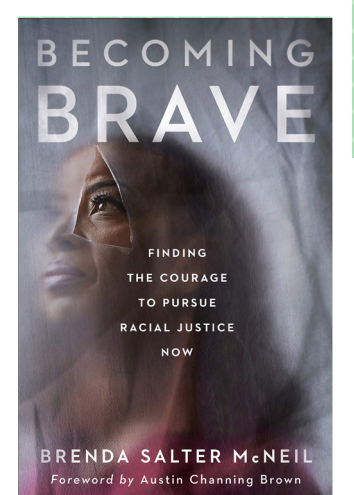




CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Joshua W. Scott



Becoming Brave: Finding the Courage to Pursue Racial Justice Now

By Brenda Salter McNeil

About the Author

Dr. Brenda Salter Mc Neil is an author, pastor, teacher and reconciler who shares with the world practical ways to make racial reconciliation more a reality than a dream. I have followed Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil since reading her previous work, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice*. After hearing Dr. McNeil preach and reading many of her works, the consistent message is that reconciliation is not true reconciliation without justice.

Dr. McNeil challenges readers and hearers to reshape and repair their perspectives of racial reconciliation by addressing systemic injustice and all forms of injustice seen throughout the world. She has written books centering around faith, reconciliation and hope while serving Quest Church in Seattle, Washington, as the associate pastor for preaching and reconciliation. As a multifaceted individual, Dr. McNeil encourages readers and hearers to join her in living a life sharing love, equality and justice to everyone she meets.

About the Book

This book is an excellent mixture of the author's ministry and personal experiences used to explain how churches, individuals and organizations can move towards authentic racial reconciliation. McNeil says, "It's time for the church to go beyond individual reconciliation and "heart change" and to boldly mature in its response to racial division." This work challenges readers to have the courage to take significant steps which cause communities to lament, communicate, collaborate, change systems and journey forward together.

By drawing on biblical knowledge from the book of Esther alongside lived experiences, she calls upon readers to reflect honestly on who they are, what they have allowed, and what they have seen. This book provides prophetic inspiration that compels readers to take racial reconciliation seriously instead of thinking of reconciliation as a trend.

If you have ever wondered, why it is so hard for Christians to make any real, significant progress in dealing with the issue of race, this work offers insight into this nuanced issue without offering platitudes or glossing over the obvious. *Becoming Brave: Finding the Courage to Pursue Racial Justice Now* is an essential work that if read with an open heart, can challenge anyone and help lead us towards reconciliation.

Dr. Joshua W. Scott is Associate Pastor of Second-Ponce De Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga.



Book Discussion Questions

A Word about How to Use this Guide

This work unfolds with endorsements, dedication, foreword, preface and then into 12 chapters. It follows a pattern of courage, awareness, healing and intentional actions. Each of these steps towards reconciliation is demonstrated well in three-chapter increments, allowing each step to be examined, explained and discussed in hope that these steps toward reconciliation become evident and be practiced. However, if your group meets only once, do not feel pressured to cover all of the questions. Selecting one question per chapter can prove enlightening as well, due to the challenging material that will cause all readers to wrestle with and reflect on how racial reconciliation can become a norm in each of our lives.

Consider opening each session with prayer and don't be fearful of setting rules for your time together. Respect is essential; empathize don't antagonize; allow the truth to be expressed and received in love. Urge each participant to pause, think and consider what he or she desires to say before saying anything. This aids with thoughtful responses given with respect and love.

Chapters 1-3

The first three chapters examine the need for courage. They begin by examining the question: "Why is it so hard for Christians to make any real, significant progress in dealing with issues of race?"

Answers to this question vary, but can be summarized as unwillingness, different perspectives, apathy, ignorance and being comfortable. McNeil moves from why progress has not been made, to exactly how progress can be made. From her own experience, she suggests that "many of us don't think of ourselves as activists. In the face of enormous global and national issues, we can feel numb. I read the headlines, and you know what I want to do sometimes? I want to get back in the bed and pull the covers over my head." With different challenges presented in our society, McNeil challenges readers to

think of themselves as activists who have the courage to stand for change.

Chapter two discusses police brutality and being courageous to stand for change. McNeil offers a quote from pastor, Charlie Dates, sharing, "I think it's the church's responsibility to call for justice. There are many people calling for justice tonight all over America. However, ours is undergirded with a call for righteousness." Within this chapter are examples of courageous people proving brave enough to stand against injustice. The reflective question that this question leads us to ask who has experienced pain due to our silence? This is a piercing question that moves readers to examine how they can be brave and take steps toward reconciliation.

Chapter three communicates the powerful thought that, "we are all unlikely activists." McNeil mentions historical and biblical figures who were courageous enough to stand up for change. She issues a charge to readers saying, "We are being called forth. The only question now is how we are going to respond to the call." With a reading of this chapter, it is essential to discuss what readers may feel called forth to do regarding racial reconciliation.

Chapters 4-6

These chapters place an emphasis on bringing awareness to racism and the need for reconcilers to fill the earth. Revealing how Esther hid who she really was in an effort to remain safe, and to be attractive to the king, Dr. McNeil speaks to the challenge of being an African American mother in sharing, "As a mother of black children, I have an additional list of things I tell my kids in hopes that they will stay safe. If you are a black person or a person of color in the United States, you know what I'm talking about! Keep your hands where folks can see them. Be mindful of how you look to others. Speak English. Don't wear a hoodie or walk that way when you're in public. If you get stopped by the police while driving, keep your hands on the steering wheel, don't ask questions, and definitely don't talk back"

Examining why rules such as these have to be a reality for some ethnic groups is fruitful for discussion. Within these chapters, the author offers steps every reconciler should take to prepare to do something about the injustices of the world, seek to grow in relationships with those different than us, and continue learning the stories about all of God's creation. This work continues by revealing how ignorance and isolation breeds hatred and injustice. McNeil challenges readers to examine their positions of privilege and power in an effort to sow love instead of hatred in the world. The discussion question to be asked is: Why do we find it so easy to be led by our ignorance, rather than to be led by God in our actions? Answers to this question can help readers examine their experiences and aid in moving us to intentional steps of reconciliation.

Chapters 7-9

Pivoting from a position of awareness to that of healing, in chapters seven, eight, and nine McNeil reveals the importance of sharing our authentic stories with each other. However, she cautions as to how we hear different stories sharing, "The story a person tells about other people really matters. I've learned to be much more careful and conscious of the stories being told to me about others. I pay attention to who is telling the story and their purpose in telling it. I also know that where someone begins the story shapes the overall narrative being told." The question to be asked is, "What makes humanity choose fear and anger over the dignity of each individual?" This is an important question that will reveal different perspectives. However, it is important that each person remain respectful, even if they disagree. McNeil offers insight into how racism hinders individuals and ethnic groups from flourishing. The author speaks to the courage and choice that Esther made to bring awareness to the king regarding the suffering of the Jews. She challenges us to think of reconciliation as a way of providing healing to the world instead of hatred. The discussion that concludes chapter nine asks what calls for courage we could be overlooking. Answers to this question will vary, but are important in helping readers wrestle with the steps they can take to move towards reconciliation instead of overlooking and participating in injustice.

Chapters 10-12

This final group of chapters centers on the need for prayer in the work of reconciliation. Continuing to draw on the narrative of Esther, who chooses to fast and pray before seeking the king's help, McNeil suggests that "prayer has the power to transform systems, structures, and human beings in ways that we could not even think to ask or imagine."

The reflection on prayer leads each of us to the question: Have you made praying for harmony among ethnic groups a part of your prayer requests? This reflective question is essential to the hard work of reconciliation and can be a beginning step for the group to take together. Within these chapters, there is emphasis on speaking truth to power and having the desire to be courageous enough to take action for the greater good. With the lived experiences from Esther to Leymah Gbowee, readers are encouraged to pray for courage and take action against injustice.

A question for the group to explore is: What frightens us about taking action against injustice? Answers may vary, but all responses should be welcomed and can help readers wrestle with the idea of being unlikely but needed activists. In chapter twelve, McNeil focuses on Esther's intentional steps in speaking with King Xerxes. This leads readers to ask: What thoughts, steps, or actions are you committed to that can repair the world?

The conclusion posits four steps forward:

- Reclaim our identity and agency as people of color.
- Confront whiteness.
- Repair broken systems together.
- Restore the credibility of the Church.

We Are Reconcilers

Consider ending your time together with reading or summarizing, *We Are Reconcilers* found on pages 193-194 and prayer.



Next Steps and Further Reading

Writings by the Author

The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change

A Credible Witness: Reflections on Power, Evangelism and Race

Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice

Books on Reconciliation

Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation, Latasha Morrison

God and Race: A Guide for Moving Beyond Black Fists and White Knuckles, John Siebeling and Wayne Francis

How to Heal our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says, and the First Christians Knew, about Racial Reconciliation, Derwin Gray, and Annie Downs

Building a Multiethnic Church: A Gospel Vision of Grace, Love, and Reconciliation in a Divided World, Derwin Gray