

## Empowerment: Awakening the Image of God



### The Man with a Name

In the Gospel of Mark, the stories of healing come and go like a steady, powerful river; a leper, a paralyzed man, a woman with a bleeding disorder, a man with a withered hand. And in most of these stories, the person healed remains nameless. But then we arrive at Mark chapter 10; a blind man is sitting by the road outside Jericho. And Mark tells us his name. Bartimaeus. Son of Timaeus.

That is remarkable. Because in the ancient world, a name was not simply an identifier; a name was an identity. A name carried weight and honor. And Timaeus — the father — was likely a man of standing in his community. His name was honored. And Bartimaeus, his son, would have shared in that honor. The word Timaeus itself carries the meaning of honor, of being valued and esteemed.

But now, Bartimaeus is sitting by the side of the road. Blind. Begging. The need has eclipsed the name. And I wonder — how many people do we walk past every single day, people who have been reduced to their need, their struggle, their circumstance — and we have forgotten that they carry a name, a story, an identity that goes far deeper than what we can see? Somebody said that every person is a book.

Jesus is passing through Jericho. The crowd is pressing in. And from the side of the road, a voice cuts through all of it. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The crowd tells him to be quiet. Some translations say they rebuked him sternly. They were pushing him back down into his place. Be quiet. Stop making a scene. This is not your moment. The crowd around Jesus decided who was welcome and who was not. They decided whose voice deserved to be heard. Bartimaeus called out all the more. He got louder. He refused to let the crowd define the limits of his voice, his worth, or his access to Jesus. Bold faith begins with refusing to let others define the limits of who you are, or how loudly you are allowed to speak.

Then comes the moment that changes everything. Jesus stopped. In the middle of a crowd. Mid-Journey. On his way to Jerusalem — where, as Mark has been carefully telling us, the cross is waiting. Jesus has already told his disciples three times that he is going to suffer and die. He is carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. And yet — he stopped. And then he said, “Call him.” And look at what Bartimaeus does. He throws off his cloak and jumps up. That cloak was likely everything he owned. It was how he collected alms. It was his covering at night. It was his security. And he throws it off, because when Jesus calls, you do not cling to the old version of yourself.

Then Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He is asking Bartimaeus to name his own need, to claim his own desire, to become an active participant in what is about to happen. What do you want me to do for you? That question is itself an act of empowerment. Bartimaeus answers without hesitation, “Rabbouni — my teacher — I want to see again.” And Jesus says, “Please do not rush past this — go, your faith has healed you.” The Passion translation renders it this way: Your faith has made you whole. Your faith has done this. In the very moment of healing, Jesus gives the credit back to Bartimaeus. He honors the man’s own agency, his own bold cry, his own persistent faith. He is saying: you brought something to this moment. You were a partner in the healing.



This reminds me of one of the most well-known stories in American history. A young girl named Helen Keller — deaf and blind since early childhood — was locked inside a world of silence and darkness. She was wild with frustration because she could not communicate, could not connect, could not be truly known. And then came Anne Sullivan — her teacher. Anne did not pity Helen. She did not simply do things for Helen that Helen could do herself. She believed in Helen's capacity even when Helen could not believe in herself. And one day, at a water pump, Anne let Helen touch the water and spelled the word W-A-T-E-R into Helen's hand — and something inside Helen woke up. Helen later wrote these words: That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free. Anne Sullivan did not create that capacity in Helen Keller. She called it forth. She awakened what was already there.

That is exactly what Jesus did with Bartimaeus. And that is what true empowerment is — not creating ability in someone but awakening what God has already placed within them.

### Awakening the Image of God

One of the most transformative ideas I have encountered comes from the teacher Graham Cooke, who speaks about identity in Christ as the very foundation of everything. He says that the most powerful thing we can do for another person is to call forth who they truly are in God — to see them not through the lens of their struggle, their failure, or their need, but through the lens of who God has declared them to be. **We are all made in the image of God. In the Hebrew, imago Dei. It means that woven into the very fabric of your humanity is the nature and the glory of God. You carry it. And so does the person sitting beside you today. And so does the person in your life who is the most difficult to love.**

However— that identity can be buried. It can be covered over by shame, by hard circumstances. Like Bartimaeus, sitting in the dust, carrying his name but living as though he had forgotten it. When we awaken someone's identity as a son or daughter of God, we are not inventing something new in them. We are uncovering something ancient and true. We are saying: I see you. I see who you are in God.



This is the holy work of empowerment. What if every time you served someone — the person waiting for food at a community meal, your child at the dinner table, your student in the classroom, your patient in a hospital bed, your customer across the counter — **what if you carried this with you: the most important use of my power, my influence, my presence, is to lift up the full and powerful humanity of the person in front of me?**

To awaken their gifts. To speak to their dignity. To remind them, in word and in action, that they are made in the image of God — and that God is not finished with them yet. When we are awakened to who we truly are, we are empowered. By the Word. By the Spirit. By the truth that cannot be taken from us.

### Partners, Not Dependents

Now look at the very end of this story. Jesus says, “Go, your faith has healed you.” And Bartimaeus immediately received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. He followed Jesus. He became a disciple. He moved from the margins into the movement following Jesus to the end.

Jesus was building a community of partners — sons and daughters who knew their identity, who had been awakened to their calling, and who went out to do the same for others. And this is a word for all of us today.

**Invite people to participate in their own goodness and discover their own gifts, allow them to use for others and find joy of life!** Let them find their own voice. And invite them — as Jesus invited Bartimaeus — to step into the road and follow. God is looking for a community of empowered partners — sons and daughters who know who they are, and who go out to awaken that same identity in everyone they meet.

**Commissioning: Go and Awaken**

I want you to feel two things at the same time. First, feel the weight of what you carry — Your responsibilities, your relationships, the people who depend on you, the weariness that comes with it. Let yourself feel that for just a moment. And now feel the other thing — the freedom of what you have been given. You are made in the image of God. That is the most extraordinary thing about you. It is the deepest and most unshakeable truth of your existence.

So here is your commissioning for this week. In every encounter — at the grocery store, at the school, at the hospital, at home, at the office, on the road — look for the person by the side of the road. Look for the one who is being told to be quiet, to stay in their place, to stop asking for too much. And stop. Turn toward them. Ask them what they need. And humbly request them what they can do well. Call forth the image of God in them and awaken their confident capabilities.

**Speak to who they are. See them as God sees them. Let them participate in their own healing, their own becoming, their own calling. Awaken them to their noble and high identity as a beloved son or daughter of the living God. Your faith has made you whole. The power and love of God is in you! Now go — and help make others whole. Go, and awaken.**