

# Chosen Family: Where Pride Meets Faith

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Happy Pride. My name is Antonio. I'm one of the co-directors of prayer and liturgy at the table, and I'm also on the preaching team.
- ! I'm a member of the Office, where I do a lot of legislative advocacy.
- And in this session, they actually had lawmakers file bills to ban gender-affirming care for adults. And a couple weeks ago in Austin, I had to testify against a proposed law seeking to ban gay-straight alliances in high schools in Texas.
- Our adversaries, invoking the name of our Jesus, seek to push us back into shame-filled closets. Today, I want to talk about how as a community of queer Christians and affirming Christian allies, we can confront this current moment by turning to Jesus.
- Jesus invites us to ground our beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity in identities that are more founded in what he has to say about us than what other people have told us.
- [ 1 : 25 ] I believe Jesus calls us to ground our sense of pride beyond humanistic assertions of dignity. Jesus beckons us to ground our identity in a pride who sources deeper than rebellion against transphobia and homophobia.
- For some of us, this will be a novel conversation. Many of us inhabit progressive spaces and can clearly articulate the beauty of our queer identities in a secular sense.
- And conversely, many of us can clearly articulate the ugliness of how the name of Jesus has been used to devalue our queer identities. As a church, through embracing our identities in Christ, we can combat current attempts to rob our communities of pride.
- We're even facing concerted efforts to force amnesia on our nation as to why we even celebrate pride. Thankfully, at our church, we remember.
- The true importance of pride is about being an opposing force to shame. A shame that was often fomented by churches. Like many Christians in this room, I am well acquainted with shame directed to queer folk.
- [ 2 : 48 ] I vividly remember when I was in law school, my stepmom passed away. At her funeral, her preacher was tasked with giving her eulogy. Instead of talking about her beautiful life and the ways in which she contributed to our community and our family, he actually went on a homophobic tangent about how God created Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve.
- Instead of pointing us to God in a moment of mourning, this person chose to use his platform to make queer people feel excluded. The use of Adam and Eve to shame queer people reminds me of the origin of shame in Genesis.
- In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve to dwell with him in uninterrupted communion. Unfortunately, in Genesis, we see the first example of shame because Adam and Eve disobeyed God.
- It reads, Immediately their eyes were opened, and they realized they were naked, vulnerable, and ashamed. So they sewed fig leaves together for coverings.

Then Adam and his wife heard the sound of God passing through the garden in the breeze of the day. So they hid among the trees, concealing themselves from the face of God.

[ 4 : 12 ] Then God called Adam's name and asked, Where are you? Adam answered, I heard your powerful presence in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked.

So I hid. Who told you that you were naked? God said. This story is so fascinating to me. Why would an all-knowing God ask Adam a question?

God knew where Adam was hiding. God also knew why Adam knew he was naked. I believe God's question served a different purpose. I believe it was a tool to reveal the lie of separation that shame had ushered in.

When I was a child, I remember hearing this story, and I imagined a tone of judgment in God's voice. Now I hear this question, and I hear a tone saturated in sadness, because his children are hiding.

Shame is dangerous, because as we see in Adam, it makes us break intimacy with God. It cuts us off from the wellspring of life through the lie of separation.

[ 5 : 21 ] Like Adam, shame makes us hide from God. Shame does not really say we are making mistakes. Shame says we are a mistake. Shame makes us avoid communion with a God who has always sought intimacy with us.

When God asked Adam, who told you that you were naked, it was not from a place of curiosity. Instead, God's question created a holy exposure, and the lie that false shame tried to put on Adam and Eve.

Even the act of asking a question revealed God's heart of persistent communication. Adam and Eve believed they needed to hide from God. And yet God's actions exposed that belief as a lie.

God invited Adam and Eve to hear his voice, to communicate with him, even when Adam and Eve believed the lie that they were unworthy of communication. Jesus makes a similar invitation to us.

Adam and Eve went from intimacy with the Lord to attempting self-imposed exile from the presence of God. But so many of us have been on similar journeys.

[ 6 : 36 ] Many of us grew up in Christian homes, learned about a God who loved us unconditionally. But moments of shame based on our queerness sent many of us into self-imposed exile.

We stopped praying. We stopped reading the Bible. We stopped worshiping. We believe we were far away from God. Yet, I hear the voice of Jesus asking his people, full of sadness and compassion, who told you that your sexual orientation would send you to hell?

Who told you that your gender identity was an abomination? Who told you that your sexuality was so far beyond redemption, you were resigned to celibacy?

Yet, like for Adam and Eve, God exposes our shame with questions in order to cover it. Indeed, in Genesis 3 and 21, we see God made garments from animal skins to clothe Adam and Eve.

Even though Adam and Eve brought shame onto themselves, God still lovingly covered his children. How much more will he cover the shame of queer folk? Shame put on us by people filled with ignorance, hate, and misunderstanding.

[ 7 : 54 ] Shame told Adam and Eve to hide from God. Shame whispers the same lie to so many queer people. However, God seeks to expose our shame, like he did for Adam and Eve, so he can lovingly pursue reconnection to us.

Practically speaking, how do we as queer people pursue reconnection to a God whose shame tells us to run away from? Fortunately, the key to our reconnection is a concept many queer people are already well acquainted with.

Chosen family. For those of us who are unfamiliar, a chosen family is made up of people who have intentionally chosen to embrace, nurture, love, and support each other, regardless of blood or marriage.

It is second nature for many queer communities to cultivate support systems to affirm us when our biological families or original communities have rejected us. In the midst of rejection by family members and society, many queer folk have attested to the lifeline that chosen family has served to them.

The reality that through Jesus, we are in God's chosen family can serve as a similar lifeline in the midst of a world who still rejects queer people. Shame causes us to feel isolated and alone.

[ 9 : 12 ] But luckily, in Psalm 68 and 1, Scripture says, God sets the lonely in families. He is our home. But how do we gain inclusion into the family of God?

The book of Romans provides some insight. In Romans, Paul gives us a revelation of how we can enter into the chosen family of God. And he writes, The mature children of God are those who are moved by the impulses of the Holy Spirit.

And you did not receive the spirit of religious duty, leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the spirit of full acceptance, enfolding you into the family of God.

And you will never feel orphaned. For as he rises up within us, our spirits join him in saying the words of tender affection. Beloved Father, for the Holy Spirit makes God's fatherhood real to us.

As he whispers into our innermost being, you are God's beloved child. Through the Holy Spirit, the spirit of adoption, queer Christians find a true pride based on being members of God's family.

[ 10 : 28 ] So many of us have felt like Adam and Eve in the garden, separated from God, or as Paul describes, orphans because of shame. Yet because of Jesus, we know shame is a liar.

We are spiritual sons, spiritual daughters, and spiritual children of God. We have a chosen family in God. We are enveloped by a spirit who has been pursuing reconnection with his children since he made garments for Adam and Eve in Eden.

A spirit who dispels lies which shame tries to tell us to separate from God. I hear the spirit of adoption declare, child, your sexual orientation reflects the image of God.

I hear the spirit of adoption proclaim, daughter, your gender identity is sacred and holy. I hear the spirit of adoption prophesy, son, your sexuality will bring glory to God.

A spirit who reminds us that because of Jesus, we are in God's chosen family forever, no matter what the world tells us. A spirit who reminds us that Jesus died for queer people, adopting us into his chosen family where there is no room for shame-filled lives.

[ 11 : 45 ] We are part of God's chosen family where he is the head, he approves of us, and he is proud of us. This revelation changes everything. At the table, we talk about being an LGBTQ affirming community.

However, we need to be frank. At this moment, we may never get affirmation from certain friends, certain family, or certain members of the body of Christ. And yet, if we hear the voice of Jesus, we have all the affirmation we need.

I think about when I was in high school. I got the same prophetic word multiple times within a few weeks from different people and in different places. The word promise, God said he would never leave you or forsake you.

Despite this promise, shame lied to me. Shame warned me that if I ever embraced my queerness, God would abandon me. The table has been the first affirming church I've attended.

And I can proudly say God has not forsaken me. I have heard his voice from queer preaches in this community. I have felt his pleasure as queer worship leaders ushered in his presence.

[ 13 : 00 ] God is still answering my prayers. God is still protecting me. God is still communing with me. His voice of acceptance roars loudly like many waters.

And ultimately, the voice of Christ, the pre-incarnate word made flesh, is the only voice which matters. My sexuality has not made me forfeit my place in the family of God.

If I belong, you also belong. It is this reality of chosen family, this spiritual heritage, that we can ground our sense of pride this June. Growing up in the black church, we would sing a song.

This joy that I have, the world didn't give it and the world can't take it away. When we ground our sexual orientations and gender identities in Christ and what he says about us, we can also sing, this pride that I have.

The world didn't give it and the world can't take it away. In this moment of tribulation for queer communities, Jesus calls us to cultivate a pride not based on our own strength and visions of self-worth.

[ 14 : 10 ] Lord, to survive this moment, we need a pride grounded about who we are in Christ and who God says we are. We are adopted.

We are beloved. We are covered. As Isaiah prophesied, for he has dressed me with salvation and wrapped me in the robe of his righteousness.

I appear like a bridegroom on his wedding day, decked out with a beautiful sash and like a radiant bride adorned with sparkling jewels. God is still in the business of covering us and freeing us from shame through inclusion in his family.

My prayer is that we as queer people who have been inundated with shame all of our lives attune our ears to the compassionate voice of Jesus for moments of holy exposure.

may we invite Jesus to ask us the hard questions. May we invite Jesus to ask us the unveiling questions. The questions which reveal the insufficiency of our small fig leaves.

[ 15 : 19 ] It is those questions which make room for the covering of the Lord. It is those questions which usher in the presence of the spirit of adoption. If we yield our shame we can have a pride rooted in the adornment and celebration of heaven over our lives.

Adam and Eve exchange their fig leaves for garments made from the hand of God himself. God is inviting us into a similar exchange. God is inviting us to trade our attempts at self-esteem and self-protection for acceptance and belonging that can only come from him.

It is a pride built on exposing and letting go of piecemeal coverings we were never meant to wear. It is a pride built on placing shame-filled garments at the feet of Jesus and letting him cover us in robes of salvation.

It is a pride grounded in our inclusion into the chosen family of God himself through the sacrifice of Jesus. Let us pray. Jesus, as we enter pride, help us see ourselves the way you see us.

We ask that you give us a revelation of our childhood in you, that we are sons and daughters and children of a loving dad. We pray that any spiritual orphans find their homes this month, that even as the church marches in pride and attends festivals, that we are ambassadors of your love, ambassadors of your grace, that you use this community to call the lost ones home, that you use this community to tell the outcasts you belong.

[17:10] May we be a community who ushers in belonging and a belonging that is built on a firm foundation on you. And God, as we celebrate our beautiful identities in the coming weeks, help us remember we are created in your image, that any other voice that says we are not made in your face and in your heart are lies.

in God, we ask that you give us a revelation that we are more loved than we can imagine, that every other voice of shame, of hate, of misunderstanding will be drowned out by your whispers of love, that your kindness will be our identities, that your love and grace will follow and pursue us all the days of our lives, and that we will see you one day and you will say I am proud of you, that you will repent of all the voices who tried to tell us we did not belong, that you will repent of all the people and communities who rejected us and said that we are not made in your image, that your voice will reign forever and it's through your sovereignty that we have a home.

In Jesus' name we pray. Thank you.