

Racial Diversity, Part 1

By Bryan Loritts

It's a place that was a major hub of slavery, the fact they've got a street in downtown Memphis called Auction Street, and there you can see on those historical plaques where they used to auction slaves there, the mentality is still an old traditional mentality. My wife and I joined a club there called the Racquet Club. We joined there for many reasons. One of them was they offer a ridiculous discount to pastors, and it's one of the few perks of being a pastor. And we joined there and quickly realized we were the only minorities there who weren't working there. And I saw the way the members treated the African-Americans there and had to leave. There's a couple of country clubs that do not permit African-Americans. Of course, they don't say that. But if a white person were to go to join, they may charge them a ten thousand dollar initiation fee. If I were to go to join, they charge me about one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand dollar initiation fee.

So you have that kind of stuff going on in the city, entrenched in racism, entrenched in traditionalism. And as we sat down and said where, what place? And this country needs a church that embodies that that embodies diversity and racial reconciliation. We said Memphis, Tennessee. And so that's why we're there now. Let me ask you a question. Let me open up the floor here. If you were starting a church and your goal like ours is to be a racially diverse and reconciled church, what would be some of the major decisions you would have to make right off the bat in

order to see that happen? Yes, location. That's good. I saw another hand over here and I see one over here. The same thing. Location.

Yes, in the back. What kind of people you're going to have on staff by that you mean is a staff diverse? Yes, good. Yeah, worship style. Great. You can say the same thing. Someone else.

What are the major decisions would you make? Yes. OK, yeah, what kind of people would the location attract? So is it in a poorer neighborhood or more of a middle class kind of a deal? Yeah, that's great. Huh, denomination, that's huge, no. Yes, prayer, that's huge, definitely, yes, in the back. What kind of worship, huh? Any other thoughts on that? Yeah, definitely, definitely. Any others? OK, now can I probe you can I ask you a little bit more detailed question, what kind of environment specifically would you try to create to be diverse specifically among African-Americans and whites to begin with in a city like Memphis. You get put in your time, your demographic study relationship studies hang out with them. Mm hmm. Yes. Yeah, definitely, definitely. Here's what we've done and you guys have really hit it all, all great responses.

What we've said is, first of all, if we're going to be a church that embodies racial reconciliation and if we experience our desire of diversity, it's a no brainer. Got to have a diverse staff. You have to have it, you know, part of me even gets a little frustrated when I see corporations or churches or academic institutions, you know, express it as a value. But if you look at their leadership. It's just not there and leadership is huge, and so you've got to get is it required text here for any class?

Good to great. It's a great book. Everybody should read it. He talks about Jim Collins getting the right people on the bus and you've got to have the right people on the bus, so to speak, people who can really embody diversity. Now, along those lines, they did an interesting study recently. Guy did a study and he looked at all the racially diverse churches throughout the country and he noticed that they fell in either one of two categories. Either they had white leadership and were charismatic. Or they were conservative and had African-American leadership. Very, very interesting. So pretty much what the guy said, based on our studies, if you want to do a racially diverse church that's conservative, you got to have African-American leadership.

And so we've sent down our Fellowship Bible model of leadership is typically based on the other fellowship Bible churches. It's a management team approach, which means there's not one specific head guy. It's sort of like a partnership at a law firm, although you do have a senior partner, but without the senior partner. What we've said recently was the guys came to me and said, if we're going to make this happen, Brian, you've got to be the point guard on this. You've got to be the quote unquote head guy. And so I've been and I went into it say, man, I'll be one of five guys on the team to now being the lead guy at our church and them saying, if we want to make this happen, we've got to be able to do it. The other thing I would say, a lot of people say they want to experience diversity. They want to experience reconciliation, build a kind of hip words, hot words today. But not too many people are really willing to pay the price to see that happen.

I've had some already existing churches come to me and say no, how do we start to see that happen in our church? I said, well, you've got to start messing with some sacred cows like music. And not too many churches are really willing to pay the price to make that happen. And so we're in a search right now for specifically an African-American or Latino worship pastor. We're not looking for a guy who will do all Kirk Franklin or Sully, kind of a hip hop kind of a style. But we're not looking strictly for the Maranatha style of it either. We need someone a little bit of soul, a little bit of louris seasoning salt on there, a little bit of flavor to it.

What's Louris? If you don't know what Louris is? I'm sorry. So we're looking for for someone with a little bit of flavor who can bridge who can bridge cultures, who can bridge cultures as far as location goes. Here's what we've decided to do in Memphis. Originally, we were in a lower socioeconomic section of town and we stepped back and said, because our body right now we're 95 percent white, middle to upper middle class. And we said at the at the rate we're growing, we're going to have is a church that gets the label of the rich white people helping the poor black people. We don't want that in the beginning stages, we want this, so we're now moving out to a section of town that has middle to upper middle class black people in it because we're looking for peer relationships.

We're not looking we're not looking to come in and to be a group of people who merely helps another group someday. We want to get to that, but we really want to we really want to form peer relationships. By the way, I really do believe the biggest barrier in the church is not racial. It's socio economical. I think it's much more difficult to get rich and put whatever race label you want to on rich people. It's much more difficult to get rich people to worship with white people than it is to get middle class African-American people to worship with middle class white people.

I think if you can knock down that socioeconomic barrier, that's huge. And so we're moving and we've made some major changes. I'm the point guy. We're moving and we're all saying this is a value that we're going to we're going to go all out for. And if five years from now we wake up and say, man, it doesn't work or we tried it, we gave it our best shot, at least we can leave saying we tried it, gave it our best shot. We're going to bring in a worship guy who's going to help us bridge bridge cultures and really help us make that happen. The other thing we've really been doing is we've really been casting vision. We've said this is a part of our DNA and we've really said to the 95 percent white in our in our body, we said if we really wanna see racial reconciliation happen, it's got to start with you. And I'll talk about this tomorrow, doing some uncomfortable things, drifting outside of your comfort zone and making some African-American friendships.

And so we've had people who've done some radical stuff in our body. I can think of a couple named Brian and Aaron Crenshaw. They lived out in a section of town known as known as Germantown. It how can I it's kind of a lower scale Hancock Park. It was a real ritzy section of town. They said we're really taking this racial reconciliation thing to heart. They sold their home and they bought a 20 thousand dollar house in a poor community of Memphis called Binghampton.

And they're living there, so this white couple, because they're saying we really want to see this happen and we've got to take ownership of doing some radical radical stuff. So I really think that we're not seeing, you know, the racism of the 50s and 60s today and nobody's burning crosses, really. But I really believe that the kind of racism that we're seeing in the church today is more of a passivity, kind of a deal where nobody is really willing to do radical stuff. And there's this air of passivity about it. It's not going to happen until the Church of Jesus Christ starts doing some radical things. And I'll talk some more about that tomorrow. We've had another couple who said, you know, we do the simple thing. We normally shop at this Kroger more or more on a white side of town.

Well, we're going to go to a Kroger in more of a minority setting. And out of that, they've made incredible relationships, just a simple, small step like that. They've seen incredible fruit come out of that. And they're starting a Bible study with folk they've met at Kroger's. But what little little incremental steps like that have been huge. And so our people are starting to catch the vision.

We're preaching it. We're teaching it. We're saying if you want to be a member of this church, this is a value you have to embrace, just like evangelism is a value that you have to embrace.

And so these are some of the things, some of the small things that we've been doing to really see racial reconciliation start to happen in our church.

I talked a little bit our preaching. It's very important that whoever is the communicator at a diverse body. Can use illustrations and analogies that connect across a broad spectrum of people. If all of your illustrations and if all of your analogies are in the vein of catering to one small segment of the pie, then don't wake up one day, five years later wondering why your church only represents that small segment of the pie. And so every time I sit down and craft a message, I carefully think through my analogies and my illustrations.

And I beg the question of racial diversity. Who is this going to hit across the board in our in our in our worship community on on Sunday? How are we doing? I think that's that's a great place to end. And the five minutes that I have here, how are we doing along the lines of racial diversity, not doing real well. As far as if you were to walk into our body, you would see a ninety five percent white audience. And I love all the people who are there, but we're a year into it and we're trying to be we're trying to be patient and cut ourselves a little bit of slack.

But we feel like we're slowly starting to make some radical decisions that will end up taking us to where we want to go eventually. And so that's I would really ask and invite your prayers for us as we really wrestle with this. We've got some people in our in our church, like in every church that drives you nuts. And they just don't seem to get it. And we're praying that the Lord gives us patience as we walk with them and that they catch the vision that the Lord would lead them somewhere else. But it's huge. Let me also give you kind of our model.

If you were to say, Bryan, what does that specifically look like? I would say up top, what we're trying to craft are our disciples, people who produce reproducing followers of Jesus Christ. We have eight core values, core values like a personal holiness and being biblically aligned, so on and so forth. Seven of those eight core values would go right under the make disciples with arrows going up to the final goal of making disciples. So our core values kind of feed into the type of person in the end goal. In the end product, we're looking to create a reproducing follower of Jesus Christ, our eighth value. We've slid to the bottom and we use the language of Lent and that a value is what we would call racial reconciliation, racial diversity. What this means is we look at everything we do in our church through the lens of racial reconciliation.

For example, if we're going to put together, we're going to put together an evangelistic outreach. We always ask the question, how is this outreach specifically going to impact African-Americans and whites and Asians and Latinos? Or if we're doing a community project, how is this going to impact various pockets of various races within our community? And so that's kind of the lens

language that that we're looking at. And so a year into it, I say we've made some progress, but we have a long way to go. And I'd ask for your for your prayers. Why? I said I'd shut it down right about now and open up the floor for some questions. Any questions along these lines? Yes. Yes. No, I don't, but if you email me and I'll give you my email address, I'd love to I'd love to send it to you. I've got the document.

We've got a guy on staff, he's a community guy who we specifically asked to pick up that mantle of diversity and to really lead our bodies, specifically, we pay him a full time salary for it by the name of Kirk Scott. Again, I'd love to give him give you his email address and you can connect with him directly on that. But he does all of our demographic studies. He does all of our facilities studies that we're looking for facilities right now. He really champions that cause in our body. Through relationships, more than people buying in division, they buy into the people who have the vision. It's a fundamental principle on leadership when I go out and raise money more than them giving to my cause, they're giving to me as it relates to that cause put in very carnal natural terms.

And so it's just kind of a years of networking and relationships that that we've had in building trust with other people. So that when I came up with the cause and say, here's what I'm pounding the table on, here's what God's lead me to do. And because we had a relationship and they believed in me, they gave it to me. The one guy he didn't even really he didn't even really know what specifically we were looking for. After speaking at one church, he comes up to me and, you

know, I share a little bit about our church. He says, I wanna do something big for your church. What can I do? I said, I need about thirty thousand dollars to to hire the staff person. And on the spot, he writes me a check, but it's ultimately because of the sovereign grace of God. OK, but it's also because I had formed a relationship with this guy and this guy trusted me. And so I'd say that's just a major principle of that kind of fundraising. It's building relationships.

Yeah. Yes, I spoke about it. Yeah. Right now, we're not ready to cross that bridge. And again, the reason why we chose Memphis is because of the sharp divide between white and black there. And so if you to if you were to say, Brian, you know, I know first you have a church plant, you can't be scattered and do everything. What's the one thing you're focused on? It honestly, it frustrates my wife who really identifies with her Latina roots, because she's like, you know, we should include, you know, Mexicans in the discussion, in the discussion, so on and so forth. What I'm saying is I look at Memphis in this specific historical needs of that city.

It's along white and black lines. Now, I haven't formed a definite philosophy on how do you reach people where there's a language barrier. I can tell you what I'm not comfortable with and I've seen plenty of churches do and that say, you know, you guys just kind of go over there, the corner, do your thing, worship, yada, yada, yada. And there's no real sense of connectedness to that body. I'm not comfortable, although I do understand part of it.

You know, there is the need to have that kind of worship experience, especially among first generations where there's that heart language. But I haven't necessarily formed a rich philosophy on that. We're really focused, if you hear me, is black white language, because that's what we really assess. Is the biggest need of Memphis. Yes. Say that again. Uh huh. Here's something interesting about racial reconciliation, especially in the context of Memphis. What I've discovered from African-Americans in Memphis is we really don't want to be bothered.

We really don't we what we work in a white world Monday through Friday. We enjoy our black church experience on Sunday because, again, for the most part, for minorities and African-Americans, included in that worship is much more of a cultural experience. And so, man, you know, let me just kind of recoup and worship with my African-American friends. And we really don't want to be bothered with what you're doing. We applaud it. It's good stuff. But there's just there's just not a real interest in doing that at all. And so, you know, there's been much more of a celebrated interest. I mean, we had we get the numbers right. I think. Eighty three people move from across the country specifically for our vision of racial reconciliation and the and the relationships that they had with us. All of them were white. And we're saying and and they said, we will quit our jobs, move to Memphis for the church first, and then we'll worry about a job later because we believe in this and we want to see it happen.

So I've got to say, from a very pragmatic approach, white people have been more on board with this than my African-American brothers and sisters. It's almost as as I talk to him, there's just this sense of of being burnt out. And let me just share very honest with you, it's a big struggle for me. It really is. I miss my African-American friends. I cannot tell you the depth of the personal sacrifice I've made to see this happen. I miss them as I sit down and I think about school for my kids in Memphis. If I want to send them to a good school, it's got to be a white school. So if I want to send them to an educationally rich school, it's going to be a white school. If I want to give them the different cultural experience, I'll fudge on the education a little bit and I'm stepping back, saying part of my stewardship as a parent is, of course, to expose them and to and to be good stewards of their minds.

But also I want to expose them to various cultures as well. And that that grieves me beyond words. It really does sadden me. And so there's been a huge price that I've had to pay personally. So my African-American colleagues, when I left Faithful Central, I shouldn't say colleagues, they weren't colleagues, people at the church, you know, they called me everything short of an Uncle Tom, a case of another gifted black man going into the white world. And so I've I've paid a heavy cost for this, and I want to say to anybody who's remotely entertaining this, remotely entertaining the idea of racial reconciliation and diversity, it's going to cost you.

It's going to cost you and so to use the overused phrase man up, I had to tell myself, man up, this is not easy. Do you think you should go to Memphis and just get all these people together and

sing Kumbaya? And that's the end of the day. Hardly. It's tough. Did I answer all of your questions? Yes. Yeah, and. Specifically asked about my wife, you know, when I am, I never sat down and said, Lord, I'd really like a wife who's half Mexican and half Irish. That just was never a prayer of mine. I just automatically assumed I'd marry a sister. You know, I just automatically I mean, my gosh, I'm in a twelve thousand member church, ninety nine point nine percent of them are African-Americans. So I'm thinking the chances of that happening are pretty high. And man I met Corey the first time I saw her. You're going to get me off track here. First time I saw her. I'm sitting on the platform there at church and there's this sea of people. And I saw her and I leaned over to the executive pastor. I'm like, is that not the most beautiful woman you've ever seen in your life? That's what we talk about on the pulpit by the way. So you see us whispering, you know, it's not deep spiritual stuff and and I just fell in love my wife.

But to answer your question, yeah, I got a lot of you know, I got a lot of and they were ridiculous comments. You know what? Black women aren't good enough. And I'm like I've dated plenty of black women while I was here. Did say plenty, a few. So some of those comments I found ridiculous. Some of them I found hurtful. Man, I did not in a very real sense. Again, I didn't sit down and say, I want to fall in love with someone who is not in my race. God just did that work. And I fell in love with my wife. Thing I really appreciate about my wife is, you know, she just has an open heart and I don't get the I don't get a forced or synthetic feel. I don't think she she's trying to be black. I don't think she's trying to be anything. But she's herself.

And but, you know, I do want to temper that comment by saying, you know, one of the most insensitive things you can say to me or any other minority is I don't see you as being Asian. We don't see as being as if God made me like this. You know, I'm not going to look and whatever I just cast in there, I just cast in there. I got to believe in the Bible says I'm fearfully and wonderfully made that God made me the way that I am for a reason. And I celebrate the fact that I'm an African-American. That's not first, I'm a Christian. That's first follower of Christ at first. But my culture does come into it at some point. And so, yeah, I was I was deeply hurt by that, but by some of those comments. Yeah. Yeah, well, we've we've ah, people don't know it, we've intentionally kept them off balance.

So one week specifically, there's a guy from the body, his name is Izzy. He'll do the acoustic stuff and it's great. And then next week we bring in this other guy from way from Jackson, Mississippi, to about two and a half hours away who does the organ and it's slammin. And so our people are so off balance, we do that specifically so they don't get locked into something. See, that's that's my whole my whole point. I think theologically, worship is really what you make it. I think I think if you have a bad worship experience, for the most part, you've got to own that. That's on you because the Bible does talk about being able to worship God in spirit and in truth now, I think from the racial dimension, I think part of what you may feel and I felt that before, when you bring up know, someone who's wider from a different culture to your church and they experience worship in a different way, I really don't think the average white person realizes how much the world caters to them and how easy it gets.

You can just get locked into it until you step outside of that bubble and until you really experience something different, then I think the lights kind of go on and say, wow, there is a different perspective and a different world that before cognitively I have understood. But now experientially it's different. You know, I used to love going out with my friends that I bring from, you know, either Talbot or wherever to to to the faithful central. I used to love going out with my friends. They now talk about the experience. I've never been in church that long before, you know, and why do you guys repeat stuff over and over and over again?

And, you know, tell me a little bit about the dancing part that was going on. I think there's a very healthy kind of thing to that. And I really enjoyed the dialogue. So don't let that frustrate you. I think that's a wonderful door to just dialogue with with people. And I found that refreshing over here. Honestly, it can be something as little as I think maybe you sit down and say, I'm going to intentionally join a church of another culture while I'm here and I'm going to I'm going to go over there and do that.

I think it can be something, you know, if you're into getting your nails done. There's a couple of ladies in our church, I should say, more than a couple. They enjoy that. And what someone literally said was, we're going to go and go to a different culture and let them do our nails specifically in African-American culture, because we'd love to engage in dialogue with them and

build a relationship to where you shop, to where you go to church. I just think the sky is really the limit. I don't know if they have any African-American societies. I think when I was here, they had something called Basic Brothers and Sisters in Christ here. I'm not sure of that still going on. But maybe there's a society of another culture saying, man, I'd love to jump in, have no idea what's going to be going on here. But there's opportunities all around for you to get to know and study other cultures.

You know, I had a guy approached me from the church. He said, man, I grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, all my life. I know nothing about black people. I want to spend one morning a week with you, just asking you questions. I promise you I'll say something stupid, but I really want to learn from you. So approaches me like that. How do I not make time for that? And so we sit down seven o'clock Wednesday morning, a little place called Perkin's and we dialogue, we talk and it's it's been huge for him. He's read books. I tell you a great book to read along these lines. I'll talk about tomorrow. How many of you is required text and a lot of high schools.

Black like me. You guys ever heard of that book? Black like me, man. This guy woke up one day I think is back in the 50s, white guy. And he said, I really want to know what it's like to be black. He's from Mansfield, Texas. John Howard Griffin, I think his name. And he went to a dermatologist and made his skin black change, shaved his head and hung out in places like Mobile, Alabama. I mean, that's radical. And his book is his diary that chronicles his experiences. I think everybody should read that book. Incredible. You talk about radical stuff

again, the name of it's black like me, but I think there's little opportunities that that's just around you.

Yeah, I worry about well. Well, part of it is just what I'm communicating, I do agree fundamentally with what you're saying. However, I don't think you can be passive about it. And so I hear a little bit of passivity and that remark and not everybody is operating from the same assumption. I do think that there should come a day, not when there's colorblindness. I don't think that's ever the goal. But when our differences are celebrated, I think I think that's what that's what Paul talks about. And his whole body metaphor. Men were different. You know, there's the hand, there's the foot, there's different gifts, yada, yada, yada. But all within the framework of the body of Christ, we're one. Yet at the same time, the mystery of the church is we're different. And so how do we celebrate our differences within the paradigm of at the end of the day, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so, you know, I think the end result is to not make a big deal of it. I don't think that's it. It's meant how do I really celebrate my African-American brothers and sisters, how I really celebrate my white brothers and sisters, how to really celebrate on down the line. And so I think that's that's where we really want to go. I think that's that's the end destination. We really want to go. Yes. Diverse not only race, but lifestyle has become obvious of the majority. It's hard for me. Approach seems like a lot of. When I got here. All already sitting at the table at the. Of the white. Oh, that was huge for me in college, it was to the point where it was really stressing me out,

stand in line and, you know, there's the black table and I really enjoyed it. But from a minority perspective, and I don't speak for all minorities, but I should have said it's up top.

I don't speak for all black people. I'm not the voice of the black community. OK, so I should have said that up top. There's different views, different opinions. However, what happens when you when you have minorities and a majority, whatever in this setting majority white setting? There's this unsaid pressure to really gravitate towards more minorities and to really stay together. So I think that's part of some of what you may be feeling when you look at the black table or the Asian table. I think some of it, too, is a sense of enjoyment. And there's a there's a sense in which I really let my guard down and I can really be myself around a person of my same culture because I can speak things and they can really empathize with me.

They know where I'm coming from. So I don't think that part of it will ever I don't think I don't think you should necessarily look for the black table to totally dissipate at all. Have you tried it? Come on. There you go. There you go. I'd say try it. Try it. You know, and we'll talk some more about that tomorrow. Hey, I got your back. Yeah. Yeah, I'm serious. I got your back. If anybody say so, just let me know. Yeah. I'm not even sure. Yeah. There you go. There you go. Yes, I think he had a question to my word. Where's your safe place? And that was an important misunderstanding, like I know the feeling of being rejected. Yeah, yeah, yeah, he asked, where's my safe place?

You know, just just being hurt in my understanding. Right, from other African-Americans or. Yeah, that's tough. You know, I think that's the one thing that's really missing for me in Memphis. I have it. My world is so busy between church and family. I really I really do long for not just friendships specifically, but also African-American friendships. Again, that that safe place for me, part of it for me, I haven't intentionally gone out and done the stuff that I'm telling some of you guys to do, but I don't have that place as of yet. And I think that's what I'm feeling a little bit about.

But these same sort of feelings, do you think it affected the way? You know, when my wife and I dated, we really kept it a secret until we got engaged first. There are several reasons for that church people can be a little nosy and messy and all that good stuff. That's a whole nother talk for another time. But also, you know, my wife is a brand new believer, and I really did want to protect her from what I anticipated to be some not so nice things from Christians. And so we didn't we didn't really experience that until we got engaged. But at that point, I knew she was my wife and I put my foot down. And regardless of what anybody thought, may the Lord bless you and keep you from marrying this woman and your opinion is your opinion.

And I don't even have to respect your opinion because I'm marrying this woman. And so she needed to feel that from me. And I tried to shield her as best as I could. Yes. How big is the

interest of our church is two hundred. We've got two hundred attenders. 50 of those are kids. One hundred and fifty adults who attend. Do you think that a I guess a relatively small stature, if you think of that, is helpful in achieving diversity, or do you think that would be way more difficult?

Oh, yeah. The reason why we're pushing so hard right now, it is easier to build diversity into a smaller church in the beginning than to wake up one day. And you're five a thousand couple thousand say we need to turn this ship around and go in this direction. It's much easier to do it now. Yeah. Yes. Not too far from their home and minutes away. Yeah, yeah, well, I through and. And I work with some of our youth, and yet none of them even get the concept that they can go to a school like this.

They don't even like it, didn't even enter their minds. Right. Nobody from the schools are going into the inner city and just like 15 minutes away. I mean, like a couple people, but it's rare. And like, when I talk to people and say, oh, come on, there's inner city churches, they're not too far away, that you could really use educated people. But it seems like most people here feel more comfortable with going to a church that way. And when I try to talk to people about that, I am not able to to bridge that gap. But it's not too far. And I don't know if it's a matter of or something like being comfortable, but it seems like just getting people to go to church is the huge thing that just doesn't happen. Yeah. What do you think? Yeah, I think that's some of the passivity we've talked about there. Me personally, I had a hard time going to church when I was

in college anyways, but that was not for racial issues. That was as more of a sin, enjoy bedside Baptist kind of a deal.

But again, I think the ultimate issue comes back to to to passivity, you know, kind of on the inner city kick. I am a little sensitive to the whole novelty of the inner city, and it's almost like going to zoo. You know, it's going to drop in which I look at these different people and these people that need ministry. We're just going to parachute out and just kind of come and go as you please. And we're kind of in the inner city right now. And I never want to paint the picture that the primarily needy people in our communities is in the inner city. And so I would even take the inner city label off of it. And we just encourage people to join a church if they're really interested and want to pick up the mantle of diversity, go to a church. It could be right down the street. But that's a different culture than yours.

So I would I'd admonish you to even take the label of inner city off of it and to say if this is something that you really feel like you should do, which I do feel like to some extent, God has called us to be instruments of reconciliation, not just in a spiritual sense, but across, but in a horizontal sense as well. And part of that is racial reconciliation to some degree. So I'd take the inner city label off it and just say, man, have you ever thought about going to a church that's different from what you're used to and a lot of health can come out of that? Yes, in the back. That's incredible and yeah, and that that that can be huge and it can be huge, a few more questions. Yes.

Well, here's here's here's where I am on that. There are what we would call essentials of the faith stuff that our salvation rests upon, the atonement of Jesus Christ, the Trinity and so on and so forth. Those are those are essentials. And so, man, if I go to a church, does not affirm those essentials. I probably wouldn't call the church to call it a cult if it doesn't affirm that there are non-essential stuff that my faith does not rest on women, the extent of women in ministry. And so, you know, if it's a female pastor or speaking in tongues, my faith does not rest on that. And so I really do believe it's an issue of maturity to a certain extent. I can visit a church for sure that that may do it differently from me. And I can appreciate some of those differences. Now, when it comes to joining a church, maybe I wouldn't join that specific church because I am uncomfortable with the nonessentials. But I think you've got to be very clear on what's essential and what's nonessential. And so, man, if you get invited to attend on a consistent basis, a charismatic church that is that's dealing and emphasizing stuff that are not necessarily essential to our faith, I'd say that there should be a sense of freedom in which you do that.

Yeah. I'm not necessarily certain that that's the goal. I don't think the end result is for us to worship together. So I think to use your example, if I'm a Baptist and you're a Greek Orthodox, I think we can sit down and have a friendship and we don't have to attend the same church. I don't think the final goal is church attendance and going to the same place. I think the beauty of that saying, you know, there's different ways we approach it. There's things you emphasize that I wouldn't and vice versa. But in spite of all that, we can be friends and have a rich, meaningful

friendship. I think that's what we're getting at here as it relates to diversity and reconciliation.

Yes, I'll take about three more. Yes. No, I've got a three year old, a two year old and one on the way. So, no, they're not doing school yet. Yeah. Yes. What does that mean?

Yeah, yeah, I think I think we're talking about methodologies here, I think to answer your question, healthy fusion is, is that we've got a maturing body of believers who can not only appreciate stylistic differences and worship, but can worship in spite of the stylistic differences. I think that's a healthy, diverse body to say, you know what I can worship to to this organ and to this Kirk Franklin or Fred Hammond kind of a deal or Israel new breed kind of a deal that we've seen a little bit today. Or I can go in the other direction. But to me, it's it's worship. And the end result is is expressing worthiness to God. And it doesn't matter if it's country or jazz or whatever, because I'm worshipping in spirit and in truth, and it is what I make it so I can I can celebrate it. So I think the reason why we're consistently keeping our body off balance is because we are trying to drive home that point.

Yes. Oh, that was that was that was meaningful and the deal with Evan, he never once said, I'm trying to I'm trying to be racially reconciled to you. And if you think that ever came up, I think the very fact that this white person would would say, I want to spend time with you, I'd like I'd like to pour into your life was huge for me. I had never, ever had that happen on that kind of a level. Oh, yeah. Any other kind of moments that. Few and far between, and I tell you, part of what I struggle with is I do feel like from time to time and I don't necessarily say it's a bad thing,

but I do feel like because I'm an African-American who's been Bible college and seminary trained, I do feel like sometimes I'm the poster child for people's events saying, look, we're diverse and you're going to help me accomplish it.

And I don't mean that in a bad way. I think that's a good thing to some extent. And if I'm if I'm putting myself in the other person's shoes and I want to reflect to my back to my body, for example, at this conference, I'm not necessarily feeling that way here, but I want to reflect to my body that we are we are seeking to have this happen. Why not invite speakers of different ethnicities? I'm just saying, when I've had a steady diet of that, that that can weigh heavily on me instead of really feeling valued personally.

You know, I think for those of you going in ministry, especially speaking, you can really feel used after a while. And I don't necessarily mean that in a good way. And so to have the flip side happen, when I have someone of a different race, sit me down and to really express value and love in esteem and significance in me when I'm not necessarily bringing anything into the anything into the relationship or on the table that will benefit them. That's huge. That's huge. It says I just will spend time if I have any agenda. That's huge. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, right. That is kind of like the version that the think that we're doing here, because, you know, that would be about.

About the differences and really having the right relationship. Yeah, all my friendships with people have been a natural thing and haven't been. Yeah, yeah, it is. Yeah, well, that couple I shared, the Crenshaws who moved from section called Germantown to Binghampton, they're having a hard time. The reason why they're having a hard time is because all the blacks in the neighborhood have been. Now, what are you doing here and what do you want? And they're saying, man, they're having to work really hard to say we don't want anything. And yet they're saying, why did you come and buy a house here?

So I think what's going to happen in that situation sometime down the road could be a year, could be a couple of years. I think the light is going to start going on saying, you know, these people, they're really genuine. Racism. I don't think we understand how much of a number racism is done on this on this country. And you have a lot of minorities who are like this that you've got to have. And the only thing that can that can really bring those walls down is time. And doing the kind of stuff that Evan Headly did with me, just sitting down doing life on life. I don't want anything. I won't give you anything. I'm not I'm not looking for you to bring anything to the table. I just want to get to know you. That's going to be huge. I was wondering why. Why isn't. Core values and the question of what that is and how can. Yeah, like that, because there's a lot right and also, would you say that it's I guess it would you could see it as a came in reality or. Yeah, racial reconciliation. Yes, why is that such a value and a passion of mine as opposed to anything else? I think part of it is because I've I've lived it and I've and I've been hurt by it.

I've been hurt by racism. And I see the incredible need in our country and especially the city of Memphis to say we need some instruments of racial reconciliation and we need to start doing some healing along these lines. Of course it is. But I have. Right. Should everybody embrace that, that that that value? Yeah, I, I'd say specifically, John instructs us, how can we say that we love God, whom we have not seen and yet natural love to our brother, whom we have seen. And, you know, Jesus says, what credit is it? He says, how easy it is to love the lovable. It's much more difficult to love the unlovable. And I would you know, you don't find any scripture that specifically says that you must go across racial lines. But I said, man, if you have the opportunity to do it, why not do it? I wouldn't I wouldn't put the burden of proof on me to substantiate that value, especially in this culture and world that we live in. I'd put it back on you and say, why not?

Why wouldn't you pick that up? Obviously, there can be varying degrees of passion about it. There will be people who are going to entertain moving into a different neighborhood, and there will be people who are going to say, you know, we don't we don't need to. And by the way, I don't think every church is called to be, you know, an instrument of racial reconciliation specifically. You know, I think there's there's white communities that need white churches that meet their needs and vice versa. But we're specifically saying we really feel a call to to to see that to see that happen. All right. Last one. Here we go. Yeah, I'd say couple of things from African-American perspective. Again, I'm speaking for all African-Americans. I know one of the things

that used to rub me the wrong way was I just got a high control kind of vibe from a lot of the whites that I was around. And so why did it have to be your way?

And there just didn't seem to be any room for me to express who I was. Because the flip side, again, was we don't really see as that color. We just see you as a person. Well, of course, you could say that in a world that caters to you. And so there's this sense of high control, kind of a deal that I felt when the landmark watershed moments in my life was in Bible college. African-American speaker came and spoke. I think he was one of a handful ever. And after just talking to the dean of the chapel and he said, man, those guys are really great and they really entertain you. And, you know, you know, content wise, he made some of, you know, off remark, but he just left saying, man, those guys can really entertain you and just kind of remember having a mental note saying, I'm not going to exist solely to entertain people.

I'm going to give solid content and I don't ever want you to see me that way. And so I constantly got the vibe that either I wasn't being taken seriously or I really had to step it up a couple of notches to prove myself. I never really got a really strong, sincere, reaching out kind of a vibe of man, we celebrate who you are. We really want to do some radical things. And when I was in Bible college, you never really experience what we experienced today in worship.

It was just sadly their way of doing it or, you know, the one chapel service year when we could do that. It was, again, this whole kind of wasn't that great. And we had the black people come and lead us and worship. Now, let's go back to the same old kind of way. There just was never that kind of sensitivity towards how can we make this worship experience this campus? How can we make it into a place that really celebrates people of different cultures?

I just I just I just I never really personally felt that. And then the few times when I would step up and would try to raise those questions, I was the angry black man so I could never say anything along racial lines without without me having some kind of a motive or or whatever. And that really led me to have the passion of wanting to be involved on some level, creating environments where we celebrate different cultures and we say you are valuable, we are going to do everything that we can to celebrate you and how God made you in this context. So it was an insensitivity and kind of a control, kind of a vibe that that really set me on this spiral, on this path and turned out to be a great thing. So. Well, let me close this in prayer. Thank you guys so much.

Tomorrow, I'll get more into issues of racial reconciliation and some specific how to's walking through scripture.

Father, thank you. Lord God, I confess, I don't have all the answers. I think I have half of them. And I do thank you, Lord God, for this opportunity to share, I understand that not everybody will be called to do this from a vocational standpoint, but I do pray, Lord God, that you would give us an incredible love in our hearts for all of humanity, we have all been made in your image. We

will all spend an eternity together. God, I pray that we would love each other deeply, regardless of race and culture, but that you would even bring us to a point, Lord God, of maturity when we can celebrate one another's differences, denominational, gender wise, racially, culturally, ethnically. And we can really experience the kind of unity we'll experience at your feet for an eternity right now. So thank you for this time. Your bless us as we leave in Jesus name. Amen.

[End of Recording].