

Race, Justice, and Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

Pete Scazzero

The events of recent days have compelled me to speak out about the daily pain of racism inflicted on our African American brothers and sisters, along with other people of color. I do so as a White evangelical pastor who led a large, multiracial church for twenty-six years and who now leads Emotionally Healthy (EH) Discipleship.

EH Discipleship was birthed, in part, from the failures and pains I experienced while trying to bridge racial, economic, gender and cultural barriers in New Life Fellowship in Queens, NYC. Those experiences forced me to grow up, study, and to be mentored in order to confront the racism in my own life first. We then developed tools, along with a wider biblical theology, that helped us as a community to have conversations about race and justice that were hard, but ultimately healing and transformative. They continue to shape how New Life, with over 75 nations represented, remains a thriving, multiracial, reconciling community today.

Racism is sinful, as are the systems and structures which enable and support it. It denigrates people made in God's image and denies that Jesus Christ died to unite a broken humanity into a new unified humanity (Eph. 2:14-16). It also diminishes our witness for Jesus in the world.

That is why I do not believe we can grow into spiritually and emotionally mature disciples if we do not address the effects of racism and prejudice in and around us. In fact, a core characteristic of an emotionally healthy church is that the culture we build is safe for people of every race and culture, where we look at people different than us and say, without words, "You're beautiful. You're valuable. You're unrepeatable."

All too often, churches and pastors with power and privilege, like myself, have failed to speak out because we fear offending the people we lead or the communities in which we live. But I urge you to speak up against racism, applying the practices and tools of EH Discipleship. For example:

- ***Commit more deeply to practice silence and solitude*** so you can lead from a deep sense of God's call and can offer highly differentiated leadership. You will need freedom from the fear of people's anger or rejection as you address complex issues and differences.
- ***Master the EH Relationships Skills so you can have hard conversations*** with people and can equip others to have them with one another. Speaking clearly and honestly, having clean and not dirty fights, clarifying expectations, listening to people as "Thou's" not "It's," – to name a few – are musts for when your community has these conversations.

- **Apply the power of the genogram to break negative family scripts around race and culture.** Genograms have a critical application to break the negative legacies of the past in our families, our country, and our churches. We do not want to transmit our negative scripts to the next generation.
- **Model weakness and vulnerability.** Begin with personal confession before leading corporate confession. Acknowledge your sins and failures in the areas of race and justice so that the people you lead see what honesty and integrity look like. Go first in being a learner, acknowledging mistakes, and asking for forgiveness.
- **Embrace the enormous grief and loss around you** by addressing your own griefs and losses first. As Henri Nouwen said, “The degree to which we grieve our own losses is the degree to which others experience us as compassionate.” Absorbing our own pain, we are able to enter the pain of others.
- **Make love the ultimate measure of spiritual maturity** in your community. Jesus surely did and love always covers a multitude of sins and mistakes. (And I have surely made more than my share!).
- **Slow down for a sustainable ministry.** This commitment to racial reconciliation and justice is a way of life, not a short-term project. So do the ministry in such a way that you will remain faithful over the next thirty or forty years. A solid Sabbath practice and a Rule of Life, for example, have kept me in the game for the long-haul.

At Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, we will be taking several action steps as well:

- With over 200,000 downloads a month in the Emotionally Healthy Leader podcast, we will dedicate the next few weeks to issues of race, injustice, and EH Discipleship. We will also have webinars with Q & A for you to come with specific questions and concerns. (Feel free to send your questions in advance to info@emotionallyhealthy.org).
- Pray for our team as we enter a discernment process on how we can come alongside pastors so they can apply the gifts of EH Discipleship, more effectively, to address racism and injustice, and truly build prophetic, multiracial communities for Christ.

Thanks for listening,

Pete Scazzero