



EXCERPT



The Colors of Culture ***The Beauty of Diverse Friendships***

September 15, 2020 | \$14, 120 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4526-2

"You need to read The Colors of Culture with an open heart and posture of a learner! The message woven throughout the book of stepping out of our places of comfort and being intentional in building authentic relationships in order to reach diverse people is needed now in our society more than ever before."

—John M. Perkins, cofounder and president emeritus of the John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation and Christian Community Development Association

Ubuntu: "I Am Because We Are"

We are living during a time in our society when fear and mistrust among people of different racial groups are becoming the norm rather than the exception. Acknowledging that there has been a huge resurgence of racism, discrimination, and individual prejudices is difficult and even baffling at times. The cultural divide appears to be expanding rather than shrinking. Although we have made great strides in learning how to connect with people beyond our discomforts and fears and to see others as God sees them, as people of value and worth, if we are honest, there is still much work to be done.

Cultural mistrust does not only come from our obvious differences such as race or lifestyle—how we treat each other as individuals, and our perception of each other both play a role as well. At a recent town hall meeting in my city to discuss what steps we can take to understand each other better, a young woman stated, "I thought we were past all this divisive stuff. I just think we have fear of each other and we have to learn how to trust and respect each other again."

It was an uncomfortable meeting, with raw conversations centered on the role of law enforcement in our city and the mistrust among communities of color due to both national and local events involving blacks and community policing. A courageous conversation took place in a room filled with people who barely knew each other but wanted to begin the necessary process to move beyond shallow words and mistrust to building bridges instead of walls.

That one meeting has initiated many more in our city, and friendships have formed between the most unlikely people. They would never have happened without people being willing to take steps to pursue understanding each other.

While we do have some heartbreaking problems happening daily in our society regarding interactions between diverse populations, it is my belief that we do have solutions that will take courage to move beyond our places of comfort. But these solutions are not as complicated as we make them. What can we do? We can learn to see every human being from God's perspective as persons of worth, value their lived experiences even when we don't understand them, and cultivate genuine relationships based on humility, vulnerability, and transparency.

If we are not willing to get real about our own heart issues with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and if we don't allow God to bring healing, nothing will change in our lives or in the lives of those we interact with daily. Sometimes it's easier to ask Jesus to change the situations around us rather than transform ourselves and allow the change to begin within us.

Almost every African Bantu dialect includes the saying, "I am because we are," which is captured by the term *Ubuntu*. The word literally means "human-ness" and roughly translates to "human kindness." The concept of Ubuntu is that, no matter our differences, we as human beings can connect with one another through sharing our life experiences, stories, and humanity. We all have stories from our journeys in life, and our stories and lived experiences are the heart of who we are. And even though our life stories do not always connect with the stories of others, they are an important summation of our personal experiences, of why we believe as we do, and ultimately of our frame of reference and our perspective of others.



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“Dr. Mingo has, for decades, lived out her counsel to be patient in forming friendships with those who are different than ourselves. She engages in courageous conversations in order to clear up misperceptions. I particularly appreciate her insights into how local churches can perhaps unthinkingly assign permanent visitor status to those who regularly attend but who come from a culture different from the majority.”

—Robert Rasmussen, executive director of Near Frontiers

My first introduction to the term *Ubuntu* came through a fascinating picture of a group of people with linked arms running together to get a small basket of sweet treats—just enough treats for one person, really. A caption explained that the group had been told that the person who reached the basket first would get the treats. When they were asked why they ran together instead of individually, their response was, “Ubuntu—how can one of us be happy if the other ones are sad?” I was still puzzled about why they would run together when there was only one prize and why that would make them genuinely happy. I also wondered what that all had to do with culture and relationships.

I finally got the message when I read the following words by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which are a rich description of how we should ultimately connect with any person from any culture.

It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion. A person with Ubuntu is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share.

- *Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of Ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.*

When genuine warmth, respect, and honor are displayed not merely for aesthetic purposes but out of genuine love and compassion for others—in other words, out of Ubuntu—a journey toward transparency, understanding, and long-lasting friendships is enabled.

From this, an idea evolved around my passion and love for seeing people from different cultures and backgrounds unite. I called it genuine Ubuntu relationships—the willingness to see every human being from God’s perspective and not through the lens of prejudices, stereotypes, and negative societal influences. These Ubuntu relationships are not just about being warm and fuzzy with people from different cultures. They involve understanding that a common bond exists between us all as well as differences that we don’t need to fear.

Our stories prove that although we are diverse in our perspectives and different from each other in very unique ways, our differences should not keep us from the things we have in common as followers of Christ and human beings. We all experience joy and laughter, trials and triumphs, fear and trust, pain and disappointment. We ultimately become unified when we are willing to walk together, as uncomfortable as it might be, and not allow barriers such as race or class to make us forget that we really do have a lot more in common with each other than we believe.



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“The Colors of Culture provides tools for improving cultural and racial understanding. While discussing diversity, MelindaJoy disarms us with Christ’s love, humility, authenticity, transparency, and global experience. She uses her mistakes as teaching tools for us. Her terms such as racial righteousness and releasing our right to be right are so refreshing and biblical.”

—Clarence Shuler (a.k.a. “The Love Doctor”), president/CEO of Building Lasting Relationships

Whether in our neighborhoods, churches, workplaces, or other spheres, community is built when we intentionally choose to come out of our comfort zones and connect to others without feeling like we are walking on eggshells. It means risking everything that we think we know about other cultures. It involves not getting stuck in fear and being willing to initiate small steps toward befriending someone.

It takes honesty to admit that even as followers of Jesus we can dislike people we know very little about because their values and beliefs are opposite to what we think or believe. But treating someone with dignity means seeing them as someone who deserves to be communicated with in a spirit of respect even if we don’t agree with their lifestyle or beliefs. To truly connect with people who are different from us will take the grace of God.

When we are willing to learn what dignity, honor, and respect look like in different cultures, we not only positively affect diverse people and their communities, but we allow Jesus to work in our hearts as well. And through this bond of humanity and the pursuit of understanding each other we discover our own identity. We also gain a greater understanding of what is written in the Bible about responding to those around us with love first. Jesus reminds us that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves. And he will help us learn how to do that.

It is doubtful that any solitary person can reflect God’s character on their own. God’s image comes to expression in community and especially in our friendships with others. The journey of soul growth doesn’t occur in isolation but rather through our relationships with others as our lives collide in our everyday dealings in a broken and hurting world. The truth is that relationships as a whole can be a bit messy, and learning how to truly relate to others takes time. But I believe most people are looking for genuine relationships and community. And relationships can be very beautiful and rewarding and reflect the heart of God for all humanity.

—From the introduction



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Q & A



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MelindaJoy Mingo is an ordained minister, professor, cultural capacity expert, and entrepreneur based in Colorado Springs. She is the founder of Je-Nai International Ministry and Significant Life Change, Inc., and has developed multicultural initiatives both at home and abroad. She holds a PhD in global leadership and an honorary doctorate in urban transformative leadership and has been widely recognized for her teaching and training in crosscultural competency.

Cultural Capacity Trainer Builds Understanding Between People of Diverse Backgrounds

What brought about the idea for *Colors of Culture*?

MelindaJoy Mingo: Throughout the years as a diversity trainer and cultural capacity trainer with organizations (profit and nonprofit), law enforcement, ministries, churches, and individuals to name a few, I felt a deep call to create a model of how people build relationships with diverse people beyond race that includes more of building communities of genuine practices.

The term *diversity* is usually tied to external factors of what we can see visually. From my experience of being a diversity trainer for over fifteen years both nationally and internationally, a theme emerged that included celebrating the value and worth of individuals based solely on getting to know people through building intentional relationships. I don't believe that traditional diversity trainings that highlight shame and guilt build understanding between people of diverse backgrounds.

I also began to see a huge resurgence of racial separation in churches and among believers that did not mirror the life of Jesus and how he related to all people based on value, worth, and dignity. I also wanted to write a book that would appeal to a broad audience and not just people of color. My desire in the book is to highlight the principles of being an intentional cultural bridge person, cultural champions, and stepping out of fear to befriend others.

What is the central idea within your book?

MelindaJoy: The central thesis of this book is that it is not difficult to build friendships with individuals who are different than us when we allow ourselves to become vulnerable and transparent and willing to embrace the similarities we have as human beings.

The distinctiveness about my approach is unpacking the concept of *Ubuntu*—a term that speaks of finding common ground with others through our humanity and experiences in life. While this term derives from an African concept of building community through demonstrating love, care, compassion, and dignity toward others, it is parallel to the biblical principles of answering the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

This book addresses the issues of racism, racial righteousness, personal identity, and the ability to truly love others from the perspective of us having "one blood" made in the image of Jesus.



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Who did you write this book for?

MelindaJoy:

- People who enjoy becoming enlightened on issues of racial reconciliation, pursuing racial healing, cultural bridge people, ministries that are proactive in justice issues, individuals who love to work in their communities as resource partners, and volunteers with various organizations that serve the less fortunate
- The arenas of social work and people who are diversity and anti-bias trainers and speakers
- Cultural learners who want practical steps for reaching the nations in America
- People who love to read books about friendships and building relationships
- Pastors and leaders who want a practical guide for crossing into cultures and becoming insiders not outsiders
- Individuals who love to travel and meet people from different cultures
- Groups that are involved in restorative justice issues

What are some key points you hope to convey to readers?

MelindaJoy:

1. The value, worth, and dignity of all people regardless of class, socioeconomic status, race ethnicity, or any other attribute that has a possibility of separating people from building genuine relationships.
2. Embrace the heart of humility and a learner when connecting with people from diverse backgrounds to build genuine relationships—learn to value a person's lived experiences.
3. Become intentional in stepping out of fear to connect with people of diverse backgrounds for the purpose of building genuine friendships.
4. Learn practical ways to build communities of mutual respect.
5. Model the relational life of Jesus and see people through his eyes while honestly accessing any personal areas of prejudices or personal biases that prevent us from truly connecting heart-to-heart with others.

Describe your heart for *Colors of Culture*.

MelindaJoy: I passionately want readers to see that Jesus created the diversity of cultures and there is such a beauty of doing life with people from different backgrounds and the opportunities are presented to us every day.

I also believe that the message in the book is a 'right now' call for believers to make biblical decisions in this current societal climate of heightened racial tensions that honor Jesus and not just the popular opinions of others.



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