



RACE, DISCRIMINATION, AND STRESS IN THE CHURCH FAMILY

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Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to:
 - **Define** race, race-based stress, discrimination
 - **Understand** how race and one's experience of race might intersect with their faith
 - **Identify** ways for pastoral leaders to intervene when approached for guidance when one experiences race-based discrimination
 - **Identify** ways congregant members might respond to pastoral intervention
 - **Apply** themes discussed to personal life



STORY TIME





PASTOR DEAL AND GAYLA



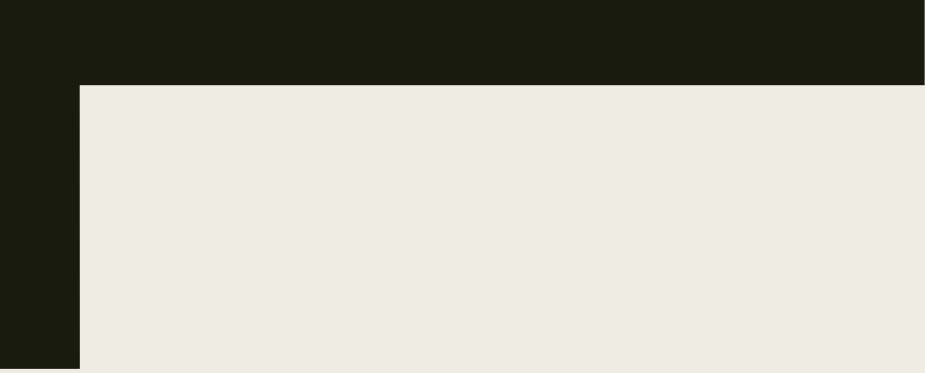

PASTOR JONES





SAILING THROUGH STORMS

- Addressing racism and discrimination in the church community requires the ability to sail through storms
- Church leadership could not have predicted the turbulence of today's sociopolitical waters
 - Presidential elections of Obama and Trump
 - Protests over the killing of Black persons
 - January 6th
 - Responses to Covid-19

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- “New fractures are forming within the American evangelical movement, fractures that do not run along the usual regional, denominational, ethnic, or political lines. Couples, families, friends, and congregants once united in their commitment to Christ are now dividing over seemingly irreconcilable views of the world. They are not merely dividing but becoming incomprehensible to one another.”
–Timothy Dalrymple, CEO of Christianity today
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Fractures



Can Unity be Found?

Paul speaks directly to ethnic divisions in the church

He reminds us that Christ is our peace

He reminds us that Christ has demolished any barriers and walls of hostility



DEFINITIONS

- Race
 - Used by society to categorize people based on perceived shared physical traits
- Sometimes, this categorization can create behaviors, thoughts, or feelings called **racism**
 - Behavior...that is based on the belief in the superiority of one group of people and the inferiority of another (APA, 2021b, 12)

- **Discrimination** (APA, 2021b)

- Occurs when racial groups are seen as or treated as inferior compared to others based on distinctive characteristics (i.e., race, gender, age, sexual orientation)

- Stress experienced from this less-than treatment can result in negative psychological consequences like **race-related stress** (Pierterse & Carter, 2007)

- A form of race-related stress, a reaction to dangerous events, and real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination is called **racial trauma** (Mosley et al., 2020)



PASTORAL RESPONSE



Feeling Unprepared



**Cultural Humility as Spiritual
Formation**

Listen to Hear, Not Respond

Empathize Well

Focus on the Wounded, not the Offender

Feeling Unprepared



Let's be honest...



Rest assured!

Race and ethnicity appear throughout the biblical narrative (Swanson, 2020)

- Abraham and his descendants' encounters with non-Jewish nations
- The great vision of every nation, tribe, and people coming before the throne and the Lamb of God in Revelation

Cultural Humility

- Describes engagement with another person that honors and values their unique constellation of identities such as ethnicity, race, gender, and socioeconomic status
- Jesus modeled this way of relating to others by being other-oriented rather than self-focused (Hook et al., 2017)
 - He expressed interest in the cultural background of those with whom He interacted
- Trying to engage sensitively and with humility can feel overwhelming



Listen to *Hear*, not Respond

- “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (James 1:19)
- We have our own opinions and likely listen through our own filter
- General rule: the family or congregant should do most of the talking
 - This emphasizes the ministry of *presence*
- If the opposite is done, it may prove difficult to empathize the shared racial experience



Empathize Well (and Deeply)

- **Empathy** is the ability to enter into another person's experience, feel what they may feel, imagine what they may be going through, and then articulate their pain back to them so they feel understood
- **We must be able and willing to sit with someone else's pain**
- The opposite of spiritual bypass



Empathy Missteps

- “A faithful, cross-shaped ministry means one must be willing to sit in the grave with a person for at least a little while before jumping too quickly to the resurrection.”
- Quick to forgiveness
 - Forgiveness is *not* denying what others have done is harmful or minimizing one’s pain
 - Forgiveness is *not* the same as forgetting
 - Forgiveness is *not* acting as if everything is okay (Touissaint and Williams, 2015)



REGGIE AND MARCOS

Focus on the Wounded, not the Offender



When the Offender has fully acknowledged the feelings of hurt and pain experienced by the Wounded through empathy, the Offender can apologize for both the act and impact of the action



This process allows the Wounded to say where he/she hurt and why, for the transgressor to be held accountable, and for a path forward to be constructed



CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

- 
- Separation/Disharmony
 - Unity
 - Current Crises

Separation/ Disharmony


- Inexperienced congregants or staff
 - *Avoid* talking about race and racism
 - *Fearful* the wrong thing might be said
 - Having a more *homogeneous* racial church makeup
- Pointed fingers
- Retreating to safety



Unity

- Acknowledging pain or wrong done and sitting in the tension of hearing another's pain can be incredibly uncomfortable
 - It is human and helpful to acknowledge the discomfort and not having the words to say to make their pain go away
- Committing to move through difficult conversations instead of succumbing to them
- Choosing to listen and demonstrate an empathic posture





Current Crises Due to Racial Upheaval

- Mistrust
 - Anger
 - Misunderstanding
-
- It is your responsibility to understand the backbone of the current crisis as well as the history of its foundation (Wystma, 2019)



LEANING OUT OF AVOIDANCE
AND INTO DISCOMFORT



PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- Self- preparation
- Ephesians 6:12
- Fruits of the Spirit
- Wise Counsel





Preparing Yourself

- Learn to engage in spiritual disciplines that enable you to sit with your discomfort
- Familiarize yourself with books of lament in the Bible
 - A Psalm of lament (Psalm 10)
 - A Psalm of lament (Psalm 22)
 - Jeremiah 20: 7-18

Psalm 20

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.

May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings.

May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.

May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the Lord grant all your requests.

Now this I know: the Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.

Lord, give victory to the king! Answer us when we call!

Jeremiah 20: 7-18

(v 11-12)

But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten.

Lord Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Recognize Spiritual Warfare

- Satan is alive and well and works to steal, kill and destroy
- Recognize that racism and bigotry are a part of the devil's schemes to hurt and divide humanity and the church
- Be emboldened to enter into discussions with prayer and intention

Fruits of the Spirit

- Appreciate how spiritual formation into Christlikeness (or lack thereof) significantly impacts our ability to minister effectively to families experiencing racial stress and trauma
- Fruit of the spirit can provide individuals who have experienced race and racism with the comfort they need, in a way that is healing and affirming
- Fruit of the spirit empowers us to be a healing presence for those wounded by racism



Seek Wise Counsel

- Develop relational connections with those who are wise, supportive, and knowledgeable about current and past racial issues
- Be in intentional fellowship with others who understand the unique stressors you might be facing, as a minister and otherwise
- Connect with others on the journey of learning how to best serve those suffering the consequences of racism
- Consider exploring city-wide church networks or your denomination's efforts, as many have racial justice or reconciliation groups with resources available

Suggested Four Step Process

1

Validate and honor the person's feelings and emotions

- Empathize with pain

2

Externalize racial stressors the person or family is facing

3

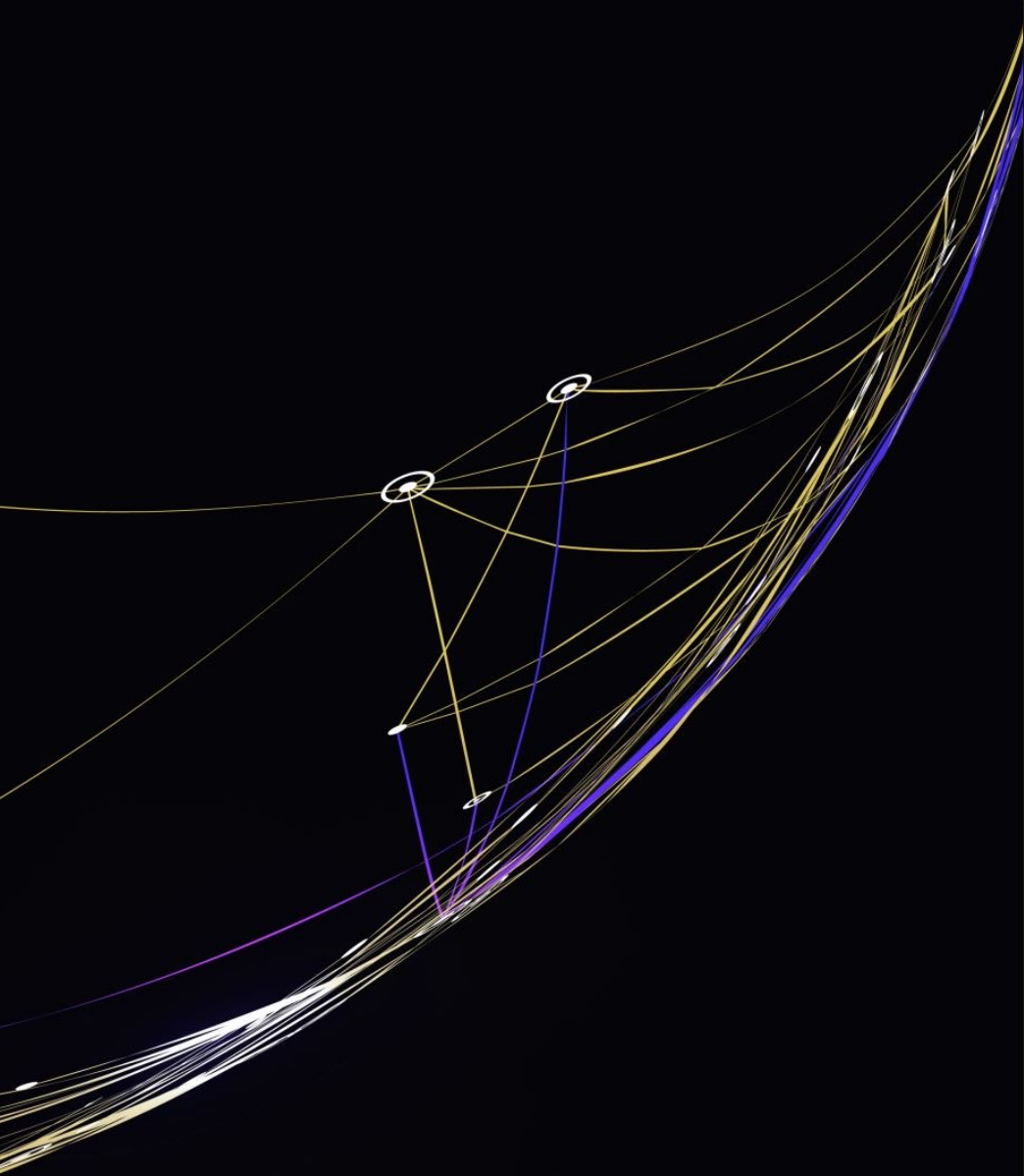
Use cultural humility to celebrate the unique strengths and assets of cultural heritage

4

Help people and families re-narrate their stories

- Place their story in the larger biblical narrative of how God is redeeming a broken world

- What resonated with you? Why?
- What was a major takeaway?
- How do you see yourself utilizing any of the information presented today?
- How might this benefit your church/ministry leaders?



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS



Joshua 1:8

- Step boldly into this storm journey with the tools provided
- Enter difficult dialogues courageously
- Embrace discomfort without fear
- Trust that the Lord your God, who entrusted these individuals to you, will be with you on this journey whether calm or stormy seas, wherever your conversations may go

The background is a light-colored, slightly blurred image of a library shelf filled with books. A large, solid black L-shaped graphic is positioned on the left and bottom edges of the image, framing the central text.

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