*Theology &*  
Episode 3: Theology, Race & the Church

**Jeff Liou:** Hey, Emily.

**Emily Hill:** Hey Jeff, how are you doing?

**Jeff Liou:** Okay. How was your week?

**Emily Hill:** It was pretty good. I had a fun, relaxing weekend. So that was nice. How was yours?

**Jeff Liou:** Pretty good. I mean, one of the highlights of the week as always was being able to have this conversation about race and the church with two very exciting guests.

**Emily Hill:** Yes, this was a great conversation. We talked to Dr. Korie Little Edwards. She is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Ohio State University, and she is the author of several books. Including *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race and Interracial Churches* and the forthcoming *Smart Suits, Tattered Boots: Black Ministers and Mobilization in the 21st Century* coauthored with Michelle Oyakawa.

**Jeff Liou:** Very excited for that to come out. We also had Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, who is the Robert Monger Professor of Evangelism at Fuller Theological Seminary, where I got my degree. He's ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church and the author of numerous award-winning books, including. *Prophetic Lament*, which is published by InterVarsity Press and the subtitle there is *A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*. He also wrote the book, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing The Church From Western Cultural Captivity*, which is going to become a Seminary Now course. And if you don't know what seminary now is, it is a ministry or subscription-based streaming video platform hosted by InterVarsity Press and partnered with Northern Seminary that delivers exclusive biblical, theological and practical ministry training from a diverse group of leading educators and thought leaders. So, seminary level courses are available to you now for a very low subscription based fee, which I'm excited about.

But Emily, back to our conversation with Dr. Korie Little Edwards and Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, what did you appreciate about the conversation we had?

**Emily Hill:** There was so many great things to think about, and I was really moved by their passion and their calling for their specific work and especially their particular plea for the church to listen to the specific callings and the gifts that people have. I mean, there's, there's a lot of debate about specialized knowledge and listening to that in the church. And they just had a really great call that God has given people unique and special gifts to listen to, and that we need to listen to them for the sake of the church. And so I was appreciative and moved by that. What about you?

**Jeff Liou:** Same, I mean, the way that they do their work for the sake of the church is really impressive. I think another moment in the conversation that we had was when Dr. Little Edwards talked about the legacy of God's faithfulness to, and through the Black church. The Black churches, distinct awareness of ways forward through racial injustice. So that those of us who are thinking about it now would do well to not just learn from, but submit to folks who have lived through justice work in the last few decades. Dr. Rah was talking about having a mentor or having significant influences. That was an interesting moment in the conversation that I'm excited for our listeners to hear. So now we present to you a conversation with Dr. Korie Little Edwards and Dr. Soong-Chan Rah.

Well, welcome everybody. It's good to be with you. I'm here with Dr. Korie Little Edwards from the Ohio State University and Dr. Soong-Chan Rah at Fuller Seminary, friends and colleagues of mine. My name is Jeff Liou, and I'm here with my cohost Emily Hill. And we're excited to have this conversation about race and the church. We have a sociologist and a professor of evangelism here with us. And so we want to start off like we do every episode and ask this two part question and get you both to answer. If you were at a dinner party and someone came up to you and asked, "what do you do?" How do you describe it to them? But also how do you explain to them why you love what you do?

Korie, could we start with you? If you were at a dinner party, how would you explain to somebody what you do and why you love it?

**Korie Little Edwards:** Oh, at a dinner party, I like that I like the vibe of that-- being at a dinner party. It puts me in a certain kind of, I don't know, mood here. Let me think. Well, I think what I would say is I do research on race and the church. I do that because I really believe that it's really important for us as the body of Christ to understand how race impacts what we do and how we do it. I mean, if we don't understand that, how are we going to reach people for Christ? So I really am really passionate about it and committed to it. I actually didn't use to be a sociologist, I used to be an engineer. So I actually changed my career to pursue this really, because I felt that in my spirit to do. It was a littlebit scary actually, you know how it is when you're stepping out in faith, but I did, But yeah, that's, that's what I would say. I would say I took, I took a leap and I changed careers because I really think it's important. I'm really passionate about it.

**Jeff Liou:** Awesome. Soong-Chan, can we hear from you, too?

**Soong-Chan Rah:** Sure. Well, it's been about two years since I've actually been to a dinner party. So this would be great to go to a dinner party and talk to human beings. So the first thing I would do is take a sip of wine and see what their faces are. If they say, "Hey, why are you drinking wine?" Then my answer will be, my job is to love the church and do good for them. But if they see me take a sip of wine and say, "Hey, can I have some also?" Then I would say, my job is to critique the church and talk about all the problems of the church. So I look at that as both/ and rather than either/ or. My job as a, as a professor and as someone who teaches at a seminary, as someone who has been a pastor as well, is to love the church and look for the good, but also critique the church and look for the places of pain and suffering. And how do we do that well? Look for the places where we need to examine the difficult places where the church has been and say, Hey, we've got to, we've got to work on this, but also say, Hey, what's the good to the church can do? So that's the way I kind of look at my role as a seminary professor, the good and the bad, the challenges and the opportunities of thechurch.

**Korie Little Edwards:** And also like to add something. Thank you so much,uh, Soong-Chan for that, because I actually, now that you talked about the sip of wine, that actually kind of again, added to my whole imaginary, is it white? Is it a little bit? And I have to say this as well-- I think that for me, building knowledge is very critical for the body of Christ. I think I really actually, you know, there's a scripture in Proverbs that says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. And to me, I think that as being a scholar and a producer of knowledge is a real calling, but just producing knowledge, that's based upon rigorous research is really important for all organizations, but particularly for the body of Christ. So I feel very committed to that and hope that it can be something that's helpful and applicable for practioners.

**Emily Hill:** Korie, I'd love to ask you to draw out a little bit more specifically about sociology. Why you think we need sociology to kind of do this work for the church, how that shapes your research of race in the church and what role sociology plays there.

**Korie Little Edwards:** That's a great question. You know, I, it's interesting. I don't think people realize how much God speaks to us as groups in the Bible. But often in, particularly in a Westernized religion or Christianity, it gets very boiled down to the individual. But often God speaks to us as a group. "Oh, Israel, listen," speaking to, even when you think of the Lord's prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven." We translate it in our minds as my Father, but the prayer is our Father.

We, when, when God talks to us, he talks to us as the body of Christ. And so what sociology is, it's the study of groups, it's why do groups do what they do? Why does, how does systems develop? And how do they impact how we experience life? And so I joke, but I actually do believe this, I say that "God is a sociologist." And so, you know, for us to really understand us as a body, we have to do sociology. We absolutely have to look at it through a sociological lens. We would be missing even, even how God sees us, actually, if we don't recognize ourselves as a we, and not as a me.

**Jeff Liou:** I'd like to follow up on that and have question for both of you here, because there is, I'm sure you're aware some skepticism about the kind of technical expert knowledge, including sociology, but also theology. Skepticism about the technical expert knowledge that comes to us on topics like race. And maybe somebody would ask, like, why do we need this academic expert level reflection on something so "simple" or that the Bible is "clear" about? So how would either of you talk about that kind of both of you are experts. So what's the worthwhileness of the expertise?

**Soong-Chan Rah:** Well, I'll say, first of all, for my perspective, Dr. Little Edwards' work in sociology is just unbelievable. I'm not a sociologist. I like to pretend I am every once in awhile. And so I appreciate those who do the really hard work and rigor to help us to understand the world a little bit better. Help us to understand who God is a little bit better to answer your question directly, Jeff, it's, it's very disheartening and it's actually very problematic when God has gifted certain people-- and I believe he has -- God has gifted certain people with certain gifts and certain capacities, and let's blunt, certain opportunities to do the study, the learning. And I look at my work, not for myself. I don't need to advance as what professor or what this, what I really want to do is serve the church. And some are gifted as pastors and preachers. And you know, their, their gifting is a gift to the church. Some are gifted as administrators and the way they lead organizations, that's a gift to the church and I hope that these folks who have these gifts are working in strengthening these gifts that someone who's leading an organization, maybe who does go out and get an MBA so that they can lead organizations better, or someone who is pastoring a church does go out and get education on counseling, on preaching, on communication skills so that they can be the part of the church better.

And it's the same way for Dr. Little Edwards and myself. We have been called to be the, I like to use the phrase for my DMin students, were doctors of the church. We help diagnose, like any doctors do. We help diagnose what people are, are in pain about what the church is suffering from. We look for ways to minister and care for, and, and, and think through how we treat that diagnosis. The doctors that have been kind of set aside for spiritual and intellectual care of the church-- let's honor that work.

Like I said, there are many people with different gifts. That's what the Bible actually says. There are people with different gifts in the body of Christ. Dr. Little Edwards myself and other academics, we've been called to exercise a particular gift, the gift of education, the gift of opportunity, to study, the gift of opportunity to write. And that's a gift to the church. Now we can't abuse it. It's true. And we can misuse it. But at the end of the day, the office or the role itself is not to be questioned. It's sometimes individuals there might abuse that office, but it really is the office of Bishop, the office of pastor, the office of professor. These are really important, critical roles in the church to help and serve the church. And I hope that's what we're doing in the work that we're doing.

**Korie Little Edwards:** Yeah. Thank you so much, Dr. Rah all for all, for all you said. Thank you so much for your affirmation. I appreciate that. I'm such a big fan of yours and your work. So just being on this together is super exciting. I, you know, I have to say this and I thank you so much for even bringing up that analogy about, in a sense, being a doctor of a church, because again, you know, there's a, there can be a sense of resistance to knowledge. But I tell you that if you read Proverbs, Proverbs is all about getting knowledge, getting wisdom. Don't be afraid of wisdom. Don't be afraid of knowledge. God is a God of, of wonder. God is big. And I think that this resistance to not knowing it could be akin to not being willing to go to the doctor when you know something's not quite right. And you just don't want to go too late. And if you've heard a diagnosis, it's not a good idea to ignore that diagnosis.

Now, sometimes it's painful to do and go through the treatment. Oftentimes treatment can be quite uncomfortable at at least it could be annoying, you know, sometimes. Really. But, but it's helpful. It's there to be helpful. And I, again, with my brother here, I am committed to the helping the body of Christ. I want us to live out the love of God, the freedom of God, the grace of God, as fully as we can, to all humans, as Jesus intends. And that's my hope and prayer. And when, so when we talk about race, I said, well, we have to talk about that. We have to talk about that because it has done it is, it is so damaging and it has been so damaging to the body of Christ, to humans, to all humans. Uh, particularly in the U S context. Well, actually it's globally, but we're going to talk about actually it's global. Yeah. We focus here on, on the U S context.

**Emily Hill:** Yeah. Thank you so much for all of that. And that's really one thing we, we really want to try to bring out on this podcast is just the importance of what academics have to offer to the church and bringing out their research and in all different things.

Dr. Little Edwards we'd love to hear about your, your research on the Religious Leadership and Diversity Project. And I know there's just so many things that you've drawn out. If you could talk a little bit about that and maybe some of the key things that you have learned from that.

**Korie Little Edwards:** Well, I was so delighted to be able to do this. This research project is funded by the Lilly Endowment and I was able to do a really comprehensive study. First time really is the first study ever conducted on pastors of multi-racial churches. One of the things that I took away from this project is that doing this work is very hard on pastors. And I, I can't stress that enough. And what I took, another thing I took away from this, from this study is that there's a big deal of division in the body of Christ. So along the lines of religious affiliation and denomination, but after having an opportunity to sit down face to face with these pastors and priests of all the different backgrounds that I just shared with you, all, I learned that we have far, far more in common than we have that's different. And wouldn't it be so beautiful if we could let that other stuff just go? I would love for pastors of across the line, so to speak, to get in rooms far more often and share their stories of pastoring in particularly those who are pastoring congregations with people of color in them and ones that are diverse, across the board experiencing similar kinds of challenges and difficulties.

Uh, so let me talk about some really specific findings that we, that we came to. One of the things that we found actually is that while it's hard for all pastors to have multi-racial churches, it really is difficult for a variety of reasons. Religion itself is quite raced in America. That is to say people all come to this space with ideas about how religion is supposed to be and those are really birthed within ethno racial experiences with religion. Growing up in the Black church, growing up in a Korean church, growing up in a Chinese church, growing up in an Anglo church, done very differently, different political ideas, different ideas about social action and different ideas about theology, music. Almost everything people come together and the pastors are trying to make this work. I mean, you talk about just really stressful. It can be very stressful.

But, but nevertheless, what I found is that for pastors of color, there's an added difficulty of heading these churches because of two things. Number one, they are a part of the often are a part of denominations or affiliations embedded in those that are predominantly white. And so they are not well supported and connected by the broader body that they're a part of. And then number two, because of race and how race works in America. And one of the ways it does that is it privileges certain people and I'll be clear privileges, white people, and more specifically privileges white men. So that they actually tend to have greater entree. So when pastors are making, wanting to get resources and funding from denominations, or even individuals who have a lot of money, when they want to make connections to other organizations in the city, for example, they, because of their ties that are already there, or because they're just perceived as already being legitimate leaders because they're white men it gets a little easier for them. Actually, it's a lot easier for them. And so we find that pastors of color have the added challenge of not being, one, perceived as legitimate leaders. And this is across race, ethno- racial background. I'm talking about this with Asian, and Black, and Latino pastors, and they also have less success in getting the kind of resources that need, they need to support their congregation.

And again, this is really important because denominations do not set aside resources. And by that, I mean, financial resources and mentoring resources, educational resources, specifically for pastors who are heading multi-racial churches. And even, even if we go beyond that, not, not for pastors of color who are heading multi-racial churches. There's a lot of discussion about it, there's a lot of lip service to it at the denominational level, at the religious affiliation level, but there are actually practical, tangible resources for them. So those are some of the findings I could go into greater detail, but those are some of the findings from the Religious Leadership and Diversity Project that I'd like to highlight.

**Soong-Chan Rah:** I really resonate personally with what Dr. Little Edwards just saying, because that was exactly my experience. Back in 1996, 25 years ago, I planted a multi-ethnic church in Boston, Cambridge. And at that time we were one of maybe two, maybe three intentionally multi-ethnic churches. And you got to remember the time period, now. Twenty-five years ago nobody was talking about multi-ethnic churches or racial reconciled churches. Everybody was talking about the homogenous unit principle, very kind of sociological concept, but kind of misused by the church. The whole idea of churches will grow if you have people that are like you. So have Saddleback Sam, I don't know what the name actually was, who wears the khaki pants and plays golf on weekends and has a cell phone and, and, you know, uh, a polo shirt. And that's your target. And of course it's a white person, middle-class 45 years old living in Orange County. Yes, you're going to grow your church, but at what cost?

And so when we started the church back in 1996, it was, it was a handful. It was literally a handful all across the United States who would identify as intentional multi-ethnic churches. So the resources just weren't there. So I'm so thankful for Dr. Little Edwards. So many other sociologists, theologians, ministry folks who are trying to kind of backtrack and work through a lot of this that for example, for myself, I lived through it and I suffered through it and remembering like, like you're describing the, the loneliness of being the one or two multi- ethic, church pastors that are out there. Now, there are more, which is fantastic, but 25 years ago, we were far and few in between.

And it wasn't talked about the way it is being talked about now. So to add resources to that is a, is a, is a very profound need. I will say that for me personally, I couldn't find others who were planting multiethnic churches. But what I did find was support, not from the majority culture churches in Cambridge, Boston, but I really found support from the African-American churches in Boston. This was something that shaped me as a pastor, as a theologian, as a professor. That when I reached out to African-American pastors, even though they didn't maybe quite get what I was doing, a multi-ethnic church in an urban neighborhood, they were there alongside, and their context was different. They're the inner city neighborhood, they're in the Black community, they're trying to serve the Black community. I'm trying to serve a more diverse community, a younger community. But the willingness to kind of come alongside and mentor and support, even though our circumstances are different, that was life-changing. To have these mentors across cultures, leadership, learning leadership, hands-on from these individuals who really, maybe might not have gotten exactly what I was doing, but were very supportive and spiritually kind of walking along side.

**Jeff Liou:** I just have to note that Dr. Rah, you are working to create some of these resources for the training of future congregation leaders. And I'd love to get you to describe some of that. I know that you're working on things including, but not limited to theological imagination. And that, as you've already mentioned, you're using insights from sociology to think about evangelism and what congregations need to be doing. Can you talk about the kinds of resources that you're trying to create or that you think that we need?

**Soong-Chan Rah:** Yeah. One of my struggles in the academy has been I really have a tough time fitting into build or academic, institution, mainly because I could, I could realistically really enjoy being part of SSR, uh, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion that Dr. Edwards has, has led in the past. And so that's one of the things that I've enjoyed what my kind of reaches research interest has been. It hasn't been so much an academic discipline, sociology, history, theology, ethics, biblical studies. It's kind of encompassed all of those, but my research area has been, how do we do the, make the church do better? How do we see the church do well around evangelism, around our witness, to the world? And things how the church can embody the principles of scripture, like a diverse community, like a community that exhibits justice? So that's been kind of my heart's pride to say, I want to engage as many different academic disciplines as possible.

So one of my first works, *The Next Evangelicalism* was really trying to do a social, historical cultural engagement around what is the reality right now? So, you know, I'm not a trained classical sociologist but I understand enough of the terms and say, Hey, this is, this stuff is good. We've got to, we've got to pick up on this. And one of the things I talked about 12 years ago was this changing face of American society and how that was actually happening faster in the American church. So this kind of browning of America, as you might call it, or the diversity that you're seeing in American society. That's been going on for, for decades now, the church just didn't know it was going on and church didn't recognize it.

But in, in the world out there, in your public school, in your local neighborhood, this diversity was happening all over the place. And we needed that sociological research. We needed those to look into the census data. We needed those who are going to look at the trends and patterns of churches, sociologists who know how to crunch those. And so that's been some of my work to take some of this data that's out there and say, Hey, we've got to take this into account.

I did some work on Lamentations, which again, I'm not a biblical scholar, but I recognize as a pastor that if we don't preach this well, and from the scriptures, we're not going to get a hearing from many places. And especially from our congregation. And so I wanted it to look at a book of the Bible, Lamentations to say, what does the Bible have to say about justice, reconciliation, racial conflict, about pain and suffering in the world and how we as a church respond to that? So I've really had the freedom and the graciousness to be able to, from others, to be able to kind of look at the general topic of ecclesiology, how can the church do well in places like witness, evangelism, as well as justice, reconciliation, and then look at it from very different disciplines.

My current work right now, I'm actually doing from the perspective of history. And I'm looking at the history of the Black evangelical movement in the 1960s and seventies, and doing a deep dive into folks like Tom Skinner and John Perkins and Bill Bentley and Ruth Bentley. These are incredibly important historical figures over the last 50, 60 years that get no publicity or no reflection whatsoever. So I want to look at how they were contributing to racial justice 50, 60 years ago and the lessons we can learn. So it's again, looking at ecclesiology, looking at how the church can do better, but now this is more from a historical lens.

**Jeff Liou:** I'm seeing a lot of overlap here, just referencing the browning of the church and the importance of Black church imagination for contemporary like America, society- wide church life. I see a lot of overlap between both of your bodies of work. And I'm wondering if I can get, maybe you first Dr. Little Edwards to help us understand. When sociologists are making comments about the browning of America, they're really pointing at the future, and there's gotta be some implications for both what we think and what we do based off of what sociologists and others are observing. And pastors can see this in their churches as well. Our little church preschool at the church where we attend browned really fast. I mean, it was majority non-white and the implications of that are huge, but can you both talk about how to pivot from what we observe, the knowledge that we gain from your disciplines and life in the church, or where things are headed? Can you help us with that?

**Korie Little Edwards:** Yeah, I mean, I think that one issue is the extent to which really what was already brought up is that to what extent would people hear? And I really think that one thing I've had to, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this Dr. Rah is you have to be satisfied with saying it and sometimes people not hearing it. And so I think that yes, the U S is changing and it has changed and it will continue to change as it relates to the demographics in this country. And it will have an impact on the church. We know that people who are coming as Dr. Rah mentioned, many people that are coming are coming or Christians of color coming to this country. If you want to be the body of Christ, then we're going, we do want to change how we go about doing church life and religious life if we want to be as strong as we want to be and as we need to do.

But again, it really has to do with whether or not people are going to be willing to take the diagnosis. And this is one of those points is that it's changing, it's changing. And what do you want to do about it? And my hope is that people will pay attention. My hope is that people will pay attention because actually you can still maintain, we don't want to get, and this is true of other institutions, as well. Is we don't want to think that because the United States is becoming increasingly diverse that somehow white supremacy will go away. That in fact, it could be, and maybe there are signals of it that as there's a one approach, one direction is as the country becomes increasingly diverse overtness of white supremacy may increase. And the reproduction of it might speed up. That is to say institutions and people who are in charge of institutions or in positions of power may be more inclined to reinforce it, to protect how things are already being done. That's one way. And the other way to go is, let's be the body of, let's be what Christ would want us to be, which is to be gracious, and loving, and open, and connected, and in community and mutual, and all those things that God calls us to be. But there are, there are very real options out there and there's a choice that has to be made.

**Soong-Chan Rah:** Yeah. So anytime there's kind of major structural institutional change, there's several different options. But two that I would point out. One is when the change occurs there are those who adapt to right. They say, the demographics are changing or here's a different example, just kind of a move from the race issue for a minute-- our young people want contemporary worship. Remember that back in the day, the worship wars? And so when change occurs, there are those who adapt to it and say, okay, our young people want contemporary worship, let's go ahead and adapt to that and have a contemporary worship. But the other side of that are those who say, no, we're going to double down on the way it's been, and it will always be this way. And we will strengthen the old ways of doing it and never back away from it.

So these are kind of, not extreme positions, but two very clear positions that many have opted towards. There are changes in the demographics of American society and in the church and there are those who are trying to adapt. Maybe we need to train our pastors better to do multi-ethnic ministry. Maybe we need to develop cultural competency skills. Maybe we need to develop deeper theological reflection on diversity and the image of God and Revelation 7:9. So there are those who are trying to adapt to this change, but as Dr. Little Edwards pointed out, there is always going to be a group that's going to double down on the way things have always been.

And the sad reality is if you look at the nation's history, It has been dominated by a assumption of white supremacy, white superiority, white centeredness, white primacy. I don't really care what the language is at this point. Let's just acknowledge that there has been a thread throughout American church history and imagination. A narrative that has existed that clearly demonstrates that white, Anglo or European Americans were the center of the story in American life, in so many different ways. So when the demographics change, the narrative has to adapt to that.

**Jeff Liou:** I'm hearing in your descriptions of the two options, adapt to the changes we know are there versus reproduce the old stuff that has funded us up to this point. I hear some real judiciousness in describing what these options are, and then also kind of narrating the problematics of reproduction. At the risk of overextending a little bit, can I ask you to be a little more prescriptive? Um, is there something that you would want to say that you would prescribe? Both of you are church folk. You're not just studying a cadaver, you're a part of the living body of Christ. And can you be more prescriptive about, are there any "oughts" or "musts" and how do you, how do you decide what those are? I mean, is it from your discipline or we'd just love to see you on display for us. Are there scriptures that you go to or pieces of your discipline that informed what we ought to do as the church in north America?

Maybe you could start with Dr. Little Edwards.

**Korie Little Edwards:** I think that we have to recognize some, this is something I have said in, in other contexts and we don't always like to say, but God is, God is clear on issues of, of justice. God is clear on issues of being with those who are oppressed, God is clear about looking out for the needy, excluded. God does not take kindly to things, to behaviors, and to attitudes that that are contrary to that. And I don't think we want to notice that God does get to a point where God says "I'm done. That's it." And what I mean by that? And I don't know, I'm not saying that I know what God will do. I have absolutely no idea, but what I do know is that God's work will continue regardless of whether you double down or not. That is to say the kingdom of God will go on. I think that with. What I have come to understand about my God is that God does make a way out of no way, that God is the one that's in charge. That God is the one that is supreme. And while one, one, or group can continue to reinforce white supremacy stand for white supremacy, contradict knowledge that goes against it, at the end of the day, God is still going to do what God's going to do. And the kingdom is going to continue to go on and to move on. And so I say at some point the "ought" is, there's a moment for being gracious and waiting, and then there's a moment for moving on. And I don't mean that in a way of saying I don't care about my brothers and sisters

I just mean that. What we have to do for the kingdom of God we have to continue to do. We have to stay. We have to move forward. We have to, we don't have a choice, but to preach the gospel, we just don't have a choice. You see? So that's my "ought" if there is an "ought."

**Jeff Liou:** I receive that. Thank you.

**Soong-Chan Rah:** I look at it from kind of two, maybe a biblical frameworks. The first is the theology of the image of God. And if you look at Genesis, you'll find that in the image of God, as Dr. Little Edwards pointed out earlier, the image of God is social. It's not hyper individualistic. We serve a Triune God, and we believe in the, in this really complex, but beautiful idea of the Trinity, which means God is not a singular, hyper individualized being. It's a being in community. And if we're truly made in the image of God, that should be a part of who we are. We were built and made for community not to just have this hyper individualized faith where it's just me and Jesus and that's the extent of my, my life, which is oftentimes kind of a sadly, a Western evangelical idea of what Christianity is. This hyper individualized it's me and Jesus all the way to heaven. So the to go deeper into our theology of the image of God requires, the doctrine of the image of God, requires that we are dependent upon one another. We need each other and so for a person to say in the body phrase, I don't need the hand, I don't need the foot because you know, the foot is more educated than the hand that doesn't make sense or to say, I don't need the hand because I'm a foot because the hand is of a different race than I am.

What if the hand's children marry the children of the foot, you know, Hey, that's going to be a problematic thing for people in the church to have all these different things happening in the church. So there are all these human reasons why we shouldn't be one. There are all these human reasons why we shouldn't be together. But the scripture seems to indicate that's the, "what" we were built for-- to be in community, just like who, who our God is the Triune God. We were built for that kind of community.

And so to deny the stories of others, feels like a heresy. To say, I don't want to hear the stories of the Black community. I don't want my children to learn that. That's a heresy. I'm sorry to, to not be told that black lives matter. That's a heresy because the, the, the Bible actually says clearly black lives matter. And if you're opposing that statement, you're opposing the words of God. And so to not hear and to ignore the stories of others, doesn't feel like a, like a social problem to me or an academic problem. It feels like a theological problem. You are legitimately, intentionally denying who God is by saying, I don't need to hear the stories of my African-American brothers. I don't need to hear the stories of my native American brothers and sisters, because that's not important to me as an individual. That's a heresy and that's an I'll call it out as that.

So we ought to engage these narratives and stories of others. And I've often said one of the best ways to do that is to not necessarily make that one blackfriend. Which, you know, we've been trying to do for 70 years now, make your a one black friend. My challenge has usually been, if you want to really hear the story of others, you ought to, and you need to have mentors of a different race from you. And this is,. I find this over and over again. When I go to a pastors conference and it's a mixed. I asked the people of color in the audience. How many of you have had a mentor of a different race from you? Every, every person of color raised their hand. They've had a white supervisor. They've had a white professor, everybody raises their hand.

Then I asked the whites, you know, how many of you have had mentors of a different race and very few will actually raise their hands. Now they'll say, oh, I have an associate pastor who is Black, or, Hey, I've got a friend on the other part of the city who is the who's Latino. But have you been mentored by as your supervisor, your Bishop? Has your professors, have the books that you've read? That's another way of mentoring, you know, the last 10 books that you've read, who wrote those books? Mostly white men have written those books. So that tells me you're very narrow mentoring circle. So what we ought to do and actually have to do in order to confront this heresy is actually to be in these relationships and learning places, not just teaching others or being best friends with a Black person, but actually be in the places of learning from.

**Emily Hill:** You just started to answer a question that I have as the white person on the call. I go to a predominantly white church at this point. And, um, there are lots of people who are listening. Who are not resisting what you've been describing. And I've been in a lot of different contexts where the predominant response to the listening is the sort of, what do we do? And there's this very strong activist impulse. I know someone who we're going through a big leadership change and they want to hire Black pastors. And so there's, I think a good intention there, but I'd be curious, you know, what you would recommend in that case? How you respond to that activist impulse of what to do and to the people who are listening and want to make that long-term change.

**Korie Little Edwards:** I really appreciate that question and my response, is this really in line with Dr. Rah. I really appreciate what your story there about when you were pastoring there in the Boston area. Let me step back with a story. I was in a community of leaders or religious leaders in my city. And it was a mixed group. And in that mixed group or several, a white leaders who were very interested in doing something and being and doing something, right, about these issues. And yet what was interesting to me is that there's a strange perspective as if it hasn't already been done and done well in the body of Christ. And I'm specifically talking about the Black church. That this kind of work has been done for decades, perhaps even during the periods of slavery, where there is activist work, being done by pastors and ministers on these issues.

So there's a very robust toolkit on how to do this but there's a real resistance to submitting, not to Black, not just to Black leaders, but Black leaders who are part of a Black institution that's controlled by Black people. Or it could be the same if, if say our indigenous siblings, that it's an institution that is controlled by, uh, by our siblings that are indiginous. Or if it's an institution that is controlled by an Asian and Asian American leaders, I don't just mean a pastor who happens to be heading a multi-racial church, made up of 80% white people or 79%. And they just got in the mark and they're embedded in an evangelical denomination. As I just already said, because of that being embedded in a denomination that isn't of itself organized around whiteness, they have to manage that.

I'm actually saying, will you submit yourself and partner with a religious institution whereby there are no white people in control or hardly any white people in power? That to me is the very first step. And if you can't do that fully in your heart, then you aren't ready.

**Soong-Chan Rah:** Wow. If I want it to be a millionaire and if I want it to make a lot of money, I would open up a counseling center for ministers and pastors of color who've been associate pastors in majority white institution. And I would just have to charge a dollar, but I would have enough clients to actually have a pretty robust practice, to care for, and to pastor, and to provide therapy for people of color who've been in majority white institutions and who've gone through the ringer. I got to tell you my phone and my email blows up, you know, at least once a month with associate pastors of color who are in majority white institutions or staff of color in majority white institutions. This is, you know, just the, kind of a, maybe not so subtle critique of hiring the one minority to fill our slot. That usually turns out disastrous because, I'm going to use this phrase-- you're expecting that person to be what I call the magic minority. The magic minority is brought in, no resources are given, no support is given, but that magic minority somehow through the magical powers can conjure up other minorities, just wave their hands and all of a sudden more minorities show up.

So that's my kind of, uh, anxiety around this kind of, well, let's hire the one individual that could actually, you know, come in and do this. My challenge has usually been, there are kind of three levels of transformation that's needed. One is the individual. As in, we need individuals in places of authority, places of power, places of influence that's, I'm not discounting that, you know, we want to have POC who are leading evangelical institutions and seminaries and churches. That's a, that's a, that's not a, that's not unimportant, but that's one piece of the, of the puzzle.

The second is changed systems and structures. If you're saying we're going to bring it a person of color to diversify our staff, if you haven't changed the structures and systems of how that church is run, that person will be there for a year or two. And that person will leave because they can't work in a system and structure that actually works against them. So change individuals, change systems and structures. But we talked about this earlier. What I've been really focusing on is also, we need to change narratives and imagination. And that's a tougher, and it's a much more abstract idea. So if an institution is majority white, it's not just about, it's bringing the one Black person, individual is going to change us. Even it's changed a few things, systemically structurally to make it more accessible to people of color. But what are the narratives that are underneath that? And, you know, let's be, I'll be blunt about this, the narrative to change the system, but from the perspective of whites, actually further perpetuates white centeredness, right? So you're saying we have this overwhelmingly white organization, we want to become more ethnically diverse. So the white people in charge, you're going to change a few things here to make it accessible to people of color without maybe even actually bringing in people of color, to think through that.

So that's where the third piece of this, the third leg of the stool. The individual change. I think we're doing that better. We're bringing POC and staff of color, ministers of color into places of leadership, even systemic structural issues where you begin to, to challenge that and examine that my main concern now is are we doing the narrative, imaginative change is that's a longer haul. So for a church that wants to do activism and say, Hey, we want to change this now. Well, what's the narrative behind that? The narrative behind that is that whites come in and, and can make change in the, in the snap of a finger and all of a sudden things are going to do that automatically. So even if you're able to do that, a group of white say, Hey, we're going to change the system and structure. Unfortunately, you've actually fed into the narrative. You've made the narrative even more profound than it has been already.

My admonition would be, how do you change the narrative of a culture and a community? Not just the individual, swap them out, not just systems and structures, even, but how do you change the narrative? That is a much longer calling, that is going to take decades, not months and not even days and years. It's going to take decades to change the narrative within these organizations. Uh, the larger the institution, the longer it's going to take to change the narrative. So these evangelical institutions that are a huge monstrous institutions that have been around for decades and even centuries, it's going to be much harder to change the narrative.

You can swap off the individual, bring in a person of color who's in executive leadership, you can even change some of the rules, systems, and structures, but changing the narrative is going to take some time. What I would love to see is this activist impulse translate into "I'm in this with you for the next 10, 20, 30 years." I'm in this process to help change the narrative. It might mean that I die a little to myself. It might mean that I put down the sort of power that I've wielded. I might mean that, you know, I differ in certain situations, but how am I going to be part of changing a narrative that has been around for 500 years? How do I, and I begin to be part of changing that in the next 10, 20, 30 years.

**Jeff Liou:** Wow. Well, thank you both so much. Emily and I both work for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which is one of those evangelical institutions that's been around for decades and on, I think I can speak on behalf of many of us we are listening. We're listening to those narratives, including the narrative that the Black church has been doing so much of this resistance and community work for decades and decades. We are listening. Some of us are listening, afresh, some of us have been listening and we have a long way to go. But in InterVarsity, we talk about these narratives and these people groups, these sociological people groups as bearing gifts from God for the church global. We're eager to benefit from those gifts for the sake of the gospel.

And the two of you have been gifts to us today. Dr. Korie Little Edwards. Thank you so much. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah. Thank you so much for sharing with us, your experience, your expertise, your wisdom, and your love for the people of God. Thank you.

**Emily Hill:** Thank you.

**Korie Little Edwards:** Thank you so much for having me

**Soong-Chan Rah:** It's been a pleasure.