

Engage360 Episode 124 | Prison, Art, and the Gospel; Rev. Justin Reddick

Intro Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Tim Koller Hi friends. Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. I'm your host, Tim Koller. Thank you for joining us for today's conversation. In our society, we often want to elevate artists in a very unique way, as though they are this uniquely set apart group. And we also have in our society people that are incarcerated, and they are also a uniquely set apart group. And one group we look up to, and the other group we often want to overlook or ignore. And today on our podcast, I am delighted to have Reverend Justin Reddick, a chaplain trainee, and the director of the Creative Arts Platform, and we're going to be learning a bit about his ministry. So welcome, Justin.

Justin Reddick Thank you so much.

Tim Koller So as we get into this, can you give us a bit of a context for this program that you're running? Tell us a little bit about this.

Justin Reddick Yeah. So, in 2016, we started doing some research on a national level. And so, I work for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and we recognized pretty quickly that there aren't a lot of facilitating programs within the federal system. The state programs do quite a bit of that. So, we decided to kind of put our heads together and try to do something kind of fun and create a space where inmates could learn about art appreciation, but ultimately hopefully discover areas of interest within their creativity that they could continue to focus on in a healthy way and then learn about the creative industry as well.

Tim Koller That's delightful. Now you are sitting at this very interesting intersection of being with people that most people would be scared to be around, or they just don't even want to know that they exist sometimes. So how is it being in an environment where you are sitting with individuals that might actually intimidate some of the people who are listening to this podcast? So, what is that like for you as a student and a graduate of Denver Seminary?

Justin Reddick It's interesting, to say the least. I've gotten really used to it, but honestly, I feel like what we try to study theologically about humanity, there's certain areas, particularly in marginalized populations, where there's no getting around it. You know, you're essentially with people that have on one hand committed crimes, right, and on another hand have that divine DNA that all human beings have. So, it allows us to really be challenged, quite honestly, to say, can I love an individual because he's a child of God, a beloved child of God, despite the things they've done. And can I do it in a holistic way that tries to help them recover parts of their personhood, right, recover parts of their identity that they otherwise maybe would be too afraid or shamed or feel guilty to engage in? And I think that's what's really amazing about art is there's a lot of visual components to it, so you can be vulnerable without having to explain that vulnerability. Now, a lot of people do that through like storytelling and so forth, but ultimately you can hide elements of the gospel in plain sight through creative exploration.

Tim Koller Oh, that's delightful. And as you think about this, this program that you're getting to be engaged in, the people that are doing this work, how are they selected for this work? Is this something that you're uniquely picking individuals out of? Are they applying for this? How do you come to have a group of people who are doing this work together?

Justin Reddick There's a lot of prerequisites to it. We look at their history with incident reports. We want to make sure that they've had six months of clear conduct. Depending on the context, we work with the educational department, psychology department. Sometimes we look at a GED. Sometimes, depending on the workshop, that'll be part of it. Other times we've had different sets of criteria where we put them in a room like in an open population and have them do a creative activity and we see how well they do under the fire, so to speak. But ultimately, there's also security procedures in place as well that kind of put that

certain people can't program with certain people. So, we'll do an all call. We'll get a list of people that are interested. And then ultimately our intelligence department kind of determines who can be, depending on the level of security, who can be in a room together.

Tim Koller That's a lot of work. That is not simple.

Justin Reddick No, it's not. Yeah, it can be daunting. Fortunately, we work for an incredible agency that does a lot of that heavy lifting for us. So ultimately when they arrive at our doorstep, you know, we just have the curriculum. We have the challenge of just trying to make them feel welcome, fostering a sacred space where they can kind of create that environment together.

Tim Koller So there's this co-created process that is happening inside of the space once they're in. And I'm curious this work that they're doing, what is the value that we see in this? So, if I zoom out and kind of look at it and go among all the things that humans can do, why is this program that you're doing, this platform that you're creating, why is this a value in this context?

Justin Reddick I think it's incredibly important because ultimately, I think that we have kind of a mandate by God, if you will, to create and cultivate things. So regardless of how good your seed is, right, you have to have an environment that can till that kind of soil, if we're looking through like, say, the lens of like the parable in the sower. And I think that time and time again, there's so many stigmas surrounding the incarcerated, that they're unredeemable, that we need to just lock them up and throw away the key. And fortunately, we're in a time right now in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. We are under great leadership and we're under a fairly new director for us who has a long history out of the state of Oregon. And one of the things that she's instilled very recently was a new core value, which is compassion. You know, I heard she doesn't even like to use the word offender or inmate. So, we're rehumanizing them all throughout the bureau right now. And I think what makes this program unique is we're using, again, kind of creativity, trying to shake that out of somebody. And you'd be surprised. There's a lot of people that don't realize how creative they are. Because there is that stigma. You're right. The artists, the post postmodern world that we're living in likes to glorify about 10% of the population, you know, and say, oh, these people are quote unquote, talented, and we don't buy into that. You know, we find people that have a certain set of skills, and we certainly acknowledge that. But what we're more interested in is kind of showing them some of the unconventional artists of the past. So, when we talk about art appreciation, we're talking about artists that have overcome trauma. Artists that have overcome hardships, and in the process sometimes created new, prolific genres of art, new styles, patterns, techniques, textures, and so forth. And so, we're trying to look at art history in a way of engaging in their personal histories. And a lot of people have discovered things about themselves that they didn't know prior to. And it's just a great way to honor this particular population of people.

Tim Koller It's beautiful that you can look at individuals that most of us, again, would probably want to, like you said, sort of ignore and just, oh, they're beyond redemption. And yet you're in this environment and you're holding that tension to say that there are things that people do that are absolutely vile and yet they are not beyond redemption. And I think part of the wrestling in this is we have a difficult time as humans looking at our own brokenness. So, when I look at someone else's brokenness, it might actually force me to go, oh, I've got some of my own brokenness that I need to deal with. So, you're bringing together these really interesting dichotomies of that artist who's uniquely set apart in that prisoner who is very intentionally set apart. And yet now you're having prisoners who are becoming artists. And this art that you're displaying is absolutely stunning. It's beautiful. So, I'm curious, how do you see these two things continuing to intersect these dichotomies of artist and prisoner?

Justin Reddick Well, I think that they complement each other. You know, it may not be a comfortability amongst a lot of people to agree with me in that statement. But I think that there is both a sinner and a saint both of us. So throughout that sanctifying process, we may lose less of that, right? The more Christlike we become, the less likely we are to behave in that manner. But I think that there's a lot of great examples throughout the world of non-profits and other things that have done this before me. One of the things I did

a deep dive into was Mr. Rogers. I read his bio recently. Fred Rogers and The Theology of Neighbor. Right. It's amazing. I like you just the way you are. Like he was hiding the gospel in plain sight. And it was a micro change in American culture, particularly at a time where television was kind of in this intersection where they were just entertaining children, right, they were just kind of making some kind of silly show with like, you know, Bozo the Clown or something like that. Let's just put our kids in front of the television and leave them there, where he was working with children developers and psychologists that really wanted to create something of value. And so, I look at just a lot of different things, right? J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, you know, this this lore storytelling. I've seen it in 21 pilots. I've seen incredible theology of Encounter. So I look to those examples to try to find a way to kind of merge that intersectionality where we're working with, like you said, a population that doesn't have access to that type of teaching and then artists who, in a postmodern world and through the world's lens, you know, get a lot of credit for a lot of things that I think as Christians, we want to try to merge that together. We want to make the rest of the population feel dignified and respected.

Tim Koller That's absolutely beautiful that we can actually look at individuals and see that the image of God is still there and that we can celebrate that and then give them what they need in order to have this expression that is part self-discovery and also part, I'm living this out as a redemptive story myself. So, the art, as you see it, it's stunning. I mean, it really is engaging. So as you think about that work and as people would go to look at some of this art, so if someone is listening to the podcast and they're in Denver, they want to come see the gallery or they go to find things that are online, whether that be some of the interviews that you've done, what would you like for them to keep in mind as they go to approach this art?

Justin Reddick A long time ago, when I first started working in the prisons, I had an inmate tell me, you know, everybody's one step away from a felony, so don't judge me. And I was like, I'm not judging you. But it was something that always stuck with me because I think you're right. There's this kind of de-stigmatizing that needs to take place. You know, that this population is set apart because they can't behave or they can't, you know, respond to the rest of the society. And so, I think that if you do encounter this, that is one of the strong points, is that it doesn't appear like you're in a prison iconography driven show. You're in a room full of artists. And we've actually had that. We had a sound crew coming in one time to do a soundbite for a show we did locally in my community, and they said, I'm here for the inmate show. And I said, this is it. And the producer looked around and goes, you're kidding. And I'm like, no, this is it. So, because we start with art appreciation and we kind of break them down and we show them and engage in all the stuff, I think everybody's capable of creative expression, everybody's capable of goodness. And we have, like you said, that dichotomy of good and bad in our personhood as humans. And so, trying not to look at them as a separate population, but one community, one kinship, one group of individuals.

Tim Koller I love it. I would imagine, though, there is some difficulty as you are working with this population that is so stigmatized. How are you handling some of maybe the anxiety or the frustrations that you experience knowing some of these people and yet others having such dramatic stigmatization, so much discrimination against them because of their history? How do you wrestle with that as someone who is having to deal with being in close proximity to individuals that others might really hate?

Justin Reddick I think regardless of if we're talking about art or we're just talking about our faith in general, as Christians, we have to recognize that we're living in a very difficult time. I live in a rural part of Colorado and there's all these different kind of cultures within our evangelical American society right now. So, part of the thing that I look to is trying to invite a larger table. I want to welcome that criticism. I want to welcome those individuals that can't look beyond the crimes that they've committed, can't look beyond the incarcerated, and just whatever it is they may have an issue with. And I want to invite them to sit down with us. And I want to encourage kind of that law reciprocity that we can give and take from one another and learn from one another in an effort to just broaden our perspective, both in incarceration, but just as a humanity within evangelical Christianity, there's a lot of things that we need to work on as Christians in this country. And this is just one of those areas.

Tim Koller Yeah, that's beautiful, because the polarization of the society that we are operating in makes it so that I almost cannot even be in the same room with people who disagree with me. And part of our wrestling is art can be intimidating because it can cause me to reflect on myself in a unique way and it can elicit emotions for me that are difficult for me to deal with. But the other part, the other risk of art for us and why we might avoid it sometimes seems to me that it would be it opens up a window into someone else's experience and it might actually unsettle some of the things that I have held so tightly. Have you encountered any of these kinds of stories, either other from the person who's creating the art where it's unlocking something for them or the viewer? Have you heard stories of people who have encountered the art and come away different because of it?

Justin Reddick Oh, absolutely. Yeah. So, we do a community show every August. So, this show right here at the seminary is being sponsored by Fremont Center for the Arts. That's one of the oldest nonprofits west of the Mississippi still operating. And so, we're very grateful to have that community outreach. And so, we don't even have to advertise for the show anymore. I think it's six years running, and we average anywhere from 3 to 400 people opening night. And I've seen every type of response you can imagine whether it's just full-on tears, individuals coming that are there to visit their family members that are incarcerated and they just, you know, break down and say, oh, my gosh, this is such an amazing thing to be able to elevate and dignify these individuals. How can my son or how can my daughter get involved in this type of programming? And then, of course, on the other side, we've seen kind of what Henry Nouwen calls the wounded healer. Right. So, we don't ask our participants to go where we haven't gone ourselves. So, I myself, you know, I'm a creative myself and I do art. And a lot of my process was very cathartic. It was very much me trying to deal with my personal trauma as a young adult. And so, throughout my twenties I was wrestling with that stuff. And it's amazing how you can look back and see that personal salvation history within your own walk with the Lord and say, oh my gosh, he was really preparing me to work with other people. And so, I've seen that happen. We have a few what we would call pioneer participants that have been in the program for a while, and they come in with a certain set of skills and they're very talented, so to speak. You know, we try to look at that as a social construct and welcome all people, whether they're doing the doodling or the stick figures or somebody that can do portraits and things like that. And we've seen them go from being like a portrait artist to a full-on storyteller where they've reached back in their story. One in particular, he came in with a gang handle. Everybody in there has these gang handles. He came in with that handle and left with a whole new handle. But it was an artist handle. He was like, I'm now associating with this particular brand, like this person. I've created this new part of myself. And so that's just a real thrill to be able to see people restore parts of their personhood through the creative act of creativity and art appreciation and just creating a space where individuals can feel safe and vulnerable to express themselves. Because ultimately that's the best part of creativity, right? Is we're tapping into a vein that is uncomfortable. I mean most artists that say something authentically, they're tapping into a part, like you said, of humanity that is a reflection, is a mirror of us, and it isn't always comfortable. And sometimes that's because there's not a scar there, right? We're still dealing with a scab that may have real application in our lives. So, I think just like all the different parts of life, art has a way of, you know, taking us to those uncomfortable places, but they're sacred spaces. And I think that's really why we call the show what we did. You know, it's a sacred place to be able to look into somebody else's life and walk alongside them and appreciate it despite what they've done.

Tim Koller I remember Bryan Stevenson saying that each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. And it seems to me that the art that you're being able to present here is really opening up a window into that, that we might want someone to be a two-dimensional character. This thing that they did means that they're beyond redemption and that's all that they are, in the same way that we might polarize someone who holds different views than we do, where we go, well, that's all that they are, is just that. And yet when you encounter the art, you recognize there is this three-dimensional human. And I love that you're saying that their identity can actually be changing as they're creating this art. It opens up to them, oh, I am more than that. I'm also this. I'm a beloved child of God. I have this restoration. I have this redemption that happens inside of it. That's really beautiful. And I heard you mentioned in there that family members will say, well, how do I get my person into this kind of program? And I'm curious, as you see the,

and this is a very crass term, but like the return on investment for a program like this, if you had someone who's skeptical of a program like this, what are the arguments that you have for why this matters?

Justin Reddick Well we've done some studies. You know, they're always looking for quantitative and qualitative data when it comes to any of the programming. And what's exciting about the Federal Bureau of Prisons right now is there's this thing called the First Step Act. And so, several years ago, they invested a lot of money, the government and Congress, into kind of redesigning the intake screening process for individuals when they first arrive at prison. Years past, they would look at your work history, they would look at your education, and they'd kind of place you and say a kitchen or facilities or something like that. Well, now there's this whole algorithm where they're looking to find all kinds of things about you on day one so that you can essentially earn good favor, good time. And so, our long-term goal is to take the creative arts platform to that arena. So, we're currently in a pilot right now. We officially started working with education as the primary department for this program, and they just contracted a professional artist, and that individual is going to be coming into the prison three days a week. And there's an individual that's already been out there for many years. He's actually one of the co-developers in the program. So, I'm really excited to see that real life application, having a professional artist, not just staff members. I mean we all have things to say. But ultimately when I'm wearing the vest and they see me in there, they're like, you're a cop. We want to hear from him. So, it's like, well, what about me? I'm an artist too, but I've come to realize I've let go of any kind of control issues I may have had initially with the program. And I'm just getting out of the way and letting God spread the word. And so, I'm hopeful that we can get it to a point of national application where we can actually vet the program through the bureau internally and basically rewrite kind of how they see art in the federal system. So, I think the return investment is essentially giving individuals that are incarcerated a front row seat into some really good programming, particularly for those that are interested in the creative industries, because there's a lot of things that we can teach them and simulate and actually do, whether that's writing portfolios, commissioned work, selling your work, photographing your work. You know, these are all things that with the advent of the Internet are changing. So, we still have some of those barriers just because they can't have access to all of that. But it's a beautiful thing to see how excited these guys get and that discovery process that areas of interest that they find in phase two of the program, the sky's the limit. And you want to keep somebody that's incarcerated away from the bad stuff. You want them to stay engaged and find something that they can invest in. And we've seen that with participants.

Tim Koller You've been doing this work for several years now, and I'm curious if you could go back to when you're beginning this program, what is the kind of advice that you would be giving to that younger self who's just beginning to enter into this work?

Justin Reddick I think I already said it. Get out of the way. Because I think that I've matured a lot as a Christian, as a follower of Christ in that time, because ironically, the program began the same year that I started seminary. So, I was in seminary from 2016 to 2021. And so, my first group of participants was that same year. And so, I had kind of a more ego driven idea behind the original program, like, wow, wouldn't it be great to be the first art teachers, we don't have art teachers and we don't really have art therapists, really within the Federal Bureau of Prisons other than a few contractors. And so, I was like, we could create a whole new program. And I came to realize that, you know, I was more of like the John the Baptist, not the not the savior. It was like I was ushering in the idea. And I'm so grateful because I think that we look at life through different lenses, you know, and working with the government can be very taxing, very stressful, but it can also be very gratifying. And so being able to be a part of it and just see it grow and recognizing that I didn't have to be the one always facilitating the art. You know, once the idea got strong enough, you know, now we have like a set of professional artists involved. We've got all these departments that I personally don't work for that are all very much involved in the program as well. So, I would tell my younger self to relax, do the best you can, be a good steward of the idea, but don't think in any way that you're in control because God is driving this thing and it's been awesome to reach back in my story and see that.

Tim Koller That's fantastic. And I'm curious, for all those years that you were in seminary, I mean, you're reading deep theological material, you're creating papers and all of these artifacts as you're gaining

experience through theological education. I'm curious how the work you were doing in the prison system influenced the work that you were doing in the seminary.

Justin Reddick Yeah, it was really nice because, you know, Denver Seminary didn't necessarily have a focal point on the arts, but virtually within the first week of coming to seminary, I got into the training and mentoring program. And the professor that I was under, Dr. Dan Snyder at the time, opened it with welcome arms. You know, it was like, hey, if you want to do creative stuff, let's do creative stuff. And so, I saw that in the psychology and the counseling program. In the chaplaincy program, I was able to infuse a lot of these ideas as they were kind of fleshing themselves out in the moment. So, I'm very grateful to the seminary for being so open to using my gifting in that way in my interest. It was something they didn't have to do. But virtually every semester I was able to infuse it into something, and particularly the training and mentoring program, I did several additional semesters on top of what was required in the MDiv, and we were able to do a show here. We were able to do live paintings, we were able to do all kinds of fun stuff.

Tim Koller It's absolutely fantastic that your real lived experience could shape the way that you were creating things inside of the seminary educational system. And as a theological educator myself, that just makes me really happy. Because I know that real life is out there, and sometimes we think about seminary as though, well, that's not really the real world. And yet you were going through that experience very much integrating your real-world experience into the theological education process. So that's a really beautiful thing for me to hear. I'm very excited about that. So, as you think about people going through seminary now, you've now graduated. You're on the other side of it. Thank you, Lord, yes. But I'm curious, as a student listening to something like this, what would you hope for them to be able to think about as they're going through their seminary education? What should they keep in mind in light of some of the things that you've encountered?

Justin Reddick I think what's great about Denver Seminary is that it's very invested in equipping, you know, the next minister, the next chaplain, the next counselor. So, in one hand, embrace that. Embrace that you're here to get a sound education and some sound orthodoxy. And there's a lot of diverse leadership here, and you're going to get that. But really invest and just be an active listener and that orthopraxis, you know, in that ability to be making the gospel tangible. And I think that this environment, I think that, like you said, I'm living proof that you can do that. You can. And I was intimidated. I didn't come to the Lord till I was 30 years old. So, I remember being in the first class and the questions weren't even that hard compared to what came. And I was like, do I belong here? And I think that that's important, and I very much felt that from day one here. And I was able to take risks. And I would tell that student to take risks, you know, engage with your professors, engage with your concentration, and find a way to kind of balance out what I guess TM tries to teach you, right, like cognitive relational in ways to kind of balance that and, you know, relational theology and the kind of work I do kind of takes the upper hand. You know, I think ultimately the theology that we're constantly kind of reconstructing and discovering within our studies, that's a lifelong process that just goes hand in hand with the sanctification process. But being relational, being able to find and equip yourself, the seminary prepares people for that. It's there for the taking if you have that mentality and you can cast that kind of vision.

Tim Koller That's absolutely fantastic. And I'm really curious, as we think about the role of the church more broadly, so, you know, people listening to this podcast are probably attending a local church somewhere. Some of them may even be pastors. The work that you're doing is something that many of them are not coming across in their day-to-day life. How do you think that person can hear this story and be encouraged that the Lord's at work either in their own life or is maybe God inviting them into some sort of stretch, like something that's going to actually make them a little uncomfortable, but maybe make them look more like Jesus on the other side?

Justin Reddick So to reframe your question, at the local church, how can this kind of work with the incarcerated illuminate some of these church goers or some of these individuals that are in ministry? I mean, I think, you know, ultimately in a town like Denver, there's a lot of diversity. There's a lot of different missions going on within the church. And so, I was always very attracted to that being kind of in a smaller

community. So, I'm part of a tear down church. You know, we're a portable church. And so not having the stress of having to worry about the four walls and things like that, it definitely invites a little bit more community engagement. We're very involved in my community and clean up after festivals and working with the homeless and doing things like that. So, I think, you know, it really depends on the mission of your church. But where I live, there's seven state prisons and four federal prisons, so it's very much a part of our community. And so, we have a lot of active volunteers and contractors that come from all walks of life, outside of Christianity to a lot of different faith groups represent locally. So, I would just encourage anyone that's listening that that may be interested in this kind of work just to do a little bit of research within your direct sphere of influence and your demographic area and try to find out ways where you can plug in if you're really interested in working with the incarcerated.

Tim Koller As someone thinks about engaging in that kind of ministry, and maybe the Holy Spirit is prompting some to consider, oh, I actually do have a penitentiary in my area. There is actually a prison in my area. What would be the appropriate step for them to go learn about what they could do?

Justin Reddick Well I know in the federal system, as long as you can pass a background check, you can go in there up to four times a year without having to make that decision initially, you know, you don't have to say, okay, I want to be badged. I want to be a volunteer, I want to come in every week, gives you an opportunity to essentially come in once a quarter and just engage, you know, whether you want to bring a worship or a study or just want to come in and observe. You know, they offer that through our reentry department, and that's in the federal system. So, there's a federal prison here off Kipling in Colorado, FCI, Inglewood, and then of course, where I work, there's four prisons a couple of hours south of here. In terms of the state prisons, I'm not entirely sure, like you said, engaging with the Holy Spirit, really seeking discernment and good wise counsel from those that are in your direct line. That was definitely, you know, part, I would never would have thought I'd work in a prison. I mean, like I've joked about this before, but like a good abstract, strong commercial gets me crying. You know, I'm like the worst guy you'd want to be. But, you know, again, we reached back in our stories, and we see that God is, you know, tending to us and he's preparing us for whatever he has in store. And that's just part of how it came to be for me.

Tim Koller Justin, you've been so gracious to answer this litany of questions that I have that are all over the place. And I'm curious, what is the question I haven't asked you yet that you wish I had asked?

Justin Reddick That's a good question. I guess one question is how can we integrate the arts back into the church? You know, not just the prisons, but have we fully recovered, can we fully recover from the iconoclast? Can we recover from the age of enlightenment? You know, I'm reading a lot right now on enchantment and the imagination and trying to look at the Bible through that imaginative lens. And we're living, like you said, through a very polarizing part of our American evangelical history. And so, is there a seat at the table for more creative acts to take place? Because when we think about worship, oftentimes we look at singing, right, in American culture. But there's over 45,000 denominations globally. You've got a lot of interpretive dances. You've got creative spoken word; you've got live painting. And is there a way to look at maybe what I've done in the prison and hopefully highlight that creativity can be a catalyst for the gospel? And it can be something that helps us reconnect with our DNA, with our blueprint in God's image. And is that something that we can do more of? You know, can there be a connection between the program and the local church?

Tim Koller I love that encouragement. I remember reading about World War Two and Winston Churchill would paint. That was part of his sort of away time. He'd go away into the countryside, and he would spend time painting. And I was always intrigued by that. As a world leader, in the midst of absolute chaos is taking time to actually create something and paint countrysides and such. And that's very odd for someone like me, who I'm far more pragmatic than that. I just need to get things done. I don't have time to paint. And yet I think the invitation into this is to say that actually the imagination that we have can actually reveal something to us of what God has placed inside of us. So, we may not be the most beautiful artist, but each one of us should be an artist. You referenced that in the beginning, that as those made in the image of God, we are creators. So, I'd love to hear you just pontificate on that just a moment as we kind of wrap up our

conversation. If you don't see yourself as an artist, why should we begin to think of ourselves as artists and creators now?

Justin Reddick Well, I think the times are living in is definitely reflecting that back on us as well. Right. I think some of the top CEOs in the Fortune 500 companies have Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees. You know, the world has been in on this for some time. And I think as Christians, we have to explore that more. We have to look at this. You know, it was one of the first things Adam was called to do was called to name all these things. Were all called to cultivate and create things and look at it in kind of a microcosm, not a macro. Right. And I think looking back at maybe what Fred Rogers taught us about imagination and creativity is did he change the scope of American TV culture forever? The answer, obviously, is no. He'd probably terrified to see how far we've come since he passed, but we can always reach back into what he did with his time. And we can say, you know, we're not always going to see that change in our lifetime. So, we have to create cultures of change. We have to create buy in. Why was Silicon Valley so successful? Well, a lot of people set up with the same minded ideas and the like mindedness, and they created a culture, right, that changed technology, technological advancements for humanity. So, I think that we can do that. And I think that once we realize that we all are creative, right? A lot of people will have that idea. Well, I'm not very creative. It's like, well, you dressed yourself today, you color coordinated, you look you look pretty normal. That's good.

Tim Koller For most of us.

Justin Reddick Well, do you like to cook? Well, yeah, I do. I make this really good lasagna. Well, that's creative, right? And just expanding our definition of what creativity can be. You know, that's really a great starting point, is recognizing that it lies dormant in and all of us that don't use it, it's kind of like muscle memory. You may have worked out in high school, but if you don't pick up a weight for the rest of your life, it'll lay kind of dormant, sleeping within you. So, I think that that's just part of that illuminating process. And for me, trying to find, you know, that quintessential authentic self, right? There are just different levels of spiritual maturity. And I think that I'm always kind of trying to get to that true, authentic self through Christ. Right? And I think I have to have creativity to do that. I have to. You know, faith oftentimes, you know, gets equated with ideas. But I think that there's more trust involved. And I think the imaginative side of some of these books in the Bible, if we really reflect on that, it can illuminate that kind of truth within us, you know, and that we all are connected. There's just this beautiful kinship, and creativity can, like you said, kind of create new avenues and areas of your life that you didn't even know were there.

Tim Koller That's beautiful because the book *Managing Leadership Anxiety* by Steve Cuss, he talks about how anxiety can make God seem really small. And it seems to me that sin is doing that, when we think about the arts, that we actually are being, our imaginations are being reduced because sin has so impacted us too, to take space, to think expansively, to think creatively, it would require us not to be so reactive. It would require us to actually engage more creatively in the world around us. And it seems that while we want to put artists up on this pedestal and we want to put these incarcerated as the less than us, if we recognize that both the person inside of us, as, you know, functioning is actually, oh, I am a creative, I am an artist. And there's also a broken part of me. So maybe the people that we've tried to create as set apart from us, both the artist and the incarcerated, maybe they're really not so different from us.

Justin Reddick I'd have to agree with you entirely. Yeah. And as you were talking, I was thinking about how the Christian, you know, society has done this in times do with like genres, like Christian music and Christian movies. And we create the art for ourselves often times, which is great. But I think if we could get a little bit more comfortable with engaging with the world right, partaking alongside the world, dipping our feet in the world, right, that's not overcoming and conforming to the world. That's just being a good steward of the time in which we live. Right. And being able to find those pockets and cultures that I discussed earlier. You know, the only way that's really going to happen is if you engage in the world around you, including the incarcerated. So, I do agree with you. I think that there needs to be less space between the inmate and the non-inmate. Right. Or the artist and the inmate. And the only way to do that is, it sounds cliché, but it's to get creative. Creative with your approach.

Tim Koller I love it. Well, thank you for making time to have this conversation. It has been absolutely delightful. I really enjoy the work that you're doing, and I'm blessed to be able to go see the art that you've brought to the Denver Seminary's campus. So, as we close out, is there any sort of benediction or any closing words you'd like to leave with our audience?

Justin Reddick Well, I'd just like to say again, thank you so much Tim for having me here. And I just want to say just a huge thank you to this entire Denver seminary community. But yeah, I would just say go forth, be creative, engage as much as you can with the arts, because you never know what's on the other side of that.

Tim Koller Beautiful. Well, friends, we're grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with us. If you get the chance, please leave us a rating or review wherever you listen to podcasts and please send any questions or comments to us at podcast@DenverSeminary.Edu In addition, visit DenverSeminary.Edu for more information and resources about Denver seminary, such as events, degree programs and other episodes of Engage 360, including full transcripts. We're grateful for your interest, support, and prayers. Until next time, may the Lord bless you.