



Being Human Leader's Notes



Exploring what it means to be fully human; to become the very best version of ourselves

Steve Chalke



About Being Human

Welcome to Being Human.

Being Human is a four week course for small groups and individuals wanting to explore what it means to be fully human; to become the best version of ourselves.

Course Structure

Being Human is split into four sections, which can be covered in four distinct sessions:

- 1) Love Yourself
- 2) Love Others
- 3) Love God
- 4) Love God and Love Your Neighbour As Yourself (and What it Means for Church)

How to Use the Materials

Each session includes an online video, which itself is split into two sections. These can be used alongside this leader's resource, designed to help you to guide a discussion within a small group.

You can also choose to use the videos and this guide as an individual study resource.

And don't forget that you can buy a copy of Steve Chalke's book Being Human, at a specially discounted price, at www.openchurch.network/shop.

We hope that you'll enjoy these materials and that you'll share them with people you know.

Lastly, please let us know what you think of the course and its content at:

<http://www.openchurch.network/BHsmallgroup>

Week 1, Part 1: Love Yourself

The Parable of the Geese (Soren Kierkegaard)

The parable that Steve tells at the beginning of this session was built by Steve around similar stories told by Soren Kierkegaard.

- Do you sometimes feel like the geese he describes? Do you feel like a wild goose or have you been domesticated?
- What relevance does the parable of the geese have for the Church in society today?



It's about being fully human, it's about becoming the best version of yourself and living intentionally. Love yourself – you're made by God



Being Human

Early in session 1, Steve says that, “Being human, being the best version of yourself, is a matter of your story and your theology, not your mood”.

- What do you think?
- What impact do you think that this way of thinking about your humanity might have on the way you live your life day by day?

Original Sin or Original Goodness

Steve compares St. Augustine's doctrine of original sin with Jewish perspectives on Genesis 3.

- What do you think?
- How does a different reading of Genesis 3, as a growth of humanity to maturity – from innocence to conscious choice about good and evil, change our perspectives on Augustine's doctrine of original sin?
- If we are made originally good by God (Genesis 1), how might that change the way we live our lives today?

Week 1, Part 2

I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)

In part 2, Steve concludes that. “Following Jesus isn't about religion and all its paraphernalia; it's simply about walking a way of life with Christ. It's about being fully human, it's about becoming the best version of yourself and living intentionally. Love yourself – you're made by God”.

- What do you think?
- How good are you at loving yourself?
- How do our lives change as we learn to love ourselves fully?

Week 2

Week 2, Part 1: Love Your Neighbour

A Central Issue: What is the Bible?

Steve suggests that the books of the Bible are often placed in juxtaposition to highlight contradiction and to call us into a conversation. He suggests that the very nature of the Bible is to call us into conversation about its content and meaning.

- What do you think?
- Is that the way you perceive the Bible?
- What impact do you think a more open conversation about theology might have in our churches and our society today?

Loving Others

Steve tells us: 'When it turns out that God hates all the same people you do, you can safely conclude that what you've actually done is recreate him in your own image'.

- What do you think?
- Do you find this very human tendency yourself? Or within your church?
- What practical approaches can we adopt to be more inclusive: 'to be more reckless in our love'?

But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:44-45)

Steve suggests that when we reach out beyond ourselves to those we don't know or trust or understand, something is changed inside us. It is we that change, by confronting the darkness and prejudice within ourselves, rather than those we reach out to.

- Do you agree?
- What practical examples of this sort of personal transformation are you aware of, either in your life or others?
- How do you think that we can work harder to put this sort of radical inclusive love into practice in our daily lives?

Week 2, Part 2

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. (Matthew 25:40)

Steve tells us: ‘Jesus is saying this: “God hides in the oppressed, in the poor, in the marginalised, in the forgotten, in the rejected, in those we find most challenging. God hides in our neighbours and even in our enemies. When we look into their eyes and cross the street to greet them, we discover God”’.

- What do you think?
- What groups do you find yourself excluding, either consciously or unconsciously?
- What groups does your church need to work harder to include within your community?



God hides in the oppressed, in the poor, in the marginalised, in the forgotten, in the rejected, in those we find most challenging.

Week 3

Week 3, Part 1: Love God

A Loving God of Creation

In part 1, Steve compares the Babylonian creation story or myth in the Enuma Elish with that in Genesis chapter 1. Although there are significant similarities between the two accounts, there are also substantial differences that articulate a newer and radically different Hebrew understanding of God and of the relationship between God and human beings.

Steve tells us: 'Every human being is made in the image of God. We are all God's representatives. We are all God's image-bearers. In Genesis 1 comes equality. We're on the first page in the first story of the whole Bible and its announced that all human beings are image bearers of the God of all creation, a good God who looks at his creation and announces, 'It is very good'.

- What do you think?
- What impact does the idea that all humans are God's representatives and image-bearers have on the way that we live in relationship with others?

Week 3, Part 2

Our God is a Bigger Bully

Steve asks: 'How great is my God? Is my God bigger than any other God I might choose to serve? Is my God simply territorial? Is my God denominational? Is my God the kind of God that's on my side or is he for the world? Is my God bigger and more worth serving than some of the other gods on display in our society?'

- What do you think?
- Is there a risk that our way of doing church becomes divisive and territorial; that we can find ourselves creating a God in our image, who's always on our side rather than being a God for everyone?
- How should we respond to that risk?



There are many gods vying for our attention today in our society. They want our adoration. They're looking for our worship.

Which God do you serve?

Steve suggests that, 'There are many gods vying for our attention today in our society. They want our adoration. They're looking for our worship. Here are some of their names: money, sex, power, the market, leisure, self-interest, health and beauty. Which god do you choose to serve? We all serve somebody.'

- What do you think?
- Are there gods that you find yourself serving in addition to the one true God?
- In what ways can we focus more on serving God and less on serving the other gods that vie for our attention in today's society?

If it doesn't look like Jesus, it isn't God

Drawing on John 1:14 and Hebrews 1:3, Steve concludes: 'If any response I have to any situation doesn't look like Jesus, it doesn't echo and it doesn't reflect the God of love, the God who loves all of us because we are his representatives and we are made in his image'.

- What do you think?
- What practical impact does that approach have:
 - For the way we read Scripture?
 - For the way we live our daily lives?
 - For the way we 'do' church?

Week 4

Week 4, Part 1

Cosmic Child Abuse

In Part 1, Steve quotes from his book *The Lost Message of Jesus*: 'The cross of Christ is not a form of Cosmic child abuse, a vengeful father punishing his son for an offence he did not commit. Rather than a symbol of vengeance or retribution, the cross of Christ is the greatest symbol of love and a demonstration of just how far God the Father and Jesus his Son are prepared to go to prove that love and to bring redemption to their creation?'

Steve suggests that substitutionary atonement theory, the idea that God's anger with humanity was nullified through the death of his son Jesus on the cross, presents God in absolutely the wrong light. Steve suggests that the cross of Christ is a transformational act of love, rather than one of anger and vengeance.

- What do you think?
- How does thinking about the cross in other ways than that of substitutionary atonement theory change our understanding of God and our relationship to him?
- How does this change the way we are called to live and act as human beings?

God's Anger or His Anguish?

Steve asks: 'Is the cross of Christ, that sits right at the centre of our Christian faith, about God's anger and disapproval of human beings or is it about his love for them, that cannot be put out, that cannot be extinguished? And, if it is about God's love rather than his anger, what does it mean for the message of our churches? What does it mean for the programmes of our churches? What does it mean in terms of our attitude to the community around us and the activities we run?'

- What do you think?
- What impact do you think this articulation of the cross has on the message and mission of the Church?

Week 4, Part 2

What is Church?

Steve draws on Matthew 16:13-20 and Matthew 18:15-20 to argue that Jesus presents a model of church that is much more than a casual meeting of two or three people in a coffee shop; rather it is a community that provides ongoing relationship as well as accountability.

- What do you think?
- Do you agree with Steve's interpretation of church?
- What impact might that have on the way you 'do' church?

Do I Really Need to Belong to a Church to be a Christian?

Steve tells us: 'The Church is a permanent community to which we belong, in which we are known and to which we are accountable. It's a community that's formed around the belief that Jesus is Lord of all. That Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; that's formed around the belief that Jesus is the Way that we should walk in. That Jesus is the one to follow. If that's true, church is where we find expression of what it means to love God, to love our neighbour and to love ourselves. If that's true, a church community is the only community in which we can grow and thrive to become the person that God longs for us to be, the best version of ourselves'.

- What do you think?
- Do you agree with Steve's take on the importance of church? Do you think we need to belong to a church to be followers of Christ?
- Does it change how you think about what is or isn't church in your context?
- What sort of church might best enable you, and your fellow church members, to grow and thrive, to become the best versions of yourselves?

What is Your Story?

Steve concludes with a question: 'If your life is a story, which of course it is, what would it be about? What is the story of your life? What would be its most important themes? What would its ultimate goal be? What virtues and values would you need to develop in order to achieve this and how would you best go about it?'

- Take some time in quiet reflection and prayer as you consider Steve's question.
- Discuss it in the group if you feel comfortable.
- But most importantly, in the coming weeks – individually, or in the group in which you've followed these materials – spend time considering how that question might inform your life. What will you do differently?



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