



Let's pray:

October 2023

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?

 **home
for good**

Adolescence and Identity

Adolescence is all about the exploration of who we are. What makes up our identity? What are the things that I care about? Where is my place in the world? It's the exploration of these questions that makes me love young people; it's why I became a youth worker. Adolescence is a season of great potential and opportunity, and I found it a privilege to be alongside young people on their journey.

For all of us, this journey of exploration can be a bit bumpy at times. When I was 13, as an expression of the generalized teenage angst that I was feeling, I began to change some things that made up my identity. I rocked a crimson floor length crushed velvet skirt, heavy black eye make up and fingernails and more black accessories. Naturally a fan of pop music that I could sing along to (hello Take That in the 1990s), I started to listen to music that sounded angrier and heavier. I feigned being furious when my Dad questioned whether I really liked these bands or whether I was just trying to make a point. I was furious mainly because he was right.

The music we like, how we dress, our hobbies and characteristics are components of our identity, but we're more than simply the sum of these parts. Some of my teenage exploration was me wanting to establish myself as my own person, separate from my parents, yet I knew that some of what and who I was, was connected to them. When I made the decision to become a Christian, a part of my struggle was that this was what my parents believed too, and I wanted to be different (and I didn't want to acknowledge that they were 'right!').

For children and families with an experience of care, questions about identity are even more layered and complex. Who do I look like? Am I like my birth family or the family I live with, or neither? Does it matter? Where do I belong? What if some of the pieces that make up a child's identity are not known or got lost, or nobody thought to record it? What if you've lived in a few homes with a few families and they've each played a part but you're not sure if or how it all fits together?



Those of us who love and are raising children with an experience of care have questions too – how can we help them explore identity that is different to our own so they also feel connected in our family? How can we honour and grow their sense of identity?

There are no simple answers, nor would it be honouring to even suggest there are. However this one verse in Ephesians has helped me in my journey of understanding my identity (beyond the red velvet skirt days) and particularly as I've journeyed with young people in our home and family and been alongside them in their wonderings and struggles around identity.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

For you are God's handiwork; His workmanship.

Workmanship is a brilliant word that means 'work of art' or masterpiece! Whatever the circumstances of our conception, birth or childhood or what we've been told or experienced, each of us, every child and young person with an experience of care included, is created uniquely, bespoke to the plans of our Creator, creative God. Psalm 139 tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and that God's works are wonderful.

As we explore identity, we can be confident that our design is heavenly, even when our earthly experience is marred by the impact of a fallen world.

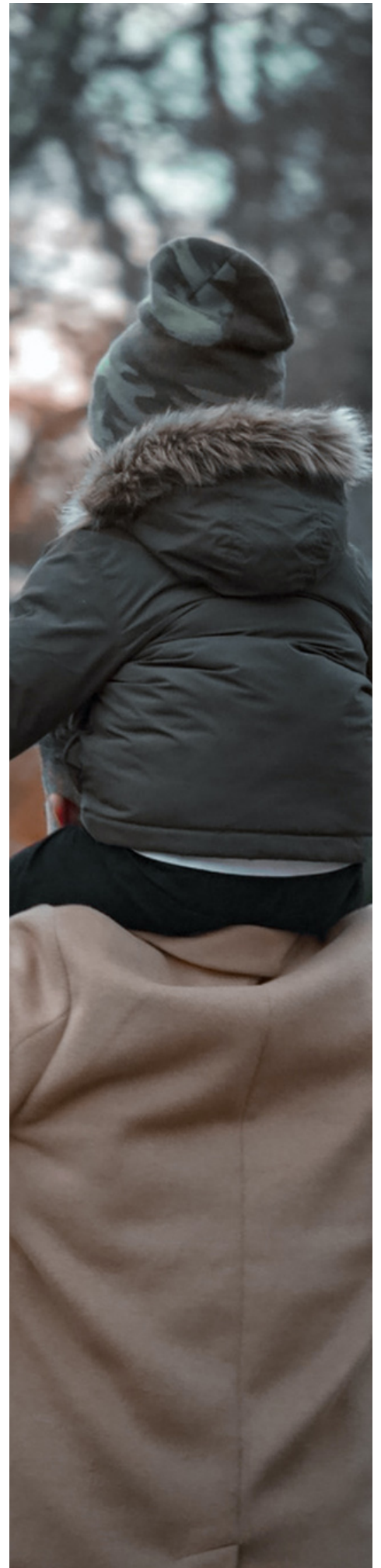
You're a work of art. So are the children and young people who you love, are raising or are connected to.

On purpose, with purpose, for purpose.

Whatever our beginnings, however traumatic and challenging they were and are, we were created with purpose on our lives. That doesn't diminish the pain or tragedy of what children with an experience of care have faced or lost. It does mean we can take confidence that we were created with great intention, full of potential.

There are some wonderful things that God created only you to do, and the children you're connected to and we get to hold on to the hope this gives us.

Claire Hailwood, Director of Content





Points for Prayer

Thank God for the children, young people and families you know and who are in your communities. Thank God for their lives, their passions, the things they love to do and the stories they tell.

Thank God for particular character traits, quirks and gifts that you appreciate in the children and adults that you know. Let's celebrate the way that God has put them together.

Thank God for the grown ups who love, are raising and care for and about children with an experience of care. Thank God for their willingness. Give thanks for when it feels like they're 'experts' and for the times when they're just doing what they can – both matter hugely.

Thank you God that the Bible tells us that we are your workmanship. Thank you for the time you took to create each and every one of us, for the delight you took in forming us. We join with the Psalmist and praise you that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Father God, we pray for children and young people whose life stories are complex and painful at times. We pray that you would be at work in their lives, and that they would know that you created them on purpose, with purpose and for purpose. We pray that this truth would give them hope that would sustain them on the journey. Amen.

Pray for teenagers as they journey through adolescence as they explore their identity in this exciting and challenging period. Ask that they would know God's presence with them as they face tricky questions and parts of their story.

Pray for parents and carers as they raise and journey through adolescence with young people. Thank God for them, and ask, as the Bible encourages us to do, for great wisdom for them.

Pray that children and young people would grow up confident in who they are with all the layers, complexity and beauty their story contains, able to celebrate their identity in and in spite of the pain.

God, we are so thankful for the adults around the UK who love and are raising children and young people with an experience of care. Thank you for the ways they are affirming and growing their children's identity. Thank you for the creativity and perseverance they demonstrate in loving their children through the pain and opportunity of exploring who they are and why they're here. We ask for your sustaining power and presence to be with them and lead them. We dare to pray that this generation of children growing up with an experience of care would be those able to celebrate their identity, in all the complexity, because of who you say they are. Amen



Creative Prayer Idea

Have a large piece of paper, perhaps a roll of plain lining paper or large sheets of paper together with the outline of a wall, full of bricks.

Consider, perhaps with others in your home or community, what different components might make up someone's identity, and write these things on the wall.

Consider how an experience of the care system might affect each of these bricks and use it as a prompt to pray that God would be at work in building identity where there are gaps and strengthening healthy components.