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Understanding Our Implicit Bias is the First Step Toward Vital Conversations

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"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to the error that counts..."

-Nikki Giovanni

As we begin to remove bricks from the wall of racism, we are finding that this process is not an easy one, nor is it for the faint of heart. Every brick is mired in over 400 years of

slavery, 12 years of reconstruction, 100 years of 'Jim Crow' laws, 86 years of redlining, and countless actions of hate that have never been reported. It has been only 39 years since the lynching of Michael Donald, by Klansmen on March 21, 1981 in Mobile, Alabama and 18 years since the racist sundowner signs were removed from 71 North in Rogers, or Hwy 10 in Booneville, Arkansas respectively.

To pull at each brick, is to reveal the pain, the suffering, the undeniable testimony of victim's loss. Up until this point, it has all been abstract thoughts, passion-filled comments, and the occasional uncomfortable moment. But now we are taking part in studies, prayer groups, book studies and conversations meant to begin this work at dismantling systemic and systematic racism and people are feeling the pains of growth and understanding.

The General Commission on Race and Religion (GCORR), was created in 1968, to begin the conversation on systemic and systematic racism, develop and provide resources to equip leadership, clergy and congregations with tools to address the different forms of racism. One of the recent studies offered has been a study on "Implicit Bias, what we don't think we think."

Implicit Bias is a study developed through a Harvard initiative; Robin DiAngelo, author of "White Fragility," is a contributor. Its premise is to begin a conversation in recognizing implicit bias, questioning implicit bias and transforming implicit bias.

Understanding our individual implicit bias is the beginning of having vital conversations regarding cultural differences and finding intercultural competency, to dismantle policies and practices that prevent conversations and actions focused on institutional, and cultural equity. It is a first step to having deeper discussions on how cultural diversity, ethnic issues and implicit biases translate into words, thoughts, impressions, and belief systems, which leads to actions, and structures. This ultimately forms larger issues such as systemic and systematic racism. As the group collectively immersed itself in varying degrees, one thing became clear, "We were no longer in Kansas anymore."

With each brick, a new bias is revealed. With each revelation comes the uncomfortability of ownership and responsibility. The weight of history, self-identity, confidence, entitlement, questioning and faith, all align into a perfect wave of anguish, guilt, anxiety and expectation. The knee-jerk reaction is to deflect, deny, minimize or even run from the raw reality of these difficult conversations and the impact of its effects on people of color either known or unknown. Others have become stymied in their actions, petrified over saying the wrong words or making a mistake. Still others will venture into this moment, trying to figure out how or what to do, and in doing so stumble, fumble and sometimes say the wrong words. Feeling the awkwardness of questions relating to the process of self-awareness which has taken hold of the moment, who honestly are concerned about doing the work. To those, I share the words of Nikki Giovanni, who said,

"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to the error that counts."

In other words, as the bricks of racism are removed, there will be some hard and difficult times ahead. Instead of thinking about the strain and tension you face, lean into this moment of vulnerability, and embrace this transforming moment. God does not move within the parameter of our assured actions, or expectations, but in our lack of, so that we and others know that it is by God's grace, authority, power and love we are transformed.

Remember God's word, in John 3:16 which says,

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

To all who are seizing this moment to lean into the space of vulnerability, I say keep up the good fight. To everyone else, I say, "Heaven is watching..."

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