



Pastor Rich Villodas ([00:02](#)):

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Announcer ([00:28](#)):

You're listening to The Faith and Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work.

Joanna Meyer ([00:40](#)):

Hello and welcome to The Faith and Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, and I'm joined today by Brian Gray. Brian serves as our Chief Operating Officer and a Director of the 5280 Fellowship of the Denver Institute for Faith and Work. How's it going, Brian?

Brian Gray ([00:53](#)):

Not doing too bad. All things in our weird world and odd times being considered, not doing too bad. You?

Joanna Meyer ([01:00](#)):

Yeah. I'm enjoying it. We're having a beautiful sunny day in Denver. So it's easier to have optimism on a day like today's and when we're talking to a guest like we have today. Today we're continuing a conversation from the last episode of the podcast where we were talking about practical principles of spiritual formation that can inform our life and work. And today we're talking to Pastor Rich Villodas about his recent book *The Deeply Formed Life*, and I know it's going to be a pretty amazing conversation. He's a guest that I've wanted to talk to for a long time.

Brian Gray ([01:30](#)):

Yeah. Rich is fantastic, a really integrated voice. He is Brooklyn born, pastor of New Life Fellowship, and that's a large multiracial church in Queens, New York. He's also a key speaker for Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, which is a movement that has personally touched me, hundreds of other people as well in terms of an integrated vision of spirituality.

The *Deeply Formed Life* is his first book, and it serves as a bit of a roadmap to the richly rooted place that we all yearn for, which is that place of communion with God, and is a place where we find our authentic purpose in the world amidst chaotic times. So really grateful to be with Rich.

Well, Rich, welcome to The Faith and Work Podcast. Thanks for joining us and sharing some time with our listeners. For those that might be a little bit less familiar with you or your background, just tell us just a bit about your story or a bit about New Life Fellowship with that.

Pastor Rich Villodas ([02:27](#)):

Yeah. So to good to be here. In terms of my own journey, I'm a native New Yorker, born in Brooklyn, New York. The East New York section of Brooklyn, which in the late '70s, '80s, and '90s was regarded as one of the more overlooked, violent, under resourced communities. But it's in that place where had a family that lived down the block about 15 cousins who lived within a two block radius. So grew up with lots of family, and came to know Christ as a 19 year old in that neighborhood. So I'm 41. So some 22



years ago. Became a Christian with about 15 other family members on one night in a storefront, Latino, Pentecostal church. And from that point on, started following Jesus, studying his scriptures, learning more about theology and went to college. And out of that place, out of college and seminary, got on staff at a church in Brooklyn, church called Brooklyn Tabernacle for a couple of years.

And then found myself at New Life as a 28 year old to lead a small group ministry and be part of the preaching team, only to find out that about two years later my predecessor Pete Scazzero was going to be transitioning out of his role. And the elders asked if I would be willing to step into a four year transition process with them. So did that in 2013, became the lead pastor at New Life, and here I am some seven years later.

New Life is a 31 year old church in the heart of Queens, and what National Geographic has called the most diverse zip code in the world. So 75 nations represented in our congregation, 123 languages spoken in the neighborhood, and to take out \$20 at the local ATM. There's usually about 20 different options to do that. So it's a beautiful, dizzying, disorienting kingdom of God kind of feel in Queens. So that's what I'm up to in this part of the world.

Joanna Meyer ([04:42](#)):

We are thrilled to have a copy of your book in our hands right now. It's called *The Deeply Formed Life*, and before we dig into some of the nitty gritty principles that are in it, I wanted to know a little bit more about the title. Tell us what the concept of being deeply formed means to you, and why would Christians want to pursue that kind of life?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([05:00](#)):

For me deeply formed, and this is going to sound like a Sunday School answer, which I think is a good place to... For me, it's the simplicity on the other side of complexity where *The Deeply Formed Life* is really about a life that's shaped by and for Jesus in a way that's robustly integrative. So my goal is that people are being formed by Jesus, for Jesus, and of course for the world but in a way that integrates elements of Christian discipleship and formation that are often segmented. So I believe that much of the church succumbs to a kind of formational compartmentalization where aspects of discipleship are seen as things that other people specialize in, and if we can get to it, certainly. But if not, don't worry about it. What I'm saying is a deeply formed life is one that recognizing the many compartments of Christian formation and in the name of Jesus and in the power of the spirit we're seeking to dive into those things for our own personal wellbeing, for the sake of the world, for the restoration of our communities. But at it's core, it's a life that's shaped by and for Jesus in a way that's robustly integrative.

Brian Gray ([06:13](#)):

Yeah. Expanding on that, my suspicion is that our listeners might be familiar with a number of the practices that you encourage and commend around Sabbath or silent or contemplative prayer, the need to find a space away from some of the noise and the hurry of life. These come up in spiritual formation as classically defined. But one of the rich contributions of what you're doing in the book is asking us to consider things like sexual wholeness within the context of spiritual formation, racial reconciliation, the pursuit of justice. Again, here not purely as an aspect of mission over there, but as integrated with our own spiritual formation.

Talk to us a bit about why it was important. Let's particularly include discussions on racial reconciliation and social justice as part of the deeply formed life. Using that language.



Pastor Rich Villodas ([07:09](#)):

Yeah. For me, it flows out of two things. One, my understanding of the gospel and examining the life of Jesus and the teachings of the New Testament. So one's understanding of the gospel informs the level of engagement in the world, and so if the gospel is seen as simply a seer theological transaction, just a fancy way of saying you're getting into Heaven when you die, or as an atonement theory, which there's lots of conversations and debate about what actually happened when Jesus died on the cross and what is the essence of the gospel. So then it gets limited to a particular atonement theory. So it just becomes now the gospel becomes theological commitments that can be reduced to just mental assents and intellectual assents and theological checklists as opposed to the gospel being the good news about something that happened in Jesus and that something that has happened in humanity because of Christ.

So for me, my understanding of the gospel is Jesus Christ in his death, his resurrection, and his enthronement has been made Lord, is creating a new family, and is making all things new. But that's my understanding of the gospel. This is Ephesians two, the tearing down of the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. These things are not ancillary footnotes to what Christian discipleship and formation should be. The gospel is that all things are becoming new in Christ and being made new in Christ, which means everything matters to God. And when I look at Jesus, I just don't see Jesus as this disembodied kind of [inaudible 00:08:58] is just concerned about the immaterial aspects of existence, like just our spirits. In his calling of his disciples, in the sending of the Holy Spirit, there is this embodiment of a new family, embodiment of justice and compassion for the poor and those in the margins.

So for me, it all begins and ends with my understanding of the gospel and what has happened in Christ and what is happening in the spirit. And so in my congregation when I ask numbers of people, many people have problems with our commitment to race who go to our church. My first question is, how do you understand the gospel, and how do you define it? And it's often at that point where I immediately see where's the point of disconnect. So for me it's about the robust aspect of understanding of what actually is the gospel.

Brian Gray ([09:52](#)):

I wanted to yell, "Preach!" a couple times, but that seems more like the Sunday sermon and not the podcast conversation.

Pastor Rich Villodas ([09:52](#)):

I'll take that whenever I can get it, man.

Joanna Meyer ([09:52](#)):

Preach it.

Brian Gray ([10:02](#)):

I'll tell you what, that vision of the gospel is really important to the work that we do at Denver Institute and in integrating this vision of a life with God for the world through our work. So a hearty amen on that one. Rich, as a followup and specific, so around racial reconciliation, you said at one point, "Reconciliation and community will always cost us something." It's an important sentiment because it keeps ideas of reconciliation from just being ideas and from being platitudes.

I'm going to go with a personal example, Pastor. Here my confession. I have thought about this before, as I've thought about housing policy and considered reparations. I said well, I've been okay with having people live in my home, but I've been the beneficiary of four generations of home ownership

that has not been given equally to other people. What does it mean for me to consider the way I view housing justice in light of the cost to me? And I feel that internal resistance. It comes up in me. It's like, "Oh, that cost is too much. It's okay to have people live in the house, but it's not okay to radical next step." So I'm recognizing even inside of me this tendency.

What would you say we run into the sense of sometimes resistance from some people in this perspective around this idea of cost? That the idea of justice is a zero sum game. Can you help unpack what some of the costs might look like, those ones that are more accessible that we need to take really seriously if we're going to pursue reconciliation in community?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([11:39](#)):

Yeah. It's a great question, and the way that I'd like to frame that is to connect reconciliation. Which I'll be honest here, and I've talked about it in the book, it's a term that I have some ambivalence using only because it is often been reduced to a aesthetic diversity. So it's a surface kind of, can we all just get together and sing together and have a good time without taking into consideration that race needs to be addressed individually, interpersonally, and institutionally to be faithful to the remaking of the world in the name of Jesus. But reconciliation for me at its core is about love, and love always costs us something. Always costs us something. So if it's frame in that way, if reconciliation is more than just a sociological movement of people coming together, it's at its core theologically oriented. And not just theologically oriented, christocentrically theologically oriented. And because it's connected to Jesus, reconciliation is about love and love always costs something.

As a parent, love costs me something. It costs me hours of sleep. It costs me money. It costs me time. To be married, it cost me something. To be a friend costs me something. So for me, love will always cost us something, and it costs Jesus his life. So in that respect if it's oriented in that way where the ultimate end of reconciliation is not just new sociological arrangement and new power structures and social dynamics, which I think are important. If the end of the goal is love, then I think we need to open ourselves up to what it means to cost us and what it means for us to give something up. So in that respect, if it's frame in that way, number one, love is costly, then the question is, what have I been a beneficiary of that my neighbor has not? And then what does it mean, to your point, what does it mean to reorder my life, reorder my thinking, reorder the various policies that I have benefited from or that I like to hold onto because it benefits me personally? What does it mean now to reorder my thinking in a way that those who have not been the beneficiaries of power can benefit from and receive the kind of support that I have received for whatever reason?

This is a Philippians two way of being in the world where a way of emptying oneself, and the question and the challenge that I know a lot of people have in this is because this zero sum game that you talk about. The nature of power has not been evenly distributed. So I have white people in my congregation who say, "What are you talking about white privilege? I grew up in the New York City in a very poor neighborhood. I've never had any privilege," which I recognize and I said, "You know what, I affirm that your experience in a very personal, local level. But on a larger scale, you do have many privileges." Having people see that is a very difficult thing, and whether we're talking about privilege is based on race or privilege is based on gender.

I have to recognize as a man I have tons of privileges that women do not have. So I need to, as a Christ centric way of being in the world is to recognize love costs something, and who have been the beneficiaries of social power? So in this case, men, white males in particular, but men generally. People who are wealthy, people who are documented, who are citizens across the board here. A christocentric way of being in the world means what do I have to give up in a way but not out of coercion, not out of guilt, but out of love. So how does it express itself in how we listen?

I mean, before we even get to any of the policies that you talk about, like in terms of housing, which I think is a very good example. I mean, how do I take the time to first of all be the person who listens first and foremost, surrendering my power in that respect there for the sake of [inaudible 00:16:10]. I think that might be a good starting point.

Joanna Meyer ([16:13](#)):

So let's get practical, Rich. You lead a multiethnic congregation. You said it's politically diverse. You guys fall on both sides of the aisle. What does this look like in a day-to-day basis to engage issues of race and injustice in the practical life of your church?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([16:30](#)):

Well, let me just give you a layout of our congregation and try to talk about some of the ways we try to navigate through this.

In our congregation there are about four different people as it pertains to the race and politics, which I think is important for this moment. There is the conservative Christian, the progressive Christian, the grateful immigrant, and the apolitical indifferent kind of Christian in our congregation. And I imagine to some degree every church has some spectrum of this in their congregation. But in mine because of its diversity, these categories of people stand out prominently.

So the conservative Christian has a very hard time seeing anything wrong with our country. The progressive Christian has a hard time seeing anything right with our country. The grateful immigrant is very similar to the conservative except that their story is one that is based on comparison. So I met with a very successful Chinese business owner in our congregation who wanted to sit with me to ask me questions because of a sermon that he heard me preach on race. And for the first 20 minutes of the conversation he was highlighting what it was like to live in communist China and how what we have here is so much better than where he came from and where his family came from. And so let's be grateful for where we're at. So that's the third person.

And again, 50% of Queens is foreign born. So that's not a little [crosstalk 00:18:13]. And there's 2.2 million people in Queens, to give you some... If Queens were its own city, it'd probably be the fifth most populated city in the country after Brooklyn. It'd be like LA, Chicago, Houston, and then like Brooklyn and Queens or something like that.

And then there's the indifferent Christian in our congregation who says, "Why are we even talking about this? Can we just focus on Jesus? And let's just sing songs and stuff like that." So that is the landscape of the community that I'm leading.

And I have found that in order to navigate through this, it requires what I would just call various formational spaces to navigate this landmine of racial hostility, racial injustice, racial whatever it is. By that I mean what does it look like preaching? What does it look like for me to create smaller, mid-sized gatherings where there can be enough space for dialogue, it's very difficult.

Three weeks ago we had, and I'll show you how this is... However we relate to race is how we relate to politics in our context. We had a gospel, the Faith in Politics Webinar, three weeks ago, and as part of the meeting I was going to give a talk for about 20 minutes on what's happening beneath the surface of our politicized world and why people see the world the way they do and vote the way they do. What's the stuff that's beneath the surface? And then the second part of it was two of our elders of our church were going to have a discussion on why one is voting for Trump and why one is voting for Biden. And when one of our pastors sent me that idea, "Hey, we're thinking about having two of our



elders have this conversation in front of 200 people on Zoom," I thought, "Are you crazy? We're not going to do that." That was my first response as the lead pastor of a congregation.

Brian Gray ([20:15](#)):

What could go wrong?

Joanna Meyer ([20:17](#)):

And on Zoom no less.

Brian Gray ([20:19](#)):

Yeah, what could go wrong?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([20:21](#)):

I said, "Are you crazy? We're not going to do that." And the pastor said, "Rich, I think it'd be a good idea for us to model something." So after my anxiety levels went down, took a couple hours to go down, I say, "Well, you better prepare them well for this. And what are the questions?" I was very anxious initially. And then we did it. And I don't want to say, "Wow. It was the best thing ever." It was some awkward moments, and I was just awkward. Some of it was like, "I wouldn't say that." And then I was looking at the chat section on Zoom, and it started getting a little out of control for a moment. But what we did was I think in that moment we modeled something different of really differentiation, which I think is an important phrase that comes out of family systems theory that I have sought to teach in many different contexts in our congregation to navigate race and politics.

And differentiation very simply is the process of remaining close to myself and remaining close to others in times of high anxiety and resisting the polar opposite pulls of fusion or cutting people off. And this takes lots of self regulation, self awareness, monitoring of anxiety, curiosity, prayerfulness. But the goal is how do we remain close to ourselves and remain close to others in times of high anxiety? So that's how I've tried to navigate through the racial tension, and I can't say we've done it perfectly. We haven't. Not everyone sees things the way that I see it, and I wish they did and they don't. They wish they would. Many of the congregants wish that I saw things the way they saw it. But how do we remain close to one another emotionally while holding onto these values?

Last thing I'll say here is part of that is every Sunday I've preached this. We're doing a five week series on politics in the gospel, and at the beginning of each sermon, I begin by saying, "No matter who you vote for," and again, this relates to race as well. "No matter who you vote for, you are welcome in our congregation. The only thing I ask is that if you're part of this church, you wouldn't see Jesus for your politics. You would see politics through Jesus. You would be humbly curious about why your neighbor sees things differently than you do, and then you would be open to change." So for me, that's differentiation. That's remaining close to others while also taking a particular stand on the gospel in this particular example.

But formational spaces, differentiation. I recognize there are things that I can preach on on a Sunday that I probably shouldn't be preaching on because it leaves too much room for misunderstanding, which has been a very painful learning for me. To say things like white supremacy, white privilege, white normative, whatever it is and however people define it or not, are explosive terms. And I'm not saying we shouldn't say it, I just think we need to be cognizant of the various spaces that allow these terms to be teased out in a way that lead to healing and not just further polarization. So



those are some of the things that I've been learning over the years. I'm making lots of mistakes, I would add.

Brian Gray ([23:41](#)):

I listened to and watched a sermon of yours online where you right from the very beginning informed the congregation that you would be talking about those terms, and I thought, "This has got to be long well tilled soil to pull that off in monologue as opposed to dialogue."

Pastor Rich Villodas ([23:58](#)):

When I said that, there were plenty of 9:00 PM Monday evening elder meetings [inaudible 00:24:04]. So I want to tell you in 2017, I preached two sermons on individual racial prejudice, and when I finished with that, people put me on their shoulders. Rich, Rich, he's our man. If he can't do it, no one can because I was like saying everyone has individual racial prejudice. But then I said okay, in the second week, we're going to talk about structural sin and institutional racism. And all of a sudden a good number of the congregation were very upset with me, but I think there was enough goodwill but some people left. There were plenty of 9:00 PM Monday night elder meetings. It cost something though, and I recognize these things are costly.

Jeff Haanen ([24:46](#)):

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Thanks again for your generosity towards God's people and the mission of Denver institute. And now, back to The Faith and Work Podcast.

Brian Gray ([26:03](#)):

Before we transition from that, I think you covered some really nice ground on this idea of moving from this individualized truncated gospel of soul salvation to including the reconciliation of all things of their systems and their structures, which are maintaining practices of injustice. I'm thinking about the second sermon you just referred to. As you commend in your book, you commend a chapter in your five sections, you commend practices specifically to followup on the contemplative life, the life for sexual wholeness, and the life of in reconciliation. Can you commend to us a practice specifically around racial reconciliation that could help people in their awareness of some of those systems pieces? So if you were to move your people from your Sunday lecture into the laboratory, what's a practice you would commend to people to see, be aware of, respond to those systems levels?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([26:57](#)):

Yeah. A lot of people don't think in systems, which is why I think family systems has much to offer in terms of understanding race as well. People think in, especially in the United States, in very individualistic terms. So without seeing the larger systems that we are a part of. So one of the ways that I like to begin a conversation in helping people navigate this, even before we even start talking about the interpersonal and institutional ways to respond is to look at the ways that we've been shaped by our families of origin. Because the ways we've been shaped by our families of origin, our families have shaped us disproportionately, whether for good or for bad, more than any other group of people. And there are conscious messages or unconscious messages that have been spoken throughout our lives about Black people, about white people, about Latino people, Asian people, Native people.

So one of the practices that I give is to ask that very simple question, what are the messages that your family of origin gave you about and fill in the blank? And let me tell you, I've led people in this exercise in my congregation and other places, and this is one of the most difficult exercises for people to engage in because it confronts you with lots of embarrassing, shameful messages that many people don't want to acknowledge. So I remember there was a Korean man in our church, and he got to the point... I looked over his shoulder because I was in a workshop with 100 of our leaders, and I was just circling the tables like a good teacher, making sure no one's cheating off each other and everyone's doing their work. And I saw that his page was blank, and I said, "Hey man, you've had about seven minutes here. What's going on?" And he got stuck, number one, at just what are the messages your family gave you about Black people. It's not that he didn't know it, but to write it down and to acknowledge it...

Now, listen, I'm a brown skinned Puerto Rican from New York. My grandfather is as dark as you're going to get, as is my mother, as is my uncles. And I grew up with messages about Black people that they were more prone to violence, that they were more prone to couldn't be trusted, and that's me growing up around Black people. Now imagine people who have not. So this gentlemen, he could not write it, and it got to a point where I'm like coaching him now. "Brother, name it. You got to name it. Say it, man. If you can't name it, you're still going to be in prison too. Come on, say it." And he was able to write just a couple of words, not even sentences. But in that process, he started living in greater reality. And I think if we can be honest about the ways we've been shaped by our families, the ways we've been shaped...

Listen, my family thinks that all Asian people are the same. Every Asian person [inaudible 00:30:09] in my Puerto Rican... So can we talk about the ways that we... What are the messages that we have received from our families? And I think that's a really simple starting point to then say, "Okay, now what [inaudible 00:30:23] of those messages in my day-to-day existence, society is now... Old ways that are well beyond what I think I'm contributing to in terms of systems and structures and institutions." But I think that's a very simple way of beginning a conversation, timing of origin.

Joanna Meyer ([30:42](#)):

Rich, one thing that fascinates me in the book is that you outline practices for individual spiritual formation, like contemplative prayer, self examination, things that in the tradition of spiritual formation might be more monastic in their tendencies. But you also advocate for a very public and active expression and process of growing spiritually, and that can be really hard to hold intention. So I'm wondering why is it so important for believers to hold both internal spiritual formation and active external expression of spiritual formation? Why is it so important to hold those intention?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([31:18](#)):



Yeah. When I think about holding onto that intention to monastery and mission field, which is kind of the language that we use at New Life a lot. The reason why it's so important, and I don't want to be simplistic here, is I think this is what Jesus shows us. I don't think we have to go far in our answers. I think our Lord shows us this dynamic of being in the monastery so to speak, a place marked by solitude and prayer and silence and introspection. And then coming out and offering a word of power and wholeness and healing and to the masses. I mean, I look at Luke four where Jesus goes into the wilderness after his baptism, and he is being tempted by the evil one. He's alone. He's in isolation. He's in silence, and he's wrestling with his battle with Satan.

But it is out of that place of his own prayerful contemplation. What kind of messiah is he going to be? Is he going to be the one marked by what Henry [Nilon 00:32:28] would say relevance and being spectacular and being powerful? Is he going to be a messiah marked by that or is he going to be a messiah marked by self giving, sacrificial love in how he engages the world around him? But he begins there, and I love what it says in Luke four. He's in the desert, and then after he comes out of the desert, it says he says these words, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he is anointed me to preach good news to the poor." I think there is a correlation between the spirit being on Jesus, flowing out of that desert experience that he had for 40 days.

So for me, if we want the empowerment of God for the world, I think it does need us to prioritize not for the sake of just having a good time with God but for our engagement in the world. So we are called to do out of our being with God, that's the language that I use. We're not called to just be without doing or do without being. We're called to do out of our being with God.

It reminds me one of the things I've been highlighting a lot in recent months in conversations and in preaching is off a very simple phrase by the late professor Dr. Robert Mulholland out of Asbury Seminary. He's written a number of books on spiritual formation, and he came to our church a few years ago before he passed away. And he said a phrase in passing that I wrote down immediately and found out he also talked about it in one of his books called *The Deeper Journey*. And he said, "There's two ways of being in the world. You can be in God for the world, or you can be in the world for God." And that's a phrase that I come back to over and over again. It's a radically different way of being in the world. I can be in the world for God, but here's the problem, I could do that without God. I mean, I could wave my banners in terms of what are the issues God cares about? What are the issues that I think the Bible cares about? And now I'm going to be actively engaged in the world trying to fulfill this vision of what I think of the priorities that matter to God.

But the problem is, and we've seen it, tons of people on mission without God. It's not coming from a place of depth and a place of contemplation and a place of compassion and love and truth. It's coming from their own reactivity. It's coming from what they think God cares about, and they might be right but you can do it without God. As opposed to I want to be in God for the sake of the world that I'm offering something of... Isn't that the distinction that Christians are to be offering the world? We're not just offering good mission and good volunteering. This is Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas, his definition of preachings should behold and to share the fruit of one's beholding or to contemplate and share the fruit of one's contemplation. That's what our mission should be. I'm beholding and contemplating God, and I'm offering the fruit of that contemplation, of that beholding in a way that doesn't need to be unnecessarily divorced from mission. So that's the hope.

And last thing I say about that is from our outside perspective, you can see two people. One person's in God for the world, and the other person's in the world for God. You might not even notice a difference. Sooner or later, to be in the world for God is not sustainable. And to be in God for the world is sustainable. So you might not be able to see it from an outsiders perspective just by observation, but

you know and the world will find out sooner or later whether we're living from a different censor because it's just not sustainable to be in the world for God over a long period of time.

Joanna Meyer ([36:20](#)):

This is one of the most fun podcast interviews we've had, Rich, because I'm sitting here scribbling notes. Usually I'm listening or I think that's great. Here I'm taking notes, read that, read this. Here's this quote, here's that quote. So it's going to be fun. We'll make sure that we link in our show notes to the two sermons that you referenced, racial reconciliation. I know our staff team listened to the second one on structural reconciliation, but I think it'll benefit our listeners to hear both. So if you're curious about what those were, what made Rich a hero, and then what got him in trouble with his elders, we'll have both links so you can see them.

Pastor Rich Villodas ([36:50](#)):

Exactly.

Brian Gray ([36:52](#)):

Rich, just a final question to close us, and let's take you mentioned towards the end of your book some aspects about work. And let's take some of these ideas and maybe apply them to people's workplaces because that is the world. The with God for the world where most people are finding themselves when they're in full-time employment that is most of their waking hours. Can you talk a little bit about how... Maybe two questions here. Talk a little bit about how our work and our workplaces function as part of our spiritual formation as the context for that, how they're shaping, and how spiritual formation in our workplace interact?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([37:26](#)):

Yeah. I think for me it starts with the theological claim that work is good. That work was created before the fall. Some people listening are probably saying, "Not my job. My job definitely came after sin." But I think for us, at New Life for me it's this understanding that work is a gift, that God is a worker, and God creates us in God's image, gives us the holy task of creating and shaping, of establishing order out of chaos, of creating community, of stewarding the gifts. So for me, work is in itself a good thing.

Moreover, work is the place where we spend most of our lives. So the reason why it must become a place of formation is because we spend most of our adult waking hours at work, either traveling to work, being at work, traveling home from work, and then working from home. Whatever it is, we spend a lot of time in work. So I think that's the reason why it's a primary formational space because we spend so much of our time there. But because work is something that was created before sin and because we're made in the image of God and because... I mean, I love that Jesus, three of his years were preaching, traveling, healing. But he spent much more of his years as a carpenter working with his father, making chairs and tables or whatever else he was making. Working with his hands. And these things are good. We're offering something to the world.

Brian Gray ([39:07](#)):

Rich, connected to what you were just suggesting, you said this in your book. "The workplace is often where our identities is shaped. For many, what you do is an expression of who you are. This is a dangerous approach because our identities are rooted in something that can't give us what only God can." I love that. It is an appropriate desolation, and it's a practical tension that a lot of us are sitting

with. So I'm thinking here of the first and the fifth rhythms in your book. Contemplative practices for the exhausted life and the idea of practicing missional presence. Help us to try to hold these together. How do we balance work as part of our missional posture to the world without it taking up an out-sized portion of who we are and how we define ourselves?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([39:53](#)):

That's a great question, and my response would be one in a theological truth and secondly in a formational practice.

In terms of the theological truths, I think our fundamental identity is that we are loved by God. There's nothing we can do to earn the love of God. This is Jesus getting baptized and before he healed the multitudes, before he multiplied bread and fish, and the father says, "You are my son whom I'm well pleased." And that's the gospel of grace. It's beautiful, and I think that's the place where we are to live out of. So that's the theological truth. I think the way that that gets embodied in a formational practice is through the Sabbath. What Sabbath does is it roots us in that truth because as I have written, Sabbath might be the greatest sign of the gospel of grace because it is while we are intentionally doing nothing that God loves us. It is while we are intentionally not producing or performing that God loves us.

One of the benefits of Sabbath is that it makes us more productive. It makes us more efficient, but that's not why we do it. The reason why we do it is because we are called to be released and rescued from the idle of efficiency and the idle of productivity. And I think if we can be released from the idles of productivity and efficiency, I think we can live without the kind of paralyzing burden of having to be something that our work can never make us to be, that our accomplishments will never make us out to be.

So I think how do we balance this? I think we hold onto that truth. I think this is a counter instinctual way of doing it. I think we need to begin from a place of rest, and it is in that place within I think we can offer our best selves to the world in terms of what we're creating, what we're shaping, what we're putting out in the world, how we're seeking to serve people. But I think it begins out of that gospel of grace and out of that formational practice where we seek to truly wrestle with and embody that truth. I think everything else flows out of there.

Joanna Meyer ([42:25](#)):

Powerful. Powerful, powerful. One thing I'm thinking about, Rich, is we always ask our guests to finish the podcast thinking about practical application, and as we head into the winter season of political transition and a lot of emotion that has come with it, a season that maybe dark for some people, physically dark as those days get shorter, but also dark as we figure out what it looks like to be more socially distanced in the pandemic, do you have any practical applications of things people can do in the most core level to stay connected to God, to be able to live in him for the world? How do we do that?

Pastor Rich Villodas ([43:04](#)):

I think for me the practice that I'm trying to live into and lead my congregation with is to have a life of deep prayer with God, and Ron Rolheiser who's written a number of books on prayer has said his definition of prayer is lifting mind and heart to God, which means that every thought becomes an entry point for prayer. No matter how holy or unholy that thought is, it becomes an entry point into prayer when prayer is lifting mind and heart to God. I think in this moment where there is political hostility, racial tensions, economic uncertainty, a public health crisis, how do we stay close to God I think is often in staying close to ourselves.



And at New Life, we teach this skill called exploring the iceberg where we want to pay attention to four really core emotions inside of us that connect us to ourselves and to God. And I've seen PhD and masters educated people struggle with this, and I've seen people who on all end of the spectrums struggle with it or embrace it. And it's four simple questions. What are you mad about? What are you sad about? What are you anxious about? What are you glad about? And I think if we gave ourselves permission to respond to those questions with regularity, whether it's once a week in a journal entry or once a week sharing what we are angry about, sad about, anxious about, glad about with a friend. Number one, I think there's something cathartic about it. I think there's a release for our souls. But I think it also bonds us to people and bonds us to God.

In this moment where there's a lot of upheaval and uncertainty and anxiety, one of the best things we can do is to lift mind and heart to God, and I think doing that by paying attention to what's happening in our inner lives. And I think it's not going to solve everything, but I think we'll live from a different censor, a deeper censor.

Joanna Meyer ([45:13](#)):

We're going to let you have the last word. That is powerful and inviting. I look forward to asking myself those four questions in the weeks to come. Rich Villodas, thanks for giving us a chunk of your morning and what I know is a very busy week shepherding your congregation. Thanks for the gift of your book, *The Deeply Formed Life*. I commend it to our listeners that they would get it and read it. It's perfect for this season. Thanks for the leadership that you've provided for all of us in this season, and we look forward to seeing your ministry influence continue to grow.

Pastor Rich Villodas ([45:41](#)):

Thank you so much. A joy to be with you.

Announcer ([45:47](#)):

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