

Voices: Race and systems: Perspective, perceptions and possibilities

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Sometimes we are not able to see something until it is pointed out to us.

I always thought I was very patient and easygoing, until my 9-year-old son pointed out I am not very patient or easygoing. This veiled outlook on my part was denial.

We also can live in denial about the world around us, thinking we know about the world, until certain things are pointed out to us.

It might have been hard for some really to see systemic racism inflicting pain and hurt on our society and culture, until it was pointed out blatantly in horrific videos of police brutality. As a nation, we no longer could look the other way, nor remain in denial about injustice brought glaringly to our attention.

And yet, there are some who still would like to remain in a veiled ignorance about how they view the world. Why is this the case?

Culture as palace or prison

One reason is we belong to a particular culture and have a particular worldview or cultural outlook.

One of my professors at Biola University described culture and any cultural outlook as a palace and a prison. Cultural outlook can be a palace when all of those around us agree with our beliefs, values and priorities. There are

no disagreements, we all share the same worldview, and we enjoy the palatial life of similar perspectives.

We agree with similar social media posts and push certain political agendas, because we feel very strongly toward these ideals and know others will join in with similar support.

However, culture also can be a prison in that it confines us and keeps us from any new way of thinking or seeing how things are different from those outside our culture. Oftentimes, the prison of culture keeps many ignorant of the plight of those who are not part of their cultural outlook.

I think this is the reason why many of us are imprisoned in a veiled ignorance. This prison keeps us confined, contained and incapable of being open to new perspectives, perceptions and possibilities of growth in our mindset and understanding of the world around us.

Maybe in our cultural perspective, we do not have all the answers figured out; maybe we can be open to certain ideas; maybe a political party is not the be-all-end-all when it comes to kingdom living.

Truth frees us from both

What can free us from the palace and prison of culture and worldview many of us are confined to? Truth.

Remember: Truth sets us free. The truth of God's word "is profitable for teaching, correcting and rebuking" (1 Timothy 3:16).

The word of God always will be our guide, and yet, God also has gifted other Christian authors, as well, to speak into the life and times we find ourselves living. Much like modern-day prophets, these authors and their books can serve as a commentary to the truth we find in God's word to further inform our perspective on things.

Learning from others

I personally know the power of these books written from biblical truth. A number of years ago, I was pastoring a church in Southern California, and at that time, God was adjusting our vision to a more multicultural outreach. For some members, particularly the ones who had been there longer than a decade, this was a stretch.

One afternoon, while I was in the church office, a church leader stopped by and asked for a book to read that addressed the new vision on which our church was beginning to embark. I lent him *Ministering Cross-Culturally: A Model for Effective Personal Relationships* by Sherwood Lingenfelter.

After a week, he returned to my office, handed me the book and said: “OK, pastor, I’m on board. Let’s move forward with this.”

Soon, most of the church was behind the new vision of our church, and that church still is multicultural. For that leader, truth liberated his perspective and perceptions, leading him to be open to the freedom of possibilities.

Considering our current need as a nation in relation to systemic racism and social injustice, it is time for believers to see God’s truth within these difficult situations, as hard as it might be to look intently into these areas.

Obviously, these themes have been too painful or uncomfortable for some churches to face; so, the determination to maintain a veiled ignorance on these issues resulted.

A veiled ignorance no longer is bliss. The people of God need to see these issues for what they are and be ready for truth to challenge perceptions and perspectives to create liberating possibilities moving forward for God’s glory.

Here is a suggested reading list I have compiled to help in this process.

- *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation* by Mark Vroegop
- *Who Will Be A Witness? Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance* by Drew G.I. Hart
- *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* by Drew G.I. Hart
- *Might from the Margins: The Gospel's Power to Turn the Tables on Injustice* by Dennis R. Edwards
- *The End of Religion: Encountering the Subversive Spirituality of Jesus* by Bruxy Cavey

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