

BOOK REVIEW

Healing Conversations on Race: Four Key Practices from Scripture and Psychology

Vazquez, V., Knabb, J., Lee-Johnson, C., & Hays, K. (2023). *Healing Conversations on Race: Four Key Practices from Scripture and Psychology*. IVP Academic. 240 pages.

How do we even talk about race when people either dodge the topic or express spilled-over rage? *Healing Conversations on Race* is a courageous attempt to offer a Christian approach to such talks. Committed to Christian formation, the authors hope to encourage Christians to pick up the hot potato, in a way that gives space for deeper introspection, mutual understanding, and possible healing. They meticulously integrated perspectives from the Bible and psychology and honestly share stories about difficult, personal encounters between people of different racial backgrounds.

Based on the ethnically diverse backdrop of the United States, the authors aim to facilitate healthy one-on-one or small group exchanges on race for personal growth and potentially systemic change. They do this by using “HEAL” – humility, empathy, acceptance, love – a model that distills interdisciplinary insights.

Humility (Ch 2) is not just a byword for the act of self-emptying demonstrated by Christ but is also a cherished construct involved in dealing with culture and racism in psychology. Humility prompts us to reflect on the call to connect, identify intentional or unintentional behaviours that sabotage the call, and appreciate perceptions of others wounded by racism.

Empathy (Ch 3) is an example set by Christ, who become man and is also an emotional and behavioural response to the emotions and needs of others. Empathy prompts us to recount stories of woundedness and highlight stories of overcoming.

Acceptance (Ch 4) is about coming to terms with our God-created emotions that reveal unvoiced needs that are often hidden deep down. By using coping skills adapted for Christian use, readers stand to embrace their own inner world and accept others’ emotional pain, instead of

automatically flaring up following some old, maladaptive relationship templates.

Love (Ch 5) is a command and characteristic of the Trinity; it is also a posture guided by specific skills that provide the basic trust we all need to thrive. Love prompts us to take steps to pray, describe pain, express empathy, identify concern, and address needs.

I adore the honesty modeled by the authors, who are psychologists and social workers. I was struck to read about Veola Vazquez’s sense of disconnection after the racial uprising of 2020 (29-30), Joshua Knabb’s reflection over his numbness to the impact of racism (66-67), and Charles Lee-Johnson’s turn from silence to engage a racially different friend (141-142). I laud the individual cases detailed. Whatever experiences readers have had with racism, they can identify with some of those named while learning how to turn situations around. I appreciate the practical steps offered. Readers are not just told to pray; on top of that they need to do reflections and practice skills. An authentic posture, contextual application, and pragmatic approach paved the way to growth in Christlikeness.

This book does not require the readers to have expert knowledge in issues of racial relations for them to understand the content. Lay Christians will find biblical principles and psychology concepts explained, integrated, and applied. Mental health practitioners will see biblical visions articulated behind therapeutic practices and specific skills adapted for use among Christians. Pastors will learn practical steps to have conversations on race and other difficult topics. As the authors insist, we acquire knowledge and skills for a higher purpose: to restore our relationship with God and with one another.

Situated in the majority world, I have benefited from this systematic and interdisciplinary discussion intended for healing from racism. I observe that there is generally more acceptance of hierarchies, just or unjust, among societies that tend to be more stratified because of cultural or historical reasons. Such acceptance could be adaptive or

maladaptive, while racism may not loom large in the public's consciousness. I will explore how Christians could go about a contextual version of healing conversations using this model. I thank the authors for their ongoing research and tireless efforts to start this discussion. Readers will be encouraged to begin their own journey of healing conversations.

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