

How God Set Me Free From Racism

“How are you?” The guy asked loudly and slowly. He didn’t think that I could speak English. Maybe it was because this was a party for International Students in Lexington, Kentucky, and I’m Hawaiian and Filipino.

“I’m fine!” I replied at the same volume. He was startled. “I speak English,” I laughed.

When I first moved from Hawaii to Florida, I had no idea that I was racist. Then I met some of my co-workers at the ministry headquarters and most of them were Southern belles with the thick Southern accent. I felt a revulsion rise up inside of me and I knew this wasn’t God. This revulsion, disgust and hate came from a dark place.

I had taken on the offense of generations of Hawaiians whose land had been unjustly taken from them by white people. Don’t get me wrong, I had a lot of white friends. I grew up in California and Hawaii, which pride themselves on their cultural diversity.

But when I moved to Florida where people stared at me and asked me, “What are you?” a hate started forming in me. And I didn’t like it. I asked one of the ministry leaders for prayer and he jokingly prayed in a thick Southern accent.

I don’t know if I was delivered from a spirit of hate but I laughed when he prayed. Rusty Russell melted my heart and soon all of those Southern belles became good friends. I learned to love BBQ, fried okra, greens and cornbread. They teased me about doing the hula and eating raw fish.

The differences that threatened to divide us were erased in a place of faith. My Southern belle friends and I all loved

Jesus. We all wanted to fulfill His purposes. We all wanted to please Him. Jesus became our meeting place and we soon discovered that we had more in common than we realized.

My Southern belle friends and I all wanted to be used by God. We wanted to get married. We loved traveling and listening to Christian music. Those Southern belles unknowingly prepared me for my future husband, Jerome Haywood, an African-American who grew up in the deep south.

Jerome shared with me that he too struggled with hating white people when he was growing up during the Civil Rights era. He remembers vividly being chased by Klan when he was 10-years-old. He remembers when schools were desegregated in Natchez, Mississippi. He also remembers his first white friend, a guy who encouraged him to pursue running track, which was his ticket into college.

The walls in Jerome's heart came down when he was the only African-American in a fraternity-like house with a bunch of Christian guys at Mississippi State University. Greg Ball, Rice Brooks, Richard Riley and some of his other roommates became like brothers to him. They were from well-to-do families, but Jerome never felt excluded or like he was a second-class citizen around them. The kingdom of God brought them together.

The Ferguson riots in 2014 and George Zimmerman case in 2012 aroused national outrage from many who believe he should have been convicted. Underneath these dramatic cases of a young black teenagers—Trayvon Martin, shot by a white resident or Michael Brown who was killed by a police officer—are issues of racism that still divide us today.

We forget that stories like Michael Brown, George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin aren't just one episode but part of a long-running drama in an overall story of pain and prejudice played out in the minds of millions of African-Americans. I don't

claim to know the details of this case because I haven't been following it closely.

But I know that the hate in our hearts can't be legally remedied. We need a change of heart that only God can bring. The only power that can unite people from different races and economic classes is the power of God. The legal system can't fix the injustice because we live in an unjust world.

We can fix the injustice by not being unjust toward first God and then our friends. I pray for peace in our nation as we wade through the questions of justice revealed by the Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin cases. I pray that our walls come down in His presence. Don't let racism rob you of great friendships or opportunities God may be trying to bring through someone that doesn't look like you.

Let God deal with racism in your heart. And purposely reach out to people that are different from you. Then you'll find freedom and discover a whole new world.

*Adapted from Keeping It Real by **Leilani Haywood**. Leilani, editor of SpiritLed Woman, is an award-winning writer and frequent contributor to Charisma. Follow her on Twitter @leilanihaywood.*