

WAKING UP

Stories of Jesus, Race, & Reconciliation

BY: **LISETTE FRASER**

Lead Family Pastor at Fellowship Church

“You will be inspired
by Lisette as you read these
gripping stories and WAKE UP
to God’s vision for all people
of all ethnicities!”

KARA POWELL

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DEDICATION

To those whose stories are so intricately woven with mine -
Mum & Pap, Kyle, Abbi & Mattias - you all are my heart! I love you!

To those whose stories have so deeply shaped mine - Rob & Ruthie,
Albert & LaRosa, Michael & Faith, John & Tina - thanks for pointing me
to the wholeness of the Gospel & the beauty of reconciliation.

ENDORSEMENTS

“Every time I’m with my dear friend Lisette, I learn from her and am inspired by her. You will feel the same as you read these gripping stories and WAKE UP to God’s vision for all people of all ethnicities-starting with you!”

**Kara Powell, PhD, Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute
Youth and Family Strategist for Orange and co-author of Growing Young**

“One of the wonderful things that I love about this book is that it captures just a glimpse of the greatness of Lisette’s heart. Her humility, courage, leadership and heart for reconciliation is immense and has been inspiring to witness. Her heart for God’s people has been evidenced by the way that she daily lives out the gospel with her family.”

**Albert Tate, Senior Pastor Fellowship Church
Contributing Author of Letters to a Birmingham Jail: A Response to the Words and Dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

“Orange City Strategy is honored and humbled to help create a platform that elevates catalytic leaders like Lisette Fraser. She’s brave, brilliant and boss!”

Sam Collier, Director of City Strategy at Orange.

INTRODUCTION

Tell me the facts and I'll learn.

Tell me the truth and I'll believe.

But tell me a story and it will live in heart forever.

– Native American Proverb

There is something powerful about story. It's why we love a great book or seeing an incredible film. It's why we are more compelled by someone's personal experience than a product's value. It's why Jesus used stories to teach people the things closest to God's heart. Story matters. Story helps us understand and connect to things that are foreign to us.

I often wonder how I ended up where I did. I wonder why this white, Dutch, Canadian girl ended up as a pastor passionate about racial reconciliation, working at a multi-ethnic church in California. At first glance it makes little sense. When you learn some of my story and you see how it collides with God's story, it makes perfect sense. How I love that God is always writing an incredible story and we get to be a part of it! Join me as I look at the stories that shaped me to enter the conversation of race and reconciliation.

// the first story //

I grew up when youth group choirs were cool. Maybe they still are somewhere and maybe they never were, but in the late 80's, I thought youth group choir was awesome! And even cooler than just choir was getting to do a musical and go on tour. Legitimately, the coolest thing ever. I was in 8th grade when our little youth group from Canada was going on tour through the US on the way to a North American convention for our churches.

It was in northern Idaho when an event occurred that I'd never forget. On tour, we would stop at local churches to perform. The churches would feed us and provide host homes for us to stay in overnight before traveling onto the next city. We were having a ball until we arrived at this town where we were not quite as welcome. You see, my youth pastor was African American. As a student, I only caught snippets of what all happened and don't remember all the details. I do have a vivid memory of us leaving the church very early in the morning, and Rob, our youth pastor, covering his head and hiding as we boarded the bus to rush out of town.

That day left an impression on me. Something about that showed me that the world wasn't right. And somehow that 13 yr old girl grew up into a pastor and one day found herself serving at a multi-ethnic church, passionate about racial reconciliation and the conversations of healing that need to happen. I often get asked why I care about it and how I ended up here? The answer is this compilation of stories. They are moments that happened in my life that prepared me for this conversation. They are stories that opened my eyes to God's work in the world and how I might be a part of it. I hope these stories lead you to reflect on your own. When our story collides with God's story it compels us to be a part of God's bigger story of redeeming and restoring the world.

// my story //

Let me tell you a little about the beginnings of my story.

My family immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands when I was just 3 years old. My parents felt that Canada offered better opportunities for the future. So we settled into our Canadian life.

And then everything changed.

At the age of 6 I came home from a sleepover with friends to have my Mum sit me down to explain that my Dad had left and wasn't coming back. Seeing as we had no family and no support system in Canada, Mum and I begun plans to move back to Holland. I headed back and lived with my Oma (grandma in Dutch) while Mum dealt with a difficult divorce, selling of the house and all.

While Mum worked through all the challenges of a messy divorce and cross-continental move in Canada, there were a few friends from the street we lived on that walked with her. A Norwegian lady who prayed for Mum and encouraged her often, and a Dutchman whose wife had passed away and was dealing with his own hurt and new reality. Mum and this Dutchman found kindred spirits in one another. Mum could help this gentleman with cooking and looking after his kids and he could help with the details of selling a house.

When the time finally came for my Mum to join my Oma and I in Holland, I was thrilled! One day in Holland, something unexpected happened—my Mum randomly ran into that Dutchman from Canada! He was visiting family and my Mum just happened to be in that city for other business. This random encounter led to them realizing how much they missed each other and in fact loved each other. And so, back to Canada we went!

Now back in Canada we ended up on the same street, just a different house. And a new life began. A blended family with all the joys and challenges that brings. My Mum and now step-Dad continued their journey. The hurts they experienced had a profound effect on them and they were both seeking to heal those wounds. The Norwegian neighbor had the answer, his name was Jesus. And so she prayed faithfully and continually for my parents. She invited them to church. And, over time, my Mum finally decided to go. I remember the day she decided to follow Jesus.

// my story // | continued

And everything changed.

About a year later my step-Dad followed suit and all of a sudden the trajectory of our lives radically changed.

My step-siblings were 18 & 20 years old at the time, so all of this affected them differently. But for me, as an 8 year old, it meant my family now was Christian and church was central to everything we did. We attended regularly, got involved in ministries and served frequently. At the age of 13 I made my own decision to follow Jesus. The best decision ever.

However, on the other side of my life was my Dad and step-Mom. They were committed, vocal atheists who were incredibly opposed to my decision. They made this known to me often. As a kid caught between 2 worlds, I struggled. I really wanted, like every other kid, for both parents to love me and like me but this faith thing was causing some issues.

As I grew, there was no denying to me the power of the Gospel. The hurt of divorce, the difficulty of bouncing between homes, the deep wounds from a Dad who was emotionally and verbally abusive left some gaping wounds and the only thing that healed those was Jesus. My Mum and step-Dad were the best I could ask for, I had friends, I had a church family and all of that was incredible, but it was only Jesus that could truly heal the hardest wounds.

That is still true today. Because I experienced God's healing of hard wounds, I feel passionate about helping experience God's healing of their hard wounds.

“When our passion meets God’s heart and then collides with the world’s great needs, we are a part of bringing God’s Kingdom to earth. We get to be a part of the best and most important story, the story of God redeeming and restoring everything.”

// God’s Story //

Growing up in an evangelical Christian Church I heard the gospel often. I witnessed many altar calls inviting people to repent and choose Jesus. And then many baptisms celebrating those people becoming new in Christ. I loved the confidence we had that one day we would experience heaven.

Somewhere along the way the version of the Gospel I knew started to feel incomplete.

The promise of eternal life was great, don't get me wrong. And knowing that my life was right with God was really good. But was that all? What about right now? What about all the things that felt broken in my life and in my world? Was there no way for those things to get fixed? Was there no healing today? As I read the word of God, I watched Jesus engage people and meet them in their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The stories of the Gospel showed me a God who healed a lot of earthly things and I couldn't help but wonder if that wasn't still possible today?

One day I heard a message on the Gospel that sounded very different, more whole and hopeful. The teacher suggested that when Jesus came to earth He came to redeem and restore everything that was broken and lost. Our relationship with God, but also our relationships with one another and with creation. When Jesus taught us to pray, He said, "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." The teacher said that implied it was possible, the we could be striving for heaven on earth. Woah.

That changed everything. Instead of waiting for heaven, we are invited to partner with God to bring heaven to earth. When Jesus came to earth, He showed us that He cared about restoring everything. He restored the spiritual, the vertical relationship between God and people, but He also healed the physical, the emotional, the relational - He came to restore everything. As He restores us to God, He invites us to live how He lived and be a part of restoring everything.

I've often said to students, "When you love God, you get to be a part of His work. You get to be a part of fixing everything that is broken. And no, you can't fix everything, but we can all fix something, and if we all fix something, we can literally change the world!"

When our passion meets God's heart and then collides with the world's great needs, we are a part of bringing God's Kingdom to earth. We get to be a part of the best and most important story, the story of God redeeming and restoring everything.

// when I realized I wasn't normal //

I loved school! I'm an extreme extrovert And I like learning. So school was a fun place. Until it wasn't...

Recess and lunch were probably my favorite parts of the day, because, well, I could talk the whole time! My Mum always made my lunches and often my favorites. There was nothing I loved more than a liverwurst sandwich on dark brown wheat bread. This is a very normal Dutch lunch. A very yummy, feels like home, Dutch lunch. Unless you're not in Holland. Because in Canada, it quickly became the thing I was mocked for. I was made fun of, picked on, and so embarrassed.

It became a dilemma. Lunch became the worst part of my day. On the other hand, I grew up in a home where you never complained about food. My parents grew up through World War II and its aftermath. As an occupied country, Holland experienced unbelievable devastation and extreme hunger. Just because Mum & Pap were older and had access to a lot of food, didn't mean those memories were wiped away. Culturally, we grew up not ever complaining about food, not throwing it out and always being grateful for what we had.

A day came when I couldn't handle it any more. I came home and carefully asked my Mum if I could start taking ham sandwiches to school. You see, those were normal and I just so desperately wanted to fit in and be accepted.

From that day forward I took ham sandwiches on light wheat bread. Everyday. It didn't taste very good to me. But no one commented on my lunch again. And soon, lunch was a better place for me. I never did eat another liverwurst sandwich. And as I think about that today, I'm kind of sad about it. They really were my favorite, but being normal was way more important. So I gave up things I loved, in fact, I started to resent them because they represented hurt and I knew they were the things that made me not fit in.

And then I woke up.

// when I realized I wasn't normal // | continued

When I was diving more into the conversations about race and reconciliation I remember meeting this stunning African American woman who shared about the day she decided to wear her hair the way it was meant to be worn. It was beautiful, curly, big and looked amazing on her. And admittedly, the significance was a little lost on me. She could tell, and so she continued. She told me that from the time she was a little girl, she was taught to fight her hair so that it looked white.

White women tend to have smooth, controlled hairdo's. Because that was what was considered "normal", that's what everyone strove to do.

She began to teach me about the idea of normative culture. Our society is built on the idea that white culture is the norm. We see it in the simple things like band-aids. When you see a box of skin-toned band-aids, whose skin tone do they match? White. We've asked people of color to become like us. We are the norm. Our speech patterns, our hair, our dress, our methods and way of doing life are "normal."

Now I realize it is not you and I that specifically stood up one day and said, "You all must become like me!" I didn't do that myself and neither did you individually. But our culture has been doing that for a long time, both inadvertently and deliberately. For instance, in generations past, slave masters would make house slaves speak white English. Today, many of us still wish 'those' people could speak more clearly so we could understand them. In hiring, businesses take less people with 'foreign' names than people with 'American' names. We worry more about the young African American following us than the young white. We have way more white movie stars than any other ethnicity.

What's so incredibly sad is that not only have we asked people of color to become like us, the process has caused so many of them to resent their own culture and ethnicity. A part of them that should be deeply loved as it was created by the God of the universe.

When I think of my own journey to fit in and be "normal" I recognize the cost to me, and it's way more than fewer liverwurst sandwiches. And my journey barely scratches the surface of those who have, for generations, been told that who they are and what they are is not normal.

// when I realized I wasn't normal // | continued

Much of the history of America is built on other cultures assimilating to white culture. This is the story of indigenous schools, the story of slavery and the story today. It is a story of people of color being asked to give up who they are to become like us. We set the standard to which everything else should conform. However, we know this doesn't work when we're in relationship. Something is lost when one has to become completely like the other.

The beauty of relationship is that as we learn about one another we get to discover how our differences make the relationship richer. My husband and I come from very different family cultures. I can't imagine if one of us had to become completely like the other for our relationship to succeed. I cannot imagine the loss in that, not just for the person having to change everything, but for the relationship. Yet that is what we have done culturally.

I can't help but wonder, if white has been normative, what does it mean for us to fully embrace reconciliation? How do we redeem the cultural things that have been stripped from people and embrace the differences for a richer relationship?

Once I became aware of things like band-aids it forced me to look deeper. It's only been in recent years that make-up came out with broader skin tones. I wonder where else we don't even realize we're asking people to become like us, white, instead of us growing, learning and embracing the fullness one another?

// when I realized what I had //

I'll never forget the excitement of going on my very mission trip! It was my senior year of High School and a team of us from my home church were heading from Canada to Mexico. We would be serving in Tijuana to work alongside the local church to help families in deep need.

This was the first time I traveled to an underdeveloped country. I had never witnessed the things I was seeing. I had no idea what to do with them. It was shocking and overwhelming. From the smells, to the trash, to the state of the homes, to the roaming animals, none of it made any sense to me.

And then the people. These people, living in conditions I could not make sense of. Why would they choose to live in this mess and not do something about it?

And then the children. Oh the children. Watching kids wandering bare foot through piles of rubble, looking at us longingly - I had no idea what to do with any of it.

Thankfully, we had work to do. It meant I wouldn't just be an overwhelmed observer, instead we got involved. It meant meeting people, spending time with them, working alongside them, laughing with them, eating with them and getting to know them for who they were, way beyond my initial snapshot.

It's amazing what proximity does to shape your perspective!

What I came to see were some of the most resilient and beautiful people I had ever met. They are my brothers and sisters. They are incredible, wonderful people. And yet they live in conditions I can't wrap my mind around. For the first time I began to understand what I had in relation to what someone else didn't have.

It made no sense.

Neither of us chose our lot in life. We were born into it. That's all. I could not figure out why I was born into a family with much and they were not. It was the first time I understood I had an advantage. And when I went home to my running water, comfy bed, flushing toilet, unending choices of food, clothes and access, I struggled. The disconnect. The injustice.

when // when I realized what I had // | continued

How could I enjoy what I had without remembering what they didn't. I had no category for the things I was feeling, no framework for what I had seen and no action steps to fix it.

What was my role?

Soon I realized that guilt and shame weren't necessary or helpful. I hadn't done anything wrong. There was nothing I did to be where I was. I was fortunate and I needed to live with gratitude. I needed to live with generosity. If I recognized I had an advantage that others didn't, as a follower of Jesus, my role is to use that advantage to help others. This is not a political statement about governments, this is a life statement about followers of Christ. This is what I did and what I do. I've been serving in Tijuana for 23 years and counting. But it's not just Mexico that captured my heart. God captured my heart and gave me a fuller understanding of my blessings, of my advantages and how He asks me to be generous with all that He has blessed me with.

And then I woke up.

In the years to follow I realized the advantage I had was something called privilege. And my privilege is expansive. I am beyond fortunate to have what I have economically, educationally, spiritually, relationally, and emotionally. Truly, I am so well off. In no way does this diminish that I've worked very hard and I've had to fight through a ton of brutal obstacles to be where I am today. But I realize I started at a different point than many. I started far ahead of many, and, to be honest, only behind a few.

Through my continued work in Mexico, my love and respect for the people has only increased. Many of the people we know have worked incredibly hard, day in and day out. They have fought relentlessly to overcome obstacles in their lives. Yet they still live in poverty. Many still can't give their children an education. They still can't get ahead. They simply didn't get to start at the same point as me.

If life is a race, I got a huge head start.

The more time I lean in and spend time with my brothers and sisters of color, the more I realize that this is true and I have a head start. Plain and simple. It is not something I earned it's just something I have based on the color of my skin.

“More than anything, as I recognize what I have, I am compelled to live with gratitude, generosity and empathy.”

when // when I realized what I had // | continued

It does not mean we haven't worked hard, had hardships, had a perfect existence, it simply means that because of the color of our skin we naturally have access and opportunity that others don't. That's privilege. And if we have it, we have a responsibility to use it for good.

This is not intended to be a guilt inducing scenario. Really. Over the years I've taken hundreds of people on mission trips. Every single time we go people have to go through a process of realizing what we have and what others don't. Reality is usually quickly followed by guilt. But it doesn't last, nor ought it, because guilt implies you've done something intentionally wrong. Wrong has been done and we have often ignored the plight of others, but I know most of us didn't intentionally set out to hurt a whole people group. And, honestly, guilt is a terrible motivator. It's unhelpful in all ways.

When you encounter poverty and it makes you realize what you have, it ought to compel generosity and compassion. It ought to force you to ask questions and to wonder many things. Being told you're wealthy feels untrue until you meet someone who isn't. It takes engaging a different reality to give you that perspective.

Often the struggle and pushback on white privilege comes from the fact that you've never realized it's true. You haven't spent time with someone for whom it is not true. It wasn't until I engaged in community with people of color that it started to actually ring true for me. It wasn't until I was out with a friend for lunch and I saw that I received very different service than they did. It wasn't until I was out with another friend in the evening and an incident happened where the police showed up and I saw that they were looked at suspiciously while I was asked for my opinion. It took engaging their reality to realize there was a disadvantage.

I had a head start. There was an assumption made about me and an assumption made about them. And it had nothing to do with who we were, our professions, our work ethic, or our personality. It was just the color of our skin that dictated people's responses to us.

And so, I've had to acknowledge what I have and start to ask questions about how to use my head start to help others. Sharing my story and their story is part of it. It's about leaning in and listening well. It's about learning. It's about asking questions of where there is advantage and disadvantage and learning to leverage what I have. More than anything, as I recognize what I have, I am compelled to live with gratitude, generosity and empathy.

// when I realized equal didn't mean same //

I love people watching! Outdoor patios in busy areas are my favorite place to pass time. Just give me a good cup of coffee, give me people to watch and I'm good. It's no wonder that I discovered a love for sociology in University. I felt like my professors were paid to people watch.

In a second year sociology course we leaned heavily into feminism. At that point, I honestly didn't know a lot about feminism or gender equality. Those weren't terms I'd heard often. You may be wondering how I'd missed those topics. I don't know. Truthfully, I'd grown up in a conservative church and in a conservative community. There were few places where I would have been introduced to the conversation. As we leaned in, I found it exciting and challenging. As a passionate type A woman it felt liberating and hopeful.

There were a number of people in the class passionate about gender equality. By their definition, equality meant being the same. The conversations often steered towards the idea that men and women could all and should all be allowed to do the same things. The argument was it was only cultural constructs that told us women that wasn't possible.

At the onset of the conversation I was all in. The world was against me and I was going to prove it wrong. But quickly something about the conversation felt incomplete, it didn't sit quite right. When equal is equated with same, our uniqueness is lost. In shocking news, men and women aren't the same. In fact, women aren't all the same as other women, and all men aren't the same either! When we ignore these differences, we actually lose the richness of who we are.

As a wife and mom, I love the ways my role is different from my husband's. We are undoubtedly equally important to our kids and we were both needed for those kids to happen (if you don't know how this works, see your local youth pastor for a talk on the birds and bees). But we are different: my husband neither gave birth, nor fed the kids from his body. If we had to be the same he would have had to wire up some awfully uncomfortable feeding contraption. On the other hand, when we are equally valuable and able to celebrate our differences, there is a richness to our 'us'ness.

And then I woke up.

“I wonder what it would be like to live with people from different races and cultures and try to fully embrace who they are?”

// when I realized equal didn't mean same // | continued

A common phrase in the conversation about race, especially from the white perspective, is to talk about being 'colorblind.' The heart behind this is to show we have no biases and see everyone the same way. It's a nice sentiment and I know it often comes from the best place. It just doesn't work. When we don't see color, all we can only see things as the shades of life we already know. If I'm a colorblind white person I can only see the world as a white world. I'm not able to understand someone else's music, language, traditions, etc it's the nature of colorblindness for there to be less vibrancy, not more. We rob people of the uniqueness of their design. We can't be colorblind, because God created us uniquely, wonderfully and differently. Equal in value, yet different. When we don't celebrate the differences, we lose the richness of our 'us'ness.

Instead of being colorblind, I'd encourage you to be color rich! One of the things I love about Canada is that when you ask people where they are from they give you their country of origin and tell you with pride. There's a sense of value in where we come from and the culture with that. We would all tell you're we're Canadian, but we'd also say where our families came from. My husband would tell you he's Scottish, despite being 8th generation Canadian. He knows his heritage and celebrates it.

I wonder what it would be like to live with people from different races and cultures and try to fully embrace who they are? And, if that is something that is lost culturally, what it might look like for them to reclaim it?

// when the story isn't told fairly //

It was a hard day and I knew it would be. It was the day we were having a memorial service for my dad and step-mom. They were killed in a plane crash. The service had been stalled for 6 weeks as we sorted through the mess of an accident and death that occurred outside of the country. Finally it was sorted out and we could have some closure to very tough season.

The difficulty of the season was compounded by the fact that I had not spoken with my dad and step-mom for years. Not by my choice, but by boundaries needed for an unhealthy relationship. My dad was continuously unfaithful, manipulative and verbally and emotionally abusive. He wasn't an easy man to have as a father. I was also his only child and my step-mom had no children, yet the service was being shaped by their siblings with little input from me, despite being in my 30's. I quickly recognized that the story that was going to be told was full of holes.

As I sat through the service my wounds deepened and my anger built. It was hard to listen to an alternative reality than the one I lived. And perhaps the defining speech was when a woman got up to talk about the mistake of time when my dad and step-mom were apart, which happened to be the 15 years when he was married to my mum and I was born. And then she prayed.

As a pastor and person of deep faith, you would think this prayer brought comfort, but it did the total opposite. My dad and step-mom were devout, vocal atheists. In fact, when I was asked if I would like to pray at the service I said no because it didn't honor them, nor did I believe it made sense. Now I prayed that day. I prayed a lot, just not aloud for the crowd.

When the service finally ended I remember being so thankful I could finally walk away. I had experienced a childhood full of hurt and then I had to sit through a service memorializing two people at the heart of much of that hurt and listen to a reality that in no way reflected mine. And no, I didn't expect people to talk about how awful they were, but I would have expected a reference to the years my parents were together, and to my life and relationship with my Dad, as the only child. There were boxes and boxes of photos of those years and all the things my Dad and I had done together. Yet that piece of my Dad's history was completely ignored that day. My history and existence was discredited that day.

// when the story isn't told fairly // | continued

And then I woke up.

As I sat with some friends a few years ago and listened to their stories, I recognized that they felt the same on a much larger level. They felt their history and existence were ignored in the larger story being told through US History. This resonated as I understood the pain of history being told from only one perspective. And so, I needed to do some research.

In Canada, history is told from a more global perspective. I am learning that it's not the same in the US. In fact, I was a little insulted to not see any of Canada's contribution to WWII in the history my kids were learning in school. The US did amazing things in WWII, don't get me wrong, I just wished you all knew that others did too! And I suppose that's the issue at hand. The history that's being taught to our kids is being taught primarily from one perspective. And while that perspective is important, it's also incomplete.

For example, for most of us it wasn't until the movie Hidden Figures came out in 2017 that we learned of the incredible contribution of women of color who helped get us to the moon! What a story! It was inspiring for everyone, but especially young women and particularly women of color to learn that these power house ladies made significant contributions to one of America's finest accomplishments. The fact we got to the moon is in all the history books. It is a story we love to tell. The story becomes richer when we learn more about it, when we learn more about who contributed to it and what their journey was like. That is the richness of America.

There are many stories we haven't learned yet, and there are perspectives which have been completely missed. So many untold stories, unsung hero's and covered over hurts. On one hand, this is to be expected, there is only so much room in the history books, and digging deeper is what wikipediaWikipedia and libraries are for. But if it was always your family, your people's history which was tied to the untold, we have then told you that your story, your history and existence isn't worthy of credit.

By not telling the whole story, we are weaving a more painful story.

Perhaps we could try learning more of the story and then tell a fuller story.

// when I realized there was more to the story //

At the very beginning I shared with you the first blatant act of racism I remember: getting run out of town when I was on choir tour with my youth group. I was in middle school, so plenty old enough to have a solid memory of this incident.

As I started work on compiling these stories I decided to message Rob, my old youth pastor. He and his beautiful wife and kids now reside in Chicago where they've been in ministry for years. Rob has continued to influence my life since those early years and yet we'd never discussed this incident. So I sent him a note and asked if my memory was correct and what the whole story was.

Well, there was certainly more to the story than I remembered! It turns out that as soon as we had arrived in town and started piling off the bus the problems began. The pastor at the host church met with one of the youth leaders as he assumed they were the pastor. When he was redirected to Rob, our African American youth pastor, things got tricky. He immediately didn't know what to do. Rob recognized the issue, it wasn't his first rodeo. He knew we were all hungry so he suggested the pastor take some time to figure out his side of things and we'd be back.

We found a local diner and excitedly headed in for dinner. For some reason, the service seemed really slow. Except the people around us were being served. We asked a few times with no response. Finally one of the older youth leaders stood up to ask the server if we could please order. Turns out they wouldn't serve us, we had a black man with us.

We went to a grocery store to buy what we could to make ourselves a cold dinner. Then headed back to the church where we were told we would no longer be performing. Oh, and the host families were no longer willing to host us. We were welcome to sleep on the church floor before we left. Early the next morning, with Rob covering his head, we were run out of town.

It was 1989. Less than 30 years ago.

I had to ask Rob how many stories like this he could tell. He said they were too many to count. And they continue today. These are not just past stories. They are present stories. He's a husband, father and pastor, yet the thing that defines him to much of our culture is the color of his skin.

“When it comes to the conversation of race and reconciliation we have to be aware of our perspective.”

// when I realized there was more to the story // | continued

And then I woke up.

When it comes to the conversation of race and reconciliation we have to be aware of our perspective. We have an impression of oppressive and racist moments. But our impression as white people can be very different from the perspective of the person of color in that moment. It's critical that we are hearing their perspective, their stories.

Because I love Rob, his wife and their family, I can't dismiss what I see and know. Because I love my pastor, Albert, his wife and their kids, I can't dismiss what I see and know. Because I love my church full of people of color, I can't dismiss what I see and know.

There's so much more to the story, to their story and my story. But as our stories continue to collide with God's story, I can't help but recognize that I have a responsibility, a calling to be a part of the reconciliation that is needed in our world. The gospel compels us to!

THE STORY CONTINUES

It is God's story that continues to propel me. It is the stories of my brothers and sisters of color that continue to challenge me. And it is Sunday mornings at my multi-ethnic, inter-generational, gospel-centered church that remind me that God is always writing a redeeming story.

God is always writing a redeeming story.

Imagining that we just finished sharing over a cup of coffee, I'd ask you this:

What's your story?

How does it collide with the fullness of God's story?

Who's story do you need to go and learn?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisette Fraser is the Lead Family Pastor at Fellowship Church, a fast-growing, multi-ethnic church in the Los Angeles area. She's spent the last two decades serving the local church in Canada and the US. She's passionate about walking with young people and families exploring the fullness of the Gospel.

She serves as a coach for the Fuller Youth Institute and as an Adjunct Professor at Azusa Pacific University. Lisette and her husband, Kyle, have two children.



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