

Compassion Camp: Be You
Psalm 139:7-16

“You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something” MSG

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Prayer - God of compassion, remind us to be who you created us to be and assure us as individuals and as a people you are with us through any and all things.

Message

They say just be yourself, just be you. But not too much you because you wouldn't want everyone to know the real you. That's too risky, too much information. Other than that, just be you.

They say be strong and assertive, but not too assertive because you don't want to appear bossy or come across as a demanding control freak. Be strong, just not too over the top.

They say be confident, but not overly confident. You don't want people to think you are arrogant or rude. You don't want to come off like a snob or anything. Be sure of yourself, but not too sure.

Be smart, but not too smart. You know, not like a know it all or like you are too good for the rest of us. Be smart but don't make anyone feel dumb.

Be sensitive, but not too sensitive, otherwise people will think you are weak or too emotional, or that you can't handle your emotions.

Be creative, just not too creative because we don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable or feel out of place. Express yourself but just maybe not challenge ideas.

Be open but not too open because then you might change how you think about something or change how you feel about other ideas and insights. Be open, just not too open.

What I mean by all this is, just be you. Mostly. Kind of.

Is it any wonder that young people struggle with knowing who they are, their identity or relationship to the world, or struggle with just being themselves? Is it any wonder that adults wrestle with knowing how much of themselves to be or reveal and when and where and how? Or who they are once their kids grow up, who they are if they have no kids, or who they become if they are married, not married, divorced, or widowed?

Identity. On the one hand it's a simple thing. On the other hand, it is a multi-faceted and challenging undertaking. It is something we are born with yet we spend our entire life growing into.

Two weeks ago I challenged you to be love. Last week, I encouraged to be kind to yourself. Today, I want to empower you to be you - the God created, God designed, God loved, you. In the plural and singular sense of

the word you. You as an individual made by God for this world and for a purpose and you as a community in this place at this time.

Throughout scripture, we are told who we are, how we are, and where our identity resides. There is, in my opinion, no stronger example of that than in the book of Psalms. Psalms is the song book of faith and the prayer book of believers. It is a book of tragedy, hope, and justice that speaks truth to the reality, pain, sorrow, love, victory, and joy of this thing we call life. It is a book of lament, thanksgiving, poetry, song, and liturgy. It has been described as, “both, humanity's words to God and as God’s word to humanity” (NIB 642). The book of Psalms, then, has been and is used in churches everywhere to speak the heart *of* the people and *to* the heart of the people.

As we consider the meaning, power, and purpose of compassion as it relates to the meaning, power, and purpose of being ourselves (individually and collectively), let us hear the words of Psalm 139:7-16 MSG.

God created you. God knows you. There is no where God cannot find or pursue you. Your life derives from God, belongs to God, and finds its purpose in God. I believe you are never too old, too sophisticated, too educated, too big for your britches, or too anything to hear again who you are. Your identity, individually and collectively is found in God.

There are a lot of voices in this world trying to tell you otherwise; trying to influence who you are. There are a lot of ideas, causes, people, projects, and specialty groups vying for your attention and loyalty; trying to

convince you of who you are or who you should be as a person and as a body of believers. But before all that, above all that, you are known by a God that is bigger than it all. A God whose purpose is to love, transform, and restore the brokenness of you (singular and plural you).

The key word in Psalm 139 is the word “known.” It may be entirely coincidental that it occurs seven times; the number indicating fullness or completion, but such a pattern reinforces the message that the psalmist is fully and completely known by God. The very first word of the psalm is the divine name “yahweh,” and the first word of verse two is the Hebrew pronoun “you.” So while verses 1-6 are often described as a statement of God’s omniscience, what really matters about God to the psalmist is that the divine “you” knows the human “me.” One commentator put it this way, “from beginning to end it is I and you” (NIB 1235).

God’s gift of compassion is in that I - you relationship which in turn allows us to participate in the you - we relationship. Compassion is God’s gift of love poured into our hearts that we might have and express compassion for others, ourselves, and the world. God created and designed us for relationships. Strong, meaningful relationships understand the depth and purpose of compassion. At the heart of that compassion is the freedom to be you - the God created, perfectly imperfect, flawed but trying, you. The presence of such love / compassion invites both fierce loyalty and sweet surrender to God first and our human connection second.

Being you is not about making everyone happy or trying to be everything to everyone (individually or collectively). Being you is not about

thinking you have to forfeit what you believe or deny your core values. It is not about anything being taken from you. It is not about political games, manipulative power plays, or sacrificing who God made you to be. Being you is about knowing that you are known and have purpose in the God of the universe. Why would you as an individual or as a collected body called the church, want to be anything or anyone else?

Compassion is about being you the person and you the church and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and use your interests, passion, talent, skill, education, experience, and resources to be a beacon of hope in our world. Oh how our world needs hope. Compassion means to be a people and a place of hope; a place to come home to, a safe place to land. To be a people and a place of welcome and refuge; of healing and growth; of learning and transformation.

Being you is not about having all the answers, it's being willing to ask the questions and listen for understanding. It is not about being right or wrong, or keeping score. It is about being willing to seek wisdom and truth alongside others; along other "yous" and live into the answers together.

Grace church is in a time of change and transition and with that there are some things we don't know or can't control in the process. And yet, there are way more things we do know: we know God is in the lead, we know our staff continues to work hard, we know change happens and is only temporary, we know we are still Grace church, we know we can do hard things together, and we know we will continue to be who we are - a people and a church that cares for one another, a church that is active in

our community, a people who care about what happens in our world, and a church that welcomes and loves and wants to make a difference in the lives of those inside and outside its walls. So be you Grace church.

Maybe that looks like family service projects alongside local agencies. Maybe it is gathering regularly throughout the summer and fall at the park for play time and picnics with other families. Maybe it's going out with others to watch birds and celebrating God's creation. Maybe it's community bike rides that end at the church parking lot with snacks and prayer. Maybe it's circling the gas grills & electric smokers once a month and sharing favorite recipes or sharing a meal with homeless teens. Maybe it's a weekly walk through the neighborhood or along the trail through town placing decorated rocks to encourage others or praying for others as you pass their house or their place of business. Maybe it's gathering other green thumbs and planting garden boxes for the food pantry or flowers for homebound residents. Maybe it's inviting those neighbors you still haven't met over to sit in the shade and have some iced tea, coffee, or a can of pop. Maybe it's in-home bible study, book clubs, or movie nights with people who are new in town, or who don't have family in the area. Maybe it's mentoring young parents, young professionals, homeless teens, college students, or foster children. The compassion expressed through being you is limited only to your imagination and willingness to see what God can do with what God created, you.

Be you church. Don't make it harder than it is. Don't get bogged down in what ifs and what abouts, just be you. Be you - try something different, explore opportunities and find fresh expressions of hope, of

ministry, of transformation. Be you individually and collectively - the you God created and brought together. Don't let fear dictate faith. Don't let conflict control decisions or commitment level. Be you - and allow the God who knows you to use you as God's expression of compassion to the world. You be you. I'll be me. We'll be us and God will lead the way.

May it be so. Amen

Sources Consulted
NIB Vol. IV