



Transcending Racial Trauma

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In Luke 10:27-29 we read; “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.” A man then asks Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds with a story; “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.” As I read the story it seemed to be a metaphor of how people of color are beaten down by racism and robbed. We feel as if we are left on the side of the road as if half dead.

We are in a time when ordinary citizens have become revisionist historians. They grasp for survival, clutching nostalgia and the false narratives that deny the facts about past and present-day racism. Some people believe the myth of meritocracy which denies the impact of systemic oppression on black and brown people. I’ve spent years helping **people of color**, including myself to uncover and tell our whole stories.

In Luke 10:31-32 Jesus tells us that; “a priest came down the same road, and when he saw the battered man; he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.” Some people respond like the priest and the Levite, they don’t or won’t see. **They are in such a rush to racial reconciliation that they fail to acknowledge the profound pain and racial trauma that people and communities of color carry.** Some believe that people of color can and should get over racism with minimal effort or no assistance. These are some of the reasons why people of color often feel invisible or untouchable as we fight to survive, maintain our dignity, and thrive in America.

Each incident of personal or vicarious racism can inflict racial trauma even if we aren’t aware of it. As we watch footage of children kept in cages on the southern border, we remember our ancestors; enslaved in pens, forced into boarding schools or internment camps. As we learn of white

supremacists destroying black and brown bodies in churches or shopping malls, everywhere starts to feel unsafe.

Research shows that when a person of color experiences a racist threat, our brains are wired to prepare our bodies to fight or flight. Because of repeated racist incidents, the traumatic stress is compounded and not adequately dealt with, so our brains and bodies don't fully stand down. We remain racially traumatized, which triggers a physical and emotional response, which in turn feeds our racial trauma. So, we get stuck in an endless loop.

Other research shows how historical racism may have weakened our DNA, causing racial trauma to be passed down to future generations. **We pray, yet still battle with the psychological symptoms of racial trauma.** These include fear, aggression, depression, shame, hypervigilance, pessimism, nightmares, substance abuse, flashbacks, and relational dysfunction. We may also have physical symptoms; hyperactivity, heart disease, headaches, and poor concentration. People of color are exhausted from silently carrying racial trauma and the burden of White people's fears. We urgently need Christ-centered healing where the Lord meets, heals, and helps us to love our neighbor and ourselves.

In Luke 10:33-34, Jesus continues his story and gives us an example to aspire to; "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them." Sometimes the Samaritan is us, and other times we get help from someone considered different or despised. Regardless, the Samaritan shows us how to love our neighbor and ourselves: we look, offer compassionate care, find a hush harbor, and engage in repair.

Look: Healing from racial trauma starts with looking at really happened, and being honest with the Lord about the depth of our pain. A prayer of lament is found Psalm 44: 24-26 King David asks God; "Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For we sink down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love." As we passionately cry out to God on behalf of ourselves or for others, we begin to hear his healing words of life that help us to grow in resilience. When we take an honest look at our past, we remember what the Lord has done, is doing, and will do for us.

Compassionate Care: When our racial trauma feels overwhelming, the Comforter is present to comfort and help us to give and receive compassion. We also need care and compassion from neighbors of all races who will stop and listen before they act. Neighbors who won't tweet or misuse statistics to justify inaction. Neighbors who won't ask if we deserve help or if a family member or we have a criminal record. Jesus tells us that the Samaritan simply put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him through the night. In Luke 10:35 we read that the next day the Samaritan "handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here." We need neighbors who are willing to show the same love of Christ and compassionate care.

Hush Harbor: We must have safe places where we can heal, rest, de-stress, expose injustice, and heal from racial trauma. These places are like the hush harbors; secluded and set apart places where enslaved people gathered, prayed, worshipped the Lord and yes strategize about freedom. Is the Lord calling you to create a new hush harbor, a healing space for people of color in your home, church, or community?

Repair: People of color are constantly forgiving others, and in some cases, we have received apologies. True reconciliation involves personal and public apology to people of color for the past and present harm and a determination to go a step beyond forgiveness. Repentance must include a commitment to stop all actions of injustice and oppression and to repair any damage done. If we want true racial reconciliation, then repair is essential, without it the apology and repentance can feel shallow.

In the book of Luke, we see how repair ushers out of the Samaritan's heart of compassion. The Samaritan did not cause harm, yet he used his time and resources to help the man. While in Luke 19, we see repair happen as a result of the repentance of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, an agent for state-sanctioned systemic oppression. After Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' home, Zacchaeus tells Jesus; "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

True reconciliation includes acts of repair. Is the Lord stirring your heart with compassion or repentance to help repair the damage done by racism and racial trauma? As people of color pursue justice and true reconciliation we will certainly face racism. But we have the grace of God and other believers to help us to continue to walk in love and forgiveness. If you are still asking, "Who is my neighbor?", Jesus responds in verse 36-37: "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus says to him and to each of us, "Yes, now go and do the same."

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