

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

### **Reclaiming Your True Identity, Part I**

**Stacey Sumereau**

*My name is Stacey Sumereau, and I'm so glad that you've joined me for today's talk. Let's begin with a prayer. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Father God, thank You for being with us. Thank You for coming to us. Lord, we call upon You to be our savior; to be the one who fills our hearts with the knowledge of who we are. Lord, we believe what You say of us. We believe that You are our God, and our Father, and our beloved. We invite You into our presence today. We ask all this through Your mother, and through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Today, I would like to start by doing something a little bit unusual. I want to sing for you. There's a song you may know by Lauren Daigle, it's called *You say*. "You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing, You say I am strong when I think I am weak. You say I am held when I am falling short, when I don't belong, oh You say I am Yours. And I believe, oh I believe what You say of me. I believe, yes I believe."

I love that song. I am very inspired by that song, and I want to use a particular line that Lauren shares in that song: "I believe what You say of me." I believe what You say of me. Now, beliefs are an interesting thing. We all believe a lot of things. I mean, I can name a ton of things that I believe: I believe Jesus Christ is Lord, I believe the Catholic Church is the one true church, I believe Chick-fil-A is the superior fast food restaurant in the world, I believe that Amazon Prime is the way to go if you want to get something fast without having to leave your house. So I can rattle off all of these things that I believe, but then we also have subconscious paradigms. We have a lot of things that we believe that we may not even necessarily know, or we may not question those beliefs. Here's an example: If your parents divorced when you were young, you may have trouble forming attachments later on and having lasting relationships, because a subconscious paradigm of yours may be that relationships don't work out, that they're not worth it. And it's those subconscious beliefs that I want to dig into today.

Here's how we find out what we actually believe underneath our conscious beliefs: We look at our actions. So, for example, if I say that I believe that Chick-fil-A is the best fast food restaurant, and yet every time one of my friends asks me "Hey, you want to go to Chick-fil-A today?" And I say "No, I think I'd rather have Wendy's." Do I really believe that? Another example is the way I live my life. If I say that Jesus Christ is my Lord and savior, if I believe that God really has things under control, and yet if I feel a lot of stress and frustration and a lack of control in

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

my own life, and that really bothers me, do I really believe that God has things under control? Do I really believe that He's my savior? So maybe just start out by taking a minute to look at where the stress and the frustration is in your life. Where is it that you need a savior this Christmas?

I want to take a look at some of those subconscious beliefs. Now, when I was a child, my belief, my paradigms aligned with reality and with truth. My parents told me that God loves me, that I'm His child, and I believed it, and I would play around in the Virginia clay and I had a wonderful childhood, and I hope that you did too. I have a friend whose name is Rosie, and her daughter's name is Eila, and her daughter, one day she was asking her "Eila, why did God make you?" And Eila said "Because He wants me to be a princess." And I say "Right on little girl." That little girl knows a thing or two about what's true.

And that was the story of my childhood as well, but when I got a little older I started to adopt paradigms and beliefs, because I was looking outside of myself. I think this happens to a lot of us. I started to look outside of myself - at my teachers, my peers, the people I admired - and I started to ask "What do you say of me?" And, without even realizing it, I started to believe what they said of me. Who are you looking to to tell you what you're worth? Who are you looking to to give you your validation? In this busy time of Advent, where we're preparing, and we're getting all of our Christmas presents ready, and we're going out and shopping, are we living as if God is in control? Are we living for the savior who's coming into the world, or are we asking "What do you say of me" in the wrong places? So I just encourage you to take this season to reflect, to make it a time of spiritual preparation, to examine these underlying paradigms.

In my own life, I often asked the mirror "What do you say of me?" When I was a teenager I started ballet, and I fell in love with it. I wanted to devote my life to being a Broadway performer. And so I would work so hard at my singing, my dancing, and my acting, and I'd stand in ballet class and I'd look at the girls on my right and my left and I'd see these tall, these beautiful swans who had been dancing since they were fetuses. And I was never going to have their bone structure, and I was never going to look the way that they did. But because I wasn't secure in my own self, and because I was asking the mirror "What do you say of me?" you can guess that the mirror told me things that I didn't want to hear.

And so I took all that anxiety right with me into college, where I started working with a theater company. Now, this theater company was the best in the area. It was renowned, and I wanted so badly to be cast in their shows. And the way that it worked was that you would show up at their training sessions for three hours a day, five days a week, and you would learn their techniques with no guarantee of

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

getting cast in the shows. Now, I had good training, good technique, and so I knew that I was one of the best dancers in the room, and yet I could tell they weren't looking at. But I was looking at them and saying "What do you say of me?" And finally, I went up to the choreographer and I said "What do you want to see from me in order to get cast in the shows this year?" And she said "You want me to be honest?" And I knew what was coming. And she said "You're bigger than all the other girls, and so I want to see how much weight you can lose in the next two weeks." Nothing like hearing that from someone you admire to make you even more insecure.

But I chose to believe what she said, that my self-worth was dependent on what I weighed. And so I followed her crazy diet and exercise plan, I power walked for two hours a day, and I came back to those training sessions 14 pounds lighter. Now, that's a pound a day that I lost, which is so unhealthy. I basically ate nothing but carrots, and apples, and granola bars, and a little yogurt here and there. And I finally had the body that I wanted, and I felt very powerful because I was getting lots of validation from that choreographer. Not only did she cast me in the shows, but she would also send the other girls to me to tell them what I had done to lose all the weight.

So I finally was happy because I finally had this body that I wanted, this body that aligned with the paradigms that I was operating out of. But you know what? It was a very high price to pay, because every morning I got on the scale and I asked "What do you say of me?" And the scale never told me that I was loved, or held, or wanted, or strong. The scale either told me that I got a pass for the day if I had lost weight or maintained the same weight, or it told me that I wasn't good enough, that no one was ever going to love me.

And so these self-destructive beliefs went on for years, this eating disorder that I had, and I pushed myself so hard. My career was going well, I was booking national tours, I was traveling around the country, but I never believed that I was good enough through all of that. And so if that's you right now, if you are struggling with the belief that you are good enough, that you are wanted, that you are lovable as you are, I just want to speak a little truth into that place, and I want to tell you that you are the Imago Dei. You are the image of God.

Now, we've all heard that since we were children probably, I hope, that you are made in the image and likeness of God. And we hear "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world." But what does that really actually mean? Now, I was getting ready for this talk today, I was putting many minutes of effort into the makeup and the hair that you currently see in front of you, and as I was doing my makeup I was asking myself "What do I really want?" I just took a step

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

back from all the theology and I just said “Stacy, what is it that you are really seeking? What is it that you want?”

And my heart came back in an instant and just spoke out of a very deep and true place and it said “I want to be effortlessly beautiful without having to cling, or grasp, or beg. I want to be attractive, and not just to potential lovers, but also to just friends.” Now, I should also make the disclaimer I’m married, so I shouldn’t just want to be attractive in a sexual way, but also just to be attractive in my soul. I want people to want to be with me, I want people to want to be in relationship with me.

And so, as my heart spoke those words, all of the theology and the tradition that I believe in came right back around and hit me in the brain, and it said “Stacey, you are those things.” Because, with no effort of my own, I am made in the image and likeness of God. Through no effort of my own, I am made in the image of love, and beauty, and goodness, and self. Being a parent has also taught me so much about my relationship with God, and about how He is my Father. When I held my little baby, my first little baby in my arms, I knew that I was going to do whatever it took for him to know how beautiful and how good he is. And the same thing with my daughter. I want her to grow up, I want both of them to flourish, to live with the knowledge that they are so loved and that they are so good.

Now, sometimes my children - they’re two and one years old - they crack eggs on the floor and they just, you know, run around and mess up my house. That’s my daily life. But when they do things that displease me, I don’t want them to walk around thinking that they’re not good anymore. After we’ve had our moment of little discipline and justice, and then they’ve done their time in timeout or whatever it is, I wouldn’t want them to walk around the rest of the day thinking “I’m not good anymore,” because what I want to do as their mother is I want to take them out to parks, I want to take them to the Discovery Museum and all these fun places, and I want them to enjoy, and grow, and flourish, and run around and be children. And if they were crying because they couldn’t get their mind off of how they had cracked an egg on the floor and displeased mommy 15 minutes ago, that would make me unhappy. That’s not what I want for them, and that’s not what God wants for you either. God doesn’t want you to think of yourself as the sum of your failures, or as the sum of the things that you have done wrong, because that’s not how He sees you at all.

Now, in Romans chapter eight, we also hear that we are not only children of God and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, but we are adopted and chosen children of God. So we need to live in this courage, in this knowledge that God has picked us out of the crowd. Not only has He created us, He’s also chosen us through the

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2019 - Transcript

waters of baptism. And we need to have the courage to reject what the world is saying of us, and to take our eyes off of that, and to ask God “What do You say of me? Who do You say that I am?” Because I guarantee that He wants you to know it. He wants you to know what being the Imago Dei is, and there’s no better time than starting right now.

I want to close with a little story. I took my children to a public playroom. We used to live in upstate New York, where it was very cold, so there were all of these wonderful resources, including this public playroom where we used to go. And besides families like ours, there also were broken families who brought their children there, and they were there because a judge had ruled that the parents, one of the parents, was not allowed to see their children alone, and so they were only allowed to meet up in this public place. And there was one little girl there who lived on our street with her mother, and at the same time we were at this playroom her father was there. Now, this is the first time I’d seen her interacting with her father. He was only allowed to see her for a few hours every week.

And while they were there, you could tell that this big six-foot-five man was just adoring this little four-year-old. And they were running around together, they were playing basketball, and jumping up and down, and he couldn’t take his eyes off of her. And at one point this little girl said “Daddy, what do you want?” And he leaned down to her and he said “I want to see you every day of my life, because I love you.” And that is what God is saying to you right now. “I want to see you every day of My life, because I love you.” So please don’t be afraid to go into those deep-seated beliefs that you have, to hold them up to Him and say “Father God, what do You think of this?”

In the next talk, I’m very excited to share with you... to build on what we’ve talked about, and to share with you my own healing and recovering journey from my false beliefs about myself, and also to equip you with strategies to win this battle for self-worth. So let’s close today in prayer. *Father God, we love You, we trust in You, we invite You into our hearts. Lord, please show us Your love for us. Please help all of those today who are struggling to know who they are. Please speak into any stress, any frustration, any self-doubt that we have. We want You to be our savior. We thank You so much for coming to us at Christmas, and we entrust ourselves to You fully. Amen.*

God bless you today and always.