

# Navigating change: when identity feels lost or threatened

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Some people to introduce you to...

## Jennifer

Jennifer is an older lady who has been in your church for a long time. She has been involved in almost every ministry group over the years, from creche to the coffee rota. Jennifer's husband died two years ago, leaving her feeling quite lonely, so she has spent almost all her time getting involved in serving. She's been welcoming people on Sunday mornings, helping with catering for a mid-week lunch club, meeting with people for Bible studies. She's also part of a local walking group and helps with litter picking in the nearby park. You don't see her at church for a couple of Sundays, which is very unusual for her, and you find out that she's been in hospital. She's now at home so you pop round for a visit. She tells you that she had a fall, she broke her ankle and while in hospital the doctors have found a potential problem with her heart so have advised her she needs to slow down, rest and possibly have an operation. While you are chatting to her she says 'But how can I rest? I don't know who I am if I'm not busy. I need to feel useful.'

## Michael

Michael is in his mid-forties. He's been at your church for about a year but hasn't really got stuck in or got to know many people. His job is very busy, he gets home late every night, goes out early every morning and often works at weekends. You get chatting to him after the service one Sunday, ask him how his week has been, how work's going and he tells you he got made redundant two weeks ago. You express sympathy and ask him how he's doing with that. He shrugs and says 'I don't really know, I don't know what to do with myself each day. I'm not really anybody without work.'

## Ola

Ola is a young mum, she has just had her second baby, and she's at home with the two children. You haven't seen her in church for a few weeks and your pastor asks you to give her a call. When you phone her she answers, says she's ok but just hasn't felt up to coming to church, it's very tiring with the new baby, she'll try to be there on Sunday. Your church have a system where new mums get meals so when she isn't there again on Sunday, you phone her to ask whether you can drop a meal round and maybe just stay for a brief catch up. When you go round she does invite you in and at first you're just chatting, but you notice that she seems quite flat. Eventually she tells you 'I just don't feel like myself. I seem to just be mum and the bit of me that is really me just isn't there. All I ever do is change nappies and run around after a toddler. Is this all there is to life now? Is this who I am?'

**Group Discussion: What questions would you want to ask one of these three people? Where do you want to know more?**

These are just three examples of people who might find their identity feels lost or threatened during times of change...are there other situations where this might also be the case?

Situations that are...

- ...sudden
- ...don't match expectations
- ...out of our perceived control
- ...that 'come at us'
- ...unexpected
- ...traumatic
- ...feel inevitable
- ...multiple

How do we move towards helping people see something of what it means to be 'in Christ' and how that fundamental identity might help them? Let's look at Jennifer again...

What questions might you ask Jennifer, perhaps particularly focused on how she's seeing her identity?

How might you start to help her see that her identity being in Christ might make a difference?

Where might you go in Scripture with her?

**Group Discussion: Pick either Michael or Ola**

**How might you want to start helping them see that being 'in Christ' might make a difference to them in their situation?**

**Where might you go in Scripture?**

**What images or thoughts about identity have you already been given as we've listened to the talks so far this week that might be helpful?**

**What other questions might you want to ask?**

Don't forget, differences in relationship and context matter, this conversation will look different...

- ...over coffee after a service
- ...meeting up casually during the week
- ...specific set-apart meetings
- ...depending on how well you already know them

For everyone who is struggling with an identity that feels like it is lost or under threat, ultimately, where would we like to get to with them?



In Christ, we are: chosen...loved...precious...held...a child of God

This is our firm foundation and solid rock.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17

The greatest change has already happened, we have a new identity, given to us, that will last forever.