



Episode 6 Transcript

Mark Charles's Unexpected Journey to Discover Unsettling Truths

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, book, navajo, church, lived, mark, native peoples, campaign, native, writing, lament, journey, abraham lincoln, literally, read, voice, thought, nation, author, began

SPEAKERS

Ed Gilbreath, Maila Kim, Andrew Bronson, Mark Charles

Maila 00:04

Welcome to the Every Voice Now podcast where we bring voices of color into the spotlight. I'm Maila Kim,

Ed 00:11

And I'm Ed Gilbreath. In every episode, you'll hear from authors of color as they share about the inspiring stories that led to the making of their books, as well as the challenges they had to endure and overcome along the way. Hi Maila.

Maila 00:31

Hi Ed, it's time for another great conversation with an IVP author of color today.

Ed 00:37

Yes, indeed, we got to talk to the brilliant and provocative author and speaker Mark Charles

Maila 00:42



You know, I was especially excited for this conversation, because I just started a book club with a couple friends to read *Unsettling Truths*. And so to not only be reading Mark Charles, but to really hear him and to hear about his journey of writing to hear about his passion for even that topic. It was incredible to be able to dive into that simultaneously as I'm reading his book.

Ed 01:06

Yes. And he has powerful perspective as a Native Christian and Native writer. And what's more, he actually just finished running for president during the 2020 election season. He's going to talk a little bit about that, too. So lots to cover. Well, why don't we get out of the way and let our listeners experience this episode of Every Voice Now with Mark Charles.

Maila 01:41

We're excited today to welcome Mark Charles, co-author of *Unsettling Truths* to The Every Voice Now Podcast today. So welcome, Mark.

Mark Charles 01:49

Well, thank you very much. It's good to be with you.

Maila 01:51

We're glad to have you. Just to kick off, can you tell us about your ethnic background, where you and your family are originally from, and where you currently live?

Mark Charles 02:00

Yeah, let me start just by introducing myself: Yá' át' ééh. Mark Charles yinishyé. Tsin bikee dine'é nishí. Dóó tó'aheedlínii bá shíshchíín. Tsin bikee' dine'é dashicheii. Dóó tódích' íí' nii dashináí. In our Navajo culture, when we introduce ourselves, we always give our four clans. We're matrilineal as a people with our identities coming from our mother's mother. My mother's mother's American of Dutch heritage, and that's why I say "Tsin bikee dine'é."



Loosely translated, that means I'm from the "wooden shoe people." My second clan, my father's mother is "Dóó tó'aheedlínii," which is "The Waters that Flow Together." My third clan, my mother's father is also "Tsin bikee dine'é." And then my fourth clan. My father's father is "Dóó tódich' íí' nii." That's the "Bitter Water" clan. It's one of the original clans of our Navajo people. I am now living in the lands known as Washington, D.C. And these are the traditional lands of the Piscataway. So the Piscataway, they're the nation that, they've lived here, they've hunted here, they farmed here, they fished here, they raised their families here and bury their dead here, long before Columbus got lost at sea. And they are still here, I've actually had the opportunity to meet some of the Piscataway, I've been welcomed to these lands by some of the Piscataway, and I want to acknowledge them as the host people of these lands, and I want to thank them for their stewardship of it.

Maila 03:17

Wow, that's a really unique way to introduce yourself. That's something we also do in our culture. I'm Hmong American, and you always introduce yourself by your clan. So I'm from the Kue clan. And so it's really neat to hear that that's even how the Native Americans do that.

Mark Charles 03:32

Yeah, knowing our family and who our family is, is very important for our identity.

Maila 03:37

The Every Voice Now Podcast is about celebrating our ethnic identities. And so for you, did you grow up with a strong understanding of your own ethnic background? Or did that have to develop over time?

Mark Charles 03:48

So yes, and no, I tell people I grew up in a Dutch ghetto, just off of the Navajo Nation. And seeing my Navajo family and grandparents every day, literally. I went to a small private school. It was a Mission School founded by the Christian Reformed Church. It was just off of the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. My Navajo grandparents worked as translators for the mission. And they lived right next door to us. And actually for a while in high school, I lived



with them and I was at their house every day. And so I knew my Navajo family. I heard the Navajo language being spoken sometime by my grandparents. But I also went to a private school and I was a part of Western American culture. I graduated from high school and I went to the University of California, Los Angeles. And I thought I was pretty well adjusted both as a multiethnic person, but also well assimilated to succeed in western colleges and educational formats, and so on and so forth. College was an eye opener for me. I think one of the things I learned when I was in college was how I both understood more than most people, but didn't understand nearly enough about even my own ethnic background and ethnic heritage, and began a journey of really understanding both of those things, where I began to invest a lot of time and understanding more about Navajo history. I satisfied my foreign language requirement by studying Navajo with the University of New Mexico. I did some independent studies on Navajo history, and looked at the Navajo creation story in one of my independent studies that I created when I was in school, so I did a lot to understand more. But it wasn't really until I moved back to New Mexico and I began pastoring and preaching in the churches on the Navajo Nation. I was a lay person, I did not graduate from seminary, I didn't go to seminary, I wasn't ordained. But anyway, my first council meeting there, the very first council meeting I had with my elders and deacons at the church, they said to me, our last pastor introduced us to the idea of contextualizing worship, for Native culture. And we want you to lead us in that process. And I said, "Sure, how do you spell it?" Like, I had no clue. And they they said, well, there's this conference in Hawaii, we want to send you and your family to what's called the world Christian gathering on indigenous peoples. And it was a gathering of indigenous Christians from all over the world, who were meeting at that point, almost every year, maybe every other year. And sharing stories and going through a journey together of decolonizing their faith, and the friendships I made in that circles, the people I was able to meet, the discipleship I was able to both gain and to give during those relationships was life-changing. And that's what really put me on the journey to beginning the process of what I would call decolonizing my faith, understanding what does it mean to be a Native man who follows Jesus? How does my language my understanding of the sacred, my perception of time, my regalia, how do all these things impact the way that we seek after and follow Jesus? That journey led us to actually move back to the Navajo Nation. I grew up in a border town, and we actually moved back to the reservation and for three years, we lived in a very remote section of our reservation. We're six miles off the paved road on a dirt road. The community we lived in, had no running water, no electricity. We were in a one room hogan about 25 feet in diameter with a dirt floor and log walls. We had an outhouse, 50 yards, 75 yards outside of the front door, we lived on a sheep camp with people who wove rugs and herded sheep for a living. And we lived there for three years. And then we stayed on the on the reservation for a total of 11 years. Our kids were born there. And they they attended a Navajo immersion school. And the experience of living among my own people, of being immersed in the culture



of giving my children and an opportunity to learn the language as children was absolutely life-changing. And that's what set me on the journey for what I'm doing today. The book I've written on the Doctrine of Discovery, the research I've done the work I've done with contextualizing worship, the conversations I've been able to be a part of around the globe. Even my running for president came out of the experiences we had living on the reservation for 11 years.

Ed 09:16

So this was sort of the birth of your becoming an author.

Mark Charles 09:19

Yes. So when we moved back to the reservation, we prepared to live off the grid. We prepared to haul water, we prepared to cook over campstove or open open fire and live by candlelight. What caught us by surprise was we quickly learned that the only group of non-Natives who come to Indian reservations are those who come to give you charity, or those who come to take your picture. Almost no one comes to build relationship with you. I could not believe how marginalized we felt; it literally felt like we just dropped off the face of the earth, and I begin wrestling with that isolation, that marginalization. I began observing and seeing the historical trauma of my people. And I actually began wrestling with my own insecurities of being a part of this marginalized community now, and I began to sense some new insecurities, as well as a lot of anger, as I was learning the history myself. And one day I was writing a letter, it was like the 10th time trying to get my friend to understand how it felt to be Native, and live on an Indian reservation in the middle of the United States of America. And as I wrote this letter, I said, it feels like my Native community is this old grandmother, who has a very large and very beautiful house. And years ago, some people came into this house, and they locked us upstairs in the bedroom violently. Today, our house is full of people. They're sitting on our furniture, they're eating our food, they're having a party inside our house. Now they've since come upstairs, and they've unlocked the door to the bedroom, but it's much later, and we're tired, we're old, we're weak, we're sick. So we can't or we don't come out. But the thing that hurts us the most, and that causes us the most pain is that virtually nobody from this party comes upstairs, seeks out the grandmother in the bedroom, sit down next on the bed, takes her hand, and simply says, Thank you. Thank you for letting us be in your house. I wrote that. And I'm like, that's how I'm feeling. My friends were able to engage with it and talk about it and have a conversation about it. I shared it with people in my



community. And they're like, you're hitting the nail on the head. And I realized I was onto something of being able to articulate this honest pain and this truth in a way that didn't diminish it or didn't marginalize it. That metaphor is what eventually led me to begin starting to blog. And eventually the audience on my blog began to grow. And people began to appreciate the ways I was articulating things. And that led me into blog more. The beginnings of the blog is what got me into writing, which eventually read to lead to the writing of the book.

Maila 12:43

Well, Mark, can you tell us what you're doing now? And even what's ahead? You wrote your book, you ran for the presidency, what's next for you?

Mark Charles 13:15

The goal of my campaign, and the goal even before the campaign, you know, we stated this in the book, which we finished writing before the campaign started, it didn't get published until November of 2019. But we finished writing it and probably three years before that, I concluded that our nation needed a national dialogue on race, gender, and class, a conversation that I would put on par with the Truth and Reconciliation commissions that took place in South Africa, Rwanda and Canada. I determined ours could not be Truth and Reconciliation, because Reconciliation implies there was a previous harmony. I said, we needed a Truth and Conciliation Commission. And I thought we need one sooner rather than later. My goal was 2021. One of my goals in running for president was to help initiate that dialogue. The hope was, was that by running for president, we would actually be able to bring this discussion on white supremacy and racism and sexism to a national level, to the point where we can begin to deal with it as a nation. Unfortunately, our campaign never got the platform we were hoping for. We definitely had a good following for an independent candidate, we did very well. But we were not able to get our message all the way to the national level. And so on one hand, the primary goal of my campaign was not met. And I'm still convinced we need this dialogue. So I am looking for ways of how do we do this? How do we continue to build on the momentum we started, even before the campaign but also through the campaign, and how do we move that forward? So one of the things that I'm doing right now I'm looking at the next two years through 2022. I want to continue to move forward with this vision of building a nation where "we the people" truly means all the people, I want to encourage younger people to consider going into politics, not just to vote, but to actually



enter into politics. I think there needs to be a willingness and ability to pass the torch on to the next generation. And I want to encourage those groups of people to go into public office and to seek political office, and then going into 2022, that's the midterm elections. And depending on how well we do with creating common memory, depending on how well we do with with critiquing and rebooting the church, depending on how well we do with encouraging younger people to move into office, and then to build this vision of building a nation where we the people truly means all the people, there's a very real possibility I will run again in 2024. But that decision has not been made yet.

Ed 16:43

Are you hopeful about the Biden administration at all?

Mark Charles 16:46

No. I do not have a lot of hope. I will acknowledge when the election was called for Joe Biden I, like I think most everyone else in the nation, breathed a sigh of relief. But I looked around and I saw the euphoria that was going on around the nation, and I scratched my head. Donald Trump losing was good news. Joe Biden winning was not euphoric. Right? Because he promised over and over and over again, he was going to maintain the status quo. I've been telling people if you've protested race, environment, or sexism over the past 12 years, you absolutely need to be prepared to protest that again for the next four. Because the systemic-level problems are not going to be addressed by the Biden administration. He made that very clear throughout his campaign and throughout the promises that he made and the people he took money from.

Maila 17:51

Well, we need to take a quick break, but when we return, we'll talk more with Mark about his journey to getting his book published. So stay tuned and thanks for listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast.

Promo 18:02



Ed 18:06

Welcome back to The Every Voice Now Podcast. I'm Ed Gilbreath. And with us today is our guest, Mark Charles, co-author of *Unsettling Truths*. Mark, let's talk more about your book, *Unsettling Truths*, which you wrote with your good friend Soong-Chan Rah, who has authored a number of books himself for IVP. We discussed earlier your journey into writing in general, how did you get to the point of wanting to write a book and doing this project with Soong-Chan?

Mark Charles 19:31

I actually was very resistant to the idea of writing a book, especially as I began to write more and blog more. I became more active in sort of the social justice circles. I wasn't looking to write a book, at least not initially. And Soong-Chan and I were both on the board at CCDA. And we were both a part of this emerging voices project at Sojourners and we were both speaking at conferences on a fairly regular basis. And there was probably about a year, maybe about a year, year and a half timeframe, where not only was I seeing seeing Soong-Chan several times a year at the CCDA board meetings and seeing him at the Sojourners meetings. But we're also running across and criss-crossing paths on the conference circuit. And often he and I would end up at the same conferences. And he at that point was finishing up his book, *Prophetic Lament*. And I was teaching the Doctrine of Discovery and calling the church into a process of lament. And so I had a chance to hear him speak numerous times, he had a chance to hear me speak many times, and we were becoming friends. And we're realizing how our messages were really aligning with each other. And his expertise on lament and his analysis of the Western church's inability to lament, anemic attempts to lament, really fit well with what I was saying about the Doctrine of Discovery and calling the church into a process of lament. And I remember one day, basically Soong-Chan just said, "Let's write a book together." And so we put the thesis together, we put the outline together, and then we shopped it around. And we wanted a publisher that would allow us to basically speak in our own voice, and say things that we felt needed to be said the way we want them to be said. And because of the relationship we had with InterVarsity, both as an organization as well as Soong-Chan's relationship with IVP, we decided to accept the offer from InterVarsity Press. And what was so funny is we we thought it would take a year to year and a half to write the book. Well, that didn't happen. It actually took us about four years, I think, to write the entire manuscript. And the great thing was is,



Ed 22:00

What happened? What was what was the journey, what--

Mark Charles 22:02

Well, the journey was, I think both Soong-Chan and I were expecting that we had talked about these topics so much, we understood our thesis well, we had our outline all laid out, it was just now a matter of getting it on paper. This was going into 2015. And then the 2016 election happened. And our nation elected Donald Trump. And white evangelicals played a huge role in his election. And it wasn't long after that, that Soong-Chan and I sat down, and we decided, we have to rethink our thesis and our outline. And we said this because the book originally was a call for the church to lament. And after we looked at how involved the church was in electing an explicitly racist, and sexist, and white supremacist president, we decided the church couldn't just be a call to lament. It had to be much more of a flat out rebuke. And so after we did that, I thought I had already uncovered most of the most egregious stuff that we were going to be writing about. But I realized I was barely scratching the surface. Let me just give you a short example. I had been working for a long time, probably four or five months on the section on white supremacy. And I wanted to end the section there was like one or two chapters, I wanted to end that section of the book with the story I tell us about Abraham Lincoln, which is at the Lincoln Memorial, there's a plaque hanging on the wall, this is in the book, that says "my primary object is not to save or destroy slavery, it is to preserve the union. If I could do that without freeing a single slave, I would do it." It literally is a plaque that says, according to Abraham Lincoln, black lives don't matter. I've stood that plaque on Lincoln's birthday on President's Day. And I've watched people file past it. There was one point where there's an African American family. I was sitting right next to the plaque. They stood there next to me, they read the plaque. And they moved on. And I stopped them. I said, "Excuse me, sir. Did you read this plaque?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Do you know what it says?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "This plaque is stating, according to Lincoln, black lives don't matter." The guy looked at me like I was crazy. He looked back at the plaque. He read it. He took out his cell phone took a picture of it. He's like, he couldn't believe it. This is the problem with Lincoln, it's like, we we can see it right in front of our face. And yet we don't see it because of how deep the mythology is that's been ingrained in our brains. And I thought that's a great story to end this section on implicit bias and white supremacy. Because it paints it so perfectly right? None of us would think Abraham Lincoln was a white supremacist based on the stories were told about him. And yet here we have this plaque that literally says, if he



could save the union any way that he didn't care about Black lives, it was all about saving the union. And I woke up one morning, and I was going to write that story into this last section of that chapter. I figured take an hour. Well, the quote, actually comes from something Lincoln wrote in response to an op-ed written in the New York Tribune. And so I thought, well, I should read the op-ed. So I read the op-ed, the op-ed referenced something that Lincoln said in his inauguration address, so I'm like, okay, I should probably read the inauguration address. So, the inauguration address, then contains a direct quote, from something Lincoln said in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and I'm like, crap, I got to--

Ed 22:06

I love it. I love it. It's the writing process.

Mark Charles 25:19

And I read this quote in the Lincoln-Douglas debates. And literally, I may not do it perfectly. But what it says is, "I have no intention of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor allowing them to hold office. There is a there is a physical difference between the white and black races, which will forever forbid the two from living in terms of social political quality, and as long as they must remain together, there has to be this the separation between the inferior and superior and I as much as any other man," said Abraham Lincoln, "believe that this superior position belongs to the white race." I read that and my jaw just dropped. I said, he was a blatant white supremacist. It was unbelievable what I was learning about this man as I read not only the Lincoln-Douglas debates, but his inauguration address. I begin going through his history. And all of my life, that one of the atrocities for the Navajo people is the Long Walk when we were taken from our traditional lands and brought down to Bosque Redondo, and we were put into this almost a death camp. It's the worst oppression our Navajo people endured at the hands of the US government. And all of my life I blamed that period on Kit Carson who was the army captain who literally went through our lands with a scorched earth campaign burning our villages, burning our homes, killing our livestock and hunting our people. But for the first time, I realized that atrocity was due to the policies of Abraham Lincoln. He was president during that period. He was also present during the hanging of the Dakota 38. And the the Sand Creek Massacre and the removal of the Dakota from Minnesota. What happened to my people was genocide, was ethnic cleansing. I don't even have a category for this. And so this was already three months delay from what we were trying to write, I'm still trying to finish up this chapter, right? And now I go into another three



months of uncovering and investigating and realizing how genocidal Abraham Lincoln was not just with the Navajo people, but throughout his entire presidency. And so what was meant to be a short story, at the end of a chapter and a half on white supremacy and implicit racial bias, literally turned into two entire chapters explicitly about Abraham Lincoln, as a white supremacist and as a genocidal man. And so this is why the book took five years to write because that's just one example.

Ed 29:18

But what I really love about the story is that it shows the writing process and how research leads to one thing and uncovers another and another and I think that's both the beauty and the agony of writing a book, just all that you realize you don't know, as you're writing.

Mark Charles 29:37

And it wasn't just research. Research was the shortest part even of the side steps we were taking. The research would take a few days, maybe. The longer part of it was first of all, lamenting it. Right? Lamenting this legacy, this mythological legacy of Abraham Lincoln I've had, that he was some hero. And now he's a genocidal person who's responsible for the killing of my own people. Right? So there's a whole process of lament that goes into just giving up that mythology. And so we realized if we're going to not only call out Abraham Lincoln as a white supremacist regarding slavery, but if we're going to call him out as a ethnic cleansing and genocidal president, we have to do it in a way that absolutely grabs people's attention and does not let them deny it. Which is why we turned it into two whole chapters in our book.

Ed 30:39

Well, the title of the book itself, *Unsettling Truths*, signals to readers that they're about to experience some really heavy complicated stuff, and you definitely deliver. Could you talk about the response that you've received to the book, since its release, critiques, criticisms?

Mark Charles 30:59

There's been a lot, a lot of reviews written about the books, it's won a few awards. And the constant feedback we get from people is, this was, they're not going to want to say this was a



good book to read, because it wasn't, it wasn't an easy book to read, right? It was a difficult book to read. But the benefits from it were really necessary and positive. There's some reviews that aren't as positive about it, which is fine. I know the book is going to be a hard read for a lot of people. But I think for what we aim to do with it, it's getting good responses, I'm very happy with where we're at right now.

Maila 31:39

Well, if I can share personally, a couple friends and I just started a book club with *Unsettling Truths* with a couple of our friends who are Native American, but they're not Christians. They have a legitimate but a poor understanding of the church, the Western church, and they just want nothing to do with it. So we figured let's read *Unsettling Truths*. And that can be a point of common conversation for us. And it's been going so well, our conversations, they love it, somebody being able to articulate their history, but also being able to call out the church. And that's been so healthy for them to even have those conversations with some of us in that group who are Christian. But even on top of that, I know you speak about the different response and the impact that you've had good or bad among different communities, but specifically Native American communities. Can you speak a little bit about that?

Mark Charles 32:29

One of the challenges with writing or with working in the Native community is right, the history of the church is so abhorrent, there is, there's a large segment of the Native community that doesn't want anything to do with the church. And, and I think, even the adjustment we made midstream, to change the focus of the book from a call to lament to a flat out rebuke, I think that makes the book more accessible to non Christians, and especially to Native peoples. There's another piece I wrote, it wasn't for the book, but it got published in another book. And it was basically an analysis of what do you say to people when they've literally not just been hurt by the church, but abused by the church. There's some times where the sin of the church is so egregious, we have to realize we have nothing to offer. We can only just sit there and listen. We actually end the book that way. That's what we say in the book, unless the church gets out of bed with empire. It has nothing to offer. During the campaign, I spoke directly a few times to white evangelicals. And I remember this was just the day before the election. So it was Monday night, November 2nd. And Donald Trump was going to end his campaign in 2020, the way he did in 2016, which is talking to white evangelicals in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Now, I've been going to Grand Rapids three or four times a year, if not



more, for the past 15-20 years of my life. I preached in their churches, I've taught at their seminaries. I've been in their colleges, I've been at their conferences. I knew who was going to be in his audience listening to him, right. And I was so fed up with it. I made an impromptu decision with my campaign on that night that I was going to do a live stream a few hours before he spoke, addressing directly white evangelicals. And I spoke directly to them. I rebuked them for what they were doing. I called them out for their hypocrisy and everything else that was going on with that whole situation. And feedback I got from people who followed my campaign who were not Christian, is that when I spoke to white evangelicals that way, not in a way that demean them or dehumanize them, but in a way that held them accountable and pointed out their injustice and where they got it wrong. I was told, "I feel like I'm on the sidelines cheering for you." Like, yeah, we need to have these things said, like these things need to be pointed out. The problem is, is most politicians don't understand the heresy of Christendom well enough to be able to identify and call it out. They understand well enough to use it. Both Biden and Trump know how to use the heresy of Christian empire. They don't know how to call it out and rebuke it. And that's what I brought into my campaign. And that's what we put into the book.

Ed 35:51

Well, we need to take one more break. But when we return, we'll continue our conversation with Mark Charles, and find out more about what made him the right person to write *Unsettling Truths*. But first, it's time for our Behind the Books segment, where we pull back the curtain and find out more of the story behind the scenes here at IVP. Today, you'll hear from Andrew Bronson, IVP's director of marketing.

Andrew Bronson 36:19

I'm Andrew Bronson, and I'm the Director of Marketing here at IVP. And believe it or not, I'm having a hard time believing it, it's 20 years that I've been doing this marketing here in the publishing business. I remember when we saw this proposal, it felt like something unique, and it stood out compared to so many other book projects. It was just something that had a little bit of extra magic to it, in a certain sense of touching on a topic that no one else was really talking about. It came from a lot of work and preparation, and years of developing content. And it showed. And you could see that clearly in the proposal. The message was so strong and clear and timely, that I felt the excitement more than anxiety, and felt like the time was right for this book. So when Mark told us that he was going to run for president, that was



something that I never thought I'd hear from any of my authors. And I honestly didn't know what to do with it at first, because it was uncharted territory. So we just dove in and walked with him on that journey to try to let it unfold by itself in sort of explore what that might mean. I think it gave us obviously some nervousness because the political climate in this country is pretty tentative right now. And to have an author in that mix could cause all kinds of headaches, I suppose. But it also gave us hope for some potential, like this could be an opportunity. When I think of him, I think of Mark as being a force to be reckoned with. And I mean that in a good way. He doesn't pull back, yet he isn't offensive in his manner. He just is really good at telling the truth, and doing it boldly and straightforward. And I just really respect that. And I think it comes through to the reader as well, that Mark's just actually doing you a service here by telling you the truth, not holding back. And that's just something that then you have to deal with, you know, are you willing to go there with them and accept the truth? Are you willing to test what he's saying? Are you feeling resistance within yourself? So it stands out from the other projects. And in that sense, it's because of the nature of the topic, I think and then who Mark is. So as we come to a year from the launch date of this book, it's been wonderful, we look back at the response to it. And the book is just continuing to sell and continuing to find readers on and on. And I think it's just going to go into year two, strongly. And then maybe year three and for and it'll just continue. It's a strong message. I see a lot of younger people who are buying the book, showing interest, and that seems real and genuine to me. And so I think I have a sense that there's a next generation adoption of the book in receiving the ideas, that's probably going to stick. I'm hoping that that's actually true. I think we see some indicators of that. So if that's the case, then maybe we've got a chance to actually see a shift happen. I'm hopeful.

Maila 40:31

You're listening to The Every Voice Now podcast. And I'm Maila Kim. Today, we've been talking with Mark Charles, co-author of *Unsettling Truths*. And later in the show, we'll share about how you can get a special 40% off discount on Mark's book at ivpress.com. Before we talk about that, Mark, we're going to talk about your voice and the importance of your voice, especially in this specific topic that you're tackling. And so we're still in the place in the church where Native voices are few and far between even in Christian publishing. And so can you tell us what are the unique qualities and perspectives of Native people that Christian books are generally missing?

Mark Charles 41:15



This was the theme of my campaign. And this is my entire message to Native peoples. When I call for this national dialogue on race, gender, and class, this Truth and Reconciliation Commission, part of my work as I'm prepping certain audiences for entering into this conversation. My call for the church is to lament and my call for Native peoples is to step into our role as the host people of the land. You know, one of the lies of this nation is that we're a nation of immigrants. Right? That's a lie. When we call ourselves a nation of immigrants, we actually exclude two primary demographics. We exclude African people who were kidnapped and brought here and enslaved. And we exclude Native peoples who are indigenous to these lands. The nation works very hard to keep that mythology intact. What's even striking is even the two Black politicians who made it to the highest office, right, President Obama and Vice President Harris, they are both immigrants. They are neither of them are descendants of slaves here in the US. This is a narrative our nation works very, very hard to keep intact. And my call to Native peoples is that we need to step into our role as the host people of the lands. The United States of America is incapable of comprehensively reforming immigration law without Natives at the table. All we have is one generation of undocumented immigrants trying to figure out to do with another generation of undocumented immigrants and there's no integrity in the dialogue. When I was living on the reservation, and I would preach in our churches, because we're on the reservation, I lived on our reservation during the Great Recession. And during the Great Recession, we hardly even talked about the recession on our reservation at all. We have 50% unemployment during a good year, right? 10 to 12% would have been a dream for us. And because most people are on fixed income or very unstable income, by the end of the month, everyone is out of money, right? And people are literally praying for their daily bread. And they're seeing God provide, they're seeing God's care for them. And when I would preach to our Navajo people, I would tell them that they have a greater faith than almost every missionary that's ever set foot on our reservation. Because Western missionaries by and large don't go out unless they're well-educated, well-trained, well-funded, and even have evacuation insurance. Right? They don't go out by and large until they have all those things. And so very rarely do they have the experience of literally and actually praying for their daily bread. Our people have that experience, sometimes on a weekly even a monthly basis. And I would tell them, you have a faith that's a head and shoulders above any missionary that's ever come here. One of the most formative things you can do in your faith journey is to literally pray for your daily bread. It's a better training tool than a decade worth of seminary classes. Your relationship with God will fundamentally change when you have the experience of literally praying for your daily bread. And I would tell our people, if these Western Christians had any clue about the faith that you had, they would be sitting at your feet. The problem is, they don't value the knowledge that you have. They don't have a value for those things. And so the problem is not that I have to tell Native peoples, what we have that we can offer. The challenge is helping Western society and



especially Western Christianity understand that we have something that they can't buy, they can't steal, they can't take. How do you make that pointed, you can't just tell people that, right? It needs to be something experiential, something that takes them into that space. And you have to basically lift up both sides. You have to, you have to empower those who have been treated as less than, that what you have is valuable. And you also have to train these people on the other side, that you're not all that. And you have a ton of things to learn from these people who you dismiss merely as the the focal point of your charity.

Maila 47:12

Mark, I want to ask you, what is the advice that you would give to other Native writers who are wanting to develop their voice? What can they learn from your your experience?

Mark Charles 47:22

One of the things that really helped me find my voice is as I was able to articulate things about the journey I was on, I acknowledged I was on a journey, I was on a faith journey, I was on an identity journey. I was on a journey of my own growth as a person as a follower of Christ. And I used my writing, first, my blogging, and then my book, as a way to document the journey that I was on. I wasn't doing it necessarily because I wanted it to be published. I wasn't doing it because I wanted to make this point. I was doing it as a way to gather my own thoughts and articulate my own thoughts about what I felt strongly about. And this is one of the things that I would encourage younger authors and younger writers to think about, rather than thinking about what's the product you're trying to create? What's the thing that you're going to sell in the book? Rather, focus more on, "What is my own journey? And am I getting better at articulating my journey along the way? Can I use this to bring people along to train to develop to help people to understand something they may not have seen before?" And the book and the writing was a tool to help me accomplish those things along the way.

Ed 48:52

Mark, I'm wondering, are there other Native voices that you think the church should be paying attention to?



Mark Charles 48:58

There is a group called NAIITS, the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies, and they are a bunch of Native leaders who are writing about theology, they're self-theologizing Terry LeBlanc, Ray Aldred. Richard Twiss was a part of that group for a while Donnie Begay is a part of that group. There's many, many others, I can't even begin to name all of them. But NAIITS, the North American Institute of indigenous Theological Studies, is a great resource for people to get some insight into how Native theologians are thinking and communicating and getting their ideas out there. There also are some some authors that I highly encourage people to read and to look at who aren't even Christian, writings on the Doctrine of Discovery. There's a great book by Steven Newcomb called Pagans in the Promised Land, a very good book about what the Doctrine of Discovery is and how it's affected Native peoples in our nation. I have great respect for Steve's voice. He's not a Christian, he and I don't agree on everything. But I think his voice is absolutely essential to understanding some of these things. So I would encourage you to look not just in what's the Christian circles, but let's even go beyond that. And just expose yourself to other ways of thinking other worldviews, other things that are going on, and how can we learn from those things?

Maila 50:26

Well, thank you, Mark, we've come to the end of our time together. It's been such an honor to have you on our show today.

Mark Charles 50:32

Thank you. This was a great chance to be with you. Thanks for the questions. I look forward to seeing what happens with this book and even what happened with your podcast. I hope you have a lot of success with it as you moving forward.

Maila 50:43

And now for our listeners, we wanted to share with you all how you can find Mark's book at ivpress.com. If you use the promo code EVN40, you can get 40% off and free US shipping. So that's a great way to get a great deal on Mark Charles's book Unsettling Truths.



Ed 51:04

Thanks, everyone for listening to the Every Voice Now podcast brought to you by IVP. Our producer is Helen Lee. And our sound engineer is Jonathan Clauson. If you are enjoying our show, we'd be grateful if you'd share about it with your friends. Please review and recommend us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.

Maila 51:24

And we love getting your feedback. So get in touch with us with your comments, critiques or questions. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @EveryVoiceNow or you can email us at evn@ivpress.com. And join us next time for another inspiring episode of Every Voice Now.

[More About Mark Charles](#)

SPECIAL OFFER | Save 40% on [Unsettling Truths](#) and get free US shipping when you use promo code EVN40 at checkout.

Additional Resources Mentioned:

- [Soong-Chan Rah, Prophetic Lament](#)
- [North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies](#)
- [Steven Newcomb, Pagans in the Promised Land](#)

About the Hosts:



Maila Kim, Co-Host

Maila is IVP's events marketing coordinator; she holds a B.A. in English Language & Literature and a B.A. in Communication Studies from the University of Michigan, and an M.A. in Christian Formation & Ministry with a concentration in Bible & Theology from Wheaton College Graduate School. She enjoys photography, growing and caring for her plants, and listening to podcasts such as *This American Life*, *Invisibilia*, and *Unlocking Us*. Follow Maila on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#).



Ed Gilbreath, Co-Host

Formerly an editor at IVP, Ed is currently an executive leader at Christianity Today; he earned his bachelor's in communication arts from Judson University and a master's in philosophy of history from Olivet Nazarene University. He is also the author of two IVP books: *Reconciliation Blues* and *Birmingham Revolution*. Ed loves listening to an eclectic mix of music, reading narrative nonfiction books on American history and pop culture, and taking long walks while listening to podcasts such as NPR's *How I Built This*, *The Daily*, *Pass the Mic*, and CT's *Quick to Listen*. Follow Ed on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).



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