

Day 1 of 5 • This day's reading

- John 8:32

Devotional

Color Brave

As Christians of differing ethnicities, we share a common heritage, a common memory. Consider these words from the Apostle Paul: “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26, 28 NIV).

This does not mean that we take a color-blind approach to community. 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.

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

I believe that real beauty can come from the ashes of our country's history with racism. But the family of God must first acknowledge the ashes. Without looking back, without understanding the truth of our country's history, it's difficult to move forward in healthy ways.

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. Truth is the foundation of awareness, and awareness is the first step in the process of reconciliation. As Jesus told us, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32, NIV).

Lord, I cry out to you, my God and Redeemer, as the only one who can save me from myself. Show me my blind spots. Help me to see truth, even when it is uncomfortable. I want to know the truth that will set me free. Amen.

Day 2 of 5 • This day's reading

- Psalms 51

Devotional

The Purpose of Lament

Acknowledgment of the truth of our country's history with racism leads us toward lament. Lamenting something horrific that has taken place allows a deep connection to form between the person lamenting and the harm that was done, and that emotional connection is the first step in creating a pathway for healing and hope.

The twelfth chapter of the second book of Samuel helps us better understand the purpose of lament. There we meet David in the aftermath of his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Bathsheba's husband. The prophet Nathan has just told David that the child born by Bathsheba would die.

In his lament for his sins and the loss of his child, David wrote Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." Lament propelled David to confess his transgressions and fall on God's mercy.

American culture teaches us not to sit in sadness and despair. Pretending that everything is okay, though, requires that we mask our true feelings. God doesn't want our masks; He wants all of us, all our emotions, even our sorrow, our despair, and our grief. He wants to hold us close, He wants to wipe every tear from our eyes. And in that closeness, He wants to change us, change our hearts, and send us out to do His work.

After his time of lament, David went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. Lament prepared his heart for reconnection with God. It prepared him for action. It prepared him for praise, even in the darkness.

As agents of reconciliation, it's never too late for us to acknowledge and lament racial injustice. It's never too late to understand the historic depth of racism and to ask God to show His mercy and heal us. Because through lament, through the night of weeping, we can experience new joy in the morning.

Lord, teach me to lament for the pain done to others and to myself. Teach me to lament for my own sins that have kept me from loving others as you would have me love. Lord, have mercy. Amen.

Day 3 of 5 • This day's reading

- Ezra 9:6

Devotional

Communal Confession

To build bridges of racial reconciliation, we'll need to confront the guilt and shame of our collective past.

Our Western society is highly individualized, and our measure of morality is based on individual guilt or innocence. We've all heard the justification: *Why should I repent of racism? I never owned slaves.* But in the Bible, guilt and shame aren't described in an individualistic sense. In the Bible, guilt and shame are often communal and point to the need for corporate repentance.

In the book of Ezra, for instance, we read about how the people of Israel had become unfaithful to God and taken up the forbidden practices of their neighbors. Ezra, a priest and scribe, was personally innocent of the sins committed by the people, but he still felt the weight of guilt and shame. He prayed, "O my God, *I am utterly ashamed; I blush to lift up my face to you. For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens*" (Ezra 9:6, NLT, emphasis added). Ezra acknowledged and lamented the truth of the sins of Israel, causing him to cry out to the Lord.

In the same way, the prophet Daniel identified with the guilt and shame of his people. Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord, and because of that unfaithfulness, Jerusalem lay in desolation. Daniel confessed, “O Lord, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you” (Daniel 9:8, NLT, emphasis added). Like Ezra, Daniel had been personally innocent of the offenses against God, but he did not try to distance himself from the collective sin of his people. He owned his part in it as a member of the community.

Although communal shame and guilt brought both Ezra and Daniel great personal distress, their response highlights the redemptive arc of Scripture. Experiencing shame and guilt provided an opportunity to recognize the ugly reality that had led to their current situation and initiate communal restoration.

Lord, I am ashamed of the racism in our country's history. Forgive us for the ways we have hurt each other, judged each other, even killed and enslaved each other. Forgive us for such sins committed today and in our country's past. Forgive us for not seeing each other as made in Your image. In the powerful name of Jesus, amen.

Day 4 of 5 • This day's reading

- Ephesians 4:31-32

Devotional

The Process of Forgiveness

When we've been hurt, sometimes anger and bitterness give us a sense of control. But the truth is, our bitterness and anger often control us. They hand power back over to those who've harmed us. That's true whether we're discussing family pains, church pains, or the pains wrought by racism, classism, or sexism. How do we get free of that power? Through the practice of forgiveness.

The first step in forgiveness is understanding just how much *we* need forgiveness extended to us, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV). We forgive because we ourselves have been forgiven.

Practicing forgiveness doesn't mean ignoring the evil we've experienced. It also doesn't mean that we deny or spiritualize away feelings of anger or grief. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he wrote, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31–32, NLT).

Take a close look at this passage and consider these questions: *How can you get rid of rage until you've taken the time to feel it? How can you get rid of anger unless you've made space to recognize it? How can you forgive without first understanding the wrong you're releasing the perpetrator from?*

Only when we've made space for our emotions, when we've honestly evaluated them, can we move into true Christ-like forgiveness.

As you receive forgiveness, you may also need to ask for forgiveness for your participation in racism or structural privilege. But as you move into that process of confession and seeking forgiveness, consider how you might do it without demanding forgiveness from those who've experienced the pain of racism. So, for example, if you are white, consider talking first to other white people who will not gloss over your confession but will truly help you process your sin. When it's time to seek forgiveness from those you've harmed, give them time and space.

We are called to forgive others just as Christ forgave us. Consider how Christ has given you grace and mercy and how he wants you to extend those gifts to others.

Lord, help me to recognize my hurts. Help me to recognize how I have hurt others. In the name of Jesus, who forgives me, amen.

Day 5 of 5 • This day's reading

- Amos 5:24

Devotional

Glimpses of the Kingdom

Reconciliation work is difficult. That is why so many people of color remain silent and why our white friends hold back instead of coming alongside us. It's messy. It requires vulnerability, humility, and courage.

For many people, this kind of work represents death to the belief systems they've held since childhood. For others, it feels like an inward uprooting, a deconstructing. For some, the history of their own oppression brings shame.

I know the sacrifices this work requires. I know that with every word I speak in this highly charged racial environment, I run the risk of becoming "that girl" or, worse yet, "that angry black girl." As a result of my commitment to truth and reconciliation, I have dealt with people, family members, and associates who have rejected me.

Many of my white brothers and sisters have also felt the sting of others' pushback against their bridge building. They've entered

into the hard work of acknowledging their own systemic privileges, repenting of them, righting wrongs, and moving into restorative reconciliation. In doing so, they've taken heat from their white friends. They've been told there's no reason to repent from wrongs so far back in history, no reason to stir up the past. Still, they've continued to press into the work for the sake of unity.

The difficulties of this work can't be brushed aside. But as I've continued in this work with people of color and white friends alike, I've seen the results. I've watched healing and wholeness come. I've watched "justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24, NIV). I'm convinced that the Spirit is active in the middle of this work.

In the kingdom of God, all are children. In the kingdom of God, all are invited to the table. In the kingdom of God, all are invited to receive healing. And it's these glimpses of the kingdom around the table—the moments of kingdom healing, kingdom wholeness, kingdom multiplication—that make all the pain and sacrifice worth it.

So press in. The healing has just begun.

Lord, open my heart and mind to recognize how You are calling me to be a bridge toward racial reconciliation. Amen.