

VOICES of RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Excerpt Booklet

"History Keeps Account"

Be the Bridge by Latasha Morrison

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"Camping While Black" and "The Cross I Bear"

Human(Kind) by Ashlee Eiland

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"Shalom and Race"

The Very Good Gospel by Lisa Sharon Harper

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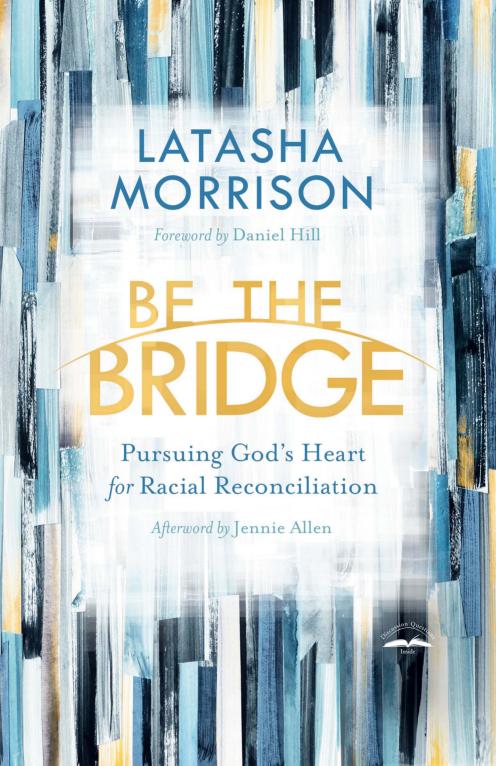
"A Voice Without Apology"

Ready to Rise by Jo Saxton

~

"The New Reality"

Renovate by Leonce Crump



LATASHA MORRISON

Foreword by Daniel Hill

BEIHEBRIDGE

Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation

Afterword by Jennie Allen



BE THE BRIDGE

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Foreword

A handful of historical eras have marked our country's long reckoning with race, and the age in which we find ourselves now appears destined to be remembered as another crucial turning point. Though a remnant desperately clutches to the fantasy of a "post-racial society," every credible indicator confirms a deep and entrenched fracture along racial lines. Pick any index—education, economics, health—and the results make starkly apparent our racially stratified society.

Making sense of this landscape is quite challenging, especially for people of faith. Jesus's final prayer was oriented around a vision for unity, and he commissioned his church to be the healing agent that brings the ministry of reconciliation into broken and fractured places in society. And yet an honest assessment raises more questions than answers. Is the church at large, and are we as individuals, currently making any contribution to healing the divisions? Or are we making things worse? Have we come to grips with our role in creating this divide, or are we stuck in a state of denial? The answers can easily leave us feeling lost, helpless, and hopeless.

For precisely this reason, I thank God for prophetic leaders like Latasha Morrison, who has committed her life to leading others with grace and patience through our challenging cultural landscape.

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Latasha is not new to this conversation. She has gone on her own transformational journey to come to grips with the deep impact of white supremacy and has accepted the mantle from God to rise up against its evil forces and bear witness to Christ and his kingdom. Since emerging as a thought leader on race, Latasha has been inundated with requests for training, teaching, and ongoing support in standing up against racism. In response, she founded an organization called Be the Bridge, which has inspired and equipped thousands of people to pursue a distinctive and transformative response to racial division. Latasha has equipped wantto-be bridge builders in fostering and developing vision, skills, and heart for racial unity. She has built partnerships with existing organizations that are committed to diversity, racial justice, restoration, and reconciliation. Through it all, Latasha has continued to learn, grow, and refine her vision for how the church can effectively model true and meaningful reconciliation. This book, Be the Bridge, serves as her incredible and much-needed gift to all of us who want to more closely follow Christ's call to unity.

We live in a fragmented time when people of faith often avoid discussions about race and when those who meaningfully confront the challenges often ignore faith. Latasha refuses to be defined by that schism. It is her faith in Jesus Christ that has made her who she is, and it is her faith that sends her into the world as a reconciler. The way she grounds everything in her faith is one of the most attractive qualities of Latasha as a teacher and thought leader.

In reading this book, you will learn a lot about how you can move from good intentions to genuine heart transformation and Foreword xiii

meaningful action. You will be pushed to take the work of reconciliation more seriously, and you will be inspired to join forces with a growing community of influencers who believe the gospel calls us to nothing less than a wholehearted commitment to truth and unity. But more than anything, you will see Jesus more clearly.

Savor the important words of each of these chapters. Let them challenge, nurture, and deepen your understanding of reconciliation. Come to see Christ and his kingdom with more vibrancy. And then take the next step to build a bridge.

—Daniel Hill, pastor of River City Community

Church and author of White Awake



THE BRIDGE TO LAMENT

History Keeps Account

Awareness of the Truth

was talking on the phone with my father, giving him a weekly update of my new life in Austin when I realized I'd not interacted with another African American in more than a week. In fact, I'd not seen or had a conversation with anyone who wasn't White. That moment revealed the depth of my cultural loneliness.

I considered my cultural isolation, how I'd last seen a Black person in the store weeks ago. When I spotted him, I went out of my way to engage him in conversation. As we spoke, I sensed he, too, valued a rare cultural connection. I considered how every time I saw another person of color and couldn't make my way across the room to speak, I gave a silent nod. The nod suggested acknowledgment, a simple way of saying, "I see you, sis; I see you, bro." It was a way to communicate solidarity to other people of color living or working in a predominantly White space, a way of

saying, "You're not alone." But as a Black woman in Austin, I still felt painfully isolated.

After about six months, I began contemplating my exit. The extreme loneliness and disconnection extended to interactions in my new church home. It wasn't the first predominantly White church I had attended or worked in. It was, though, the first time my work, church, and social circles were all White. Some of my White friends thought color shouldn't matter in the body of Christ, an easy thing for them to say. I'd ask them to imagine themselves in an all African American context, attending services where they never heard music by Hillsong, Bethel, Chris Tomlin, or Elevation Worship, just to name a few. Wouldn't that create a cultural shock?

On an almost daily basis, White people asked whether I was wearing my "natural hair" or noted how articulate I was (meaning "for a Black person"). Difficult as it was, and with a fresh determination to stick it out, I decided it would be best to educate my friends who had never before worked with or had a Black friend. We spoke about the subtle comments and actions that felt degrading, and I explained how these constituted micro-aggressions. As they became educated, as they stepped into empathy, they realized just how hurtful some of their comments had been. They apologized and sincerely meant it, which relieved a lot of tension. My friends seemed genuinely interested in deepening their understanding of race relations. However, the predominantly White culture of Austin was less willing.

Six months after I arrived in Austin, and in conjunction with my job, I was attending an Upward Sports basketball game (Upward Sports is a Christian sports organization, and many leagues are hosted by churches) and doing my best to meet and greet the parents there. I realized that parents were still getting to know me, were still feeling me out, trying to determine what type of Black person I was.

That's right. What type of Black person.

The typology of Black people is a racial reality in America. As a Black person in a majority-White culture, I observed people looking at me, trying to determine whether I was more assimilated to White culture or whether I was too Black for their comfort. They'd prejudge me by how I spoke and dressed and whether I allowed micro-aggressions to pass without comment. If they judged me more assimilated, more controlled by the majority-culture narrative, I was more accepted. But if I pushed back with my own cultural stories, with more factual recitations of the truth, and if I wore my hair natural or enunciated words a certain way, I'd be judged according to their racial bias and prejudice. The more I embraced my ethnic identity, the greater the chance I'd be rejected by those White parents—seen as unsafe, angry, and likely to make trouble.

That there are these two perceived types of minorities—assimilated or non-assimilated—has caused so much division in communities, among other races, and within the majority culture. These perceptions create internalized racism, colorism, and our own racial prejudice against other groups and one another. They often determine whether a person is hired or fired and what opportunities are open to that individual in the current social construct.

I had been at the game for about thirty minutes when I took a seat next to a White family. The father and I started a conversation, and he began asking me political questions. It was just after the 2012 election, and even before he started asking directly about my vote, I knew he was trying to *type* me; I knew where the conversation was headed.

Can I just watch the game? I thought but didn't say.

I will not let you determine if I'm a safe Black person for political rhetoric today, I also thought.

These are not things you say aloud to those in the majority culture, so I took his questions and comments on the chin until he asked if I knew any Black conservatives. I wouldn't discuss partisan politics, I told him. It's too divisive. Besides, I said, for a few years I'd been on a journey of dismantling, deprogramming, and detangling many unhealthy worldviews I'd previously held relating to the intersection of politics and my Christian and racial identity. I'd come to realize that race is both a political and a social construct.

Instead of asking what I meant, the father kindly changed the subject after my persistent disengagement. All seemed fine, until his wife suddenly brought up desegregation. How the conversation went from basketball to politics to desegregation I still don't know, and in the moment, I was dumbfounded.

Had they saved all their questions for the first Black person they interacted with?

I love history, and since that African American History class in college, I had taken great care to understand the truth about desegregation. Seizing the opportunity, I explained how the implementation of desegregation lacked empathy, structure, and planning. Enforcing a law didn't dismantle racism. Diversity doesn't disrupt systemic racism, I told her, nor did it kill racist views. By studying the truth about desegregation, I'd come to see that the process in the South lacked on-the-ground leadership and that the concern for black schools—students and teachers—was not a priority. What's more, the process of desegregation lacked recognition of psychological and emotional effects on both the White and the Black communities. Had it acknowledged the White community's implicit sense of superiority? Could it undo the psychological results of abuse and trauma the Black community had suffered at the hands of the majority culture? And didn't that same abuse continue as more Black teachers were fired than White, more Black schools closed than White, less training and resources given to Black teachers, coaches, and faculty than White?

She barely listened. Instead, she shifted the conversation, began discussing how the Black children who were bused to her school displayed so much anger. This anger, she said, caused a lot of conflict. She acknowledged that neither community—non-White nor majority—was prepared for the transition. That lack of preparation led to anger among the Black students, and that anger led to fear within the White community.

Leadership didn't strive to bring unity or encourage understanding of growing diversity, she said, and so the desegregation of her school had led to internal segregation. At this point the conversation again turned. She began discussing slavery and Abraham Lincoln and the unintended consequences of the Civil War. She gave an unsolicited opinion about how the actions of

Abraham Lincoln amounted to war atrocities, how he crushed the South economically. Like the schools during desegregation, the South was not ready for the transition.

I sat silent, completely flabbergasted. She villainized President Lincoln even though he'd freed the slaves, even though he'd taken the first step toward honoring the Constitution of the United States. (Don't get me wrong; I don't see President Lincoln as having a spotless record when it comes to race relations.) But this woman—she didn't seem to care. Her opinion of our emancipating president had been formed primarily by the economic effect his administration had on the American South.

She continued, talking about the fires, destruction, and near deconstruction of the South, which, she said, was the land of her ancestors. She continued with her romanticizing of the South, and then she offered the boldest of statements.

"It wasn't all bad, you know. Many loved their slaves in the South," she said. "They were treated like family."

Heart racing, emotions all over the place, I didn't know whether to scream, cry, or shout. Here I was, at a community basketball game surrounded by people connected to my work and church. I paused for what seemed like the longest moment of my life; I believe it truly was one of the most important. I considered how we'd come to this place in the conversation, wondered how this stranger could be so oblivious to the pain and evils of slavery. How could someone be so deceived? How could the truth have been so watered down and washed away? How could any Christian hold these views?

In that moment, that holy pause, I gained my composure and

tried to remain calm. Practically speechless, I couldn't find all the words to give her a brief inductive history lesson. Instead, I told her I'd read the slave narratives and that there was no love or care in slavery.

"Love," I said, "brings freedom, and slaves didn't have freedom or choice. Family doesn't leave family in bondage."

And having stated that truth, I changed the subject.

The Power of Truth

What is the truth? Hasn't *truth* become a complicated word in these days when news is labeled "fake," where "alternative facts" serve as the basis for a sort of virtual, choose-your-own reality? This complexity, though, isn't as recent as many would think. Truth has always been evaluated from various perspectives, depending on whether one is the teller or the listener, the winner or the loser, the dominant party or the marginalized. When the teller has an agenda, especially if the teller holds power, lies often are told to distort the truth. Eventually, those lies permeate our culture, our very way of thinking. In that gym in Austin, I listened to a Christian woman who'd been enculturated in politically charged lies, and I felt the sting of her comments.

The truth—historical, sociological, psychological, and spiritual—should not be up for debate, especially among Christian people. In Ephesians, Paul wrote, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist." The gospel of John records Jesus's prayer: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

Truth, unvarnished and unfiltered, is essential to the work of sanctification, freedom, and reconciliation. So what is truth in the context of racial reconciliation?

The truth is that each ethnicity reflects a unique aspect of God's image. No one tribe or group of people can adequately display the fullness of God. The truth is that it takes every tribe, tongue, and nation to reflect the image of God in his fullness. The truth is that race is a social construct, one that has divided and set one group over the other from the earliest days of humanity. The Christian construct, though, dismantles this way of thinking and seeks to reunite us under a common banner of love and fellowship. Consider these words from the apostle Paul:

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.³

This does not mean that we take a color-blind approach to community. Too many Christians believe that the ultimate goal should be seeing the world without color, and some even pretend to already be in this "holy" place. But Paul wasn't suggesting that aspects of our gender or racial identity aren't important, that we should all meld together into one indistinguishable throng. In fact, Paul emphasized that unity can be found in diversity. We all have been given different gifts; we all are different parts of the

same body.⁴ In the love of the family of God, we must become color brave, color caring, color honoring, and not color blind. We have to recognize the image of God in one another. We have to love despite, and even because of, our differences.

Unfortunately, many American Christians approach the conversation of race from various "truths." I've heard more than one White Christian claim that their churches weren't complicit in slavery or that they haven't benefited from systems of non-White oppression or that they're "color blind." I believe that to effectively pursue reconciliation, we need to identify and agree together on the truth, based in facts. After all, we can't fix what we don't understand or acknowledge.

Let's consider this foundational truth: God didn't create race. Did he create different ethnic groups? Yes. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, scriptures identify different ethnic groups. For instance, in Zechariah 2:11, the prophet wrote, "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people." The word *nations* in the text comes from the Hebrew word *goy*, which means a group of foreigners, people who were ethnically different from the Israelites. In Acts 13:47, we read, "This is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" The Greek term used for Gentiles, *ethnos*, also means a foreign, non-Jewish people group. It is, of course, the word from which we derive the words *ethnic* and *ethnicity*.⁵

But despite the Bible's recognition of differing ethnic groups, there is no indication of race. Race, as we know it, is a political and social construct created by man for the purpose of asserting power and maintaining a hierarchy. When we believe the lies embedded with racial hierarchies, reconciliation becomes impossible.

As Christians of differing ethnicities, we share a common heritage, a common memory. We are reminded who we are and whose we are through our salvation history. We remember how Christ's sacrifice on Calvary connects us to the family of God, connects us eternally to one another. In our Christian faith, our memory is embodied in various communal and liturgical acts. In common prayer, in communion, in baptism, we are reminded that all our stories are wrapped in and intertwined with God's story. And as brothers and sisters in Christ, we must not only share our foundational memories and practices of faith but also share and understand our personal and ethnic histories. To participate in the family of Christ alongside the non-White culture, the majority culture must understand non-White perspectives and the truth of historical narratives.

Without understanding the truth of racial injustice, both majority-culture and non-White-culture Christians will find themselves mired in dissonant relationships. If we avoid hard truths to preserve personal comfort or to fashion a facade of peace, our division will only widen.

Jesus can make beauty from ashes, but the family of God must first see and acknowledge the ashes.

Our Shared Past

Our common memory of slavery has been diluted and misinterpreted. Too much of our past has been whitewashed from the history books or conveniently left off the community monument. Consider, for instance, the story of Mary Turner, a wife and mom in Valdosta, Georgia.

Turner was born about 1899, after the Emancipation Proclamation, during the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War. Though slavery had been outlawed, in an effort to keep the Union together at any cost, federal law often turned a blind eye to the injustices against members of the Black community. Slavery in the South took a new form, a form largely ignored by the federal government.

The South was in shambles, and its economy, built on the backs of slaves, was struggling. Plantation owners had regained their farms and businesses, but their financial model couldn't succeed without slave labor. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865, allowed for the use of slavery as a form of criminal punishment. So though many of the slaves were technically freed, they could be subjected again to debt slavery or be sentenced to slavery for minor crimes. Black citizens were assessed taxes and charged excessive interest, and Black orphans were returned to the plantations, where their costs of living were charged against them in debt. All of this subjected former slaves to what many today refer to as slavery by another name.

What's more, many former members of the slave patrol had been recruited as law-enforcement officials. They arrested Black people if they walked on the wrong side of the road or if they were deemed out of place. These arrests subjected Black people again to this new form of slavery.

This racial reality frames the story of Mary Turner.

In Valdosta, a White plantation owner named Hampton Smith was known for abusing and terrorizing anyone who worked for him. Struggling to keep the employees he needed to run his agricultural business, he turned to debt slavery, also known as peonage. He'd bail people out of jail and then hold that debt over their heads, requiring them to pay him off by providing cheap (or unpaid) labor.

Sydney Johnson, who had been arrested for simply rolling dice, was bailed out by Hampton Smith. Realizing after a few days of work that he was not being properly paid for his labor, Johnson refused to work. Smith took issue with this refusal and beat Johnson. After recovering from the beating, Johnson shot and killed Smith and then fled, an act that ignited fury and rage in Valdosta.

A manhunt for Sydney Johnson ensued, and the White mob took the occasion to lynch and murder several Black men. Among them was the husband of Mary Turner, who was eight months pregnant when she heard the news of his death.

Grief stricken, enraged, and wanting justice, Turner indicated that if she discovered who'd murdered her husband, she'd seek warrants for their arrest. Her comments were not treated lightly, and a White mob gathered to send a message to the Black community: they would not be subjected to punishment for lynchings; they would not be threatened.

Mary was caught trying to flee. The White men who formed this mob tied the pregnant eighteen-year-old by her ankles, hung her upside down from a tree, poured gasoline on her body, and burned her alive. As Mary hung from the tree, dead, her abdomen was cut open and the baby removed. The child hit the ground and let out several cries before his head was crushed by one of the White men. As if the lynching and infanticide were not enough, the men raised their guns and filled Mary's burned and lifeless body with bullets. Mary Turner and her unborn child were denied the right to live because she had the audacity to demand justice.⁶

At the time of Turner's death in 1918, my great-grandmother Gladys Beatrice Nicholson was twenty years old. Women in my family, women I knew, lived through the peonage era, through the era of slavery by another name, through the era of lynching and infanticide.

Mary Turner's story is ugly, a difficult story to read, and maybe that's why it (and thousands like it) isn't told in our text-books and is rarely acknowledged as part of our history. This and other heartbreaking realities undermine the romanticized stories, the lies, of slavery and Reconstruction that have been woven into the accepted narrative. Events just like this one led to the flight of thousands of Black families from the South through the period of Reconstruction and into the late 1960s, a movement now known as the Great Migration.

Mary Turner's family has never received justice. Shouldn't her horrific loss of life be acknowledged by the White community? Shouldn't her name be written on courthouses and public buildings, places where justice is supposed to be found? Can you see why the Black community might think so? And could her story help us understand the strained race relations to this day in Valdosta and the surrounding Lowndes County?

Jesus can bring restoration to even the most broken and

gruesome atrocities, atrocities like the lynching of Mary Turner; after all, Jesus experienced his own unjust lynching. Like Turner, Jesus was hung because he opposed the dominant authority. But Jesus sought to bring reconciliation, even to that place. After he was wrongly convicted and hung from a tree, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Forgiveness and healing cannot begin until we become aware of the historical roots of the problem and acknowledge the harm caused

The Power of Awareness

In our reconciliation circles, the Be the Bridge groups we've started around the country, we discuss stories like Mary Turner's. We also discuss the broad history of racism in this country, how it began the minute Europeans stepped foot on the land. In some groups, we've discussed how Christopher Columbus began subjugating the native people when he first discovered the New World, how he said, "These people are very unskilled in arms. . . . With 50 men they could all be subjected and made to do all that one wished." And that's exactly what Columbus and his people did. They oppressed the natives, stole their resources, and brought diseases that decimated the native populations. Yet to this day, Christopher Columbus has his own national holiday.

Some of our groups have discussed the atrocities committed against Native Americans too, such as how in 1823, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, finding that Native Americans could occupy and control lands

within the United States but could not hold title to them.⁹ And in 1830, our country passed the Indian Removal Act, which allowed President Andrew Jackson to negotiate the relocation of Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river.¹⁰ The act ostensibly provided for a peaceable relocation, but those who didn't agree to the terms were forcibly removed. And then, the Homestead Act of 1862—ratified just a little more than thirty years after the Indian Removal Act—gave millions of acres of land west of the Mississippi to White settlers, land that had belonged to Creek and Cherokee natives. Finally, in 1902 and 1903, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had the right and power to modify or terminate Native American treaties without the Native Americans' consent. And with that, all our agreements with the Native Americans became as worthless as the paper they were written on.¹¹

In our Bridge groups, we've explored how the soil of America is steeped in racism. And through these discussions, I've seen awareness lead people out of denial and ignorance, into lamentation, and ultimately into racial solidarity. I've seen my friends transform as they begin to understand our nation's history from a perspective that includes racially diverse voices. My friend Bekah Self is one of those people.

I first met Bekah at a Be the Bridge group. She was living a few miles from me in a predominantly White suburb of Austin. In her neighborhood, she might go weeks without seeing a brown or black face, but this was not a new experience for her. She'd grown up in a homogenous and isolated White Christian bubble. She'd attended a Christian private school in the suburbs of Dallas.

Her parents served as leaders in the White homogenous church of her childhood. She attended Baylor University, a primarily White private Christian university.

She admitted to our group that she'd lived a certain kind of experience, one filled mostly with White people and White narratives. In this isolation, her stereotypes and assumptions were rarely, if ever, challenged, so she entered our group with little to no knowledge of the racial tension in America. She was bubbly, energetic, and completely unaware of what to expect. On her first night meeting our group, she told us she felt a little intimidated and explained that she wasn't certain she belonged in the conversation. Her life already exuded love, she felt, and she wasn't a non-White, hadn't adopted children transracially, so she wasn't quite sure why she was there.

After going around the room and hearing what brought each person to the group, I asked the first question: "Have you ever experienced racism, and if so, where were you and how did it make you feel?" As several people of color began to tell personal stories, the room grew tense and awkward. You could feel the discomfort. What was everyone thinking?

I observed the shock written on the faces of many of the White women. They were coming into proximity with the effects of injustice in the lives of real people.

I noticed something else as we went around the room: many of the White ladies didn't have a story involving racism. They couldn't even identify a story involving a friend of another ethnicity who'd been affected by systemic racism. We continued around the circle, and one of the Black ladies who wasn't originally from Austin recalled a time when she and her sisters visited the capital city in the late 1960s to purchase their mom a birthday gift. They were insulted, racial slurs were slung at them, and they were escorted from the store. As she finished her story, the room let out a collective gasp. That's when I noticed Bekah.

She was crying, and through her sobs, she managed to wonder aloud why she was in the room, since she hadn't experienced such humiliation, pain, or embarrassment because of her race. She questioned whether she should be part of the group, said she had nothing to offer to the conversation. She was undone.

What Bekah didn't understand at the time (though she does now) was that her role wasn't to *do* anything. She didn't need to say anything or strive to find a related example. Her role was to listen and learn. By becoming aware of the realities of racial division, she could grow in empathy, and empathy is the first step toward racial solidarity. Empathy would allow her to sit in someone else's pain.

Bekah wrestled through her tension and listened to the stories of her sisters. As she did, she grew in her awareness of the problem. Week after week, she came back to the group, bringing her fears, her insecurities, her doubts, her assumptions, her stereotypes. Together, we led her to lay those fears and insecurities at the foot of the cross, where we are all equal and whole. And over time, as she was met consistently with truth and grace, she grew in humility.

It wasn't easy, but Bekah began to inspect every area of her

life, looking for racial bias and prejudices and identifying ways society had shaped her views of other racial groups. She began to reach out to neighbors who didn't look like her. She started having conversations about implicit bias with her children, husband, church, and family. In true Bekah fashion, she shared about becoming a bridge builder with anyone who'd listen.

Bekah has become one of my dearest friends. She now coleads a Be the Bridge group with another friend from that original group, Susan Seay. Bekah grew in awareness, and that awareness has led her in the journey toward making reconciliation a lifestyle. Today as a personal trainer in Austin, she seeks out opportunities to include diversity in her own business and looks for ways to lead others toward a healthier perspective on race.

Finding Freedom Through Truth

Historical truths play an important role in our understanding of how we arrived in our current racial tension. Without looking back, without understanding the truth of our history, it's difficult to move forward in healthy ways. And even though it might be painful to recount our history as a country, denying it leads us nowhere. Truth is the foundation of awareness, and awareness is the first step in the process of reconciliation. Jesus said as much: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 12

Truth frees us to grow. Frees us to see. Frees us to be aware. Frees us from the bondage of racial sin. Frees us to have courage for the difficult conversations.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- I. Is truth important on the Christian journey? Explain your answer.
- 2. Why do we sometimes try to suppress truth? What motivation might be at work when we avoid engaging with truth?
- 3. List at least two scriptures that call us to a common and shared memory of our faith.
- 4. Why is it important to be familiar with historical events?
- 5. List three historical facts related to our nation's racial history that you learned outside school.
- 6. Why does the process of bridge building begin with awareness?
- 7. Discuss some ways we can become more aware of our racial history.

A Prayer for Truth

Lord, you ask us to shine your light of truth into the darkness of sin, both in the world and in our own lives. We need your truth to cut away our nation's long-standing racial inequity, our idolatry of whiteness and nationalism, and any form of injustice or oppression. Lord, let us bravely cling to the truth of your love, truth that leads us to speak against all forms of hatred toward people created in the imago Dei. Amen.

-HEATHER WINDELER

FOREWORD BY DANIELLE STRICKLAND

ASHLEE EILAND



HOW RECLAIMING HUMAN WORTH and EMBRACING RADICAL KINDNESS WILL BRING US BACK TOGETHER



ASHLEE EILAND



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Human(Kind)

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We are together in this. Our human compassion binds us the one to the other—not in pity or patronisingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.

—Nelson Mandela, December 6, 2000 Johannesburg, South Africa

Foreword

This world is a mess. Our world is a mess. My world is a mess. Even typing that feels cathartic somehow because it's the truth. Amid the complexity of the messy problems in our world—racism, sexism, and violence, just to name a few—grows fear. That fear manifests in our everyday lives in the way we distance ourselves from one another. We are afraid to engage. We are afraid of conversation; our lives have become full of subjects too sensitive and difficult to bring up. So we stick to weather and sports, clinging to whatever is polite enough to ensure we stay out of the tension. Living this way makes us feel uncertain and overwhelmed and paralyzes our best efforts to connect. Is there a remedy?

In *Human*(*Kind*), Ashlee Eiland offers us a deep tonic for our condition. Far more than a self-help formula that alleviates any tension, her invitation to try kindness is a terribly beautiful offer. The cynical among us may scoff at the idea that something so simple could be a way out of our current cycles of pain. But simple does not equal easy. This is an invitation to come out from behind the walls of complexity and despair and get to the task in front of us. Even before that, it's an invitation to get to the task *inside* us—to start applying kindness to ourselves.

I'm honored that Ashlee has welcomed me into her life. She has navigated a rich variety of circumstances to find herself here, in a wise and generous place. The word *kind* describes her well. The pain and beauty of her life are infused here with an opportunity to rediscover our own humanity through another lens. As I read these stories, so beautifully crafted and honestly shared, I wonder who Ashlee is. I find myself trying to define her. Is she an African American woman searching for value, belonging,

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and connection in a world full of racial tension and confusion? The answer is yes. And yet she is more than that. Is she a strong, wide-eyed, curious girl growing into a wise and whole leader in a church filled with sexism? Yes, she is, and yet there is more. Is she a contemplative seeker, yearning for depth in a shallow, functional, success-driven culture? Yes, she is, but there is more. Is she a mother who longs to nurture and lead other little humans into the fullness of God's sacred callings? Yes, she is, but there is more. And that's what kindness does, I suppose. It helps us look into and beyond our typical defining labels. It breaks open the boxes we have put ourselves in. Suddenly, we have the open space to explore what else we are and could be and might even become if we gave ourselves permission to explore the *more* of ourselves and of one another.

Ashlee is not just one thing—she is human and therefore complex. Her situation is unique and common at the same time. She is a holy, mysterious, beautiful creation who has a sacred glow in the deepest part of her, a divine yes right at the center. And discovering this is the core call of this book—to move beyond the categories and limitations we put on one another and even the ones we put on ourselves. To uncover the longings, the divine invitation, the sacred image in one another. To uproot buried hopes and possibilities and nurse them back to life—using kindness as a potent remedy. Resurrection power is found in the simple truth that kindness might just be able to bring us all back to life. So be curious, honest, grateful, and friendly, and don't avoid sacrifice, commitment, rejection, or loss, because if we are kind, these things become portals to healing and wholeness.

—Danielle Strickland, author, speaker, and social justice advocate

Camping While Black

(Adventure)

B lack people don't camp. At least, that's the general consensus. It's not even a stereotype, really. It's just a fact. I've never met black people who camp on a regular basis. I'm sure there are plenty of us who like camping and are maybe even camping right now. But, much like croquet or pickle ball or race-car driving, camping does not come to mind when I think of the black experience.

But I've been camping. More than one time.

Let's clear something up. When I say camping, I'm not talking about being away *at* camp, where one stays in cabins or heated lodges equipped with full-size beds, refrigerators, toilets, and showers. I'm also not talking about parking *on* a campsite in a fully furnished RV where you can sleep inside, separated from nature by a physical door with a handle and comforted by cool air flowing from a built-in AC unit. Just to clarify, this is called "glamping."

I'm talking tents. Campfires. Going potty in the woods. Catching fish with your bare hands and eating them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. This is the type of camping I was subjected to by my mom, dad, and their band of camping compadres.

My parents' circle of friends is the kind of community some people wish for their whole lives but never find. When I was growing up, there were consistently about three to five couples my parents did life with for Valentine's Day, Christmas, and New Year's Eve. If there was a holiday to celebrate, there was a party to throw. The adults got dressed up and went out, spouses often in coordinating outfits, to someone's home or to a hotel or restaurant, ready to serenade a significant other for karaoke night or dance and eat in celebration of yet another milestone of friendship.

These celebratory habits were generally accepted and encouraged by me and the other party "orphans." We ended up forming a little community of self-sufficient preteens and teenagers, huddling in my godbrother's room or somewhere on the other end of the party site, figuring out ways to entertain ourselves while the grown-ups had their fun.

Then one weekend my parents told me we were going camping. I was so confused. *We don't camp*, I thought. And by "we" I meant black people.

But before I knew it, we'd loaded up our sheltie, some tents and coolers, and bags filled with camping gear and attire. All brand-new. We then set our sights on Bastrop, Texas—a little town on the outskirts of Austin that was about a two-hour drive from our house in Houston.

There was at least one perk from the outset: to make trips more enjoyable for me as an only child, my parents often encouraged me to invite a friend from school to keep me company. This trip was no different. My friend Brittany accompanied me, and we met a boy named Cedric at the campsite, a family friend of one of the other couples. Add Cedric's friend and another couple's son, and there we were: five black city kids and a dog, silently staring at one another across a campfire, shiny camping chair tags waving in the smoke-stained wind. The adults picked up where they left off, laughing and telling stories, smooth jazz and R & B providing a soundtrack for the rustic scenery. But we kids were not laughing.

After all, we were camping. Far from the comforts of our Nintendos and *SimCity*, we were out of our element—and yet we were forced to give this camping thing a try.

To keep ourselves busy, the five of us kids eventually figured out that we could play cards and volleyball. Brittany and I took the dog on walks to the water, doing a weird preteen girl thing where we avoided the boys at all costs one minute and then tried to convince them to hang out with us the next. It was so much emotional work. Far from leisurely.

Then there was the work of trying to keep my hairdo intact. I wrapped my thick black hair in my satin bandanna at night, just as I was accustomed to doing at home. But because I didn't wash my hair every day (this is part of the magic of certain types of black-girl hair, in case you didn't know), my hair would absorb the smell of campfire smoke, my silky and perm-straightened strands battling the stench of burnt s'mores and slightly overdone hot dogs.

Here I was, out of my element once again. This time, in the middle of nowhere.

My family did this camping trip to Bastrop at least a handful of times, and each time the same scene was set: at least a couple of black city kids saturating themselves with layer upon layer of mosquito spray, playing some sort of sport or dealing cards around a campfire, listening in on the adults' stories and outbursts of laughter. That was camping.

On one such trip, the weather forecaster was predicting intense rain and thunderstorms during our stay. We took our chances, being familiar with the unpredictability of Texas weather. The forecast could call for clear and sunny and, somehow, you'd wind up drenched, or the meteorologist could send you to the grocery to stock up on water, canned goods, and masking tape, predicting the apocalypse, and . . . ta-da! Beach day.

When we got to the campsite, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. We unpacked our bags, set up our tents, and got the fire going. Cedric was there—avoiding me, most likely. I remember digging through my backpack, trying to decide whether I was going to take a walk by myself or actually do some of my math homework. One family was setting up a brand-new RV—which completely broke our camping rules, mind you. But it was a welcome addition. No one wanted to admit that we envied its AC and shade, which provided shelter from the heavy flannel blanket that is central Texas heat and humidity.

Sitting near the campfire with my math book, I could hear my dad and his friend cracking jokes. My mom was getting a meal ready with her girlfriend when we heard it: muffled shouting. The sound pierced the still air, went silent for a few seconds—and then we heard it again. I looked up, and in the distance, coming up the dusty hill to our campsite, was my Uncle Lonnie—huffing as his short frame race-walked toward our stuff, moving with a sense of urgency. We couldn't hear him, so we all stayed still, holding our books and beverages, waiting for him to get a little bit closer. *Maybe he spotted a black bear*, I thought. Maybe the one toilet at the campsite was clogged. Surely, it wasn't anything too pressing.

Just then, the sky above me went from light powder blue to an ominous puce green. With the snap of a finger, the clouds opened up and water started falling from the sky in sharp sheets. This was more than rain. The wind picked up. The fire was snuffed instantly. The overhang of the new RV blew back, and my dad and his friends lunged instinctively to catch it. Nothing was safe.

As my mom and her friends scrambled to save our things, all I heard was my dad yelling for me and the dog to get in the car. Without another thought, I grabbed our dog and shoved my backpack into our SUV. My shaky hands slipped on the seat belt as I scrambled to fasten myself in. The rear door flew open, and I watched from my seat as the adults stuffed

soaking-wet tents, clothes, coolers, and blankets into the back without stopping to determine what belonged to whom. In the midst of the chaos, I looked outside and saw that it was green and clear and still. It was the most eerie mental snapshot of my life. Then it hit me: This wasn't just a storm. It was a tornado.

My parents darted into the car, and my dad revved the engine without a seat belt on. Somehow, he got us out of the campsite and onto the main road without a scratch. As we drove away from the tornado and back toward home, I took note of the musty smell of mold beginning to set in. Everything was wet and muddy. Huddled next to the dog, I was shivering, even though the car's heat was on. My hair was destroyed: only a damp and frizzy crown of curly, shocked strands remained. No satin bandanna could've saved it. Up front, my parents were mostly quiet for the entire two-hour drive.

Finally, back at home, I reached into my bag. My orange math book was twice its original size, the pages and cardboard cover expanded from the water damage. This meant two things: I couldn't do my homework, and all of a sudden, I had a killer story to tell at school on Monday.

We never went camping again.

My parents continued to meet up with their friends for parties and celebrations. I went on to attend my fair share of camps, where, huddled in the safety of a cabin or the luxury of a hotel room, I could wrap my black-girl hair and do my homework in peace, safe from the threat of tornadoes and the anxiety of awkward interactions with introverted boys.

Although my camping days are over, I now know what's possible. Before that first declaration that we were, in fact, going camping, I'd made an assumption about what was possible—about what I could and couldn't, should and shouldn't do—based on what I'd seen.

In the absence of an example, I'd drawn a hard line about what could be included in the breadth of my experience, hesitating to participate because "That's just not what we do."

However, choosing to do the things "we just don't do" can lead to some of life's greatest adventures. By diving into experiences, conversations, and relationships we otherwise would never touch, we get to create new memories and potentially confront unintended stereotypes—for our own sake and to rewrite the stories others may try to tell about us.

As the other kids and I grew up and went our separate ways, my parents and the other adults stayed connected and kept up their holiday party traditions. They even met my friends and me in Las Vegas years later as a part of my twenty-first birthday celebration.

Camping was something I didn't love, but I love that we tried it. I love that it helped me connect with nature in a way I'd never experienced before, a connection that is still meaningful to me even now. I love that it allowed me to make friends I never would have met otherwise. I love that I witnessed my parents in relationship with people who mean a lot to them around a campfire and under an RV canopy.

In the end, I love that the thing "we just don't do" became a great story—one that formed new possibilities in my life. That's the genius of adventure, isn't it? It gives us more than just a tale of a singular experience. It also unlocks what *could be*—what *could* become part of our stories. The things we used to be closed off to, the boundaries we used to place around our lives or the lives of other people, are now an open road without a railing, an unobstructed path to expanding what we've previously known to be true. How have we been limiting ourselves? Better yet, how have we been limiting the possibility of what's true in others? Whatever great things we think certain people don't do—I guarantee one of them does. If we're lucky enough to meet or form relationships with people who defy the limiting stories and stereotypes that have been told and held

about them, maybe we'll be less surprised when we hear about the mom who has six kids *and* works a full-time job, the eighty-nine-year-old man who still lifts weights at the gym every day, the Latino boy who's really into anime, the high school girl who loves football and made the team—or the black girl who went camping.

Maybe we'll be more empowering, kind, and generous when we think of what's possible in others' communities, cultures, and lives—or even our own. We'll talk about all the places adventure has taken us and what we've learned and how we succeeded along the way, stitching possibility back into the tapestries of our stories. We'll talk about the Bastrop camping trips and the bad storms, the barriers broken and the limits defied. And maybe, one day, people won't be so surprised.

The Cross I Bear

(Kelegse)

Reclaiming human worth and embracing radical kindness will always require that we sacrifice something: our energy, our time, or our pride.

One of my favorite Scripture passages talks about what will be required of us if we choose to pursue sacrificial living the way Jesus did:

Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. (Philippians 2:3–6, MSG)

Forget yourselves. What if the key to being brave and defying the divides that have formed in our families, our neighborhoods, our churches, and our friend groups has something to do with forgetting ourselves? What if the heaps of our demolished pride form the foundation for unity? What if we hold our stories with confidence and tenderness, appreciating what we've learned, but don't consider them or our values the most important thing?

This is the journey of humankindness: knowing and loving ourselves fully and honoring the hand life has dealt us, emptying ourselves for others, seeing the fullness of joy and hurt and pain in every interaction, and then choosing to regard another with humility and selflessness anyway.

I have a long way to go to live a life that reflects Paul's charge in Philippians 2, to extend kindness as he challenged in Ephesians 4: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (verse 32, NIV). But the unity of our humanity—achieved not by our own striving but because of a good God's perfect love and kindness toward us—is worth the continued pursuit.

This will require some flipped and tipped thinking, some stretched perspective. This will require some stillness and pause, some humiliation and sacrifice.

But at the end of the day, you must ask yourself, *Is our human unity worth my sacrifice?* I'm not talking about unity that is tolerant or fake, ignoring conviction and diluting identity. Mere tolerance and ignorance aren't kind. I'm talking about unity that rallies us together around our *imago Dei* and calls us to pursue relational healing with a higher purpose, anchored by the freeing power of the good news of grace.

Our one and only lives are meant to be lived in fullness—a fullness that honors our stories *and* the stories of strangers and neighbors and loved ones.

We can find our way back to one another. However, it will require all of us. After all, in the beginning what was true of and united our humanness was that God considered it *very good*.

At a church service a while back, I was standing in the front row next to the man who married my husband and me. He and his wife had recently journeyed a tough and largely public road in their marriage, but here we were, standing side by side in worship at the foot of the cross that towered above us onstage.

I'd had a particularly tough day and was finding it hard to focus. The burden was wearing on me, a black woman in a predominantly culturally white church who needed to show up with strength. I was weak. I was especially tired that day.

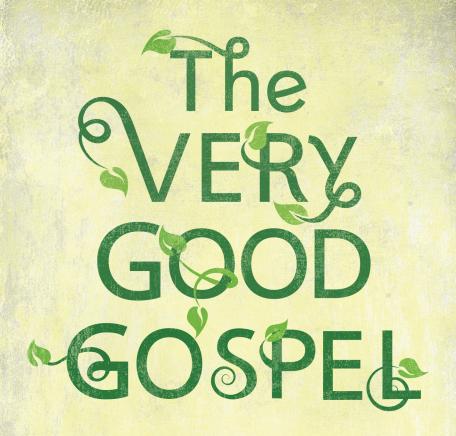
But in the middle of the worship service, this man leaned over to me and said, "Ashlee, I know that most of these people will never understand the cross you've had to bear. But I see you—and God sees you. And he loves you."

This man, this white man with a thick South African accent, summed up what humankindness means to me.

We all have burdens we've had to shoulder in life—circumstances that were hard to carry, that we never thought we'd live through. Some will never understand us, no matter how hard we try to tell our stories or justify our positions.

But if we're willing to release some of ourselves for the sake of another in the spirit of radical kindness, to let go of power, control, or other lesser gods that we've been gripping so tightly, with enough attention, care, and love, we can still acknowledge the complexity and sacredness of one another's lives, even if we never understand the whole story.

We can choose to see one another, to invite proximity and share space. We can listen and learn. We can remind one another that even when we get it wrong, we can continue to submit ourselves to the "incredibly humbling process" that Jesus himself endured. We can take heart in knowing that God sees us, and because of *his* loving-kindness toward us, we are able to grip tightly to a worth and identity defined in him, loving one another in ways beyond our own human strength and ability. And that loving, radical kindness, if we choose to accept and pursue it, will be what binds us, beautiful and imperfect, together again and again and again.



How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right

LISA SHARON HARPER

FOREWORD BY WALTER BRUEGGEMANN





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THE VERY GOOD GOSPEL

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For all those who long for more.

FOREWORD

Lisa Sharon Harper has written a bracing, generative exposition of the elemental narrative of gospel faith. She has done so by sharing the sequence of the "very good" of creation, "the wreckage of the Fall," and the "very good" of the gospel of reconciliation and restoration.

The powerful witness of her book is an antidote to a "thin" reading of the gospel. By *thin* Harper means a surface reading that settles simply and immediately for what meets the eye and assumes that a quick summary gets it all. Such a reading of the gospel risks reducing it to a package of certitudes without recognition of the depth and mystery of the news. She examines the convenient fundamentalism that has too often given credence to racism and gender violence, and she addresses the progressive church and the flaws of "thin" theology.

Thus, Harper proposes a "thick" reading of the gospel. The notion of "thick description" has an important pedigree that's well worth noting. The phrase was first coined by Gilbert Ryle in his philosophic understanding of the world that refused simple scientific explanatory positivism. The term was taken up by Clifford Geertz in his cultural anthropology. Geertz insisted that conventional social-scientific observation could not possibly grasp—let alone explain—the significance of social symbols and practices in cultures other than our own. George Lindbeck used the term in his resistance to "propositional" or "expressive" theological method as he advocated a "cultural linguistic" approach.

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In her book, Harper takes up the awareness of Ryle, Geertz, and Lindbeck and applies it to our discernment of the gospel. There is more to the gospel than meets the eye, so evangelical thought must be patient in its recognition of the inscrutable mystery of the God of the gospel who gives gifts and summons to tasks that do not fit our preconceived categories.

The capacity that Harper exhibits to move from thin to thick in her exposition of the gospel is empowered by her personal witness of faith and life. She knows firsthand about the racism and gender violence that arise from a thin rendering of the gospel. Indeed, she knows in her own life about the "wreckage of the Fall," whereby violence is inflected on one's neighbors. It took my breath away when I read of her third great-grandmother who was the last adult slave in her family on a plantation in South Carolina. One cannot overestimate the force of the memory and experience of such violence as a context for rereading the gospel.

Her melding of textually informed theology and her experience of violence result in a book that is compellingly thick. Harper addresses the deep wound-producing practices of our society and articulates the costly hope of healing inherent in the gospel. With acute insight, she details the interface between gospel faith and lived reality. *The Very Good Gospel* is a welcome read that invites a rethinking of faith and life that is all too often dumbed down to thin. Thinning our bodies may be good for our physical health, but such thinning of faith is a recipe for chaos and death. Harper bears witness to the thicker, truer understanding of a saving, transformative, reconciling faith that is indeed "very good."

Walter Brueggemann Columbia Theological Seminary October 12, 2015



Shalom and Race

August 22, 2014. I pull my rental car into the parking lot of Three Kings Public House across the street from Washington University in St. Louis. I'm here to talk with evangelical faith leaders about what had happened twenty minutes away on August 9.

As he walked home from a convenience store in the suburb of Ferguson, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer. Brown's body lay in the middle of the street for four and a half hours. The officer involved, Darren Wilson, filed a nearly blank incident report. But the account given by police chief Jon Belmar conflicted with various eye-witness reports. Candlelight vigils turned violent. Young people from the area took to the streets in protest. The Ferguson Police Department brought out military-grade vehicles, equipment, and weapons in an effort to contain the protests. Tear-gas canisters were fired into the crowd. Demonstrators were ordered off the streets. News reporters were assaulted. The Missouri State Highway Patrol took over security, and after one night of quiet, violent clashes broke out again.

I followed the events on the news and didn't sleep for a week. A single question haunted me: With so many white and multiethnic evangelical churches in St. Louis, why weren't there more white people and other non-African American ethnicities marching with the people of Ferguson?

I landed in St. Louis on Wednesday, August 20, with one primary goal: to help build a bridge between white and multiethnic churches and the movement for justice in Ferguson. Two days later, I ended a call with my boss, Jim Wallis, and walked into Three Kings pub. It was time to show the people of Ferguson they were not alone.

Howie Meloch, the associate regional director of a college ministry in the area, greeted me at the door. He had assembled a number of top white, black, and Asian American leaders of evangelical churches, networks, and ministries in St. Louis. Leroy Barber, author of *Red, Brown, Yellow, Black, White—Who's More Precious in God's Sight?*, co-facilitated the gathering.

I spoke about the Genesis 1:26–27 declaration that all humanity is made in the image of God and emphasized that in the same breath, God said he would give humanity dominion. I reflected on four implications of that truth:

- 1. Every person in this restaurant, every person on the street, and every person in Ferguson is made in the image of God.
- 2. That means that, all things being equal, every person was created with the command and the capacity to exercise the Genesis 1:26–27 dominion, which means to steward or, in modern terms, to exercise agency or to lead.
- 3. To diminish or ignore the ability of humans to exercise dominion is to diminish or ignore the image of God in them. And it is to diminish or ignore God's image on earth.

4. The fastest and surest way to diminish the ability of humans to exercise agency is through poverty and/or oppression.

Leroy Barber reflected on Isaiah 61:1–5, reminding us that Isaiah said there is one who will proclaim good news to the oppressed. He pointed out that Jesus quoted this passage in his first sermon on earth. He reminded us of the prophecy in verses 3–4: "They will be called oaks of righteousness. . . . They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations." Leroy mentioned that those who would take action are oppressed, brokenhearted captives and prisoners, the ones who mourn. It is a description of the people of Ferguson.

I called the pastors and other leaders to a time of reflection. Here's the question: "Do you believe this? How does it make you feel in your gut to imagine being led to peace by the people of Ferguson?"

In the discussion that followed, one forty-something leader stood, shifting his weight from left to right. Then he leaned against a wall, as if asking it to hold him up. He looked at me, as if asking permission to speak. I nodded. Then he stood straight and spoke.

"As a white man," he said, "I have been taught I was created to lead everyone else."

Another St. Louis faith leader confessed, "It never even occurred to me that I would be led by the people of Ferguson. It never entered my mind as a possibility."

We have believed a lie whose roots run deep in Western thought. It has shaped Western worldview, structures, legal paradigms, and the church. To glimpse the way to shalom in the arena of race, we must first understand the dimensions and outcomes of this lie. To do that we must clarify terms and understand how they intersect with or contradict biblical teaching.

ETHNICITY, CULTURE, NATIONALITY, AND THE TOWER OF BABEL

Race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality often are used as interchangeable words, but each one has a different shade of meaning. They have different origins, purposes, and outcomes. And in truth, there is no universally accepted definition for any of these terms. What I'm going to share are the ways I've come to understand them after training and teaching on justice and racial healing for twenty years.

Ethnicity is biblical (Hebrew: *goy* or *am;* Greek: *ethnos*). Ethnicity is created by God as people groups move together through space and time. Ethnicity is dynamic and developed over long periods of time. It is not



about power. It is about group identity, heritage, language, place, and common group experience over time. Ethnicity is the difference between African American, Caribbean, British African, Irish, Irish American, Ko-

rean, Korean American, English, Anglo-American, Polish, Polish American, and so forth. Ethnicity is God's very good intention for humanity.

Culture is implicit in Scripture, but the word itself is never used. Culture is a sociological and anthropological term that refers to the beliefs, norms, rituals, arts, and worldviews of particular people groups in a particular place at a particular time. Culture is fluid.

Nationality indicates the sovereign nation/state where an individual is a legal citizen. It is a geopolitical category determined by the legal structures of the state. I tend to think the best indicator of nationality is the birth certificate or passport the individual holds.

Many English translations of the Bible translate the Hebrew and Greek

words for ethnicity as "nation," but we must understand that nation-states the way that we understand them, as territorially and politically drawn areas of geography with a shared government, did not exist prior to the late eighteenth century. Nation-states are a modern construct. Before the modern era, people organized themselves around ethnic tribes, clans, and ethnically based empires.

THE TOWER OF BARFI

The first uses of the Hebrew word *goy* (foreign ethnic group) in Genesis are instructive. The word is found in the list of Noah's descendants, commonly called the Table of Nations (see Genesis 10). The word is found next in the story of the Tower of Babel (see Genesis 11). Most scholars now understand that the same company of priests that wrote Genesis 1 also wrote the Table of Nations in chapter 10, while the writer of Genesis 2 also wrote Genesis 11. In the same way that Genesis 1 offers a sweeping account of creation and Genesis 2 offers a more detailed and separate account, the Table of Nations offers a sweeping foretelling of the fulfillment of the mandate to multiply and fill the earth and the Tower of Babel story offers a more specific and separate account of how the mandate was fulfilled.

Before the Tower of Babel was destroyed, "the whole earth had one language and the same words" (Genesis 11:1). The people gathered there had come from the east to the land of Shinar, where they settled. Shinar exhibits the major characteristics of empire: a single trade language and a commitment to erecting tall buildings and monuments despite the oppression and exploitation of slave labor.

The enslaved laborers were working with materials—brick and

bitumen—that are dangerous when erecting such a large structure. Brick is man-made and it crumbles over time. Bitumen, similar to tar, is an asphalt-like substance used to hold the bricks together, something like mortar or cement. A survey of monuments that have lasted throughout the ages confirms that structures built using stone on stone are the sturdiest and longest lasting. A structure of brick and bitumen eventually will crumble. It is an unstable construction method. In an act of care for human life, God intervened by confusing the people's language. Jehovah scattered them lest they bring great destruction on more and more people.

More than any other, this text lays the foundations for understanding God's good intentions for shalom, ethnicity, and culture. Walter Brueggemann explains in his commentary *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* that the scattering of the peoples was not a curse, as some have interpreted it. It was a blessing.¹

As they were scattered, the people would settle in a wider area, having the chance to fulfill the basic human call to multiply and fill the earth. They would develop separate languages, cultures, and worldviews. And each group would experience distinct trials and triumphs and develop core strengths and weaknesses as a result. Their various ethnic heritages would be forged through common experiences of life together. According to Brueggemann, God's kind of unity will be achieved as all parts of the diverse human family "look to and respond to God" from their respective corners of the world.²

As counterintuitive as it sounds, the confusion of languages was from God. Like the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 2, the reality that humanity speaks a multiplicity of languages cannot be dealt with successfully without God. Like the Tree of the Knowledge of Good

and Evil, the confusion of languages serves as a reminder of our limitations. It draws us back to God, beckoning us to find shalom between ethnic groups in and through God.

THE WAY OF GOD

In the person of Jesus, we see God incarnate crossing the ethnic boundaries of his day. He conversed with the Samaritan woman, the demoniac, the Syrophoenician woman, and the Roman centurion. On the cross, the tablet above Jesus's head—King of the Jews—was written in several languages as a taunt, mocking a supposed king. But the tablet actually made it possible for Jesus to cross ethnic and lingual barriers even in death.

When the Holy Spirit was released among God's people (see Acts 2: 1–13), the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel was reversed. Men and women who did not share a common language were suddenly speaking and understanding unfamiliar languages. God was indicting imperial rule, which demands the exclusion of ethnic identity to consolidate a dominant culture. Instead, the Spirit of God maintained lingual and thus cultural and ethnic diversity while at the same time making it possible for disparate groups to understand one another. Paul pointed to Jesus's power to reconcile Jews and Gentiles, bitter ethnic enemies, as an example of the power of the Resurrection. "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14).

In the Temple, a wall separated the Gentile court from the Jews. A written warning told Gentiles not to cross beyond that point upon the pain of death. That's hostility. But Jesus broke down that wall. When he beat death, he began the reversal of the Fall. Having overcome the one power that all humanity must encounter, he ensured he could beat all other powers of division and separation, including the power of ethnic enmity.

What might our churches look like if we believed and practiced this? What dividing walls of hostility would fall? What policies and structures would be transformed? How might our desire to be safe—keeping ethnically and culturally insulated, protected from critique, challenge, and change—be transformed by encounters with the living God? How much more of Jesus would people of faith experience if they allowed him to break down walls of ethnic and cultural difference?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours—if not the most segregated hour—in Christian America." Perhaps churches have committed themselves to building and maintaining Towers of Babel. Towers of Babel require efficiency, uniformity, a single language, and a dominant culture. They are enemies of the image of God on earth, yet the church continues to study the Tower of Babel user manual so it can build bigger, brighter, more efficient monuments. I believe that the call of God to the church in these days is to dismantle Babel. Return to worshiping communities rooted in place, where power is shared. In such places, the image of God and the capacity to exercise dominion in all cultures and languages are affirmed and cultivated.

METRO HOPE

Tucked in the northeast corner of gentrifying Spanish Harlem, in Upper Manhattan, Metro Hope Church was founded in 2007. It is a diverse con-

gregation with ninety worshipers on a good Sunday, and it is surrounded by historic black megachurches, Hispanic megachurches, and affluent white church plants. The church plants are commissioned by white megachurches with the goal of ministering to the needy who live above 125th Street—or to minister to those who migrate there to gentrify the area.

New York City is incredibly diverse while also achieving in 2011 the rank of second-most-segregated city in a study conducted by CensusScope.org and the University of Michigan.³ While most New York churches cater to single ethnic groups, Metro Hope is roughly 40 percent African American, 35 percent Latino, 20 percent White, and 5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander.

Reverend José Humphreys, an Afro-Puerto Rican pastor in the area, leads his faith community through the "mindful practice of seeing one another through the eyes of Christ." Sunday morning worship is infused with Harlem's jazz fusion spirit. I visited the church soon after a Staten Island grand jury decided not to indict the police officer who killed Eric Garner. The congregation's white associate pastor, Stephen Tickner, preached the sermon and moved directly into the fray of public policy and the biblical call to justice. In fact, Tickner, Humphreys, and others on Metro Hope's leadership team were among the leaders who organized faith communities to join the massive protest marches that shut down the West Side Highway in Manhattan the night the decision not to indict was announced.

During the week, the Metro Hope community's leadership team might host a transformative group dialogue on an issue of race, ethnicity, culture, or justice; sponsor an event to harvest the church's community garden; hang out at a local coffee shop to help support indigenous businesses; or start dialogue among the members of the church's intentional living community.

To Metro Hope, subverting Babel looks like planting seeds of shalom in the lives of its parishioners through radical community, hospitality, and commitment to the personal, social, economic, and cultural flourishing of their city.⁴

That brings us to race.

RACE, DOMINION, AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

Race is about power—in biblical terms, *dominion*. As a political construct, race was created by humans to determine who can exercise power within a governing structure and to guide decisions regarding how to allocate resources. Racial categories do change over time, but only as governments refine language.

Plato's *The Republic* (360 BCE) laid the foundations for the Western belief in human hierarchy. According to Plato, God created a class hierarchy determined by "racial" categories delineated by the kind of metal people were made of: gold, silver, iron, or brass. Each "race" was ordained to hold different stations in society. Book VIII laid the foundations for the belief that the mixing of the races would lead to destruction.⁵

Fast-forward to 1452. Pope Nicholas V paved the way for the Portuguese slave trade in West Africa when he authorized Alfonzo V of Portugal to perpetually enslave anyone not Christian, especially Muslims. Three years later, the same pope issued the papal bull *Romanus Pontifex*, declaring that Catholic nations had the right to "discover" and claim dominion over non-Christian lands. The bull also encouraged the enslavement of the indigenous peoples of conquered lands.⁶

Fast-forward to the Enlightenment era. In 1767, Swedish botanist Carl

Linnaeus, founder of botany's taxonomy of fauna, published the twelfth edition of his *Systema Naturae*, which defined the first taxonomy of human racial hierarchy based on skin color.

Twenty years later, the US Congress made official what the courts of the American colonies had already established by precedent. The newly formed United States of America enacted the racialization of power. Congress passed the three-fifths compromise, which increased the number of members in the House of Representatives who represented districts in the slave states. Congress determined that each enslaved person would be counted as three-fifths of a human being. Congress members from the North had argued that slaves should not be factored into the populations of slave states. With the compromise, however, Congress declared that black people would be counted, but as less than human.

Three years later Northerners got their way on the first national census in 1790. Enslaved black people were listed as chattel—nonhuman property—along with pitchforks and horses.

In the same year, Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1790, which declared that only free white men could become naturalized citizens. This was significant because only citizens can vote, and voting is the most basic form of the exercise of dominion. Other forms of dominion, such as the capacity to steward, to exercise agency, and to lead, hinge on this basic right. With this law in place, for the next century new immigrants to the United States could be legally categorized as white.

In 1922, the US Supreme Court heard the case of Mr. Takao Ozawa, a Japanese man who argued that Japanese people are white. Ozawa had been in the country for twenty years and wanted to become naturalized. He had been blocked by the Naturalization Act of 1906, which restricted

naturalization to free white people and people of African descent. The court denied Ozawa's claim to whiteness and, with it, his chances of becoming a citizen.

We see our nation's struggle to define race in changing categories used when a national census is conducted. In the first US census in 1790, racial categories included free white, free other, and slave. Thirty years later, racial categories were expanded to include free colored and foreigners (not naturalized). And every ten years following 1830, our country has struggled to adjust its racial categories to match the growing complexity of our people groups. By 2010, the census revealed the absurdity of the fundamental category of race. In that census, race, ethnicity, and nationality were combined into a single category of race.7 The 1850 census took place at the height of the American slave trade and in the midst of the Second Great Awakening, which called slave masters to free their slaves. The census that year sought to capture the realities of an increasingly complex human landscape. According to a report on Census.gov, the 1850 Free Inhabitants schedule listed races as white, black, or mulatto (mixed). The schedule had a separate question regarding place of origin, and there was a completely separate schedule for slaves. The slave schedule delineated race using two categories, black or mulatto. Chinese men from Canton Province began arriving in the United States to work for the Central Pacific Railroad in 1850. By 1868, twelve thousand Chinese men worked for the company. The 1870 census responded by adding Chinese to the list of races. The category incorporated all people of Eastern descent. In this year, the census incorporated the category Indian for Native American but only counted assimilated peoples living in or near white communities. In 1890, eight years after the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), the census delineated between Chinese and Japanese. It also attempted to capture the complexity of mixed-race heritage by adding quadroon and octoroon to the list of races. A review of the 2010 census shows the categories Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish ethnic origin, with an option to write in one's nation of origin. The census lists "racial" categories, and respondents choose one or more categories, which were white, "black, African am., or Negro," "American Indian or Alaska Native-Print name of enrolled or principal tribe," Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, "Other Asian—Print race, for example Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on," Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, "Other Pacific Islander—Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on," "Some other race—Print race."

Why does the federal government ask for the nations of origin for Asian and Latino people, tribal affiliation for American Indian people, and include "African American" (a specific ethnic group within the racial category "black") but does not ask "white" people to identify their ethnicity or nation of origin?

It's because of power. The only racial category on the national census that did not change from 1790 to 2010 was "white." In the United States, whiteness is the centerpiece around which all else revolves. That was and is intentional. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin argued to the British ministry that due to the shrinking percentage of white people on earth, America should be kept an exclusively

n the United States, whiteness is the centerpiece around which all else revolves.

Anglo-Saxon colony to protect the race.8 In the years following the establishment of our nation, the founders followed Franklin's lead and white became the identity of power.⁹ Race is inherently about power, and whiteness was created to define who would wield it.

The core lie of Western civilization is that God reserved the power of dominion for some, not all. Since the Enlightenment era, that lie has been racialized. With the founding of our nation, racialized dominion was made law with one resounding message: God reserved the right of dominion for white people and no one else.

IMPLICIT BIAS

Across the centuries, the image of God has been breached throughout the world. The breach is the result of what psychologists call explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious) ethnic bias. Explicit bias laid foundations for the international slave trade, the annihilation of indigenous peoples on every continent, and the establishment of racial hierarchy. Explicit bias built the systems we continue to operate under in America. Implicit (unconscious) racial bias, meanwhile, looks at our broken world and says, "Things are as they should be." Implicit bias is what the mind does when it makes quick associations in order to shorten its thought processes. For example, when encountering a table, the mind does not say *It has four legs and a plank, therefore it is a table.* It just looks at the object and immediately associates it with *table.* Unconscious association is a normal part of brain functionality. But in our racialized society, we have learned to make unconscious associations with whiteness and blackness and other people of color.

The study of implicit racial bias has revealed deep-seated beliefs about people of European descent and African descent. Millions of people have taken the Implicit Association Test, created by Project Implicit, a collabora-

tion between scientists at Harvard, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington, to discern their levels of implicit bias. Seventy-five percent of respondents have tested positive for some level of bias in favor of whiteness and against blackness. That means 75 percent of people tested associate factors such as goodness, high leadership capacity, benevolence, truthfulness, high financial standing, and lack of criminality with people who look like they are of European descent. Conversely, 75 percent associate things such as badness, low leadership capacity, lack of character, poverty, and criminality with people who look like they are of black African descent. What was most notable was that respondents across various races and ethnicities had the same implicit biases. It also didn't matter if they had dedicated their lives to fighting racism and injustice. Seventy-five percent of *all* respondents tested positive for implicit bias in favor of whiteness.¹⁰

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University discovered that implicit bias impacts every level of the justice system, from first encounters with police to the decision whether to arrest, shoot, or release a detained person. Implicit bias impacts the booking process, the quality and content of legal defense, judge selection, a jury's perceptions of the defendant, and sentencing. The Kirwan study also found that implicit bias impacts the way teachers treat students, the way properties are valued—impacting school funding—and even the way health care functions.¹¹

From Plato to mass incarceration, the belief that certain people were created to rule and others were created to be ruled has been so deeply ingrained in our collective worldview that we don't question these disparities. Implicit bias tells us things are as they should be. Unjust systems and structures remain in place because the people do not demand a better world.

But that is not what God has called us to.

BAPTISM

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:27–28). These words became the first baptismal liturgy of the church. Baptism, as a result, connected the outward demonstration of washing clean to the inner cleansing of all implicit and explicit biases that were entrenched within the systems and structures of both Roman and Jewish society.

Roman imperial systems and structures were built in part on Plato's belief in human hierarchy. But Christian baptism, from the start, erased the power differentials. This celebration of Christ's death and resurrection reminds us to see, protect, and cultivate the image of God in the other—to recognize and cultivate the other's capacity to exercise dominion. This was radical teaching in Paul's day. It remains so today.

WASHING CIFAN

What does it look like to be washed clean of twenty-first-century implicit bias? Here are practices that research has shown help cleanse people of implicit racial bias.

Become Aware

Take the Implicit Association Test at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html (or Google "Implicit Association Test") and choose the Race IAT (Race Implicit Association Test). This test measures how hard we have to work to undo the associations the test puts into our subcon-

scious. Not having to work that hard indicates the bias wasn't as strong to begin with. If it takes longer, then the participant started out with a stronger bias.

Grow Your Empathy

Listen to the stories of people who do not share your ethnicity. Read books and articles written by them. Watch movies by them and about them. The practice of placing ourselves in the shoes of others lowers the presence of unconscious bias.

Immerse Yourself

Increase and deepen relationships with people who do not share your ethnicity. When people build relationships with people they previously were biased against, their unconscious bias levels go down. In their book *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith reported on a sociological study they conducted. They found that the only way worldviews changed was for an individual to be immersed in communities populated by people the individual had been biased against.¹²

Take Every Thought Captive

Paul talked about taking every thought captive to gain the mind of Christ. This also works to lower implicit-bias scores. Researchers refer to it as changing habits of mind. They recommend that we focus on a person's unique traits as opposed to his or her group affiliation. I've been practicing something like this for the past year. When I'm talking with someone and am tempted to write the person off as "just a [fill in the blank]," I look the person in the eyes (if I can) and remember that the image of God lives inside

the person. Then I sit in that truth. Suddenly, the person becomes fully human to me, with stories, histories, dreams, struggles, joys, and strengths.

Forsake Race

It is impossible to live justly within a manufactured system that was built with the purpose of defining who has power and who doesn't. That system runs counter to the ways of God. What would it look like for white Jesus followers to renounce their racial affiliation, to no longer accept the power and privilege allotted through the current system? Or to leverage it for the sake of others? And what kind of new world could we build if all of us on American soil—all of us—replaced race with our ethnic heritage (ethnos) rooted in place, language, and community? We would remember the history, study the ways race broke our world, and build the future that corrects its impacts. We would refuse to be defined by a lie. Then, perhaps, we would experience more of the power of the Resurrection as we brought our whole selves and the living power of the Resurrection into multiethnic community with our neighbors, in our schools, in our hospitals, in our courts, and in the public square.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

The Black Lives Matter movement exploded after the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The movement was born as a hashtag in 2013. Three queer and cisgender black women crafted it in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of Trayvon Martin. The #BlackLivesMatter movement spread like wildfire as reports of police killings of unarmed black men, women, and children appeared on news outlets

almost daily. As of late 2015, the *Washington Post* recorded ninety police killings of unarmed people in just that one year. As mentioned earlier, thirty-five of the victims (40 percent) were black men, though black men make up only 6 percent of the US population. The Black Lives Matter movement is led by young black people because they are the ones most likely to face down a police officer aiming a gun. While the Black Lives Matter movement is secular in origin, I find its organizing principles quite biblical.

Isaiah 61: Oaks of Righteousness. The first organizing principle is that young black people must always be up-front, leading any Black Lives Matter initiative. This falls in line with the prophet Isaiah's admonition, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations" (61:3–4). Isaiah was referring to the oppressed, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the prisoners. They will restore and repair the ruins.

Matthew 25: The Least of These. If you watch newsreels reporting on the marches of the civil rights era, most show black people dressed in their Sunday best to march down the street. Men wore suits; women wore white gloves and heels to march on blistering asphalt. Rosa Parks was chosen to sit down in the white section of a city bus as an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in Montgomery, Alabama. She was chosen, in large part, because she was so "respectable" in the eyes of white people. She was an unassuming, light-skinned maid from a working-class family. This tactic worked in its time. People were appalled when they saw this respectable maid being booked by the Montgomery police. Likewise, the nation was aghast when they witnessed the brutality of Alabama state troopers who beat protestors on Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965. The politics of respectability

turned the nation's sympathy toward black people by humanizing them in the eyes of white people.

The problem was that the benefits of the civil rights movement were largely enjoyed by only the most respectable among black people—the black middle class. By and large, poor black people were shut out of the gains and suffered the brunt of America's war on drugs and mass incarceration. In response, a central organizing principle of Black Lives Matter organizers is to forsake the politics of respectability. Jesus identified with the least among us, and unless we are actively loving the one with the least access to food and water, the least access to health care, the least access to good housing and education, the least access to justice within the justice system, the least access to a welcome in the immigration system—unless we are actively loving the least-deserving among these, then we are not loving Jesus. Jesus shunned the politics of respectability when he aligned with the least of these.

Genesis 1:26–27: Dominion. What does it look like to become an accomplice in the Black Lives Matter movement? It looks like being submerged in the cleansing waters of Christ and rising with new eyes able to see. It means being ready to fan the flames of the image of God within young black leaders and other leaders of color. It looks like believing they are made in the image of God, made with the inherent call and capacity to exercise dominion. Young leaders of color are capable of leading us all into a better world. For white people this will mean entering the movement as learners, allies, or accomplices who leverage the privilege and resources they have for the building up of the movement. For people of color, this will mean rising up and leaning into their God-given call to lead us all to a better world. It will mean learning all they can from books and gleaning what

they can from the elders. It will mean addressing and seeking their own healing from the deep wounds of oppression. And it will mean stewarding the well-being of all. For clergy and other faith leaders, it will mean offering ourselves as chaplains, foot soldiers, safe havens, and resources of the movement for a better world.

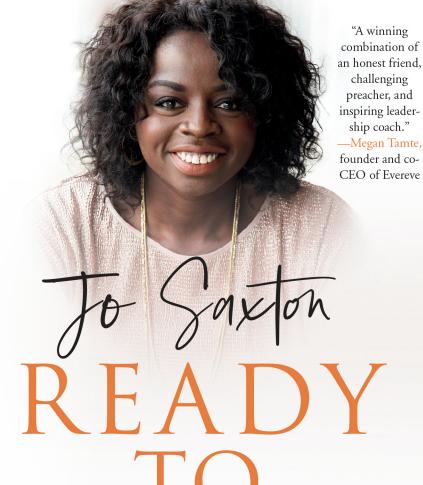
REPAIR

The institution of race broke America at its foundations. It will not be enough to tinker here and there. We need to envision a new way of being together. Fundamentally, this will mean the interrogation of all our assumptions about how our society should be. It will mean imagining a world where everyone—especially the least of these—has enough to thrive. It will mean a world where all at least have good enough education, good enough housing, good enough health care, good enough access to justice in the justice system, good enough protection of the right to vote, and good enough welcome to feel the embrace of the nation in order to thrive here. To find the folks working toward repair in your town, city, or state, do a Google search. Search a category—such as housing, education, employment, voting rights—plus the word organizing or equity plus the name of your town, city, or state. For example, "Education Equity Minneapolis." Click and a list of groups moving policies toward a more just education system will pop up. Search "Environmental Justice Organizing New York City" and a long list of groups will pop up. Once you do the search, show up. Once you show up, follow the lead of the people who are already there. That's how you become an ally/accomplice to the movement to repair what race broke. Here's an easy way to remember it: Search. Find. Show Up. Follow.



Let's close with the reflection exercise that I led faith leaders through in St. Louis.

- 1. Close your eyes.
- 2. Remember Isaiah's statement that it will be the oppressed, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the imprisoned who will repair the ruined cities and the devastations of many generations.
- 3. Imagine yourself being led by the oppressed in your town, city, and state.
- 4. How does it feel in your gut to imagine following the lead of the least of these?
- 5. Be brutally honest with yourself. Do you believe the Scripture?
- 6. If not, then confess your unbelief to God, and ask God to help you believe. Then work through the "Washing Clean" section in this chapter.
- 7. If you believe, then ask God to guide your steps as you enter the movement to repair what race broke in America.



OWN YOW VOICE
GATHER YOW COMMUNITY
STEPINTO YOW INFLUENCE

READY TO RISE

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READY TO RISE

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Details and names in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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Introduction

(A Seventh-Grade Girl Finds Her Voice and Speaks Truth to Power)

It's a broken world. I want to help fix it. I want to lead the people who want to help fix it.

he school auditorium rippled with excitement. It was award night for the seventh graders. On the stage, more than a hundred honors students waited, familiar faces unfamiliarly dressed. In turns, they mocked and admired one another's outfits, chatting animatedly in an attempt to subdue their nerves and self-consciousness.

Across from the stage, the room was filled with their loved ones until it was standing room only. Proud parents, even prouder grand-parents, and loved ones posed and positioned cameras and smartphones, while others greeted one another, celebrating their children's achievements or confirming car-pool arrangements and sports

schedules. Younger siblings were being distracted by snacks or toys or the occasional tablet. The older ones entertained themselves with their own electronic devices, or they caught up with peers who'd also been brought along.

Meanwhile, the teaching staff milled around the auditorium, patiently trying to conduct sound checks on microphones and speakers that seemed to delight in jolting the audience with sudden and intrusively loud feedback. But then the principal took hold of a mic and cleared his throat to indicate the event was about to begin, and a hush fell over the room.

There were murmurs of surprise when the young woman's name was announced, because she hadn't told any of her friends that she was one of the two students selected to give a speech. Clutching her note cards, she made her way up to the podium and adjusted the microphone, perhaps because she felt it was the right thing to do.

She looked up and saw the number of people in the room and the anticipation on their faces. Spotting her parents, she exchanged a flickering glance with them and then determinedly looked down at her notes. She began speaking.

First, she thanked the families, parents, and teachers for both their presence and their contribution to her class's achievements. "This night belongs to you all," she said.

Then she spoke about her school journey—how she'd been shaped by experiences both positive and painful. She described the influence of teachers and friends who'd believed in her and encouraged her, thanking them for her growth. When she began speaking about harder times, she shared how difficult it had been to fill in a school survey that asked her to identify her ethnicity but didn't permit her to check more than one box. There just wasn't an option that reflected her biracial identity.

"I wondered why there wasn't a box for me," she said.

In fact, she'd called her mom in tears that day. "It's like I don't exist," she'd said, weeping.

Somehow, it was in this touch of vulnerability that her confidence seemed to grow. It was obvious the crowd was really warming to her, and she looked directly at the people in front of her. She indicated that she'd overcome her challenges by drawing strength from how her family had previously dealt with racially motivated incidents. She said that as she dreamed of the future, she didn't expect an easy or straightforward journey to achievement, but she wouldn't be deterred either.

"It's a broken world. I want to help fix it. I want to lead the people who want to help fix it."

After commending her peers and thanking parents and teachers again, she ended her speech to rapturous applause. There were many tear-stained but smiling faces in the audience.

She skipped back to her seat and to the company of her friends, and took a deep breath and smiled at me.

I didn't cry, but I *was* deeply moved. When she had used her seventh-grade mind and heart to speak truth to power, it wasn't just her confidence that had struck me, nor was it the tender vulnerability as she shared her story. Instead, it was the calm assumption with which she declared that she, that *we*, could play a role in changing a broken world. She simply believed that she, with everyone around her, had a contribution to make.

I leaned back into my chair, returned my daughter's smile, and thought, *That's my girl*.

A Voice Without Apology

(And What "Too Much" Really Means)

Women don't need to find a voice, they have a voice, and they need to feel empowered to use it, and people need to be encouraged to listen.

-MEGHAN MARKLE, Duchess of Sussex

he atmosphere was thrilling. Deborah could see her people, thousands of them, moving toward her and the army. Some were running, some were dancing, some hobbled, and others were carried, but all were moving. They'd come from the villages and the towns across the region. She could hear voices shouting, laughing, screaming and even some wailing. It was the laughter that moved her the most. It had been such a long time since she'd seen many of her people smile or laugh.

Music filled the air. Drums beating, people clapping their hands and stomping their feet, all in rhythm. She looked down and realized she was stomping too, in rhythm. Instead of the sound of marching that had terrorized her people for years, these were the celebratory footsteps of the free.

Deborah turned toward the people by her side. Looking over her shoulder, she saw him. He was staring directly at her. He nodded slowly and smiled at her, the way he did for only her. Lappidoth. Always for her. She held his gaze for an extra moment and returned his smile.

Barak stood next to her, looking at the crowd. He stood up straighter than she'd ever seen him stand. This was who she always knew he could be. It was satisfying to see him that way. Next to him were other warriors, tribal leaders who had been reluctant to go to war. They'd held back and tried to hold Barak back, but now they claimed the victory as theirs too. A flame of frustration burned in her heart, but she suppressed it. There would be time for conversations, she resolved.

As her eyes scanned other faces, she saw *her* standing there. Jael. She walked over to her and took both of Jael's hands in her own. They smiled and laughed, tears streaming down their cheeks, the same fire in their eyes. The world would know that this woman, Jael, was the hero of their story. Deborah would make sure of it.

It was time. She returned to her place in front of this joyous people, these free people.

Deborah raised her hands, her arms outstretched as if to encompass an entire nation. The people cheered for Deborah; they screamed, shouted, and sang praises to God. She smiled and laughed with her arms open wide, encouraging their voices to rise—louder, louder. She wanted them to hear their own voices, their own joy, their own grief, their own praise. It had always been there—it just had been denied for so long.

Finally, Deborah took a deep breath and began to sing,

When the princes in Israel take the lead,
When the people willingly offer themselves—
Praise the LORD! (Judges 5:2)

For twenty years, the Israelites had been oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan. Sisera, Jabin's army commander, led a military unit with weaponry more sophisticated and powerful than anything the Israelites could hope to use. Inevitably, the people succumbed to the intimidating daily brutality of military rule. The roads were unsafe, and travelers had to find alternate routes for fear of being robbed. The villages were also dangerous, and people fled their communities to walled towns for their own protection (see Judges 5:6–7). Eventually occupation and oppression became normalized. Elders passed from this life to the next without promise of hope or assurance of the generation they left behind. Children grew into adults with no other framework for their lives. What was a painful reality for some was all an emerging generation of Israelites had ever known. After twenty years, God's people *finally* voiced their desperation and cried out to God for help. Enter Deborah.

THIS. GIRL. IS. ON. FIRE.

Deborah was a powerful, wise, and strong leader. A judge and a prophetess, she was her community's spiritual and civil leader. She led secure in her authority and role, even in challenging circumstances.

Her leadership shatters the common stereotypes of women in leadership and breaks through the expectations to show what we can be. The text notes that Deborah is a married woman, wife of Lappidoth (Judges 4:4). But the phrase *wife of Lappidoth* has more than one meaning. It also means "woman of torches" or "fiery woman." I think the words speak of both Deborah's marital status and her character as a woman on fire with a God-fueled passionate and strong voice in her nation. Maybe like fellow prophet Jeremiah, she, too, lived with fire in her bones, with God's unstoppable words in her heart (see Jeremiah 20:9).

After all, our Voices are more than mere words. Our voices are our God-given identity and purpose in action.

Yet the full power of Deborah's voice was not limited to the words she spoke or the song she would sing. After all, our voices are more than mere words. Our voices are our God-given identity and purpose in action. In her book *Raise Your Voice*, writer and speaker Kathy Khang reminds us that "our voice—our influence and our interaction with people and the world around us—is embodied through our

words *and* actions."² Deborah used her voice in its fullest capacity and models for us ways we can use our own.

In the Trenches of Our Everyday Relationships and Conflicts

Deborah governed from the Palm of Deborah in the hill country of Ephraim (see Judges 4:5). There she met with men and women on a daily basis, handling disputes too complicated for local judges, dealing with people's everyday drama and trauma.³ She processed and spoke into the burdens of the nation. Sometimes using your voice isn't about the public spaces and crowds; it's more personal, gritty, and everyday.

Hearing and Voicing God's Heart for His People

As the spiritual leader of the community, Deborah listened to God when He seemed to be far from His people. It is no surprise the nation relied on her leadership. In turbulent and terrifying times, Deborah was the influential voice of guidance, leadership, and spiritual insight. She was also the catalyst for change, transformation, and deliverance of God's people for a generation. Sometimes using your voice means representing God's heart and values to those around you, speaking and living prophetically amid cultural upheaval.

Courageous Conversations

As Israel's judge, Deborah also oversaw the military. She summoned Barak to be her general and gave him God-given instructions to gather an army of ten thousand men to fight Sisera and his military might, promising God would "give him into [Barak's] hands" (Judges 4:7). Some translations read these instructions differently. Instead of

Deborah starting her conversation with Barak by saying, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you," (verse 6) she begins, "Didn't the Lord, the God of Israel, command you?" suggesting Barak might have had these instructions for some time and was holding back. Deborah wasn't afraid to use her voice to confront and challenge when required.

Barak's response was conditional. He would go to war against Sisera only if Deborah went with him. It's no surprise Barak wasn't confident, even if he had heard God. He'd lived through twenty years of intimidation and oppression, seeing Sisera and his sophisticated weaponry crush his people. Perhaps it also crushed his confidence in God or his confidence in hearing from God or his confidence to lead. After losing their villages and highways to Sisera and his men for twenty years, how could they possibly expect to win now?

Barak had lost his voice under the crushing weight of oppression. He *needed* Deborah's influence, her spiritual leadership—her *voice*—to risk the wrath of Sisera and indeed risk his own life. He needed to know that God was on his side and Deborah was His representative. Perhaps Barak felt that the ten thousand men he'd call to risk their lives and join him needed the same. Deborah agreed but told Barak his reluctance to believe God's words *to him* would cost him the ultimate prize in battle: Sisera. Now Sisera would be taken out by a woman.

Sometimes our voices are needed for courageous conversations. Sometimes our voices give other people the courage to find theirs.

A VOICE THAT LEADS UNAPOLOGETICALLY

It was Deborah who described God's military strategy for the battle (see Judges 4:6–7). And it was Deborah who gave the war cry to the

gathered tribes of Israel. Deborah's voice empowered people to fight for freedom and receive their deliverance. Her voice sang their story when the battle was won.

Deborah didn't dial herself down in the presence of others. She didn't edit the acknowledgment of her contribution in a quest for (false) humility. She was bold, and in her victory song before an entire nation, she owned and named her place in the story. She didn't hide who she was or what she brought to the table. No, she owned it and talked—sang!—about who she was and what she had done.

In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths.

Villagers in Israel would not fight; they held back until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel. (5:6–7)

Mother in Israel? Some scholars note that the reference as mother could refer to Deborah's biological motherhood, showing that a mother's role can extend as far as the corridors of political power.⁴ More often, scholars understand *mother* as a title of honor for an authority figure, a protector in the community.⁵ "As a mother, Deborah provided military and political security for all of her children," wrote professor and priest Wilda C. Gafney.⁶ In addition, theologian and author Dr. Linda Belleville states that "in Israel" is recognition of Deborah's national leadership role.⁷ Deborah was secure enough to voice and articulate the broad scope of her leadership and influence in her society.

There are times when the hardest voice to elevate is your own—

especially if you are a woman, particularly if you're a woman on the margins. It's not always seen as culturally acceptable to tell people the full extent of who you are. For all the talk of showing up and being courageous in our culture, in some contexts it's seen as arrogant and offensive to do so. Humility is seen as quiet and deprecating, and hiding is seen as holy. Yet here Deborah is, speaking of the impact of her contribution with a before and after. Here is Deborah telling people about her position in society, the level of her authority. She doesn't appear to be squirming either.

There are times when using your voice means articulating who you are—the skills you bring and the impact you make. It certainly means advocating on behalf of others, but it also can mean amplifying and advocating for yourself. Could you? Would you?

A RAISED VOICE RAISES UP OTHER VOICES

Deborah's influence created an environment where, in the face of oppression and fear, God's people could rise up and challenge the status quo. Her courage inspired and ignited courage in her people—not only in the once-intimidated Barak or the armies of God's people but also in an unexpected heroine called Jael. When Sisera realizes he's about to be defeated, he runs away until he arrives at Jael's tent, expecting protection and a chance for rest. Jael welcomes him, and while he sleeps, she kills him, thus ending twenty years of terror for the Israelites.

When we use our voices, our influence, when we show up in our own lives and callings, others are strengthened, invited, and empowered to do the same.

HOLD ON—IS THIS WOMAN'S VOICE TOO MUCH?

Some theologians aren't kind to Deborah or Jael. They describe these women's leadership as unfeminine, too masculine and aggressive, and express some disappointment in their accomplishments or minimize their influence. One leader even suggests that although Deborah was successful in her career, she was not successful as a homemaker.⁸ Another wishes Deborah had used her influence "in the quieter ways of life." Jael's conquering of Sisera is considered "more like the work of a fiend than a woman." ¹⁰

When we use our voices, our influence, when we well pin our own lives and callings, others are strengthened, invited, and employment to do the same.

It's worth noting these actions aren't happening during peacetime. These are challenging choices made during an attempt to overthrow evil after decades of oppression. There have been warrior women throughout history who have fought for their people, from Boudica to Amina of Zazzau to the sainted Joan of Arc to women faithfully serving in the military today. Deborah and Jael and women like them are serving their nations in wartime.

Perhaps a broader picture of womanhood and femininity is needed—and deserved.

Deborah mentions another set of women in her victory song:

Sisera's mom and her attendants. As Sisera's mother wonders when her son is due to return home, her attendants note that it's likely he and his army are looking at the plunder and choosing "a woman or two for each man" (Judges 5:30). The attendant saw this act of taking women of a conquered community against their will for their own sexual pleasure as an inevitable part—a reward, even—of winning a war. Deborah and Jael understood that if Sisera won, he and his army would not only steal their possessions but also systematically commit sexual atrocities upon the women in their community. This moment didn't need these ezers to live so-called quieter ways of life, nor did it need Deborah or Jael to have the perfect home. This moment required the ezers to be warriors and fight for their people's freedom and particularly for the women in their community. This moment needed their fully embodied voices amid the devastating brutality of war.

Deborah's influence made it possible for Jael to end Sisera's life and deliver a nation. Deborah hails Jael as "most blessed of women" (verse 24). It's interesting that the only other person who receives such an accolade in the Bible is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Have you ever felt that your voice was too much, or not good enough? Your voice and influence might not win a popularity contest and might be misunderstood, but does that mean you shouldn't use it?

A VOICE WITH A LEGACY

Most of all, we see Deborah's influence in her legacy. The book of Judges is filled with warfare and violence and struggle, yet it captures Deborah's impact with a simple sentence at the close of her story: "Then the land had peace forty years" (5:31).

I've read Deborah's story many times, and I'm left wondering,

What if she hadn't used her voice?

What if she hadn't owned her influence?

What if she hadn't shared the words God had given her?

We have the privilege of knowing how the story ended and the lasting impact of Deborah's leadership at the time. Still, it's not hard to imagine how differently the story might have ended if Deborah had hidden or held back her gifts:

What if she'd chosen to stay silent?

What if she'd decided that it wasn't worth it, that the risk was too great?

What if she'd believed that no one would value what she had to say?

What if she'd concluded that it wasn't her job because she was a married woman?

What if she'd concluded it was too hard, too painful, and too much and that she wasn't enough for the job?

What if . . . ? I know the questions seem repetitive, incessant, and annoying. But it's what-if questions like these that occupy mental and emotional space in women, holding them back from using their voices every single day. It's what-if questions like these (or the fear of their answers) that have gnawed at me and left me voiceless in every

stage of my life, these ordinary one-on-one conversations that I simply didn't have.

There was that time I should have asked myself where the ambiguous relationship with that cute guy was headed. We spent so much time together, connected deeply, assumed we'd be spending time together on weekends and never invited anyone else. I wanted to know what we were, where this was going—unless the answer was no. So I didn't ask and didn't share what I felt or hoped or expected from a relationship. I didn't walk away because I was muted by fear of feeling rejected and alone.

Or the many times when someone asked me how I was doing and I didn't answer truthfully that I was low, afraid, or insecure. I was afraid of the vulnerability, theirs and mine. It didn't feel like bravery to be honest about my struggles; it felt like risking exposure and hurt. What would I do if I wasn't taken seriously? So instead, I silenced myself, my heart, my traumas.

It wasn't easier using my voice for others in the trenches either. I've had those moments when I feared my words would be pointless and shallow. I felt ill equipped to talk someone else through pain bigger than my own mind could fathom, forgetting that my embodied voice could hold a hand. So instead of saying a clunky word, I held back. I held back from the conversations that required courage from me and might inspire courage or bring comfort or simply make me present to others.

My what-ifs silenced the stirrings to respond to God's voice. I worried, *What if I was wrong?* Surely it was safer, wiser, to ignore the signs and promptings, even when it left me conflicted. When it came to my

voice as influential, as engagement with the world around me, the questions just got louder and harder. Who did I think I was to even want to be influential? Who told me my voice mattered just because I wanted it to, just because I was passionate?

But self-doubt wasn't the only problem. Even when I wanted to speak, my words weren't always welcome. It wasn't polite to talk about gender, women in leadership, the role of women in society at large, or the stories of sexual harassment and assault agonizingly captured in the hashtag #MeToo.

It certainly wasn't polite to talk about race. I was advised that when I typed #BlackLivesMatter on social media, people found my hashtags off-putting, alienating. The sponsorship we sought as we planted a church wouldn't come. I needed to find more accessible, user-friendly terms to share my thoughts. Supposedly I'd expressed my experiences too passionately. Worse still, too angrily. Perhaps it would be better if I talked about things "calmly," "reasonably," "logically." Now I was being militant and divisive.

What happens when your voice sounds like a scream that doesn't stop? Is it worth hearing then? Maybe silence is comfortable for your listeners, but it wasn't comfortable for me.

It's a stark contrast to Deborah's unapologetic approach. Her unapologetic voice. The way she openly recognized and publicly owned her impact, credentials, and influence. And then she articulated it in word *and* song! It's natural to assume that you find your voice in the area of your qualities and accomplishments when you finally are at the top of your game—when you've actually got something to sing about, as it were. But it's not automatically the case.

Janice Bryant Howroyd is the founder and chief executive of the ActOne Group, a global employment and workforce management company She is a multimillionaire, a philanthropist, and the first African American woman to run a billion-dollar business. Yet when she describes some of the key challenges in leadership, she points out that her gender and ethnicity were considered barriers for potential clients:

I'll tell you candidly—and I'm not proud of it—there were times when I would gift my intelligence to other members of my team and have them go in and make a presentation or them make the pitch so that the client wouldn't have to interact directly with me as an African-American or as a female.¹¹

She concludes,

Perhaps the one decision I would change in my career would be that I would forgive myself for being smart and being female a lot sooner.¹²

Have I forgiven myself for being a smart woman? Have you?

Have I forgiven myself for being a smart black woman? When I heard Howroyd's interview, I'd never thought about it that way. Yet I know there have been times when it's been easier to minimize my skills and accomplishments, when I've hidden my intellect and pretended I don't know what I actually know. To publicly own my gifts

and skills seemed like publicly inviting rejection and criticism. Worse, it felt like arrogance and pride. Apologizing for my voice has come at a cost. When I've not fully owned my voice, my influence, I've squeezed myself into roles that don't fit me and don't serve anyone well. When I minimize my credentials, I negotiate in accordance with my *perception* of someone's acceptance, not in recognition of my personal worth and value and contribution. I'm poorer—literally, in some cases—for it.

HAVE I forgiven MYSELF FOR BEING A SMART WOMAN?

Worst of all, there is a cost to my integrity. When I'm living a lie to keep the peace, to keep others comfortable, to not rock the boat, I am still living a lie.

I've spent years in every chapter of my life—single, dating, married, a mom, a leader, a pastor, a small-business owner—silencing myself, wondering what would happen if I used my voice. I also wonder how much time I've wasted wondering what *might* happen. What I needed to consider was the heavy price I've paid by not using my voice.

Your voice makes a difference—in the trenches, to the timid, in the trauma and the triumph. Your voice in all its fullness is powerful and brimming with potential. You don't need to apologize for it or be afraid of it. But you do need to discover it, or recover it, and learn how to use it in all its beauty and purpose.

REVIEW AND REFLECT

Have you ever felt as though your voice was too much or not good enough?

What is the what-if that stops you from using your voice?



LÉONCE B. CRUMP JR.

FOREWORD BY MATT CHANDLER

RENOVATE

CHANGING WHO YOU ARE BY LOVING WHERE YOU ARE

LÉONCE B. CRUMP JR.

FOREWORD BY MATT CHANDLER



Renovate

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Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them.

Start with what they know. Build with what they have.

But with the best leaders, when the work is done,
the task accomplished, the people will say

"We have done this ourselves."

—Lao Tzu

Jesus is the King. He is the King over every earthly power and over every spiritual power. He is the one true sovereign to whom all will give an account. He and He alone can extend eternal grace and eternal judgment. Paul tells us "all things were created *through* him and *for* him." Jesus is our loving shepherd and our friend. Jesus has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He will not orphan us. Jesus also sends us out to "make disciples of all nations," teaching them to observe all He commanded. It is knowing that Jesus is King, that He loves us, and that He sends us out that should inform and drive the Christian life. This is where I found *Renovate* to be so helpful. The balance and synergy between these three truths as written by Léonce Crump should be helpful for all Christians regardless of their context.

To be fair, *Renovate* is written with a specific context in view. That context is Atlanta, Georgia. You will see in these pages Léonce's love for this city. He is aware of its history, sociological makeup, and current realities. He hasn't turned his eyes from its brokenness and wickedness, or from the complexities of the urban context. He does write as a man provoked like Paul

was in Athens. If you don't find yourself in an urban center or anywhere near Atlanta, there is still plenty to learn from the book in your hands. I pray that more Christians would pay close attention to where they live and minister, and would develop what Léonce calls a theology of place. There are some reasons this hasn't taken place. In my opinion, *Renovate* is spot on about sentness needing to be established among all Christians and not just those who feel called to vocational ministry. I couldn't help but smile as Léonce told stories and dreamed of ordinary church members feeling called into difficult neighborhoods and doing ministry for the long term in a given place. I also was reminded in a new and fresh way that Christians should think of their jobs in a specific way driven more by loving God and neighbor than it should ever be about making money or finding purpose in life.

Léonce will write quite a bit about transculturalism and the ethnic complexities that exist not just in Atlanta but where any sinful men and women dwell near each other. If you are an Anglo brother or sister, some of what he writes might rub you the wrong way and you may be tempted to disregard some of it. My experience with these types of conversations is that the posture of the Christian should be humility with a desire to understand. Your experience probably doesn't walk in step with Léonce's. But it would be a good thing to seek to understand how his experiences and losses have shaped him and how he sees the world around him today.

I have been friends with Léonce for quite a few years now, and I'm glad that the Lord sovereignly crossed our paths. I am eager to see what God accomplishes through his passion and unique gifting. I pray that the Spirit of God would shape, form, and renovate your heart toward Himself and your neighbor. Enjoy reading.

> —MATT CHANDLER, pastor of The Village Church and president of Acts 29 church planting network

The New Reality

If we don't come together right now on this hallowed ground, we too will be destroyed, just like they were. I don't care if you like each other or not, but you will respect each other. And maybe . . . I don't know, maybe we'll learn to play this game like men.

-Coach Herman Boone, Remember the Titans

The celebration from the crowd was palpable. The unthinkable had just occurred. After a perfect season, not losing a single game, T. C. Williams High School, an integrated and diverse school, had just won a state title, and Denzel Washington's swagger never looked better. Most of us are familiar with the movie *Remember the Titans*, but because it is a movie, we can regrettably forget that it was a story based on the lives of real people.

In 1971, though still dealing with racial unrest, the city of Alexandria, Virginia, decided it was time to totally integrate their school system. A step toward this goal involved hiring an African American coach, Herman Boone. We have to keep in mind that the US Supreme Court actually mandated desegregation in 1955, so the fact that it took Alexandria sixteen years to follow through on this tells us a great deal about the state of racial tension there.

The movie gives the true account of white players who refused to play with their black teammates or for their black coach. In the same way, the story line shows black players who refused to play with their white teammates or for white coach Bill Yoast. While the school was integrated on the surface, it was not in their hearts. And unfortunately, in every sphere of life, from the schools we attend, to the neighborhoods we live in, to the places we work and even worship, this is still a looming reality: we are integrated on the surface but still segregated in our hearts. In the community of Christ, this is simply not acceptable.

If we are to strive for more than merely filling a room with people who have vast differences, we must fill our *lives* with people who have little in common with us other than the cross. This is the call God has placed on those He has rescued and invited to His table. The gospel, by design, moves us beyond integration and into true community. Concerning this, Paul writes to the Galatian church:

But when Cephas [the apostle Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. (Galatians 2:11–12)

Now, in order to understand what's going on here, it's imperative to have some understanding of what came prior to this moment; in other words, context.

THE FOLKS OF CHRIST

The book of Acts is basically the record of how things went down in the forming of the early church. Among other things, we are told that Stephen was murdered for preaching the gospel (Acts 7), and the new church in the city of Jerusalem began to be persecuted. Because of this heated persecution, many of Jesus's followers were literally run out of town under the threat of death. One of the places they were scattered to was the city of Antioch, a large melting pot of a city situated as the geographical and political crossroads of east and west in the Roman Empire.

Men of Cyprus and Cyrene [came] to Antioch [and] spoke to the [Greek-speaking non-Jews there] . . . , preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord

was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. . . . And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts 11:20–21, 26)

Out of this scattering and subsequent preaching of the gospel was birthed a beautiful and diverse church, a place where both Jew and Gentile were not only coming to faith in Jesus but now worked, worshiped, and walked together in community. A new reality had come into being with this community whose identity and self-definition centered neither on their Jewishness nor their Gentileness but rather in their collective devotion to the One in whose name they shared a common life.

Thus they were called *Christianoi*—the folks of Christ. While the term *Christian* has taken on many different connotations today, in Antioch it meant one thing: those who follow Christ and live according to His teachings. Christians then were not only those who loved God, but those who also sought to love one another in community. Only the Prince of Peace could unite people so different, creating a family out of people from every tribe, nation, and tongue.

Even the leadership at Antioch was diverse. According to Acts 13, there were in the church prophets and teachers—"Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul" (verse 1). It is worth noting that Luke takes the time to list these men not only by name but by ethnicity as well. Could it really be a

coincidence that two of these men were from Africa, one from the Mediterranean, one from the Middle East, and one from Asia Minor? I don't think so. God was making the point that His people would include all people, not just in surface-level integration, but in the deepest possible levels of relationship and leadership in His church. Why was that contextual clue important? Hang on.

WHAT GOD HAD IN MIND

Many Jews thought that in this new way of following Jesus, Gentiles needed to essentially become Jewish first. This is what some Jews had in mind, but it was not what God had in mind. In Antioch, He was fulfilling His promise to bless all nations by drawing some from all nations into His family. No one knew this better than Peter. He'd been joyfully sharing meals with non-Jewish Christians, experiencing the freedom of the gospel as a Jew crossing the ethnic barrier to eat with Gentiles. There was nothing staged or artificial about this. They were natural relationships, eating with one another, just kickin' it. And it was good. But suddenly, when other Jewish Christians showed up, Peter segregated himself by only eating with other Jewish Christians. In addition, the Scriptures indicate that Peter not only stopped eating with Gentile believers, but eventually he stopped associating with them altogether. And Paul says that because of this, Peter was out of step with the what? The gospel, and he stood condemned.

It's probably wise to pause a moment and pinpoint the reason behind Peter's behavior. Scripture is quite clear: Peter was afraid. He was fearful of what the Jewish Christians would think or do when they saw him sharing not only meals but life with the Gentile believers. And because of his position of influence, Peter's fear infected the other Jewish Christians at Antioch, resulting in a complete withdrawal from the community of Gentiles.

And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that *even Barnabas* was led astray by their hypocrisy. (Galatians 2:13)

Even Barnabas? It was at this point that Paul had had enough and confronted Peter publicly, face to face. In that verse from Galatians, the words *hypocritically* and *hypocrisy* literally mean "playacting" and "crooked walking." Paul is not mincing words here. Peter's integration was surface only. His heart was woefully divided. Racism or classism of any kind in any culture is incompatible with the truth of the gospel. And anyone who denies this truth stands in opposition to the new creation God is bringing into being.

I remember being the only African American elder at a former church post and feeling the withdrawal from a couple of the other elders when racist church members would come around. In fact, one of the men asked me if I was always going to have that "rapper hair." Evidently one of his friends in the church had complained about it. Yeah, about my hair.

NEW ETHNICS

One of the central outworkings of the gospel is the breaking down of ethnic, economic, and cultural hostilities and building up of communities that capture the full breadth of God's creative genius.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. (Ephesians 2:14)

Jesus broke down these divisions in His own body, securing our salvation and submitting our tendency to separate ourselves to the pain of the cross and the power of His resurrection. Faith alone unites us to Christ. We cast ourselves completely on Him and His righteousness. And for His sake alone, God counts us righteous and accepts and welcomes us into His family forever. This is the heart of the gospel. This is the good news!

In Christ there is a new humanity, a new community, where our identity is defined by the calling of the cross. In Christ the ruling paradigm is that there is no separation; we must, in fact, move beyond integration. And if you think for a second this means we should all just become the same, think again. This is not some attempt at assimilation or manufactured community. The gospel unites us in Christ despite our differences. In fact, the gospel drives us to celebrate our differences as the diversity-strewn beauty from the Lord's creative hand. And if that is true, then what distinction can we make? Who are our people, our kind? How can we be united in Christ but divided in His family? Living that way would be a *mockery* of the gospel.

As a giant of his time, a native son of Atlanta and a gifted orator, Dr. King has had a profound effect on me. He was by no means perfect, but point me to the man who is and I'll tell you what he's hiding. Dr. King had a dream of a world where race, color, creed, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education were not used to generate class distinctions and hostility but rather used to create a woven work of "all God's children" living in love and unity in the beloved community. This should be the dream of the church, because it was greater than simply being a man's vision for the world. It is a dream that is reflective of the heart of God, the dream of His Scriptures, and made possible only by the sacrifice of Jesus.

ALL MEANS ALL

We love our city because we see the potential that we have, through the working of the Holy Spirit and by the power of the gospel, to see this gospel dream become a reality. We love our city because every day we have the opportunity to live out the words upon which our country was founded. On July 4, 1776, our forefathers ratified these words: "We hold these truths to be

self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

These words, penned by the men that founded our nation, are powerfully wonderful words, but then, as in the minds of some people now, they were not applied to all whom God created. By 1776 the Africans who'd been shipped to North America as property had been enslaved for almost two hundred years. Though some thought slavery was wrong, the majority of people saw it as acceptable. Slaves usually could not marry, have a family, testify in court, or legally own property. Where were their unalienable rights and equality? And even before the African was shipped to America, the Native American was used as forced labor. The details of that season of our nation's history are different, but the result was the same—inequality.

It would be almost one hundred years after those words were penned in 1776 that slavery would officially end. But even after this, there was still no sense that all men were created equal. On the heels of slavery would be another hundred years of oppression—Jim Crow, segregation, and separate but equal. Then there were the *onlys*—white-only water fountains, whiteonly swimming pools, white-only restaurants, white-only schools. My own mother, who is very fair-skinned because her grandmother was half-white due to the rape of her mother by a slave master, was told by a white teacher that she should "pass." My mother was encouraged to leave her family and live

as a white woman so she could be more accepted and live an easier life. Equality on the surface does not necessitate equality in our hearts.

STILL THE SAME

I realize that in discussions like this, some will respond, "Yes, but that was so long ago, and things are different now." Unfortunately, things haven't changed as rapidly or broadly as we might imagine. A few months ago I was returning home from one of our worship gatherings in Grant Park, and I saw a man running around my neighborhood and waving a Confederate flag. He was shouting, "The South shall rise again!" I'm afraid the sin and evil of racism and classism has not ended; it has just been governed and suppressed. The words this nation was founded upon are impotent in the face of blatant hatred and systematic division of people along racial, ethnic, social, and socioeconomic lines.

This is the history and, in some places, the present reality of our nation. But what about the church? The visible bride of Christ is supposed to be different, a living example to the world of how humans should relate to God and in turn how humanity should relate to one another. "If then you have been raised with Christ," then by all accounts you should be daily putting off the old self with its practices (Colossians 3:1). Why? So you can live and love well in the new community of Christ, having put on the new self. This is then your primary identifier; it is the way people know you above all else.

The new self is not just a new nature or even a new person. It is a new humanity altogether. In this new reality, the forefathers' words can finally become true. This equality across all lines is a re-creation of what was always intended, how human relationships were always meant to be. We all stand equal at the foot of the cross, because we all belong to Christ.

The renewal refers not simply to an individual change of character but also to a corporate recreation of humanity in the creator's image.

—Peter Thomas O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon

This re-creation involves what community was always supposed to be, and this is what it means to be a *New Ethnic*. This term came to me as I was preparing to see our church planted in Atlanta. As I wrote out the mission statement and wrestled with the Scriptures about who I'd like this church to be, this term surfaced.

We become New Ethnics when we come to follow Jesus and are transformed by the gospel. We are striving to be freed from the bounds of prejudice, fear, and hang-ups of simply being identified by our race, class, or culture. We long to become a new people altogether, a beautiful tapestry of God's creation, called and chosen by Him for something bigger than ourselves. As such, we are deeply committed to being intentionally transcultural.

Audacious, huh? And I say that because if you look at the atrocities of the past, and even those of the present when it comes to racism and classism, you know those attitudes and ideas still exist in the church as well.

Dr. King famously said that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week. For years this is just the way it was. Racial, ethnic, and social divisions existing even in the body of Christ. This inspired the writings of men like Lemuel Haynes, an African freedman, pastor, Puritan, and Republican abolitionist who pastored an all-white church in the 1700s. "No one can, Haynes insisted, be denied freedom or 'Communion' because of race, appearance. . . . At 'the comeing of Christ,' Haynes insisted, 'when the Sun of riteousness arose this wall of partition was Broken Down.'"²² What Haynes means here is that every Christian is equal. Every Christian is family.

CHRIST IS ALL

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:11)

You are likely familiar with these words of Paul, but I'd like to briefly unpack them for the sake of our conversation. These three categories he mentions are very clearly measuring sticks "out there"; in other words, societally. But not "in here"—not in

the unfolding kingdom of God where those who have been raised with Christ are being transformed by the renewing of their hearts and minds. Paul outlines three human distinctions with which we are all familiar, but he casts them in different language.

- 1. Ethnic identity—"Greek and Jew"
- 2. Faith heritage—"circumcised and uncircumcised"
- 3. Class, culture, and social standing—"barbarian, Scythian, slave, free"

These were rigid dividing lines, particularly in the first century. To some degree, though in modified language, they are still at play today in our broader culture. But they cannot coexist with the gospel as we routinely conceive them. And so you might wonder, Then what do we do with our obvious differences. Are we no longer to acknowledge them? No. It is not that these distinctions disappear, but that they are mediated through our primary identity—we are Christ's and He is everything. Jesus is all and in all.

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

It'd be easy for me to tell you that I had a gospel epiphany and never had an issue with race or culture or anything ever again. That'd quite simply be a lie. I grew up in southern Louisiana, and next to Mississippi, it might have been one of the most racially tense states in the nation. I have early memories of being called "nigger" at one of Dad's work parties by one of his

employee's sons. I remember having it yelled from the stands when I was playing pee-wee football. And I remember walking down the street and having a dip bottle chucked at me from the window of a truck outfitted with a Rebel flag. Experiences like these made me so hateful toward white people that by the time I was fifteen, my own mother, who grew up during the civil rights movement and lived her entire life being discriminated against, called me prejudiced and said, "You are becoming exactly what you despise."

It was in that same year, just before I turned sixteen, that I met Judah Vedros. This kid shared the gospel with me no less than ten times. His persistence finally paid off, and I agreed to attend a youth group service with him. It was at that gathering God saved me. After all the years of bitterness, God sent a young white kid who heavily favored Tom Cruise to show me the beauty of the new humanity. I naively believed I was healed of my prejudice, but there were remnants of that former life that continued to influence my thinking.

Throughout college I toyed with the idea of an interracial relationship but decided to date only inside my race. I partied hard and hung out with a lot of girls during my nearly two-year full-sprint rebellion away from God. But after God reoriented my life, I went on a dating hiatus. During that time I made a list of thirty-seven things (I'm ridiculous) I wanted in a wife; number thirty-seven being that I wanted her to be a beautiful black woman. And then I met Breanna.

The night I met her I went home and told my old man, "I may have met the girl I'm going to marry." Breanna was (and is) beautiful, smart, and musically gifted, and she loved God more than anything. But it wasn't long, even in light of Breanna's overwhelming beauty, before I began to have doubts. She was (and is) beautiful, but she is not black. I didn't know if she would ever be able to fully understand me, and if God blessed us with children, I believed they would go through hell growing up in the South.

But as I began to go through my list, I realized that Breanna embodied thirty-six of the thirty-seven things I desired in a wife. I told my mom about my conundrum, and I'll never forget what she said: "Well, when you begin to trust Jesus, I guess that last thing won't really matter, will it?" And with that statement I was forced to reconcile my theology with my heart. Was I just playing on the surface or did I truly have a heart for what God wanted?

Now, after nearly a decade of marriage, I cannot imagine my life with anyone else. Every time I see my three beautiful children, I am reminded of the power of the gospel. And my heart is filled with joy. After all of my hurt, anger, and reactionary sinful prejudice, God continues to renovate me through my own marriage and family, and to show me what it means to live out the new humanity—to live as New Ethnics. Together, as a family, we have the privilege of leading Renovation Church—a three-times-failed church plant, which is now a diverse and dynamic community of over one thousand people—to do the same. Not for the sake of the church alone, but for the sake of the city, for the love of our place, for the belief that we can see substantive change, and with the understanding that we are working out God's desires, however imperfectly, every step of the way.

THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

Right now, in this moment, you are in a dangerous position. Why do I say that? Because if you've read this entire book, you did not heed my warning at the beginning to return this book immediately and try to get your money back. Or you really do want your life, your family, your church, your place to change. And you believe, through the power of God's Spirit and at least some (hopefully all) of the principles in this book, you can see and be a part of that change. If the latter, wonderful! But I stand by my words. You are in a dangerous position all the more. Why? We've turned over some big rocks in this work. We've laid a theological foundation for why this present world matters to God and, subsequently, why it should matter to us as we seek to renew culture. We've explored the need for you to have a knowledge of the history of your home in order to take measured steps in any efforts to see it change. We've addressed the damage that transience does to society in general and ministry in particular, demanding that Christians embody a theology of place and a clear sense of sentness. In the end, we encountered the new humanity that awaits us in full when God comes to claim the earth, but which must be fought for now, in earnest, if we are to be biblically faithful or expect to see a catalytic change. And if you are the leader I believe you to be, then your first response will be to take what you've gained and *do* something.

the right words + the right time = CHANGE

That is our equation, and *time* is of great import. You need time. Time to sit with these ideas. Time to engage your friends and family. Time to engage those you lead or those who are leading you. You need time to work through the questions I've asked and to work through those that the Spirit has surfaced in your heart. You need time to simply be present, in your place, with these ideas. And then, armed with the right words and seasoned with enough time, go boldly, and don't stop until the good Lord says so.