

Forgiveness For America's Original Sin

When I was in my mid-twenties, I decided to go to counseling to process through some of my issues. I decided to go because I didn't have sustained joy in my life. I had happy moments, but they were just that—moments. Honestly, I was highly functional and to others, my life was the basic run of the mill existence that should be expected. However, that wasn't good enough for me. I wanted more, better, and something lasting. We talked about a lot of stuff in counseling—relationships, boundaries, my choices, not being bound by other people's opinion and the like. Counseling really served to empower me to take control of my life and happiness. What I was looking for was not coming from an outside source. The validation that I needed wasn't coming from other people. I had to be healed spiritually and emotionally and that was going to be an inside job.

Then it happened. I experienced this great breakthrough and I was happy again. I actually stayed happy. I remember going to my counselling session with this renewed vigor and zeal for life. My counselor longed to discover what had happened. I had forgiven. I took off the anger-painted glasses and stopped looking for others to fix my life. Forgiveness released the people who had screwed me over from the obligation to fix me. Truth is they couldn't fix it. They couldn't mend my heart, redeem lost time, or restore the trust. While plenty of people had a role in my brokenness, none of them were able to restore me. When I forgave them, they were released from the expectation to heal me. That made room for God through the Holy Spirit to repair as only He could. It made me a better woman ready for healthy relationships and prosperity because of it.

So, one of my biggest takeaways from counselling was that the people who broke you—abandoned, abused, lied, cheated, molested, or misused you—cannot actually fix you; they cannot undo what they have done. They can try, be remorseful, and even change their ways, but they cannot repair the damage. That is just the way it works and there is no way around it. If you want wholeness, peace, love, and joy, it has got to be an inside job. If you want to be free, you must release your abuser from the responsibility of fixing you.

So, it is 2015 and every time we hear of an unarmed Black man being killed at the hands of the police, it conjures up memories of America's sorted past

with her black citizenry. We remember America's original sin—racism—that oppressed a nation of people. Black America has endured slavery, lynching, intimidation, Jim Crow, police brutality, mass incarceration, and systemic injustice at the hands of her own country. Today, there is a cry for justice and healing rising up in the Black community. Private citizens have taken up the call to police the police by recording every interaction with law enforcement. There have been marches and protest; the justice department is doing investigations. Yet, there is still a missing link in this path to renewal for the African-American community.

If racism is America's original sin, Black America's original sin is unforgiveness. We do not want to talk about it, but it is hard to ignore the fruit of this bitter root. Recently, during the Baltimore protest, I heard a refrain from the news commentators; "The young people here are angry." I don't deny that people have a reason to be angry, but never moving past our place of anger, only hinders the healing process.

No amount of legislation or even reparations can resurrect our dead, restore broken families or mend our hearts. There is a healing that must take place in the Black community that all America's wealth cannot purchase. Congress cannot pass a bill that guarantees peace and wholeness for the Black community. We must take it upon ourselves to facilitate our needed healing. America cannot fix it; only when we release her from that responsibility can God come in and heal us. We must forgive.

Forgiveness is not a whitewashing of history. Nor is it sitting in a circle singing Kum Ba Ya. It is not denying our pain but recognizing it. It is time for Black America to get painfully honest. We should name America's offenses one by one and name the effects it has had on us. But, this is not a list to be broadcast on every news outlet per se, but let it be spoken in our prayers. Let it be the list of things that we decide to forgive America for. Then, we should ask God to heal us from the residual effects of these offenses. And, while we are being honest, this would be a good time for us to repent of our own sins. Sometimes, the way we respond in our pain can be just as grievous as the origin of our pain. In our frustration with America, we have also let ourselves down a time or two by our own actions. We have allowed destructive behavior and ideologies to flourish in our communities. If we are calling people to the carpet for wrongdoings that have negatively affected our community, we must also call ourselves into accountability if we want to see healing and restoration in our communities. Then, we have to forgive ourselves, extending grace and forgiveness to each other.

Yes, America still has some work to do regarding her original sin of racism, but that does not prevent us from doing our work.

To see communities transformed, renewal must come from our own hands. Yes,

America still has some work to do regarding her original sin of racism, but that does not prevent us from doing our work. Sure, protest and decry injustice in all its forms until righteousness washes over this great nation like the ocean's tide. Refuse to believe restoration and validation lies in someone else's hands. Choose to change, regardless of the actions or inaction of the rest of the nation. It is worth the effort and work it requires for our community to achieve wholeness. We must take up the cause of this inside job.