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The Black Reconciliation: Finding Restoration through Healing Circles in a Racialized World

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THE BLACK RECONCILIATION:
FINDING RESTORATION THROUGH HEALING CIRCLES IN A RACIALIZED WORLD

“The Black Reconciliation”

GENEVA REE TAYLOR

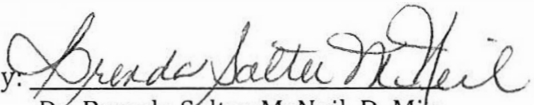
SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

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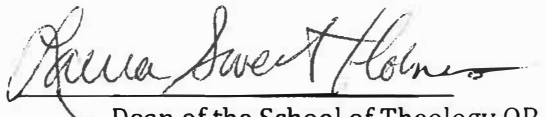
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
OVERVIEW OF THE CYCLE OF INJUSTICE	3
THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION	5
POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME	6
THE IMPACT OF RACIALIZED TRAUMA	10
THESIS PROJECT OVERVIEW	12
CHAPTER 1 <i>Mara: Identifying Responses to Racial Trauma</i>	16
THE BARKER MEN	19
A NEW WAY FORWARD	21
LOSS OF IDENTITY	22
CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP	24
WHITE FOLKS ARE EVIL	25
THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY	28
THE POWER OF HEALING CIRCLES	30
MOVING TOWARDS HEALING AND WHOLENESS	31
CHAPTER 2 <i>A Biblical Foundation for Healing Racial Trauma</i>	34
MOVING TOWARDS HEALING CIRCLES	35
HEALING THROUGH MOVEMENT	38
COME HERE AND STRETCH OUT	40
HEALING AND FORGIVENESS	42
ACTING ON FAITH	46
CHAPTER 3 <i>Practical Applications: Leading Healing Circles</i>	48
UNDERSTANDING HEALING CIRCLES	49
DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW	50
CONDUCTING HEALING CIRCLES	50
SESSION 1: THE POWER OF STORY	51
SESSION 2: MEDIATION ON GOD'S TRUTH	52
SUMMARY OF HEALING CIRCLES	55
THE NEED OF SABBATH	56
CHAPTER 4 <i>Conclusions: Healing the Disconnection</i>	57
IDENTITY CRISIS	58
SEEKING SOLUTIONS	61
APPENDIX	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	68

Abstract

This thesis will examine the ways in which African American communities can engage in a healing process that will produce personal, relational, communal, societal and global restoration. This project will specifically identify and examine the trauma and brokenness that African Americans experience in a racialized society. To accomplish this, a theological foundation will be established that will help to develop strategies, tools, and skills that can support the process of healing and restoration. In addition, this thesis will explain how current models of reconciliation are not adequate to address the deeply rooted complexities that people of color face in America. To achieve this the following question will be explored in this thesis: *Will Christian healing circles begin the restoration process for African American individuals and families who have experienced the trauma of living in a racialized society and foster wholeness and renewal in their relationship with others?* This thesis is based on the belief that the responsibility of healing is the African American community's obligation in the journey of reconciliation, in order to reach its full God given potential as agents of transformation, restoration and social justice.

Introduction

“Hate has caused a lot of problems in this world, but it has not solved not one yet.”

–Maya Angelou

In the last eight years, racial tension has become more vocal and socially normalized as a pattern across the United States (U.S.). This cycle of racism has been evidenced through a series of traumatic events across the country. This process of racism has happened in the U.S. for years, but it reemerges and is viewed differently today due to technical advances and social media. People who are disenfranchised are recording and showing the world their mistreatment through videos and status updates on Facebook, thus demanding accountability for those abusing and misusing their authority. Some of the familiar names and incidences of the reluctant participants of this cycle of injustice are: Trayvon Martin (2012), Eric Gardner (July 2014), Michael Brown (August 2014), Freddie Gray (April 2015), Texas pool party chaos with an out of control officer (June 2015), the Sandra Bland (July 2015), Flint, Michigan water crisis (2016), Philando Castile (July 2016), and Heather Heyer (2017). The list goes on and on, as the cycle repeats itself again and again.

Recently, increased dialog using terms such as white privilege, white supremacy, diversity, inclusion, equality, multicultural, and reconciliation have become commonly used in public discussions within the U.S. These buzz words may give the impression that racism is being conquered within America. Although the vocabulary, definition, concepts and ideas around these words and topics are important—and have brought clarity around some racial issues—simply discussing racism has not solved the country’s racial disparities. It is the contention of this thesis that knowledge does not necessarily result in

change. Therefore, obtaining knowledge does not solve racism, as is proven by the fact that injustice has remained constant through information gained.

Overview of the Cycle of Injustice

What is this repeated cycle of violence and injustice and why does it continue to occur? According to Oxford Dictionary, one of the definitions describing the word cycle is “a series of events that are regularly repeated in the same order.” It has been well documented that there are a series of racial events that reoccur repeatedly within America and it has been happening for years. Some people are aware of the cycle that replays itself like a broken record; however, for others this is their first time hearing the tune.

With this understanding, it is now important to provide a brief overview of what the Cycle of Injustice looks like. It begins when a traumatic incident happens to a disenfranchised person. This is followed by a national, and in some cases international news coverage, on the traumatic incidence. The international news brings shame to the United States, which makes the U.S. appear inhumane, because of the facade that this country is a melting pot of happy multicultural people. As a result, people may protest, if they have not already begun to speak out against this injustice. Most of the time there is a small percentage of the disenfranchised protesting with majority of White people, who want to demonstrate their solidarity. This is followed by a call for justice to be served and in some incidences this occurs, but in many cases injustices prevails. After the traumatic event, most people experience a variety of emotions, ranging from rage, anger, pain, worthlessness, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and fear. These feelings dissipate until the cycle begins again. However, for some people they don't have to wait until the

next cycle begins because these emotions are their constant reality. There are even those who no longer feel their emotions in order to cope with living in a racialized society.

A perfect example of this constant sense of threat and trauma took place in March 2016, when a 78-year-old white man “sucker-punched” a young, Black protester in the face at a Donald Trump rally. The perpetrator, John McGraw was not arrested until the following morning, maybe because the video of the assault gained such widespread attention and outrage. However, Rakeen Jones, the black protester, was immediately arrested. Before John McGraw’s arrest, he made the following statements at the rally after the incident in an interview:

The Interviewer:	“Did you like the event?”
McGraw:	“You bet I liked it”
The Interviewer:	“What did you like about it”
McGraw:	“Knocking the hell out of that big mouth we don’t know who he is but we know he’s not acting like an American”
The Interviewer:	“So he deserved it?”
McGraw:	“Every bit of it”
The Interviewer:	“What was that?”
McGraw:	“Yes he deserved it, the next time we see him we might have to kill him” ¹

These horrific experiences are not new to most African-Americans in this country, but these incidences have just become more visible to mainstream audience’s (In other words, to people who are “sleep”—referring to those who are missing out on something popularly known). In his book, *Between the World and Me*, the black author Ta-Nehisi Coates writes to advise his son on racial issues in America. Coates explains to his son the atmosphere he will encounter while growing up in the United States. In the beginning of the book on page 9, Coates states:

¹ John McGraw "we might have to kill him" - Donald Trump Rally Attacker (Video Interview) March 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNTcC_u3qmw.

"The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogative includes frisking, detaining, beating, and humiliations. All of this is common to black people. And all of this is old for black people. No one is held responsible." ²

These cultural issues not only impact the black communities, but everyone in America participates in this cycle of injustice. Some are perpetuating and others are dismantling the cycles within our society, but there are also those who stay sleep, completely unaware of what's going on. No matter where you fit into this equation, it is important to note that this is not a black and white social issue, but it is a sin issue with the solution being reconciliation.

The Need for Reconciliation

The term reconciliation has been floating in the Christian atmosphere for the last five decades, but it has become more prevalent within the last five years, due to the violence enacted upon black men in America, causing racial divides. One of the major concerns I've observed is that the discussion about racial reconciliation is had amongst the privilege. These are often white counterparts, who have had the opportunity to pursue higher education, and those individuals who are not directly connected to the minority communities affected by the racial divide. This one-sided discussion has often not taken into account the voices of many, whose role should be included in any conversation had about unifying the church body. The prior statement is not true of all reconcilers, but many times, if there are two groups and not just one, this heavily affects the message that is conveyed.

² Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 9.

Reconciliation takes partnership and participation in order to bring true unity and peace to both parties involved. There is a responsibility to those in this process. One has to be willing to dig deep and to be uncomfortable in a safe space, that encourages growth. The process is not easy, but worth it. God wants us involved in this process, which is seen in Matthew 11: 28-30, when Jesus says "Come to Me" you got to get up from wherever you are at, and move your body, change your mind frame, and go to God. "Come to Me," the creator of the universe, the creator of man, and God gave man creative ability to create systems that help us in therapeutic ways.

As the writer of this thesis project, the reason for the work of reconciliation I'm so heavily tied to the work of reconciliation is to achieve vindication socially for African American people so that we can abide in a society free from fear. As a black woman, I must continuously work on internal healing or I will operate out of a place of anger and bitterness. As a leader, I am equipped to guide from the perspective of being the minority, which makes me sensitive to the needs of those who may experience very similar situations.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

The African American culture has been through traumatic issues in the past and in the present. In her book, *The Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Dr. Joy DeGruy tackles these issues. She suggest that the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome began from centuries of slavery followed by systemic racism and oppression, resulting in multigenerational adaptive behaviors. Some of these coping mechanisms have been positive and reflective of resilience, and others are detrimental and destructive.

In brief, Dr. DeGruy presents facts, statistics and documents that illustrate how varying levels of both clinically induced and socially learned residual stress related issues were passed through generations because of traumatic experiences that black people have endured. According to Dr. DeGruy, trauma is an external force causing violence to a person through an event or experience, which causes physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological injury. Trauma can affect a person in multiple ways, including but not limited to dysfunctional behaviors and beliefs, unhealthy attitudes and disposition that lead to unwanted consequences. Trauma created by humans cause greater consequences that produce more negative effects. In addition, when trauma is repeatedly experienced from person to person, the victimized adopt dysfunctional behaviors that cultivate their survival and these behaviors can be unhealthy.

Some of these behaviors are visible in the black community today. Dr. DeGruy says there are traditions, physical traits, and beliefs that have continued since slavery and the Jim Crow era, which have developed due to years of trauma. A common unhealthy belief is African American's fear of white people. This might be news for some people, but for most black people there is still a lot of mistrust and fear of Caucasian people in the African American community. Dr. DeGruy explains this as a symptom of the *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)*:

“Many black people still believe that white people mean them harm. While this is true in many cases, it is obviously not true in all instances. A 2003 study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that African Americans were fearful their doctors might use them as guinea pigs in research that might hurt them. They often cited the Tuskegee experiments as evidence of why they continued to be skeptical and suspicious.

Beliefs can so color our minds that we become paralyzed, unable to move beyond our fears and doubts, thus limiting our choices. Blind to our potential, we wander aimlessly; searching for enlightenment, yet remain barred from the infinite

possibilities that are all around us. The essence of this belief's influence was captured in this passage from Proverbs, "...for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" Proverbs 23:7

Our beliefs are working for and against us each and everyday. We believe what we believe and than perceive things in ways that 'prove' or validate our beliefs that evolved over hundreds of years of slavery and oppression are some of the most significant impacts of PTSS. The effects of some of these beliefs can be seen in the patterns of behavior associated with PTSS..."³

Dr. Joy's quote is an example that speaks to the sincerity of unhealthy behaviors that have been adopted since slavery. Even today some African Americans struggle to trust doctors or medical professionals, because of the countless evidence that shows the injustices in the medical field towards black people. Here are two examples of people who experienced this type of injustice, Saartjie Baartman and Henrietta Lacks.

Saartjie Baartman was shipped from Cape Town, South Africa to London to be stared at for her larger buttocks, full breast, long labia, and facial features, like her full lips. White people found her body fascinating. She died at the age of 25 years old, but after her death she was still displayed and stared at in museums. Her brain, vagina, and other body parts were placed in jars and were studied by scientist. Saartjie was not seen as a human being, but as an object for medical science.

Henrietta Lacks is a black woman whose cancer cells researchers at the John Hopkins Medical Center stole, without her knowledge or consent, to advance their medical studies. These researchers used her cells to fuel their medical breakthroughs and did not compensate she family from any of the profits made from this groundbreaking research. For years, her family had no idea that her cells were still alive in petri dishes in scientists' labs. They eventually learned they had fueled a line called HeLa cells, which

³ Joy DeGreuy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy Of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2005), 122.

have generated billions of dollars, but they didn't realize that her genome had been sequenced and made public for anyone to see. Her cells advanced medical discoveries, created vaccines, and cured many diseases. These two stories and others are retold in the African American community and continue to bring doubt about the trustworthiness of the “white man’s medicine.”

In the book, *Medical Apartheid*, the author Dr. Harriet Washington discusses how blacks are dying from “common ailments that are more often prevented and treated among whites than among blacks.”⁴ One of the reasons that blacks are not treated for these ailments is because many African Americans are not going the doctor. The history of misleading black patients has caused a decline of annual checkups therefore, many serious diseases go undetected. This results in untreated and undiagnosed conditions that can lead to critical or potentially fatal consequences.

Dr. Washington presents details of how white medical professionals have caused broken relationship with many African Americans. She discusses slave experimentation, circuses which displayed of Black bodies, research on black prisoners without their consent, Tuskegee Airmen Experiment, research targeting young African American’s, and the list goes on and on.

These type of experiences places doubt, anxiety, and fear in the hearts and minds of African Americans and they continue to distrust the very people that are supposed to help them. These feelings can than lead to conspiracy theories, myths and superstition that become real facts for some black people. African Americans are not the only people that do not trust medical professionals, but blacks collectively are suffering the most in

⁴ Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 3.

their health from this belief. Dr. Washington says “...contemporary African Americans, because studies and surveys repeatedly confirm that no other group as deeply mistrust the American medical system, especially medical research.”⁵ This problem has been here for years and is visible through the multiple health difficulties that many African Americans face. Both Dr. Joy and Dr. Washington clearly lay out the problem of the trauma and lack of trust with the white, medical profession, however, what is the solution?

The Impact of Racialized Trauma

Dr. Joy DeGruy continues to discuss some of the associated symptoms of PTSS in her book and reveals a wide variety of other issues that harm the black community. Dr. Washington also continues to share the dark side of the medical system with black people in her important book. It is, therefore, necessary for African Americans to take the time to heal from traumatic issues that have plagued the black community’s history and presence in order to move forward in healthy relationships; relationships with God, self, and others. It is this writer’s belief that this work should be administered with the work of the Holy Spirit as open wounds are healed individually and collectively with God’s leading. Additional strategies should also accompany this work such as counseling, sharing stories, healing circles, the arts, deep revelations gained through theological teachings, Christian history, and a collection of people in these communities to help others feel more empowered.

Dr. DeGruy also discusses “trauma informed care” in a cultural responsive way. She says that honoring the tradition of the people is crucial for this process to work. The book offers different strategies for healing: justice circles, healing workshops, which are

⁵ Washington, Medical Apartheid, 5.

places where people can tell their stories and listen to other's stories through healthy conversation. In these workshops, victims name their wounds, the perpetrator, and identify the impact of the transgression(s) made towards them.

Trauma informed care in a cultural responsive way, honoring the tradition of the people is crucial in order for this process to work. One thing that is significant is to teach on: Why this healing process is valuable to a person's life? What are different options for therapeutic measures? Professional counseling has such a bad stigma in the Black community, but is only one option out of the multiple ways to find restoration. Therapy in the Black church can be a taboo topic and place where few are willing to go. It's a hard pitch to sell and many are not signing up to participate in such heart wrenching work, but it a vital place to start.

Internal work is simply the precursor to reconciliation. It is simply the first note that sets the tone. It doesn't end, it doesn't go away, it's simply the first note, and it continues to play as you add other notes to create a melody. Taking the time to heal from traumatic issues from one's past and history, in order to find healing to move forward in healthy relationships with one's self and those from other ethnicities, through counseling, sharing stories, and allowing the Spirit of God to minister to your wounds individual and collectively as a group. These are just a few steps that comprise this therapeutic process. Healing can also occur through experiencing and participating in the fine arts: music, dance, visional art, and creative writing, just to name a few.

Thesis Project Overview

One significant part missing from Dr. Joy's excellent research is addressing the need for reconciliation. The inclusion of reconciliation would take her proposed solutions for healing trauma to another level. This would require forgiveness and this can only be administered with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, this thesis will be deeply rooted in a thorough exegesis of Mark 3:1-6 where we encounter Jesus interacting with the Pharisees and a man with a withered hand, who is in need of healing. In this scripture passage, the Pharisees did not look upon the disabled man with inspiration or admiration. Instead, they found fault with him and were unable to see the "need" that was right in front of their faces. Not only did they ignore the need, they were also completely silent and showed little understanding of this man's desperate situation.

Jesus' responds to the man with the withered hand, first. He immediately speaks to the person in the greatest need. While waiting for the man to move closer for his healing, Jesus responds to the Pharisees in a way that is both strategic and purposeful. He challenged them with a rhetorical question, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" It is my belief that, Jesus already knew the answer to this question but used it to illustrate to the Pharisees their lack of discernment regarding the needs and struggles of those in their society. Jesus was angry and grieved at the hardness of their hearts towards the man with the withered hand. The Pharisees did not exhibit Godly love or compassion for the other.

In my experience, reconciliation has been focused on the oppressor's needs first and often the needs of the oppressed are not addressed. However, in this passage Jesus

responds to the man with the withered hand and the Pharisees simultaneously. Therefore, in this thesis, the “Pharisees” will be used to represent those in our society who are seen as oppressors, namely white people. In contrast, “the man with the withered hand” will be analogous of black people and other racial minorities, often viewed as the oppressed.

With this in mind, the focus of this thesis will be to exam the healing practices, strategies, tools for those who are oppressed, with the addition of the greatest weapon in healing, which is the Holy Spirit (2 Chronicles 7:14). It is my belief that God desires all people to be healed and operating out of an abundance of love. According to 1 John 4:18, “...perfect love cast out fear,” yet many are operating out of fear, which can manifest itself as rage, anger, anxiety, and depression. God offers freedom from these heavy weights.

Therefore, based on Dr. Joys work, this thesis will continue her healing approach by including the role of reconciliation in this restorative process. Specifically, this thesis project will examine the ways in which African American communities can engage in a healing process that will produce personal, relational, communal, societal and global restoration. This project will identify and examine the impact of the trauma and brokenness that African Americans experience in a radicalized society. A theological foundation will be established to help develop strategies, tools, and skills that can support the process of healing and restoration in the black community. In addition, this thesis will explain how current models of reconciliation are not adequate to address the deeply rooted complexities that people of color face in America.

This thesis is based on the belief that the responsibility of healing is the African American community’s obligation in the journey of reconciliation. This is essential for

the black community to reach its full God given potential as agents of transformation, restoration and social justice. The question that will be explored in this thesis project is:

“Will Christian healing circles begin the restoration process for individuals and families who have experienced the trauma of living in a racialized society and foster wholeness and renewal in the black community?”

The following components will comprise the basis of the healing circles that will be the methodology used in to pursue the answer to this thesis question:

- 1) Introduction: Identifying the Problem
 - a. Establishing the need for a trauma informed healing approach to reconciliation for the black community
 - b. The dilemma that most Black folks encounter with racial trauma
 - c. The difference between the two
 - d. Thesis statement
2. Theological Foundation: Establishing a Theology of Restoration
 - a. What's is God's heart for me & for the other?
 - b. Theology is the study of God. Therefore I must clearly understand who I believe God is and why that is importance to this process
 - c. God is relational (Trinity), God is the creator of all human beings and has made everyone in his image (Imago Dei)
 - d. Therefore, what does God want for me and others based on this?
 - e. For example since God is relational God wants to partner with me and be in relation with me. Since I am made in the image of God wants me to reveal that image, through wholeness, healing, value, and worth.
3. Proposing a Solution: The Healing Circles Process & Curriculum
 - a. The effects of carrying the heavy load
 - b. The Wounded Soldiers are ineffective and unable to produce
 - c. Melt my stony heart: What healing looks like
 - d. Exploring Sabbath & Self Care
 - e. Building authentic relationships with each other, and the other
 - f. The Black church: A Vehicle for Healing and Justice
4. Conclusion

In closing, I agree with Dr. Joy DeGruy that at the core of the problem is the fact that African Americans are struggling with Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, which displays itself as a false sense of inferiority. As my dad would say, "As black men we

have to develop a paranoid disposition to survive in America." It is important to understand that these terms and strategies are secular and Black Christians are turning away from Christ to find healing in Black supremacy rooted religions. It burdens my heart to see people turning away from the faith because we don't recognize the role of internal healing. We as a church should no longer see therapeutic methods as taboo.

The solution is to both inform and involve ourselves, our body, our family as black people of the internal healing that is necessary. It is my contention that steps toward healing cannot happen successfully until the diagnosis is named and the path to recovery and life is made clear. This is the purpose and goal of this thesis project. I hope this study will allow me to influence African American congregations to become places of healing and hope for black people who experience the trauma of living in a racialized society.

Chapter 1

Mara: Identifying Responses to Racial Trauma

“Anger is just anger. It isn't good. It isn't bad. It just is. What you do with it is what matters. It's like anything else. You can use it to build or to destroy. You just have to make the choice.

— Jim Butcher, *White Night*

In light of the racial trauma experienced by African American people in this society, we will examine the common responses to the pain that is evidenced in black communities. To do this, I will begin this portion of my thesis by telling a story—a story about a woman, who was born in a time when a man was a woman's major identifying factor. Women's status was formed and developed by the men that were in their lives. These men were seen as women's spiritual and physical coverings and protection in society and in their homes. This particular woman was set, she was married and had two sons. Her boys were her pride and joy. One day her husband passed away. Ten years later, both of her sons died also.

The loss left her alone. She lost her covering, her protection, and status in society. She lost her identity. She had no control of her situation and felt hopeless, lost and alone. I could imagine her being ready to give up. The woman in the story is Naomi, a biblical character, who can be found in the Old Testament book of Ruth. For this thesis, the most interesting point in this story is Naomi's choice. Naomi decided to change her name. In Ruth 1:20 & 21 we are told why:

“So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?” “Don't call me Naomi,[a]” she told them. “Call me Mara,[b] because the Almighty[c] has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted[d] me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

Naomi had a reason to change her name to Mara, as you read her explanation. I

believe Naomi's name change represented where she was at a time in her life and she was in a dark place. She was grieving and I believe there is a time for grieving. Ecclesiastics 3:4 talks about that, but I believe that she settled there. She decided that her situation would shape her identity. Since her identity had already been stripped away by the loss of her male loved ones, she would take power and control and find a new identity in which she had formed. She made a declaration over herself, and her declaration was bitterness. By Naomi changing her name she also gave permission for others to address her and see her as such.

I believe there was a certain satisfaction in her bitterness and in a way she might have found comfort and safety in her new identity, even though it was a false identity. In Naomi's story, I see many stories. However, I can't help but to see a strong correlation between Naomi and the African-American experience. Like Naomi, African Americans have lost so much. They have lost their location, language, culture, tradition, heritage, wives, daughters, sons, husbands, family, friends, identity, humanity, dignity, respect, honor and the list can go on and on. After losing so much there have been many African Americans, who have changed their names to anger, hate, bitterness, pain, frustration, hurt, and many other dark adjectives.

Some African-Americans declare this name over themselves using terms such as "nigga, bitch, angry black man, angry black woman, 'bebe's kids' and black women with attitudes." Other blacks are unaware of their name change, but they are living these attributes out. Whether it's a derogatory name or an adjective of pain, these names are out there and some, NOT ALL African-Americans, have settled there, just like Mara.

They have lived into their names. They've leaned into their pain. They have

leaned into the pain of injustice and inequality that has haunted African Americans, since they were stolen from Africa. Most African Americans experience the feelings, emotions, and terror of being black in a racialized society. They also experience the anger. This pit of compromised identity is made up of anger, frustration, pain, bitterness, and many other emotions, behaviors, and feelings that have developed since slavery. Some blacks have decided to move past this stage. They don't settle and get stuck in this place of pain and anger.

However, just like Naomi had a reason to grieve, African Americans also have reason to grieve, because we have lost so much. The problem with what Naomi did was that she unpacked and set up camp in the place of her pain. Naomi's situation was so severe that she changed her name and made her pain, a destination, and not a place to visit. The dilemma with making your pain a destination is you can become stuck in the very place that was only meant for you to be temporarily. There are times when I find myself renaming and it's a very easy place to go and its even easier to stay stuck there. After giving myself time to experience pain, sorrow, and fury, however, it is essential to move towards forgiveness and love so that your do not become stuck.

There are times when I find myself stuck in places and visiting longer than I intended. I remember many painful experiences of loss. Loss of life, loss of freedom, loss of youth, loss of goals and dreams, loss of spirituality, loss of culture, loss of tradition, loss of history, loss of identity, loss of value, loss of language, loss of land, there are so many "lost parts" in the African-America community. It is simply heartbreaking to experience and see the loss daily, moment by moment and at times it can be overwhelming. It is a downward slippery slope and the risk of being stuck is high. I have

changed my name multiple names and it has tried to chain me down.

The Barker Men

There is one experience that changed and challenged me at the same time. I remember Joseph (Joe) like it was yesterday. Our families were close. Actually our mothers were friends long before we were born. Joseph and I just happened to be the same age, therefore we were each other's playmates, but we lost touch during junior high. As we got older we would see each other from time to time and when we embraced, I would notice that the spark in Joe's eyes as a young boy slowly dimmed every time I saw him.

So this is nothing new to me, this is something I encounter a lot working and living within the black community. Many young black men have lost their spark earlier compared to their white counterparts. What is that spark? I describe that spark as a zeal for life, hope for the future, an excitement to encounter adventure, a childlike faith to believe for the impossible. I think most of us start off with this spark as a child, but throughout life's hardships that spark can die. I believe it's something you have to fight to keep.

Nevertheless, his spark was dim. He had two small boys and was in a relationship with his second child's mother and really wanted to make that work. He graduated from high school, but never pursued higher education. He was unemployed and did not have a clear career path, making it hard to provide for his family. He was also using alcohol and marijuana heavily, most likely to deal with all of his insecurities and pains.

I personally believe that the stress to provide for his family, substance abuse, and

the feeling of inadequacy was just so overwhelming that one day Joe decided to jump out of a moving vehicle into traffic on the freeway. I still remember walking into the hospital and seeing his body hooked up to all those machines. He was brain-dead and the ventilators were breathing for him. I spoke with his family and they said he had been struggling for months to find his place in the world. I remember his younger brother telling me that Joe was depressed and had talked about ending his life.

Joe's younger brother was Lorenzo and he was a character. Even though we were in the hospital and mourning his brother, Lorenzo was still finding ways to make others smile. He was the light in every dark room and he had so much personality. I loved him to pieces! I prayed with him and loved on him, even after the hospital visit. I took him under my wing like a little brother. Joey would've wanted that. We would talk on the phone. I'd give him advice and resources, pick him up and take him places, and listen to him cry, but we always seemed to find a way to laugh. He was always smiling, so I never thought that he would commit suicide! Lorenzo died a year to his brother's death. He was struggling to find his place in this world too, just like his brother. He needed a place to live, he was unemployed, he was grieving his big brother, he was gay, and many in the African American community did not accept his lifestyle. He also struggled with drug abuse and alcohol. Our communication had fallen off months before his death. Learning about his death it was not easy for me.

It's still shocking to know that the tragedy continued, because in addition to his son's, their father died prematurely of a heart attack. I personally believe his heart was heavy from losing so much, and from the guilt and shame regarding his boys. Joseph Barker Sr. was super fun and he loved me like a daughter and I loved him like a father.

Both of his boys reminded me of him in different ways, but Lorenzo definitely was built and looked just like his father. These three black men will always hold a special place in my heart. They have taught me what hopelessness looks like (Joey), fatherly love (Joseph), and unspeakable joy (Lorenzo). I have seen their beauty and I'm inspired to reignite the sparks instead of ignoring the unlit or dimming wick.

In the last four years there have been moments of grief over the Barker men. I have become upset, angry, frustrated, bitter—but mostly angry, because my friends and family were more prone to experiencing hopelessness that led to suicide. Black men are committing suicide at a higher rate than any other group and that is not just a statistic to me—it's my reality that I have experienced. Therefore, I do not take the work of reconciliation for black folks lightly. I believe anyone can get stuck and decide to change their name, any race, any gender and any culture, but I'm called to us—to "black people."

A New Way Forward

In this stagnant place, in this place of changing your name there are many behaviors, habits, coping mechanism, mindset, strategies, and skills that a person has had to develop in order to exist in such an environment. This type of behavior is easy to identify and in many communities it has become normalized, since it has been in the environment for years. These unpleasant behaviors are destructive, harmful, and deadly to black folks and have been killing our community. These behaviors stem from the same place, the root of un-forgiveness, which is the root and the foundation of the stemming issues that result thereafter. Here are just a few of the negative results that are important to identify in the African-American community.

Loss of Identity

It is my contention that one of the biggest problems is the lack of identity in the African-American community. According to Dr. Willie Jennings, the author of the book *The Christian Imaginations: Theology and the Origins of Race*, people of African descent have been dislocated and displaced taking them away from their land, and ultimately their identity. In speaking of a white slave trader bringing a African body to a Japanese ruler, he states

“Valignano stood before the ruler and presented the new world of the ‘southern barbarian,’ as they were called by Japanese. He showed European mastery over lands and peoples by having this black body in servitude. Though he spoke and presented himself and his church in friendship, this was also a moment of closure, as the African was not permitted to speak for himself. Indeed, even if he has spoken his native language he would probably not have been understood. Standing there half-naked, he had been taken from his home and given a new identity calibrated to his body and articulated by his Christian master’.”⁶

Jennings continues by explaining the impact of this on identity,

“Valignano entered this moment of dislocation by choice, the slave by force. In this new space, Japan, Valignano is a white man among, ‘white people,’ established in the knowledge that being there was not a disruption of his identity, but an expansion of into a spiritual and quasi-nation network. That new space, however, meant utter disruption for the African. Gone was the earth, the ground, spaces, and places that facilitated his identity, and what remained, embodied in his master, was signified and signifying reality of whiteness, not simply by his master’s speech but by the very location of the master’s body operating in power next his.”⁷

Based upon these insights from Jennings, the impact on the black community today is that there is no sense of self or a sense of our rich heritage, traditions, culture, principles, ancestors, or elders, since slavery, when we were captured from the continent of Africa. Rev. T.D. Jakes, a prominent pastor, author and world-renowned speaker says this about the importance of identity, "If you lose your name you've lost your power"

Naomi decided to lose her power, and consequently her identity, because of her circumstances. Although similar, the story of Naomi and African Americans differ

⁶ James Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (United States of America: Yale University, 2010), 39.

⁷ Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 40.

somewhat, because Naomi had a name that she was familiar with and identified with. Most African-Americans have never known their original names to identify with because they were given names from their slave owners. In addition, enslaved Africans were also forced to carry on their slave owner's names, which still true to this day.

As a result, the identity of black people has suffered and needs a resurrection—a resurrection of history, of love, of hope—but mostly a resurrection of identity. In my experience, most Christians often try to minimize the need for racial identity by pointing to 2 Peter 2:9 which says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Although I believe this scripture and my spirit declares from within me YES! There is a cultural/identity disparity for those who have been displaced for years from their original history. Therefore, I disagree with Christians who believe that reading 2 Peter 2:9 and others scriptures like it will solve every identity problem and related issues for the African-American community. What some church folks fail to understand is the two contrary experiences that a black persons faces in this racialized society. Black people struggle to find identity because of the spiritual and social challenges at work in our world today. There is not only a spiritual battle for salvation and freedom, but there is also a social construct raging within most black bodies. Blacks' social identity clashes against scriptural identity constantly, therefore the war is raging for which truth to accept. In other words, Black people must ask themselves the question, "Do I believe what I have experienced (socially from Christians and non-Christians), or do I believe biblical verses (scripturally)?"

In the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent in Genesis, chapter

3, there is one thing that stands out to me, namely the serpent's ability to convince, trick, and deceive Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Eve was convinced of something that was not true from the serpent, just like Naomi was convinced to change her name. This is just like some African Americans who have been convinced, tricked, and deceived that our identity is inferior to whites.

Codependent relationship

In my opinion, there are some Black people who are in codependent relationships with Whites. This is an unhealthy relationship where both parties struggle to obtain power. Some of the unhealthy ways codependency plays out between these two groups in society can be described by the examples listed below:

- There are no clear standards for Whites in your life. This is to say that you let them treat you any kind of way, without standing up for yourself. Of course, this behavior probably stems from slavery but it still lives in our society today.
- Many blacks also feel as if White people's presence is needed to bring value to them. This is often seen in over valuing the words, opinions, and ideas of white people. Blacks and other minority races often look to find confirmation from the Caucasian race in order to be right. There is a strong belief that white people are always right, since we have been taught that white people are superior.
- Many African Americans are seeking validation and acceptance from White people. This can be seen in the assimilation of clothing, hair, learning styles, education, language, names, attitude/principles and even spirituality. Some blacks are in a constant need of approval and permission from whites.

- Overcompensating is also born in the place of codependency. This shows up through a materialistic lifestyle, which mainly seeks to find validation from others through status. Seeking status and approval, comes from an insecure place that is never satisfied. However, as the great Bishop T.D. Jakes says, "People who know who they are, don't have to prove who they are!"
- Passive aggressive behaviors are used in order to control the other person in the codependent relationship. This is demonstrated mostly with white people towards blacks.

Through these codependent relationships, some blacks have given too much power and responsibility to white people. When we are convinced that white people are in control of our purpose we then become powerless and our own destiny and demise soon approaches. This is also a form of trickery from Satan that was discussed earlier and is found in Genesis, chapter 3. Without having a rich identity base, many African-Americans will fall into this type of codependent relationship with whites, instead of experiencing healthy and whole relationships with people of different races. It is challenging to have healthy relationship with others when you do not have a healthy relationship with yourself. This is why identity is foundational in the movement towards wholeness.

"White Folks are Evil"

Most Black people are aware of this perspective, which has rang loudly in most black communities for many generations. In different parts of the country and in different

families there are certain names that describe the Caucasian race such as, “Poor white trash, crackers, master, pig, demons, devils, and other derogatory names that are not true for a whole race of people. There is lot of blame to go around and black folks are justified in placing this on whites. It is a historical fact that African-Americans have experienced heinous acts, torture and simply evil from white folks and continue to do so. There has been no reconciliation councils to help bring these two racially opposing groups together after such traumatic experiences. None of these issues have been addressed in the black community; therefore there is continued hostility between us. I agree with the views of Pastor Harvey, the lead pastor of Emerald City Bible Fellowship in Seattle, WA, which is a multicultural church committed to racial reconciliation in the Rainer Valley area, when he says; “White people are responsible for some of our problems but they are not responsible for ALL of our problems.”

For years, African-Americans have been told to forgive their oppressors and some have entered into the work of reconciliation and wholeness with our Caucasian brothers and sisters. However, for years some African-Americans have chosen not to take the road of forgiveness because they believe they are following a “white man's religion.” Some believe that when you forgive you are saying that the oppressor should not have any consequences, which implies that there is no justice or the oppressor is right. Other people believe that forgiveness is a way to assimilate, subdue, brainwash, and/or conquer black people. I can definitely hear and understand people’s mistrust, because trust has been broken between these two races for centuries. However, what they fail to realize is that forgiveness is not completely about the oppressor.

Christianity is not a white man's religion—it never has been and never will be!

Christianity is a faith for all races, nations, tribes, and tongues. I never grew up thinking of Christianity as a white man's religion. I have only interacted with my Christian faith through an Afrocentric lens. I was raised in a Christian household where my parents taught us that Jesus was black. As a child I grew up believing that all the people in the Bible were black—Adam, Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, all of Jesus's disciples and St. Paul were black. Therefore, it was shocking to enter a Christian Book Store and see white people in these children Bibles! Nevertheless, my faith was not connected to a blue-eyed, blonde haired, Jesus. My Jesus had brown eyes, long locks and mahogany skin. Therefore, I thought his whole family and all his friends were also black. Obviously this was not accurate because Jesus related with everyone, but this completely shaped my faith.

So hearing other religions coming to the knowledge that Jews are originally black is old news to me. The results of this for some in the black community is that there are some twisted religions that African-Americans have delved into because they speak to areas that the churches refuse to discuss. These religions bring a sense of cultural identity through rich teaching of heritage, they attempt to dismantle the codependent relationship between races and they focus on community with strong accountability to one another.

I do not agree with the doctrine of the Hebrew Israelites, Ancient African faiths, and the Nation of Islam, but I appreciate their attempt to bring healing to brokenness. One of the major challenges I have with these types of religions is their superiority complex. This is the belief that black people are superior and whites are inferior. They are also under the assumption that all white people are evil. There are even black churchgoers that hold contempt in their heart towards their white counterparts, which

affects their ability to reconcile and become a united body of believers.

The Importance of Community

These varying perspectives contribute to one of the biggest missing pieces in the African-American community, which is unity. There seems to be so much division in this community such as the divide between African-Americans and Africans, women and men, different religions, the Malcolm Xs and the Martin Luther Kings, the educated and the uneducated and between generations. So many approaches, so many different ideas, and strategies can cause even more division. Many within the black community refer to this as “the crabs in a barrel” mentality. However, I think that it goes deeper than that and must be addressed because working together in unity and creating a family structure is substantially important for the health of our communities.

Isolating from people and isolating from feelings and emotions seems to be a norm for many young black people and even older generations. It appears as if we are numb and there are many ways to become numb. One of the major ways of numbing is substance abuse. Not being able to name/claim one's feelings and emotions and work through them properly can cause an unhealthy environment to occur. In the African American community, there is a constant rumbling of emotional outbursts that have not been properly processed through, therefore we spew out our dysfunction on each other and harm one another. We damaging and kill each other with our words, our actions, our fist, guns, knives, and through our other behaviors. Have you ever heard the saying that "Hurt people hurt people?" In my view, not only is this a true statement but it's one that is experienced frequently in the black community.

How did we find ourselves in this place of disconnection and isolation? The easy and most clear answer is that we were intentionally divided during slavery through being physically separated from family members and friends. We were separated from our land in Africa and we're separated from our rich history, heritage, and traditions. Black people have also been separated emotionally from their ability to feel, which is needed in order for us to bind ourselves closely together. As a result of living in this racialized society we have been disconnected from one another mentally, economically, and educationally for years. This was done purposely in order to divide and conquer us and it is still happening today. After we become "woke"/aware of these issues in the community that are used to destroy us and bring destruction to our people, we must then ask ourselves what should we do next? We can sit for years griping and complaining about the problems in the community and not putting in any action to solve the problem; or we can start to bring a higher level of community through honoring each other.

It is my contention that the black community today lacks the type of honor and unity that we once experienced with one another. This is not to suggest that we do not have honor or unity, because that would not be true. Instead, these qualities have been diminished, because we've been mis-educated and barely educated about our royal heritage, culture, elders, men, women, children, ancestors, principles and standards from which we come. Today a large portion of the dishonor comes from the lack of identification; individually and collectively. Historically, we have always been a people that have lived in peace, unity, and honor. These principles were taught through storytelling and through experiencing the land in Africa.

There is an ancient African word called "Ubuntu" that literally means 'humanity

to others'. In popular culture it is also used to mean 'I am what I am because of who we all are'. In other words, "I am because you are." In essence, this term communicates the belief that I cannot fully become who God created me to be unless you become who God created/intended you to be. In essence, we can only be human together.⁸ God has created us to need each other to survive and reach our full potential in the context of mutually affirming and supportive relationships. Ubuntu theology is a great example of the type of unity we strive for in the black community. This type of unity was once practiced among Black people, but through the Westernized ideas and principles of individualism and the codependent relationships that resulted with our white counter parts; our unity has been dissolved and is no longer seen as important.

The Power of Healing Circles

I volunteer with Community Passageway, which is an organization that helps youth, who have committed crimes, to have their misdemeanors and felony charges dropped in the Seattle area. It is more than a diversion program but it is a relationship-based program where the adults (the ambassadors) wrap themselves around a young person like family. They do this by being present for them with the ability to speak into their lives. In this program, one of the ways we create a healthy family environment is through a "healing circle." Our healing circles mainly consist of creating a safe space where young people can express their emotions and experiences with no judgment, but instead be embraced and encouraged. Most circles consist of storytelling. A question is asked around the circle and answered with everyone sharing ideas. I think of these

⁸ Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2009), 110.

healing circles as a large therapy session.

Anger can change a person to the point that they no longer know who they are. They become unrecognizable to themselves and others. When sitting in one of the many healing circles with Community Passageways, Andre Taylor the leader and founder of the Not This Time organization and movement in the Seattle area made a profound statement that I will never forget. He said, “The enemy (the devil) wants you to hate White people so much for their heinous acts afflicted on our people, because that places hate in your heart. When hate is in your heart you are immobile—you’re frozen—and you are unable to fully commune with God. You are in a place of darkness. Therefore, I forgive white people because I refuse for my anger against the Caucasian race to keep me from experiencing all of God. Whites have stolen a lot from me, but they will not steal my ability to commune with God.” His statement reminds me of an interview that prolific writer, Toni Morrison did years ago, when she said, “Anger ... it's a paralyzing emotion ... you can't get anything done. People sort of think it's an interesting, passionate, and igniting feeling — But I don't think it's any of that — It's helpless ... it's absence of control — and I need all of my skills, all of the control, all of my powers ... and anger doesn't provide any of that — I have no use for it whatsoever.”⁹

Moving Toward Healing and Wholeness

For African Americans, it is challenging to live out destiny when all of these behaviors, mindsets, and habits are negatively at work in one's life. When anger and

⁹ Quotes by Toni Morrison, (Quotes) March 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/157843-anger-it-s-a-paralyzing-emotion-you-can-t-get>.

bitterness become a station you choose to stay at like “Mara,” your choice to produce ugly attributes can hold you back from God's intent for your life. Essentially one can become ineffective and unable to flow and produce the purpose God has for their life.

Therefore, if I could preach a sermon to my people I would say, “No matter how great your pain is, we all have a choice of how we will respond. We all have a choice of what we will do with our pain. Making a choice to not stay stuck and working towards healing and wholeness is God's design for your life.” This is supported in James 1:19-21 that states:

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

This scripture speaks volumes to the African-American community because it gives a choice, which is to be "slow to become angry," because “human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” This is very clear, when people are operating from a place of human anger they are not able to produce the righteousness God desires. They may produce something, but that is not godly, righteous, holy, or pleasing to God. This is why we are urged to "get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent" Don't just sit in your filth and bathe in your filth, but work on it, get rid of it, and don't get stuck like “Mara." Instead, humbly accept the word planted in you through meditation, which can save you." Get humble, get vulnerable, forgive your enemies, and pray for those who spitefully use you (Matthew 5:44 & Luke 6:27 & 28). Your ability to actively live out Matthew 5:44 & Luke 6:27 & 28 is through spending time in the word of God and allowing it to change you so you can be saved.

This is a hard discussion because it is difficult to tell African Americans that you

can't stay here any longer. As an African American woman, I understand the pain we have endured and the challenges we have faced. Even though we may be justified in our anger and pain we have to find a different way forward from this place. It is necessary in order for our communities to be healthy, healed, and whole. Thus far, we have focused on examining the negative option of anger and bitterness. However, now it is time to explore the option of forgiveness so we can move towards a place of healing and wholeness.

Chapter 2

A Biblical Foundation for Healing Racial Trauma

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love
can do that.
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

The movement of the body is powerful for African Americans and it is significant in our healing process. There was a lot of pain that has happened in the hearts and minds of black folks, but there has also been pain in the body. Our bodies have endured horrifying violence by the hands of white people. Blacks have been whipped, lynched, raped, hunted down like dogs, endured beatings, abused, torched, and killed. Our bodies were carried on boats in terrible conditions from Africa to America and we also endured long hours picking cotton in hot fields. Black bodies endured physical abuse and even today's black generations feel this trauma through what scholars call "Generationally Transmitted Trauma." This refers to a type of trauma that is held in the body and can be transferred from generation to generation.

I first heard about this type of trauma during Dr. Joy DeGruy's conference, but after listening to Dr. Rachel Yehuda's interview, I had a deeper understanding of how trauma can affect future generations. Dr. Rachel Yehuda is a professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, who studies the area of Generationally Transmitted Trauma. Dr. Yehuda's research on Holocaust survivors was discussed during an interview called, *The On Being Project*, where she says:

"We established a clinic for Holocaust survivors, and what we found was that our phone did ring, but it was mostly children of Holocaust survivors who called us. And what we began to see quite clearly was that offspring were reporting that they had been affected by the Holocaust in many different kinds of ways, but in a very coherent and cohesive pattern."¹⁰

¹⁰ Rachel Yehuda, "How Trauma and Resilience Cross Generations," *The On Being Project* (Interview), February 2018, <https://onbeing.org/programs/rachel-yehuda-how-trauma-and-resilience-cross-generations-nov2017/>.

Dr. Yehuda continues her report in the interview by noting:

“What was very, very interesting was that there were some experiences that didn't register that much, but all traumatic experiences that involved some kind of an interpersonal component were more likely to be difficult. Holocaust offspring also showed a lot of resilience-related qualities, but in terms of this idea of being more vulnerable to depression or anxiety, that was real. We also found — and this really was very surprising to us, that Holocaust offspring had the same neuroendocrine or hormonal abnormalities that we were viewing in Holocaust survivors and persons with post-traumatic stress disorder.”¹¹

Dr. Yehuda's research of the people affected by Holocaust can be inferred to suggest that Generationally Transmitted Trauma is also present in the African American experience. Black people do not just hold their own trauma, but they're holding the trauma of their parents, grandparents, great grand parents, and beyond. A more Pentecostal term to refer to this is “generational curses” and it's opposite is “generational blessings.” Dr. Yehuda says later in the interview that you do not have to be held prisoner to your DNA, but you can be healed and transmit healing to your next generation.

Black bodies can hold Generationally Transmitted Trauma and wounds from today's social inequities facing individuals of color in a racialized world. Carrying this becomes heavy in the mind and body, but the trauma that has occurred in the body, through movement can also be healed in the body through movement.

Moving Towards Healing

In Matthew 11: 28-30, God shares a clear view into his heart for ALL people, especially those who are broken, disenfranchised, and hurting. God offers healing and deliverance to all those who would come. Listen to hear God's heart in this text:

“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

¹¹ Yehuda, “How Trauma and Resilience Cross Generations.”

There are multiple promises in these three verses that Jesus speaks, to a broken people, thousands of years ago, but the scripture also applies today. Jesus is still speaking that same message to the broken hearted. How many are receptive to hearing the Father's call? God is speaking and offering lighter loads and healing for our brokenness. Those who are treated unjustly, the down trotted, the abused, the traumatized, the oppressed, the oppressor, the victim, the abuser, the lost, the least, the left-out, the guilty, the abled body, and the differently abled person. There is healing for all. Whatever you identify with from the list above, God beckons you with open arms to come and receive healing and deliverance.

Although God welcomes all people regardless of their racial background, this thesis will primarily address the need of the black community to come to Him for restoration, healing, and forgiveness. In many ways and for many years the black community has responded to God for our salvation and guidance, but at times we have forgotten to give God our trauma and pain.

When Jesus says, "Come to me" this is the first stage of engagement—it requires the movement of the body, the change of location, and the adjustment of one's mindset. To come and bring our pain means fighting nervousness and doubt and moving one foot in front of another towards Jesus, our healer. This movement takes faith, it takes trust, it takes risk and it takes obedience in the very act of coming.

The Webster's dictionary's definition of movement is "the act or process of moving, especially change of place or position or posture."¹² Jesus says, "Come to me", in obeying this command, it is essential for us to ask ourselves, who is the "me" calling

¹² Merriam Webster, (Dictionary), January 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/movement>.

us to come? It is vitally important when coming to God to have a revelation of who God really is. The One calling us to come is the Creator of the Universe, the Healer, Redeemer, and the Alpha and Omega. The knowledge of who God is helps a person's expectation through faith, which allows them to place their confidence in God's ability and enables their walk towards Jesus to be easier.

My favorite part of this scripture in Matthew 11: 28-30 is the power of exchange. Yes, we are aware of "Generationally Transmitted Trauma" but a greater transformation takes place between God and his people. This is where sacrifices and an exchange takes place because the text calls, "All who are weary and heavy-laden" and then assures them that, "I will give you rest" This suggests that a person has to be willing to release their heaviness, their pain, their Generationally Transmitted Trauma, and their personal trauma and give it to God. They do this trusting and having faith that God is able to provide rest. Then Jesus calls them to, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." This implies that a person has to be willing to take on a new way of thinking to receive this great exchange of heaviness for rest. God requires people to give up their practices, environments and toxic beliefs in exchange for a restful life. Sometimes people can be so used to the chaos and other times people can become so attached to the "Mara" they have become, it is hard to walk into a different position. However, Jesus says, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." In this promise we are assured that this way of life is easy, if we depend and rely on the Spirit of God.

Healing Through Movement

Dr. Kimberly Wedeven Segall, Professor of English and Co-Director of Social Justice & Cultural Studies at Seattle Pacific University, illuminates the importance that African Americans find healing through the performing arts. In her book, *Performing Democracy in Iraq and South African: Gender, Media, and Resistance*, she speaks of the importance of dancing, singing, theater, and poetry as expressions of deep emotions. Dr. Kimberly's research in her book is quite similar to God's request, command, and appeal to us, which is to come through movement. With negative movements in our past, it is important to begin making positive types of movement towards healing, wholeness, and towards God.

God's desire for us is to produce the type of righteousness that is discussed in James 1:19-21 which says, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." In order to live into this scripture, trauma can no longer be swept underneath the rug. This was confirmed when I attended a worship service on Easter Sunday at New Beginning Christian Fellowship Church in Renton, WA, and heard Pastor Braxton make the following statement from the pulpit, "Trauma cannot be prayed away." He was preaching about how unaddressed trauma in the black community causes even more damage. He also spoke about the reason why so many people do not engage in the work of being healed and becoming completely whole. He suggested that it is avoided because it's painful. However, I believe that Jeremiah 29:11 is true when it states, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This

says that God is ready to give us a future and a hope but the questions we must ask are, “Are we ready to receive it? Are we willing to do what is required? Do we know what is required of us?”

I understand that using verbiage like “require,” can sound very legalistic and may scare people. However, in the act “coming” we are operating in vulnerability, honesty, truth, trust, expectation, belief and with faith. Many are not willing to engage on this level of openness and authenticity, but it is profitable towards our healing. As seen in Matthew 11: 28-30, our internal spiritual work requires our involvement in the process.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with Dr. Segall when she explained how slavery happened through movement. I began to think about the fact that rape occurred in movement, lynchings and beatings were physical acts. Torturing my people was physical and happened through the movement of the body—incorporating joints, muscles, tissue, bones, the brain, and so many other pieces of our amazing bodies. Dr. Segall discusses the importance of performance in her book when she says,

“So why are these public performances important? Since traumatic memories remember what one most desired to forget, performing them is a painful process that is worked out in communities as well as in state institutions. These songs, dances, and stories are not mere reflections of culture, but as Victor Turner argues; rather, they may ‘themselves be active agencies of change.’”¹³

Dr. Segall continues by describing her experience as an audience member by observing:

“As the lines between theater and therapy, trauma and testimony, completely broke down, I was undone, unraveled. In theater, we speak of a fourth wall, an invisible barrier between stage actors and audience, easily demolished by entering into the audience.”¹⁴

After speaking with Dr. Kimberly and reading Matthew 11:28-30 again, I had a deeper understanding of God’s word. Partnership with God is important in reconciliation.

¹³ Kimberly Wedeven Segall, *Performing Democracy in Iraq and South Africa Gender, Media, and Resistance*. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 26.

¹⁴ Segall, *Performing Democracy*, 124.

The journey may be uncomfortable at times, the movement may challenge us, but this is where the healing takes place.

Come Here and Stretch Out

In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus commands a man with a withered hand to come and stretch it out as described in the text below:

“Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”

There are many things we can learn from this man. He had two commands from God. The first, “Come here”. In order for him to come, he had to have faith and recognize the authority and power residing in that of Jesus Christ. After commanding the man to come to him, Jesus asks the man to take another step of faith by stretching out his hand. The phrase “stretch out your hand” was also used in the Old Testament in regards to power and miracles that were to be done. The concept of “stretching out” was used with Noah when he stretched out his hands to free the dove. The term is also used in the Old Testament when Moses was told to stretch out his hands in the miracles God performed in Exodus 7:1-9. This expression speaks of what “we do”.

The final command given to the man with the withered hand in the gospel of Mark demonstrates the importance of reconciliation for the person in need. This form of reconciliation is between God and humankind. Jesus is not asking the man to go with him in a private room and then gives him the command to stretch out his infirmity. Instead, he commands him in public and the man with the withered hand must publicly declare his

need by showing his weakness to an Almighty God, with onlookers, skeptics, and people with higher status, education, and economic resources watching. Yes "those people" are there in the crowd watching and judging. These people are not supportive or encouraging in any way towards the miracle that is taking place. However, that does not stop Jesus from performing a miracle. Jesus's ability to perform this miracle is not based upon the naysayers and the negativity that can be present. Jesus's ability is based upon himself, and yes, he also encourages us to believe him for the impossible.

I can imagine that the man with the withered hand felt insecure, embarrassed and shame because of having his withered hand exposed in front of an unpleasant audience. However, he pushed past those feelings and was overtaken with his desperation to be healed. The need for healing was much greater than his personal emotions. Jesus and the man focused on the miracle and not the audience that surrounded them.

For too long African-Americans have focused on the audience that has been around us. We have focused on the audience that has surrounded our stories and it has not healed us. We have given too much attention to our oppressors, enemies, naysayers, agitators and haters: but we have not kept our eyes on God. The author and finisher of our faith, is this God that petitions us to come. God is encouraging us to keep our eyes on the miracle with Him, the miracle of love, forgiveness, healing and restoration. Like this man, we also have to walk out in the midst of the crowd and the noise to draw closer to Jesus. It took obedience and faith for him to walk out amongst the noise and the opinions of the Pharisees present. His obedience to the second command of Jesus to "Stretch forth your hand" illustrates the trust and vulnerability that one must have to be restored. It is not comfortable to uncover and expose the very thing that has caused our shame and

embarrassment. However, it is necessary to be healed and restored. Many people would be timid to do so, but, this man takes the second step of obedience and does what is commanded of him.

In this biblical account, we see that Jesus will meet us where we are. His grace is sufficient where we are deficient. He makes up the difference in what we lack when it comes to bringing about our healing. Jesus takes the time to focus on the one who is in front of him, despite the presence of the Pharisees and their accusatory stance. Jesus responds to the man with the withered hand by immediately meeting his need. He does not stand on the sidelines and stay silent. If we are followers of Christ, the church should lead by Christ's example and dive into brokenness, in order to be change agents that bring healing. This causes me to question, "How do we in the church, create a welcoming atmosphere to meet the needs that one would be ashamed or embarrassed to uncover? Does our love of Jesus, sincerity and compassion emulate from inside us? Similar to the man with the withered hand, what might also stop those who are marginalized from moving forward in obedience to be healed?

Healing and Forgiveness

What is this miracle that God is bringing the African-American community into? What is the "stretching out" that must take place? For way too long, black bodies have been restricted. Black bodies have been bound up for way to long, but God is calling for a stretching; so we stretch our arms, we stretch our legs, our necks and backs as we break out of what once constrained us. There have been mental shackles, there have been bars, there have been limitations, caps, laws, restrictions, policies, ideas, principles, that have

kept us bound and are still restrain us. Some of these restrictions are no longer being placed on us by an outside entity. However, it has now become the penalties of slavery and injustice. Our past has plagued us with behaviors and lifestyles that are not fitting for the kings and queens that we are. Therefore, a change is arising and a new day is dawning.

There is a push that is happening, there is a miracle-taking place, a stretching. This stretching is forgiveness, it is not an easy stretch but it is extremely necessary. This stretch keeps our hearts light and takes away the heaviness of our anger and bitterness when worked through properly. There is scriptural support for this found in Matthew 5:43-45, which states,

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven...”

Through this scripture, we see the importance of forgiveness in the body of Christ because it identifies us with Christ. Forgiveness is the Imago Dei lived out accurately. Jesus does not just prove the importance of forgiveness through his sermons but he is a doer of the principle of forgiveness. While on the Cross of Calvary, Jesus uttered the last seven sayings, and I am not surprised that His first saying focused on forgiveness. In Luke 23:33 & 34 it clearly says,

“When they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on His right and the other on His left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up His garments by casting lots.”

Since we are to be Christ like, let us walk in forgiveness—not only for white people who have oppressed us but also for one another in the black community and for ourselves. Our ability to forgive is a life-changing practice that God calls us into repeatedly as children of God. I believe the Lord is challenging his people to stretch forth their hands towards

progress. Apostle Paul also recognizes the importance of growth in God because in the book of Philippians 3:13-14 he talks about the significance of pressing:

“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

God requires more of us, God initially asks the man with the withered hand to come, but God invites him into a deeper relationship with him through requiring more of him. This is seen through asking him to “stretch forth his hand.” It seems like a difficult step but it is a possible step. Through this challenging request, Jesus develops the man’s faith and character. Through Paul’s example, we see spiritual growth as a discipline of the Spirit that we must pursue. The ability to forgive provides us access to look at things differently and from a higher plateau with deeper perspectives.

The ability to forgive and stretch out is very beneficial to the black community, because violations and wounds occur continuously against us. Therefore, the practice of forgiveness is needed in order to stay healthy and burden free. There will be white people who desire to oppress us. There will still be other black people in our own community that will repeatedly wound us, and we will hurt ourselves. This is why forgiveness is so important in the process of healing.

This type of forgiveness is not something we can do in our strength. This type of forgiveness is an attribute of the Holy Spirit. It is not meant for us to do this alone. This is why God has sent us a Comforter to lead and guide us into all righteousness. Through our submission, communion, and connection to the Spirit of God we are able to walk through the process of forgiveness. This is why our connection to God is so life giving. Through our relationship with Christ, we are able to produce much fruit. We see this in John 15:5 that says, “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in

them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” In this scripture, we see that in order to produce much fruit we have to remain in God. Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing.

This leads me to my next point, which is motive. What motivates our fight for justice? Another, more personal, way to ask this question is, “What is your motive for in your fight for justice? What stirs in your gut that calls you to create change for those who are disenfranchised?” I’m sure we would find many different answers to these questions. However, I would urge all of us to examine our motives. Either our motives are coming from a whole healed individual or from an individual’s anger and bitterness. It is very important to note that “healed people heal people” and “hurt people hurt people.” That is why our motives count when fighting for justice.

When you are a wounded soldier fighting for the rights of others, you can become less affective because your dysfunction will slow you down. You are only able to see out of your brokenness (the perspective of Mara) and your endeavors for justice will either fail or destroy you in the process. “Burn out” is a real consequence if you are not connected to an energy source, which I believe is the Spirit of God.

Without this spiritual empowerment, James 1:5-8 reminds us that we can succumb to doubt, which can result in double-mindedness that can make someone unstable in their ways. The passage states:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

It is my belief that some African Americans can be unstable because of our unwillingness to “come forth and stretch out” our hands. I would argue that this is especially true when

it comes to forgiving and moving towards unity. However, we cannot believe in the God of our salvation and with the same heart harbor resentment and un-forgiveness towards whites and expect a holistic healing as a people group. As believers, we cannot continue to deny our healing by holding onto the pain of the countless years of inequality. Un-forgiveness is a tormenting spirit that has lived in the black community long enough. Today, we serve notice on you spirit of torment and we declare that “you must go in the mighty name of Jesus!” This is not just true for African Americans; it is also relevant for other disenfranchised people as well.

My specific calling in the ministry of reconciliation, however, is to help Black people who are disenfranchised, walk into their healing through Jesus Christ. I believe that this work can be achieved through utilizing the process of healing circles. This would provide a safe place where African Americans can voice and hear the narratives of others in their local community. During this intimate time, the participants are challenged to deal with and face their fears, bitterness, un-forgiveness, doubt, and hate. When eliminating these hindrances, one can become whole and stable to interact with our white members in the body of Christ, which enables us to reconcile and further the unity among its members.

Acting on Faith

In Matthew 14:25-33, we see another biblical story where the word “stretch” is used. In this instance, Jesus calls Peter to come forth and the Greek word used in this passage is the same definition used for the word “stretch” in Mark, chapter 3.

“And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The winds and the waves in Peter’s story mirror the Pharisees in the story of the man with the withered hand. In this passage, there is a beautiful image of Jesus Christ “reaching out” to grab Peter’s hand as he calls out for help. This exhibits that even in our deepest need of a miracle, a healing, deliverance and/or restoration; our own fears will not stop the hand of Jesus from intervening, when we cry out (a form of stretching) to him.

It is important to understand the circumstances in which Peter’s faith moved him to obedience. He initially, acted on his faith, by following Christ’s command. Peter’s fear of the wind and waves changed his gaze and focus from the One calling him and he starts to sink. Peter is similar to many of us when we are focused and distractions and obstacles thwart our attention—some for good reason. However, it is when our gaze departs from the promise of a miracle that we can lose the footing that is desired from the One who is calling us to be whole.

Peter is similar to many of us when we focus on distractions and obstacles much like the man with the withered hand, who could have been distracted by the audience surrounding him. It is when our gaze departs from the promise of a miracle that we can lose our footing in our journey towards the One who is calling us to be made whole.

Chapter 3

Practical Application: Leading Healing Circles

For my graduate internship, I conducted a 6 week Healing Circle at Emerald City Bible Fellowship (ECBF), which is a multicultural church in the Rainer Valley area of Seattle Washington. Pastor Harvey Drake; who is a leading pastor in racial reconciliation leads this interracial church, therefore the church has been heavily involved in this work. The purpose of this Healing Circle (HC) was to provide a space for black people to work on becoming healed and whole from racial trauma. However, before getting into the details of this healing circle process, it is important to understand what a healing circle is.

Understanding Healing Circles

Healing Circles consist of an intimate sized group of people sitting in a circle creating a safe environment that incorporates deep listening to other peoples' stories. These circles also consist of speaking your truth and sharing your own story in a non-judgmental space. Most Healing Circles ask deep, critical, and reflective questions that bring enlightenment to the mind, body and souls of those who engage in the process, when done properly. Therefore, this requires that the facilitator and participants create an atmosphere of safety and intimacy.

This brings to mind the passage of scripture in 1 Samuel 20:31 about Jonathan and David that says, "And as soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most" This is an example of the

type of intimacy that is to be achieved in Healing Circles. Jonathan and David formed a bond through weeping, kissing, and fellowship together. This radical encounter changed their lives. They were both restored and their relationship became stronger. I believe Healing Circles can offer that same type of intimacy. Although there is no kissing and only some weeping in Healing Circles, this type of intimacy between Jonathan and David that heals broken relationships shows the goal of the safe and authentic environment we seek to create between each other and with God in Healing Circles. This experience is captured in the words and imagery of the following poem:

*Awaken by a Kiss*¹⁵

He is asleep
I wonder if I should wake him
It is hard for him to find rest
He works so hard
Daily he rises with the sun

But I haven't talked to him all day
I haven't looked him in his eyes and told him how much I love him
I watch him breathing
His abdomen moves
Up and down
The sound of his sleep puts me at ease

My figure tips touch his skin
As I rub his head gently
Carefully I dare not wake my King as he slumbers
But I did not kiss his lips or feel his love cover me with his arms wrapped around me
I reach over and kiss him gently

He awakens
Our eyes lock quickly
And he says no words as he wraps his arms around me
He holds me tightly
He kisses me on my lips, on my cheeks, all over my face
He is happy to have me
He holds me in delight as my soul sings within
We sleep and dream together

What if God woke up the nation with a kiss?

¹⁵ By Geneva Taylor

Demographic Overview

The Healing Circle (HC) took place at Emerald City Bible Fellowship (ECBF) on Wednesday nights from 7:00-9:00 PM. The group was comprised of 14 participants, who met weekly from July 6-August 10, 2016. All of the participants were African Americans with ten (10) female and only four (4) male members. It was not surprising that there were more women than males in the group because there are often more women in the church than men. The age range of the participants represented a wide spectrum from 20 to 77 years old. Educationally, 11 out of the 14 participants have Bachelor degrees; one (1) person has a Master's degree and the 3 members are currently in graduate school. Again, the fact that most of the participants in the HC were educated and have some level of college education was not surprising. In my experience, people who engage in racial reconciliation usually have some form of higher education.

Regarding denominational affiliation, 6 of the participants attend ECBF, 3 people identify themselves as Baptist, and 2 members attend a non-denominational church. Most of the attendees have been Christians for more than eight years or longer. Seven (7) of the participants are lay members in their church and the other six (6) are ministry leaders in their congregations. This demographic information was gathered through a survey¹⁶ that was administered during the first Healing Circle at ECBF.

Conducting Healing Circles

Every facilitator leads his or her Healing Circle differently. Therefore, no healing circle is the same and there is no right or wrong way to conduct the experience. However, there are more effective and less effective ways to lead a Healing Circle. In my

¹⁶ See Appendix A

experience, it is most effective if the facilitator has participated as a member of a Healing Circle before leading one. Also as a facilitator, I have an educational background and it is helpful that I can incorporate curriculum design into my leadership of this process. The following is an outline of the curriculum I used to facilitate the Healing Circle for this thesis project, which was comprised of these components: Introduction, Ground Rules, Opening Prayer, Small Group, Circle Exercise and Closing prayer.

Each session consisted of introducing the purpose of the specific Healing Circle. We also established ground rules as a group that everyone in attendance agreed to abide by. Every session began with prayer to ask God to direct our time together and heal us. In addition, the Healing Circle was structured to help the group become more familiar with each other, so they would feel comfortable enough to share their own personal story. The word of God says in Revelation 12: 11, "they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony and they loved not their lives unto death." Participants in Healing Circles are able to hear the testimony of others and see that they are not alone. This enables them to connect with each other through their stories and their life experiences. The following is an overview of the Healing Circle sessions I facilitated at Emerald City Bible Fellowship:

The Power of Story

The goal of this first meeting was for the group to hear the stories of others with intentional listening and to be able to stand in their truth to tell their own story. After opening in prayer, I divided the Healing Circle into three small groups. Each group was assigned a narrative to engage with concerning a traumatic African American experience, after which they were responsible to report their findings to HC. The first group read a

passage from a slave, the second group listened to a recording from an ex-slave, and the third group read an article about Black mothers who lost their sons due to police brutality. After the small groups met, each person was instructed to take fifteen minutes to fill out the “Body Worksheet” individually.¹⁷ Afterwards, the group re-convened and the HC opened with these prompts: Tell the story of the person's body that you were assigned in your small group. What story does your body tell? Using the Body Worksheet how does your personal story and the story assigned to your small group sound similar or different? The following is an overview of how this Healing Circle session was structured:

Session 1: The Power of Story

Circle Purpose: Sharing and hearing the Stories of our Bodies

- Survey, Sign-in, & Greeting-10mins
- Intro 15mins
 - Why we are here? Circle Purpose
 - Explain PTSD
 - Prayer
 - Group rules
- Small Groups -20mins
- Break-5mins.
- Fill out Body Worksheets- 15mins
- Closing Circle Discussion – 30mins

Session 2: Meditation on God’s Truth

This session is an intentional follow-up to the previous Healing Circle on the power of story. It is my belief that after hearing the stories of our ancestors and hearing the stories of other participants, it is even more important to hear God's story about us. It is my observation that we as Christians rarely use our imagination. We may use our imagination to lust, to worry and to dream but we do not use our imagination to engage with God. We bring value to the unheard stories; however, we must also ask, “What does God say about us? This type of spiritual reflection happens during the meditation time in

¹⁷ See Appendix B

Healing Circles.

After introducing the purpose of this healing circle, reviewing the ground rules, and opening in prayer, I guided the group through their first mediation exercise. I begin by explaining that some Christians are turned off by meditation because it is not largely taught about in the local church. Meditation seems to be a taboo subject; however, I assure them that it is definitely a spiritual discipline that needs to be exercised more often when done biblically. Meditation has the ability to strengthen our belief system through the transformation of God's word. I explained that the scriptural understanding of meditation is to turn your attention solely on God, based on the following scriptures:

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Philippians 4:8

"I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds." Psalm 77:12

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua 1:8

"On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate." Psalms 145:5

Once a biblical foundation for this practice has been established, I dimmed the lights and instructed everyone to get comfortable and remove all distractions. Each person was asked to close his or her eyes and imagine the trauma they've experienced in their bodies being placed in God's hands. Specifically, I instructed them to picture God with his arms outstretched welcoming them with the trauma from their past and present. I also made it clear that if this was their first time meditating or using their imagination in this way, there was no need to be afraid. I assured them by saying, "If this feels childlike you're in the perfect place. The Holy Spirit is leading this time for each person, revealing his or her area of need."

As they sat in the Healing Circle, the song “O Come to the Alter” by Elevation Worship played softly in the background as I asked them to ponder the question, “What areas does God need to heal in your body or in your story?” The song invites people into the presence of God by acknowledging their pain. The lyrics are as follows:

*Are you hurting and broken within
Overwhelmed by the weight of the sin
Jesus is calling
Have you come to the end of yourself
Do you thirst for a drink from the well
Jesus is calling*

*O come to the altar
The Father's arms are open wide
Forgiveness was bought with
The precious blood of Jesus Christ.
Leave behind your regrets and mistakes
Come today there's no reason to wait
Jesus is calling
Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy
From the ashes a new life is born
Jesus is calling.*

*Oh what a savior
Isn't he wonderful
Sing hallelujah
Christ is risen
Bow down before him
For he is Lord of all
Sing hallelujah, Christ is risen*

*O come to the altar
The Father's arms are open wide
Forgiveness was bought with
The precious blood of Jesus Christ
Bear your cross as you wait for the crown
Tell the world of the treasure you've found¹⁸*

After a significant time of individual meditation, the participants were given the opportunity to share their experience with the group if they felt comfortable. Everyone shared their honest feelings of their pain that God was addressing during the mediation

¹⁸ Elevation Worship Lyrics: O Come To The Altar, (Lyrics) May 2018,
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/elevationworship/ocometothealtar.html>

time.

We ended by reviewing scripture that are written on index cards and are rotated around the circle slowly. The scriptures are focused on "What does God says about us?" and after the scriptures have made a full rotation around the circle. The exercise is complete and participants have a sense of closure. The following gives an overview of how this specific Healing Circle was structured:

Session 2: What is God's story over us through Meditation

Circle Purpose: What does God say about us and what is his truth?

- Intro, Icebreaker, Go over the rules-10mins.
- Review last week's circle on stories-10mins.
- Meditation exercise- 15mins.
- Circle Discussion on meditation exercise-30mins.
- 5mins. Break
- Scripture exercise- 20mins.
- Circle Discussion on scripture exercise-30mins

Summary of Healing Circles

A summary outline of each of the remaining Healing Circles in this six-week series is described below, including the purpose for each session and its basic structure:

Session 3: How Do We Forgive?

Circle Purpose: Dealing with anger, bitterness, and un-forgiveness

- Review Rules & Prayer – 5mins
- Debrief from last class & Check in-30min.
- Break-10mins
- Scripture Exercise on anger, bitterness, and un-forgiveness-20mins
- Circle Discussion- 30mins

Session 4. Help us to forgive!!!

Circle Purpose: Understanding the importance of forgiveness

- Review Rules & Prayer – 5mins
- Debrief from last week & Check in- 30mins
- Break- 10mins
- Watched a video on forgiveness-30mins.
- Circle Discussion-30mins.
 - Homework:
 - See play @ECBF "A Blues for Charlie"
 - Watch Dr. Brenda's YOUTUBE

Session 5: Reconciliation

Circle Purpose: How do we build trust and come together? Why it's important?

- Review Rules, Survey & Prayer – 15mins
- Circle Discussion on the Play: -30mins
 - A Blues for Charlie
 - Dr. Brenda's YouTube
- Break – 5mins
- Lecture from Dr. Brenda – 25mins.
- Circle Discussion on Dr. Brenda's Lecture- 20mins

Session 6: The Lack of trust, vulnerability, and authentic

Circle Purpose: Understanding the historical disconnection between races

- Review Rules, Survey & Prayer – 15mins.
 - Debrief last class/Homework- 20mins.
 - Break- 5mins.
 - Discussion on the history of distrust, danger and Chaos - 15mins.
- Vs.
- Video on (The importance of trust, vulnerability, and comfort vs. safety) - 20mins.
 - Closing Circle -30mins.

The Need for Sabbath

The Healing Circle at Emerald City Bible Fellowship revealed the need to incorporating Sabbath and self-care into the curriculum. In the future, I would include more scripture in the weekly practice of the Healing Circle on this topic. Reflection questions such as, “Do you include Sabbath as a part of your weekly schedule? Where have you incorporated Sabbath and why? Do you believe you deserve self-care and why? How could you create more space for self-care to be a regular part of your schedule?” It is my hope that this would aid the healing process for participants in Healing Circles.

Conclusion

Healing the Disconnection

Through leading the Healing Circle at Emerald City Bible Fellowship (ECBF), I learned that I was not adequately prepared for the heavy emotion that would linger in the room with us. I did not know how to turn those intense emotional reactions into positive energy. Therefore, to become a more effective facilitator, I attended a specialized training on healing circles in March 2018 led by Seroem Phoung. Seroem has been leading and training Healing Circles nationally for more than 20 years and is the CEO of Point One North Consulting.

The Point One North Consulting training focused on the importance of operating out a place of wholeness in order to pursue justice more effectively. He explained that activists and advocates for equality, justice, and inclusion often find themselves fighting from an unhealthy place of anger. During the training, there were solutions offered to address this issue that I had not previously considered. As a result of this training and the guidance from Seroem, who has since become my mentor, I am able to better understand and manage the emotional reactivity of those who are participating in the Healing Circles I conduct.

In addition, I also furthered my understanding of Healing Circles by visiting the continent of Africa with Seattle Pacific Seminary in the summer of 2017. We were there specifically to attend the Chamwino Music Festival in Tanzania, East Africa under the expert guidance of Dr. Kedmon Mapana. Dr. Mapana is an ethnomusicologist and global scholar, who organizes this yearly music festival to encourage Tanzanians to embrace

and honor their traditional music.

While there, I learned that healing circles are also conducted in Africa. They are not led formally, but informally, through performances expressed through song, dance, instruments, film, photo, and dress. I saw how these are not just performances but healing circles taking place indirectly. I felt the intimacy that was shared as an audience member watching these powerful performances. I tried to capture the beauty and spirituality of my experience by writing the words and imagery of the following poem:

Swayed bodies
 Moving me to dance
 In my heart the music
 Speaks to my soul
 I'm quietly listening to God within me
 This is not a performance this is my altar

By attending the festival, I was more aware of my history and the correlation between African-Americans and the arts. When Africans were enslaved and brought to America on ships, they created music to express their deep pain, despair, agony, trauma and sorrow. Later as slaves, African Americans picked cotton and created music under arduous conditions in the fields. Even in freedom, music has been a great escape for most blacks as expressed through genres like gospel, blues, and jazz. While in Tanzania, I saw that there is a healing power in the arts that provides a safe space and the opportunity for Africans and African Americans to hear and share in each other's stories. This process is very similar to what happens in Healing Circles.

Identity Crisis

In addition to my experience at the Chamwino Music Festival, there were other interactions in Africa that drastically changed my perspective. One of them was with a

young man named Selisha Davis. He is the founder and director of Soul-Expressions, an organization in Kampala, Uganda that gives young people a positive outlet to express themselves creatively in their own community. While traveling on a bus for hours, Davis and I discussed our experiences of Africa. I told him that the trip was challenging for me because, at times, I did not feel welcomed. I explained that my expectations for my first trip to Africa were high! I thought my experience would bring me a spiritual sense of identity and belonging. However, there were many times when I felt disconnected. My experience of Africa is captured in the words of the following poem that I wrote while on the trip:

Where do I belong?
 Disjointed
 Disfigured
 *
 I am too American to be African
 Too African to be American
 I'm torn between two distance places
 Searching for home, but my home is in the unknown
 The un-findable
 Can you trace me back?
 To a people,
 To a land,
 To a language,
 A tradition,
 A dance,
 A song, a drum
 Do you know me? Do you recognize where I belong??
 Will you claim me as yours?
 Because I am searching for home,
 But I am too American to be African and
 Too African to American

After sharing with Davis my feelings of displacement while in Africa, he then shared his story with me. Selisha explained that as a boy he was trained to hate himself. Africans were taught to hate everything about themselves from their colonizers. They were taught to hate their faith, their God, their hair, their food, their fashion, their skin complexion, their history, their ancestors, their teachings, their dances, their drum, and

their music. He was also taught, from the time he was a young boy, that white people were to be respected, honored, and aspired to. In contrast, Africans were criticized, analyzed and challenged to change their beliefs, habits, and behaviors. Davis said that his people were brainwashed to believe they were never good enough, never smart enough, never strong enough, or never beautiful enough. Therefore, he said, we came to believe that we were simply never enough. He said that he has felt the burden of self-hate many times in his life.

I observed this type of self-hate demonstrated throughout my time in Africa. While in Tanzania, another Black woman and I were with a group of mostly white graduate students from Seattle Pacific Seminary. We both noticed that we were treated differently than the white members of our group. The Caucasians were welcomed with excitement and anticipation into their villages, buildings, and were treated as special guests in most places. However, as Black women, the two of us were seen as their added guests.

This type of treatment continued in Kenya but it was even worse in South Africa, where I went to participate in an internship at a local high school. While there, several young, black women admitted to me that their aspiration was to be white. In addition, I experienced daily challenges such as being served last to my white counterparts and receiving advice from other women encouraging me to marry a white man. There was such praise and an aspiration towards Europeans. Contrastingly, there was such a lack of self-love that I literally found it to be terrifying. However, I was more upset, angry, and hurt by the disrespect Europeans displayed toward Africans. My African sisters and brothers seemed to be used to this type of treatment, but I was not, so I tried to capture

my feeling in the words of the following short poem:

They walk as strangers in their own land
 The indigenous people walk
 Others walk in arrogance claiming territories that do not belong to them
 They are pretenders
 Yet they are walking
 They walk strong in their wrong

Seeking Solutions

After talking with Davis about the problems African's face, the conversation moved towards solutions. Davis believes in the importance of the fine arts; he believes that art has the ability to heal the wounds of the African community. He says trauma can be healed through dancing, drumming, singing, acting, and even sports. Through physical movement, people are able to produce a creative, vulnerable, and authentic atmosphere. Soul Expression has helped countless youth learn how to “explore-create-share,” which is the motto of this nonprofit, community-based, organization. It has also created a group for women, who have been victimized and traumatized as a result of war, rape and other horrible experiences. They are finding emotional freedom and healing through a drumming group that Davis created. A young student shared about the transformative power of Soul Expression when they wrote:

“As a young person, I was very shy growing up but football was the only way I could speak to other people without saying a word or having any fear of failure or judgment. It gave me power and confidence and a feeling of belonging”.¹⁹

After visiting Africa, I now know that Healing Circles are not only valuable for African Americans in the United States, they are also important for African people.

Although my experiences as an African American is different than that of a person born

¹⁹ Soul-Xpressions. <http://soul-xpressions.org/about/> (Website) May 2018.

and raised in Africa, there are similarities that we share. One is our struggle, our pain and the hurt that we have endured as a people. Another is the process by which we bring our people to healing.

I believe that Africans and African Americans have swallowed our emotions long enough! Our ancestors taught us how to contain our emotions for survival; however, we are free now and we have the privilege to feel, to express, and to heal ourselves fully. Healing can come in many forms but I believe that Healing Circles are one of the most powerful ways to begin the restorative work of healing when it is facilitated properly. I believe this because there is power in actively listening to each other's stories and there is power in sharing our truth. Healing occurs when everyone participates. It's like a chorus of stories simultaneously healing each other through familiarity, vulnerability, honesty, and triumph. When a safe space is formed in an unsafe world people are drawn to this type of environment. This is the type of atmosphere we achieved in the Healing Circle at ECBF in the summer of 2016.

The women and men who participated in this process reported that they are more able to open up and speak their truth because an authentic environment was cultivated for them to practice these skills. The healing circle participants also reported that they felt relief because they were able to identify with the experiences of others through sharing their stories. Some said that it was a space where they could get the chaos out of their brains and bodies. This project revealed that having a safe place to express, feel, connect, identify, share and receive is essential to the healing of African Americans.

As a result of this thesis project, I am convinced that God wants our healing and is the author of this Spirit-led, restorative process we now call "Healing Circles." Although

there may be many ways to heal the wounds of un-forgiveness and injustice, it is my belief that true reconciliation only comes to full fruition through the work of the Holy Spirit. The skills introduced, accrued and practiced through Healing Circles are based on a biblical and spiritual foundation that gives people a pathway to true healing and restoration. While this thesis project was specifically focused on the Black community, Healing Circles do not just benefit Africans and African-Americans. This type of healing is beneficial for all people because God wants all people to flourish and reach their full God-given potential.

Appendix A

Healing Circle Survey

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this confidential survey. Findings will be used to help develop a ministry of reconciliation for this local church.

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Do you identify as male or female?
4. What ethnicity do you identify as?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. What church do you attend?
7. What is your church's denomination?
8. How long have you been a member of this church?
 - ☐ More than 8 years
 - ☐ 4 to 7 years
 - ☐ 3 to 6 years
 - ☐ Less than 2 years
9. What is your role in this local church?
 - ☐ Lay Member
 - ☐ Ministry Leader _____(specify)
 - ☐ Pastoral Staff
 - ☐ Administrative Staff _____(specify)
 - ☐ Other _____(specify)
10. Would you identify yourself as a Christian? Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, for how long have you been a Christian?
11. In your own words what do you consider the purpose of your church?

12. How much (should add up to 100%) is this church involved in the following:

- ____ % - Teaching/Training
 ____ % - Preaching
 ____ % - Evangelizing
 ____ % - Ministry/Service Projects
 ____ % - Other: _____ (specify)
100 %

12. How would you describe the racial climate of this local church? (Check one)

- ☐ Very Affirming
☐ Affirming
☐ Somewhat Affirming
☐ Tolerant
☐ Negative/Conflictual

13. How important are race relations to you as a member of this church?

- ☐ Very Important
☐ Important
☐ Somewhat Important
☐ Unimportant
☐ Not important

14. Below are specific topics please rate the level of importance in you locate church:

- 5-Very Important
 4-Important
 3-Somewhat Important
 2-Unimportant
 1-Not important

____ **Racial Reconciliation** ____ **Evangelism** ____ **Justice and Equity**

____ **Community Outreach** ____ **Education & Career** ____ **Racial Reconciliation**

____ **Church Tradition** ____ **Cross-Cultural Experience** ____ **The News**

____ **Christian Education** ____ **Politics** ____ **Mental Health** ____ **Physical Health**

15. Which is the best description of how this church operates? (Please select one)

- ☐ Autocratic (the rule of one)
☐ Democratic (the rule of the people/leadership)
☐ Pneumocratic (the rule of the Holy Spirit)

Appendix B**Body Worksheet**

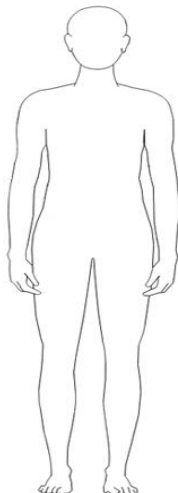
1. Describe how you view your body? What are some negative and positive things you feel about your body?

2. What is the work your body is doing in Community?

3. What do you want people to know most about your body?

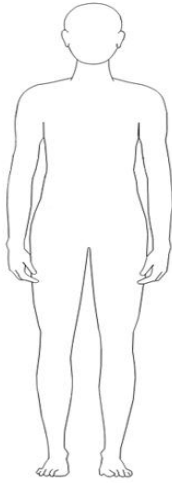
4. Circle three areas on the body below where you feel most uncomfortable in society?

And why?:



5. Circle three areas on the body below where you need healing?

And why?:



6. What body from last week do you most identify with? And why?

7. Do you have a story to share about your body?

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