

Richard Land: Nelson Mandela's Greatness

Nelson Mandela was a great man. If there were to be an international Mount Rushmore of 20th-century world leaders, his countenance would certainly be among the first to be carved into the rock surface. Why is this so?

The reasons are many and not difficult to define. To his own nation of South Africa, he was, to use American analogies, a rare combination of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and **Martin Luther King Jr.**

He was, like Washington, the “father” of his country, in that he led the long, difficult struggle to free his people from the bitter oppression of apartheid. Then, like Washington, having served as his nation's first president, he helped cement democracy in his country by voluntarily leaving the highest office in the land when he would have been elected to office as long as he desired to serve.

Voluntarily walking away from such power is rare, and few men have done it.

Further, Mandela, like President Lincoln, was “the great emancipator,” freeing the vast majority of his countrymen from racial oppression by a white minority that was almost as dehumanizing as slavery.

Ultimately, however, Mandela's lasting greatness will rest in the fact that, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., his life illustrated the power of forgiveness and redemptive love to transform hearts and minds. When Mandela was released from almost two decades in prison, his message of forgiveness and reconciliation toward his former captors and the oppressors of his people was so rare on the world stage that it approached uniqueness.

For Americans who lived in the last half of the 20th century, however, it inspired cherished memories of another great reconciler: Dr. King. How would we have traveled the difficult journey from Jim Crow segregation to the triumph of the civil rights revolution without Dr. King's transformative leadership?

I clearly remember hearing Dr. King say in the mid-1960s, when I was a teenager, "Those you would change, you must first love." I thought that if Dr. King could love "Bull" Connor, Birmingham's brutal, racist chief of police, or Sheriff Jim Clark of Selma or Gov. George Wallace, then all of us could indeed follow Jesus' admonition to "love our enemies" and to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" even when they have been spiteful, hateful and worse.

I thank God that He gave us a **Nelson Mandela** and a **Martin Luther King Jr.** Both men became world-renowned icons because of their remarkable ability to love their enemies and bring about real, lasting reconciliation where anger, hatred and significant violence and bloodshed would have erupted without their transformative presence.

I pray that God will raise up more people like Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr.

They have been too few among us, and how desperately we need them in today's world.

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