

Celebrated Author Builds Community and Character Through Bible Study

Pulitzer Prize nominee Clifton Taulbert hopes his 10-lesson curriculum will motivate people to engage in acts of kindness

As the United States observes Black History Month, the residents of a Mississippi Delta cotton town are again rising to prominence through a native son who has shared their legacy worldwide.

Clifton Taulbert, whose memoirs have been made into a movie (Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored) and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize (Last Train North), has transformed another book into biblically based teaching.

Becoming a Good Samaritan: On Your Road Between Jerusalem and Jericho is based on his Eight Habits of the Heart, originally published in 1997. Designed for groups of up to 20, the 10-lesson curriculum includes a challenge to commit to develop a caring attitude and engage in unselfish acts.

The lessons delve into the eight habits, which include such traits as brotherhood, dependability, friendship and a nurturing attitude. Those are qualities the Tulsa, Okla., author believes are necessary if the church hopes to become a community demonstrating Christ's character.

Taulbert unveiled the Bible study in August at Victory Christian Center's annual Word Explosion, which drew 35,000 people to the Mabee Center at Oral Roberts University. Afterward, the audience responded with a standing ovation.

The acclaimed speaker, who credits the Holy Spirit with inspiring him to write the best-selling stories about those who raised and trained him, said he was overwhelmed by the reception. "What I saw was people recognizing difficulties existed during legal segregation, but it also showed them when you yield to God you can do great things in spite of difficulties," said the native of Glen Allen, Miss.

Ironically, Taulbert is better known in distinguished academic, governmental and professional circles. A guest professor at Harvard University, he has addressed corporate seminars, international forums and a Library of Congress audience hosted by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

However, when Victory Christian pastor Billy Joe Daugherty invited Taulbert—a member of an Assemblies of God church—to speak, Taulbert initially resisted. After first appearing there in March, he accepted Daugherty's suggestion to transform his "eight habits" seminar into a Bible-based study.

Daugherty said the message is a fresh word, one that is sorely needed in the body of Christ. Daugherty compares Taulbert to figures such as T.D. Jakes and Joyce Meyer, saying they came to prominence long after they started teaching.

"To me, the body of Christ is discovering a treasure with someone who has the ear of the Air Force Academy, whole school systems and Washington departments in our government," he said.

Those who have used the curriculum say it has already had powerful repercussions. Mickey Gordon has taught two sessions to seniors in her Bible class at Victory Christian Center's high school. It is also used at Glory House, a church-affiliated residential home for women.

The teacher thinks the study has the potential to create a kinder, gentler nation by emphasizing selflessness. "I'm seeing a calmer class and kids reaching out to teach each other and forming community," Gordon said. "These are common-sense principles that have become uncommon."

While Evangel Christian School in Louisville, Ky., is just implementing the curriculum in high school Bible classes, middle school students began reading *Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored* last fall. Principal Kevin Miller said shocked students wanted to know if the events described in 1950s and '60s Mississippi really took place.

"We talked about the importance of everyone being created in God's image and being equal," said Miller, whose suburban school has doubled the number of African American students—from 7 to 14—this year. "There's a lot of lessons in there. And I think the curriculum will help with the atmosphere and culture of our school."

Taulbert hopes *Good Samaritan* will help stimulate positive actions. And he couldn't be happier that the characters from *Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored*—the real people who shielded him from many of segregation's cruel realities—will help make that happen.

"I find it very exciting that behind the wall of segregation

there was Jesus Christ, preparing hearts and stories for another time in history,” Taulbert said. “[God] knew it would be needed in the 21st century.”

Ken Walker