

One BRMC Small Group Study

Can I Be Me?

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon on 17 May 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:

John 4:7-26, Genesis 25:27-34, 27:35-37

Context:

This Sunday, we celebrate Women's Society of Christian Services (WSCS) Sunday and we give thanks for the many ways that women have shaped and influenced our lives, be it spouses, mothers and friends. Women are integral in helping us find our identities in Christ.

Today's passages from John 4 and Genesis 25 and 27 shows three characters who struggled with their identities. The Samaritan woman at the well struggled as an outcast of her society and with broken relationships. Jacob and Esau struggled with their identities in various ways.

This study is an opportune time for us to reflect on our struggles with our identities and how we can find comfort and reassurances in our identity in Christ. It is also an opportunity to reflect on whether we could be a source of God's love to those who might be struggling with their identity.

Introductory

1. From Genesis 25:27-34 and 27:35-37, what characteristics and circumstances might have contributed to insecurities in the identity of Jacob and Esau?
 - Jacob was the second-born among the pair of twins in his family and was the younger sibling. (v26) Hence, in the traditional Israelite society, he was likely forgotten about and would have received the lesser favour and inheritance from his family.
 - The birthright among the siblings traditionally went to the older sibling. The birthright was a symbol of the future leadership of the family and the future primary inheritor of the family's wealth. The sibling with the birthright used to inherit twice as much as his other siblings.
 - While Esau was the well-known and strong brother that everyone likely knew about, Jacob was the quiet and forgotten-about brother who spent his time dwelling in tents. (v27)
 - Hence, these factors may have led to Jacob's insecurities and fears building up within him. He may have felt jealous and at a loss over his predicament, feeling the need to take actions into his own hands.
 - Esau, on the other hand, might have felt insecure because his mother loved Jacob more. He might have felt the heavy responsibilities of the elder sibling upon his shoulders. He might even have been envious of Jacob's apparent

contentment to stay at home, indulge in domestic skills (like cooking) and his apparent favour with those in the household (such as their mother).

2. What are some characteristics of the Samaritan woman's identity that casts her as an outcast? What makes this so remarkable that Jesus would still reach out to her?

- The Samaritans and Jews had an ongoing rivalry and were not keen on interacting with one another. (v9) The Jews saw Samaritans as outsiders of the faith due to differing beliefs and they did not have any shared religious gatherings or associations.
- The Samaritan woman herself was shunned by the other women in her society. While most women would go to the well to draw water in the early morning, the Samaritan woman had to draw water under the hot sun at noon. (v6) This was likely to avoid the sneers and insults from the other women in society.
- The Samaritan women likely struggled with loneliness and broken relationships. Having 5 previous husbands (v18), it is likely she struggled with broken relationships and that she comes from a background of brokenness and isolation.
- However, Jesus did not see her as an outsider because of the background that she came from. Jesus, a Jew, still shared His love and comfort with an outcast among the Samaritans. Jesus did not dwell on her sin or condemn her.
- It appears that Jesus went to the well intending to meet this very Samaritan woman.

3. Jesus told the woman at the well that those who drink of the water that He gives will never thirst again. (v13) What does this water represent?

- Picture yourself finishing a long and intensive run or queuing in the hot sun for McDonald's for an hour. You will likely feel thirsty, your throat will feel parched and you will be desperate for a drink of water.
- Though we may not know it, this is how much we need Jesus in our lives. Jesus fills our being and soul, fulfilling our deepest needs and insecurities.
- While physical water can bring temporary relief, Jesus brings fulfilment and satisfaction to our lives permanently. Nothing else can satisfy our needs and desires just as Jesus does.
- In John 7:37-38, Jesus further explains living waters at the Feast of Booths. He says that the living water that flows through us when we believe in Him is the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Jesus and open up ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we find the peace that Jesus has promised us.

Reflection

4. What are some things in your life that may lead you to feel insecure about your identity?

- This could be something that you struggled with growing up and a part of your family background. Perhaps you grew up as the forgotten younger sibling always living in your older siblings' shadow. Perhaps you grew up as the older sibling that struggled with pressures and expectations to excel.

- This could come from pressures to succeed and excel in the schools or workplaces that we are in. Expectations to come in at the top for exams, performing in our workplaces to get a promotion or pay raise, juggling busy schedules of managing both work and households. These pressures and expectations and our ability to live up to it may feel like it determines our identities.
- This could also come in the form of insecurities over our relationships with the people around us. Our relationships with spouses, family members, friends, colleagues and how well the closeness is maintained may be causing us to feel insecure. We may feel it reflects poorly on our ability to love the people around us.
- Perhaps it could be something hidden or deep insecurity we struggle within our souls. It could be a hurtful remark from our parents or friends that we've kept within ourselves for many years, allowing it to fester away. It could be a sin that we've been struggling with for an extended period and we've regressed to time and time again. These hidden things gnaw away at our confidence and can take root and warp our identities and self-worth.
- Our lives are complex and there are many things past and present that build-up to the complex background and identity that we have. Some of these things positive, while some are negative and may cause us to feel insecure and affect how we view ourselves.

5. As you think of these things that may make you feel insecure and challenge your identity, pause and take the time to bring it to God and lay it at His feet. How do you think your identity in Christ can surpass and cover these insecurities in your worldly identities?

- Is God holding up a mirror to show us a reflection of ourselves? Are we, like Jacob wrestling with God? Can we instead see the image of Christ in us?
- As you encourage your group to reflect, you may wish to review the passage and statements below to help you affirm for yourself and your group their identity in Christ:
 - i. John 3:17-18 says 'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned...' Remember that Jesus does not come to condemn us for our sins or make us feel guilty for not living up to expectations and pressures.
- It may take some time to wrestle and struggle with God over these insecurities as we lay it at His feet. Take heart that God is renewing you and doing something new in your life. It may be a painful struggle but as you yield your identity to God, trust that He is helping you and revealing more of Himself to you today.
- Remember your true identity in Christ. You are His child. He sacrificed Himself to adopt you into His kingdom. He deeply loves you and nothing in this world can take that away from you.
- Take time to reflect on this truth and reflect on what it personally means to you and any struggles you have with your identity. If you need more faith to believe this truth, pray to God for more faith and trust that He will grant it to you.

- As we reflect, maybe what we each need to do is to yield to God and trust in all that God has promised for us.

Application

6. Jesus said that 'the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (v14) Once we have received the living water in our lives, Jesus calls us to overflow with this water in our lives to the people around us. How can we share the living water with the people around us?
 - When we believe in Jesus and the love he has poured out for us, it is inevitable for us to overflow with this love to the people around us. Many people in our society struggle with insecurities too and many of them don't know Jesus.
 - During this time of restrictive movement, some people are struggling with isolation and this allows insecurities to fester. This is the perfect opportunity to share Jesus' comfort with them and to reassure them of Jesus' love. Even a phone call or a text message can help to bring them joy in this time.
 - Perhaps you can take some time in your small group to break up into smaller groups and listen to one another share of some insecurities or challenges they are facing. This can be a time of listening and mutual encouragement.
 - During times of trials and difficulties, the church is only strong when we are united and encourage one another to persevere. Unity comes when we share in our struggles and when our members know that they are not alone in their struggles.

Prayer

7. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you need to confess some hidden sin and bring it into the Light of Christ or perhaps you might need to surrender your insecurities and anxieties to God:

"Father in heaven, thank you for placing a mirror in front of me and revealing my sins and insecurities. Father, I am sorry for what I have done and for trusting in myself rather than in You. I now surrender these anxieties and insecurities to you, trusting in Your Word to cast my burdens onto Jesus because He cares for me. Fill me with the assurance of Your everlasting love.

In Jesus' name. Amen"

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you feel led to pray for those who are struggling with insecurities and anxieties. Give them to the Lord:

“Merciful Father, I thank you for *(name/s of family and/or friend/s)*. Lord, I trust that you are Sovereign over their life. I surrender *(name/s of family and/or friend/s)* to You and rely on Your promise that You will cause all things to work for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purposes. Give me wisdom as to how to minister to them and show them how much You love them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.