

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • NOVEMBER 15, 2020

“WEAR IT!”

The Scripture Colossians 3:9-11

Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with God's label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

The Message *Wear It: Custom Made* Mark Briley



Most name brands come and go. *Z Cavaricci* and *Pepe* jeans were all the rage when I was a teen. You had to tight roll those pant legs just so, because you wouldn't be caught leaving the house any other way. Throw on a multi-colored silk button up shirt, and you were dressed to impress. On special occasions, you might wear those jean-short coveralls with one of the straps undone so half of it hung down across your chest. Kris Kross will make ya, "*Jump, Jump!*" My grandfather, who was a farmer and actually wore coveralls every day to get the job done, surely shook his head at such a fashion statement. God bless him, he loved me anyway.

Now that I've thoroughly embarrassed myself, I'm wondering if we went around the room, we could all share stories from phases of life where our outfits certainly defined the times. In doing so, I would hope to not be alone in being appalled to learn that the styles changed, and nobody bothered to tell us. Some styles die hard. You've also likely got that special camp or concert t-shirt, a hoodie, or something that every time

you do your closet clean out you pause, consider the pitch, and then leave it hanging because, dog-gone-it, you just can't quit that old Tommy Hilfiger fleece.

My mother is one of my favorite humans on the planet. And I know she's watching. "*Hi Mom!*" I loved the day we were looking at old pictures from when my brother, sister, and I were little tikes and I scanned back a bit and said, "*Ma, that sweater you're wearing in the picture is the same one you're wearing right now!*" It's held up amazingly well and no one wears it better! It's kind of velvety and my favorite line whenever I catch her wearing it now is a movie line classic, "*What is that, velvet?*" Prize to the first movie buff who texts me the movie name.

Most clothing has a shelf life, but there are some custom-made pieces that couldn't fit another any better. Some things are uniquely made for one. In this new season we're living into, our faith has a unique story to tell – what Paul calls a custom-made life, newly promised to each and all. Have you been fitted for this new life? That's the question we're holding together today as we continue our "*Wear-it!*" sermon series. Today's installment? *Custom made*. Our focus today is on three short verses from Paul's letter to the Colossians – they're like a packed closet... there's so much in there it's hard to know where to begin.

Verse nine is first and plainly says, "*Don't lie to each other. You're done with that old life.*" Lying is exhausting, really, and I think that's what Paul is saying. It's about integrity. Having integrity is about being the same person on the inside that we are on the outside. Integrity is about wearing your custom-made soul for all to see. Lose the pretenses. Let the stained glass image go. I had multiple conversations about this with some of you this week. One of you pulled up your sleeve a bit and said, "*Can we talk about vulnerability this series? Being comfortable in our own God-given skin?*" Another said, "*I remember the moment I realized my kids were watching me. They always had been, but I clearly remember the moment that I realized it was true. I knew at that point that I had to live in the world the same way I was teaching them to live at home if I could have any sense of influence in their life.*"

Authentic. Transparency. *Custom made*. So much of shame-based religious and political methodology has more to do with keeping people contained than setting them free. There was a political strategist, who admitted at a backyard barbecue to an off-the-clock writer, something of his job that he wasn't all that proud of. He said, "*My job is to scare the hell out of senior citizens in southern Florida and convince them their medical benefits are going to be taken away.*" "*Is it true?*" the writer asked back. "*Not really,*" he said with a bit of regret in his eyes. "*Don't lie to each other,*" Paul says.

With all this COVID time, I think people are having space from the normal hamster wheel routine to really think about what matters; to think about the church and their faith. Is "*church*" a box to simply check off the list, or is it a place to truly explore the honest depths of what matters most?

Jesus surely didn't have an institution in mind when he was getting real with crowds and crowds of people hungry in every which way you could imagine. There was no intent to build facades around platitudes or clichés so people could appear to have it all together. The intent was to get real with each other without the threat of judgment grounded in some religious achievement or merit. Paul says, "*Don't lie. It just doesn't fit anymore... and you can't keep up with it.*" Environments in which we are encouraged to hide our faults are toxic.

Australian nurse, Bronnie Ware, spent the bulk of her career in palliative care, tending patients with 12 or fewer weeks to live. Not surprisingly, most of her patients had joys and regrets. Bronnie said in the last few weeks of their lives, however, most were able to find a higher level of clarity about what mattered most. Remarkably, the most common regret of the dying was this: they wish they'd had the courage to live a life true to themselves and not the life others expected of them.¹ They wished they'd embraced their life as custom made, handcrafted, beautiful *as is*. How can we be loved as we are if we are always in hiding? What were you born to bring to this world? You know it... at least at some level. At some level we generally get honest with ourselves, and we just know. Most of the refreshing moments I've experienced in my life have been when I'm with someone, and I know I'm getting the real thing.

Dancer Martha Graham says, "*Each of us is unique, and if we didn't exist something in the world would have been lost.*" It begs the question – "*Why are we so quick to conform? What has the world lost because we did?*" William Blake said Jesus was "*all virtue and acted from impulse, not from rules.*" If we are to be like him... which, in some ways... is not an imitation but rather a true authentic living into the God-image uniquely planted in us, then we should speak and move in step with our uniquely authentic selves. What if we lived as if we trusted that part of God's message to the world was you? The true and real you? *Custom made.*

It's not that easy, I know. There are parts of all of us that fall into the traps of some line of thought of the day, some group-think direction, some storyline based in lies that gets us off track in seasons of our lives... or even in small ways every day. But falling into those traps, our souls get choked out like stored away sweaters in last season's tub. And when you feel the tension... that tension between how you are living and what the soul is trying to unleash, there's a churning that you can't quite shake. If you're caught up in categories, Paul says next in this passage – don't be. They don't hold up long term. Their like name brand labels that go out of style and not worth the fuss.

There are hundreds of descriptors I could share about myself – I'm a dad, a husband, a Disciple of Christ minister. I'm a son, a brother, an uncle. I'm English with enough Irish in me that we were probably *O'Briley's* at some point. You get the labels and you

¹ This story comes from Donald Miller's "Scary Close." Nelson Books. 2014. The word from Martha Graham and William Blake also come from this source which influenced the feel of this message.

could list your own. But custom made? There's only one you... one of one. When my boys are collecting football cards – the coveted and most prized card you can get is a 1 of 1. No other like it. You're a 1 of 1, and it would be such a loss to not get to know you.

I saw a story this week that was just amazing. It was video of Marta Gonzalez, former Prima Ballerina who is living with Alzheimer's disease. It's a video, actually, of Marta and a music therapist who knows that within Marta is a dancer. It's who she is... even as she's lost her understanding of so much about life. Her truest soul expression is dance. As she listens to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, her soul is infused with all the synapses and sparks of her soul that flow throughout her body. She shifts from being slumped over in her wheelchair to a different posture all together: She sits up straighter, her head held higher. She immediately remembers and feels the choreography again. She looks like the dancer that she is – so graceful, so lovely. Watch...² [Open the link [HERE](#) to view the video.]

When we lose the pretense, our true self comes out. We sit up straighter, move more authentically, hold our heads higher. Singer, songwriter, Alicia Keys said it this week what she's learned about herself during this re-evaluating season of COVID: *"I'm ready to shift, less concerned with image, more concerned with being me. I'm unafraid."*

It seems, if we could interact more as one human to another human over one image to another image, one label to another label, we might actually find it easier to be truly *for* each other. And the more we are *for* each other, the more the Realm of God will come to be in our very midst. Being custom made and seeing others as custom made begins to take down our walls, and we live less in the world of comparison. What did we hear about comparison a few weeks ago? Comparison is a punk. Would you say that out loud, *"Comparison is a punk."* Isn't it though?

I was talking with a friend this week who was raising some questions about a couple dozen men in his life right now who may be going through the motions but underneath are churning for something more. They may not even be able to name it, verbalize it, but it shows up in their eyes. It shows up in their language. It shows up in their attempts to compare and compete. The question? Where's the church for these men right now? And it's not just men, of course. That was just the context of the conversation. It's so many others who are trying to squeeze into societal boxes when Paul is saying, *"You're so custom made ... you don't even know."*

At what point, are we able to not present the smoke and mirrors but authentic community that helps each other live into our best lives... grounded and centered in the love of Christ? Who among us will rise to help create a culture where this can

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zs3IHFwt6JQ>

grow? At what point, when we accept our custom-made selves, can we recognize the opportunity we have to invite others in the life we've come to claim?

It is Donor Sabbath Sunday, and we thank Tory for bringing to us the power of sharing the gift of life with others in need... and what extraordinary ministry for Tory to match organs from one who no longer has need and another who needs that very gift to be born anew. Talk about custom made!

My wife's dad, Kenneth, died in his forties... Carrie was just thirteen. While so much of her dad's body could not be procured to give another life, doctors were able to donate her father's eyes to another in need. Carrie has never met the person who was given a new chance to see but it has brought her comfort knowing her father's eyes were custom fit for another giving someone a whole new view of the world.

Maybe you've heard of the story of Bill Conner. Bill's beloved, 20-year-old daughter, Abbey, died unexpectedly while on a trip, a tragic drowning. While she couldn't be saved, she was able to donate four vital organs that brought new life to four other people. Her dad, Bill, was heartbroken as you can only imagine but recognized his daughter's important gifts to others in need. Bill wanted to raise awareness of the importance of organ donation, and he longed to meet those who received organs from his daughter. One of the four was willing to meet their donor's father – it was Lou Jack, Jr., a 21-year-old man who was given about ten days to live with his failing heart. Abbey's heart was now beating in Lou's chest. Bill set out from Wisconsin on a 2,600 mile bicycle trip to raise awareness, and it just so happened that the most important stop along the trip would be in Baton Rouge on Father's Day where he would meet Lou Jack, Jr. The meeting held all the feels as you could imagine. A grieving father, stepping off his bike to the embrace of a young man who could only stand before him in that moment because his daughter's heart was beating inside of him. They hugged



for more than a minute before Lou gave Bill a stethoscope, unbuttoned enough of his shirt to reveal his deeply scarred chest. Bill put on the stethoscope, held it to Lou's chest and heard Abbey's heartbeat for the first time in six months. The two men wept, both with the deepest gratitude for the moment that forever altered their lives. Lou's family sent Bill off on his bike with a recording of Abbey's heartbeat so he could listen to it as he made the rest of his trek. Bill said, *"If you want a legacy -- what better legacy could you have than to help people live?"*³

This is what a life in Christ is all about. It's about shedding the pretense and facades of pride that will never fulfill us. It's about loving

³ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fl-reg-broward-transplant-ride-fole-20170710-story.html>. This story is told in many different publications. This is one of them.

your custom-made soul, pressing to be the unique expression of God in the world that only you can share, and helping other people live out their custom-made lives, too. Styles will come and go, friends. And we won't always be "*in style*" or often know the difference... but... you get one shot at being you... and nobody else gets that same opportunity. You're one of one. Wear it humbly. Wear it proudly. Wear it knowing... you're custom made.

Song of Response
"Like a Custom-made Wardrobe"
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. The life I lived was like ill-fitting clothes
that I kept on wearing when I could see
that my life wasn't working, left me hurting,
it was all wrong for me.
2. I was deceived by the life-games I played,
that hurt me, bound me; I just had to quit.
Now I'm living the life that is right,
just like clothes custom-fit.

Refrain:

My Creator who knows me, who knows just what I need,
gave me new life in Christ, glorifying God's Son.
Like a custom-made wardrobe, for all who receive,
while in Christ we are one.

3. So, your bound by a life that won't fit,
it's something like clothes that are not right for you.
Find new freedom in Christ, filled with meaning,
in a life that is new.

Refrain:

Your Creator who knows you, who knows just what I need,
offers new life in Christ, glorifying God's Son.
Like a custom-made wardrobe, for all who receive,
while in Christ all are one.

The Benediction

As we move from this sacred time, let us put on the armor of God:
the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness,
the sandals that bring the gospel of peace,
the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit,
wearing the strength of God, we go in peace.