

The **SHAPE** of you

Session 1: Who am I, and who can I be in Christ?

1. Hi, who are you?

Sticker fest! We each made a BIG name badge (A5 size) adding drawings and stickers to represent something about us. We used these to introduce ourselves and things which are important to who we are and what we do.

2. Course intro

We covered the aims of course and discussed a few things we needed to agree to make the group a safe space to share. This included not needing to share anything we preferred to process privately, an encouragement to be honest with ourselves and open with God, and an agreement to keep confidential anything people do share.

3. What can change when we meet Jesus?

We looked again at our illustrated name badges and considered how it would feel for some of the details of our lives to change. What bits could or could not change?

Some things, like details of our past, did not seem changeable, but other things like our jobs and plans could, albeit uncomfortably.

We read Luke 5:1-11 and saw what happened when Jesus met a fisherman named Simon. Suddenly Simon's business took a turn for the better! But he realised that it was more important to follow Jesus than ask him to come back and do some more fishing. In fact, everything changed for Simon, including his name. Nothing on his name badge would have remained the same!

So, we discussed how we felt about that. Change can be uncomfortable but sometimes welcome. Some felt that there were things in their lives they would happily see changed.

This led to the question: how do we recognise when change is good and worth pursuing? We generally felt that a change with a purpose is good, and if God makes the change, it can be great.

4. What does God want to do with us?

We read Mark 1:14-15. Jesus doesn't call people for no reason. He has a plan and purpose for us.

Initially, the word "repent" stood out and we talked about what it means, to think again, change our minds, and ultimately change how we live.

We also discussed what we understand by "the kingdom of God" and our experience of seeing God's work and purpose starting to be more visible in the world. This was really encouraging - lots of us shared faith-boosting experiences of healings, love and peace shared which we credited to God at work in us and through us.

5. A picture of our life together

We read John 15:5-8, where Jesus calls us branches in him, the vine. Together, we are God's gardening project, skilfully cultivated to be fruitful.

While munching some grapes, we discussed how amazing fruit is compared to anything we can make by ourselves, and what it means to be fruitful. Some made the link to the "fruit of the Spirit", such as love, joy and peace. We agreed that this is essential to have and great to share.

It's also amazing that we can trust God to keep growing it, using us to bring his kingdom goodness to the world.

Finally, we talked about what qualifications branches need to be productive. Simply remaining in the vine seemed like the main one, given that God was providing everything else. Looking back to Simon and how his life transformed when he decided to stick with Jesus, we felt encouraged that God could do a lot with us too.

PS - we also noted that there are other pictures of our life together which affirm our specialness, uniqueness and God-given talents, gifts and skills. We will look at them! God does not make us all identical as Christians. But we need to start by responding to Jesus' call to repent and believe so that he can grow us and use us. We don't need to impress him.

6. Prayer and worship time

We responded by removing our name badges and sticking them to a cross, offering ourselves to God consciously as we read Romans 12:1.

People offered praise and thanks to God for the work he was doing, and several asked him to do more with them over coming weeks.

We shared a little prophetic encouragement, affirming the fruit that we were seeing had grown or was starting to grow in each other's lives. To recognise this physically, we added lots of fruit stickers to each other's name badges to represent what God was doing.

After listening to the song "Who You Say I Am" by Hillsong Worship, we took back our stickers from the cross and read Romans 12:2, which promises that we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and that we can know God's will.

7. Take home material

We each took away:

- A summary picture of this week's messages which included a space to stick our name badge as a reminder of God's promise to transform us and make us fruitful.
- A list of what God says we are, with Bible references (originally produced by Freedom In Christ Ministries)
- A daily journal sheet to help us reflect for 5 minutes per day over the next week, so that we could write down what we felt about tonight's discussion and prepare for next week on our hearts and hopes.

Like a classic "partwork" publication, there will be a free binder with part 2!

(Sorry, they didn't arrive in time to go with part 1....)