

WEEKLY REFLECTION

We live in a culture obsessed with inventing ourselves. We exhaust ourselves building and maintaining our own identities. Defining ourselves by our own works means success goes to our heads and failure goes to our hearts. It's a fragile existence, like building sandcastles waiting to be swept away. Scripture offers a completely different paradigm: you don't invent your identity, you receive it.

In Genesis 17, Abram is ninety-nine years old. He's lived with thirteen years of divine silence after trying to DIY God's promise. Despite Abram's insufficiency, God breaks the silence as *El Shaddai*, the All-Sufficient One, who meets us like a parent nourishing a crying child. God calls him to walk *Coram Deo*, before the face of God. While we constantly hustle to save face or show face for cultural validation, God invites us to live solely before the face of the One whose sufficiency is all we need. Abram's old name meant "exalted father," which was painfully ironic for a childless man. God changes his name to Abraham, "father of a multitude." The world labels us by our failures, but God names us based on His future promises.

This received identity must precede mission. If we reverse the order and try to perform to earn an identity, we will burn out under the weight of legalism and imposter syndrome. Religion says, "I obey, therefore I am accepted," but the gospel declares, "I am accepted, therefore I obey." We are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. We see this in the story of Savera in Rwanda, whose identity was completely by Jesus, transforming her from someone labeled as less valuable than a chicken to a lighthouse for Christ to her community.

Yet, a received identity costs us our autonomy, requiring a painful "circumcision of the heart" to cut away our old sinful nature. We see the cost of our new identity in the Martyrs of Fraternity. These Burundi teenagers stood hand-in-hand against a militia, choosing to declare their identity as children of God above their own survival. Most of all, we see it in Jesus, who went to the cross to exchange His righteousness for our sin, so that we can be called co-heirs with Christ and children of God. Tomorrow morning, the world will yell a thousand different labels at you, but the only face that matters already looked at you from the cross and said, "You are my beloved." He gives us a name that no failure can ever erase.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

What is the story behind your name? Do you know why your parents chose it or what it means? What is a nickname you've had at some point in your life, and how did you receive it?

QUESTION TWO:

God changed Abram's name to mean "father of many peoples" long before he ever had a child. What old names or labels from your past do you still allow to define you, and how can you trade them for God's promises?

QUESTION THREE:

Reflecting on the quote by A.W. Tozer: "We're not saved *by* good works; we're saved *for* good works." What happens when we reverse that order? How is your identity in Christ pushing you to look outward toward global and local missions, inspiring you to be a blessing to the nations?

QUESTION FOUR:

Circumcision was an intimate, permanent, and painful physical reminder that Abraham's legacy depended on God's strength, not his own. What does a circumcision of the heart look like for us today? What part of your old identity does the Spirit need to cut away?