

Learning for L.I.F.E.

Bible Studies

God's Story or God's Word gives us LIFE (John 6:63)! His Word is more than enough (Psalm 62:5). And just as He speaks to me, He can and will speak to You (John 10:27-28, Jeremiah 33:3). As a matter of fact, He desires to commune with you (Psalm 149:4)!

These series of Bible Studies will help you experience LIFE more abundantly (John 10:10); fully equipped, enlightened and empowered so that you may better love, know, reflect and serve God (Hebrews 13:21).

It is my prayer, that God's Story and its impact on My Story, will serve to transform Your Story so that you too can experience greater knowledge, understanding, wisdom, renewal and a desire to then share the good news with others!

God can and will speak to YOU! God's Word can be alive and active for YOU! YOU can receive revelation! YOU can obtain discernment! You can possess Godly wisdom! And through the light of GOD'S story, YOUR story can be transformed!

Learning for Your
Liberation Inspiration Fortification Edification

HOW TO BENEFIT FROM THE LIFE LESSONS

The LIFE Bible Studies seek to arrive at the heart of the Bible for women of color, which is to develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

The Format for the LIFE Bible Studies is as follows:

Be Equipped - Each series begins with an opportunity for you to explore and make meaning of God's Word for yourself. This section is designed to get you in the Word. It is designed to support a greater understanding of God's Word and to provide space for you to receive revelations and insights regarding God's Word as led by the Holy Spirit.

The format for the LIFE Lessons is as follows:

- **Introduction** – This section provides the context in which the LIFE Lesson was written and identifies the themes or concepts to be addressed.
- **Scripture** – This serves as the foundational text for the Lesson. It can also serve as a text for your memorization as you seek to hide God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).
- **Lessons Learned** – This section provides insights, understandings, and revelations that I've received from the Word of God.
- **Lessons Lived** – This section provides practical and actionable practices you can employ to support not only the understanding of God's Word but the living of His Word (Luke 11:28).
- **Reflections** – This time of reflection provides questions and prompts to encourage the passage(s) to speak to you. The following questions are included in every LIFE Lesson with additional questions provided that speak directly to the theme or concept being addressed.
 - How does the [identified scripture] speak to you?
 - What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
 - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?
 - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
 - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
 - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?
- **Playlist** – Here I provide songs that have served to encourage me. The songs selected are deemed relevant to the theme or concept being addressed and it is my desire that they encourage you as you process, digest, and apply what's been shared. I encourage you to listen, and let the music infiltrate your soul. And I also encourage you to read the lyrics and obtain a message from the music.
- **Prayer** – I close every LIFE Lesson with a prayer, and I encourage you to pray it as well.

Be Empowered – Here's the exciting part! Each series ends with an opportunity for you to practice crafting and sharing your story. I know, I know, this might be scary for some, but in this section, I provide various activities and reflective exercises to support the writing, re-writing and/or sharing of Your Story.

This section provides you the opportunity and platform to practice and practice will only make for better practice as we're all a work in progress. Let's learn and grow together!

How to Use the LIFE Lessons

To get the most benefit from this journey, I recommend the following:

- **Begin in prayer always.** Pray for God's guidance as He leads you to greater understanding of His Word.
- **Read God's Story first, before reading the LIFE Lessons.** Allow God's Word to speak to you without the bias of my thoughts or the thoughts and opinions of others.
- **Engage with The LIFE Lessons.** Contemplate the reflection questions and let the selected songs for each study fill you as you commit to living the principle(s) being addressed.
- **Share your experience, your questions, your thoughts, etc.** with me and other women committed to this journey via the comment section or on other social media venues such as Twitter and Facebook.
- **End in prayer always.** Pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17). Ask God to guide your journey as you commit to a life surrendered to Him.

May God bless you as you seek to know Him more completely and intimately!

LEARNING FOR LIFE: BIBLE STUDY
My Black Life: With Liberty and Justice for All

My Black Life: With Liberty and Justice for All

Introduction

If you've completed the LIFE Lessons Bible Study Series - [Discovering My Biblical African Roots Bible Series](#)), I hope that you've been educated, encouraged, and motivated to "live Africa!" If you haven't, I encourage you to do so.

Many have shared, "This is great! But now what? How exactly do we "live Africa" in times of continued racial tension and unrest, inequalities, and injustices? And those are all valid questions. What should we do with all of this newfound information? How do we, as descendants of Africa, walk with our heads held a little higher, and our chests stuck out a little further? How do we let our natural, God-given talents burst forth? How do we create and innovate as we did in the days of old? How do we once again provide safety and refuge to those who are hurting or lost (Colossians 3:13)? How do we spread the message of redemption and deliverance to a dying world (2 Corinthians 5:20)? How can we be Christ's true worshippers (John 4:23), repairers of the breach and restorers of the streets (Isaiah 58:12-13)? How do we do all of this while we're still hurting, still catching up and still figuring it all out?

The purpose of this study is to begin answering the aforementioned questions. The purpose is to examine God's Word as written, through a lens of Biblical justice. And just as important, these lessons are designed to begin a dialogue within our homes, our churches, and our communities. I don't have all of the answers, truth be told, I'm still learning and growing myself. But if we come together and talk it out, we can begin the process of healing and reformation.

This series of LIFE Lessons seek to reveal God's plans and purposes for His Children of African descendant. We'll begin with God's Word as we explore the concept of **Biblical Justice**. After having read and reflected upon God's Story, I invite you to experience My Story as a reflection of God's Word and workings in my life. Finally, I encourage you to engage in various reflective exercises to support the writing, re-writing and/or sharing of Your Story. It is my prayer that my journey gives you confidence, joy, and inspiration as you come to understand your role, plan and purposes as descendants of Africa. May you stand a little taller and smile more broadly, knowing that you weren't an afterthought. God had you in mind. And He has always seen us, just as He sees us today!

I pray that My Story in the light of God's Story will serve as a catalyst to transform Your Story.

From my heart to yours,

Davenia

Be Equipped

Word Analysis

Examine the word/concept oppression. Then engage in the following:

- Identify the definitions and meanings of the word:
 - Identify the English meaning of the word
 - Seek to identify the original definition/meaning of the Word (i.e., Hebrew or Greek translations/meanings of words and/or context, the language of varying translations, etc.)
 - Determine how the word is used in the Biblical and the secular sense
- Identify where the word is used in the Bible and note the following:
 - Where does the word first appear?
 - How often does it appear?
 - In which books of the Bible is it found? In which books is it used most?
 - Which writers or characters use the word?
 - In what context(s) is the word used?
 - How does each writer/character define or describe the word?
- Look how the word/concept "evolves" from its origin to its conclusion throughout the Bible.

Reflect:

- How does what you've learned expand your understanding of Who God is?
- How does what you've learned impact your understanding of oppression and how you see yourself, your family, your community and your ethnic group?
- How might what you've learned differ from the secular perspective of who is oppressed?
- How can what you've learned, apply to your daily life?
- How can what you've learned, apply to your engagement in ministry to the oppressed?

Behind Enemy Lines

COV-19 seems to have brought about more TV time for me. And lately, I've been fascinated with historical or dramatized nonfictional movies, and of late spy movies such as *The Imitation Game* and *Official Secrets*.

But what's been more fascinating is my research and reading about the unsung heroes of my ancestors. And of particular interest has been the stories about the Black Union Intelligence Officers. These spies, recruited by the Union army, were former slaves or servants who escaped from their masters and others were Northerners who volunteered to pose as slaves to spy on the Confederacy. They were among the few black operatives who quietly gathered information in a high-stakes game of cat-and-mouse with Confederate spy-catchers and slave masters who could kill them on the spot. These unsung Civil War heroes were often successful, to the chagrin of Confederate leaders who never thought their disregard for blacks living among them would become a major tactical weakness.

Harriet Tubman is the most recognizable of these spies, sneaking down South repeatedly to gather intelligence for the Union army while also leading runaway slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad. However, there were others. Take for example John Scobell who was considered just another Mississippi slave: singing, shuffling, illiterate and completely ignorant of the Civil War going on around him. Confederate officers thought nothing of leaving important documents where Scobell could see them, or discussing troop movements in front of him. Whom would he tell? Scobell was only the butler, or the deckhand on a rebel sympathizer's steamboat, or the field hand belting out Negro spirituals in a powerful baritone. He had a couple of successful missions where he was able to extract valuable papers from a Union defector. And then there was Mary Elizabeth Bowser, who was born a slave and then eventually freed her and sent to school. Bowser then returned to Richmond, where here former slave owner was running one of the war's most sophisticated spy rings. Van Lew got Bowser a job inside the Confederate White House as a housekeeper. Bowser then proceeded to sneak classified information out from under Confederate President Jefferson Davis' nose. It was recorded that Bowser "had a photographic mind. Everything she saw on the Rebel President's desk she could repeat word for word."

These spies, if you will, went behind the enemy line, to glean important information which contributed to the success of winning battles and wars.

Scripture: I Peter 5:8 - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Lessons Learned

If were to go behind "enemy lines" in the battles of our lives, we'd find that we have a common enemy. The Bible tells us over in I Peter 5:8 that we have an enemy the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

So who exactly is this enemy of ours? Let's take a brief look at the Biblical record regarding this one who prowls like a lion. The Bible reveals that God created all of the angels (Genesis 2:1, Nehemiah 9:6). One high-ranking angel by the name of Lucifer (or day star) sinned against God, rebelled, and was kicked out of heaven, losing his place of heavenly authority, and cast down here to earth (Isaiah 14:12–15; Ezekiel 28:11–17, Revelation 12:9). Prior to Lucifer's fall, we read that he had been trained in heaven before the

very throne of God. Lucifer was anointed, he was a guardian cherub, he had pipes that were second to none, he walked with God upon the holy mountain and he walked among the stones of fire, for goodness sake! Satan was blameless (Ezekiel 28:14)...until he wasn't. Iniquity was found in him (Ezekiel 28:15), he became violent and his most grievous transgression was his desire to be God (Isaiah 14:13-14). Lucifer has waged war against God and God's people (Ephesians 6:11-12), becoming satan (not a typo, I just can't give him the satisfaction of a capital S), which means enemy or adversary (Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:9). Satan is out to destroy us with his time-tested game plan to distract, deceive, discourage, destroy.

Even Paul shared his concern about the enemy and his ploys (2 Corinthians 11:3). And Paul had every right to be concerned because through Biblical history, satan convinced half the angels in heaven that they should flee and join his camp (Revelation 12:9). Lied to Eve, caused man's great downfall (Genesis 3:1-4). Introduced jealousy between Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-8). He cast doubt upon God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 16:1-4). Deceived the Pharisees, causing them to confuse God's love with a legalistic, burdened down drudgery of do's and don'ts (Luke 11:37-44). Caused Peter to deny Christ (Matthew 26:33-35). Caused Thomas to doubt Him (John 20:24-29). Served as the root of Judas' greed and betrayal (Matthew 27:3-5) and was the source of the hatred behind the stones that killed Steven (Acts 7:54-60).

And the same mastermind of evil then, is our same enemy today. And although different times, he uses the same tactics he's used throughout the ages --- distract, discourage, and deceive all with the intent of destruction.

Lessons Lived

"Fight the power." "Hell no we won't go." "No justice. No peace." "Freedom now." "We shall overcome." Mantras of my people for over 400 years. And for a time, they were my mantras too. I stood in solidarity with my people against police brutality. I wrote about the impact of slavery and racism on our Black men and our families. I analyzed the liberation theology and the critical race theory. I researched what a movement back to Africa would look like. I fought to break through "glass ceilings." I fought to eradicate poverty. I fought to change laws and legislation. I fought the system, the man, and everything and everybody who sought to keep my people down.

My fight was fueled by my quest for justice, my quest to be seen and heard, and my quest to shed my hurt and anger. I was just a swingin' and swingin' and swingin'. But after a while, all my swingin' felt like shadow boxing. I was fighting, but I'd lost sight of who exactly I was fighting and what I was fighting for: **"the man"** - was this all men, white men, or figuratively all white people? Or was I fighting the **"the system"** - was I fighting our community and local governments or was I fighting the federal government? Was I fighting to add more laws and legislation? Or is the fight against the criminal justice system? Or the welfare system? Or am I fighting **the nightmare of my history** from which I am trying to awake (James Joyce)?

I've come to realize that before we can win the battle against injustice, we must first know ourselves and that's what I sought to understand through my study of Africa and the descendants of Africa ([Discovering My Biblical African Roots Bible Series](#)). I've also come to understand that in order to engage in combat, we must also know the enemy against whom this battle is waged against. Sun Tzu, a Chinese general, military strategist and author of *The Art of War* said this, "If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle."

Fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong way leads to a space where the very core of you can no longer breathe. And I, for one, was tired and out of breath. And God, in His infinite wisdom, showed me that perhaps my exhaustion and inability to breathe has more to do with me fighting the wrong enemy than it does with the act of fighting itself.

Some years ago, I participated in a group therapy, retreat of sorts. And one of the activities they had us engage in was designed to let go of our anger and to ultimately forgive. We were asked to bring a picture of a person or persons who had hurt us. The pictures were tacked to a wall, we were given darts, and we were directed to aim away. And with every dart my anger, my hurt, and my pain was unleashed. I began to feel vindicated as the picture of my tormentor became distorted and disfigured as it shredded under the blows of my darts. As we sat down with tears running down our faces, the facilitator began removing our shredded pictures...and the image that remained was an image of a shredded Jesus. The gasps were audible. I would never, ever have thrown darts at my Jesus! But the point that the facilitator was making, and a point that I had to soon come to remember, is that we are all image-bearers (Genesis 1:27). Not just those who do good or who live holy, but every man and every woman created. So when I fight "man" or "woman", I'm fighting on of God's created and loved.

Please hear me out. Targeting our true enemy **does not** diminish our hurt, pain, or experiences. Nor does it excuse those who have inflicted our pain. And it doesn't mean that we stop fighting. But it does help us to understand that our real battle is not with people, but against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness (Ephesians 6:12). According to Priscilla Shirer, "Everything that occurs in the visible, physical world is directly connected to the wrestling match being waged in the invisible, spiritual world. The effects of the war going on in the unseen world reveal themselves in our strained and damaged relationships, emotional instability, mental fatigue, physical exhaustion and many other areas of life. Many of us feel pinned down by anger, unforgiveness, pride, comparisons, insecurity, discord, fear. . . and the list goes on. But the overarching, primary nemesis behind all these outcomes is the Devil himself."

See when we look at our enemy in non-spiritual terms, we're most likely going to seek non-spiritual solutions to ease our pain or to "combat" our enemy. However, when we understand that this battle is much bigger than us, and that the mastermind of our oppression, our trials, and our pain is satan, whose primary goal of his kingdom is to stand between us and our Savior and to keep us from glorifying God and fulfilling our purpose. He wants us to forget that we indeed have a Savior, who not only cares about us, but Who is powerful, mighty, and has already defeated our foe (Hebrews 2:14, Romans 16:20).

And not only that, God has also provided us with the game plan for how we too can overcome our enemy. We have not been left defenseless. So be encouraged and give God the glory, knowing that our enemy is an already-defeated foe (Revelation 20:10).

Reflections

- How does I Peter 5:8 speak to you?
- What battles have you been fighting in your life? How have you been fighting?
- Why is it important to be aware of who the enemy is?
- How does viewing your "enemy" or the one who has hurt you as an image-bearer impact your perspective?

- In what ways do you find yourself engaged in spiritual warfare? Where are some areas where the enemy “attacks” your faith?
- How does knowing that Jesus has already won our war and defeated the enemy, change how you approach battles?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
 - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?
 - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
 - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
 - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from "My Black Life" Playlist. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

No Hold On Me by Matty Mullins - [Matty Mullins - No Hold on Me \(Official Lyric Video\)](#)

Waging War by CeCe Winans - [CeCe Winans-Waging War With Lyrics.](#)

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You so much for being big enough, powerful enough, and loving enough to handle my pain. I want to lash out, to fight back, to get revenge. I want to fight and I ask that You help me see things through Your eyes. . Help me understand the nature of my true enemy. Help me not be deceived by the devil and to remain vigilant, keeping my eyes on You. I am so grateful dear Father, that Your son Jesus Christ triumphed over satan. Now I ask, that You help me to also overcome the enemy through Your power of Your Holy Spirit. I claim that same victory in my life today. Work in my life that there be no ground to give satan a foothold against me. I rebuke all the insinuations, accusations, and temptations of satan in Your name, Jesus. I affirm that Your Word is true, oh God and today I choose to live in the light of Your love. In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Born With a Purpose

In the [LIFE Bible Study Series Serve God, My Black Life: With Liberty and Justice for All, Behind Enemy Lines](#) I shared my frustration regarding the ambiguity of "who" exactly was the enemy of my people. And I've had the same frustration regarding the "why" of our fight. Are we fighting so that we can experience fair treatment or equal opportunity? Are we fighting for freedom? Or are we fighting to have our voices heard, to have our stories valued, and to be embraced as a "true American?"

Understanding our "why" or our purpose is important because our purpose is what will keep us centered, keep us grounded. It's what will give us meaning and keeps us focused. Our "why" is what keeps us motivated during times of hardship and struggle. So is our why as Christians, and more specifically as Christian descendants of Africa.

Scripture:

Exodus 23:9: Also, you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

John 4:23 - But the hour is coming, and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

Lessons Learned

Colossians 1:16 makes it plain that everything got its start in God and finds its purpose in Him. So how do we, as Christians, fit into God's plan? What's our mission between now and His soon return? These are important questions to answer since the Bible says in Proverbs 19:21 that although we're busy plotting and planning and trying to orchestrate the events in our lives, it's only God's purposes that will prevail.

This topic of "purpose" can be (an eventually will be) a LIFE study in and of itself. Stay tuned. However, for the purposes of the lesson, I will simply provide a brief overview of our Biblical purposes as followers of Christ.

- ***We were created as living images of God for His glory.*** (Psalm 19:1, John 17:4, Colossians 1:16, I Corinthians 10:31, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Matthew 5:16)
- ***We were created to worship God.*** (Psalm 66:1, I Chronicles 16:9-10, Revelation 5:13)
- ***We were created to love God with all our heart.*** (I Samuel 12:24, Luke 10:27, Isaiah 43:10)
- ***We were created to love others.*** (Luke 10:27)
- ***We were created to be Christ's disciples.*** (John 15:8, 17:4, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8, 22:15, Ephesians 4:12, I Timothy 4:6)
- ***We were created to make disciples.*** (Matthew 9:37-38, 28:19, Mark 1:17, John 15:16, Romans 10:14-15, 2 Timothy 2:2)

Every Jesus-loving, Jesus-following believer should strive to fulfill the aforementioned God-ordained purposes. But during my study, I have learned that God also prescribed some very specific purposes to us, as descendants of Ham/Cush/Africa.

Isaiah prophesied that God would bring forth a remnant from Cush (Isaiah 11:11), and that we, as a redeemed people, would bear gifts to Zion (Isaiah 18:7). Zephaniah also proclaimed that from

beyond the rivers of Cush, God's people would bring Him offerings (Zephaniah 3:10). Psalm 68:31-32 declares that "Cush shall reach out its arms to God," singing praises to Him! The Psalms 87:3-6 predicts that one day people would recognize the spirituality of the Ethiopians, and will come to understand that they/that we have been born anew in Zion!

In Isaiah 30:1-15, We find the Children of Israel relying on Egypt, the familiar and tangible, and once again, doubting God and His promises. What they have assumed to be unwarranted delays and undue hardship, has caused them to become skeptical, and questioning of God's love for them. So God, out of His love and His patience, explains to His children, that His promises towards them have not been fulfilled because they have failed to walk in the purposes for which they were ordained. Here's my interpretation of His reply in (Isaiah 30:12-15):

"Because you despise my Word and would rather trust in all the lies you've been told, in people who've never had your best interest at heart, in a perverse, worldly understanding of justice, and in a system that has been driving you into the ground; you find yourself in the mess that you're in now. All of your anger, and hurt, and victim-ness and need for retribution that you wear like a second skin is like a high wall that you've built up around yourself, thinking that it's your shield and protection. But this wall is not protecting you. In fact, if you don't come from behind the wall, it is going to collapse all around you, leaving in its wake indistinguishable and useless fragments. But it doesn't have to be this way. There is still hope for your salvation. Just return to Me. Stop trying and doing and plotting and scheming to save yourself. Abide in me. Rest in me. Trust me. Your strength and your comeback story can only be found in ME! Walking in your purpose is where you will find peace and restoration. In returning and resting, you shall be saved, in quietness and trust shall be your strength."

Lessons Lived

Most people, myself included, love a good comeback story. Remember the Titans, Blindsight, Rocky, 42, Cinderella Man, Bruised, The Pursuit of Happiness...I could go on, but you get the point. We're drawn to these stories because they speak to success and prominence being restored. They speak to the underdog winning and "the system" or "the oppressor" finally taking a kick in the teeth.

But what if our comeback as a people isn't based in the restoration of success, wealth, prominence, winning or finally kicking "the system" in the teeth? What if our return is found in our God-ordained purpose, which is to return to Him our offerings of praise, showing the world what it means to be a true worshipper? What if our seemingly delayed comeback story isn't because we aren't fighting hard enough or because others haven't acknowledged our greatness and their sins, but because of our misguided understanding of our true purpose?

Maybe, just maybe it's time we stopped trying to obtain restoration by our own blood, sweat, and tears. Perhaps it's time to return our gifts of praise to God. To live as true worshippers. To show the world that despite hardship, injustice, brutality, lies, scorn, and shame, WE PRAISE. To serve as an example of the strength of humility and the beauty of trust.

I know some are ready to log off right now. How can she downplay the struggle? How can the injustices of this world, particularly against our people, be ignored? How can she dismiss the sacrifices of thousands before her and the thousands united in the fight today? **Please hear me.** I am not

diminishing, downplaying, or ignoring our struggle. Nor am I suggesting that there is no call or space for our fight against oppression and injustice (Isaiah 1:17), because there is.

But what I am saying is that when we, as Christians, place our God-given purpose at the core of our "fight", then all that we say and do will be Christ-centered.

All that we say and do is done with the understanding that glorifying God, being disciples, making disciples, and showing the world what it means to be true worshippers are priority #1.

When we are clear about our purpose, we can begin to operate out of a place of victory not victim-ness. We begin to focus less on our circumstances/our problems/our needs and we can focus more on the liberty and victory that we have in Christ.

When we are clear on our purpose, our fight no longer mirrors the fight of the world. Others will see Christ reflected in our reactions and our actions. Our fight's main purpose will be to spread the gospel message, give hope, and win souls.

When we value The Cross over "the cause", we can live out our God-given purpose, returning to the source of our strength, and in doing so, we will be saved (Isaiah 30:15)! Now this is definitely worth fighting for!

Reflections

- How does John 4:23 speak to you?
- How does your fight for justice align with or differ from our God-given purposes as described above?
- What are your thoughts with respect to the specific purposes for descendants of Africa as described above?
- How might your "why" be impacted in light of the information shared?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
 - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?
 - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
 - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
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Playlist

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- Christ Representers by Jonathan McReynolds - [Jonathan McReynolds Christ Representers Lyrics](#)
- We Must Praise by J. Moss - [J-moss we must praise](#)

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as I work to understand Your plans and purposes for my life more fully, I pray that Your joy, peace, grace and wisdom wash over me (2 Corinthians 9:8, Proverbs 4:6-7, 2 Thessalonians 3:16). And in whatever You have me to do, and wherever You would have me to go, give me a desire and a heart to serve You more than anything (Deuteronomy 10:12), while walking daily in dependence on You (Proverbs 3:5-6). Grant me affirmation of Your calling (Isaiah 6:8) and when it's clear, empower me to "get out of the boat and to walk on the waters" confidently and courageously with You (Matthew 14:22-33). Show me where to sow my seed, so that I can be a blessing to others (2 Corinthians 9:10). Help me to be ready and willing to take risks and to step forward when You call (1 Samuel 3:7-11). Help me to remember that I can ultimately find satisfying purpose when I seek after You (Psalm 16:11, Psalm 37:4, Isaiah 58:11). In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Free at Last, Free at Last

Freedom. If asked, many would suggest that it's an endowed right bestowed upon every human being. It's even in the United States Declaration of Independence, "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***" <<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>>. And it's also heralded as a right of every human worldwide, as described in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognizes "...the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family with its foundation being ***Freedom, Justice and Peace in the world***" From <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>>.

And this call for freedom has served as the rally cry throughout the generations. "Let my people go." "Give me freedom or give me death." But along the way, our definition of freedom has shifted. According to Webster's dictionary of 1828, freedom was described as "A state of exemption from the power or control of another; liberty; exemption from slavery, servitude or confinement. freedom is personal, civil, political, and religious" From <[webster's dictionary 1828](#)>. However, today's meaning of freedom seems to have shifted. According to the updated Webster's Dictionary, the definition has been expanded to now include, "the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action; unrestricted use; and the quality of being frank, open, or outspoken" From <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom>>. Additionally, upon examination of Collins Dictionary (2022), Freedom is defined as "the state of being allowed to do what you want to do; exemption from arbitrary restrictions on a specified civil right; exemption or immunity from a specified obligation, discomfort, etc.; a being able of itself to choose or determine action freely; a being able to act, move, use, etc. without hindrance or restraint; a being free from the usual rules, patterns, etc.; and the power to exercise choice and make decisions without constraint from within or without; autonomy; self-determination" From <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/freedom>> .

So how should we, as Christians, define or understand the concept of freedom, and what should the Christian's fight for freedom look like? When I sought a Biblical understanding of the concept of freedom, I saw three overarching meanings in relation to the concept of freedom: 1) freedom from oppression and slavery, 2) freedom from sin, and 3) freedom from false and destructive mindsets.

Scripture: Galatians 5:13 - For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Lessons Learned

There was a time when I was pretty clear on what my people's fight for freedom was all about. We fought to end the institution of slavery. We fought for freedom from brutality, oppression, and the denial of our unalienable rights to pursue life, liberty and happiness. We fought against the burning of our homes and communities, the theft of our possessions and land, and we fought against lynchings and violent brutality. We fought against the denial of civil, political, religious and personal rights. We fought to change laws, abolish laws, and adopt new laws. And we fought for restitution. We fought to just breathe and to catch up. And the role of the church and our reliance on and recognition of God as the One orchestrating our fight and as the source of our strength was clear.

Today, I'm not so sure. It seems that freedom no longer means the same things as described above and the fight for freedom has shifted from a fight defined and led by God. So let's go back to the source and re-examine the concept of freedom from God's perspective.

One of the central themes of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is the quest for physical, mental and spiritual freedom. Let's examine all three.

Physical Freedom

From the early beginnings as a people, the Children of Israel were taken into slavery by the Pharaoh of Egypt because of his fear of and dread for them (Exodus 1:1-13). And although the first time, this wasn't the only time the Children of Israel were taken into captivity. Because of their continued disobedience, The Children of Israel found themselves in a pattern of disobedience, captivity, oppression, repentance, freedom, repeat (II Kings 17:7-22, 22:19-20; 23:25-28).

Despite the cause of their captivity, the Bible sheds light on God's heart for His people who were physically enslaved and oppressed (Jeremiah 30:8, 34:8-22, Psalm 106:46, Ezekiel 34:27, Isaiah 9:4, Hosea 11:4). God witnessed the suffering of those held in captivity and whether deserved or not, by His grace, he delivered His children from slavery (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 7:8), II Kings 17:23-41, 21:10-15). God also spoke to how those in slavery or servitude should be treated (Exodus 20:9, 21:1-11, Deuteronomy 15:12-18, Leviticus 25:39-40).

Spiritual Freedom

"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:34-36)." Here, Jesus is speaking of a different kind of freedom than that of physical freedom. Jesus uses the analogy of slavery and freedom. He describes how our continual engagement in sin makes us slaves to sin. But Jesus doesn't leave us hopeless. He shares the Good News that our faith in Jesus frees us from the death we deserve for sinning against God (John 8:31-32). Yet, because we live in a fallen world and are fleshly beings, we will always battle sin (I John 1:9, 2:1, Romans 7:21-22). But as Christians, we don't have to become slaves to it (I John 2:1-6, Romans 6:2). Through the power of Christ, we are set free from the bondage of every thought, action, or attitude that falls short of God's holiness (Romans 3:23, 8:21).

When we choose to live for Christ, we obtain the power, through the Holy Spirit, to live triumphantly over sin (I Corinthians 15:56-67; Romans 8:37) because as God's image-bearers, we receive a new nature (John 3:3, I Corinthians 5:17). To be free from sin means sin no longer wields its power over our lives. The strongholds of hatred, selfishness, greed, pride, and lust have been broken (Ephesians 6:10-18). We gain freedom from sin and then willingly becomes slaves of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:18, Philippians 2:13).

Mental Freedom

Motivational speaker, author and actress Priscilla Shirer, in her book, *One in a Million*, shared a story about her children's elephant encounter at the circus. Her boys were fascinated by the animals, but particularly by the elephants. They were amazed by their size and their strength yet surprised with respect to their seemingly docile behavior. They asked the question, "Why don't they run away? There's no fence, they aren't chained or kept in cages? Why do they stay?" And what she learned was that the

elephants had been conditioned to stay. She discovered that as soon as the elephants were born, they were shackled around the ankle, and tethered to a pole by a chain. The chain only allowed them to go so far and when they attempted to go further, they were yanked back into place. After a number of attempts, the elephants give up trying, thus learning to stay in "their place." By the time the chains are removed, they have been conditioned to stay within the boundaries set for them. Even though they were free, they continued to react as one shackled.

The movie *The Matrix*, depicts a futuristic world in which humanity is unknowingly trapped inside the Matrix, a simulated reality, created by intelligent machines in order to distract humans while they use the bodies of the humans as an energy source. And like the circus elephants, those trapped inside the Matrix were captives, yet they were blind to their state of imprisonment. On the surface, they appeared free, and as long as they didn't resist their bondage, they were "safe." But it's in this state of mental captivity where you have the appearance of one who is free, but you actually aren't. And this type of "blind imprisonment" is perhaps more terrifying than physical bondage because it is one of the most effective ways to keep us captive.

The Children of Israel experienced a similar type of "mental captivity." When Moses first shared the promise that God would deliver them from slavery in Egypt and give them the Promised Land, they were too discouraged to believe Him (Exodus 6:6-9). They had become accustomed to their identity and life as slaves and at the first sign of trouble, although free, they wanted to go back (Exodus 16:3, Numbers 14:4). Instead of living as ones who were free, they wanted to remain settled in their slavery, to remain victims rather than live as victors, as free.

With all of our supposed freedom - freedom to go where we want, eat what we want, shop where we want - we can still be imprisoned by thoughts that hold us captive to fear, numbness, busyness, sadness, worry, guilt, condemnation, anger, and pain (Ephesians 4:18). When our thoughts dwell on the lies of satan or continually entertain evil, strongholds develop, and hold you captive. Our habits, beliefs, traditions, and perceptions can trap us in a prison of the enemy (I John 4:1, I Peter 5:8, John 8:48, 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Lessons Lived

On one of my trips to Rwanda, Africa, I had the pleasure of going on a Safari. And like Priscilla Shirer's sons, I too was enamored by the elephants. But these elephants, unlike the elephants they encountered at the circus, commanded respect and made it clear that they were the king of the land which they roamed. They freely explored the vast lands upon which they occupied. And they did not hesitate to warn us when they felt we were getting too close, to assume a protective stance when they felt threatened, and to charge when we apparently hadn't gotten the message to move on (Seriously didn't know that elephants could run so fast. Praise God our jeep went slightly faster).

It may surprise you to know that both elephants, the ones at the circus and the ones in Rwanda, existed within boundaries. The difference, however, is that the "boundaries" established for the circus elephants served to oppress them, whereas the boundaries established for the Rwandan elephants, served to protect them. Despite the illusion of "freedom" the elephants in the safari still had boundaries. Bobbed wire placed around the perimeter of the reserves served to keep them from venturing into towns and villages. Security guards were strategically posted to ensure that the elephants were safe from poachers. Tourists had to be escorted by a guide in a Jeep and could only be in designated areas so as not to disturb the ecosystem.

This is the type of true freedom God promises us and when we give our lives to Christ and choose to follow Him. Jesus has always been God's answer to our cry for freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17, John 8:32). In Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin or the erroneous, destructive mindsets of Satan (Romans 6:1-7). In Christ we are free indeed (Romans 8:15).

So as Christians, what should our fight for freedom look like? We must first recognize that gaining freedom will be a battle. As demonstrated in the movie *The Matrix*, those who awaken to their captivity will serve to threaten the balance of the matrix. Any attempt to escape signals a breach in the order, exposes the deception and *The Matrix* does not react well to threats to its existence. We have a similar enemy in Satan. But the good news is that God has provided us an escape plan (1 Corinthians 10:13). Our fight for freedom should begin with a personal commitment to walk within the confines of the freedom that only Christ can give (2 Corinthians 3:17). A commitment to stand firm, not allowing ourselves to be burdened by a yoke of slavery to sin or despair (Galatians 5:1).

Our freedom must depend solely on Christ, rather than "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world (Colossians 2:8)." Every day, we must "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we must take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)." We are to "live as people who are free, not using our freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God (1 Peter 2:16)." The Word of God is plain - Jesus said, "If you abide in **My Word**...you will know **the truth** and **the truth will set you free** (John 8:31-32)." Praise God it doesn't say my truth or your truth. Praise God that freedom isn't based on my experiences or your beliefs or their truths. No, my friend, freedom is found in God's Word, in God's truth alone! So to live in freedom, there are times when we will need to let go of sin or let go of the story that Satan has written for us and then cling to Jesus!

And as we're living in the freedom of Christ, we must seek to "liberate" others who are living in the bondage of sin and "hollow and deceptive philosophy." We need to be the voice that offers hope, that speaks truth, and that points others to Christ (2 Timothy 4:2). Our rhetoric shouldn't sound like that of the world (James 4:4). Being able to do what you want without limits or standards is not freedom, it's chaos and confusion. Our fight for freedom should point others to Jesus, "Who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry and Who sets the prisoners free (Psalm 146:7, Luke 4:18)." It's only through Christ that we find light within the dark and scary pits of the mind. It's only through Jesus that we find an escape from the sin that has us shackled and (John 8:36). Know Freedom. Know Peace (Isaiah 26:3, 48:18).

Reflections

- How does Galatians 5:13 speak to you?
- Compare the "world's" definition or understanding of the concept of freedom to the Biblical understanding.
- How does your understanding of freedom align with or differ from the Biblical meaning?
- What are your thoughts with respect to our fight for freedom as described above?
- How might your "fight for freedom" today be impacted in light of the information shared?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
 - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?

- **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
- **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
- **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from "My Black Life" Playlist. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- Shackles by Mary Mary - [Mary Mary - Shackles \(Praise You\) \(Video\)](#)
- I Am Free by Tasha Cobbs Leonard - [Tasha Cobbs Leonard - I'm Free \(Live At Passion City Church\)](#)
- Free Indeed by Timothy Reddick - [Free Indeed by Timothy Reddick](#)

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I long to walk in the full freedom that only You can give. In the mighty name of Jesus, I declare that chains of the lies of the enemy, of sin and of my own distorted truths be broken. Free me, oh God, to live within the boundaries of Your truth with joy and worship without restraint. I receive Your freedom by faith in the most holy name of Jesus, Amen.

Justice for All

Ta-Nehisi Coates gained widespread recognition as an author and journalist during his time as a national correspondent for *The Atlantic Magazine*, where he wrote about political, cultural, and social issues, particularly regarding African Americans. And like many African-Americans, I listened. I was like, "Yes. Someone gets it. Someone is telling it. And others are listening too." Finally! Then I read Coates' response to the issue regarding reparations in his book, *We Were Eight Years In Power: An American Tragedy* (2017). And his response was as follows, "We may find that the country can never fully repay African Americans." And for some inexplicable reason, I felt sad. It was like Coates had taken me to the precipice of "social justice", but left me in a suspended state of "Ok, now what?" What was I to do with the stirred up anger and indignation? Is this the best there is, this suspended state of anger, oppression, and injustice? But God continued working with me, and His Word began to dominate my thoughts and His voice began to penetrate my spirit and He revealed to me that justice was so much more than what Coates and others had painted it to be. God showed me that somewhere along the way, we had distorted God's design and intent for seeking justice, reducing it to solely being concerned with punishing wrongdoing. Let's rediscover God's meaning of justice together.

Scripture:

Micah 6:8 - He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

Isaiah 1:17 - Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Lessons Learned

The concept of justice did not get its beginnings with "one nation under God with liberty and justice for all." Justice, according to Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the American Language, refers to a basis for morality. It is alignment to a standard of goodness. The concept of justice is as old as creation itself. God created the heavens, the earth and all that's within (Isaiah 42:5) and declared that it was all good (Genesis 1:31). Good, meaning desirable, fitting, whole, upright, right, and righteous. When man sinned against God, Satan's reign of terror, oppression, and injustice was set into motion. And this set God's plan of restorative justice into play. The heart of God's justice from the beginning of time has been to restore wholeness, set things right, and recreate His creation to a state of goodness (Revelation 21:5, Ecclesiastes 12:14).

As a matter of fact, we see a similar alignment in the Bible. The Hebrew word for justice is *tsedek* which is derived from the word *zakah*, meaning clear or pure, right or just. As a verb, it means to act on someone's behalf or to justify ([The Jewish Chronicle](#)). And usually, goodness or righteousness are synonymous with justice (Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 89:14, Isaiah 30:18, Amos 5:24).

Before we can begin to understand justice as God has prescribed, we must first understand sin. Sin is a transgression against God's law (1 John 3:4) as well as immoral or grossly unfair behavior (Daniel 9:4-5; Micah 2:1; James 3:6). Sin embodies everything contrary to God's nature and is a crime against Him for which justice demands a penalty of death and separation from God (Romans 1:18-32; 2:5; 3:23). But God loved us so much that, despite the fact that our sins demand death, He sent His Son to be our substitute upon the cross, thus demonstrating that God's justice was not violated, but satisfied (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). God's own righteousness is provided as a gift to us based upon His grace and

mercy in response to our faith (Romans 3:23-26; Ephesians 2:3-7). God's mercy and justice met at the cross and serves as God's ultimate solution for dealing with the injustice in this world (Allen, 2021). His mercy and grace are not in spite of His justice, but because of it (From <<https://www.gotquestions.org/God-of-justice.html>>).

True justice then is rooted in the very heart and character of God. God's works are perfect, and all His ways are **upright and just** (Deuteronomy 32:4). God is **righteous**, He **loves justice**, He **upholds the cause of the oppressed** and **tenderly loves** those who are powerless (Psalm 11:7, 10:14-18, 146:6-8). And **for His justice** our great God will be **exalted** (Isaiah 5:16)!

Gary Breshears (2008), a theology professor at Western Seminary further describes tzedek or justice as "a life in which all relationships—human to human, human to God, and human to creation—are well-ordered and harmonious." According to Scott Allen, author of Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice, justice is similar to shalom, or the deep peace and harmony that result from relationships in alignment with God's perfect moral standard.

Biblical Justice is so much more than righting the wrongs of the oppressed and punishment for the oppressors. Rather Biblical justice encompasses the regeneration of fallen human hearts and minds and the reformation of society (Allen, 2021). It encompasses living harmoniously and peacefully with God, with one another and with all of God's creation according to God's standard or Word.

Lessons Lived

I understand what Biblical Justice is, but what does it look like? How exactly do I stand for justice

As previously described, justice flows from the heart and character of God. Thus, we can only impart justice as we follow Christ's example. (<https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible/>). We can only act justly or enact justice when we first acknowledge that each of us possess inherent dignity and worth as ones created in the image of God (From <<https://robsingleton.com/2021/03/11/what-kind-of-justice-do-you-want/>>). And once we understand our created worth, we are can then purify our own hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit (James 4:8) and live justly (I John 3:7). Micah 6:8 pretty much sums up our call for living justly. "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" It will only be with transformed hearts that we are able to extend God's justice throughout the world ([See My Identity in Christ Bible Series](#)), for which we will receive God's rich and abundant blessings (Psalm 106:3).

As we work daily to live justly - meaning living rightly, free or sin, and with pure hearts - we can then "fight for justice" on behalf of others. We can fight to restore wholeness and transformation of people and communities in alignment with God's Word (Ezekiel 36:26-27). According to James, the kind of "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27)". According to Psalm 82:3, we are to "defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy." And Proverbs 29:7 states that "The righteous considers the cause of the poor..." According to Isaiah, we are to "learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, and plead for the widow." God Himself admonishes, "Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place (Jeremiah 22:3)." The Bible even challenges the

societal structures that weighed the people down (Leviticus 19:15, Proverbs 31:8-9). And throughout the Gospels as well as Acts, we see Christians ministering to the poor and marginalized (Matt. 9:35-38, Acts 3-4, Acts 5:12-16). "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same (Luke 3:11)." And there's admonition to tax collectors: "Don't collect any more than you are required to (Luke 3:13)." And to soldiers: "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay (Luke 3:14)." And at the end of Acts 2, we find the new community of believers "selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (Acts 2:44-47)."

I could continue because there's more, but hopefully you get the point. The Bible is full of examples for living justly and enacting justice and we have even more opportunities to extend and advance that same kind of justice today. Justice is about so much more than punishing the wrong. It's about doing good, defending the defenseless, and giving/helping/uplifting the poor and down trodden. Biblical justice includes treating all people fairly, but also with protection and care. And as demonstrated, the Bible regularly pairs justice with acting righteously and behaving with mercy, love, kindness, and compassion.

In Exodus 23:9, God commands His children, "You yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt." The Children of Israel's previous experiences should have motivated them to love, welcome, and seek justice for the foreigners who sought shelter in their land (Lev. 19:33-34, Deut. 10:17-19; 24:17-18). God wanted His chosen to remember that it was by His grace and power that had brought them from their oppression to "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deut. 26:9). And in remembering the grace extended to them, they in turn, should extend the same to the foreigners in their land (From <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2016/october-web-exclusives/church-and-refugees.html>>).

Perhaps this is a message to us as African Americans. What people better understand the horror and impact of oppression? And what group of people have witnessed and been beneficiaries of God's grace, mercy, power, miracles, redemption and restoration? Our remembering should motivate us to let the world know that love, forgiveness, redemption and restoration are available through the finished work of Christ. We should be living, breathing examples of the coming kingdom by living justly, loving and helping others and by fighting injustice wherever it appears. We are called to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). We are called to love everything that God loves (Isaiah 61:8) in all the ways that He loves (Jeremiah 7:5).

Our extension of justice shouldn't be something trendy or a fad, rather justice and righteousness are the very foundation of God's throne (Psalm 89:14). It should be the overflow of our gratitude for all that God has done for us and should be an expression of living God's Word out loud. We should be living justly, giving to the poor, uplifting the discouraged, loving the "least of these," and speaking out against true injustice, which is anything that goes against the Word of God.

And when we grow weary because injustice and oppression seem to have no end, just remember that ultimately God is the One Who will right all the wrongs of this world (II Timothy 4:1, Psalm 10). In Habakkuk 1:3-4, Habakkuk wonders why God allows the unjust to continue in their wickedness. God assures Habakkuk that it is He Who will eventually judge the Babylonians. And in the meantime, the just must wait patiently and trust God to show himself as just (From <<https://www.thenivbible.com/blog/god-of-justice-verses-found-in-the-bible/>>). This same advice holds true for us today. Living justly, doing good, helping others, and speaking out against sin can be

exhausting. But we admonished to keep seeking justice, knowing that in the end God's justice will prevail (Psalm 94:15). "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24 ESV)." Know justice. Know peace.

Reflections

- How do Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 1:17 speak to you?
- Compare the "world's" definition or understanding of the concept of justice to the Biblical understanding.
- How does your understanding of justice align with or differ from the Biblical meaning?
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- Mercy Said No by CeCe Winans - [CeCe Winans: Mercy Said No](#)
- Compassion by Dottie Peoples - [Dottie Peoples - Compassion](#)

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, please do not keep silent, O God of my praise! For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; They have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and have fought against me without a cause. In return for my love they are my accusers. But right now in the midst of my oppression and distress, I give myself to You in prayer (Psalm 109:1-4). Help me my God; save me in accordance with your love. They may curse, but I know that You will bless and when they attack they will be put to shame, and when they are, let them know that it is Your hand, that You have done it (Psalm 109:26-7). In the meantime, help me to walk justly, to give to those in need, to speak out against injustice and most importantly to love as You love. In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

God's True Worshipers

It's rare to hear of God's prophecies and promises specifically for descendants of Africa. Yet the Bible does reference prophecies and promises for us. Isaiah foretold that God would bring forth a remnant from Cush (Isaiah 11:11). Psalm 68:31 declares that Cush will reach out its arms to God, and this redeemed people, these worshipers from beyond the rivers of Cush (Isaiah 18:1-8), will bring offerings and bear gifts to Zion (Zephaniah 3:10).

As I've contemplated God's prophetic Word for me and for my people (See Bible Study Series - [Discovering My Biblical African Roots Bible Series](#)), I've wondered as to the exact meaning that we, a worshipping remnant of Cush would reach out our arms to God, bring Him offerings and bear gifts to Zion?

Scripture

John 4:23-24 - But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Lessons Learned

As mentioned in previous lessons, each of these topics can be a study in and of themselves. And in time, they will be. But for now, here's a brief synopsis of my understanding of God's prophetic messages to the descendants of Cush.

The series [Discovering My Biblical African Roots Bible Series](#) ended by establishing who Cush and the descendants of Cush were literally and figuratively in the Bible. Cushites were characterized as a militaristic people (2 Chronicles 14:9-15, Isaiah 20:3-4, Jeremiah 46:9 and Ezekiel 30:4-5, 38:5) who were mighty and conquering, feared near and far (Isaiah 18:2). They were also known for their wealth (Job 28:19) and their strength (Nahum 3:9) and were kings and rulers (Isaiah 37:9, II Kings 19:9, 2 Chronicles 14:9-15) as well as major geopolitical players during King Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18-20, Isaiah 36-39, and 2 Kings 19:9).

The Cushites, like many neighboring nations of the Israelites, became prideful and turned away from God (Isaiah 13:11, 18:2, Ezekiel 30:1-8) and as a result, were destined to experience God's wrath (Isaiah 20:4-5, Zephaniah 2:12, 2 Chronicles 14:13, Amos 9:8). However, God, because of His love for His people, had a plan and a promise in place for the salvation of His faithful remnant (Romans 9:27-28, Revelation 12:17).

Then who exactly are God's remnant people? A remnant is a small remaining quantity of a larger whole of something. Biblically speaking, God's remnant people are a small group of people who God has set apart, has redeemed, and have or will save (Matthew 7:13-14, Romans 9:27). "Although remnants could be looked upon as worthless scraps, and many times are, God assigned high value to those of His people whom He had set aside for holy purposes, those He labels as "remnants." From <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-remnant.html>

Isaiah 11:11, speaks of God's remnant and a remnant from Cush is said to be amongst this group of chosen people. Other characteristics of God's remnant are those who are faithful (Romans 11:5), who

keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17), who recognize and accept God's forgiveness (Micah 7:18-19), have integrity and strive to live justly or free of sin (Zephaniah 3:13), and are chosen and set apart by God (Micah 2:12).

As descendants of Cush, who are faithful, who keep the commandments and live justly, are counted as part of the remnant. Praise God, hallelujah! But wait. There's more. Not only are we specifically identified as part of the remnant, we also have been called out as a worshipping remnant of Cush who will reach out our arms to God, bring Him offerings and bear gifts to Zion (Isaiah 18:1-8, Zephaniah 3:10).

It has been prophesied that we will reach our arms to God. What exactly does this mean? The Hebrew meaning of the text "shall soon stretch out" means that it will be done with haste or with an eagerness (<https://www.quoteskosmos.com/bible/bible-verses/Psalm-68-31.html>).

"The meaning of "shall soon stretch out her hands" could have several meanings. One meaning could reference a posture of faithfully "receiving" power from God (Exodus 7:19, 8:5 and 9:22, Joshua 8:18-19, Acts 4:30) in order to perform miracles. It can also be a gesture of sorrow (Jeremiah 4:31, Lamentations 1:17) as well as a posture of prayer, supplication and submission (Job 11:13-15, Psalm 141:2, I Timothy 2:8). And if we continue reading on to verse 32 of Psalm 68, we can see that the posture of out stretched hands is also one of praise and worship. "Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; oh sing praises to the Lord."

Zephaniah 3:10-12 further describes God's message to the remnant of Cush.

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
My worshipers,
The daughter of My dispersed ones,
Shall bring My offering.
11 In that day you shall ***not be shamed*** for any of your deeds
In which you transgress against Me;
For then I will take away from your midst
Those who rejoice in your pride,
And you shall ***no longer be haughty***
In My holy mountain.
12 I will leave in your midst
A meek and humble people,
And ***they shall trust in the name of the Lord.***

Here, we are explicitly called God's worshippers. I just want to sit right here in this space for a moment. We, this called out remnant people - We, God's dispersed daughters who have been carried away, many of our people on slave ships, beyond the rivers of Ethiopia - We, who are hastily returning to God with outstretched hands - We who are bringing Him our offerings without shame of our past, but as a meek and humble people - We who are trusting in the name of the Lord - are God's true worshippers!!!!

Lessons Lived

I don't know about you, but I had to take a serious praise break. I literally have goose bumps while writing this. For the first time, our calling as remnant Cushites has been made clear as daylight. I've come to understand that our blessing, our redemption and our restoration as a people isn't going to come through a return to power and wealth or through recognition and restitution. No, our redemption

and restoration as a people will come through our return to God (Lamentations 5:21), our worship of Him and Him alone (John 4:23-24) and our example of worship to the world (Zephaniah 3:11-12). And again, I'm not saying that power, wealth, recognition or restitution are unimportant or undeserved. But what I am saying, is that I don't believe this is what God has prioritized for us as a people. He wants our worship, our sacrifice, and our humility.

I can't wait to write a series on worship, because there is just so much we need to unpack. But for right now, just embrace the fact that we are God's worshippers. Note, God didn't say that we are to be His praisers. For so long, I confused praise with worship. And if you've ever experienced a "Black Church" service, you'd agree that yes, of course we are God's worshippers. We have cornered the market on praise. But what I've come to understand in that while worship inhabits our praise, worship is so much more.

According to Webster's Dictionary (1828), to worship is to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission. However, Biblical Worship isn't simply a cerebral, emotional or mystical exaggerated expression of our feelings. Biblical worship is the presentation of our entire selves as a living sacrifice to God, ignited by the Holy Spirit (From <<https://pursuitbible.com/what-is-worship-according-to-the-bible/>>). Biblical worship is a function of the heart expressed through a lifestyle of holiness at all times (Habakkuk 3:17-18, Psalm 34:1, 61:8, 63:4, 71:14). It is an intimate relationship with God in which we express our reverence or deep respect, our love and our adoration for God. It is defined by the priority we place on living a Godly life (From <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/spirituallife/what-is-true-worship.html>>). As God's true worshippers (John 4:23), we are called to worship Him with our whole selves - mind and body (Romans 12:1-2, I Thessalonians 5:23), in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1).

Our worship should encompass:

- Our **Love** for God and Others - (Psalm 24:3, Matthew 5:8, Psalm 66:16-18)
- Our **Humility** - (Philippians 3:3, Psalms 103:13-18, Proverbs 3:7, Zephaniah 3:12)
- Our **Obedience** - (Romans 12:1, I Peter 2:5,9 Deuteronomy 10:12, 2 King 17:38-39)
- Our **Sacrifice** - (Genesis 4:4-7, Genesis 22:12-14, Luke 7:36-50, Mark 12:41-44)
- Our **Service** - (Revelation 14:6-7, Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 28:19-20, Proverbs 19:17, I John 3:17-18, Isaiah 58:10, Hebrews 12:28)
- Our **Praise** - (Nehemiah 8:6, Psalm 34:1, 61:8, 71:14-15, Malachi 1:6-9, Isaiah 11:12-19, 29:13, John 2:13-17, Romans 5:2, Hebrews 13:15)

What a tall order. Personally, I find it easier to write about injustice, to march on behalf of the oppressed, to work towards economic empowerment for my community, to educate others about uplifting the marginalized, or to give voice to the voiceless. It's been easier to highlight what "they" need to do to right the wrongs I feel I and my people have endured. But this? This is hard. How do I sing the Lord's song in this strange land of oppression, sin, hurt, and pain (Psalm 137:4)? How do I humble myself when that makes me look weak? How do I love others when they're kicking me and keeping me down? How do I praise when I'm so discouraged? How do I serve when I have so many needs myself?

And just when I was beginning to feel completely overwhelmed, God reminded me that He hasn't left me without an example (John 13:13-15) or without a Helper (John 15:26).

Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of all kings, the One Who was regal, royal, blameless and without sin, is the only One Who had the right to be prideful, puffed up, and worthy of retribution. Yet when Jesus was scorned, rebuked, chastised, beaten, betrayed, humiliated, and even put to death (Isaiah 53:5, Luke 8:53, Matthew 27:27-31), He still served as our perfect example of love, humility, sacrifice and service (Philippians 2:5-7, Hebrews 5:8). Jesus responded to lies with truth (Matthew 4:1-11). He remained silent when mocked (Luke 22:63-65). He forgave those who persecuted Him (Luke 23:34). When they hurled their insults at Him, Jesus did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to His Father Who judges justly (I Peter 2:23). Jesus even obeyed when the ask seemed preposterous, humiliating, undeserved, and painful beyond words (Luke 22:42). But most importantly, Jesus glorified and worshipped His Father in heaven (John 8:54, 17:1, Matthew 26:17, 30, Luke 4:17-21).

And that's what we're called to do. Be like Jesus. Respond to lies with truth - the Word of God (II Timothy 2:25). Rebuke in love (Galatians 6:1). Forgive and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). Respond in silence to mockery (Proverbs 13:3). Don't retaliate when wronged, as a matter of fact, we're called to do that which is contradictory to our very nature - feed our hungry enemy, pour water to quench his thirst, and shower him with love (Proverbs 25:21-22). Don't threaten. Don't hate. Don't retaliate. Instead, give. Love. Humble yourself. And glorify your Father in heaven.

I know this is easier said than done. But we must love. Even the people who mistreat us, hurt us, and oppress us. See, truth be told, wanting something from "the oppressors" whoever they might be, is pointless. It's a waste of time and energy seeking payment for a debt that no man or woman can pay. So love. Let God serve as our debt collector. Ask Him to take away the bitterness, the anger, the hurt and the pain and to replace it all with love.

Perhaps we've been humbled so that God can use us to love, serve, give, submit, obey and worship as an example so that others might be saved (I Corinthians 1:27-29). We've been called out (I Peter 2:9)! How will you respond? I hope you'll join me in a response of worship and love.

Reflections

- How does John 4:23-24 speak to you?
- How do the texts Isaiah 11:11, Isaiah 18:1-8, Psalm 68:31 and Zephaniah 3:10-12 speak to you?
- What does being God's true worshipper mean to you?
- How do you understand what it means to worship God?
- How can you be more like Jesus in your response to the oppressors or the enemies in your life or your community?
- What is your understanding of worship?
- In light of what you've read and studied, how might your worship change?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
 - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?
 - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
 - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
 - **Edification:** How might you share your story in order to edify others and bring glory to God?

Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from "My Black Life" Playlist. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- Praise Is What I Do by William Murphy - [Praise Is What I Do - William Murphy](#)
- Here I Am to Worship by Hillsong - [Here I Am To Worship / The Call - Hillsong Worship](#)
- The Reason Why I Sing by Kirk Franklin - [Kirk Franklin - Why We Sing](#)

Prayer

Dear Sovereign Lord, please turn us back to You, so that we might be restored; and please renew our days as of old (Lamentations 5:21). You, oh Lord, made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against Your anointed ones (Psalm 2:1-2). Indeed many conspire against us doing what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. But now, Lord, consider their threats, their lies, their unjust behavior, and their oppression and enable us, your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:24-31). In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Repairers of the Breach

Now that we know our real enemy, our true purpose, the freedom and justice we should be fighting for, and how to worship God; we can be about the work of repairing the breach and restoring the streets!

Our calling as God's worshippers ([LIFE Lesson With Liberty and Justice for All, Here I am to Worship](#)), isn't simply an act of passivity. We are also called to play an active role in winning souls for the kingdom. Yes, serving as an example of what it means to truly worship God in spirit and in truth is our calling, but we're also called to proactively "repair the breach" that has caused a rift between us and God and us and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and in the world.

To "repair the breach" is an old battle term from when cities were surrounded by walls as a source of protection. However, a tactic of the opposing army was to try to create a *breach* or a break in the wall so that they could enter the city with the intent of stealing and killing. The task of the "repairers of the breach" was to rebuild what the enemy had destroyed. And only after the breach had been repaired, and safety secured could the people go about "restoring the streets." So what does this look like for us today?

Scripture: Isaiah 58:12 - Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the **Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets** to dwell in.

Lessons Learned

When Isaiah penned this particular chapter and verse, things in that day were a hot mess. When Solomon's son Rehoboam had taken over the kingdom, he was responsible for the destruction of most of what those before him had built. He favored the rich; taxed the poor; spoke with a vile tongue; ignored the advice of wise counsel; mistreated women; polarized his nation; and pursued his own self-interest (II Chronicles 10:1-19). The people, eventually rebelled which ultimately led to the division of the kingdom. Ten of the twelve tribes went north to form Israel and the remaining two tribes that stayed behind formed Judah (I Kings 12, 2 Chronicles 10). Israel, the Northern kingdom, was taken by the Assyrians (II Kings 17:15-18) and Judah, the Southern kingdom, was conquered by the Babylonians (II Kings 24-25). The temple was destroyed and most of the people were forced to live in exile (Psalm 137:1). Now, God's chosen, who had once flourished in the land of milk and honey were no better off than their enslaved ancestors in Egypt.

So Isaiah in a sense, was called to serve as the "repairer of the breach", not literally, but figuratively. Isaiah used a metaphor that the battle-weary people would understand. He shared that they were called to repair that which had been infiltrated, broken and severed. Yes, the literal wall that had once protected them had been breached. But the greater, more significant breach was the breach between God and His chosen people as well as the breach that divided God's people into two kingdoms.

Isaiah sought to encourage the people, assuring them that no matter how dark and gloomy things were at the moment, a brighter day was ahead if they would just return in faithfulness to the God, the One Who had called and loved them (Isaiah 58:8-9, Joel 2:13, Hosea 14:1, Zechariah 1:3). Isaiah knew that the only way the breach between God's people could be repaired would be to repair the breach that had separated the people from their God (Matthew 12:25).

Lessons Lived

During my studies, I'm always amazed at the many parallels between the Children of Israel and African-Americans (more on that in another LIFE Lesson to come). Our walls of protection and security were breached when the first slave ship came ashore. And as a result of that breach, we, like the Children of Israel, suffered centuries of oppression. That's the literal breach. But perhaps there's been a figurative breach as well - a breach in our spirituality as well as a breach between our relationships with one another and between us and our White sisters and brethren.

Repairers of the Spiritual Breach

In the Bible Series, [Discovering My Biblical African Roots Bible Series](#), I began tracing my ancestral roots through the Bible. Not only did Africans have a political, economic, and cultural presence throughout the Old Testament they also had a spiritual presence (Genesis 14:18, Exodus 4:24-26, Exodus 18:1-27, I Chronicles 9:20, Zephaniah 1:1). And that relationship with God was evidenced in the Gospels (Acts 8:26-40, Acts 13:1) and continued to play an integral role in the lives of Africans post the resurrection of Christ. According to Jacob Olupona, professor of indigenous African religions at Harvard Divinity School, "African spirituality...beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane." African spirituality was a way of life, and informed everything including political art, marriage, health, diet, dress, economics, and death (From <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/10/the-spirituality-of-africa/>). Whether my African ancestors understand God in the way we understand Him today or not, God was ever present in their lives, their practices, and their worship. And it was their connection to God that sustained them through slavery, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement (For more regarding the History of the Black Church see the documentary [The Black Church: This is our story this is our song](#)).

But I'm wondering if somewhere along the way, our connection with God has suffered a breach? As I examine my own behaviors, I realize that there was a time when God was my first recourse - unexplained illness, childrearing blues, work drama, lost friendships - God first. But when it came to my struggle trying to understand the many incidents of police brutality against Black boys and men. And the racial unrest. And the unexpected focus on "my story of oppression." And the protest and riots. And the debates as to whether my Black life matters. My first recourse wasn't God. Instead, I joined with "like-minded" men and women calling for our liberation, our reparations, and our validation. I read everything Black-conscious-raising-liberating-get-myself-woke-books that I could find. I was glued to the news, listened to talk radio shows, posted away on social media and while I should have been feeling better, I grew sadder and angrier by the minute. Why was I still angry and sad? Because my connection with God had been breached. And it wasn't until I returned to Him that I experienced peace and was able to put my "problems" or the "problems" of my people in perspective.

As highlighted in [The Black Church: This is our story this is our song](#), the church played a critical role in the African American community's survival. Throughout history, the Black church served not only as a place to worship, but as a community support group, a bulletin board, places of mediation, a gathering place, a hiding place, and a center of political activism. These churches also offered its members an opportunity to exercise roles that had traditionally been denied to them within society (From <https://blackthen.com/the-role-of-the-black-churches-during-the-civil-rights-movement/>). But over time, it seems as if these roles have begun to take precedence over the sharing God's message of love, hope, and redemption. We're placing our civil liberties over our spiritual liberties, reparations over reformation, protest over prayer, political statements over God's standards, and legalities over love.

Perhaps as a people, our first step in repairing the breach is to reconnect with God. Herald His message of love, hope, and redemption. Be the trauma center for others who are hurting because we too have been hurt. Help people over the precipice of injustice, giving them a soft, safe, and sure place to land - in the arms of Jesus.

Repairers of the Racial Breach

The Bible speaks of a day when "the nations" will flow together into the Kingdom of God (Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:2). As shared in the LIFE Lesson [A Race Second to None](#), the Bible did not categorize people by race but by nations (ethos) or by different ethnicities. I know that all God's promises are true, but when I look at the state of relations between our varying ethnicities, particularly between African-Americans and White-Americans, I wonder how. The breach between the two 'nations' resembles the aftermath of an earthquake. But God is looking for someone who will build up the wall and stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:30). And maybe we are the ones to do it.

As always, God gives us an example. Look at the early Jews and the first-century evangelists, particularly the life and actions of Paul. Paul was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 16:37), a prime example of a "righteous" Jew (Acts 22:3, 23:6), and was known for persecuting Christians (Acts 8:1). Yet, Paul became the untiring champion of Christianity, starting a dozen or so churches and writing 13 books of the Bible. So how, with this past, was he able to "reconcile" his differences with Gentiles whom he had looked down upon, with Christians whom he had persecuted, and with Jews who had not yet accepted Christ? How did Paul navigate this terrain when historic grievances could have so easily torn the body of Christ apart long before it even started to grow (Williams, 2020)? When we look at the life of Paul, we find nuggets to guide our path to being "Repairers of the Breach." Whether your experience has been that of the "oppressed" or that of the "oppressor", Paul's life speaks to us all.

Reconciliation According to the Life of Paul

(Again, I recognize that each of these could be its own study, and eventually they will be. But for now here are some considerations for you to study and ponder).

1. **Repent** - Upon accepting God's calling, Paul had to first repent of his former sins and wrongdoings, be baptized, and declare His allegiance to Christ (Acts 22:12-17). It's easier to see the need of repentance for the "oppressor." However, when one is cast in the role of "victim" or the "oppressed", it's difficult to see outside of our oppression and to recognize our need for repentance too. Why examine myself when I'm the one who has been wronged? But we too, because we are human born in iniquity, have some stuff with us. But before we can enter into our calling, we must do some internal examination. Ask some tough questions. Repent of those things that are contributing to the widening breach - anger, hatred, doubt, unforgiveness, chasing after the things of the world, lackluster praise and worship, forgetting our true purpose. Once we return to God, He can recalibrate us so that come what may, we walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1).
2. **Forgive yourself** - Know that after you've repented, because of Christ's sacrifice, our sins are immediately forgiven (Psalm 51:2, Romans 4:8, Colossians 2:14). But for many of us, living as one who has been forgiven is difficult. God has forgiven us but we find it difficult to forgive ourselves. But we must so that the guilt, shame, and weight of our past sins don't continue to weigh us down today (Isaiah 38:17, 44:2).
3. **Forgive others** - Forgiveness is not an emotion but is a choice and an act of the will. "When Jesus commanded His listeners to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, He was

talking to real people with real enemies and real oppressors (Williams, 2020)." When we take matters into our own hands and focus on ensuring that justice is served to those who have wronged us, we are essentially displaying our distrust in God. When we hang on to unforgiveness, we suffer. Paul understood that it was only by God's grace that He had been forgiven (I Corinthians 15:9-10) and as a result he had no other recourse but to forgive others so that he could be about his Father's business (II Timothy 4:14-16). And this is the same for us today. No matter how much it hurts, how heavy things are, or how angry we are, we have to forgive. And our forgiveness isn't contingent on an apology or acknowledgement of "their" role in our pain (Luke 23:34, Matthew 18:21-22, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:37, Exodus 32:31-33). What does this look like? For inspiration, you can read some incredible stories of forgiveness here ([Rachel Denhollander's Story of Forgiveness](#) and [inspiring-forgiveness-stories](#)). For me personally, when I've had to forgive someone who I can't forgive face-to-face, I "write it out." I've written letters of forgiveness to America, to those who have hurt me, and to my younger self. I've written the letters and then as an act of surrender to God, I have watched those letters burn in the fireplace. For those whom I am able to engage in conversation with, I do so. When appropriate, I ask for forgiveness and I offer forgiveness. No matter how impossible it seems, God can give us a spirit of forgiveness (Luke 12:12). When we forgive, we can then live in the fullness of joy (Psalm 32:1-5).

4. **Share truth** - With respect to the role, place and purpose of Africans and the descendants of Africa in the Bible, there have been so many misconceptions, distortions and lies about who we are and were designed to be. Perhaps this was not done on purpose, but it has been done with purpose. The lies and misconceptions of our people has stripped away our identity, has left us grasping for straws and attempting to define ourselves by someone else foreign to our "nature" and God's original intent. And this has left us spinning into a ball of self-hate and confusion (From <http://www.herroyalroots.com/wordstudies>). According to Priscilla Shirer, Christian author, motivational speaker, and actress, "Without concrete allegiance to and affirmation with this truth—with real truth—you're left weak and susceptible to things that may look right and sound right yet actually aren't right. But with the standard of truth in place, you can adjust everything else in your life—your ambitions, choices, and feelings; your mind, will, and emotions—until all of it lines up correctly. The time has come for us to be women girded in truth ([The Armor of God Priscilla Shirer](#)). In the [LIFE Lesson With Liberty and Justice for All, Here I am to Worship](#) described the prophetic revelation that we, the daughters beyond the rivers of Ethiopia would humbly return to God as His worshippers. John 4:23 sheds further light on what God's True Worshipper does - we worship the Father in spirit and in *truth*! It is our task to first understand Biblical truth, to worship through the knowledge and living of that truth and to then share Biblical truth. And we are to share this truth just as Paul did - humbly, in love, yet with zest and zeal.
5. **Point to Jesus** - The answer to repairing the breaches is Jesus. While fighting to change legislation is important, we can't outlaw hatred. Our primary response to the severed breached should be the sharing of Jesus so that He can change hearts, as He's the only One who can. When we get caught up in all the ways and rhetoric of the world and lose sight of Jesus, we begin to look and sound like the world. We spread the same lies and distortions. We affirm that which is unbiblical. We begin to exchange the truth of God for the lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). And we and our communities remain in the same state of hurt and confusion. Jesus. That's it. Give them Jesus.

Reconciliation may seem impossible and will most likely come about only by an act of God. But halleluiah, God is on our side. If God could reconcile the Jews and the Gentiles, then surely He can reconcile us (Ephesians 2:11-13). Christ is our peace, the One Who has broken down the middle wall of separation (Ephesians 2:14) and through the power of the Holy Spirit, has given us the power of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-19). Let's begin to repair the breach between Blacks and Whites within our churches so we can then be about our Father's business, serving as a model of how to repair the breach for the world. And once we repair the breach, we will then be positioned to "restore the streets."

Restoring the streets is justice in action. And we have a clear recipe for how to go about the restoration of our most vulnerable and broken communities. The blueprint for restoring the streets can be found in Isaiah 58:6-11. And the Message Translation sums it up best:

“This is the kind of fast day I’m after:
**to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts.**

What I’m interested in seeing you do is:

**sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.**

**“If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims,
quit gossiping about other people’s sins,
If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,**

Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once.

Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage.

Then when you pray, God will answer.

You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’

Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

I will always show you where to go.

Once we look outside of our hurts, the wrongs heaped upon us, and our desire for someone to pay; we can begin the work of repairing the breach and restoring the streets.

Reflections

- How does Isaiah 58:12 speak to you?
- How would you describe the current "breaches" within your church, your community, and the nation?
- Besides Paul, what other Biblical analogies can you identify with respect to reconciliation or repairment of the breach?
- What is the most difficult step in the process of reconciliation as described above? Why?
- What one step can you take towards repairing a breach with another person or a group of persons? How might you personally apply the lessons learned from Paul with respect to "repairing the breach?"
- Compare and contrast Isaiah 58:6-9 to Matthew 25:35-40.

- Think about your local community. What are the current needs? How you can begin making a difference or taking steps to restoring the streets?
- What are your personal LIFE Lessons?
 - **Liberation:** What new insights have you gained that have freed you from past thoughts and/or practices?
 - **Inspiration:** In what ways have you been spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally motivated to live for Christ?
 - **Fortification:** What additional scriptural texts, passages or stories can serve to reinforce and strengthen you against the attacks of the enemy?
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Playlist

As you process, digest, and apply what's been shared, here are a couple of songs from "My Black Life" Playlist. Listen, Let the music infiltrate your soul. Read the lyrics and let the words encourage you. And I pray that you'll be blessed as I was.

- A Heart That Forgives by Kevin LeVar - [Kevin LeVar "A Heart That Forgives"](#)
- I Need You To Survive by Hezekiah Walker - [I Need You To Survive](#)
- Forgiveness by Matthew West - [Matthew West - Forgiveness \(Lyrics\)](#)

Prayer (Nehemiah 10:5-11)

“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, Who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, 6 let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer Your servant is praying before You day and night for your people, the people of African descent. On behalf of our community, I confess the sins that we have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We've forgotten how You've kept us. We've become disgruntled and dissatisfied. We've gotten puffed up again. We feel we deserve more. We have not obeyed Your law, as we've begun to chase after the things of this world. 8 “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ 10 “We are Your servants and Your people, whom You redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 11 Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this Your servant and to the prayer of Your people who delight in revering your name. Return our hearts to You. Restore us to our true calling. Help us to forgive. Help us serve to repair the breach. And grant us favor in the presence of all men.” In Your most holy name Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Be Empowered

Of late, society's view of Christians is that we are silent when it comes to issues of "justice", race relations, and meeting the needs of the oppressed. After having completed the My Fight for Justice Bible Study Series, write a personal position statement that refutes this claim.

Be sure that your statement is in alignment with Biblical Truth, provides examples of how you have been engaged and/or how you intend to be engaged, is clear and concise, is shared in love, and invites/welcomes dialogue.

References

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