

# LOOSING LAZZARUS

## LESSON 3

JESUS LED,  
SO I MUST LEAD!

SEVEN WAYS TO DECONSTRUCT PERSONAL AND STRUCTURAL RACISM FROM JOHN 11

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Jesus said, "Take away the stone." John 11:39

Leaders are men and women who rise to the occasion when a need for leadership presents itself. Leaders are ordinary people who step up when equally ordinary people step back, step down, or step away. This is why when it comes to leadership, the best ability is availability. When ordinary people rely on an extraordinary God, great things usually happen.

Being made of flesh, leaders are not devoid of fear. As brave as the Apostle Paul was, Jesus had to tell him in a vision after a tumultuous period of ministry, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not keep silent (*Acts 18:9*)." When God tells a leader to not be afraid, it's because He knows we are afraid! Whether it's Paul, David, Joshua, or Mary the mother of our Lord, God has to tell us to not be afraid when our knees are knocking. As a result of God's affirmation, leaders are people who face their fears and lead through them because the calling on their lives and the need to make a difference is greater than their individual insecurities and reservations.

Jesus rose up at a time in John 11 when people needed leadership. The twelve disciples needed to see courageous leadership. Mary and Martha needed to experience compassionate leadership. The community and even the Pharisees needed to see conscientious leadership. Above all, Lazarus, a dead man, needed to hear commanding leadership. For Jesus to step into this moment and be a leader, it would require courage and Him taking a risk. The Pharisees had placed another death threat on Jesus' head, yet that did not stop Him from going back to Judea to do what was needed and necessary (*John 11:7 - 8*). Jesus' decision to go impacted His disciples because they knew that wherever Jesus went, they would have to go, too.

As doubts swirled in the minds of the disciples, John 11:15 says, "Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to Him.'" The crux of leadership is found in the words, "Let us go." Jesus was not going to lead the disciples anywhere He was not willing to go Himself. Following Jesus back into Bethany was a costly decision for the disciples. This is why Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him (*John 11:16*)."

It was Winston Churchill who once said, "Mountaintops inspire leaders, but valleys mature them." Jesus, the Good Shepherd, led His disciples into a valley of a situation they would not have gone into on their own, but He knew they needed to be there. When it comes to issues of race in America, God does the same thing with us. He leads us into the fight and not always away from it.

God has placed us in a world that is racially torn and racially unjust, and it will not go away if we put our heads in the sand. Things will only change for the better when courageous, Christian leaders face this crisis head on. We must rise up like Jesus and lead others in a way that honors God and helps our fellow man.

If you have any level of light or illumination in regard to racial matters, you have a responsibility to show people the way to go, beginning with your family. Silence should not be an option when you know the truth and seek to live by it. Therefore, you must determine some practical ways your loved ones can join you in going to where the battle is and getting your hands dirty trying to help resurrect others. What does that look like in our context? Perhaps you can lead others by inviting them to learn with you, pray with you, go with you, march with you, protest with you, vote with you, speak up with you, and worship with you. If your tribe is white, they will more than likely follow you before they follow someone who looks and talks like I do. Not only that, the next racial crisis in our country is an opportunity for you to show them in your leadership that you know how to follow black people.

That's right. I said it. In order to lead others well as it pertains to racial awareness and appropriate corresponding action, we must also be willing to follow well. It is imperative to be in relationship with people who experience racism regularly as a part of life. These people can teach us about the invisible wrongs in society that we don't normally see because we don't experience them. For instance, two black men in my church, recently told me on the same day about how both of them faced injustices on their respective jobs due to racism.

One was accused of inappropriate contact with a white woman, and the other was accused of stealing by white coworkers. In both cases, the white people in charge took the accusers' word, and did not bother to look at the video evidence that would have exonerated both men. Although these two men were different ages and worked two different jobs for two different companies, they were treated in virtually the same manner. They were both told they could resign or have charges brought against them. When they considered their options legally, both men decided to resign. One man didn't have the financial resources to fight in court, and the other man decided not to waste his money in court fighting the case.

I listened to both of these men share their stories. I knew their character, and I also know how “the system” can work against men of color. I lamented with them and I told them that I believed them. It was critical for their mental wellbeing to hear me tell them I believed them because others were treating them as if they were guilty. To my white leaders, once black people and other ethnic minorities trust you enough to tell you their experiences with racism and structural injustice, it is imperative for you to listen without suspicion. You must listen without conjecture, realizing that just because something is not your experience, that doesn’t mean it’s not true.

If for some reason you feel compelled as a white believer in Christ to rise up and advocate for the racially oppressed, please be courageous in your leadership and take the risk. Lead with your lips as well as with your life. Use your sphere of influence to impact others, and while you are leading them, be sure to follow black people who have been in this battle a lot longer and who fight from a different vantage point in terms of personal experience. You will be blessed. The people who follow you will be blessed, and the black people you learn from will also be blessed.

# REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 01.** Dr. Williamson began this lesson talking about the need for his church to deconstruct its balcony because of safety reasons. A professional company was brought in to deconstruct the balcony and then reconstruct it. When it comes to race, racial biases, ignorance, prejudice, stereotypes and false beliefs, what are some things in your life that need to be deconstructed?
- 02.** When it comes to having your racial worldview reconstructed, what black person or person of color is personally assisting God in your renovation and transformation?
- 03.** It's one thing for individuals to undergo a reconstruction, but what often gets left out is the need for businesses, boardrooms, departments, offices, and organizations to be reconstructed so as to become more just, aware, and equitable regarding race. How would you describe the racial equity and representation that exist in the structures you participate in? Proverbs 11:1 says, "Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight." What can be done or what can you do to help balance out the scales in the structures and institutions that you participate in and have authority within?
- 04.** Have you ever thought about where in your life you intentionally or unintentionally submit to the leadership of black people or people of color? Does this matter? Why or why not?
- 05.** What black people are you following and learning from as it pertains to race?
- 06.** The twelve had to get their hands dirty at the grave site by rolling the stone away. Once they did their part, God did His part. Once they did what man could do, God did what only He could do. Jesus raised the dead once the disciples rolled the stone away. What are some specific things that you can do right now to follow Jesus into the work of racial reconciliation and racial repair? What are some ways that you can get your hands dirty by rolling away the stones of ignorance and obstruction?

