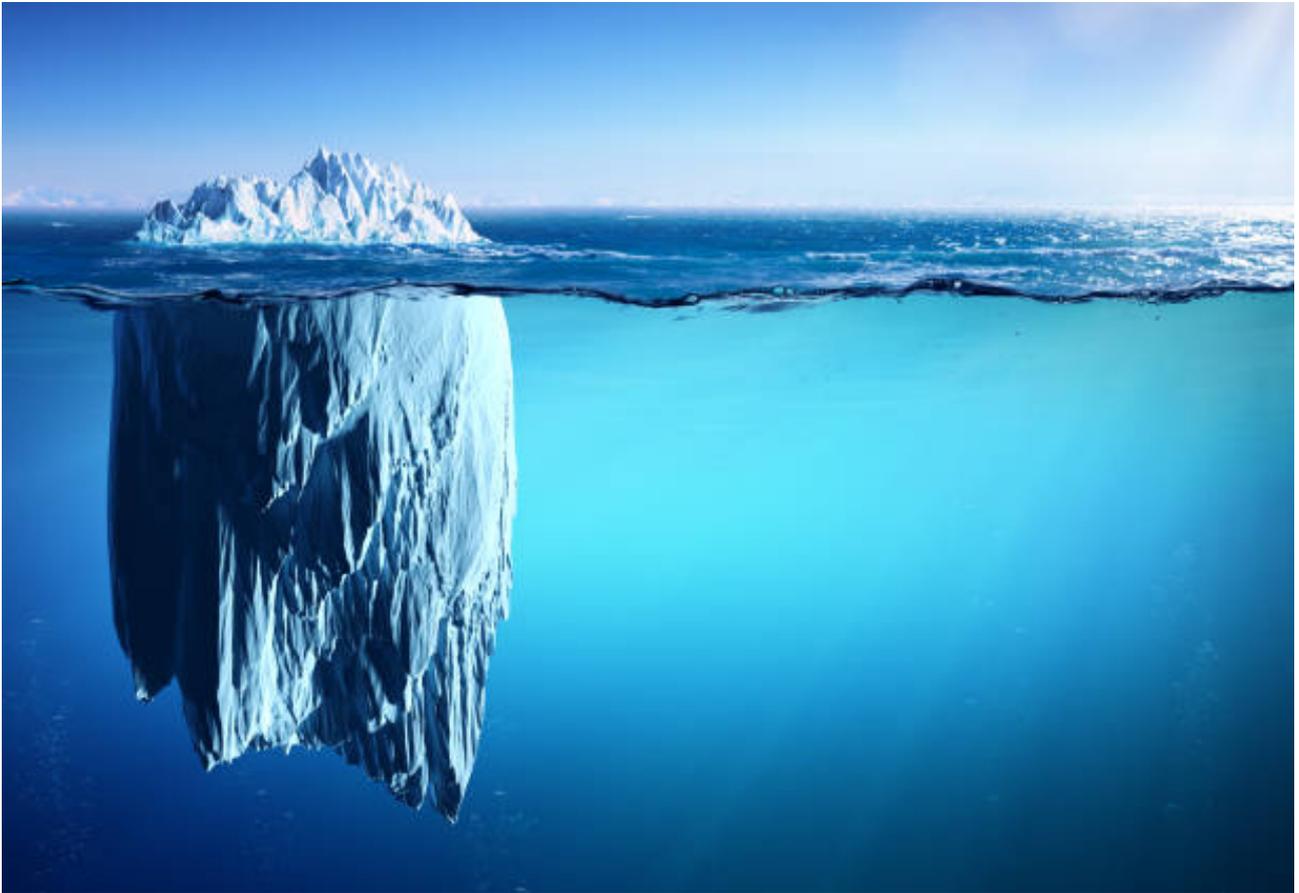
Application

This week make a list of the emotions you find hard to feel and face in yourself. Ask God to begin to help you face and feel them in the safety of his presence. Ask him to reveal ways to heal and grow as you go through this process.

Notice where you have numbed yourself, say sorry. Ask God to begin a journey of healing and acceptance in you and with you.

7. The Deep Stuff

John 4: 7-18



Introduction

Starter for 10: What percentage of an iceberg is visible above the water line?

Our lives can be like this, with only a small amount of who we really are being offered or on show to those around us. This study will help us to look beneath the surface at what makes us who we are.

Read

John 4:7-18

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Focus in

1. Jesus and his disciples are in Samaria, why is it significant that He has chosen to travel through Samaria?

2. Why is it relevant that the Samaritan women is drawing water from the well “at the sixth hour”?
3. Why is it ‘surprising’ that Jesus talks to her?
4. What does the gift of God and the Living Water refer to and what is the result of receiving this gift?
5. How do you think the women felt when Jesus revealed the truth about her five husbands?
6. What effect did this revelation have on her faith?

Application

7. If you wish, share a time when you have felt one of the following emotions and ask yourself the associated question.
 - ❖ Anger – how was I hurt?
 - ❖ Frustration – what was making me feel helpless?
 - ❖ Shame – what was I hiding?
 - ❖ Resentment – what did I hope for or expect?
 - ❖ Sad – what did I lose?
 - ❖ Jealousy – where did I feel inadequate?
8. What can we learn from this passage about Jesus’ approach to areas of shame in our life?
9. How we react in times of stress can signify things lurking beneath the surface. Think of times you’ve reacted in a way you don’t want to repeat and ask yourself why. Bring this to Jesus and receive his gifts.

Choosing to face rather than ignore aspects of your life that are holding you back can feel hard. But it can be done whilst anchoring yourself in the unfailing love and grace of God. In seasons where He is revealing areas of your iceberg that need to melt away, stay close to Him and allow Him to transform you into the image of Jesus. I pray we can learn to love ourselves as Jesus loves us.

8. My not so glorious inheritance

I Peter 1:3-9



Introduction

We want to be discipled by Jesus, becoming more like Him. But we are also discipled by the world. Our family upbringing is an important part of this. We have been looking at emotions in the previous two studies. We are now looking at thoughts, which influence our emotions, and are influenced by them. Specifically, how are our beliefs formed, (how we think the world works.)

Opening question

Share an example of a character trait you share with your parent (perhaps one you vowed never to adopt.)

Inheritance in Christ

Read I Peter 1:3-9

What is our inheritance in Christ, and what does it include? (see also studies 1-5)

How is my inheritance kept safe for me?

Does this mean my life is now perfect? Why or why not?

What role do trials have in my life?

How can we rejoice at the same time as suffer?

Family Culture

When we are young we absorb family rules and values. We often kick against these as a teenager. We take family culture with us. (examples: we don't like those sort of people, the TV is always on at tea time, always hit back at bullies, failure is not tolerated.)

When you first left home did you find you disagreed with others over how to do daily tasks (because of your family culture). Give an example.

If you are/have been married or in a relationship, how much did you clash with your partner over different beliefs/culture?

What can you remember of family culture?

What rules were there, in the following areas?

- i. Money
- ii. Success
- iii. God
- iv. Gender roles
- v. Marriage
- vi. Complimenting or praising
- vii. Sex
- viii. Play and recreation
- ix. Expressing anger
- x. Loss and grief

What have you taken into adult life?

Share one with the group.

Through Christ we have been replanted into a new family of origin – the family of Christ, with its own beliefs and values for dealing with all of these things.

What are one or two things God wants you to re-learn in his family?

9. Embracing Brokenness

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10



Introduction

An important part of growing in emotional maturity and discipleship is embracing the fact that we are all a bit broken. We've made choices that have hurt us. We've also been the victims of other people's bad choices. All of this impacts our lives and it's deep stuff that God cares about. Often we can push our brokenness down, or play an elaborate life-long game of hide and seek with it. You hide it and then don't seek it! God has a plan to help you face your brokenness and find healing.

Read

Luke 15:11-32

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

What does this story tell us about brokenness and welcome?

Focus in

1. Think of a place or environment where you feel safe, relaxed – where you can be you. Share your thoughts if you wish.
2. What ‘ingredients’ can help to create an environment in which you can be honest, admit mistakes and talk about struggles with other people?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 “A thorn in the flesh”
 - i. Where has Paul’s thorn come from?
 - ii. Why has Paul been given this thorn?
 - iii. How did he initially respond to the thorn?
 - iv. How did Paul’s attitude to his thorn change after hearing from God?

Application

4. What are the thorns God has entrusted you with? How do you feel about them?
5. How have they positively impacted your character?
6. See Romans 8 v28 – how does God use our thorns?
7. We generally want to avoid being open about our vulnerabilities...but think of someone who models brokenness and vulnerability well – describe them and what you respect about them.
8. How can you press into your thorns and receive more of what God has for you in your weakness?

Spend some time meditating on the painting above and sitting at the feet of God, listening to what He is saying to you.

10. Know your limits

Mark 1:32-39



Our limits are a gift from God.

Opening question

Can you think of an occasion when you said no, when asked to do something?

Read Mark 1:32-39

What was Jesus top priority?

Why did Jesus not stay where he was but move on?

When is it difficult for you to say “no”?

How did a profound sense of limits allow Jesus to have a sense of satisfaction and completion in his work?

In Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus is repeatedly tested in the wilderness. How did Jesus refuse to go beyond the limits the Father has set for him?

In what way is there spiritual warfare raging over your life in the area of limits?

Culture

In our culture we are facing an exponential growth in many aspects of life e.g. email, advertising, cost of housing, debt, health care costs, bankruptcies. This leads to an unprecedented overload in all areas of our life. This can lead to performance breakdown, stress and burnout. Our culture resists the idea of limits.

Spend a moment to embrace your limits at this stage in your life. Consider the following:

- i. Personality/temperament
- ii. Number of talents/gifts
- iii. Scars/wounds from family/past
- iv. Emotional needs and capacity
- v. Relational status and family obligations
- vi. Place where you live
- vii. Finances
- viii. Intellectual capacity
- ix. Spiritual understanding
- x. Physical health

What would it look like for you to be faithful to your true self - the person God uniquely created you to be?

Margin is the space between what we do and the limit to what we can do. This allows us to respond to extra unexpected events and people, to reflect and ponder, and have some rest and recovery when needed. In our culture margin has all but disappeared.

Do you feel you have any margin?

How might you choose between competing priorities e.g. work life balance?

How can you create some margin in one area of life e.g. time, emotions, finance?

11. Dealing with grief and loss

John 11:1-37



Painting: *Jesus Wept* - Daniel Bonnell

Introduction

One of the inevitable parts of life that we must all face is grief and loss. We will lose the ones we loves, but we will also have set backs and painful moments through work, home life, with health and in relationships to name but a few. Part of being truly true to ourselves is naming these moments of pain and disappointment. Lamenting in God's presence and acknowledging the pain and disappointment of a situation.

Read

John 11:1-37

Firstly what do you notice in the text? What stood out to you? What might God be saying to you through it?

Focus in

Why does Jesus weep over a situation he knows he is going to fix?

What do you think is helpful about the way Jesus weeps?

What does this suggest about his humanity and emotional life?

Exercise 1

Share a personal loss from the last year and the impact on you (not necessarily a death – a change in relationship, children growing up, changing church etc.)

What has helped you to face it?

What would have been helpful at the time which didn't happen?

Our culture resists and avoids grieving. How did your family of origin deal with losses/setbacks?

Exercise 2

Make a timeline of losses in your life – have you grieved these? Read one of the following Psalms 42, 43, 77, 88. Using these as a template or permission write one your own lament psalms and share with God your frustrations/doubts.

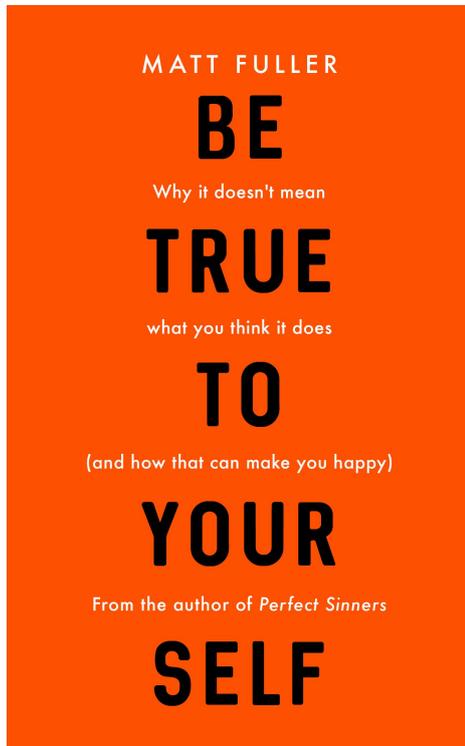
Exercise 3

Jesus shows us how to get down in the dirt with those who are grieving and weep with them. Name one person who has loved you well – describe their qualities; what caused them to stand out in your life?

Application

Philippians 2:5-11 gives us a great framework for loving others. Read it and ask God to 'give you the same mind that was in Christ'. As he has helped you to grieve, heal and grow, how can you be that person to someone else?

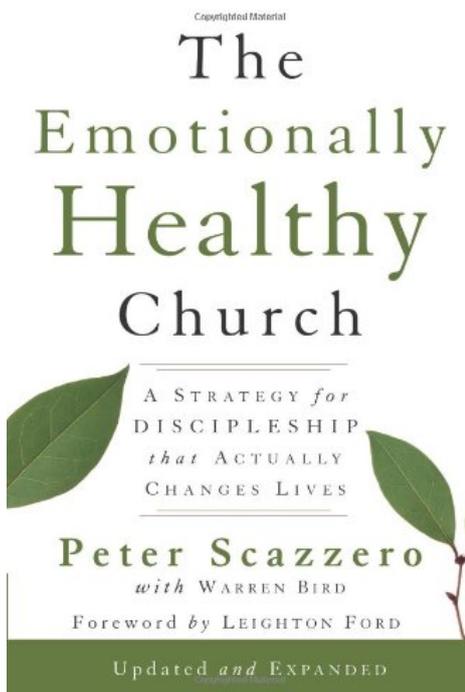
Helpful resources



Be true to yourself - Matt Fuller

This book helps to unpack some of the topics we've thought about in part one of this series. Matt Fuller unpacks who God says we are in order to release each one of us into a fuller, richer and more beautiful understand and daily reality.

£5.97 - Eden Books



The Emotionally Healthy Church - Peter Scazzero

This book has helped to shape and inspire part two of our current series. In it Peter Scazzero takes us through a step by step process to help us come to terms with who we are, help us find our blindspot and painful places and find healing and wholeness in Jesus. All of this work in us is a significant and often overlooked part of our discipleship journey. If you wish to go through this book there is a workbook which accompanies it.

£13.19 - Eden Books

(Additional workbook £7.84)