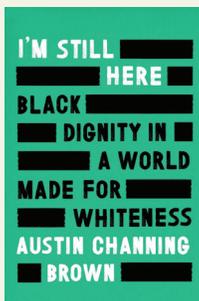


In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Carrie Jarrell Tuning



I'm Still Here

by Austin Channing Brown

Austin shares an eye-opening account of growing up Black, Christian, and female in middle-class white America, inviting the reader to confront apathy, recognize God's ongoing work in the world, and discover how blackness—if we let it—can save us all.

1. **White People Are Exhausting**

Brown writes, “White people who expect me to be white have not yet realized that their cultural way of being is not in fact the result of goodness, rightness, or God’s blessing. Pushing back, resisting the lie, is hella work” (p. 20). “It’s work to be hyper visible because of your skin—easily identified as being present or absent—but for your needs to be completely invisible to those around you” (pp. 20-21). Do you agree with her? Do you think that Black peoples’ problems are often ignored? Why or why not?

2. **Playing Spades**

Brown’s focus is on the Black Jesus and his liberating power. “By the time I learned of Black Jesus and his liberating power, I knew I had already met him at ten years old, in a Baptist church where the Spirit moved us every week. There Jesus cared about my soul...And for those whose families hurt us, or significant others had left us, supervisors didn’t understand us—all these things were taken very

seriously...” (p. 38). Do you think she made an accurate statement regarding Black Jesus and his liberating power? Why or why not?

3. **The Other Side of Harmony**

Brown places emphasis on “...a discussion that led one white classmate to air her grievances about not being accepted to the University of Michigan...But alas, her explanation was short: “Because of affirmative action, Black people took my spot” (p. 49). Do you think the white student was justified in her statement about affirmative action? Why or why not? Why do you think some people believe that affirmative action only helps Blacks?

4. **Ain’t Not Friends Here**

Brown writes about her experience as an undergrad, “...whenever white people acted a fool. When they wrote in our newspaper that the Black students should just leave if we weren’t happy. When I overheard racist comments in the cafeteria, or explained to the

residence director for the millionth time that our lobby isn’t suddenly “scary” when Black football players happen to be occupying it. Any time something like this happened, Dr. Simms’s voice would sound in my head: Ain’t no friends here” (p.65). How would you have handled this situation? Do you perceive that being in the presence of Blacks is threatening to whites or other races? Why or why not? How do you define racism?

5. **Whiteness At Work**

Brown purposes, “But for many of us, life hacks can’t stop the inevitable. They slow it down, yes. But eventually, those of us who work for white Christians are asked the question Are you sure God has really called you here? And then I know just how invisible and dispensable I am” (p. 78). Do you think that white people believe that Blacks must always conform to their way of thinking and if they don’t, they are not a team player? Why or why not?

6. **White Fragility**

Brown states, “That day I cried, I knew I had done nothing wrong, but my body was still processing the onslaught of anger and condescension...I knew more than that man did about all the things he considered himself an expert on—Black boys, the hood, the nonprofits

working on issues of crime, poverty, and education. But instead of recognizing that I am flesh, blood, emotion, real, a human, he had taken all these things for granted, speaking to me in a way that he wouldn't have to anyone who looked like him. This is partly what makes the fragility of whiteness so damn dangerous" (pp. 88-89). Do you see white fragility as being dangerous? Why or why not?

7. Nice White People

Brown points out, "When you believe niceness disproves the presence of racism, it's easy to start believing bigotry is rare, and that the label racist should be applied only to mean-spirited, intentional acts of discrimination. The problem with this framework—besides being a gross misunderstanding of how racism operates in systems and structures enabled by nice people—is that it obligates me to be nice in return, rather than truthful. I am expected to come closer to the racists. Be nicer to them. Coddle them" (p. 101). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? How can the Christian who believes in the Triune God invoke change?

8. The Story We Tell

Brown writes, "Ultimately, the reason we have not yet told the truth about this history of Black and white American is that telling an ordered history of this nation would mean finally naming America's commitment to violent, abusive, exploitative, immoral white supremacy, which seeks the absolute control of Black bodies. It would mean doing something about it" (p. 117). Do you believe that white supremacy still exists in America? Why or why not?

9. Creative Anger

Brown stresses, "My anger can be creative and imaginative, seeing a better world that doesn't yet exist. It can fuel a righteous movement toward justice and freedom. I don't need to fear my own anger. I don't have to be afraid of myself. I am not mild-mannered. I am passionate and strong and clear-eyed and focused on continuing the legacy of proclaiming the human dignity of Black bodies" (p.126). Do you agree with Brown's viewpoint regarding creative anger? Why or why not? When Blacks voice their opinions about racial issues, why are they often dismissed as another anger Black person?

10. The Ritual of Fear

Brown reiterates, "We fear the overreactions of white people who clutch their purses in elevators and lock their doors when we walk by. We fear the overreaction of police who assume they are in danger when they have the wrong suspect or when we are unarmed...But until then, we find ourselves repeating this all-too-familiar ritual of fear" (p. 137). Do you believe that Blacks are overreacting when it's their ritual of fear? Why or why not? How would you respond in similar situation(s)?

11. A God for the Accused

Brown writes about the incarceration of her cousin. "I realized that Jesus also understood the accused, the incarcerated, the criminals. Jesus was accused. Jesus was incarcerated. Jesus hung on a cross with his crime listed above his crown of thorns...Suddenly racial justice and reconciliation wasn't limited to Black and white church members; it became a living framework for understanding God's work in the world" (p. 147). Since Jesus was wrongly accused, incarcerated and crucified, do you think that some people believe that it must be okay to treat Blacks the same way? Why or why not?

12. We're Still Here

Brown points out, "I am not impressed that slavery was abolished or that Jim Crow ended. I feel no need to pat America on its back for these "achievements." This is how it always should have been. Many call it progress, but I do not consider it praiseworthy that only within the last generation did America reach the baseline for human decency" (p. 151). Do you agree that Brown made valid statements? Why or why not?

13. Justice, Then Reconciliation

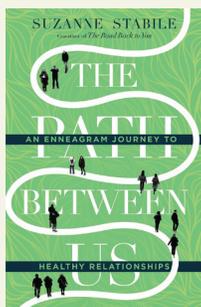
Brown emphasizes, "But reconciliation is not about white feelings. It's about diverting power and attention to the oppressed, toward the powerless. It's not enough to dabble at diversity and inclusion while leaving the existing authority structure in place. Reconciliation demands more" (p. 171). Do you believe that justice must happen for Blacks before there can be reconciliation? Why or why not?

14. Standing in the Shadow of Hope

Brown closes by pointing out that, "Knowing that we may never see the realization of our dreams, and yet still showing up. I do not believe that I or my children or my grandchildren will live in an America that has achieved racial equality. I do not believe this is a problem that America will fix within any soon-coming generation...and I work toward a world unseen, currently unimaginable. I am not enslaved, and yet I look back and see centuries of creative evolution of the hatred for Black bodies...I ask myself, Where is your hope, Austin? The answer: It is but a shadow" (p. 181). Do you agree with Brown that the racial problems for Blacks in America will not be resolved within any soon-coming generation? Why or why not?

Dr. Carrie Jarrell Tuning is a CBF church starter and pastor of HOPE Christian Fellowship Baptist Church located in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. She graduated from Howard University, School of Divinity, located in Washington, D.C. in May of 2001.

NEXT MONTH



The Path Between Us

by Suzanne Stabile

Most of us have no idea how others see or process their experiences. Understanding the motivations and dynamics of the nine Enneagram personality types can be the key that unlocks sometimes mystifying behavior in others—and in ourselves.