

When my family and I moved from the suburbs of Denver, I had no idea how formative that transition would be for me. The move was good for me because I was able to have so much more freedom than I did in the city – I could wander the town as I pleased and I knew I was safe. It was bad, though, because the small mountain town was white; while my life in Denver had some color in it, that little town was full of people who looked just like me.

I'd read about racism and prejudice but had never actually witnessed it until I landed in that community. I knew in my heart of hearts that the racist talk and prejudiced attitudes were wrong and yet, when I was in the midst of it, I fell into its trap. Not everyone was this way, but it was around, and it fell on my ears and into my mind.

At first I was entirely offended by the jokes and put off by the discussions, but as time went on I began to accept it. A comment overheard from the barber, a minute play on words from the grocer, an off-handed remark by a teacher – all these little things took root in my mind and I began to put them to use. A racist seventh-grade joke by my friend would be followed by one I had recently heard; an eighth-grade discussion with a teammate about how we - as the white kids - were better at sports than the Hispanic kids we had just played against.

Throughout high school and into college I had this evil in my mind, ready for use. My racism wasn't burning crosses and wearing hoods. My racism was thinking I was better simply because of my skin tone. My racism was retelling jokes I'd heard. My racism was verbalizing racial slurs in my mind. Mine was not overt racism – that wasn't what I had learned – my racism was underhanded, under-breath, in my mind. It was inappropriate but used at perceived appropriate times.

Some twenty years removed from that time and space the evil is still there: the jokes, the comments, the phrases are all still in my mind, unused but ever-present. I am ashamed that I still carry them, and I'm angry that they take up space and flood me with unwanted thoughts. I wish getting rid of this trash was as easy to empty as the trash in my room in Currie.

As much as I try I can't get rid of it, and yet I know that this evil must be somehow driven out of me. In summarizing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I must admit that neither my own power nor my own submissive waiting for God to act will vanquish the evil, "Rather, both man and God, made one in a marvelous unity of purpose through an overflowing love as a free gift of himself on the part of God and by perfect obedience and receptivity on the part of man, can transform the old into the new and drive out the deadly cancer of sin."¹

I myself can't get rid of this evil that invades my soul, and I can't sit on my laurels waiting for God to do something. I need to invite God into those dark places and ask for help in cleaning up the mess I've made. It's going to take some work, some elbow grease, and patience, but I'm sure that someday it will be gone.

I invite you to do some cleaning with me in this coming year. What are some things in your life that you need help throwing away? What are some things that you desire to be tidied up? What are some things you're unsure what to do with? "God is too courteous to break open the door, but when we open it in faith believing, a divine and human confrontation will transform our sin-ruined lives into radiant personalities."²

As we invite God into our process of cleaning our lives, may we have courage as we dispose of the garbage in our hearts, patience as we toss out the trash in our souls, and perseverance as we scrap the junk in our minds.
much love. sheth.

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 140.

2. King, *Strength to Love*, 143.