

loving your black neighbor as yourself

A Guide to Closing the Space Between Us

chanté
griffin



LOVING
YOUR BLACK NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF

A Guide to Closing the Space Between Us

CHANTÉ GRIFFIN



WATERBROOK

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To my mother, Vivi, who taught me to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength; to my father, Bobby, who taught me to pursue my dreams; and to Aunt Jackie, my godmother, who remained resolute in God's goodness until the end.

CONTENTS

<i>Before You Begin</i>	000
-------------------------	-----

Part One: Love

Love Is . . .	000
1. Love Yourself	000
2. Robbed of Love	000
3. Love Withheld	000
4. Love Poured Out	000

Part Two: Loving Your Black Neighbor

Love + Wokeness	000
5. Loving Through Cultural Lenses	000
6. The Black Love Lens: Intimacy in Neighborhoods	000
7. The Black Love Lens: Intimacy in the Church	000

8.	The Black Love Lens: Honor	000
9.	The Black Love Lens: Stand Up	000
10.	The Black Love Lens: God's-Gifts	000
11.	The Black Love Lens: God's-Gifts from Partners-in-Love	000
12.	The Black Love Lens: The Spirit of Love	000

Part Three: Go and Do Likewise

	"Lift Every Voice and Sing"	000
13.	Transforming the Road	000
14.	"Stony the Road We Trod"	000
	<i>On Chanté's Shelf</i>	000
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	000
	<i>Notes</i>	000

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Blackness is my mother tongue, my very first love language.

I was birthed in a Black Pentecostal church. My dark-skinned body was birthed into choir rocks and hand claps, my spirit reborn in the cool baptismal pool. My speech refined with new tongues, and my future prophesied into being.

I don't remember my parents (barely adults themselves) keeping my little sister and me on any precious sleeping schedule: *6:00 dinner, 7:00 bath, 8:00 bedtime story*. I do remember falling asleep at church to the sound of the drummer's snare and the organ's sirens. I remember women shouting and wailing and being ensconced by other women in white who fanned them as they lay outstretched on the floor, discreetly covered by white sheets.

My sis and me were "church babies"—children whose sleep can withstand the preacher's whoops and the congregation's hollers, permanent fixtures at most Black Pentecostal churches. We usually passed out on the pews, clutching our children's Bibles to keep Satan from prying them from us. Sometimes we wore bows in our hair and lace on our socks, accented by the black patent leather shoes our mothers bought us for Easter service. Sometimes we sported little wool jackets and bow ties that matched our fathers'. We'd been taught we must *always* look good for God.

I remember children's church, where I learned that "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world: Red and yellow,

black and white, they are precious in His sight.”¹ I remember Sunday night service, Thursday night Bible study, and Saturday morning choir rehearsal.

For the first ten years of my life, my world was completely Black. I attended an all-Black church in South Central Los Angeles and that church’s all-Black private Christian school, and my family lived in an adjacent all-Black neighborhood. I remember only one exception to this all-Black world: Cindy, the only non-Black person in our entire K—8 school. Cindy was Filipina, wore a short bob with bangs, and always had a lot of money. And when I say “a lot of money,” I mean five dollars.

I knew about other racial groups, but I never interacted with them. My experience was not uncommon for a young Black girl living in South Central Los Angeles in the 1980s.

The Black world was the only one I knew. And it felt safe, even with the helicopters that sometimes flew above my neighborhood as I played double Dutch with my friends on the cracked concrete pavement. To us, Blackness was as natural and unassuming as the daily sunrise. It’s amazing how much self-esteem we built as the standard and not the deviant.

I didn’t know to cherish these moments. I didn’t know that my world would turn upside down when my parents decided we were “movin’ on up”² to a neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley, where my sister and I would become two of four Black kids in an entire elementary school. There, I learned that the outside world didn’t just not see us. It didn’t love us.

From My Heart to the Page

When my family left our all-Black world in South L.A. in 1988, I became aware of racism for the first time. That’s when I first saw

the robbery: Most of the Black students weren't tracked into the honors and advanced-placement classes in school, despite their undeniable brilliance. Resources for schools, parks, and jobs often bypassed areas with large Black populations and went straight to more affluent, predominately white neighborhoods. My neighbors tried to rob me of my dignity by calling me the N-word, insisting my Black skin wasn't beautiful, and purposefully looking past me to serve the white man behind me in line.

Inside my all-Black world, all I felt was love, but outside it, I could see the loveless forces that had crammed us together in a concrete jungle in hope of never having to be neighbors with us. In my new multiracial world, love was as consistent as fleeting middle school crushes, and the inconsistency would mark my psyche for years to come.

They say that your childhood experiences lay the foundation for your future. They're right.

I've spent most of my career intentionally serving my Black Neighbors. First as a university chaplain working with Black collegians and then as a director at a non-profit primarily serving Black and Latino/a students. Today as a journalist, I write about the intersection of race, culture, and faith. Like actor Cuba Gooding, Jr., declared in the film *Jerry Maguire*, "I love Black people!"³ My love for us is as deep as forever and as wide as eternity. So *Loving Your Black Neighbor as Yourself* is a natural outpouring of my love for Black people—a way to show my love and a guide for others to lavishly love their Black Neighbors.

Partly a "how to" book and partly a "grow into" book, at its core, this is a spiritual formation book designed to help you become someone who loves your Black Neighbor multidimensionally. The first part of the book is designed to help grow your love for God, your Black Neighbor, and yourself. The second part is designed to

show you practical ways to love your Black Neighbor.

With this in mind, the book is meant to be experienced rather than simply read. You will encounter prose, poetic interludes, heart checks, imagined reading exercises, and prayer pauses—all designed to help you deeply engage with the material. I encourage you to take your time with every part of this book. When I ask you to pause, please don't skip ahead. Please use every instance as an opportunity to grow. Immerse yourself in the imagination exercises. Honestly search your heart, write your thoughts, and reflect during the checks. Pray, Beloved. Pray like your heart depends on it, because it does. Urgently seek out and engage the Spirit of Love, and the Spirit will engage you right back.* So take your time. Sip the words in this book like a fine wine.

If you're able, read this book alongside community—your family, friends, neighbors, or small group. If you want, host a group discussion or book club meeting. Having others to talk and share with will only help your journey.

Although this book is written primarily to white people and non-Black people of color, it is a love tome meant to love and honor the Black community. This book is for *anyone* who wants to love their Black Neighbor anew. If you're not Black, then this book is definitely for you. If you're Black, then this book may be for you, too, because we aren't necessarily immune from the ways racism, colorism, and classism have colored how we view and love one another. So while some parts of the book may resonate with you more than other parts, I hope the stories in its pages make you feel seen, loved, and honored.

No matter who you are or where you're from, I hope you feel

*One of my favorite passages says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

seen, loved, and honored as you read. I hope you can receive this book the same way I received it: with an open mind and an open heart.

Lexicon and Language

Language is critical. It can include, exclude, uplift, and reshape. As we enter this author-reader conversation, a shared language will help connect us. So allow me a moment to get us both on the same page.

Who Is “Black”?

I write this book from my perspective as an African American woman. In this book, *Black* generally refers to either African Americans or experiences common to African Americans living in the United States. When I use the word *Black*, I seek to capture *some* of the common experiences of being an African American in the U.S. Additionally, I use *Black* as an umbrella term that can encompass experiences of other Black folk living in the States, including recent immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, for example, who may closely identify with their country of origin. I’m cognizant that their experiences can differ from and mirror the experiences of those who identify as African Americans.

Black is capitalized throughout this book to signify honor and respect and because in 2020 *The Associated Press Stylebook* (a style and grammar guidebook used by journalists and other writers) declared that the word should be capitalized when denoting a shared culture and history. But just as importantly, as my writing colleague Janelle Harris Dixon asserted in a 2016 Twitter post, “I always capitalize Black. My editors can change it if they must, but it never leaves me with a lowercase B. We are an uppercase people.”⁴

Your Black Neighbor

Your Black Neighbor is any Black person you come across at any moment in time. Your Black Neighbor is also the collective Black community. Your Black Neighbor can be a colleague at work, a group of Black teenagers playing b-ball at a public park on a warm evening in August, a group of Black parents at your parent-teacher association meeting, or someone you've known since you shared Fruit Roll-Ups in kindergarten.

Names for God

I've read that there are more than one hundred names for God in the Bible and that in Judaism, the four-letter name of God, YHWH, is forbidden to be uttered because it is considered too holy. Instead, God is often referenced as "Hashem."⁵

I admire how Judaism puts respect on God's name, and I try to do the same throughout this book but differently. I always capitalize references to God to show respect. I also capitalize the name of anyone I want to lavish extra honor on.

Generally, I refer to God as "God," and because I love nicknames, I also refer to God as "the Spirit of Love" or "Love."⁶ Theologically, though, I recognize the differences among the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit.

Last, although God is a spirit and is neither male nor female, I reference God as Scripture does, using male pronouns for God the Father and Jesus the Son.

African American English

African American English (AAE) is a language that Black folk in the U.S. have spoken for centuries. Occasionally I use AAE as I write, so if you come across a word or phrase or sentence construction that feels odd, then I'm most likely using AAE, and I invite

you to either read the footnote I supply or look up the term online. If you don't recognize AAE in this manuscript, then that's a sign of the impact AAE has had on Standard American English.

Definition of Racism

You'd think it would be easy to define *racism*, but it is anything but easy. There are differing definitions, and racism can take many forms. At the crux of racism are racial hierarchy and the belief that some groups are superior to others and thus are more deserving of certain things. Historian and author of *How to Be an Antiracist* Dr. Ibram X. Kendi defined a racist as "one who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea."⁷ Furthering his idea, I define *racism* as "failing to love someone largely—or at least in part—because of their race." I include unconscious bias, racial prejudice, microaggressions, and the sin of partiality to a racial group under the racism label because their impact is the same. When unchecked, racism, in any form, always produces pain and death—in us and our neighbors. I use *racism* as an umbrella term because it speaks to the weight and impact of not loving our Black Neighbors.

Racism can be intentionally or unintentionally espoused by individuals, groups, organizations, corporations, and policies. While white people and people of color can perpetuate racism, I believe the Spirit of Love can replace this *ism* with love.

Throughout the book, I seek to honor God, you the reader, and your Black Neighbor. If you feel like I've somehow missed the mark in how I use language, I apologize and invite you to extend grace and love to me.

As You Begin the Journey

My hope is that you would engage with this book the way I learned to. Here's what I mean.

When I started to write this book, I thought of it as work to be done. Yes, work I felt called and inspired to do, but work nonetheless. As a result, each weekday at 7:30 A.M., I rushed to grab the corner table at my local Starbucks to write. As the months wore on, I realized that while I initially thought it was my responsibility to work on the book, the book ended up working on me. It required me to face parts of myself I didn't want to see. It demanded that I share from a place of vulnerability and authenticity, in ways I didn't want to. It asked for more of me: more prayer, more research, more love, more compassion. Ultimately, the book grew me into more than I was prior to writing it.

This is my prayer for you: That as you do the work of reading this book, you will allow it to work on you. That you will allow it to show you parts of yourself you haven't wanted to see. That you will allow it to unearth vulnerability and authenticity within you. That you will allow it to ask you for more and grow you into more. I pray that as you become more, your love for your Black Neighbor will become as deep and boundless as the Spirit of Love's love for you.

PART ONE

Love



Love Is . . .

Love is . . .

the wrapping of oneself around another. it's handling someone with gloves to ensure they are well taken care of.

love is gentle and soft like a newborn's tummy. love knows that the other is fragile, that it must handle with care. it makes concessions for the other, which makes love subject, even submissive, to the other. love doesn't mind, though.

love doesn't try to control. love releases the other, releases the other with no expectation. love is the ultimate angel investor: it invests with no expectation of ownership.

love is the needed space and the grace we give to another when they push us away.

love covers another when their nakedness is exposed. love brings figs and blankets and builds a warm fire.

love never fails.

CHAPTER 1

Love Yourself

Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Renew a loyal spirit within me.

—*Psalms 51:10, NLT*

I ran into walls as a toddler. And into sliding glass doors. Turns out I needed glasses, like my father, his mother, and her siblings. And not the cute, stylish kind you can buy from a hip brand like Warby Parker. Imagine a two-year-old with a small body, a big head, and lenses so thick her eyes doubled in size!

True to my four-eyed persona, I was kind of a nerd in school. I *loved* to get good grades on tests, assignments, and pop quizzes—plus, I was doing *all* the extra credit because the only thing better than an A is an A+. Case in point: When I was around ten or eleven, I was determined to ace the eye exam at the optometrist's office, even though I have astigmatism, and let's not forget—I used to run into walls. When I arrived at the eye doctor's office that afternoon for my annual exam, I started to memorize the eye chart: "D, C, T, P . . ."

"What are you doing?" my mom asked as she caught me reciting

the letters. My mouth remained silent, but my face clearly communicated that she had caught me.

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

When dealing with difficult racial issues—be it racism, unconscious bias, the sin of partiality, racial prejudice, microaggressions, or anything else—*everybody* wants to ace their eye exam. *No, I didn’t say anything racist!* you declare. *No, I didn’t do that racist thing!* you insist. *And no, I’m definitely not racist!* you protest. It’s easy to hold shame for not seeing your Black Neighbor clearly. It’s also easy to avoid admitting there’s a deficiency or to cover up the deficiencies in your vision by reciting “D, C, T, P . . .”

But when someone calls you out for saying or doing something racist, you can choose how to respond: Do you allow fear, pride, and shame to wrap themselves around you like a protective blanket, refusing to confess, furthering the pain you’ve caused? Or do you love yourself, trample shame under your feet, and eagerly undergo an eye exam so you can receive new lenses?

Love Yourself Fully

When we were children, our parents or guardians regularly took us to the doctor and dentist to make sure our bodies were functioning well. They did this because they loved us and they knew we wouldn’t go on our own. Think about it—how many eight-year-olds are like, “Mom, you know what I want for my birthday? A trip to the dentist!”

But today as adults, we take ourselves to the doctor, the dentist, the optometrist, the cardiologist, and more. We take ourselves to appointments because we want to be well. We also recognize that

when we aren't well, it affects us *and* everyone around us. For instance, if we don't realize that we need new lenses to see clearly, we will go around running into walls and people. If we stay in denial about the fact that we need lenses, we will continue running into things, hurting ourselves and others. Loving ourselves doesn't stop at doctor visits, though.

In contemporary American culture, we commonly define loving yourself as taking good care of your physical and emotional health by eating well, exercising, carving out "me time," visiting a therapist, and maybe retreating to the spa with your friends or to the man cave with your buddies. Yes, loving yourself can include all of this, but loving yourself also means tending to your spiritual and relational health just as you would your physical and emotional health. Loving yourself requires a multidimensional, holistic love.

The concept of multidimensional love isn't new. In Deuteronomy 6, when God's commandments were given to the Israelites, he said to love him multidimensionally, "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."¹ In fact, loving God multidimensionally is so important that Jesus called it out again.

In Luke, a religion expert attempted to test Jesus on the law, asking Jesus what he must do to live with God forever. Jesus agreed with the expert's answer to the question, including the addition of loving one's neighbors: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"²

God's love for us, and our love for God, is the foundation from which we love ourselves and our neighbors. Loving ourselves multidimensionally, in partnership with the Spirit of Love, is one of the truest ways we love ourselves.

If you love yourself, then you are willing to look at the parts of yourself that need a doctor's tender, loving care. You are willing to

receive the wellness package the Spirit of Love has for you, which includes being honest with yourself, God, and your Black Neighbor about the full condition of your heart.

Hearts have eyes—if not literally, then definitely metaphorically, according to Paul Baloche, who penned the popular worship song “Open the Eyes of My Heart.”³ Our hearts hold our innermost beliefs, and they reveal how we see and resultantly treat our Black Neighbors. If we allow our hearts to be examined, they reveal how much (or little) love we have for those neighbors and the ways our love needs to be purified. Our hearts house our fears, our insecurities, our pride, and the parts of us we don’t wanna acknowledge. In fact, we don’t always know what’s in our hearts until someone shows us the results of our eye exam.

Beloved, love yourself by being honest about any ways you haven’t viewed your Black Neighbor properly. Allow yourself to be wrapped in God’s forgiveness and love. When you seize the opportunity to confront the sin of racism as an opportunity to love yourself, then despite how horrible getting called out may feel, you will embrace it as a gift from God. A gift that can close the space between you, God, and your Black Neighbor.

Prayer Pause

Confronting any racism in your heart is no easy task. You may think, *Chanté, I don’t need to do this—I’m fine!* Or your physical heart may be racing a little because you’re afraid of what you may see. Either way, I encourage you to be open to what the Spirit of Love may show you. Whatever it is, it will be good for you *and* your Black Neighbor.

Before we move forward, let’s pray for guidance and

support from the Spirit of Love. First notice the posture of your body: Are you tense? Holding your breath?

Take a deep breath, in and out, allowing any tension to leave your body. Then pray this breath prayer.

Breathe in:

Spirit of Love, talking about racism is hard.

Breathe out:

Remove any fear or shame I may have.

Breathe in:

Give me courage for an eye exam.

Breathe out:

Give me grace to love myself anew.

Love Yourself: Recognize That Your Heart Could House Racism

In 1906, a Black preacher named William J. Seymour led the Azusa Street Revival in California. Blacks, whites, and their Chinese, Mexican, and other neighbors worshipped God together freely during the event.⁴

Bishop Ithiel Clemmons, a historian for the Church of God in Christ, wrote, “The interrelatedness of holiness, spiritual encounter, and prophetic Christian social consciousness attracted people of all races to the Azusa Street revival. It was an egalitarian, ecumenical, interracial, interclass revival that for about three years defied the prevailing patterns of American life.”⁵

A white preacher, G. B. Cashwell, excitedly traveled six days

from Dunn, North Carolina, to Los Angeles to experience the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street and to receive the supernatural gift of speaking in tongues. But when he arrived, Minister Cashwell felt uncomfortable during the multiracial worship service. Although he wanted to receive this new spiritual gift, he didn't want a Black leader to lay hands on him so he could receive it. He turned to prayer to address the discomfort he felt.⁶

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

Ultimately, Minister Cashwell submitted to the Spirit of Love, and in turn, the Spirit of Love gave him new heart lenses. Society's dividing wall—which insisted he and his Black Neighbors remain separate and maintained he was in some way superior—fell in his heart. As Pastor Seymour laid hands on Minister Cashwell, he humbly received a rich spiritual gift through his Black Neighbor and spoke in tongues.⁷

Reflecting on the experience, Minister Cashwell noted that “a new crucifixion began in my life and I had to die to many things.”⁸ He remained at Azusa Street for several days. When he went back to North Carolina, he went with newfound intimacy with and honor for his Black Neighbor. The Spirit calling Minister Cashwell out was a loving invitation to go deeper into the heart of God and to see and love his Black Neighbor with new lenses.

So what about you? Is the Spirit lovingly calling you out for any racism in your heart? If so, how will you respond to the invitation to love with new lenses?

PERNICIOUSNESS OF RACISM

The sin of racism—of seeing and treating your Black Neighbor without love because of their race—is a destructive, deadly force. An offhanded remark about your Black Neighbor’s skin tone can sow death in her, just like putting on a KKK robe could. Regardless of its shape, racism is always destructive, and it’s everywhere, like the air we breathe. Racism looks like . . .

- a Black person being complimented for being smart and articulate because they weren’t expected to be
- a Black person being denied a job or promotion because they wear braids or another ethnic hairstyle
- segregated hair-care aisles at stores with “ethnic” and “regular” sections
- grocery stores in predominately Black neighborhoods requiring customers to show their receipts when exiting the store
- neighborhoods with high Black populations receiving fewer home loans
- the creation of separate white churches and Black churches
- Black neighborhoods becoming “food deserts” because of a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables at grocery stores, while having a proliferation of unhealthy fast-food chains
- Band-Aids, crayons, and stockings labeled “flesh” color but coming in a singular peaches-and-cream shade
- #DrivingWhileBlack
- higher conviction rates and harsher sentencing for our Black Neighbors than our white neighbors who commit the same crimes
- trying to touch a Black woman’s hair, like she’s a pet

Love Yourself: Be Humble and Question If You're Seeing Clearly

I grew up in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the Black-led Holiness Pentecostal denomination founded by Charles Harrison (C. H.) Mason, who was deeply influenced by the Azusa Street Revival. If you've spent a lot of time praying with COGIC folk, you know that some of them often pray some version of this prayer:

Lord, please forgive me for anything I said, did, or thought that wasn't pleasing to you. Forgive me for any sins I committed knowingly or unknowingly. . . .

This prayer is imbued with humility. It assumes that we mess up often, despite our best efforts and despite not always knowing it. Cultivating this type of humility is essential as we interact with God and our Black Neighbor, because sometimes we just don't see ourselves. So when someone calls us out, we're baffled as to why because we don't see what they see. As author Ijeoma Oluo put it in *So You Want to Talk About Race*, our logical conclusion is "It just doesn't make sense to [me] so it cannot be right."⁹ But sometimes our logical conclusion isn't right. When we pursue humility, we allow Love to give us new lenses.

A few years ago, a writing colleague, Melissa, and I started to become close friends. We worked at cafés together, talked about our writing dreams, and eventually talked about God. She described herself as spiritual but not Christian. So we chatted about God and faith, we prayed together, and she visited my church.

One day, she stopped coming to church and she stopped talking to me—a double whammy. She said I wasn't accepting of her and where she was in her life. I couldn't for the life of me understand

what she was talking about. Of course, I wasn't a perfect friend—I mean, who is? But I couldn't grasp how someone I had been friends with for years—someone whom I had stood by and prayed for during some of the darkest times of her life—would just walk away. Because I couldn't understand her decision, I attributed her departure to not wanting to be around God or people who followed God. I didn't know what else to think. I grieved the loss of our friendship and kept praying that she would know God more deeply. I never thought to ask God to examine my heart lenses.

Several months later, I was praying when, seemingly out of nowhere, the Spirit showed me my heart toward Melissa. Yes, I loved her. Yes, I wanted the best for her, which included her fully embracing Jesus's love for her. But you know what else was in my heart? Impatience. The Spirit showed me that, deep down, I was kinda frustrated that Melissa was dragging her feet with Jesus. She was up and then down, in and then out, yes and then no. Because I didn't understand her approach to faith, when she said she felt like I wasn't accepting of her and where she was in her life, she was absolutely right. While praying in Love's presence, I saw how my impatience had caused her to not feel seen, loved, and valued right where she was.

Melissa was picking up on what was happening beneath the surface; she was talking about the state of my heart. I, however, was focused on my actions. My actions were great: praying for her, inviting her to church, taking her out to coffee. But the impurities in my heart—impatience and, if I'm honest, maybe a little bit of a desire to control—tainted my interactions with her.

Impurities may be standing between you and your Black Neighbor. Maybe one of your Black Neighbors has called you out for being proud or paternalistic. Or maybe you've been called out for saying or doing something racist, and you honestly don't see what

they're talking about. In fact, maybe you've concluded that it's *their* issue or that they're just too sensitive. If this has happened, I wanna implore you to embrace "racial humility," a term coined by Professor Robin DiAngelo.¹⁰ Essentially, racial humility means that you exercise humility when dealing with racial issues.

Honestly, I was hesitant to include the term in this book because I wanted to be able to say that humility is humility. If you're humble, then you're humble. If you're not, then you're not. No need to specify the type of humility, because humility is all-encompassing. But then I realized that while humility should be all-encompassing, when it comes to calling out racism especially when it's in our hearts, that's not often the case. The pervasiveness of racism on U.S. soil—particularly in the church—is so embedded in our foundations, so prolific in our practices, that we must counter it by practicing a specific, nuanced spiritual discipline: racial humility.

Overall, you can be someone who operates with a lot of humility, but you can still have some areas where you aren't very humble because you feel like they're non-issues. Ironically, these are the very areas you need the most humility in. Some Christians—especially white Christians—don't exercise racial humility because they don't believe they need to. It's a non-issue to them. And since they believe they're already humble and love everyone equally with the love of Christ, they often end up running into walls, doors, *and* their Black Neighbors!

Racial humility looks like taking the heart posture of COGIC folk and presuming you may have knowingly or unknowingly sinned against your Black Neighbor. Racial humility simply says, "Maybe I don't see things as clearly as I'd like to believe. Lemme listen to my Black Neighbor and the Spirit of Love to see if I need new lenses. Maybe they see more clearly than I do."

I'm so grateful that the Spirit showed me my heart toward

Melissa and then gave me new, patient lenses to see and love her through. I've since apologized and we've reconnected. I wish I'd had the humility to ask the Spirit about my heart lenses months before.

I know that in American culture, a racist is one of the worst things one can be labeled. But get this: In Scripture, pride is at the top of a list of seven sins God hates.¹¹ Racial humility is so crucial because it cuts against the pride God said is so detestable. Racial humility is the sinew that connects you to your Black Neighbor, because sometimes what severs your relationship with your Black Neighbor is not solely your racism but the pride that prevents you from acknowledging it. So if you get called out for saying or doing something racist, resist the urge to prove that your heart is good and that your eyesight is twenty-twenty. Instead, embrace humility. Wrap it around yourself like a cashmere blanket from Nordstrom.

Love Yourself: Confess When You Don't See Your Black Neighbor Clearly

Several years ago, I met a white woman who oversaw DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) for her university. I started asking her questions about her work—cuz that's what I do, even while at dinner parties—and sensing my enthusiasm for the topic, she waxed poetic about the importance of DEI and her university's commitment to it. But at the end of our conversation, as she mentioned her school's affirmative action program, her mouth revealed what her heart really believed. When referring to the Black students admitted through this program, with shock in her voice, she said, "Some of them are really smart!"

Did you catch that? Her surprise that Black students could be smart? Her differentiation between the "smart" ones and the oth-

ers? She didn't see her Black Neighbor as smart, capable, and worthy of a seat at her university's table. She viewed affirmative action programs as programs that brought in unqualified Black students to meet quotas and create diversity. And when I called her out, asking her what exactly he meant by her statement, she mumbled and fumbled her explanation. She couldn't explain it without admitting to her racist views. As she sat there, trying to protect her pride, she was actually missing an opportunity to experience this freeing truth: Confessing your racial sin allows love to cover your sin.

She could have said something like "What I said is jacked up. I'm really embarrassed. I'm so sorry." Now, I understand that hoping she would say that is a big ask. I understand that when someone gets called out for saying something racist, it's easier and perhaps instinctive to cover, not confess. Yet these uncomfortable moments are where humility is essential. If she were someone who was growing in humility, she would have asked me for forgiveness—if not in the moment, then definitely later on.

Had this DEI officer confessed and not covered, she could have experienced forgiveness from me in that moment when she felt exposed. Yes, I was offended by the statement—not to mention baffled as to how she became a DEI officer—but I also recognize that racism's sin-filled tentacles seek to suck the love out of our relationships with one another. Had she confessed, she would have experienced the love of God being poured out to her through me. But on that day, she missed out on the healing love that says, "I see what you just did, and I hold grace and forgiveness for you."

Beloved, forgiveness and love await you on the other side of confession. You don't have to cover your sins when you remember that "love covers a multitude of sins."¹² Knowing this, the next time your Black Neighbor or another neighbor calls you out, you can be free to confess and not cover. In fact, if you can remember

a specific moment when you covered in the past, it's not too late to go back and ask for forgiveness. Your Black Neighbor will likely be shocked, and their respect for you will grow. Honesty is the bed-rock of intimacy.

What to Do If You Get Called Out for Racism

However painful, getting called out is a path toward heart transformation. If you live in a country that historically has routinely denigrated your Black Neighbor, then your heart most likely needs new lenses: new ways of seeing your Black Neighbor. So count it all joy when you're called out—either by a stranger or by your Black Neighbor whose cubicle sits next to yours. Be grateful that the Spirit of Love loves you too much to let you go through life running into walls and into your neighbors all the time.

But what happens when you're called out for racism? Bluntly? Directly? Or even with loving care? While every situation is different and may need a different response, here are some helpful steps to follow when you're called out for racism.

1. Listen

Don't try to justify what you did or said or why you did or said it. Just listen. Try to hear what the person is saying. Listen for their pain and hurt. Listen for their intent: Why are they telling you this? Are they trying to salvage your relationship? Help you grow?

2. Ask Questions

Tell them you want to fully understand; then ask if you can ask clarifying questions. If yes, then ask those questions. Try to avoid questions that start with "Why," as they can put people on the defensive, which is the *opposite* of what you want. Instead, use language like "Help me understand . . ." or "Can you go into more

detail about . . .” Be kind and compassionate as you ask.

3. Apologize

After you’ve listened, apologize. Even if you don’t fully understand what they’re saying. Apologize. Resist the urge to try to prove that your heart vision is twenty-twenty. Instead, if you want to be really honest, say something like “I don’t fully understand what you’re saying, so I’m gonna need some time to think and process it. But I’m sorry I hurt you.”

4. Examine Your Heart

Take the time to really think about and process what they said. Then examine your heart: Why did you say or do that thing? What was your intent? What was the impact on your Black Neighbor?

5. Ask the Spirit of Love to Examine Your Heart

Your heart can deceive you, and sometimes you can’t see yourself clearly. In prayer, ask the Spirit to examine your heart. The Spirit will reveal the truth you couldn’t see.

6. Ask a Trusted Friend to Join In on the Examination

If you feel like you still need clarity, then talk and pray with a trusted friend who listens to the Spirit. Choose a friend who regularly practices racial humility too. They may be able to help you figure out how to repair things with your Black Neighbor.

7. Return to the Person Who Called You Out to Further Discuss What Happened

Set up a time to continue the conversation. Enter the conversation with humility and love.

While you may not need to follow all seven every time you get called out for racism, these steps will help you cultivate humility before God and your Black Neighbor. Humility, when cultivated, softens our hearts and makes them pliable, able to bend toward another. Humility is always worth the steps. (Bonus: These steps will also cultivate humility if used when you're called out for *anything*!) When you humble yourself and allow others to examine your heart's eyes, you begin to create healthy relationships and close the gap between yourself and your Black Neighbor.

Love Yourself: Persevere and Endure

My friend Kat is an avid salsa dancer who used to compete semi-professionally. When she was practicing for a competition in 2008, her dance partner lifted her into the air for a trick and somehow she fell on her head, right onto the hard ballroom floor. Thankfully, she was okay physically, but she was stunned and a bit traumatized.

After Kat calmed down, she instinctively knew that if she didn't try the move again, she would never be able to do lifts again because of fear. So she turned to her partner and said, "Let's try it again." And they did it. "Again!" she said, and they did it once more. They did the move again and again and again until the emotional sting of the fall dissipated from her memory.

Some of the most intense arguments I've ever experienced have centered on race. I've left some of those conversations bruised and injured, seething with hurt and anger, vowing to never experience that type of pain again. You might be like me: You were in a discussion—perhaps a workshop about race—when things went south. Accusations flew, tempers flared, and things got real ugly, real fast. You were bruised and injured, and you limped away stunned, vowing never to allow that to happen to you again.

If this describes you, then the Spirit of Love wants to bind up your wounds and pour love into the places of injury so they're no longer tender to the touch. Please don't allow past injuries to keep you hurt, fearful, angry, or bitter. Pray, and allow the Spirit to tend to unhealed racial injuries. You can't love your Black Neighbor well if you're injured or you lack endurance.

I've always hated running. When I had to run a mile in PE class to pass the Presidential Fitness Test, I literally huffed and puffed the entire time and was always one of the last stragglers to cross the finish line. After I graduated from high school, I never ran again. And I mean never. Not to get to the bank before it closed at 5 P.M. on Friday on a holiday weekend. Not even to grab the last five-dollar toaster at Target's Black Friday sale.

But then I tried salsa dancing. With salsa, you move on six of every eight beats, and if you're a woman, then the men love to twirl you again and again and again! The music is fast and pulsating. I absolutely love it.

One Friday night, several years ago, I went out dancing. I had been dancing for only about thirty minutes when I started to huff and puff. I looked around and noticed that the other women were twirling with loads of energy. That's when I realized that salsa dancing requires serious stamina. In order to dance with ease and enjoyment, I was going to have to build endurance by . . .

Can you guess?

By running.

So that's exactly what I did. Once or twice a week, I would run (slowly) around my neighborhood, including up and down a couple of hills. I hated running. I hated those hills. But I was determined to build the stamina I needed to dance. Building endurance wasn't easy, though. Sometimes I would be so out of breath that I had to walk or jog at a snail's pace, but I kept going. I wanted to dance

with endurance. And enjoyment.

Likewise, if you want to love courageously again and again and again, through any falls and injuries, then you need a type of endurance that comes from the Spirit of Love.¹³ One that enables you to love your Black Neighbors day after day, month after month, year after year, despite how tired you may feel. A love that endures even when your ego is bruised and humility tries to ghost you.

Seeing your own racial sin and the racial sins of your country over and over requires endurance. Also, struggling with the same sin repeatedly can be demoralizing. Over time, you can slip into either shame or denial. Endurance, however, will help you choose love after you run into (yet another) wall. Like my friend Kat, you will have the strength to keep doing the thing that once left you stunned and traumatized. You will gladly cultivate this endurance because you really love dancing—or, in this case, your Black Neighbor. And instead of vowing never to return to the dance floor, you will take the hand of your dance partner, Love, and say “Again!”

You love yourself well when you choose to endure alongside Love instead of walking away from your neighbors because of either frustration or fatigue. Scripture consistently encourages us to persevere in our life with God. For example, one of the most famous passages, 1 Corinthians 13, reminds us that love “always perseveres.”¹⁴ Hebrews tells us to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” and to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”¹⁵ Another scripture encourages us to “not grow weary in doing good.”¹⁶

Loving God takes endurance. Loving your neighbor takes endurance. Even loving yourself takes endurance! However, if you endure, Beloved, if you don’t get tired of loving God, your Black Neighbor, and yourself, then you will receive the greatest gift of all: life with God, forever.

Beloved, a forever life with God is predicated on allowing the Good Physician¹⁷ to examine your eyes. So love yourself enough to go to the eye doctor. Receive all Love has for you and your Black Neighbor. I wonder how different your life might be if your goal wasn't to try to not be labeled racist. What if your goal was to be someone who humbly exchanged racism for love? What if you were someone who went around telling all your neighbors, "My lenses used to be no good. But look at these new lenses!" What if you were more celebratory of your present than ashamed of your past?

Prayer Pause

I want to give you space to air out anything hidden in your heart. Fill in the prayer below either through the written word or by speaking out loud. After you've shared this with the Spirit of Love, share it with a trusted friend. Note: The trusted friend doesn't need to be your Black Neighbor. Please share with a Black Neighbor only if you strongly feel the Spirit asking you to.

Spirit of Love,

I am not proud that I have thought . . .

I am embarrassed to say that . . .

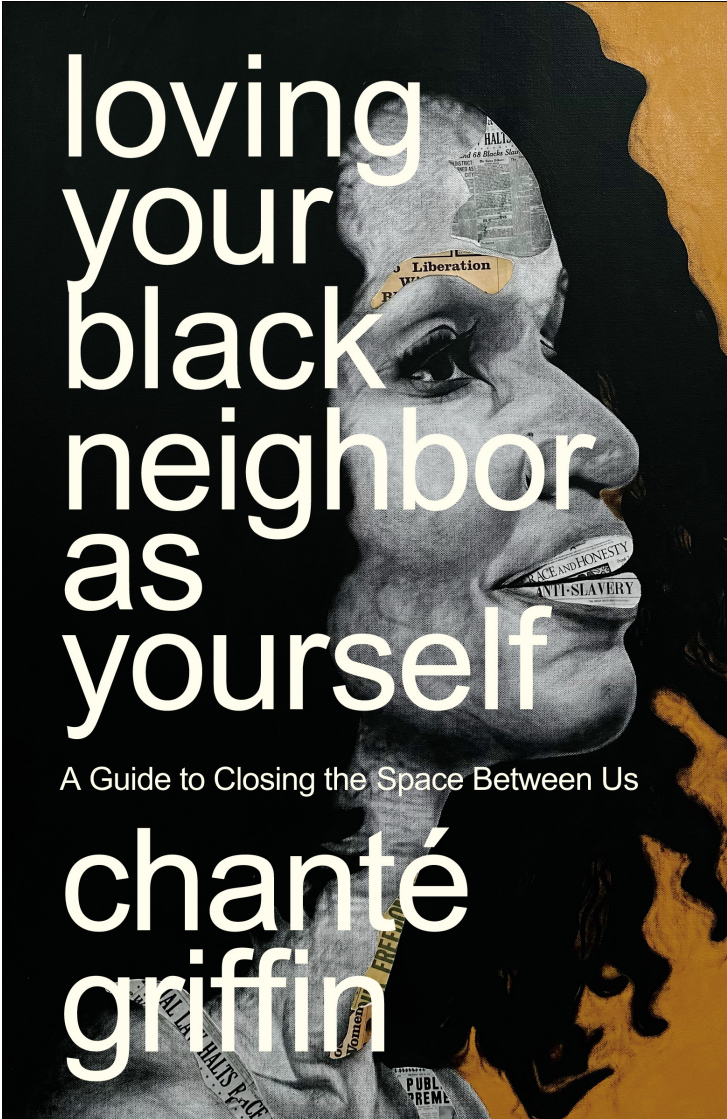
I admit that I have . . .

Please grow me into someone who . . .

Please help me . . .

I forgive my Black Neighbor for . . .

I forgive myself for . . .



loving your black neighbor as yourself

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