

Parish Retreat Session 1: Formed For Identity in Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Irwyn Ince

[0 : 00] sort of uptick in quality and ambiance here. Are other people feeling that? It's always great to be back every year and kind of see the incremental changes that happen. A lot of memories have been made in this room, a lot of great, amazing conversations, a lot of wonderful times of prayer, a lot of laughter.

Hopefully we'll have some more of that tonight. But this weekend's very exciting because as this retreat does every year, this is an opportunity for us as a community to take those central values that define our community and our vision and really dive into those.

And our values are the values of generous hospitality, spiritual formation, and then missionary faithfulness, living all of life in reference to the mission of God. And so that first value, what does it mean to be a community that is generous and even extravagant in our hospitality?

Our willingness to embrace and to make space for and to welcome into our family all those who God sends us. And how do we welcome people as we've been welcomed by Jesus Christ?

And so that's why we have the Reverend Dr. Erwin Ince with us. Erwin is a veteran pastor. He pastored a church for 10 years in Columbia, Maryland. He is a father of four, right?

[1 : 22] He has a sort of historical connection with our church family. He was a part of Res and a friend with the people who got Church of the Resurrection started all those years ago, and a friend of Dan Clare's and now a friend of ours.

And so we're excited to have him because he's come back to D.C. to be a pastor at Grace D.C. and to start the Institute for Cross-Cultural Ministries that is – well, he'll tell you more about all that they're doing, but I can tell you that their sort of central statement of vision is this, that the ICCM is a church-based entity dedicated to equipping churches with the confidence and competence to welcome others the way Jesus welcomes us.

So that's right in line with the kind of thing we want to be talking about. And as a community, you know, we always want to be in a posture of learning from people who are leading and doing great things in the kingdom. And so our hope and prayer is that we learn from Erwin.

And so I'm just going to say a brief prayer, and then I'm going to invite him up here. Lord, we pray for this time. We pray for all of us who are gathered here. Lord, we've all been welcomed at one point or another into the kingdom, though we did not deserve it.

We've all been embraced into the arms of Jesus Christ, Lord. And if there are any people here who have not yet felt that embrace, we know that your arms are wide open for them.

[2 : 46] And we pray for Dr. Enz as he speaks this morning. We pray that he would be an instrument in your hand, Lord, that his voice would be your voice, his word, your word. We pray that our hearts would be open to receive it.

In your son's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning, folks. Yes, good, good morning. I hope we're all well satisfied in our bellies and well caffeinated.

I am well caffeinated. And so, Lord willing, we'll be relatively sharp this morning. So, yeah, we are this weekend talking, as you can see in the booklet and on the screen, about a new we, image, identity, and community in Jesus Christ.

And I will say at the outset, I have far too many slides for our time together. So, my goal is not to get through every slide that I've got, but to work through this in a way that is enriching for you all.

And I know that we have got some time set aside for discussion with questions, but I invite you through this process to interrupt me if you have a question.

[4 : 18] And if it's something that I want to defer to later, I'll say that, but I'm all about dialogue. All right? So, let me start off by just kind of talking about what I call my core conviction.

And this comes out of my own story, coming out of a very racialized worldview.

In my college years, I rejected the faith, the Christian faith, during my high school years. I thought playing football was much more important than Jesus.

And so, but that rejection of the Lord became active as an undergraduate, as I was studying electrical engineering.

And I joined a group that had a very Afrocentric worldview. It was called the Sons of Africa. And I, for me, you know, Christianity became the white man's religion.

[5 : 32] I was immersing myself in people who had a very black nationalistic worldview. And so, I mean, I was, I would go to bed during those years.

There was a period of months where I would go to bed watching a Louis Farrakhan speech on video that I had on video. Like the same speech from 1985 Madison Square Garden speech that I had on video.

And every night, that's what I went to sleep doing, watching that, because I wanted to get that. Like, I wasn't interested in being a black Muslim. I just wanted to get that deep into my, into my bones.

And so, when I, when I came to faith and the Lord brought me to himself at a historic African American church in Washington, D.C., particular lights began to go off for me.

I began to realize that my true family, my eternal family, were those to whom I was united by faith in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 49] From every racial and ethnic background. And so, the problem that I saw was that, oh, okay, I'm reading the scriptures now, and I'm seeing this is God's plan and God's vision.

But I don't see it in the church. Like, the church I'm at, we're all black. There's a church down the road, they're all white. That one's all Asian, that one's all Latino.

So, I'm not seeing the living out of what I see in the scriptures in any practical way. And I know that there are valid, actually, reasons, at least in America, for these kinds of divisions within the church.

But that, I wasn't able to kind of shake that. And it created in me what I call a divine dissatisfaction. And that's a phrase I borrowed from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

That he would use to describe, saying, what is it that you see, as far as God's standard and God's word, that you don't see being lived out in the society or in the church.

[8 : 11] And it's this divine dissatisfaction. I have to live into it. And so, that's a long way of getting around to, did I go backwards? I did.

All right. Well, I'll go back to what was on the slide before. My core conviction, which is that the ministry of reconciliation, as demonstrated in the local church by the gathering of people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures, ethnicities, and cultures, it is the natural outworking of a rich biblical commitment.

If we're committed to God's word, then what we will be pursuing is the ministry of reconciliation demonstrated by the gathering of people in the local church from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities.

And so, this is what I've given my life to in pastoral ministry, and now as we build this Institute for Cross-Cultural Mission.

And so, here are three things we're going to, in these two sessions, we're going to try to cover.

Right? Image, identity, and community in Christ. We're going to talk about being formed to image God.

[9 : 27] We're going to talk about the God that we image, kind of laying the groundwork, the biblical foundation. We're going to talk about being formed for identity in Jesus Christ.

We're being formed to have our core sense of who we are, being rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ.

Not to say that ethnicity is unimportant. Not to say that we're striving to be colorblind. No, you see me, you need to see that I'm a black man.

But, my ethnic identity is subordinate to my identity in Jesus Christ. And then, we're going to talk about being formed for identity in community.

And so, look, let's talk about the God that we image. I've been just captured probably the past year or so.

[10:31] I don't know how it happened. But, just with this notion of beauty. Right? To reflect on the beauty of God.

That God is the standard for beauty. Yes, and beauty is an attribute of God.

He's got lots of attributes, right? But, I think in this case, it's beneficial, at least it was for me, for us to study as we consider God's nature.

Who is God? And, who are we? If God is beautiful, what does it mean for the humanity that images God? And so, here's the question.

Like, what is beauty? Alright, why do I have a picture of camels on the screen? Well, camels are beautiful, aren't they?

[11:29] Well, like, earlier this year, January, there was a scandal. In the camel beauty contest pageant in Saudi Arabia, in January.

There were 12 camels who were disqualified from the pageant. Why were they disqualified? Because they had found a veterinarian who had injected them with Botox to make them more attractive.

Injecting their lips to be fuller. Their nose. They had to perform some procedures. They have the beauty pageant in Saudi Arabia for camels.

They have documents of the standards of camel beauty that you've got to utilize to make an adjustment. And, right, it's funny, right? But, right, this is no laughing matter.

There are, it's, the article said that there's over \$31 million in prize money at these pageants. So, you know, I mean, I've got to get my camel looking good.

[12:41] So, that begs the question, right? Like, what is beauty? Now, we don't, we're not going to have any camel beauty pageants here in the good old U.S. of A. Right? But we know what it's like to commodify beauty.

Right? We know what it's like to parade women and men on stages and make judgments about their physical appearance and their value based on that appearance and calling that beauty and calling them beautiful.

And so, really, the question is, what is beauty? What does it mean to be beautiful?

All right, I'm just going to ask the question. Y'all tell me. What, if I, what is beauty? What does it mean to be beautiful? Some sort of pleasure.

Yeah. Yeah. It makes you feel like things are, you know, in a right way. Yeah. It's an ideal, like platonic ideal that you see. Yeah. Yes, but some kind of pleasure, right?

[13:51] It's, there's a, there's a light to it. Yeah. Uh-huh. I'd say a lot of self-esteem. Self-esteem, right? It's connected with beauty. Yeah. Yeah.

What else? Curves. Curves. Curves. All right. So, I was looking at this, okay, we're all adults in here, right?

There's a, this guy made this video on, he put on Facebook about how he's, it's him as the dad and all of the old school 1980s music that he's teaching to his child.

Like, you know, they don't make music like they used to. And so, it's a, this is, this is me, right? I'm going to show you what real good music is, right? And there's this, there's this one song by the Gap Band, A Brick House.

Right? That's the Commodores. Thank you. That's not the Gap, thank you. The Commodores. She, she's a brick house, right? And, and, and, uh, and, uh, the dude says, as he's seen the song, right?

[15:05] I got two brick houses, the one I pay for and your mother. So, that's me, right? Right?

Curves are an aspect of beauty, right? But, question is, right?

Here, so I'm going to borrow, I'm going to borrow from, um, uh, from an old theologian. Um, you know, beauty, is beauty simply, you know, you know it when you see it?

Right? Is it, right? Is it this subjective thing? Is it only in the eye of the beholder? Um, is, uh, um, you know, what do we mean, right?

That song, we're marching to Zion. Beautiful, beautiful Zion. We're marching onward to Zion, the beautiful city of God. Um, I, um, uh, I'm going to, I'm going to run through these.

Okay. Because I know I'm going to, how much time do I have, by the way? What time are we going to need to be done? Oh, okay. All right.

[16:08] So, I'm running through this. We're not, we're not going to stop here. Um, um, uh, but, uh, yeah, I'm going to keep going. Sorry. Um, I'm going to, but I'll read that last quote.

This is from, um, a, uh, an art historian, um, who is critiquing notions of beauty. Um, and, uh, and she says that she's not, she's not a follower of Jesus, but, uh, this is, she makes this true statement in her critique.

She says, only God can act as origin and end of beauty, incontrovertible enough to stop the seepage that pollutes the ostensibly close, otherwise pure system of aesthetic judgment.

That we've got to have a standard, in other words, for beauty. And only God can act as that standard. Um, uh, yeah, I'm going to skip through this too.

Um, uh, Herman, Herman Bavank, one of my favorite theologians, uh, but, but he's making the same case that God is supreme, uh, supreme beauty.

[17 : 21] Um, so, here we go. All right. So, I want to say that beauty is theological in nature.

It is essential to beauty is what we find in the scripture, a grand narrative of the defeat of the formlessness of chaos, a grand narrative of God bringing order out of chaos.

This is the story of Genesis chapter one. In the beginning, the, the, the earth was formless and void. Darkness was, um, was covering the, the, the, the earth.

It is a, a story of, uh, of chaos. Uh, and that's the pattern of Genesis chapter one. Uh, the, the six days of creation are God bringing order out of chaos, forming and filling.

Day one, he forms the light in the parallel day. Day four, he fills what he has formed with the, the sun and the moon.

[18 : 34] Day two, he forms the firmament and the sky. And day five, he fills it with inhabitants, birds and fish. Day three, he forms the dry land and vegetation.

And in day six, he fills it with land animals and, of course, with, uh, with people. This is, uh, essential to beauty. And so there are three aspects of beauty I want to engage us with.

I get this from, uh, St. Thomas Aquinas, um, where he defines beauty, uh, this way.

He says, species of beauty has a likeness to the property of the sun, S-O-N. For beauty includes three conditions. Integrity or perfection.

Proportion or harmony. And lastly, brightness or, or clarity. And this is kind of morphed into three Ps, uh, helpfully by a guy named Stephen Guthrie.

[19 : 35] Wrote a book called The Creator's, The Creator's Spirit, The Holy Spirit, and The Art of Becoming Human. And he puts it in three ways with three Ps.

First, perfection. All right? We, beauty, uh, includes perfection. Uh, the, the reality that in the scriptures we see this, uh, Guthrie says, To hope for the kingdom of God in its fullness is to hope for beauty.

The psalmist says in Psalm 50, Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. And here's the deal.

By perfection, we don't necessarily mean, there's a mystery there. Uh, we don't, it's gotta be a perfection that can accommodate scars.

And what I mean by that is, Jesus Christ is beautiful. He, the risen Christ, the risen, ascended Christ, is glorious, majestic, and beautiful.

[20 : 53] Yet he still bears the mark of crucifixion on his body. He still bears the scars. And so there's a mystery here. There's a, that's a perfection that can accommodate scars.

It's not the perfection, Gaff Guthrie says, of, uh, the sheen of the fashion magazine that has been kind of glossed over so that you've removed anything that, uh, that might, uh, uh, be seen as, as off or, uh, or warped.

The marks of human history, this is Guthrie, indeed of human sinfulness, depravity, injustice, he says, are indelibly inscribed upon the flesh of the resurrected Lord, carried into the life of the new creation by the Spirit and transfigured.

These marks in no way tarnish the glory of the new creation. Those wounds, as we sing, yet visible above, are in beauty glorified.

And so, it's right, he says, to speak of the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, uh, uh, as the work of the Spirit is beautifying it.

[22 : 08] By this we mean the perfection of integrity. The work of the Holy Spirit is to perfect the creation by bringing it to completion, making humanity in each created thing what it most truly and fully is.

So, there's perfection and there's proportion. The new creation, Esther Lightcat Meek says in her book, Loving to Know, the new creation will be beautiful because there will be harmony and right

relationship between God and humanity, among humanity, and among all that God has made, each thing will be most truly what it is and what is more amazing.

The utterly distinct character of each being will contribute to the beauty of the whole. And this reality of proportion and right ordering of harmony is true of God first.

So, there's perfection, there's proportion, and there's the third P that our brother spoke of already, pleasure. Simply put, beauty delights.

Esther Lightcat Meek puts it this way. She says, rather than drawing the beautiful object into the orbit of my concerns, I'm the one drawn in.

[23 : 25] The work captures rather than serves my interests. To submit to something is to acknowledge its weightier presence, to treat its presence as weighty.

We find ourselves in the presence of something that's already won our respect, that's already changed us. The word in Hebrew for glory that we find in the Old Testament, as translated as glory, its root means to be weighty, to be substantive.

So, when we're talking about the glory of God, we are acknowledging his weighty presence. In the presence of something, someone, that has already won our respect.

It is characterized by a decentered delight in another. For perfection, and pleasure.

And I want to say that God's beauty particularly is seen in his Trinitarian life. I don't remember who I'm quoting here.

[24 : 39] I might be quoting Bob Inc. I might be quoting John Frame. The fact is that these attributes of love and knowledge, as well as all the other attributes come alive and become real as a result of the Trinity.

Apart from it, they are mere names, sounds, empty terms. As attributes of the Triune God, they come alive both to our mind and our heart. Only by the Trinity do we begin to understand that God, as he is in himself, hence also apart from the world, is the independent, eternal, and omniscient, and all-benevolent one, love, holiness, and glory.

The Trinity reveals God to us as the fullness of being, the true life, eternal beauty. This is Bob Inc. here in this second quote.

This is significant. He says, In God, too, there is unity and diversity, diversity and unity. Indeed, this order and this harmony is present in absolutely.

In the case of creatures, we only see a faint analogy of it as, Among us, unity only exists by attraction, by the will and the disposition of the will. It's a moral unity that's fragile and unstable.

[25 : 55] He's saying that among humanity, unity only exists by means of attraction. We want to be unified with the people we are attracted to, whether that's my wife or the people who share my same preferences.

That's what drives my desire for unity. But in God, he says, both are present, absolute unity as well as absolute diversity.

This is an aspect of who God is, right? The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Father. The Spirit is not the Father. And the Son, this three God, three Gods, one God in three distinct persons, in mutually loving, mutually glorifying, mutually submitting, mutually honoring, mutually supporting community in eternal beauty.

And so, I'm going to keep pressing because I'm running. The beautiful community of the Godhead we see worked out in Scripture.

We see it in Deuteronomy 6, Hero Israel, right? The Shema, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[27 : 23] We see it in Christ's baptism in the Gospels in Matthew 3, where Jesus is baptized. And Matthew says, immediately, when he went up from the water, the heavens were opened to him.

Spirit of God descends on him like a dove and comes to rest. And the Father speaks, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Peter, in his opening of his epistle, he talks about this work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, when he writes to the elect exiles, who are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for the sprinkling with his blood.

The testimony throughout Scripture is that God is one, and at the same time, without contradiction, the Scriptures give us the mystery of three persons who are God.

The reality is that the confession of the Trinity is at the heartbeat of our faith, is at the heartbeat of the Christian religion.

[28 : 40] And this beauty and glory of our triune God is seen in the mutual glorification of his communal life as Father, Son, and Spirit.

I'm going to skip that too, because I've got to get to what I'm saying. The implications of this. I've been going at light speed, but this has implications for what we think of ourselves.

The God that we image is beautiful, and his beauty is seen most profoundly in his Trinitarian life together as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And we are formed to image him. We are formed as his image. The first thing that we find the Bible saying about us is that we are made in the image of God.

God declares, let us make man in our image according to our likeness. And what does this declaration of image mean?

[29 : 58] Yes, in a sense it means that we're beautiful, we're going to get to that a little bit later. It means, first of all, that we have individually an unassailable individual dignity as creatures made in the image of God.

we have a unique place in the world. Wait, I won't pass that. We have a unique place in the world. In his book, *Designed for Dignity*, Richard Pratt at a certain point talk about dignity. He says, look, I want you to put down my book and the next person that you see, I want you to shake their hand and say, hello, your majesty.

That's how much value and worth it is a royal dignity that the Bible is declaring of humanity in Genesis chapter 1 and verses 26 and 27.

Nona Verna Harrison in her book, *God's Many Splendored Image*, says that this royalty involves dignity and splendor, a legitimate sovereignty rooted in one's very being because everyone is made in the image of God and because the image defines what it means to be human.

[31 : 27] People are fundamentally equal regardless of differences in wealth and education and social status and the church, she says, preached this countercultural message in the ancient world and still preaches it now.

That this is, this was the countercultural message of the church in the ancient world that every single human being from prince to pauper is an image bearer and has royal dignity.

Martin Luther King Jr. put it this way, he says, the whole concept of the *Imago Dei* is the idea that all men have something within them that God injected, not that they have substantial unity with God, but that every man has the capacity to have fellowship with God and this gives him a uniqueness, it gives him worth, it gives him dignity and we must never forget this as a nation, there are no gradations in the image of God.

Every man from a treble white to a base black is significant on God's keyboard precisely because every man is made in the image of God.

he said, one day we will learn that. We will know one day that God made us to live together as brothers and to respect the dignity and worth of every man.

[33 : 01] This is unassailable, it's undeniable, and yet it is extraordinarily difficult for us to live into it.

Here's what I want to say biblically. Second commandment, God forbids the worship of idols. He says to Israel, you shall not make for yourself a carved image of anything that's in the heavens above or the earth beneath or waters under the earth.

You shall not bow down to it or worship it for I, the Lord, your God am a jealous God. And we think there's a sense in which, right, this is about idolatry, right, this is about bowing down to something other than God.

And God's glory is at the heart of the commandment, but the reality of individual human dignity is also at the heart of this second commandment.

Why do I say that? Because God forbids the making of images that we would make images of him for worship.

[34 : 30] And the declaration in the second commandment essentially is I've already made my image in the earth. I've already declared what my image is. And so, literally speaking, to bow down to an idol is to worship something less than yourself.

To bow down to an idol is to demean your humanity. No, we're not God, but God is the one who says this is my image.

this is I've made my reflection in the earth. And it's you. Why would you devalue yourself by bowing down to something you made?

And so, this is just the immeasurable value and dignity that every person has because we are the image of God.

And so, I just did about three slides in those two statements because I've got to get to this. I've got to get to this aspect of identity and formation because that becomes the question, who are we?

[35 : 47] Who do we believe ourselves to be? What does it mean for us to embrace the reality of being image bearers of immeasurable value and worth and dignity?

What does it say? What do we think about our identity? I'm not going to show this clip because I don't have time. But maybe we see. This is, so, Sterling Brown won an Oscar earlier this year for his role in the TV series *This Is Us*.

And he essentially, in his speech, he sent the writer of the show, he said, I have been used to colorblind casting.

And he wasn't making a, that wasn't a positive statement. He was saying, I've been used to colorblind casting. Oh, we need some diversity here, so let's throw a black man in this role.

And he gave credit to the writer. He said, but you wrote a role that could only be played by a black man. You wrote a character that could only be played by somebody who looked like me.

[37 : 07] He said, and that speaks not just to me, but to everybody who looks like me. And it makes it far more difficult to dismiss me.

This aspect of a need for an identity that conforms to dignity, a self-identification that conforms to an internal sense, self-identification that accords with dignity.

That's what every human being desires. We try to go about it different ways, but at the heart, we desire a self- identification that accords with dignity.

Identity, for definition, is a person's understanding of who he or she is based on socially constructed, meaningful categories that people use to describe themselves.

And what makes for a self- identification that accords with dignity? There are various ways in which we try to go about it in our fallen condition.

[38 : 40] In his book, *Sources of the Self, The Making of Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor lists these four things. Here's how we try to get at our sense of self-worth, an identity that conforms to dignity.

We want a sense of power, or we want a sense of dominating public space, or we want some sense of invulnerability to power, or any kind of self-sufficiency.

He says, the very way we walk, move, gesture, speak, is shaped from the earliest moments by our awareness that we appear before others, that we stand in public space, and that this space is potentially one of respect, or contempt, of pride, or shame.

We become aware of this at an early age, that our life is lived before others, and we want dignity, but we become aware that this space that we occupy is potentially one of respect, or contempt, pride, or shame, and we want the respect.

And we go about it in different ways. I don't have time to go through the implications of this, but this is the 1968 sanitation workers strike in Memphis, Tennessee, where they made these protest signs.

[40 : 13] It's just a declaration of dignity. The sign simply said, I am a man. The protest march, right, is to carry signs that declare, their dignity.

I am a man. Look at me. See me. We are aware of this need, and we live in a world that just tears away in our sense of dignity in very, very real ways.

I'm going to take three more minutes and just say this. This is how it came to be. Genesis chapter 11, the Tower of Babel.

I refer to this as the ghettoization of humanity. Rodney King, you know, Rodney King in 1991, 1992, after his brutal beating of the police in L.A., he made a statement for which he's become infamous. He said, can't we all just get along? Can't we all just get along? Well, Genesis chapter 11, verse 1, records the last time humanity all just got along.

[41 : 42] It says that the whole earth had one language and spoke the same words. Right? Humanity was one big happy family.

But humanity was one big happy family in our rejection and rebellion against God. Our unity was union in our sinfulness.

Genesis 11, Genesis chapter 10, is the table of nations. So Genesis chapter 6, to verse 9, is the flood narrative, is the recreation story.

God covers the earth with a flood because humanity is so depraved, right? And he promises, he covenants in Genesis chapter 9, I'm never going to destroy the earth again with a flood the way I've done, even though man's heart is set only on evil from his youth.

And then you get Noah's sons in Genesis chapter 9, and Genesis chapter 10 is the table of nations. How all these nations, God reissues the creation mandate in Genesis 9, 10, he says, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth.

[43 : 03] And in Genesis 10, it seems like humanity has done it, the table of nations. Here's all of the nations and all of the people over the earth. Genesis chapter 11 takes a look back at how those nations got spread over all of the earth.

God said, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth. Humanity said, we don't want to do that. It says, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they settled there.

And they said, let's build for us a city and a tower with its top extending to the heavens. They said, lest we be dispersed from here over the face of all the earth.

God, we know what you said, but we're not into that. We just want to do our thing right here. And God comes down in mercy and judgment and it says, God says, this is only the beginning of what they'll be able to do.

If I let this go on, this is only the beginning. So, the Lord says, let's go down and confuse their language.

[44 : 17] And it says, in Genesis 11, it says, so the Lord came down, he confused their language so that they may not understand one another's speech.

And it says, the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth. That the Lord forced their hand.

He confused their language so that they couldn't understand one another. And so they had to do what he commanded. Why am I going through this? The point is, this is the connection point to see why is it that we have such a hard time valuing or recognizing the worth and the value, the immeasurable dignity of people who are different than we are.

because I get my sense of dignity, value, and worth from my tribe. I get my affirmation from my people.

That's what I rooted in. I rooted in, oh, we're the, this is how, this is what it means to be human. This is what it means to be worthy. This is what it means to be worthwhile.

[45 : 38] And y'all over there, y'all are different. Y'all do things differently. Y'all speak differently. Y'all act differently. You know, y'all are not really as human as we are.

That's why, right, the story of humanity in many respects is a story of oppression. Because I don't value you.

So I can demean you. God would not, all right, I said three minutes, I've already taken five, so I'm skipping. Skipping what the sociologists say and what the theologians say about identity, to say only this, the last slide, is that it's not an accident that Genesis chapter 12 comes after Genesis chapter 11.

Not simply because 12 follows 11. But God, the Lord dispersed them from there over the surface of all the earth.

what is Genesis chapter 12 about? God calls Abraham, right? The end of chapter 11, God says to Abraham, go out. Abraham was a pagan.

[46 : 53] He wasn't worshipping the Lord, right? The Lord calls Abraham and says, leave your father's house and land and go to a place where I will show you, right?

I am going to make you a great nation. I am going, in you, all the nations of the world will be blessed.

In you. Well, what is that blessing? What's the blessing? Yes, right? It's the promise of Jesus Christ. But it's like, right? Genesis 10, again, the table of nations.

Genesis 12, right? Genesis 11, the scattering and the division of the nations. Genesis 12, in you, all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed, right?

I am going to do the work of reunification. I'm going to do the work of reuniting humanity.

[47 : 58] And the next time, they're not going to be one big happy family in rebellion against me. They're going to be one big happy family under my lordship.

That's the promise of Genesis chapter 12. And that is what we see, right? That's what Christ came to do. God's response is restoration and reunification.

See, I didn't get through a lot of slides to get there. And so, here it is, right? In this, the cry and the call is not to find our primary sense of identity in our tribe, whatever our tribe is.

Our ethnic tribe, our academic tribe, our socioeconomic tribe, right? By, you know, my Brooklynite tribe, you know, you're from Brooklyn, you're probably a little bit better than other places.

Anyway, the lords were still working on me with that. Right? But this call because, and I'm going to get to a quote later on, but this, because this, the work of the Lord is restoration and reunification, under Jesus Christ, the call is to root our sense of who we are primarily in Him as image bearers, as those who have an immeasurable dignity, value, and worth that doesn't come from my association to other black people.

[49 : 58] It comes because God has said it. Because He declared it. And so it does not matter my ability, it does not matter my height, my weight, it does not matter.

I am of invaluable worth because God has said so. That's the source of our sense of dignity and value and worth.

Alright, I'm going to stop there. I said a lot, but I'll turn it over. What are we