

VISION FORWARD



I AM MY DAUGHTER'S KEEPER

(By Alissa Evans and adapted from her sermon, "I am my daughter's keeper")

The question that spurred on this series was, "AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?" We've spent the last few weeks discussing various sides of racism, and have come to the conclusion that, yes, "I AM MY BROTHER'S KEEPER." We ALL bear responsibility, if we are truly going to be able to grow and change in this area as individuals, as a church, as a country.

The following verses are two verses that God has used to grow and change me. They are challenging words to pray. But I challenge us to pray them, if we want to grow more like Jesus, if we want to in truth become "my brother's keeper".

"Search me O God and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous/wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

A big reason I decided to share today was because one day I want to look into my black child's face and her future children's faces and know that I've done my part to make sure they are able to enjoy all the same freedoms and same treatment as my white children and their future children.

I am a white woman, married to a white man. Together we are raising 4 white children and 1 black child — our youngest, who was also badly burned and scarred with some disfiguring injuries.

When we were asked to take Emme in as a foster child, I was terrified and totally intimidated by the medical care she would need. Her color NEVER even crossed my mind, aside from worrying about needing to learn how to care for her hair. But here are a few thoughts that I've been wrestling with both since we got the call to not only care for Emme but to adopt her and especially so these past few months:

"When I am supposed to burst my black daughter's bubble of innocence and blissful ignorance of racial issues?"

"At what age do I sit and tell her that some people will say mean things to her, mistreat her or demean her just because she's black?"

"What do I say to her when her friends say something to her in their ignorance that deeply hurts her feelings?"

"What do I say to her when someone talks badly to her about having a white family, and she begins to feel conflicted?"

"Do we have what it takes to teach this child to be proud of who she is - skin tone, scars and all?"

"How can I a white woman teach her to be a strong, confident and proud black woman?"

"When do I stop shielding her from our nation's terrible history of slavery and segregation?"

"When do I tell her of all the absolutely horrendous and evil acts that have been committed against black people in this country?"

While some areas of the country have a "worse" issue with racism than our little corner of the world, racism IS still here.

Both my oldest son and my oldest daughter have had confrontations with classmates over racial insults, stereotypes, outright racism, and the use of the favorite word for the average white teenager...you guessed it, the N-word. All three of our older children have taken to correcting their peers on social media when they show racist colors, almost always being told in reply, "I'm just joking, lighten up."

Once when our oldest, Joshua, heard a group of younger teenage boys in the locker room trading joking insults with each other and the N-word was thrown around, he turned the corner and told them he never wanted to hear that word out of their mouth again. Of course they wanted to let him know, "Dude, we were just messing around." He stood his ground and let them know they will not use that word again. They shrunk back and closed their mouths.

Another time, while we were in the car, our oldest daughter, Hannah, who regularly debates with her peers (something common of all my children!), was messaging with a "friend" that was being outright racist on a social media post. This student was being nasty and throwing the N-word around like it was nothing. He proceeded to try to argue his point and tell her to lighten up. Needless

to say she was exasperated and says, "Ugh, I hate white people!" Emme who was seated next to her got the look of complete shock on her face and said, "Hannah, your parents are white. You can't hate white people." We proceeded to tell her that was just an expression that Hannah was using because a white friend of hers was saying some mean and stupid things. Without skipping a beat, Emme gets a huge smile on her face and says, "Well, I'm glad I'm not white. I don't want Hannah to hate me."

You see that's racism: Let me show you my true heart but then justify it in some way, often times by diminishing the intent behind what was said or done, by pretending it's just a "joke" or, worse, by diminishing the victim's humanity.

Systemic racism, as I understand it, is a form of racism that is so embedded as normal practice or thought within society or an organization that you often don't recognize it. I can't speak with any authority to many forms of systemic racism, but what I can speak to is the day I realized I WAS A RACIST.

Yes me, Alissa Evans, sister to 3 brown brothers, aunt to multiple brown nieces and nephews, friend to all races, and mother to a black child was RACIST.

I am so deeply ashamed by this story I am about to share with you, though I will say I have confronted this in myself aggressively from the moment I saw it. I'm being vulnerable with you now so that you can see that racism isn't just yelling the N-word at someone or kneeling on someone until they suffocate to death. I'm sharing this with you so that we as a church body can confront the ugliness we have in ourselves and together can be part of the healing and restoration that I believe God has for us as a church, as a community, and on a larger scale the restoration he desires for all people.

There I was one day out and about (alone) when I see this black lady holding a baby. As I got closer, I realized this black lady had a white baby. IMMEDIATELY the thought crossed my mind, "Why does this lady have that baby?" No sooner did I think that thought did the Holy Spirit convict my heart with the almost audible and definitely SOUL piercing words: "HOW DARE YOU. How dare you become suspicious of that precious woman caring for that precious child?"

I was stopped dead in my tracks. I honestly can't even remember what I was doing at the time. But I immediately went to my car and cried recognizing the ugliness within me. Here I was suspicious and condemning this woman for holding a baby of another race when I was about to go home and care for my child of another race. To date, I have no idea if that was her baby, an adopted/fostered child, her relative's child, a friend's baby...WHO CARES. This was the question for me:

Why, why was it ok for me to have a black child without reservation and often times “praise” from others, but in my heart at that moment that poor woman came under my judgmental/suspicious eye/heart?

Prior to this, if you had asked me if black people could help and rescue another human being, my answer would have been absolutely. Are white people the only ones that can rescue, save, give of themselves selflessly? My answer would have been absolutely not. All races can and are doing that. I’VE SEEN IT. So why, then, did that ugliness appear? BECAUSE it was IN THERE. IN ME.

That is an example of Systemic racism in our country. It’s also referred to as “white savior complex”. If someone needs to be rescued, historically and culturally, we expect to see a white person. It isn’t an idea planted in me or taught to me by my family. No, this was a mindset that I unwittingly adopted from society.

Were we God’s goodness and provision for Emme *because* we were white? NO. God sent us, called us, gave us to her and her to us, because of our heart towards Him, His heart towards her, and the heart that grew in us towards her. I believe it’s because we have been willing to wrestle with the hard questions—are we actually the best for her, do we have what it takes to raise her, to truly love who she is, to truly embrace how she looks with scars and skin tone...all of it. We love her because HE FIRST LOVED US. I rescue, not because I’m white, but because I was rescued first. I give mercy and kindness, because those things were given to me first.

Humanity is the problem. Humanity has a brokenness. Yes, even “good” people have a brokenness and that brokenness is bent towards elevating yourself above another. The personal example I gave could be multiplied by infinity the world over. Racism is a heart issue. It’s, ultimately, thinking of ourselves as better than others. In this case it’s due to race. Can you imagine the injustice of me being her mother while in some way, no matter how small, thinking that I was better than her? Would that have been what’s best for her? NO! God for her good and for my good had to remove that ugliness from my heart.

Maybe you are thinking that you aren’t racist. Maybe you are tired of all this talk on racism and think it just doesn’t apply to you. Well, let’s focus our lens out a little and then take an honest look at yourself, regardless of what color you are.

Racism is a posturing problem. Do you posture yourself above others? Think about it: Crossfit vs Zumba. Stay at home mom vs working mom. Biden vs Trump. Organic vs non-organic. Blue collar vs White collar. College educated vs GED. Etc. We are all made in the image of God and are valued regardless of any of these things, yet we are regularly sizing people up and measuring ourself to find some way that we are “better” than them. Bottom line,

Paul says in Romans 3:23 that we ALL fall short of perfection. There is that ugliness and sin in all of our hearts. It may look different, it may not be racism per se, but we ALL need a savior and, guess what, that savior is NOT white.

So, where to do we go from here?

You see, because we ARE our brother’s keeper—because I am my daughter’s keeper—I first must be my own keeper. I must first be willing to take care of and confront the sin in my own heart. Because until I am willing to do that, I have blindspots that impact others, I have blindspots that ignore the ugliness in me. And here’s the thing about that sin and ugliness that we either don’t see or refuse to deal with: it GROWS.

That day when I ran and cried in my car, I didn’t just run to my car and hide in shame. I ran to my car, cried, exposed my shame to the Lord and repented and begged Him to rip that ugliness out of me. I cried and prayed as I have many times before and have many times since, “Lord, take that horrible pride out of my heart.”

“Search me O God and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous/wicked way in me, and lead in me the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

And God led me to other places in His Word like Philippians 2:1-5, “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”.

You see this is one of the many areas in which modern culture and the scripture clash. Modern culture wants us to believe that “you are enough” or “you are perfect just the way you are”. BUT IF THAT WERE TRUE our entire sermon series would NOT be necessary (or any for that matter). The fact is we are accepted and loved as we are, BUT we must be willing to be challenged, to grow and to change into the likeness of who Jesus is.

Where do we go from here?

Be willing to get honest with yourself. Take the risk and pray Psalm 139:23-24. Let the Holy Spirit search you and see if there is something there that needs to go.

I would encourage you to go on Youtube and look up Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man with Emmanuel Acho. This is a safe place for you to take a look at some racial issues from his perspective (though there is more than one black perspective). It’s a safe place

for you to hear something that may challenge you in an area or blindspot you may have.

In one of Emmanuel's conversations with Matthew McConaughey, Matthew quotes a poem by Langston Hughes called Let America Be America Again it was written in 1935. The line that struck him that he shared in the conversation was "O let America be America again - The land that has never been yet. And yet must be." Emmanuel Acho responds with, "America, we have never been what we have aspired to be."

Elim Grace. we have never been all that we aspired to be. Alissa Evans, you have never been all that you aspire to be. Not one of us has been all that we hope to be. But with the help of Christ we can be transformed day by day more and more into who HE has called us to be until finally one day we enter perfection with Him in eternity.

I AM MY BROTHER'S KEEPER: RESOURCES

At the beginning of our series, "I am my brother's keeper," I challenged us throughout July to take a position of leaning in, listening, and learning about race and racism. It would involve stepping out of ourselves, our comfort zones, and our understanding of current events. But Jesus told us to "go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice." (Matthew 9:13) And to learn about mercy is a process that includes learning about those who are in need of mercy. So to that end, here are some resources I went to to help me learn.

BOOKS -

Martin Luther King, Jr. On Leadership by Donald T. Phillips

The Founding Father On Leadership by Donald T. Phillips

Abraham Lincoln On Leadership by Donald T. Phillips

Strength To Love by Martin Luther King, Jr.

To Heal A Fractured World by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Exclusion And Embrace by Miroslav Volf

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo

Be The Bridge by Latasha Morrison

A Gentle Answer by Scott Sauls

Unified by Tim Scott and Trey Gowdy

MOVIES/DOCUMENTARIES -

Selma

The Hate You Give

I Am Not Your Negro

13th

OTHER VOICES:

Uncomfortable Conversations With A Black Man with Emmanuel Acho (YouTube)

Larry Elder (Radio Host)

Thomas Sowell (Economist)

Ben Carson (Politician)

Barack Obama (44th U.S. President)

Voddie Bauchman (Pastor/Writer/Dean of Theology)

Reclaiming My Theology with Brandi Miller (Podcast)

Lecrae (hip-hop artist)

This list is not exhaustive and it's growing. Furthermore, the point is not to find people and ideas about race and racism that I may already agree with nor that confirm what I may already believe. There are ideas and people on this list I don't agree with. But I can still learn from them, and I should be willing to. In humility I go and learn where I may be ignorant, where I may be blind, even where I may be wrong.

Let's continue to go and learn together.

"Let the wise hear and **increase in learning**" Proverbs 1:5

AUGUST PRAYER TARGETS

Take out your phone, set a 2-3 minute timer, and pray daily for:

- 1) Unity — that although we may disagree on matters such as masks, presidential candidates, protests, and vaccines, that we would not allow these things to divide us as Elim Grace; that we would not tear each other down, but "in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:1-5)
- 2) The Desens House — we are now in a position to remodel, but this will require resources, especially labor, so let's pray for workers.
- 3) Parents and school — this upcoming school year is filled with much uncertainty and confusion; pray for parents as they work hard to make the best decision for their children regarding school (private, public, homeschool)

PUT THOUGHT INTO ACTION:

THOUGHT: "Unity can only be destroyed from within. Unity can withstand any attack from the outside."

ACTION: What are *you* doing to help build unity within your marriage, family, friendships, church, place of work, neighborhood, city?