

The generations of hurt that the Chauvin conviction can't heal

## **We are disguising our collective wounds instead of treating them.**

by [Sean Goode](#) in the [May 19, 2021](#) issue



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As the father of two teenagers, I've found myself occasionally responding to their behavior in a way that is both problematic and strikingly familiar to the way my parents responded to me. Every time I catch myself in the act, I question why I would employ the tactics that traumatized me on my own children. The unfortunate answer is that it seems to work, at least in the short term.

As I've embarked on my own journey of healing, I've had to apologize to my children for those moments of reflexive response, rooted in my woundedness. The long-term harm has been greater than any fleeting gain. The old adage is true: hurt people hurt people.

This pattern of responding out of woundedness is not limited to parenting. It is present in every aspect of our lives and our society. Humans are experts at hiding from healing and repeating the traumatizing patterns of our past. It is almost as if

we seek somehow to normalize hurt, to create the space to be OK with it so we can continue to evade the healing we need.

If the last 14 months have shown us anything, it's that we are a people in desperate need of healing. Nothing embodies this truth like the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent trial and conviction of Derek Chauvin. As the verdict was read, a collective exhale was felt across our country, and for at least that moment, there was a feeling that this was an example of true justice and accountability.

But was it?

The criminal legal system is rooted in explicitly racist practices, and for centuries it has disproportionately arrested, adjudicated, incarcerated, and executed African Americans. With this foundation, it's not a system that can be expected to produce fully just outcomes—though, like my problematic parenting tactics, it might produce an immediate desired result. It does little to address accountability to those who are impacted when harm has been done. And it does almost nothing to create healing.

What the criminal legal system does is to allow those who have power, position, and prosperity to feel as though something in the background is working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to keep them safe from criminals who would otherwise be waiting at their doorstep to steal, kill, and destroy. This isn't done in the pursuit of justice; it is done for the preservation of property. We can see this rationale in the system's origins: capturing people who escaped enslavement.

I wasn't relieved when I heard the Chauvin trial verdict. I cannot rely upon an unjust system that has been used to oppress the most marginalized. This system cannot produce an outcome that will be redemptive of the whole of its harm. If I use the tools of the oppressor to oppress others, I have become the source of my own oppression.

Thankfully, there is an escape from this vicious cycle, an off-ramp from this redundancy. It's found in the healing and wholeness we experience in Christ.

Imagine a system that relies on grace to bring people to redemption instead of guilt that buries them in retribution. Imagine a system that isn't focused on harm but on healing, so that those involved can be made whole and thus less likely to harm others in the future. This may seem like an abolitionist fantasy, but it is also the foundation of the Christian faith. Is it not our conviction that all of us are guilty and

are saved by grace? Isn't our call to extend to others the same unending grace that we have received?

This is the catalyst to the healing we all so desperately need. The very healing that helps me become a better parent, husband, and human being could help our society heal from past harms. Wherever we are, so should this healing be. It isn't present only during Sunday morning services or midweek Bible studies. The Great Commission urges us to take this healing power everywhere and create an earth that is as it is in heaven. I trust there will be no judge, jury, or executioner there.

I've seen these possibilities enacted in the real world. The organization I lead, CHOOSE 180, practices the conviction that grace is a better motivator for behavior change than guilt. When police criminalize the behavior of youth and young adults in our region, those young people often get referred to us. We then build supports around them, offering them community instead of a courtroom. Ninety percent of the time, 12 months later they have no new involvement with the retribution-based criminal legal system.

We have experienced months of social unrest since the murder of George Floyd. His death, recorded for the world to see, became a great awakening for many to the injustices that continue to be perpetrated upon Black and Brown people. In the wake of many police killings, we have heard calls for defunding and dismantling our country's oppressive system of policing. Many people have called this too radical an idea, but I say we must not stop there. Abolition is the goal—not only of our policing practices but also of our court system and prison system. All of these have been designed out of woundedness. We continue to disguise our collective wounds instead of treating them with the healing they so desperately call out for.

Jesus was and is the great healer, abolitionist, Savior, and Messiah. The question is, Will we receive his healing and stop the generations of hurt that have been caused by our failure to acknowledge its impact? Will we abolish these systems that cause harm, or will we continue to justify them in our hurt? This hurt shows up everywhere, from a wounded child to a knee on a neck to a courtroom verdict. Will we work to heal it?