

Review: Becoming Brave

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Becoming Brave: Finding the Courage to Pursue Racial Justice Now

By Brenda Salter McNeil (Brazos Press)

Becoming Brave is part Bible study, part memoir and part call to advocating for justice.

Brenda Salter McNeil is associate professor of reconciliation studies at Seattle Pacific University, director of the reconciliation studies program, and associate pastor of preaching and reconciliation at Quest Church in Seattle. From this brief resumé, it is clear McNeil has been engaged in reconciliation work for some time.

Her focus took a turn during a flight. McNeil was reading *Dear White Christians* by Jennifer Harvey, who asserted reconciliation tends to stop short of justice by simply celebrating diversity and inclusion as an end goal. When McNeil read her name included in a list of leaders “culpable in perpetuating this paradigm,” she “sensed that something was calling me forth” to go beyond reconciliation to advocating for justice.



McNeil frames her journey from reconciler to justice advocate with the

story of Esther. Starting with Queen Vashti, she gives attention an often overlooked yet significant person in the story. McNeil imagines the queen's thought process leading her to refuse to appear before King Xerxes. Such calculations make people like Queen Vashti beacons of courage for others living between a rock and a hard place.

McNeil's advocacy for justice goes beyond race. She also advocates for justice across gender and sexuality. Noting that she previously "avoided speaking about sexuality for fear" of being labeled "too liberal," she now "will no longer keep silent about the truth that *all* people are created in the image of God and, therefore, *all* people are worthy of love, protection, equality, dignity, and respect."

As McNeil expects, some readers will conclude she has gone too far in her journey, that justice overtakes biblical convictions. Whether that actually is the case for McNeil, there is value in learning from the experiences and the arc of someone else's story, even if one doesn't arrive at the same conclusions.

Eric Black, executive director, publisher and editor

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