

LOVING YOUR BLACK NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

A 5-DAY COMPANION DEVOTIONAL

BY CHANTÉ GRIFFIN

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Introduction

The racism in our country and our hearts can feel overwhelming. But God—the Spirit of Love—can replace this ism with love for our Black Neighbor. Your Black Neighbor might be a colleague at work, a teenager in the park, or a parent at your child’s school. Your Black Neighbor is also the collective Black community. Loving your Black Neighbor as yourself starts with loving yourself well enough to want to learn and grow.

DAY 1

LOVING YOURSELF MULTIDimensionALLY

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:5–9; Luke 10:27; 1 John 4:16–21

READING

“What are you doing?” my mom asked as she caught me memorizing the letters on the eye chart at the doctor’s office. Even though I had poor vision and needed glasses, I wanted to ace that eye exam.

“Don’t do that,” she insisted. The doctor needs to know what you can and can’t see so he can give you the right lenses and help you see clearly.”

When dealing with racial issues, we all want to ace our eye exams. It’s easy to avoid admitting there’s a deficiency by reciting “D, C, T, P...” even though our eyes might need better lenses. But consider this: We commonly define “loving yourself” as taking good care of your physical and emotional health. Yes, loving yourself can include eating well, exercising, and carving out “me time.” But loving yourself also means tending to your spiritual and relational health. Loving yourself requires a multidimensional, holistic love.

In Deuteronomy 6:5, God commands the Israelites to love him multidimensionally, “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

Loving God multidimensionally is so important that Jesus calls it out again when a religious expert attempts to test Jesus on the law. Then, he builds upon the verse inscribed on the hearts of all Israelite children, “and, love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

God’s love for us and our love for him, is the foundation from which we love ourselves and our neighbors. Loving ourselves multidimensionally, alongside the Spirit of Love, is one of the truest ways we love ourselves.

If you love yourself, then you are willing to look at the parts of yourself that need a doctor’s tender, loving care. You are willing to receive the wellness package the Spirit of Love has for you, which includes being honest with yourself, God, and your Black Neighbor about the full condition of your heart.

When you realize you have said or done something racist, you can choose how to respond: Do you allow fear, pride, and shame to wrap themselves around you like a protective blanket? Or do you love yourself, trample shame under your feet, and eagerly undergo an eye examination so you can receive new lenses?

PRAYER

God, talking about racism is hard. Remove my fear and shame. Give me the courage for an eye exam. Give me grace to love myself anew. Amen.

Now, take a few minutes to sit with God in prayer to receive the courage and grace God has for you.

DAY 2

A NEW HEART LENS

Scripture: Proverbs 11:2; Colossians 3:12–14; James 4:10

READING

In 1906, a Black preacher named William J. Seymour led the Azusa Street Revival in California. During the event, blacks, whites, and their Chinese, Mexican, and other neighbors worshipped God together freely.

A white preacher, G.B. Cashwell, excitedly traveled six days from Dunn, North Carolina, to Los Angeles to experience the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street. But G.B. felt uncomfortable during these multiracial worship services. He turned to prayer to address his discomfort.

As he prayed, the Spirit revealed the racism in his heart, preventing him from receiving more of God's love and power. He had to choose: would he submit to God, or would he submit to racism? Would he submit to being under the spiritual leadership of the Black leaders at Azusa Street? Would he allow his Black Neighbors to come close physically and spiritually?

The Bible promises that "with humility comes wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2). Ultimately, Cashwell submitted to the Spirit, and the Spirit gave him a new heart lens. Society's dividing wall—that insisted he and his Black Neighbors remain separate and maintained he was superior—fell in his heart.

Reflecting on the experience, Cashwell noted that "a new crucifixion began in my life, and I had to die to many things..." He remained on Azusa Street for several days. When he returned to North Carolina, he went with newfound intimacy with and honor for his Black Neighbor.

The Spirit calling Cashwell out was a loving invitation to go deeper into the heart of God and to see his Black neighbor with new lenses. It took humility for Cashwell to respond to that call. Racial humility is the ligament that connects you to your Black Neighbor because sometimes what severs your relationship with your Black Neighbor is not solely your racism but the pride that prevents you from acknowledging it.

Racial humility means presuming you may have knowingly or unknowingly sinned against your Black Neighbor. Racial humility simply says, "Maybe I don't see things as clearly as I think I do. Let me listen to my Black Neighbor and the Spirit to see if I need a new lens. Maybe they see more clearly than I do."

PRAYER

Take a few minutes to confess any racism, ask for forgiveness, and ask God to give you new lenses.

DAY 3

TARRYING IN PRAYER

Scripture: Romans 8:26–27; Ephesians 6:12; James 5:16

READING

Although American culture might be described as fast-paced, racism in our land will not be overcome by quick, sporadic prayers uttered here and there by a few people. Our fight against racism is spiritual. As Scripture says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens” (Ephesians 6:12). Our Black Neighbors will not be free from the shackles of racism until legions of us tarry in intercessory prayer for God’s reign of love and justice.

If you feel a desire to pray more or become a person of prayer, then act on that desire. Decide how and when you will pray. Be sure to put it on your schedule so you don’t forget, whether it’s praying while you’re driving to work, praying during your lunch break, or praying when you first awake in the morning.

Do you want to commit to praying for your Black Neighbor with a group? If so, carve out time to pray with your family, church community, or friends. Find the prayer warriors in your life who want to join you in praying for your Black Neighbor.

If you are new to intercessory prayer, then start by praying for justice and righteousness for your Black Neighbors in one specific place, such as your local school, neighborhood, church, or city. Follow the Spirit’s leading to where your Black Neighbor needs prayer support. Consider listening prayer—pray for specific guidance and listen to see what the Spirit shows you to pray for.

Love wants to close the space between you and your Black Neighbors. Love wants to give you the right lenses to see and love your Black Neighbors. Love wants to endow your prayers with power from on high. So as you seek to love your Black Neighbor, honor them, experience intimacy with them, give them God’s gifts, and stand up for them, be sure to love them through prayer.

PRAYER

God, I want to experientially understand the power of prayer. Please help me to cultivate intimacy with you by praying more and becoming a person of prayer. Give me the strength to pray until I see justice and righteousness reign in our land. Amen.

Now, take a few minutes to pray for your Black Neighbor.

DAY 4

GOD'S GOT YOU

Scripture: Joshua 1:9; Ezekiel 36:25–27; Galatians 6:2

READING

Galatians 6:2 reminds us to “carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Beloved, if you want to follow Jesus, then you are called to bear your Black Neighbor’s burdens. You are invited to hold and carry these burdens as if they were your own, with tenderness and care. When your Black Neighbor has been knocked down, choose to bear the burden by speaking up to the culture of silence that glosses over injustice.

Maybe you have, at times, participated in this culture of silence. Maybe, at times, standing up for your Black Neighbor was hard, so you just didn’t do it. Perhaps your boss or city council member set a racist policy in place, and you knew that it was wrong but said nothing. Or your uncle or grandparent made a racist joke, and instead of speaking up, you laughed along. Whatever the situation, compliance with this culture of silence—being unwilling to tell the truth when racism is at play—keeps you from loving your Black Neighbor, keeps you from loving God, and keeps you from loving yourself. An unwillingness to challenge social norms, policies, and structures because they feel either too big or too powerful surreptitiously abdicates your power and love.

In those moments of silence, perhaps you lack the courage to speak up. Perhaps your stomach turns, your knees buckle, and your tongue fails you. When fear takes over, turn your heart toward God. He’s got you. He will support you no matter the potential costs of standing up for your Black Neighbor.

What if you asked God to change your heart so that your goal isn’t to be labeled racist but to humbly exchange racism for genuine Love? To be someone who went around telling people, “My lenses used to be no good. But look at these new lenses!” To be more celebratory of your present than ashamed of your past. It’s from this Love that you will find the courage to stand up and speak out so that God’s justice can rain down.

PRAYER

Spirit of God, please help me to open myself—my heart, soul, mind, and strength—to my Black Neighbor. Help me love my Black Neighbor as I love myself. Amen.

Now, take a few minutes to pray for a burden your Black neighbors have been carrying.

DAY 5

THE POWER TO MOVE MOUNTAINS

Scripture: Matthew 17:20–21; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Hebrews 12:1–3

READING

Seeing your own racial sin and the racial sins of your country again and again is exhausting. You realize that your resolve alone isn't strong enough to defeat the many-headed monster that is racism. Your brain isn't smart enough to undo the impact of more than 400 years of racial oppression. Even collectively, we aren't savvy enough to figure out how to completely dislodge racism from systems, structures, and individuals' lenses.

Only the Spirit, who has infinite insight and power, can show us how to move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Through prayer, the Spirit gives us wisdom, strength, and hope to fight the forces of racism in our country and in ourselves.

Scripture consistently encourages us to persevere in our life with God. One of the Bible's most famous passages, 1 Corinthians 13, reminds us that love "always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Hebrews tells us to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" and to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1). In 2 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul urges us to "not grow weary in doing good."

Beloved, don't grow weary as you pray for justice and righteousness to rain down on our land. You will reap a harvest if you do not give up (see Galatians 6:9). But remember: The spiritual battle you encounter is a marathon—one your spiritual ancestors started running long ago. As in any race, without the proper refreshments, your energy and strength will wane. If you engage in prayer as an action step in pursuit of racial justice but neglect to refresh your spirit, you will burn out or become bitter. So, as you stand up faithfully for the Black community in prayer, remember to sing spiritual songs and read Scripture (see Ephesians 5:19). These acts of worship and communion will remind you of God's power to defeat any enemy.

Loving God takes endurance. Loving your neighbor takes endurance. Even loving yourself takes endurance! But Beloved, a forever life with God is predicated on allowing the Good Physician to examine your eyes. So, love yourself enough to go to the eye doctor. Receive all that Love has for you and your Black Neighbor.

PRAYER

God, help me to persevere in prayer and action for justice and righteousness, knowing only you can move mountains—but you can move mountains. Amen.