

SIX-FOLD TEST FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY

SERMON SERIES: POPULATION | PARTICIPATION | POWER | PACE-SETTING | **PURPOSEFUL NARRATIVE** | PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

PETER AHN

Purposeful Narrative

#5. How do the stories of new backgrounds become incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward?

Acts 10, NIV

CORNELIUS CALLS FOR PETER

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked.

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

PETER’S VISION

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four

corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

PETER AT CORNELIUS’S HOUSE

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my



house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Did you ever have a moment that transformed your life forever? I mean, this moment was so big that you knew

that you would never be the same. That happened to me about 16 years ago. I was about one year into my church plant, Metro Community Church in northern New Jersey, and I was invited to attend a leadership gathering of about 15 pastors from around the country. To give you the ethnic makeup of the group: 13 were Asian American and two were African American. We did a lot of fun stuff. We ate some great food. We did some really fun things. We went paintballing. But a big part of our time together was to share some of the things that we were struggling with in our hearts.

One night the leader of the group asked, “What is your greatest struggle?” I will never forget what one Black pastor from Tennessee shared. He said, “My greatest struggle is with Asian Americans.” That was an attention-grabber. I just listened to see what he would say next. I wasn’t quite prepared to receive what he had to say. He said, “My struggle with Asian Americans is that you don’t understand how hard it was for my people to bring civil rights into this country. We died for that in this country, and yet you’ve come and benefited from what my people have sacrificed. You’ve benefited greatly.” And then he said this: “We’re not asking for your money. We’re just asking for some respect.”

I knew at that moment that his story and the narrative of African Americans in this country no longer would be a story that was foreign to me. I knew that I had to get to know his narrative—the narrative of African Americans in this country—because it had impacted me so much. My life would never be the same.

Today, we’re going to look at a passage in Acts 10. The Apostle Peter has a moment like that—a moment that would transform him for forever. It transformed Christianity forever. It was breaking down the ethnic barriers between Jews and Gentiles.

Now throughout the book of Acts, we see glimpses of that. We see the Ethiopian who gave his life to Jesus. We see the Samaritans who give their lives to Jesus. But it was time for an authoritative apostle to break down those ethnic barriers. And if Peter struggled with ethnic barriers—struggled with his own prejudices—I wonder how much we struggle with those as well. I’m willing to go out on a limb and say that the majority of us, including myself, have ethnic barriers that we’ve created that often prevent us from connecting with people who don’t look like us.



I'm grateful that we're here today. I'm grateful that you're here and that you're watching this. I don't think you would be here today if you didn't truly care about ethnic diversity. Every single one of us has preferences, don't we? We have preferences that we choose to hold on to. We determine who we want to bring into our lives and who we don't want to bring into our lives. Those are preferences. My hope is that God will be able to redeem those preferences in such a way that we will allow other people's narratives to come into our lives so that we can figure out what God's purpose is for it. I believe God has a tremendous purpose not only for our own personal lives but also for our denomination if we will begin to embrace the narratives of other people in our denomination who don't look like us and we allow them to converge with our narrative and see what God's purpose can be had through it.

Peter struggled with this. Peter had preferences. Do you realize that? He only connected with Jewish people and that's why he lived in Jerusalem. This was his preference. Peter had the Jewish laws to support him, but God was going to break that down in Acts 10.

Today I want to talk about this: **How can we allow ourselves to get to a place where we overcome our own ethnic preferences so that we can embrace the narratives of people who don't look like us and we can allow them to converge with our narrative and unlock God's purpose to be fulfilled?**

So, if you don't mind, can we just bow our heads for a moment of prayer?

God, I come to you right now and I ask that you'll be with every person who is watching this right now. I pray that this would truly be a holy moment for them, and that you would reveal to us exactly what you want us to receive from Acts 10. I thank you that we are people, but there's a story that we have. Every story is important because we were all created in the imago Dei (image of God). I pray that you would help us to understand what Acts 10 is about so that we can go deeper and understand what the gospel message is about so that you can be with us personally, be with our churches, and be with our denomination. I pray that the words that come out of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts watching today would be pleasing to you. It's in your name that we pray, amen.

I want to paraphrase a little bit about Acts 10. It

starts off with Cornelius. Cornelius is a centurion; he's a Roman. A centurion was a Roman captain, and Roman captains were basically in charge of 100 men. The Roman army was the most powerful army back in the first century. And the reason they were was because the backbone of their army was really the captains, the centurions. Cornelius was a God-fearing man. Cornelius loved God. He did not convert to Judaism although he embraced much of the Jewish laws. One of the reasons he didn't embrace Judaism fully was because he was unwilling to get circumcised. God would offer a way in which he wouldn't have to do that now. And so while Cornelius is praying, God reveals to him that he needs to go and send his men to fetch Peter the apostle and allow Peter to share what God has laid upon his heart.

Right after that scene happens, the next day—it's about noon—Peter is on his roof and he's praying. As he's praying, God begins to speak to him. It's noon. I don't know about you, but when 12 o'clock hits, I usually get pretty hungry. And when I pray around that time when I'm hungry, what usually happens? I start to think about food; and that's exactly what Peter was doing. Peter was thinking about food. And as he was praying, God starts to reveal to him animals, all sorts of animals. And God tells Peter to eat. He says, "Kill it, and eat it."

Peter says, "No way. I would never eat that—those are unclean animals."

God looked at him and God said, "No, don't you ever call something unclean that I have deemed clean." And then God revealed to him in a vision that he was to go and follow the men who were coming to him.

Peter was struggling with this so much that it says in the text that God had to reveal this to him three times. He really struggled. The men came, finally, from Cornelius's home and knocked on the door. Peter is grabbed, and he goes down. He invites them to stay with him for the day. And the next day, he goes with Cornelius's men to Cornelius's house. As he goes there, Peter reminds Cornelius and his guests that it is against the Jewish law for any Jew, let alone an apostle like Peter, to associate with and visit a Gentile. But Peter told him that God had told him to come. So he said, "What do you guys want? What is it that you need?"

Then Peter explained in detail what God had spoken to him while he was praying. And then Peter was so moved that he said one of the most important things



ever recorded in the Bible: “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right’” (Acts 10:34). Then Peter goes on to teach them about Jesus and shares with them the ministry of God. While he’s doing this, the Holy Spirit falls upon the room and he baptizes everyone there.

Peter witnesses this. Peter’s servants witness this. It is an incredible experience. And what happens is an affirmation of what we learned from Paul in Ephesians 2:12-16, one of the most important passages in Scripture that talks about, really, the totality of the gospel message.

Look at what he says: “Remember that at the time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Ephesians 2:12-16, NIV).

Here Paul is helping us to understand the totality of the gospel message. The heart of the gospel is our reconciliation with God, that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are now reconciled to God. We know that. We believe that to be true; we believe that to be the gospel. But what Paul is trying to help us understand is that that’s really only about 50 percent of the gospel. The other half is that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ he has destroyed the walls of hostility between Jews and Gentiles—between us and our ethnic barriers—so that we can become one. That is an important thing to grab onto. So Paul will go as far as to say this: When we focus on a gospel that only focuses on our reconciliation with God, we commit a defamation of the gospel. **The gospel message is not only about our reconciliation with God—it’s also about our reconciliation with one another**, particularly, those people whom we might be hostile toward.

The Jewish people should have known this. In Genesis

12:3, God speaks to Abraham about this. God says to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you, I will curse. And all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So when God spoke to Peter on the rooftop, he was fulfilling the promise of Abraham that saw it to completion through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter’s experience allowed his ministry to happen, and what he did at Cornelius’s home opened the door for Gentiles to receive the Christian faith. If it wasn’t for what Peter does here in Acts 10, Paul the Apostle would not have been able to bring the gospel to Gentile territory.

I want you to know that our God is always about breaking down the walls. He was never about building them and creating them. And we as Christians must do the same. We must be willing to overcome our barriers—those ethnic preferences that we might have, the walls we have built up that do not allow us to embrace the narratives of people who do not look like us.

So how do we do that? We all have ethnic preferences. How do we overcome them?

First, through devout prayer. Cornelius was a man of prayer. A good Jewish man would pray three times a day; and that’s exactly what Cornelius did. He had a devout prayer life. When he prayed, he didn’t pray necessarily wanting to go get something from God. I think a lot of us pray because we need God to do things for us. Cornelius didn’t pray in that posture. Cornelius didn’t pray to get from God. He prayed to give to God. That’s an important posture to understand in prayer.

And then we find Peter on the roof praying. For Peter, prayer was a lifeline. And while he was praying, God spoke a revelation to him. This is key. Notice that when God reveals himself to Peter and speaks to him prophetically, Peter has no idea what it means. That’s important for us. Because sometimes God will reveal things to us and if we don’t understand it, what do we do? We often disregard it altogether. But we can’t do that. Peter had no idea what God was revealing to him. He didn’t really understand. All he saw was the next step, and that’s key.

When God reveals something to us, it’s really important for us to realize that we can’t try to just figure it all out and what it means. If we can’t figure it out at that time, we shouldn’t disregard it. What we should seek is: God, what is really the next step? And that’s what Peter discerns. God said, “Hey, some men are here to get you.”



When Peter walked down, and they kind of helped him to figure out what that revelation meant. Peter didn't fully know what the revelation meant until he went to Cornelius's home. He was able to overcome his ethnic preference because he had a devout prayer life. It was a lifeline to him.

When we think about prayer, a lot of times we pray because sometimes we feel like we need to pray. It's what Christians should do. For some of us, it's a chore. We just check it off on our list. If we pray like that, then we really don't experience the power of prayer that we see in Cornelius and in Peter. Like Cornelius, Peter prayed, not wanting to get from God but wanting to give to him.

Some of you are asking, "Well, how do you pray like that? How do you pray where you don't want to get from God but you want to give to him? How do you do it?"

You know how you do it? You listen. You stay quiet. When you pray, you don't talk. You listen to hear from God. That's the way Cornelius and Peter heard from God. They didn't hear it from God because they were talking; they heard from God because they were silent and God spoke to them. So much of our prayers have to be surrounded by silence because if it's just us talking we're never going to listen to God. We're never going to hear what he might have to say. When we can pray in that posture, that's how we build deeper intimacy with God.

Did you ever enter into a relationship with somebody and they're always the only ones talking? You can't get close to somebody when they're doing all the talking. There has to be talking that's equal. You have to talk; they have to talk. It has to be equal. Likewise when you pray to God, it's your opportunity to build intimacy with him. We can speak. Yes. But we also have to give ourselves time where we can listen to God.

The only way we are going to overcome our ethnic preferences is when we hear and when God reveals himself to us in a deep way to overcome some of those preferences. Prayer will help us to experience that. And because Peter and Cornelius each had a deep prayer life, they were able to overcome ethnic preferences. We would not be the church today if Peter did not receive that revelation from God on that rooftop and allow himself to be used by God to go to Cornelius's home and the Holy Spirit fell and baptized every Gentile believer at that moment. That's how Paul the Apostle was able now

to minister to the Gentiles. So prayer is key. If you ever want to overcome your ethnic preferences, you have to have a devout prayer life.

Second, **we overcome our ethnic preferences through genuine repentance.** What do we need to repent of? Our prejudices. Every single one of us has prejudice to some degree. Prejudice is an expression of insecurity—feelings of inferiority. If we don't feel secure and accepted in Jesus Christ, if we don't find our identity being a child of God—being created in the *imago Dei*—then many times what happens is that our insecurities will feed into our ego in such a way that we have a need to feel more important than other people. That's how racism starts. It's when we believe we need to feel more important than other people and, as a result, we do things where we create barriers and preferences, and we decide not to congregate or connect with other people who don't look like us.

Race is a human construct, but ethnicity is from God.

I want you to understand that. Race was never created by God. It was created by human beings. God created ethnicities, and we embrace that in each and every one of us because we are all created in God's image. A good friend of mine says this: "Jesus may live in your heart, but Grandpa lives in your bones." What that means is this: We've all grown up in a home. We've had parents and grandparents; and our parents and grandparents have ethnic preferences as well. As little kids, we were shaped by how they see people—they impact how we see people of color and other people in certain ways. We have to do our due diligence as followers of God, not only to have a devout prayer life, but to go back into our family lineage and say, "What are some of the prejudices that I grew up with in my home?" We have to call it out, we have to repent and ask God to forgive us so we can have healing from it, but also so we can begin to see everyone the way God sees them. An attitude of repentance will help us to heal relationships with people who are different from us from different ethnic groups. That is what it's about.

Peter repented. In verse 28 he says, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean." When Peter realized he had been wrong with his earlier prejudices, he readily admitted that in his conversation with Corne-



lius. When Peter preached to the crowd, he again publicly confessed the lesson he had learned that God shows no favoritism. He says, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (v. 34). Our willingness to accept and repent of our past prejudice goes a long way in helping us to overcome our ethnic preferences. It allows us to come together to love and learn about each other’s narratives, and also serve one another and allow God’s purpose to be had as that happens.

When I was in that room with those other leaders and that Black pastor shared his feelings about Asian Americans, I heard him say he wanted respect, and that’s all Black people are looking for from Asian Americans. At that moment, the other Asians in the room and I said, “Would you please forgive us? Would you please forgive us of our sins of not respecting you and your tribe? We will do our best going forward to understand and to learn and connect deeper with you so that your narrative can be a part of ours.” That was a powerful moment.

Another person in that room was a Black pastor from Madison, Wisconsin. His name is Alexander Gee. This was 16 years ago. Today, Alex and I are best of friends. I have slept at his home many nights. He has slept at my home many nights. His daughter calls me Uncle Peter, and all three of my kids call him Uncle Alex. His narrative and my narrative have been so deeply purposeful. And I’m going to share at the end exactly how God used him in my life in that way. But it’s so important for us to have a devout prayer life and also to genuinely repent of our prejudices. That’s how we overcome our ethnic preferences.

The third way we overcome our ethnic preference is through uncomfortable obedience. Obedience is never going to be comfortable. It’s uncomfortable. If we’re honest, we never want to be uncomfortable. Look at verses 19-23: “While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.’ Peter went down and said to the men, ‘I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?’ The men replied, ‘We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that

he could hear what you have to say.’ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.”

What did that mean? It meant they spent the night at this house—Simon’s house, the tanner’s house. That’s significant. I want you to understand this: This was the very first time in Peter’s life where he actually slept with Gentiles. Do you think it was comfortable for Peter to do that? Absolutely not. This was the very first time that Peter actually broke bread and ate with Gentiles. In the first century, a Jewish person—particularly Jewish teachers—would never, ever eat with Gentile people because you are who you eat with. And so a Jewish person could never eat with a Gentile person. Why did Peter do it? Because he’d rather obey God than be comfortable.

Peter also stayed at the house of a tanner. Now, I don’t know if you guys know what a tanner’s vocation is, but they basically work with dead animals. The house smelled awful. They would not allow tanners to stay in the quarters where other people live. They had to stay on the outskirts of town because of the dirty work they did. Peter was willing to even stay at a tanner’s house. Why? Because, at the end, obedience for him was more important than his comfort level. If you and I want to submit ourselves to true obedience, it is never going to be comfortable because of our brokenness and our sinful nature.

As Americans that we don’t like to be uncomfortable. I love what Mark Sayers says in his book, *Disappearing Church*: “Christians today in the United States have embraced a secular version of salvation.” And you know what that is? It’s safety. Why do we believe in Jesus? Because we want to go to heaven when we die; we want to be safe even after death. That’s really not what the gospel is about. It’s about not just saving us for heaven; it’s about us being used by God to expand the kingdom of God here on this earth. If you want to overcome your ethnic preferences, roll up your sleeves and be willing to be uncomfortable because God is calling you to be obedient.

God has created everyone in his image. We are created in the imago Dei. Personally in our own lives and also in the lives of other people in our church and in our denomination, what it would look like to begin to embrace people who don’t look like us, who might be so different from us? We hear their narratives. They hear our narratives. We come together. We obey God because



that's what God wants, and we see what purpose God has for us. What happened when Peter did that? Cornelius and his family were baptized in the Holy Spirit. And what happened after that? Ministry to the Gentiles became normative in Jerusalem and beyond.

I wonder what our denomination would look like. I wonder what our churches will look like if we can overcome our ethnic preferences to the point where we are willing to obey God even when it's not comfortable, even though it hurts—because it will hurt—that we'll be able to do that and allow the narratives of people who don't look like us to become a part of ours, and see what God will do. I think God could do something really special in our churches, in our personal lives, and our denomination. Will you embrace a devout prayer life? Will you genuinely repent of your prejudices? Jesus may live in your heart, but Grandpa lives in your bones. And will you begin to obey God, no matter how much it hurts? That's how we overcome our ethnic preferences.

So Alex and I have been friends for 16 years. We've traveled the world together. We've done ministry together. And the ironic thing is this: I invited him to go to Africa for the very first time in his life. He's African American, and he always wanted to go to Africa. But many years ago, I said, "Hey, do you want to go with me to Africa one year?" He said he would love to. And you know what's interesting? I hadn't gone to Korea in about 16 or 17 years. And several years ago, he said, "Hey, do you want to go with me to Seoul?" He invited me to go to my home country, and I invited him to go to his home country. That's the kind of friendship we've had.

About seven years ago, I was getting ready to go on sabbatical, but I wasn't sure what to do. I do a sabbatical every three years. I take three months off. My first sabbatical was just a sabbatical at home. And I said to him, "Alex, I don't know if I want to do another sabbatical at home." Alex was in New York, so we hung out in Times Square. And he said to me, "Peter, can I make a recommendation?"

"Oh absolutely." I said, "What is it?"

He said, "Peter, I want to encourage you to spend the majority of your sabbatical in South Korea."

I had never even thought about that. I said, "Really?" I said, "Why?"

He said, "Peter, you still have a lot of shame in embracing your Korean heritage. It's because of how you

grew up." I grew up in a predominantly blue collar Italian neighborhood in northern New Jersey. I came there at third grade, and the moment I stepped foot in that school, the kids would always make fun of me because of the way I looked. They made fun of my eyes and all those things. I knew that in order for me to assimilate into the school and the school culture, I had to deny a big part of who I am and how God made me Korean. I had a lot of shame in being Korean. Alex said, "Peter, you need to figure out...you need to know why God made you Korean. So go spend two months in South Korea. Go visit the hospital where you were born. Go visit the home you lived in."

I only lived in South Korea for three months as a baby and then I came to the States. I spent 90 days of my life in South Korea, and then I came to America. Alex said, "Go meet relatives you've never met before. Ask them questions, learn about your family." And then he said this: "You also need know the meaning of your Korean name."

My Korean name is Chung Kun, and I had a lot of shame back then even in my Korean name. Korean names have a lot of meaning, but when I asked my mother what my Korean name meant, she didn't know. And so I never knew what it meant.

I remember when I was dating my wife, Jenny, and she asked me, "Hey, what's your Korean name?"

I said, "Well, my Korean name is Chung Kun." She started laughing at me, and I said, "What's so funny?"

She said, "I can't believe your parents gave you that name." She said, "Nobody names their kid in the 21st century Chung Kun."

I'm like, "What do you mean by that?"

She's said, "Peter, it's like if we got married and we had kids and we had a son, and I said I want to name our son Bubba. Would you be okay with that? Would you want your kid to be named Bubba?"

I remember hearing that and thinking, "Really? That's kind of what my name kind of sounds like or means, or how people would see that in Korea?" So I didn't like my name at all. My father gave me that name because he went to a sage, paid him money, and said, "Would you give my son a good name?" He did this because we believe our name is important, because we believe that a name is prophetic and we can live into it when we become an adult.



I applied for a grant, went out to South Korea, spent two months of my sabbatical there, and visited the hospital I'd never visited before. We actually went in there and talked to the administration. I went to see if my birth records were there. They didn't have any records like that back in the early 70s. I went to the house that I lived in. It was still intact. I couldn't believe it. And we knocked on the door, hoping that they would open it, but they didn't. I took some pictures there. It was really great. I met my uncles and reunited with them. We talked, we hung out. And then I met my great-uncle who was my mother's uncle. I had never met him before. My mom had not seen him for 40 years.

I asked him, "Could you tell me about my grandmother?" My mother has no recollection of her mom because she died when my mother was a baby. So he started to share all the things about my grandmother, and it made so much sense why my mother is the way she is because of her mom. I just remember just coveting that. And the highlight of the trip for me was this: My aunt has been an English teacher for about 20 years. In order to know the meaning of somebody's name in Korean, you need to know the Chinese characters. And she knows the Chinese characters, knows the English language very well, and of course knows the Korean language well. So we were having lunch at a restaurant, and I said, "Hey, auntie, will you tell me what my name means?"

She said, "Yeah, sure." So she grabs a napkin. She writes my name in Chinese characters and she says, "Okay." She says, "The literal translation of your name in English means deep roots; but the best translation is righteous roots."

When she shared that with me, I couldn't believe it. I felt my heart beat even louder. I looked at my wife and said to her, "How do you like me now, baby?" I couldn't believe my name meant righteous roots. All these years, I had shame with my name. I never knew my name meant righteous roots. I know my father paid a sage to give me that name, but I believe God used that many, many years—even before I was born. He used that because he knew one day I would be a pastor and I will live into that name.

After that trip, I remember talking to Alex and telling him my name means righteous roots. When I call him now, he doesn't call me Peter; he calls me Chung Kun. And when I call him, it actually says Chung Kun on his phone.

I thank God for that experience because I came back thanking God for making me Korean. All the shame I felt all the years in my life has gone away, and I'm grateful for how God made me. I want you to know something. It took a Black man to help a Korean man to fall in love with how God made him. God used the Black person to help me to embrace my own narrative—to embrace how I've been created in the imago Dei.

That moment 16 years ago with those pastors when Alex was in that room, I knew my life would never be the same and that God would give me an opportunity where a Black person could be my friend. Sixteen years later, I can't even begin to tell you how much our narratives have converged and how we've been able to live out God's purpose together as friends, but also as ministers of God's kingdom.

I wonder what our denomination would look like. I wonder what our churches will look like. I wonder what your life would look like if you can begin to welcome people who don't look like you into your life, allow yourself to overcome some of the barriers that you've created, allow them to be a part of your life, and allow their narratives to be a part of your narrative and see how God's purpose can converge and form through it. In my opinion, if we can do that, our denomination's best days are still ahead of us. And if you can begin to do that in your life, the best years of your life are not behind you, but they're still ahead of you.

Will you embrace a devout prayer life? Will you listen more than you speak when you pray? Will you genuinely repent, knowing that Jesus might live in your heart, but Grandpa lives in your bones? Would you repent of your prejudices? And will you obey God no matter how painful it might be? If we can do that, I believe there's a new day for you in your life, in the life of our church, and in the life of our denomination.

God, I want to thank you for this message. I want to thank you for speaking to all of us. And I pray right now that you would speak. Whatever it is that you want to do in the lives of my brothers and my sisters in Christ, will you do it? I pray, like Cornelius and like Peter, that you would reveal yourself to us in a deep way. I pray that we would listen to you more than just praying and speaking as we pray. I pray that we would do the hard work of overcoming our own prejudices we grew up with, so we could begin to see everyone like you do, created in your



beautiful image. And I pray, God, that we would know that obedience hurts; it's okay. And that you would help us to get outside of our comfort zone and that we will allow ourselves to be uncomfortable as we obey you. I pray that as that happens, God, we will allow the narrative of our life and the narratives of other lives of people who may not look like us in our churches, in our denomination—whatever, maybe even in our families—I pray you will allow it to converge and your purpose will be lived out in our lives. Thank you, God, for this time. It's in your name that I pray, amen.