

# Who are you, really?

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Date: 23 November 2025

Preacher: Andy Banks

[0:00] Good morning, everybody. Very good morning to you. A warm welcome to Union Baptist Church.

! Thank you for joining us this morning. This is another occasion to be gathered as God's people to worship him. And it's such a privilege and a joy to be together. For those of you that don't know me, my name is Andrew.

I'm one of the pastors here, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to our service this morning. Thank you for joining us. A very special welcome to Dismas and Josephine, who've come with Jabali to bring him for dedication this morning.

And we're so excited to be able to give thanks to God together as a church family for him later in our service. Welcome to those joining us on our live stream, and especially welcome to any friends and family of Dismas and Josephine who are joining us from overseas in Kenya.

Welcome to you, and glad you can celebrate this occasion with us through our live stream. Today we celebrate the gift of children, and we remember the love of our Heavenly Father who loves us as his children.

[1:07] Psalm 103 says, As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust.

The life of mortals is like grass. They flourish like a flower of the field. The wind blows over it, and it is gone. And its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children.

Let's pray as we prepare to worship God together. Father God, we thank you for the goodness and love that you have poured out on us.

Thank you that you have welcomed us as your children, even though we don't deserve to be called that. You are good and full of compassion for all your children, and we praise you for that today.

Please meet with us as we worship you today. Stir a child-likeness in each of our hearts to run to you today and call on you and praise you as our perfect Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[2:16] Amen. I invite you to stand, if you're able, as we come to worship God in song, as the music group lead us now in a time of song worship. Let the ending of my heart be the mountain where'er God.

The hands that I dream from, oh, he is my song. Let the King of my heart be the shadow where I hide.

The ransom for my life, oh, he is my song. You are good, good hope.

You are good, good hope. You are good, good hope.

You are good, good hope. Let the King of my heart be the way beside myself.

[3:53] The anchor in the waves, oh, he is my song. The King of my heart be the fire inside my face.

The echo of my days, oh, he is my song. You are good, good, good hope.

You are good, good hope. You are good, good hope.

You are good, good hope. You are never gonna let, never gonna let me down.

You are never gonna let, never gonna let me down.

[5:15] You are good, good hope. You are good, good hope.

You are good, good hope. Father God, you are good.

We know that you want to bless us. You want good things for us. And you have. All the good things we have come from you. And you surround us with your goodness and your love.

And we thank you for all those things we see around us, like the sun and the weather, even if it's a bit disturbing sometimes. And thank you for...

We're going to be reminded this evening that we're surrounded by friends and family as well. And we have places that we can belong. And that is precious to us.

[6:26] But most of all, we belong to you because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. And that, Lord, is so special. And we appreciate that so much. So let's remind ourselves now about those truths that we are, that the King, the everlasting King, welcomes us into his presence.

How amazing is that? And in our Father's house, there's room, there's places for us, and we're children of God. Let's come into his presence and really relish and kind of bathe in those truths which come from God's Word.

And we're going to sing about them now. Who am I that the highest King would welcome me? Oh, my God.

Oh, hold on a minute. I think we've got the wrong words up there. That's brilliant. Yeah, lovely. Thank you, Colin. OK, let's start again.

Let's go. I was lost but he brought me of his love for me, of his love for me.

[8:34] The sunset tree of his great teeth, I am child of God, yes I am.

He at last he has ransomed me, his grace was dear. While I was a saint you see, Jesus died for me, yes he died for me.

The sunset tree of his free teeth, I am child of God, yes I am.

In my Father's house, there's a place for me. I am child of God, yes I am.

I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who you say I am. You are for me, not against me, I am who you say I am.

[10:03] I am chosen, not forsaken, I am who you say I am. You are for me, not against me, I am who you say I am.

You are for me, not against me, I am who you say I am. The sunset tree of his great teeth, I am child of God, yes I am.

In my Father's house, there's a place for me. I am child of God, yes I am.

Amen. Do please sit down. Now, I'd like to at this point to welcome Dismas and Josephine with Jabali.

If they can join me up on the stage here. Welcome. Thank you so much.

[11:23] Thank you so much. So, for those of you that don't know this lovely family, this is Josephine and Dismas, and this is baby Jabali, who we're giving thanks for today. Now, by way of introduction and explanation, we're welcoming today Dismas and Josephine, who come to give thanks to God for their son, Jabali.

And today we celebrate the gift of Jabali, and we praise God, who is the giver of all life. Now, we acknowledge that children are not the property of parents, but are entrusted into the hands of parents to love and to nurture them in God's ways.

So, today we come to seek God's blessing on Jabali. It's giving us a big yawn there. Hopefully, he'll stay awake. And God's help and equipping for Josephine and Dismas, as they parent and nurture Jabali and his sisters, Neveline and Gael.

And we come today to promise that this church will be a place where children and young people will be welcomed, taught, loved and prayed for.

The Bible calls us to see in children a sign of the kingdom of God. And Jabali today is a living sign that God welcomes us without condition. He lavishes his love and grace on all who come to him with empty hands and open hearts.

[12:45] Now, at this point, I'd like to welcome Dismas and Josephine to share briefly about why they particularly want to express their thanks to God with the church family today. And just give a brief testimony of why you're thankful today.

So, I don't know who I'm going to give the microphone to you to start with. Thanks, Josephine.

Praise God, church. Just a little bit there. Thanks. Well done. Praise God, church.

Praise God. I'm Josephine, as you've heard. I just want to thank God for today. I'm so excited to bring my son before God. It's always good to start with God.

I know by dedicating him to God, he will live in the ways of God. And that is our prayer. Thank you. Glory and honor to the mighty, everlasting God.

Amen. My name is Dismas, as you've heard. I'm the husband to Josephine and the dad to Jabali, a new member of our family.

[13:48] We have other two daughters watching us online. It's Nevelyn and Gael, they're in Kenya. We're here for a purpose, to thank God for the gift of Jabali.

We were rewarded. And Jabali is significant because Jabali is a strong rock. It's a Swahili name, meaning a rock.

In him, he's a strong foundation. He's an unwavering strength that we look at where the rest of the members of the family will be anchored on.

And then we named him Zachary. Zachary is God remembered. So God remembered us for a son. And so we appreciate that. So that's the main reason why we have come here.

Relating his name and the reason why we're here is to thank God for the gift of Jabali. Just to say thank you for the Christians of Union Baptist Church, who really prayed for us when we were in dire need of prayers.

[14:57] At that time, Jabali was joining us. It was not easy. And so we are here to testify of the goodness of God, that we saw God through him. Because once he was born, he developed a respiratory problem.

And so he was in the NICU. And we were wondering, will he survive? Because the pediatrician consultant told me, it's 50-50. So that's where we were.

And then I cried to, we, the pastor reached out to us. Christians like Roger Pantridge and Sarah Atwell, Miriam, they reached out to us. And we were really praying and the entire church prayed for us.

And this is the miracle that we have. And that's the reason why we're here. Just to give thanks to God and say that we're going to nurture this boy in the ways of the Lord. Thank you and God bless you.

Thank you so much. Thank you so much for sharing that. We do give thanks to Jabali's being here is a miracle. And thank you to all of you who responded to that call to pray at the time that he was born.

[16:00] And we're so thankful for the way that God has answered that prayer that we can be here today to give thanks for this very special person. So let me start with a prayer of thanksgiving. Let's pray.

Living Lord, you are the source of life. No one is born and no one dies without your knowledge or outside of your love. We thank you for the birth of Jabali and for his life and all the potential which rests in him.

We also thank you for the love which brought him to life and which continues to surround him today. We know how much he depends on those who care for him. But we believe that you will give Dismas and Josephine all the wisdom, patience and skill which they will need.

So we present Jabali to you now with all our thanks and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Now at this point we're going to ask some questions to Josephine and Dismas.

These are promises that we're asking if you'd be willing to make about how you're going to bring up Jabali and why you're bringing him today. So the questions are going to come up on the screen. So I ask you to join in the part in bold if you agree with these with these statements.

[17:07] So we'll start with the first one. Dismas and Josephine, do you thank God for the gift of your child Jabali? And do you accept the joys and duties that parenthood will bring?

We do. And the next question. Dismas and Josephine, do you promise to bring Jabali up within the Christian community and by God's grace so to live that he'll be nurtured by Christian love?

We do. We do. And now we have a question for all of us as members of Josephine and Dismas and Jabali's wider family as the church family.

And I'm going to read these statements to us as a on behalf of us as a as a church family. And I ask you all if you're able to agree with these statements to join in with the we do at the bottom.

So gathered here as members of this congregation and as representatives of the wider church of God, do you promise to offer Jabali and his family your love and support?

[18:10] We do. That's wonderful. And the next question. Being faithful in prayer, will you share your faith with him by word and example? We will.

That's wonderful. Now, you've told us about Jabali's name. That's about Jabali's name. He's Jabali, Zachary or Juuk. And Jabali means rock in Swahili. So we pray that Jabali will know Lord God as his rock, as the one he can always depend on.

But we pray in turn that knowing that he is loved by God, that he will be a rock to others and that he'll be a man of God that others can depend on as a rock. So that's a that's a wonderful name to be reminded of.

So I'd like to take Jabali from you momentarily, if I may. Thank you very much. Hello, Jabali. Hello. You're bigger than last time we had a cuddle.

Yeah, you're growing big and strong. Hi there. This is all your church family. Yeah. And they're very happy to see you today. That's wonderful. So we want to welcome you officially into your church family, Jabali.

[19:16] So Jabali, we rejoice for you are God's gift to us. Grow strong in the knowledge and love of God. And we pray that you will grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ, following him through the waters of baptism and in a life of faithful witness, bearing the fruit of his spirit.

So now at this point, I want to pray a prayer of blessing on Jabali. And one of the things that I've really appreciated about spending time with Josephine and Dismas and getting to know them, it's given me an opportunity to practice my Swahili, which was starting to get a bit rusty and still a bit rusty.

So if you'll indulge me, I'm going to say the prayer of blessing in Swahili over Jabali and I'll say it in English as well. So Jabali. Amen.

Amen. Amen. So Jabali, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So at this point, if I may, I just like to walk up and down the aisle with Jabali just so he can say hi to all his church family.

[20:51] So Jabali, let's go on a little walk. Mum and dad aren't far away. So let's come down here. And we can say hi to everyone. So this is your church family.

And that's Joanne. And they're very, very happy to see you. There's Daniel. There's Yvonne. Hi there. These are our friends. Hello. Hi there. Hi there. There's Naomi. Hi Naomi. Hi Naomi. Hi. Hi Kevin. Hi there. Hi there. Hi. There's lots of lovely people, isn't there? Yeah. Should we go back? Okay.

Mum and Dad are there waiting. So I better take you back. That's lovely. Hi again. That's wonderful. So isn't it wonderful that we can give thanks to God together as a church family.

[21:48] for Jabali, who is a wonderful gift. He's a gift to Dismas and Josephine, but we can share in that gift today. And that's a special joy for all of us. So I'm going to hand him back to Dad now. Thank you.

There you go. Thank you very much for my cuddle. Now I have something for Dismas and Josephine. So there's a certificate in there.

And then this is a gift from the church to Jabali. It's a child's Bible for him. And this is one that many people in the church have found really helpful.

It takes you right through the story of the Bible and every page pointing to Jesus, our Savior. So I hope that you'll enjoy reading that to him and that he'll enjoy reading that when he's old enough to read that.

So let me present that to you. Now at this point, I'd like to welcome Roger and Sarah Atwell, who I'm going to ask to come and pray for Dismas and Josephine and Jabali.

[22:47] Okay, he's going first. Okay. That's nice. So let us pray. Dear God, we thank you so much for the wonderful gift and our reward of little Jabali into both his own loving family and also into our church family here at Union.

We thank you for his safe delivery, for his growth and potential that's already developing day by day as his parents love and nurture him. We pray for increasing strength and sound sleep as the weeks

go on and protection for him both physically and spiritually as he grows up in the UK. We particularly pray that he will learn about your love and sacrifice of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ, for him as he develops into a young man and that you will bless him and make him a strong man of faith and love in the future.

In this coming week, we pray for safe travels and physical health protection for him as he goes to Kenya to meet his two sisters, Nevleen and Gail, and other members of his extended family. And we pray, Lord, that the family will bond and love each other and enjoy the time that they have together. And we pray that very soon they might all be able to be a family together again here as you intended.

[24:08] Let us, as Jabali's family, church family here, never stop remembering and upholding him in our prayers as he grows up among us, a loved, blessed and wonderful member of our church.

Amen. Heavenly Father, I pray for Dismas and Josephine as they love and care for Jabali. May they bring him up in a knowledge and love of you. I pray that you will strengthen and equip them in the days and years ahead as they commit them to you each day, trusting you in all things. I pray for their family in Kenya, especially their two daughters. May they too have the joy of sharing in the care and love for Jabali. And we pray for safe traveling for Josephine and Jabali back to Kenya and for your protection.

Give Dismas and Josephine a special measure of your grace and peace in these coming months of separation. Holy Spirit, pour your blessing into their hearts and grow them closer to you.

[25:19] All these prayers we pray in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you so much, Roger and Sarah. Bless you. Now, in a moment we're going to sing again. Often we ask the parents if they have a particular song they'd like to choose to sing as part of the service.

And can I ask you Dismas to explain the song that you've, or Josephine, to explain the song you've chosen and the reason for that. Thank you very much. I think it's one, yeah.

Thank you once again. As I said, Jabali is a miracle that happened to us. And it was so significant in the theater room.

For the first time I was asked to dawn on like a doctor. So it never happens in Africa. I was like a doctor and I was witnessing everything and then everything turned haywire and I was like, what's not happening?

[26:26] But the entire theater, the truth be told, they were Christians. And they asked me, do you like any music? I told them, I was like, how do I give, I mean, I propose a song in the theater, like for music?

I mean, I've come for business. So it rang me later on, it rang into my mind, like, okay, I like music, Christian music then.

Why don't I suggest a Christian song? Because I was like, do I suggest any other song? No. I said, okay, can I do a Christian song? Music? Gospel song? Yes.

I told them, okay, fine. So I loaded the player from my playlist. And so they were playing all along. And everyone, including the doctors, they were singing and praising God.

And so it was amazing in there. And so everyone was happy until things changed at the last minute when Jabali came out. But the last time the thing was, there was a song that was going.

[27:29] And that was in Christ alone. It gave us a lot of hope because it was now the time Jabali's respiration is a problem. And so it was just Christ alone.

And we were looking at him and listening to that song. And that is Jabali's song. So that's why we really want to have it sung for us. It just gives us a lot of memories. Thank you very much. And I've seen my sister Olivia is with us. Thank you for joining me. We work together with Olivia and Julian. Thank you very much. Welcome. Welcome. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for choosing in Christ alone.

It's one of our favorites as well. So we were happy with that. Very happy with that one. And what a great song to praise God as we give thanks for all his goodness, especially today, as we see that reflected in the in the life and the answer prayers around the birth of Jabali.



Do please sit down, I'd like to welcome Carrie-Anne, who's going to come and lead us in prayers of intercession. Let us pray.

Thank you, Lord, that we are your children, that we are created in your image, and that you have called us your masterpiece. Thank you that we can know you, know we are loved by you, and forgiven by your sacrifice.

[34:40] Lord, give strength and perseverance to your persecuted church, to the Christians who declare you as the way, the truth, and the light, even when it is difficult or even dangerous to do so.

We pray for the peace deal between Ukraine and Russia. We trust that you already know the outcome and can work all things out for good. We pray for wisdom for all of the leaders involved, and for a fair deal and lasting peace.

As the temperature reached freezing this week, we think of those people in Wickham who have no home to go to. Thank you for everything Wickham Homeless Connection do to support them. Please equip Wickham Homeless Connection with everything they need to be able to offer the homeless people of Wickham the help that they need over this winter. We think of the people in our community who do not find Christmas a time for celebration.

The lonely, the bereaved, those who struggle with the pressure it brings. We pray for our lightening the load service, and for the people who come needing to lay their burdens upon you, and just to be still in your presence.

[35:53] May you give them your peace this Christmas time. We pray too for the Shepherd's Nativity, and all the children who will come into the church. We pray that you will use this event to glorify your name, and that the children would understand that Christmas is really about your birth, and the gift of life that you bring.

Thank you for Jubali, and for the blessing he is to Dismas and Josephine, and to their family and friends, and to the church. We pray that he will grow up knowing that he is loved by you.

May we as a church support Dismas and Josephine in teaching him about you. All this we pray in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it.

[37:34] For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if you live by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body.

You will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again.

Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs.

Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.

[38:39] I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to this present time.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

[40:06] But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. Thank you. Thanks very much, Stephen.

As we prepare to hear from Andy, as he shares a bit more on that passage, we're going to sing again as our musicians lead us. So I invite you to stand if we're able, and we're going to sing, What Gift of Grace, Yet Not I, But Through Christ in Me.

Let's praise God. Amen. What Gift of Grace is Jesus, my Redeemer?

There is no more, forever now to give. He is my joy, my righteousness and freedom.

My strength of love, my deep and hopeless place. To this I hope, my hope is only Jesus.

[41:38] For my life is only unto this. Oh, I'm strange and divine, I can sing.

Oh, it's mine, yet not I, but through Christ in me. The night is dark, but I am not forsaken.

For by my side the Savior will stay. I labor on, in weakness and rejoicing.

For in my need, His power is displayed. To this I hope, my shepherd will defend me.

Through the deep, His valley, He will lead. Oh, the night has been won, and I shall overcome.

[42:51] That young I put through Christ in me. Through faith I dread, I know I am forgiven.

The future's short, the price is half in pay. For Jesus' short, the price is half in my heart.

And He was raised to overcome. To this I hope, my sin has been defeated.

Jesus now and ever is my plea. All the chains are released, I can sing.

I am free, yet not I, but through Christ in me. We have her bread, I long to follow Jesus.

[44:07] For He has said that He will bring me home. And day by day, I know He will renew me.

Until I stand with joy before the throne. To this I hope, my hope is only Jesus.

All the glory evermore to Him. When the grace is complete, still my lips shall repeat.

Yet know I, but through Christ in me. When the grace is complete, still my lips shall repeat.

Yet know I, but through Christ in me. Yet know I, but through Christ in me.

[45:10] Amen. Please do take a seat. Hello, those who don't know me, my name is Andy. I'm one of the team here at Union.

Great to be here with you this morning to share together. This morning we're taking a short break from our Corinthian series.

And instead we've got a chance to tackle some of those big questions that we have in life. And

today we're going to look at something that every one of us at some point has struggled with.

But it's also a massive issue in today's society in particular. And that's the whole issue of identity.

It's who I am.

We hear the cry. It defines me. We also hear. But what defines you? Who defines you? And it's the subject that creates a whole load of big questions as a result.

[46:17] So as we begin to have a look at some of those big questions, let's pray together. Father, as we come before you again this morning and thinking about another of those big questions, God, I pray that you'll remind us of who we are in you and where our true identity lies.

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Why do I feel torn between who I want to be and who I keep being?

Why do I feel like I'm not enough or sometimes I'm too much? What gives me value? Who am I really when everything else gets stripped away?

And so as human beings, we try to answer some of those identity questions through all sorts of different ways, don't we? Our appearance, our achievements, our relationships, our culture, personalities, our career, our sexuality, even our success.

And they come to define our identity. Or do they? Because those things shift, don't they? They change, they break.

[47:33] And we become worn out trying to live out what we or our culture around us thinks our identity should be. Has anyone here ever forgotten their phone charger?

You of us, no doubt. And therefore, having to keep your phone alive when it starts getting into the red, it kind of gets below 10% and then 9% and 8%.

And we become a survivalist. We turn down the brightness. We close every app. We switch to low power. We turn off Wi-Fi.

We turn off friends. We turn off hope. And that's what it's like trying to live relying on that wrong identity.

The kind that changes and breaks based on our own strength, image, and performance. When it starts to tell you, actually, you're not enough.

[48:34] Fix yourself. Change yourself. And you'll be better. Compare yourself. Hide your mess. Do better. It's all about your happiness. Your value is performance.

And it drains you. But the good news this morning is that you don't have to live like your emotional and spiritual battery is constantly in the red.

And edging closer and closer to the dreaded 1% and then switch off. There's another power source. Another identity.

Another voice. And it tells us a different story. So today, I want us to see how God offers us something much deeper. Something may be even surprising that our identity and our value needs to be spoken to.

But first up, I want us to think about that word value for a moment. Because it's an interesting one, isn't it? Why does something have value? I was reading an article recently.

[49:38] And it was talking about a pair of the famous basketball player Michael Jordan's trainers. Second hand and worn by him, I might add.

And they went in the U.S. for well over \$560,000. The article also highlighted some other things that sold for crazy money.

The trousers that Olivia Newton-John wore as Sandy in the final scene of Greece were sold for \$162,000. The dark blue gown Princess Diana wore while dancing with John Travolta in the White House in 1995 was sold for \$347,000.

The tennis racket that Serena Williams smashed during the 2018 U.S. Open final. So yes, it was broken. And it sold still for over \$20,000.

A lock of Elvis' hair, which was believed to have been trimmed from his head in 1958, was sold for \$15,000. Scarlett Johansson, the American actress, had a used tissue apparently sold on eBay for over \$2,000.

[50:48] And one of singer Lady Gaga's acrylic fingernails, which was found on the floor apparently in her changing room, was auctioned off for over \$12,000.

Now obviously these things didn't demand great prices because they themselves were worthy in any way. Unless broken tennis rackets are maybe your thing.

But they went for those prices because of who they belong to. And it's the same message that God's Word, the Bible, has about those who belong to Jesus.

Those whose identity is found in Him. No matter how we feel about ourselves, no matter how much value we do or don't place on ourselves, no matter what others think of us, followers of Jesus know their value is in who they belong to.

You see, instead of attempting to find our identity in things that eventually crumble and fall, here in Romans 8 we read that it's God's Spirit working in God's children that gives us our true everlasting identity.

[52:08] And in it we hear a different voice from the one that tells us that you're not enough. And shows us the difference that we can have by living out our true identity as children of God.

The first difference that it gives us is a fearless freedom. In verse 15 we read that the Spirit replaces fear with freedom in our relationships with God.

The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

Interesting though, isn't it, that fear still grips our lives. That anxiety and worry and what people think still affects how we live.

And even more so in the world around us with its obsession with social media in particular that tells us we need to have a filter on our lives so we can be accepted.

[53:10] And yet here we are being told that by living in relationship with God, with the Spirit now living in us, creates freedom in our lives, not fear.

And it's that freedom that should now rule how we think and live. It's a reminder of our lives before and after coming into a relationship with Jesus.

And it's also that reminder that now, in this new age of belonging to Christ, we can now boldly approach God as Father.

Our focus now is not what the world thinks, but who God says we are. I love the song that we sung a little bit earlier. I am who you say I am.

Who the Son sets free, oh is free indeed. I'm a child of God. I'm chosen, not forsaken. I am who you say I am. You are for me, not against me.

[54:11] I am who you say I am. And Reuben Morgan, who was one of the writers of that song, describes it this way. This song is about freedom. Free from the tyranny of self, free from the opinion of doubters, set free from the chains of our past and the hopelessness of life without God.

God's kindness has brought us in from the outside and made us royalty. God's truth over us is final. Sometimes it's good to remind ourselves what God says over us.

It's a new identity, fearless freedom. And in that freedom, the Spirit brings about our adoption into sonship.

That's right. The Bible doesn't say God simply tolerates you or that he just forgives you or gives you rules and a checklist. It says we are adopted.

My parents were told that they couldn't have any kids. So they adopted my sister, who is 10 years older than me. And then seven years later, my mum went to the doctors because she was feeling ill all the time and was told the reason that she was feeling ill all the time is because she was pregnant.

[55:30] But I can't have kids, my mum said. Well, you can now, said the doctor. And then three years later, she had more tummy trouble and that was me. I was asked the question recently, when did I find out that she was adopted?

And I honestly couldn't answer the question. I've got no idea. She's just always been my sister. Part of the family, part of us, our flesh and blood in our eyes.

It may well have taken her much longer to feel the same and to identify as part of the family. But for us, she was home. She was ours.

She was loved and still is. Adoption is not an accident. It's not random. It's chosen. It's deliberate. Adoption gives a new name, a new family, a new inheritance, and a new source of security and identity.

[56:32] And as a result, we get to call God our dad. And we see that in the second half of verse 15. The word Abba, meaning father, was an everyday word, a homely family word.

Certainly not a word that we would use to address the creator of the universe. And it's been suggested that when we call out and pray to the Father, we experience the inward witness of the Holy Spirit.

Because when we cry Abba, Father, using the very words that Jesus used, as it tells us here in verse 16, it's the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

I don't know if anybody remembers the fast show from the early 90s. And this particular Paul Whitehouse character in it, and he talks about everything being brilliant.

And I think there was a milkhead where he used to kind of go around kind of going, isn't milk brilliant? That was kind of the advert at the time. And basically, he just spends the entire time kind of going on about literally random things.

[57:41] You know, isn't a chair brilliant? And he just talks really excitedly about life. And there's one particular episode around about Christmas time when he was talking about Jesus.

And he said, I mean, brilliant. Imagine him at school. The other kids are talking about what your dad does. And he goes, Colin, my dad's a postman.

What does your dad do, Nick? Oh, my dad's a lorry driver. What does your dad do, Jesus? He says, my dad is God, the supreme being. I mean, imagine that, he says.

God is your dad. Brilliant. The reality is, though, that that is exactly what followers of Jesus are able to say.

We get to call him Abba, Father, Dad. And I love these words, which I think I've shared before, taken from one of our prayer walls set up at an Easter camp back in New Zealand that I was part of a few years ago.

[58:38] And it's written by one of the young people who attended there. And it's this wonderfully intimate prayer that's simply written. But the bit that I love the most is just that little ending where the kid says, I love you too.

Amen. It's just such a beautiful image and such a lovely, intimate set of words. But that is exactly what speaks of our intimacy that we get to experience and truly understand as our identity as a child of God, that we get to call God, Dad.

We get to come before the king of the universe with a simple cry of our hearts, Abba, Father. It's the spirit of God bearing witness with our spirits and saying, I love you too, Dad.

We are then assured of a future hope of glory. Yes, it gets better. In verse 17, we then read that our future is now certain as children of God.

Now, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs in Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings in order, that we may also share in his glory.

[59:56] We need to be reminded here that it isn't just a heavenly inheritance, but the Holy Spirit is the first fruits of this inheritance, giving us an assurance and a hope that not just in the future, but right now, no matter what is happening around us.

The second part of this verse also reminds us that as Christ suffered, so will we. But we need also to be reminded that as we do, we follow the one that has overcome the world.

And we are not alone. God's spirit gives us power when we have nothing left to give. Courage to take the next step when we can't see the path ahead.

And hope of glory when all around us is falling apart. But what does this look like? I don't know if you're one of the kind of people that when you're reading a book, or you're watching a movie, or you're kind of watching a TV show, and it gets really intense.

And you know, you kind of begin to get really nervy. You begin to begin to start worrying. You're really on the edge of your seat. And are you one of those people that's maybe, just maybe tempted at that point to skip to the end, just to see how it finishes?

[61:15] Or maybe go online and kind of have a little look at the synopsis, just to kind of make sure that, you know, I don't want to watch it anymore if it's going to get too scary. But you notice what happens when we do that.

We end up reading or watching in a very different way as a result. We act differently. Why? Because we know how it ends. What an amazing blessing as the children of God that we can be reminded this morning that as the children of God, no matter what we are facing, no matter how hard today or this week has been or will be, no matter what is around the corner in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead, we can lift up our gaze.

We can live lives of certainty in uncertain times. Because guess what? We know how it ends. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

There will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain. Our full adoption will one day be complete. Complete renewal.

I can still feel quite hard though, can't it? Too much sometimes. And as we trust and give our lives to the one who we know overcomes, but can we fully trust?

[62:39] I mean, have you ever looked at old school pictures of yourself and wondered how anyone even let you outside? The years between 11 and 14 in particular are evidence for me that God loves us enough to let us survive a very awkward stage.

And Paul is saying spiritually, we're kind of in that awkward in-between stage of life right now, groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to this present time.

Not who we were, but not yet who we will be. But God sees the finished version. Your identity is not stuck.

You are becoming what God already sees. This gives you hope beyond your current circumstances. This gives you hope that actually it is beyond my mistakes, beyond my relapses, beyond my messy emotions, beyond my slow progress and my bad days. Because your identity isn't tied to how you feel today. You are who God says you are. That is what we are learning this morning.

[63:54] That is what we need to hear this morning. You are not your failures or fears. You are not your follower counts. You are not your mental health diagnosis. You are not your worst day.

You are not your parents' expectations. You are not other people's labels on you. You are not your mistakes. You are not who your ex says you are. You are not your appearances or your appearance.

And thankfully, because some of us peaked in year five, you're not your job. You're not your past. You're not your age. You're not your achievements. Hear the voice of truth this morning telling you a different story.

Be reminded today of your true identity as a child of God. Chosen, wanted, adopted, secure, loved, safe home.

That's your identity. Whether you're six, 16, 36, or 86. So this morning, I hope we have been reminded of what our true identity and value in God is.

[65:00] Let's allow God's spirit to work in us, his children, to continue to give us that fearless freedom, knowing we are adopted in our true family, in our intimate relationship with dad.

God, God, assured of a future hope of glory, despite what might be happening around us. Because imagine that. God is your dad.

Brilliant. Let's pray. Father, we are so thankful for that encouragement of these words today. God, that reminder that I am a child of God.

Father, as we come before you again today, Father, I pray that you will speak into the deepest and darkest parts of our soul today.

God, that you will remind us and that you will set us free from those burdens that say otherwise. From the things that have been said about us.

[66:09] From what the world and what even ourselves thinks we are. And that, God, this morning we can take on that new identity. I'll be reminded of that identity of who we are as a child of God, loved and home.

God, encourage us, I pray. God, build us up, I pray. God, remind us that we are brothers and sisters together. God, continue to use us to remind this world around us that needs that same hope.

God, in your name we pray. Amen. Jandy.

We're going to have an opportunity, some time to respond to that. Respond to what we've heard in God's word. And respond to what was explained to us as we sing our final song.

All I once held dear as we reflect on what difference, knowing that we're loved by the God of the universe. And how we respond to that. I invite you to stand if you're able and let's sing together.

[67:19] All I once held dear. All I once held dear. All I once held dear. All I once held dear.

All I once held dear.

I have counted. I have counted lost. Spent a worthless love compared to dear.

Knowing you, Jesus. Knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.

[68:50] My God's desire is to know you more, to be found in you, and known as God to possess my faith.

But I could not earn all surpassing gifts of righteousness.

Glory to you, Jesus, glory to you, and it is no greater than me.

You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.

Oh, you know the power of your ways in life, and you know you in your suffering.

[70:08] You become like you in your death, my Lord. So if you truly live and never die.

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater than me.

You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.  
Love you, Lord. Amen. Amen.

Do please sit down. Thank you so much for joining us today. We do hope you'll be able to stick around for tea and coffee and refreshments after this time together.

[71:17] Now, just a few announcements of things which are coming up. Hopefully, you will have seen these Christmas postcards, which are double-sided, and these are available at the stage here, at the tables by each of the exits.

So please grab one or two on your way out. These have information about services and events happening in the Christmas season, which are ideal to invite your friends and family and neighbours and colleagues to.

So on the blue side, it's the Shepherd's Nativity Adventure, which is in two weekends' time on the afternoon of Saturday, the 6th of December. This is an ideal event to bring families to.

It's completely free. We ask families to sign up for a time slot to arrive between 2 and 4.30. But the kids, families, all ages get to play some games in here.

They get to have some Christmas refreshments. They get to do Christmas craft, and they get to follow a trail through the building, which will culminate in our Nativity Grotto, where they'll see the Nativity scene all lit up lovely, and they'll be able to receive a book as well there.

[72:23] So that's a wonderful event, especially for families. Now, first of all, please take a postcard and invite people. The second thing, there's several things that we need help with, serving refreshments on the day and various other things.

If you can help with that, please see Jackie. And also, Jackie's in the process of setting up our Nativity Grotto, which is in the Hazel Room, which is up behind that wall with the cross on up there. And if you've got a Christmas tree, which you can donate to that, then please have a word with Jackie, and she'd be very grateful for that, because we're going to fill the room with Christmas trees, as well as a Nativity stable scene for people to see at the end of their journey on that Shepherd's Nativity Adventure.

On the red side, a couple of services, which are ideal to invite people to. The first one is Sunday the 14th of December. That's our Carols by Candlelight service. We'll have traditional carols.

The place will be lovely, lit up by candlelight, and there'll be an accessible evangelistic message. It'd be a great one to invite your neighbours, friends, and family to. Help with that is that rehearsals are starting today, after tea and coffee, for the choir.

[73:27] Now, if you'd love to be part of the choir, even if you haven't said anything up till now, now is the time. Today's the day. Just come here at 12, isn't it? Starting at 12 for the first rehearsal.

If you can't stick around today but would like to be part of that choir, please talk to Ruth, who's wearing red, she was leading our music this morning, or Andy. Please let them know, and we're going to have rehearsals next week and the week after as well, from 12 to about 12.40.

So do please be part of that. We've also got Christingle service, the second thing on here, which is on Christmas Eve. It's a great thing to invite people to, especially ideal for families.

Now, the next notice, something before those things happening. We've got a midweek Advent service on Wednesday, the 3rd of December at 1.30pm. That service will also include communion, and there'll be refreshments after the service.

Do please join us then, if you're able to. It'd be a wonderful way to start the Advent season. And then following that, we've got a special service called Lightening the Load, which is on Sunday, the 7th of December.

[74:30] There's some flyers like this, again, available at the exits, that you can take one. Now, this is a quieter, reflective service, which is especially going to be helpful.

It's open to everyone. It's especially going to be helpful for people who find Christmas difficult for any reason. Maybe you find Christmas stressful. I'd include myself in that category at times, so I'm looking forward to that.

But you might find it's a time where you're reminded of past loss or pain that you've experienced. And that's going to be a wonderful service to meet with God, have some quiet time with him, and be

helped, be given strength as we come into God's presence, strength to get through this season. So do please invite other people to that and make every effort to come along, if that will be helpful to you, on Sunday, the 7th of December. One final notice I've just been given is that some of our children were raising money for meaningful Advent calendars to give through One Can Trust to less privileged families.

If you'd like to donate to that, Karen Bates is going to be around afterwards. She's collecting money for that. So do please see Karen Bates after if you'd like to donate to that. Now, do please join us after the service at the exit there or in the welcome space through there.

[75:46] There's going to be tea and coffee available. And thanks to Dismas and Josephine, they brought some cake to share as well. So that's available in the welcome space there. It's a great opportunity to get to know each other.

I'd like to encourage you, if you're a regular here, please look out for someone that you haven't spoken to before, that doesn't look so familiar. Go and introduce yourself to them and get to know them. That would be a wonderful way to make everyone feel welcome.

Let's finish with a prayer of blessing. Let's pray. Dear Father, thank you for the hope that you have given us. A hope which is a joyful expectation of the future, based on true events of the past, which changes everything about our present.

Help us to live in that hope as we look to you, our loving Father. Bless us, we pray, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you.

Look forward to chatting over coffee. Thank you.