

Sunday 9th March 2025 - Know My Name: And What Is Your Name?

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Date: 09 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We're continuing our series of Know My Name. And this morning, we're going to look at what is your name?

Have you ever met someone or had a conversation with someone and then found yourself thinking, now what is your name? You know you should know it, but you can't think of it.

And you put it down to old age, but it's probably more the case that names are complicated, very complicated. And I've tried to simplify it this morning, you know.

You start off in life with one name, but many of us end up, during our lifetime, being known by another name, or even another name.

It is as though our lives have different phases, when we are known by different names. When a baby is born, the baby usually gets a name, or two, or three even.

[1 : 10] And some people formally recognize this through a baptism or a christening ceremony. And then usually for a while, that's what the child's called. Sometimes, the names parents burden their children with can be unusual, to say the least.

There are many, many examples, like these, for instance. So, number one there, we've got Dominic, Andrew, Lukey, Newsome, Fairclough, White, Dorigo, McAllister, Batty, Strachan, Speed, Chapman, Cantona, Kazo, who was named after all 11 members of the Leeds United team, which won the league in 1991 to 92.

And that's not the only example of that. There's also, number two there, Moon Unit. This was a suitably weird choice of the late rock star, Frank Zappa, for his oldest daughter.

And her siblings include Dweezil and Diva Muffin. And number three, which I can't pronounce, this last one is the son of billionaire Elon Musk, reportedly pronounced X-Ash-A-12, X-AI-Archangel, or simply X.

The name contains references to the unknown variable, the elven spelling of AI, and a favourite aircraft.

[2 : 40] And as I'm sure you're aware, Elon Musk has even renamed Twitter as the social media platform X. So, how about Karen Elaine Johnson, Henry Charles Albert David, Reginald Dwight, Stephanie, Stephanie, Joanne Angelina, Germanotta.

Perhaps you recognise these people, do you? But, you know, those are their real names. We know them as Whoopi Goldberg, Prince Harry, Elton John, and Lady Gaga.

And again, there are many other examples of people who use a different name in their professional life. So, as I say, names are complicated. And I, myself, am no exception.

My full name is William David Moss. But as is the family tradition, going back to 1500, William is always the first name.

But it's the second name that is actually used to call people by. So, on the top there, you can see a little bit of a family tree. And the yellow card, the card with the yellow stripe on there, that's my French university card showing me to be William.

[3 : 57] And I love this because it's one way that even modern computer systems can't cope with. So, just about every week, somebody addresses me as William in an effort to be friendly or to get something out of me.

And I simply think, you haven't a clue who I am. I haven't a clue. You probably know me as Dave. That one, yeah? But professionally, I'm known as David.

This was simply because there were several Daves on the school staff when I started teaching. So, it was an easy way to distinguish me from the others. Also, David works well in French, David, and

German, David, yeah?

And in class, pupils would occasionally ask me, Sir, is your name David? This was simply, sorry, thinking they'd made a remarkable discovery, yeah?

But I used to neither confirm or deny this. I simply emphasized that it was all right for them to call me Sir. Sir. Formal titles seem to be less in vogue these days, but they still exist.

[5 : 15] You know, Reverend, Doctor, Prime Minister, or even Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Some of you will need to wear a name badge for work.

You know, on a lanyard, it's the in thing, isn't it? And usually, this is somewhat formal. Some of you will know me from processing your DBS application on behalf of the church.

It's a great privilege and a real joy that upwards of 80 people in this church come forward to help and support others through the many activities which take place from week to week.

And I did a quick statistical analysis and about two-thirds of those volunteers are now using different names than they started out with in life. No wonder we're asked to constantly update our records.

Did you know, by the way, that all new passports are issued in the name of His Majesty? For the purposes from travel from country to country, the king is required to verify that this is your name and this is your identity.

[6 : 31] The Bible has many, many examples of people changing their name. Here are a few. So in Genesis, no longer will you be called Abram, your name will be Abraham.

Abram is renamed Abraham by God to represent his new role father of many nations, signifying that through him a large lineage would be established fulfilling God's promise to him.

The name change occurs quite late in his life where Abraham literally translates to father of a multitude in Hebrew. Another example, a man came and fought with Jacob until just before daybreak and they kept on wrestling until the man said, let go of me, it's almost daylight.

You can't go until you bless me, Jacob replied. Then the man asked, what is your name? Jacob, he answered.

And the man said, from now on your name will no longer be Jacob, you will be called Israel because you have wrestled with God and with men and you have won.

[7 : 53] So Jacob demonstrated that he was willing to let God prevail in his life and in response God changed Jacob's name to Israel meaning let God prevail.

Here's a rather different example. So, don't call me Naomi. This is from the book of Ruth. She told them, call me Mara because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me, the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

So it's a very different reason here. Naomi changes her name to Mara because she wants to express her deep grief and bitterness after the deaths of her husband and sons.

So Mara means bitter and in Hebrew and while Naomi means pleasant. So essentially she feels her life is no longer pleasant and is now filled with bitterness.

[8 : 56] So she asked people to call her by this new name instead. She's making a powerful statement about her emotional state. And perhaps more familiar to us, in Matthew we read, Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the son of the living God.

And Jesus replied, blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I'll build my church. Simon is renamed Peter because the new name which means rock in Aramaic symbolizes the strong foundation upon which Jesus intends to build his church.

church. And then another example would be that of Saul changing to Paul. So the change name comes when Paul began his ministry and sometime after his conversion on the Damascus road.

So Saul's name was also Paul. It was like mine, William, David, that sort of thing. The custom of dual name was common in those days and as the apostle to the Gentiles he used his Roman name Paul.

It makes sense for Paul to use his Roman name because he's traveling farther and farther into the Gentile world. So a big relief for me.

[10 : 20] So I'm not crazy when I've got my multiple names and I can be Dave and David or David or David or whatever I want to be. It's good.

And monks and nuns are often called by a different name once they take holy orders to signify their new life. This theme has been explored in some depth for those of us who watch the TV series called the midwife.

So the sisters of Ninata's house, who are constantly questioning their calling, have welcomed in a new postulant. And last week we saw her commit her first vows to God and changing her name from Sandra to sister Catherine.

So, ultimately of course it doesn't really matter what you call yourself, it's you who are you and who you are in everyday life, who you are in God that matters.

We all go through different stages of life no matter who we are. Many Christians unfortunately are still in the childlike first half of life where everything revolves around themselves.

[11 : 41] So the quotes here, I give you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

And like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. We're now going to have a short musical interlude.

Thank you. And like one day a week he gets a spiritual lunge.

On Sunday he puts on his spiritual vest and gives his language a spiritual rest. He's just a fat little baby.

He wants his bottle and it don't mean maybe. He samples solid foods once or twice. But he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice. He's been baptized, sanctified, redeemed by the blood. But his daily devotions are stuck in the mud. He knows the books of the Bible and John 3, 16. He's got the biggest King James you've ever seen. I've always wondered if he'll grow up someday. He's mama's boy and he likes it that way. If you're happy to see him, tell him I said he'll never grow if he never gets there. He's just a bad little baby. He wants his bottle and he told me maybe.

[13 : 39] He sent full solid food once or twice. But he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice. He's just a bad little baby. He wants his bottle and he told me maybe. He sent full solid food once or twice. But he says doctrine leaves him cold as ice. He's just a bad, Fat, fat, fat, fat, fat, fat, fat, fat, baby.

It appears that life has at least two halves. The first half is when we're in baby mode. The second, when we grow up and discover the world beyond ourselves.

This is what happened to Abram, to Jacob, to Naomi, to Simon and to Saul. As they moved on with God to a wider experience of life itself.

And as they move on to that second half of life, that's when they become Abraham, Israel, Mara, Peter and Paul. The first half of life is spent building our sense of identity.

Our own importance and security. This is sometimes known as the false self. Sigmund Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysts, called this the ego self.

[15 : 13] So just as a baby needs to be healthy, we need to develop a healthy ego structure. We need to take ourselves, but sometimes we take ourselves so seriously, we establish a relative identity.

It may be good or bad, but it's not your true identity. You only find your true identity when you enter an ongoing relationship with God.

In Mark, we read, Jesus says, we need to die to ourselves, even renouncing the self. So the first half of life is about creating this identity.

Finding some boundary markers. Keeping traditions. Making some money. Getting an education. Perhaps marrying and raising children.

And then we must defend this approach for the rest of our lives. Most of us are so invested in this approach, in these first answers, but by the age of 40, we can't imagine life being anything more than this.

[16 : 23] And perhaps without realizing, we continue thinking, life is still all about me. And this first half-life religion has been passed off the real thing for many centuries now.

And our churches embrace it wholeheartedly, rarely looking beyond the thinking of, this is my faith, this is what I believe. Politicians are adept at making promises that they are basically concerns of the ego.

They promise they will keep us safe and prosperous. And that's usually enough to get them elected, because most people are not asking higher questions of the second half of life.

Questions about things such as the purpose of education, affordable housing, care for the environment, justice, the arts, immigration, penal reform, or even the morality of war itself.

They become just side issues, and are only really ever important if they affect me personally, in my little world. Define yourself radically as one beloved by God.

[17 : 36] This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion. In the second half of life, the ego still has a place.

But now we're in the service of the true self or soul. Your inner and inherent identity. Eventually you discover, often this is through failure or significant loss, that your conscious self is not all of you, but only the acceptable you, the face you put on.

You will find your real purpose and identity at a much deeper level. Your true self is far more than a positive image you present to everyone else.

The real Dave is someone beyond the passport document, the name badge for work, the DBS admin assistant, or indeed the F&F; leader.

Now, you begin to discover God working through his Holy Spirit within you. Loving your neighbor, loving the outsider, loving the poor, all suddenly begin to make real sense.

[18 : 55] We learn that God is gentle and does not come into our world unless we actually invite him to be part of our lives. We learn that God loves us if we change.

But rather God loves us so that we can change. So that we can become ourselves. I'm going to repeat that.

We learn that God does not love us if we change. But rather God loves us so that we can change. So that we can become ourselves.

God loves us and knows us at far deeper levels than we can begin to realize for ourselves. Only by asking big questions do we grow as people and find our place in the world.

Our society simply wants easy, quick answers. For those of us who started life in the last century, that was me, we grew up very much in the era of the importance of self.

[20 : 05] For years, we've been saturated with the idea that self-interest defines who we are. We're told, look after number one. You're worth it.

Believe in yourself. And even, God helps those who help themselves. Psychologists have based much of their treatment on encouraging people to look at and explore the inner self.

Looking at who you are within. How is it then that during the lockdowns for the COVID pandemic, people weren't deliriously happy?

All that time just to look after yourself for inner reflection, time to sort out all your problems and put yourself first. Most of us have hopefully discovered that all this time with our own selves was not a good thing.

Surely, it's no coincidence that it's when we're looking beyond ourselves, perhaps at drop-in, creating space, singing for well-being, FNF, little friends, book club, games night, and so on, that we often begin to be our true selves.

[21 : 23] We discover who we really are in relation to each other and in relation to God. We often focus simply on the life of Jesus during his ministry, as they're told in the Gospels.

The second half of life, so to speak. But we should not forget that he spent his formative years in Nazareth, asking questions in the temple.

There was a first half of life which laid the foundation for the second half. The formative years were about discovering who he was as a human being.

The second half of life was about showing his humanity as God's son to the people around him.

Throughout the Gospels, we meet people who encounter Jesus and discover their true self.

Many people these days simply seem to believe that meeting Jesus is about a reward and punishment system that guarantees you a place in heaven.

[22 : 30] Few believe, or indeed know, of the transformational grace and love which is given to us every day. So many simply want to protect how it's always been.

The status quo of empire, power, war, money, and the private ego. But time and again, Jesus shows us that trusting in him is about constantly letting go of the false self so that our true self in God can stand free and revealed.

God knows us by name. When God calls, you're no longer Saul who sought to persecute and exclude, but you are Paul, the apostle, who travels near and far to include everyone.

You're not Abraham, who has eyes only for his own family, wandering and lost. You are Abraham, the father of all God's people. You are not David, Eddie and Marian's son and brother to Anne.

You're not David, a farmer's boy. But you are Dave, loved by a God and follower of Christ. Much modern religion makes a false distinction between holy and unholy.

[23 : 54] We've created a religion with rules and limitations where only a few are invited. But Jesus comes and turns this upside down. There's story after story in the Gospels where Jesus comes and invites everyone to belong, to be loved, to be accepted.

We are to call on his name. We are to call and know him. And he comes to us. He knows our name and transforms us into our own true selves.

When you truly experience God as your true self, you're liberated from the systems and rules that control you, liberated from needing everything and trying to be right or perfect.

You realize who you really are, ordinary and poor, in need of God's love and grace, just like everyone else.

In John, we're told, the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

[25 : 10] And in Luke, we're told, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Our loving God knows your name.

And he holds you now and forever. Thank you.