

Steven Arauz

Interview Robyn

A year ago, we introduced you as you were getting ready to open your home to foster children. We found it remarkable that you were planning to do it as a single person. Our church family committed to embrace you with support and I know they are curious as to how the journey has been.

- A. First placement in June
- B. Learned about myself as a person,
- C. Single mom, working mom, life with children

When people think of foster care, they often state they are concerned of the baggage the children will bring with them. What do you have to say about that?

- A. We all have baggage
 - i. Broken relationships
 - ii. Unmet expectations
 - iii. Loss and grief
 - iv. Trauma

Sometimes people think the effects of negative life experiences are more noticeable in foster children than in other people. Is this something you've noticed?

A. I am a teacher, and I notice that all children have sadness, share joy, struggle with situations, and love celebrations.

B. In foster care, I've noticed that my kids struggle with knowing who they are. They often ask me "Am I loved?" "Am I cared for?" "Am I beautiful?". I think there is a search for an identity that is blurred by the circumstances they are facing

What have you learned about yourself through this experience?

A. I've learned that I am strong, I'm a good mother, I'm a fighter, I am an advocate, I am a nurturer, and that I am loved by two little humans whom I could have never imagined loving so much in return.

MESSAGE

Introduction

"Who am I?" is a question we all ask at some time in our lives. It's an especially critical question during our early stages in life. As we search for answers we begin to define ourselves. How is our identity formed? To what extent are we defined by our talents and interests? by our

membership in a particular ethnic group? by our social and economic class? by our religion? by the nation in which we live? How do we label ourselves and how are we labeled by others? How are our identities influenced by how we think others see us? How do our identities inform our values, ideas, and actions? In what ways might we assume different identities in different contexts? How do we manage multiple identities? Answers to these questions help us understand ourselves, and each other.

As most of you know, I teach History and Bible at Forest Lake Education Center. I like to begin the school year by asking students what it is that they see when they look into the mirror. It's a simple question but the answers they give always make me wonder how much of what they see in the reflection correlates to the expectations set by their parents from the start of their childhood.

- A. Most of the answers students give are typically along the lines of girl, boy, soccer player, long hair...but when asked to look closely and be free to write their words down without having to state them, students normally write down things like not good enough, least favorite child, not pretty, weak, loser, the problem, a mess, stupid...

Young Professionals Story

People going around a circle stating professions

- A. Attorney
- B. Physical Therapist
- C. ER Nurse
- D. Healthcare Management

Searching for Identity

- A. Pedagogist, Professor, Educator,
- B. I stated "teacher" and the response was "How Cute"
- C. Struggled with accepting that I Am a teacher because I based my identity on other's evaluations of me...I didn't protect myself from my own critical constant evaluation of who I was.

Research On Not Finding Identity

Foster Care Stats

- A. 90% of boys not in families end up in juvenile detention centers

Homeless Youth

- A. 60% of our homeless population in Orlando are LGBT teens searching for belonging. Their Christian home

Brene Brown Research

A. "Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance." — Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

Jesus Finds Himself

In the book of exodus, we find Moses having a conversation with God. The mighty God of the universe calls Himself I AM. In Exodus 3:14, the Bible says, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM". Moses had said, "When I go down to Egypt and the people ask me who sent me, what shall I tell them" (Exodus 3:13). God said, "You tell them that I AM sent you."

Jesus completed the statement that was given to Moses. Seven times in the Gospel of John He uses the expression, "I am."

1. He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger" (John 6:35).
2. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12)
3. Jesus said, "I am the door" (John 10:9)
4. Jesus said, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1)
5. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11)
6. Jesus said in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life"
7. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6)

Gethsemane

A. It is in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus makes the final claim that encompasses in its entirety the meaning of Identity. He spends a whole night struggling with depression, anxiety, and shame. He asks his closest friends to be his support group but He doesn't base his strength on them. He bases his power in acknowledging His Father and His power to change everything. It's there, when he's alone in the wilderness, that he states "Not my will but yours be done"

B. Jesus had taken the time to be absolutely sure of who He was. He had claimed 7 different I AM statements throughout his ministry. In the heat of the chaos that awaited him, he could focus on his mission in life because he was very aware of Who He was.

C. When the soldiers appeared in the garden to capture him, they asked, "Are you the one we seek for?" His response was not a coincidental one. The words He used were a source of power as he claimed his identity.

D. "I AM". At the moment, all the energy of God Himself was being claimed. The Creator of everything that ever was, is and is to come was in that statement. Power. Limitless power was in that statement of "I AM" and it was that power that made the

soldiers fall backwards in a flash. The source of Jesus' power wasn't in saying his name. The source of power came in knowing who His Father designed Him to be.

E. Often I see the mistake made where I think that saying the name of Jesus has some sort of a supernatural power. As if Christians believed in magic, I often finish my prayers saying "In the name of Jesus" and then I move on with my life. What if the reason we never seem to find what we most desire is because we've been using the name of Jesus as a magic word and not realizing that the name Jesus is a simple representation of an infinite God bound by no magic words or favors. I call him Jesus. Others call him Yahweh, Elohim, Allah, God. But what IF real power to find my desire is in the example Jesus set...to say and claim WHO God Has designed me to be. I AM. I AM Who He Says I AM .

Quinton & Nathan's Story

Around 5 years ago, I first opened my home to foster care. I took in several children but none have changed my perspective on identity as much as did Quinton's personal journey.

A. He had been in the system since he was 5. He was moved from home to home. Just when he might have thought it would all start looking better again, he was removed from his known world and tossed again to the unknown.

B. For 5 years, he lived and relived what it was to be severed without warning from all human connections established. He had zero say or power to determine any of his circumstances. He lived in one foster home and then the next and until the next home would ask for him to be removed.

C. He quickly learned a coping strategy to help reduce the pain he felt every time he was removed. He detached himself from creating meaningful connections with those around him. He figured that his heart would hurt less if it never was allowed to love new people around him.

D. At quick glance, all any outsider could notice when they met Quinton was that he was extremely overweight, had missing patches of hair on his head and eyebrows, and had an unending source of energy. Most people wondered if it was worth my time to bring home this clearly "messed up kid".

Changes begin when belonging is evident

- A. Clothes shopping story
- B. First sign of internal healing and display of affection

Mirror Story

- A. Hair pulling
- B. Negative thoughts on self image
- C. Masterpiece Explained

- D. Nathan Joins a year later
- E. Repetition of Mirror strategy

It is in claiming who I AM that I find myself loved by me and by God. It is in calling out the lies that I've believed that then there is room for truth. It is in believing that I AM forgiven that allows me to love once again. It is in saying I Am Loved that I find Love for those around me.

Conclusion

"Stop walking through the world looking for confirmation that you don't belong. You will always find it because you've made that your mission. Stop scouring people's faces for evidence that you're not enough. You will always find it because you've made that your goal. True belonging and self-worth are not goods; we don't negotiate their value with the world. The truth about who we are lives in our hearts. Our call to courage is to protect our wild heart against constant evaluation, especially our own. No one belongs here more than you." Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*:

"True belonging (and Identity) is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are." Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*-

So, Who are you?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| - I Am A Work of Art | - I Am a Light to the World |
| - I Am a Child of God | - I Am my Brother's Keeper |
| - I Am a Conqueror | - I Am Whole |
| - I Am Beautiful | - I Am Extraordinary |
| - I Am Forgiven | - I Am Chosen |
| - I Am a New Creation | - I Am Victorious |
| - I Am a Good Father | - I Am Blameless |
| - I Am a Good Mother | - I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made |
| - I Am a Masterpiece | - I Am a Friend of God |
| - I Am Free | - I Am Accepted |
| - I Am Brave | - I Am Loved |
| - I Am No Longer a Slave to Fear | - I Am Who He says I Am |

Benediction

"You are His beloved child in whom He is well pleased"



When do you like to be able to call the shots?

How does it feel to think of God's kingdom as a the place of service or being a slave?

What do you remember about understanding the gospel for the first time? Or if you haven't yet what do imagine it to be like?

How hard is it for you to imagine that you are not under the law but under grace?

What do you think about Paul's statement about "There is neither male nor female in Christ"?

How has the church messed with this throughout history?

What do you think about creation being of one creature then divided into two and that there is oneness in shared flesh??

How have you felt marginalized because of your gender?

How have you not treated the "other" gender as equal?

What step will you take to make no gender distinctions but rather celebrate differences as a source of joy?



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