



Sho Baraka: ([00:03](#))

The artist among different people. We have this calling to reproduce healing. To try to figure out how do we reimagine redemption in this brokenness?

Joanna Meyer: ([00:19](#))

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: ([00:29](#))

Hi and welcome to The Faith and Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, the Director of Public Engagement at Denver Institute for Faith and Work. I'm joined today by Brian Gray, the director of the 5280 Fellowship, which is a nine-month intensive discipleship program for emerging leaders focused on faith, work, and culture. It is so nice to see you, Brian.

Brian Gray: ([00:48](#))

Yes. It's good to be here as well. Looking forward to the time and particularly the conversation.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:53](#))

One of my favorite parts of hosting the podcast is the conversation we have with amazing people. And today is no exception. Our conversation partner is Amisho Baraka, best known as a rap and recording artist, but he's really a true polymath, which a person of wide ranging knowledge and learning. We will discuss his new books and themes related to calling, race, and creativity. You won't want to miss the bonus track that accompanies this episode, which contains Sho's cultural recommendations to learn more about these themes. Brian, would you tell us more about Sho?

Brian Gray: ([01:25](#))

Yeah. You bet. Sho Baraka is certainly globally recognized as a recording artist, as a performer, as a cultural curator, an activist, teacher, and now a writer. His work combines his artistic platform with really rich academic history to contribute a unique perspective. He elevates the contemporary conversation on faith, art, and culture for us and you'll see that in our conversation. He's an alumnus of Tuskegee University and the University of North Texas. Sho is a co-founder of Forth District and the AND Campaign, which we are big fans here. He served also an adjunct professor at Wake Forest School of Divinity. We had him out to speak at one of our past events at the Denver Institute connected to his record from 2016 called The Narrative. But today, we're going to be discussing his thought leadership, his creativity, through his recent book, He Saw That It Was Good: Reimagining Your Creative Life to Repair a Broken World, which is a beautiful title from a brilliant thinker.

Brian Gray: ([02:30](#))

Welcome, Sho. Thanks for taking a few minutes and being with us today. It's a honor.



Sho Baraka: ([02:36](#))

Thank you guys for having me. No, I'm excited to have this conversation. It's been a while since we've chatted.

Brian Gray: ([02:42](#))

Since we've seen each other, for sure. Hey, congratulations on the release of your book and your debut book. It's some good really important themes. I'm wondering, for us, for our listener, can you talk to us a little bit about what were your hopes, what were your motivations? Why did you want to bring this piece of creativity into the moment?

Sho Baraka: ([03:04](#))

I think when you're an influencer or you have a platform, people have expectations of you. They want you to speak to particular moments. They want you to share your thoughts. Even when you have zero authority on a subject. They'll be like, "Hey, what do you think about the pipeline in North America?" I'll be like, "I don't... Look, I could talk about it if that's what you want me to do. And so after 2016... Between 2016 and 2018, I was speaking a lot, writing a lot, and there seemed to be a lot of interest with people having me take my thoughts to the pages. A lot of people wanted me to write about politics and race and, though I can talk about politics and though I can talk about race, I just don't feel like I'm necessarily an authority or a sociologist in the area of race relations or a political wonk when it comes to policies.

Sho Baraka: ([04:05](#))

And so I said, "What are some of the things that I feel like I really have a passion about? That I think I've spent years engaging and doing and that I feel somewhat I can speak authoritatively to?" It came down to just something that I think you guys can connect to is basically this idea of how do I broach the subject or bring my own personal theology and ethics of creation and work to the stage to be able to challenge people on how they work, how they view art, how they view creation, and vocation, and how that affects politics and how that affects race and how that affects relationships and different areas and segments of life? And so that was me as a polymath trying to figure how to consolidate all these different things that are going on in my crazy head and say, "How can I try to be cohesive?" While at the same time... I've always wanted to write fiction. Taking the opportunity to not just talk about creativity, but to show creativity through it as well.

Joanna Meyer: ([05:16](#))

That was so fun in the book. For our listeners that haven't read it yet... and I hope that they will buy a copy of your book and read it... between the chapters, there are... There's prose. There's poetry. You'll get a taste of what's going in Sho's creative mind in addition to his incredible thought leadership. It's a fun read. And different than anything else that I've read. I want to know, Sho... I know that when you



came to faith as a young adult, it changed the course of your creative journey. How has being a Christian really shaped your work moving forward since that time?

Sho Baraka: ([05:51](#))

That's interesting. I think the one thing I've learned... When you become a Christian, you just assume Christianity is this force that just doesn't come with baggage. The reality of it is that everybody practices Christianity within a culture. It comes with history. It comes with sometimes formulas and methods. I don't think that's... Although I do think Christ came with an ultimate culture and an ultimate kingdom and a way of living, he didn't come to just demolish all culture. He came to enhance it. He came to make it more beautiful. And I think what happened with me is, when I came into Christianity, I found myself trying to figure out how to live. Like, all right. I love hip hop music and, now that I'm in Christianity, all the churches that I'm a part of make me feel like hip hop is not acceptable. It's not an acceptable form of expression. So, I have to find a new identity, if you will, because all my life I've been shaped with this. And then I moved into more of your Presbyterian spaces from the Black traditional spaces and it was like, oh, now you can't love the social thinkers of that particular... of your past experiences. I need to give you these reformers. I need to give you these puritans. And I'm like, okay, well, this is a new culture that I'm adapting to. And then-

Joanna Meyer: ([07:32](#))

I'm laughing, but that had to be painful. I mean, [crosstalk 00:07:35] but you're like, oh man, that is hard on the soul.

Sho Baraka: ([07:38](#))

It is very painful. But it took some... It took a different reformation, if you will, of my own to come to this place where I realize... and just out the tutelage of wise men and women to disciple into me this idea that, yes, Christ comes to renovate, to change, to redeem, but he's not asking you to throw away all aspects of the things that made you Amisho Baraka. And so his saving grace, the knowledge of the Gospel, became transcendent rather than demolishing, if that makes sense. Even though, in some ways, there are some things that needed to be demolished. And so, for me, Christianity changed... And that's more recently, honestly... like in the last 13, 14 years... is when I came to a place where I was like, oh, so Christ loves the things that I'm offering as long as it's submitted unto him and he has total authority over these things.

Sho Baraka: ([08:44](#))

I think the same with vocation. I think, as people operate in vocation, it's not that being an engineer is sinful. It's how do you operate? I talk about it in my book as how do you swing the hammer as a constructor? How do you paint? There are types of art that seems perverse but the reality of it is the art in itself is not perverse. It's what we do with it. It's the perversion of our hearts. It's the perversion of our thoughts and our actions that make the art or make the thing perverse. And so as I began to navigate through these particular cultural... these Christian cultures, I'm realizing that everybody has their pinups



and they have their hobby horses and their trophies. Sometimes being in those particular palaces aren't the best for individuals like me. And so you got to figure out how to maneuver within those spaces. If you can't maneuver, then you got to exit. And then what does it look like to exit? So, Christianity for me has been this negotiation of understanding how to submit unto the Lord, serve my brothers and sisters, and operate in spaces that sometimes aren't totally... I guess you could say designed for who I am.

Joanna Meyer: ([10:07](#))

That makes a lot of sense. Brian, did you have a follow-up question?

Brian Gray: ([10:11](#))

No, go ahead.

Joanna Meyer: ([10:12](#))

One of the things that I most appreciated in the book, Sho, is that you write from the perspective of a creative, but you write to any worker. You speak to anyone who wants to serve God through their work. And so I wonder if you could explain this a little bit. How is creativity the task of every worker?

Sho Baraka: ([10:32](#))

I go back to Genesis. There's been great movements in the last six, seven years. One of the more prominent being Tim Keller and the Faith and Work Movement in New York that has postured this idea that work is not drudgery. It's not painful. It's not sinful. It has been offered to us as a reflection of an attribute of God. And so for me, when I think about creation, I think solely of... in this book and as I'm trying to posture it... I think solely of creating a product for the glory of God. You're creating something as a way to share with your brothers and sisters in humanity. And so artists aren't the only ones who create and distribute product. That's everybody. Mothers and fathers who stay at home, they're producing human beings and citizens of this world. Coaches are trying to develop athletes so that they can progress and be great at their particular sport. Scientists are trying to develop medicines and formulas so that we can have better lives. There's always this creating. There's always this cultivating that we're seeing in different vocations.

Sho Baraka: ([11:56](#))

The beauty of that creation at the end of the day is we're hoping that it is good. Very similar to God. God creates out of the void and He creates for the benefit of humanity and we get to benefit from that creation. What happens is we see, in Genesis, that human beings corrupted that. What we want to do is we want to take the blessing of creation and colonize it all for our own benefit and our own self-interest. That is the opposite of our intention with creation. Creation and creating is to help us flourish and help us see the beauty of society. Unfortunately, because of the fall, we don't do such a good job of creating from the artist perspective or from the everyday vocation.

Joanna Meyer: ([12:50](#))



The subtitle of your book alludes to work, creativity, as a tool that can heal a broken world. You're alluding to that. Tell us a little bit more about what you mean.

Sho Baraka: ([13:02](#))

Well, I think the idea of creating is to create a product for the benefit of people. I mean, doctors are... They hold an office so that folks can come in and be healed because something is ailing them. When we find that folks need to get from point A to point B, we create roads, infrastructures, and vehicles. That's a product that's made. When parents need a break from their children, somebody was wise enough to create Netflix so you can just put up a TV and just say, "Hey, leave me alone." These are all products that are created to help people.

Sho Baraka: ([13:37](#))

And so what we do is we... As humans, we're trying to reimagine a better situation for ourselves. The problem is is sometimes, in our imagination, we are creating out of the deficit of our own self-interest and that can create bankruptcy in society. That bankrupts dignity. You create... Well, this will benefit me, but we're not thinking about how this could benefit society. Now, granted, there's no creation that can satisfy all humanity, but there are things that we can point to and say, "Well, that obviously was created for the..." Christopher Wright, a prominent theologian, talks about how the Old Testament talks about all poverty... well, most poverty is created. It doesn't happen accidentally. Oftentimes in our vocation, when we create, we create to marginalize and to dominate other people versus thinking about the flourishing of our human brothers and sisters.

Brian Gray: ([14:48](#))

Sho, you give examples, a number of examples, particularly of Black innovators who done exactly what you've just suggested. I'd like to talk to you a bit about your... the example of George Washington Carver. Let me say, from confession, growing up in a pretty traditional white dominant subculture with the privilege that comes with that and the particular writing of history that comes from that, the first time... I knew about George Washington, but the first time I knew about George Washington Carver was Proud to be Black in the mid-80s from Run DMC and this lyric, "George Washington Carver made the peanut great. Showed any man with a mind could create." So, for me, I thought who's this? I didn't have Google. I don't know who this is. There are so many rich examples inside of Black history and you bring a number of them out, which are innovators. Who are doing what you just suggested. Creating a product for the benefit of people and the glory of God. Why is George Washington Carver such a wonderful example of this? Tell us a bit more about his life and work that inspires you.

Sho Baraka: ([16:07](#))

There's so many layers to my affinity towards GWC, as I like to call him. One is I am an alumni... alumnus... I don't know the proper word... of Tuskegee University, which was Tuskegee Institute when he was there. I didn't really know a whole lot about George Washington Carver other than, as you mentioned, the basic information that is passed around on Black history. Him and the peanut, et cetera,



et cetera. The legume plant and stuff like that. But then when you get to Tuskegee, you actually get to learn the legacy of the man. Not just the performer or the inventor. You get to learn the humility. You get to learn his connection to nature. But more so, you get to learn the spiritual depth this man carried and walked with. His love and affection for God. The Lord.

Sho Baraka: ([17:03](#))

And so he's not just an individual... This is the reason why he's so important to me. He's not just an individual who creates by mistake and he happens to just be playing in the laboratory and discovering things and said, "Hey, you know what? Here's to something that the world could benefit from." He's intentionally going into the lab with the forethought that I love nature... Well, better yet, I love God, so therefore my affection for God gives me this affection for nature and because of my affection for nature, I want to use these products for the benefit of other people. And so there's some great intention in that. I think, oftentimes, when we work, we just haphazardly like, oh, I'm going to go into work and if I stumble upon something great, I'll be like, oh yeah, this is something that the world could benefit from. Well, I think God created with great intention. We navigate through the garden with great intention to create for the benefit of others with great intention.

Sho Baraka: ([17:57](#))

George Washington Carver is an example of that on top of the fact... Not only did he have those attributes, but he also did it in a time where people intentionally were trying to squash his creativity. Didn't see him as a full human in the sense that he could create all these resources, but couldn't benefit from the resources that he created in the ways that the white man and woman could. But yet and still, he still carried this joy and this love about him, which was just amazing. And so I think about the mysticism of him. I think about his interaction with... I mean, he was a very strange man, too. Oftentimes, geniuses are strange. But even in that, I think he's a life that should be honored way beyond the fact that he created these 300 different items from these wonderful plants. It's just he and himself and his connection to nature.

Sho Baraka: ([18:58](#))

And here's the other thing, if I can get more spiritual, is that I think he exemplifies a particular connection with God and nature that I think is very much lost in our intellectual Christianity. I think we're so academic and we want to analyze things from just the cognitive. As I talk about in my book, there's this corporeal expression that I think that George Washington Carver... GWC, better yet... exemplifies in that he has this physical connection to nature. That he talks to plants. It's not a gimmick. He literally talks to them. And so I think that we, as human beings, need to find this particular... I don't know... this interesting balance, this dance, with our bodies, with the physical nature of our faith, and of humanity. We're so caught up in the head with everything that we don't feel. And I think God has created us to feel. To touch. Paul talks about the rebuke from... I think it's the Cretans who said don't touch, don't do this, don't do that. This is not a [inaudible 00:20:17]. We don't have a faith of a... We have a faith that teaches us to feel, to love, and to be.



Joanna Meyer: ([20:22](#))

I love the words that you shared from George Washington Carver's tombstone. His epitaph said that, "He lived a life that stood out as a gospel of self-forgetting service. He could've added fortune to fame, but cared for neither. He found happiness and honor being helpful to the world." That would be any of our epitaph.

Brian Gray: ([20:43](#))

Yeah, I'd take that tombstone if I could. I don't know.

Sho Baraka: ([20:46](#))

Absolutely. I'm telling my wife that I hope that, if you die before me, that's on my tombstone.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:55](#))

In many ways... Like George Washington Carver. His creative and work journey flowed through the brokenness of America's racial history. He began life as a slave and, even his later years when he had such professional accomplishment, it was not in full freedom. He was limited by some of the racial environment of the time. I know, in your work as a creative, that at times you've had to wrestle with what it means to be authentically you in a climate where maybe the white church expected you to fit a more narrow box or their vision of what your art should look like. I'm curious to know a little bit more about how you've navigated that tension of being a creative that reflects both the goodness and the shadows of life. What has it been like maintaining a sense of clarity of your own vision and stepping through some of those constraints that have been placed on you at times? I realize that's a million dollar question.

Sho Baraka: ([21:53](#))

Well, I wrote a book about this. It's called He Saw That It Was Good. I think chapter five is probably the chapter that reads best. Chapter four and chapter five for the most part is the chapter to read to answer that question and to steal some of the Cliff Notes from those chapters. I think the one thing the artist has to understand is that there is... One, Earth is a messy place. It's broken. I think, as I communicated earlier, the artist among many different people. We have this calling to reproduce healing. To try to figure out how do we reimagine redemption in this brokenness? And so no matter where you land, you're going to find brokenness. Racial injustice in America is far-reaching. It's deep. It's in our history. It's unavoidable. It's ubiquitous. However, I don't have... I can go any place and I will find a reason why humanity will hate one another. I can go to India and you find caste systems. You can go to Ireland and it's religion. You can go to South Africa and it's tribalism. You'll find hate wherever you will find a neighbor. And so the artist... The job of the artist is to figure how do we reimagine relationships through creativity?

Sho Baraka: ([23:34](#))



And so, for me, it's always been, well, if it's tension I find in the Black church, well, what's the common thread that we have that I can create from that I can get us to reimagine a better, more charitable society? If it's racial tension in the white church, well, what's the common interest that we have that I can paint... that I can paint a picture of God so where we can see that we can have a beautiful canvas and conversation that draws dignity in the difference? If it's a male-female tension within the artist relationship, well, where's the common interest? And so on and so forth. I think the moment you find yourself contented in saying, oh, I think there are no more tensions to resolve, you'll be hit with a rude awakening that will lead to some very deep, painful moments.

Sho Baraka: ([24:29](#))

I think I'm just... I've learned that I'll never get comfortable on this side of heaven because I know that we're broken people who are always trying to build our own kingdoms. As long as we're constantly trying to build our own kingdoms, that means there's always going to be culture wars. There's always going to be self-interests that find itself lording over people. There will always be preferences that lead over principle. And so, as an artist, I find myself really, really invested in social issues within my art and within my music.

Jeff Haanen: ([25:06](#))

Hi. This is Jeff Haanen, the founder of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. Thanks for listening to The Faith and Work Podcast and for letting me interrupt you briefly to share just a request. I want to ask you to consider becoming a financial contributor to Denver Institute. Each day, thousands of people listen to our podcast, engage our short courses, and grow spiritually as a result of generous donors like you. Each podcast episode is 100% funded by generous donors who believe that work is a way to love God, serve our neighbors, and demonstrate the gospel to our world. If you've enjoyed The Faith and Work Podcast, would you consider paying it forward by giving right now? You can give by visiting [difw.org/donate](http://difw.org/donate) or by visiting the show notes page from this episode. Whether it be \$50 a month, \$25 a month, or a gift of any amount, we are so grateful for your support. Again, you can give by visiting [difw.org/donate](http://difw.org/donate) or by checking out this episode's show notes. Thanks again for your generosity toward God's people and toward the mission of Denver Institute. And, now, back to The Faith and Work Podcast.

Joanna Meyer: ([26:12](#))

I want to read an amazing quote from the book. This will tempt people to buy it because it's a worthy read. You say, "We swing constantly between reverent and repentant. Between living in the big story of God's good image and in the many smaller, twisted stories that we've been told since Eden." I thought that was a gracious way of acknowledging how hard that is.

Sho Baraka: ([26:33](#))

[crosstalk 00:26:33]

Brian Gray: ([26:33](#))





Sho, I just heard you... I feel like I heard you being a bridge builder. I feel like John Inazu has this phrase that's captured a lot of us at Denver Institute. The vocation of translation. And so as you you talked about tensions, I heard you taking these smaller stories that we've been told since Eden and trying to hold those together in translation and bridge building and showing, not telling. No pun intended on that. Can you talk specifically about how... How has your faith informed your sense of, Sho, this is who you are? And how do you see that maybe being generalizable to the rest of us? Whatever moments of tension or bridge building or translation workers anywhere find themselves in. How is the gospel bidding us to do that kind of work?

Sho Baraka: ([27:42](#))

I think this is a really important question for me because I wrestle with this and I think there are a lot of people who are like me. Friends that I have who are wrestling with the same question. First of all, shout out to John Inazu because he's a very sharp man and I think he has some really wonderful things to say. The tension that I wrestle with... and even in the idea of reconciliation, bridge building, whatever language or proxies you want to use... is that I know, as a Christian, I don't have the luxury to forfeit... or to remove myself from being an agent of reconciliation. Because that's the job of a Christian.

Sho Baraka: ([28:21](#))

However, socially, I am oftentimes fatigued and I have zero desire to be a bridge builder or an agent of reconciliation. Because, one, I've found in American history that African Americans have always found themselves as the individuals that have to do the work of reconciling and creating... being the agent that feels like, all right, how do we get you guys to see the humanity in Black people? Two, in doing that, what often happens is you're so busy trying to convince somebody that you're worthy of dignity, of a job, of fill in the blank, that you don't get work done. This is part of the reason why I believe we find a lot of communities of color lacking in great enterprises. Whether that be educational enterprises. Whether that be economic enterprises. Because the lie that Black people have to feel like they have to be within white spaces in order to be successful and succeed. I think a lot of the dissonance... Well, there needs to be some dissonance. There has to be some discernment, better yet, in what it means to be a reconciler versus being someone who is consistently trying to seek approval and seek significance.

Sho Baraka: ([29:50](#))

And so, for me, to bring the question back... and I think this is what you were... For me, I think who I am has found a lot of comfort in being unapologetically Black, unapologetically Christian, and unapologetically offering those things to the world. If this can help you, which I know it can, then praise God. Because I no longer feel the need to have to read John Edwards. I no longer feel the need to have to, when I'm looking for information, go run to George Whitfield. The reason why I think Joanna mentioned that... One of you guys mentioned the Black individuals that I reference. I did that intentionally, but I also did that to normalize. I'm not trying to say Black author, Black this person, Black that... I'm just saying literary agent Toni Morrison. Scientist George Washington. I don't want to have to put those caveats before them to make them non-American. They're American just as much as the next



person. You know what I mean? Just as much as T.S. Eliot is American, Toni Morrison is American. Just as much as we... Mark Twain and... Zora Neale Hurston. That is me.

Sho Baraka: ([31:16](#))

So, when I talk, when I speak, when I present myself, I'm going to talk about my experience. Before, I tried to be very... I tried to be palatable to white evangelicalism because I felt like there was this edit that kept me conscious of my surroundings. Now, it's like, look. I am walking into this space. If you ask me to speak, I'm going to speak about the people I want to speak about. I'm going to talk about the experience and I'm going to address it in a way that I feel is godly but from my personal experience. We can talk afterwards whether or not you felt like it was fill in the blank and then I will walk off hopefully with a humble posture and evaluate what was communicated. And off to the next stop.

Sho Baraka: ([32:05](#))

And so that's kind of like... Because of that, I feel like... and just to extend this a little bit further. The reason why I think it's helpful is because I think American Christianity... maybe Western even, Western Christianity, Western European, but especially American Christianity... can do for an overhaul of its theological posture when it comes to this idea of justice. If you're going to reevaluate what does it mean to be a liberating faith... not just mentally liberating, but liberating in a holistic sense... you cannot avoid the Black Christian history in America. Because these are individuals who understood the epitome of liberation not only in the very spiritual sense as evangelicalism will talk about it... more recent days, not historical evangelicalism... but even the physical aspect of liberation. And not using your faith as a weapon to demoralize people. That is the faith that was adopted on the... before the plantation, on the plantation, after the plantation.

Brian Gray: ([33:21](#))

And has been lived out in the Black church traditionally.

Sho Baraka: ([33:25](#))

Yes. For the most part. Now, that's not to say that the Black church doesn't have its failing and it hasn't been oppressive, but it is the legacy of the Black church. Justice has always been tethered... There is no separating this idea of justice. Whether you want to call it social justice, you want to call it redemptive justice, whatever. I don't care. Marx didn't send them.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:54](#))

Justice is justice!

Sho Baraka: ([33:54](#))

Yeah. Karl Marx had nothing... He was not sending off the Frederick Douglasses. He was not sending off the Sojourner Truths. He wasn't sending off the [inaudible 00:34:03]. That was Jesus who said go forth and make disciples. You know what I'm saying?

Joanna Meyer: ([34:11](#))

Sho, I can just sense the weight that you carry in those conversations. I listened to a ton of podcast interviews and I read your book and just watched what you've been doing in the last couple years and I know that you live that every day. Figuring out how do you be plainspoken and pointed when needed and also [inaudible 00:34:28] that work of translation has got to be exhausting. I was thinking about a theme that you draw on. It's one of the anchoring themes of scripture. The idea of living as an exile. That we'll never completely feel at home in this world. I think, in this moment, that's especially critical for Christians of any political persuasion or ethnic background. Of figuring out how do we relate to our present times? Can you tell us a little bit more about what exile means and its implication for listeners' life and work?

Sho Baraka: ([35:03](#))

I literally just think of Moses. I think of Egypt. I think of people who were not built to be in Egypt. They were individuals who were forced there through unfortunate events and then, once there, taken advantage of. And having to understand how to make the best of a life in a place where they are foreigners. Where they don't belong. And so we that also in the life of David, Daniel, et cetera, et cetera. Even though the Hebrews weren't exiles, per se, in Exodus, they operated as a folk who didn't have a land. And so what I see myself and I see a lot of people... When we talk about Jeremiah 29 and the Lord saying build houses, marry, tend to your garden, and your flourishing will... the city also will flourish. Oftentimes, I think many people use that area of scripture and I'm just like, yo, I think that definitely applies to the Black experience. I'm not saying solely, but I think that applies greatly to the Black experience in America. People who were brought here and recognized there's probably no returning to Africa, so what do we do? And so as individuals who rest in this country, in this nation, understand you marry, you build gardens, you build homes, you live. Because in your blessings, the city will be blessed as well.

Sho Baraka: ([36:47](#))

The beautiful thing is that there are oftentimes when you're in the palace and you don't feel like you belong there, but yet and still, the Lord has given you power and influence and you should use that for the benefit and the blessing of other people. We see that with Daniel. We see that with Joseph. We see that with Esther. We see that with Moses. And, ultimately, we see that with Jesus. Jesus creates the palace. But he comes into it, he invades the space, and he gives his life for the benefit of humanity. I think that is the exemplary action of all individuals who call themselves Christian. No matter where you are... I don't care if you're Black, white, orange, whatever... you place yourself in a position of power and you use it for the benefit of other people.

Sho Baraka: ([37:32](#))

And so, for me, an exile... It has its subgenres, but at the end of the day, it's a Christian. Because you are in a world that is not necessarily... You exist in a space that is not for you... and I say that with air



quotes... but you are tasked to redeem and to reform and to reimagine it in a way that could be a blessing and more charitable for other people. I'll often talk about Eden as a far cry, where we'll never get back to perfection on this side of heaven. However, we do exist in the Garden of Gethsemane, where there is tension. There's a Garden of Eden and there's a Garden of Gethsemane. There's a garden of tension, pain, and turmoil, however, yet, Jesus still says, "Lord, I wish you could remove this cup, but I also understand that I have this task that I got to fulfill." And that's the garden we live in now. It's like, okay, there was once perfection. Now, we live in this garden of tension. I want this to pass, but I have a responsibility to participate in the redemption. And I may have to take myself to the cross in order for that to be accomplished. And so this is the job of every individual. We can talk about the subcultures that probably can identify a little more than other cultures, but that is what it means to be an exile.

Brian Gray: ([38:53](#))

Sho, I just need to tell you what just happened with me and just express gratitude. I've taught that passage. Jeremiah 29. It's so important to me for what it means for Christians today to represent faithful presence in a place. I have never thought about it through the lens of the Black experience. I mean, never. It just illustrates a couple of things I've already heard from you in this conversation in terms of how the Black innovators and historical figures that you allude to... Yes, they are Black in America, but they're Christian innovators. So, I just bring to that text... Listener, if you're not already aware, I'm a white guy who grew up in the suburbs. I bring the perspective that comes with that to Jeremiah 29. I've never thought about that text through the Black experience. The level of depth and richness that is added to that... Super important passage to me in the sense of what it means to be an exile. I just want to put an exclamation point behind that and say that's really important for me to listen to and that's important for all of us to listen to. I'm really grateful and I'm sorry for the fatigue that must come with having to add that layer of translation to the conversations you find yourself in.

Sho Baraka: ([40:32](#))

Well, thank you for the transparency. As much as... Just to talk a little bit about fatigue. There's a reality that, yes, and there have been moments when I'm like, I don't want to talk to another white person about my issues.

Brian Gray: ([40:48](#))

I mean, yeah.

Sho Baraka: ([40:49](#))

However, if I'm honest, I recognize... I am married to a woman. My daughter is 16. One of my best friends is a female. I recognize the more time I spend around them, I am learning how to be an advocate for women in a way that I probably wasn't... I don't know... 10 years ago. Because I am an honest observer, I am trying my best... The young lady who's like my best friend. We have a lot of business ventures together. Oftentimes, I find myself... I catch myself mansplaining more in meetings or taking charge when I'm like, you know what? She's just as capable. Let me just shut up. Now, there are other



dynamics. I'm older. More experienced. But even in that, it's like, I have to trust and give her opportunities because there's not going to be a... Oftentimes, there are excuses that we make for why we can't allow the diversity in the room to speak. You know what I mean? And so, in a similar sense, when I hear white people talk about, "I know it's got to be fatiguing," and I'm like, yeah, but honestly, how will people change unless they engage in a conversation? And so even when my Black brothers and sisters, Brown, Asian, whatever... I say, "Hey, look. I get it. Sometimes there's some stupid questions asked." Granted, I remember... "How do you get your hair... Can I touch your hair?" Like, no, don't touch my damn hair.

Joanna Meyer: ([42:41](#))

Thank goodness it's a podcast! I can't touch your hair, Sho.

Sho Baraka: ([42:45](#))

But there's also a sense... Like, I remember doing a musical in Winston Salem and then we had an after... I guess you could say get together with a lot of the people... some influencers in the city. Donors. Just the... Because the play was about the 1968 sanitation worker strike. Afterwards, seeing the tears and hearing the people cry and just engage with the cast and the writers afterwards. Part of me was like... First, I was like, look at these white tears. I can't even. Ugh. I can't do this right now. But then the more people got to talking, I was like, well, damn. If we wouldn't have done this, would they have been aware or alerted to the issue? You know what I mean? Whether or not they're sincere or not... that's not my place to judge... but the reality of it is that I know, even to this day, there's some great work being done in Winston Salem because of that play and because of that interaction. And that there are some people who made some confessions about their life that I'm like, man, that's interesting. And not being fatigued put me in a place to where we can create those conversations.

Sho Baraka: ([44:05](#))

Now, obviously, yes, people can read books. They can watch documentaries. They can do all that stuff because there's a lot of work that's been put into this thing. But sometimes human interaction is the best translation, as John Inazu I guess is talking about. There's something about a human interaction that a book can't do. There's something about a human interaction that the 13th documentary can't create. If everybody's fatigued, then there is no exchange that's going to happen. And so, for me, I get it. I even... You got to rest. You got to respite. You got to take care of yourself. But there's also this responsibility I have to not only be a continued learner but to be a continued teacher.

Joanna Meyer: ([44:48](#))

Thanks for the gift of that in the midst of the exhaustion. Thanks. Thanks for your time. Thanks for your service, your patience, your forbearance, your passion, and your gifts. It is truly a gift to our broader community to know you.



Sho Baraka: ([45:06](#))

Thank you very much. It was a pleasure being on.

Joanna Meyer: ([45:11](#))

What a mind and heart stretching conversation with Sho Baraka. Our conversation continued when we asked Sho to point us towards creative works that inspire him, which we are offering as a bonus track that accompanies this episode. Check out our show notes for links to Sho's book, albums, and his two new singles. Thanks for joining us today. Your enthusiasm and interest fuel important discussions like this one.

Joanna Meyer: ([45:36](#))

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