



## Episode 8 Transcript

### The Untold Origin Story of Esau McCaulley's Reading While Black

#### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

book, black, esau, people, church, writing, write, authors, academy, academic, reading, voices, seminaries, scholar, read, hear, couple, job, person, voice

#### SPEAKERS

Ed, Esau McCaulley, Maila, Anna Gissing

**Maila** 00:05

Welcome to the Every Voice Now podcast, where we bring voices of color into the spotlight. I'm Maila Kim.

**Ed** 00:11

And I'm Ed Gilbreath. In every episode, you'll hear from authors of color as they share about the inspiring stories that led to the making of their books, as well as the challenges they had to endure and overcome along the way.

**Maila** 00:31

What's up, Ed?

**Ed** 00:33

So Esau McCauley? Wow, it's a big day, we get to talk to Esau McCaulley in the house, New York Times columnist and bestselling IVP author, we're really jazzed.

**Maila** 00:48

Yeah, I mean, Esau McCaulley is known for his writing. He's writing everywhere. He's the author of Reading While Black. What is it, New York Times, Washington Post, all of the above. So we get to have a really good conversation, not only about his writing, which I think is what people know him as. But I think we also get to hear a lot about his journey before being a writer, his childhood, his relationship with his family, all of that.

**Ed** 01:13



His struggles as a black scholar in in the Christian academy. I mean, he's pretty honest about some of that journey, and about white perceptions of black authors in the marketplace. I mean, he was very frank. So he gives us a behind the scenes look at the publishing process and the writing of Reading While Black. It's a rich conversation,

**Maila 01:36**

I think Esau gets to do a lot of interviews with people about the content of his writing and the content of Reading While Black, which we get to touch upon in this episode a little bit. But I think what I'm most excited for is, he shares a lot of the stories before even writing Reading While Black, and then he also gets to share the stories of after the book has been published and the the messages he gets from people or the moments where it really resonated with the reader. So I really liked his story that he shared about the dedication of his Reading While Black to his father. I thought that was such a profound story that I don't think a lot of people even know about. So I'm excited our listeners even get to hear in on that.

**Ed 02:23**

It's a jam packed episode. So let's get out of the way and let our listeners hear our conversation with Esau McCaulley.

**Maila 02:40**

We're excited today to welcome Esau McCaulley, author of Reading While Black and also the host of The Disrupters Podcast to The Every Voice Now Podcast today. So welcome, Esau.

**Esau McCaulley 02:50**

Thank you for having me.

**Maila 02:52**

We're excited to have you here. But let's just kick off, if you can share with our listeners a little bit about yourself, your ethnic background, your family, where you're from, where you currently live, all of that.

**Esau McCaulley 03:03**

I'm from Huntsville, Alabama. I'm African American. I'm married to a pediatrician/Navy reservist, who's currently deployed. So that's kind of a big thing going on in our house. We have four wonderful children. I teach New Testament for Wheaton undergrad and graduate school in Wheaton, Illinois.

**Ed 03:20**



Esau, tell us about your journey into writing. I never set out to be a writer consciously. But it was just always something that brought me joy. And I didn't realize how much of a writer I was until I was doing my doctoral work. And people said, well, you should develop a hobby while you're doing your PhD. What became a public writing career was actually how I took a break from my academic writing. What ended up becoming, anyone who's read CT articles, or New York Times articles, Washington Post articles, The Witness, or those kinds of things started off as I would just write what became a blog, which then turned into a group blog, which turned into a public writing ministry. And so Reading While Black kind of combines both of those personalities, both the academic side and the popular side. And so I sat down to talk to my wife. So this is my fifth year now. And so when I graduated from doing my doctoral work, I said, Okay, let's give this five years, okay. And if I'm really bad at academics, I'll just go pastor. It wasn't a fallback plan like I didn't love it. I was torn. I was torn between being a pastor and going into the academy. And I had done pastoral ministry before. And I said, well, let's just, let me give the academy for five years. And if five years from now, we don't like it, then we will just go and do something else. So this is 2015. So we're now in 2020. So I think I'm gonna stay. So I never thought of myself as someone who was going to write a lot. I literally thought this whole thing could burn to the ground. But man, you're a New York Times columnist, you've been in the Washington Post, CT, of course, and now a bestselling book. How did we get here? It's amazing.

**Esau McCaulley 05:02**

I'm glad you asked this question. I could say a couple of things. One is, I was a much worse writer, when I tried to write like other people. And so I was like, okay, let me do the academy, the way the academy tells me to do the academy. And I just wasn't very good at being a stereotypical white academic. There's these epiphany moments as a person where your life kind of diverges. I'll never forget, they were teaching you how to get a job in the academy. I remember this very clearly, they said, listen, you can't say anything controversial. You don't want to be Google-able, you want to have like, no social media, don't write on blogs, put your head down, and then wait five to seven years, write technical stuff, get tenure. And then you can do whatever you want. And they said, make yourself accessible to as many different types of schools as possible, be bland so that people can read into you what, what they want to see. And I remember at the time I was like, 35, or 36, I'll graduate this year, I'll be 45. I started this when I was 18, trying to help black people. I remember saying, I'm not going to do that. And if I don't get a job, then the McCaulleys will eat another way. So that was when I started for the first time really being intentional about writing lots of stuff that I cared about, that then led to a blog that I started, with just a small personal blog that I was, it's really important for writers to be a bad writer over by yourself. So for like a year or two, I was just writing bad articles that nobody was reading. But I'll never forget the first time I had 100 hits on an article, I



thought I had made it in the world. 100 clicks. After that I wrote for a group blog for free for like, I don't know, another year. The first article, that I wrote for CT was published the same day, I got my PhD.

**Ed** 06:52

Wow.

**Esau McCaulley** 06:53

I walked across the stage, looked on my phone. And the article was up. something about the fatherless, something about Christmas, and different types of families. And I just started writing for CT for a long time. And I still do so it's not in the past tense. So can I tell this story.

**Maila** 07:10

Yeah!

**Ed** 07:10

Come on.

**Esau McCaulley** 07:11

Okay. So this is how it all happened. So I'm just minding my own business. And I'm getting ready to teach a lecture on New Testament translations. And the whole point that I was going to make is that all the translations are basically good. But it's important to have a diverse translation committee of men and women, people from different cultures to help you read the Bible better. That was the point of the lecture I was going to give. I put out a tweet that says we need to have more diversity in Bible translations. The Internet got mad and said, unless you have, you know, black people, the Bible is unwoke. I don't know what they got mad about. But something like I didn't believe the Bible was accurately translated because there were no black people on there. That's not what I believe. But people got really upset about this. The Washington Post reached out and said, hey, do you want to write something about it? I said sure. So the article gets written, the people in the Times say, oh, we saw some of the other stuff you wrote, would you be interested in writing for us? I said, Sure, I'll write for you all. I wrote an article for the Times around Christmas, it did really well. I wrote two or three more articles, they were like, oh, we love what you're doing. Do you want to write for us monthly. And so from there, it just happened. And so I never ever plan on having a public writing career. I just started a blog four years ago. And the next thing, you know, ended up here. All that is happening as relates to the book. I started that book around the same time around 2016, 17, I first started thinking about the book. And I'm saying to myself, I need to write a book related to the issues that are facing my community. I sat down one day, this



literally an afternoon and said, what are seven to 10 questions that I think about a lot as a black Christian. So policing, black identity, all of the things that became chapters in the book, were right there. So I wrote those down. So then when I get the contract with IVP to write the book, at the time I'm writing the book is 2015, 2016. And it's much as it is now. Contentious election, issues of injustice and calls for reform, political protest. And so I wrote the book, in that context, dealing with a world that looked like 2016. 2020, we're kind of in the same place, as a country. So when *Reading While Black* comes out, it feels like man, like he just wrote this book like about now, because America has been circling around this stuff, on one level for my whole life, but in a particularly intense way over the last four years. And so my writing career has been for the most part me trying to say, what does my understanding of the Christian faith especially want to say like the orthodox or traditional reception of it, have to say to the issues pressing the day, and when I see something, I just write about it. And so that's been how all of this occurred.

**Ed** 09:58

Listen, let's let's talk about the book real quick. You dedicate your book to your dad, Esau McCaulley, Sr., and you write that he died before ever getting to see your collective name in print. Tell us a little bit about your relationship with your dad, especially with regards to you as a future writer.

**Esau McCaulley** 10:18

So this is really complicated. So, very few people ask me this question. But me and my father had a complicated relationship. He was in and out of prison. And he died unexpectedly a couple of years ago, to the end of, end of his life, we really weren't on the best terms. And as a kid, I was really upset with my father because he wasn't there. And I didn't really understand. And the more I got older, the more I began to understand something about addiction, what addiction does to people, not just what addiction does to people, but like what America does to people. And my father is a moral agent. So America isn't responsible for everything that he did. Being a black man in the south, in the 60s and the 70s and 80s, just wasn't very easy. And I didn't understand that. And I began to see that my father was doing the best that he could to function in the world that was handed to him. He didn't have the advantages that I had, he had it worse growing up and things that happened to him. And so as he got older, I was able to sit down with him and like have that conversation. And the reason I talk about like our name is because in Huntsville, my hometown, growing up that name, the name Esau McCaulley is not associated with success, not associated with academics and not associated with writing. It's associated with other things. And so what I wanted to do when I wrote the book was to say to him, like, listen, I'm gonna, I'm a Jr., I'm going to take, I'm going to take our name, all the places that you couldn't go. And so this one time I was going to speak in a prison. It was in



Maine, my father was in was in jail in Huntsville, Alabama. And I walked into the prison, and I couldn't give them the talk that I had prepared. I said to them, I'm your son. What I became is what's possible for your kids. Not only is my father not defined by his past, I wasn't defined by it either, so we can always become something new. And so what I wanted to do with the book was to say, look that this is what this is what's possible for us. And so when he died, one of the things he said to me, he was like, man, like, I just haven't, we haven't been as close as we would like, because I just felt like you were doing so much better. And I didn't want to mess it up. So he knew that I was doing well. He knew that I was, you know, graduate school and those kinds of things. But he didn't know that like Reading While Black was coming. And so a lot of the music in Reading While Black is actually music that, some of it was music I listened to like after he died.

**Ed 12:46**

Thank you for sharing that.

**Maila 12:46**

Thanks for sharing that Esau. Well, we need to take a quick break. But when we return, we'll talk more with Esau about his journey to getting published. So stay tuned and thanks for listening to the Every Voice Now podcast.

**Ed 13:16**

Welcome back to The Every Voice Now Podcast. I'm Ed Gilbreath. And with us today is our guests Esau McCaulley, author of Reading While Black. One of the things you mentioned in the book is that the black ecclesial tradition, the witness and ethos of the black church, rarely appears in print. Can you unpack that more? What do you mean by that? And more importantly, why is that the case?

**Esau McCaulley 14:25**

Man, you're gonna try to get me in trouble.

**Ed 14:29**

You're a disrupter. Right?

**Esau McCaulley 14:30**

Yes, I guess I would say there's actually two things that you see a lot in print, you see kind of what I would call accommodationalism, where there's like African Americans who are willing to repeat the talking points in the majority culture, and who just kind of looked down upon black spirituality. And then you see kind of the black progressive tradition that has a strong



affirmation of kind of black identity, a strong emphasis on justice, but it's often revisionist in certain key elements of Christian theology. And so what I didn't see a lot of for black theologians, you know, the Bible is, you know, friend, not an enemy. And we care about the things that the black church has historically cared about. And so historically there, there hasn't been a lot of that in print. The way that I look at it and say it is this: you can go to Wheaton, or you can go to Harvard, different schools that are much different places, theologically, in the white context. There is no black Wheaton. Right? There are historically black colleges and universities and there's seven black seminaries. But like, you don't have the same range. I'm not saying the seven historic black seminaries aren't doing authentic black theology and I am. I'm saying that the spectrum of opinion, I think, has been more narrow on the African American side. And when I talk about ecclesia, ecclesial, it's because for the most part, because we didn't have access to a lot of institutions, a lot of black theology has remained in the church, it's been ecclesial. And so when I talk about ecclesiology, I'm talking about like the instinct, the ethos, and the vibe that you get from attending black churches. And so it was one of those things where like, the proof was in the pudding. And so that's what I said, I'm just gonna have to make a claim, and hope that people recognize, and because as an African American who's relatively on the traditional side, I'm a minority in the academy. And so what I call black ecclesial theology was me trying to say, I think there's a way of doing this, it's a little bit different. And we need our space and freedom to be to do that different thing. It's a call for a new genre.

**Ed 16:26**

And it resonates, obviously. Have you have you been feeling it from both sides? Or is there a particular side that is a little more intense in terms of the reaction to Reading While Black?

**Esau McCaulley 16:37**

As an academic, you don't know if you're a crazy person, or as a writer. And so I've been like, every time somebody black says, man, this is exactly what I needed. This speaks my experience. I say, okay, I'm not alone. So, that response has been positive. And the other thing that's been encouraging is that like, white, there's been a lot of white readers, who also got something from it. And this is the thing that I say to people all the time, we have a word in English called Anglophiles, lovers of British culture. They read British fiction. They like British theologians. They think that British evangelicalism gets evangelicalism better than evangelicalism in America, because the British temperament is better like this. Is this not true?

**Ed 17:27**

They watch The Crown,



**Esau McCaulley 17:28**

They watch *The Crown*. So if you know what, when they write, when they're writing, you know, Jane Austen wasn't about us. We say, even though I'm not the primary audience of this book, I can glean something from it. And a lot of those movies and books are unapologetically British. And that's what people like about it, it feels different. And so when I said, I'm writing a book to black people, it doesn't mean that it wasn't accessible to everybody else. It means that, like, there's a certain way in which we do things that are formed by our experiences and our culture. But because we share a common commitment to the Scriptures, I would hope that people from outside of our, my tradition, would recognize themselves in it, because the book is two things. Now, it's a love letter to the like black church. And it's a love letter to the scriptures. Were like two or three months in and y'all done and bought the book, but I can tell you what the book really is. It's a subtle apologetic for the ongoing normative role of the Scriptures in the African American community. And so that's what I was trying to do. Sorry, IVP. I'm gonna write more books for y'all. But I don't think any book's gonna be as popular again, this is my, this is it. So maybe I'm shooting, I'm shooting all my shots right now. But there was a couple of times where I was writing the book, and I had to stop. And I was like, man, that paragraph is going to be read for a long time. I remember it. I remember it clear as day. I remember how I felt when I wrote the chapter on black rage. And I remember writing the sentence, "The history of black people in this country is the litany of suffering." I remember writing it and feeling it. In Isaiah 53, I'm talking about black suffering, and I said, "we were men from whom people hide their faces. They saw us stricken and accursed by God." Like there's no hiding, right, you know? So I said, I remember writing it and feeling it and saying, this is gonna resonate. I knew it was, I knew, I knew when I wrote the chapter on policing, I couldn't know whether or not it was it was good. I knew nobody else was doing what I was doing. It was clear to me, right, as I was writing the book that I was doing something different. Now whether or not it was good was a separate question.

**Ed 19:28**

Right. Well, somebody thinks is good, because right now, as you said, as the book's been out a couple months, it's already on several bestseller lists. Right now among the 50 top-selling evangelical Christian books. It is nestled between Gary Chapman's *Five Love Languages*, and Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling* devotional series. This is pretty remarkable stuff. This is hot. This is hot stuff. Can you talk about what does it mean that it's so well received out there?

**Esau McCaulley 20:28**

Well, there's a couple of things. There's two versions of me personally, I can talk about how I receive it, there's kind of like two Esaus that exists and receive these two things. What I like to do, is to just put my head down and do my work. That's what I like. So when I'm writing





articles, I mean, I'm glad when people email me stuff, I have no desire to read the reviews, I don't read them. Now, there's also the other side, though, of, don't come from me if I didn't send for you. And that means I gotta have confidence in what I do. It may sound cheesy, but I'm just a Christian. Sometimes I get so frustrated being an academic on Twitter, I just want to like present the gospel to people or something. And so I'm not a real academic. And like, I play one on TV. I'm a, I'm a juiced-up pastor. So when it when I see that the book does spiritual good for people, that's what makes me feel like, man, I'm so glad that I wrote that. And I'm so glad that it's resonating with people, and it resonating with people during an important time in their life. So it's just to me, on one level, I'm shocked that the book is doing this well. I'm shocked. That's, I don't know, Christian Esau, a regular, just like how I live my life. It's all shucks, oh, man, how did I get in New York Times? I want to tweet to people every day. I can't believe y'all are still buying this book. Then the other side, it goes well, no, it's kind of dope. But maybe I say this last thing. And it's not to be super Christian about it, but it is. You can't eat success, right? You write a good book, but like you can't hold, you can't hug affirmation. Right? You can't hug success. It doesn't make me happier that people have bought my book. I was happy that I felt like God put this on my heart. And I wrote it. And I was, I was completely, I'm completely fine. So the results feel good. But it doesn't, it's not what fills me up. I get excited, mostly, when I receive information from readers. And that's what's, if it was good.

**Ed 22:38**

Yeah. It comes at an amazing time. It seems like we're in an amazing era right now for black Christian authors. Also on the same bestseller list with your book are books by Latasha Morrison and Jemar Tisby. I think there were a total of five black authors on that list. Do you think we are at a lasting turning point in evangelical publishing, where we're gonna really elevate these black Christian voices? Or do you think this is just a temporary moment?

**Esau McCaulley 23:08**

Well, what I would hope, so it was really funny, because I'm really, Jemar's a friend of mine. And so *The Color of Compromise* came out like a couple of years ago. And I remember seeing how well the book did. I'm also friends with Justin Giboney, who wrote who was one of the writers of the *And Campaign* project. And I thought, okay, I'm an academic, I don't have, it's so weird to think about, I wasn't like, I'm in the academy. And so in some sense, I saw them opening the way for me. So even though Jemar might be younger than me, but he kind of made space for me to be able to write and people to kind of pay attention to it. What I would love to see happen in evangelicalism, though, every black book isn't going to do what *Reading While Black* did. So I do think that there is now a desire for more diverse voices. One of the things I can say about IVP is they they continue to consistently publish black and brown



voices. So that's what I would like to see is to continually have a deep bench. But I do think it's almost like when Christian hip hop first, like got big. They go, there's a market for this. And then everybody was trying to find the next Lecrae, right? And so I think they're like, people like Jemar, oh, there's a market for this, then let's go and find them. And so I mean, in a sense, what became Reading While Black, is what, and this sounds weird. I separate myself from it. It's actually what should occur, I think, in the academy. So when I put, when I signed the contract, I remember this this because someone said you have to put out your all of your social media stuff, and I wasn't even on Twitter. I said, I have 726 followers, but I got a bunch of friends on Facebook. I was trying to boost my personal Facebook account, because I wasn't an influencer. So I signed a contract to Reading While Black, and I think that was like 2017, 2018 before any of this occurred. And so yes, my story is unique, because my platform exploded before the book was published. But the fact that I was able to sign a contract with them, I had zero full public footprint at the time. So I think what we have to continue to do is not just sign black voices that have kind of crossed over into undeniable like, you know, they have a huge platform, so people want them, we need to have up and coming black voices, and develop and nurture them. I can say that 'cause that's what happened to me. That I signed a contract early on, before any of this stuff occurred.

**Ed** 25:44

I like your you're saying we need to make room for more okay books, having written an okay book myself. I like to be there.

**Esau McCaulley** 25:54

I like the title, I'm not gonna lie to, I haven't read it. I'm sure it's good. But like the title was good. Was it Reconciliation Blues?

**Ed** 26:01

Reconciliation Blues. Yes.

**Esau McCaulley** 26:02

That's a good title! That was strong.

**Ed** 26:05

Well, we need to take one more break. But when we return, we'll continue our conversation with Esau McCaulley, and find out more about what made him the right person to write Reading While Black. But first, it's time for our Behind the Books segment where we pull back the curtain and find out more of the story behind the scenes here at IVP. Today, you'll be hearing from Anna Gissing, who served as Esau's editor.



**Anna Gissing 26:35**

I'm Anna Moseley Gissing, and I'm an associate editor at IVP Academic. I mostly work on biblical studies and biblical theology projects. And in my role, I get to start talking to authors right at the book idea stage and stay with them until the book releases. So it's really fun to walk with them through the whole process. I noticed that Esau and I had a couple of mutual friends on Facebook. So I asked a friend to introduce us. And then we decided to meet in person a few years ago at the annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature. At that point, Esau did not have a book proposal yet. But he had a broad book idea that I thought sounded like something that I would love to see. That book idea ended up being *Reading While Black*. And one of the things that he said, I remember, at that lunch was that as a New Testament professor, he wanted to assign books for his black students that would connect with them. And he didn't feel like there was much to offer. And he wanted to write something for them, for those students so that they would feel like the book was written directly to them. And I loved that vision. Biblical studies is still dominated by white men in terms of scholarship. And so I'm always trying to be proactive and looking for other voices, whether that's women of any ethnicity, or authors that aren't white of other ethnicities. And I think we're just learning in evangelical spaces, the importance of hearing from biblical scholars of all different ethnicities, and each individual scholar brings their own experience and helps us see what we've missed. I noticed that there was excitement, not just from leaders or other scholars, but from readers who had a chance to read early. And then we have also had the pleasure of seeing the book win awards. And in particular, the CT book of the year, the Beautiful Orthodoxy award, which is just amazing. I'm very excited about this award, and especially that Christianity Today has recognized the role that this book can play for the church, for so many people to be able to read this book, and to grow in their relationship with the Lord, and in their ability to interpret the Bible. So I'm thrilled to see that award. I do think more and more institutions are recognizing that they need to make sure to assign texts by diverse authors, and their students are not going to be well-educated if they are not reading a diverse group of authors. So I think it's not just Esau's book that is spreading to lots of different readers, I think there is a sense that we really are missing out if we only read white authors.

**Maila 29:39**

You're listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast and I'm Maila Kim. Today we've been talking with Esau McCaulley, author of *Reading While Black*, which you can find wherever books are sold. So Esau, let's talk a little bit more about your voice and the importance of your voice to this particular topic that you're writing about. So of course black Christians have been writing on the topics of justice and race for a long time. But you are a black New Testament scholar



writing a book on biblical interpretation. So tell us why your voice as a black Christian author matters in this subject matter.

**Esau McCaulley 30:13**

What I wanted to do in the book was to highlight the habits of black Bible reading. And I felt like it was a missing part of the conversation. So it wasn't just my voice. I'm not the first person right on hermeneutics. So don't don't misunderstand me there. But I felt like okay, there was a lot of books that were written about, there needs to be a reckoning for the things that are wrong in the church, or in segments of the church. There's been a lot of books like evangelicalism is wrong, here are the sins of evangelicalism, let me lay them out for you. There's a lot of books about injustice and fighting for justice. I didn't feel like there was a book that was written to my community directly, like I'm looking them in the face, and saying, here's how we can continue to be better readers in the Bible. And so I felt like, people misunderstand what my job is, I'm an exegete. I'm a biblical interpreter. I remember reading one review that said, I'm surprised there was so much Bible in it. I was like, Bible's in the title. And so what I thought that I had to offer was biblical interpretation, from a decidedly African American perspective. And what I hope to do is to free students or free readers, to say it's okay to ask these kinds of questions. And it's okay to have this hermeneutical stance. I think it's important for each person and say, this is the perfect, like I talked about, Jemar was a friend of mine, but he's a historian, I couldn't write *Color of Compromise*. Right? I couldn't, because I'm not a historian. And so I said, okay, I can't write *color compromise*. What can I do? Y'all gonna see later down the road, when my brother Charlie Dates eventually drops his book, I can't write that book. So having a lot of black friends around me gave me freedom to stay in my lane. And to try to flourish it.

**Ed 32:06**

Esau, you mentioned in the book that it was only in the middle of the 20th century that the first African American man received a PhD in New Testament, Leon White, whereas European American Christians have been earning PhDs for centuries. Talk about what you are seeing in the academy now in terms of opportunities for African American voices to be heard and respected. And where's there still room for black voices to make themselves heard in the area of biblical scholarship?

**Esau McCaulley 32:34**

This is tricky, because there's a couple of different things going on in the academy. One is there's the collapse of our discipline, in the sense of the higher education jobs are, are much more competitive than they were even a couple of generations ago. So there's just fewer jobs, you don't make a lot of money doing this. So there's that reality. There's also the reality that



some institutions are becoming more aware of the need for diversity. And so they're willing to be intentional about hiring diverse voices. And that's led to a lot of things that go on in the academy. And wanting to say, well, if you're not a person of color, or a woman, you can't get a job in the academy, you shouldn't be here, like a reverse racism is happening. But what I say to people is, just look around and say, like, how many institutions have two black New Testament scholars. And what I mean is that a lot of times what happens is, one black person gets the job. And all 100 white male applicants thought that they would have gotten the job if it weren't for that black person. Everybody thinks that we got their job. And so there is a hypercriticism of black CVs, where you can be a random white male scholar who has an OK CV, and you exist in the career, and nobody's running around saying, why do you have that job? But every black New Testament scholar or female scholar gets hyperscrutinized? Right, because they are put against a person who didn't get the job, but thinks they deserved it. And so what I would say to people, let's actually look around and look in departments, pick 10, seminaries pick them, this mainline conservative, and ask yourself how many of those seminaries have multiple people of color, let's say 40 to 50%, which is the American population, how many seminaries in America actually reflects the demographics of the church? None of them do. But what happens is whenever a black person gets a job, it's seen as an affirmative action hire. I was told, I was told that I was going to get a job because I was black when I was doing a PhD. One day, one day when I'm, you might give me, one day I'm gonna pull the receipts and tell everything that was said about me, maybe I got the job because I'm good. And even now I'm being completely honest, even now, people will say well, well Reading While Black is a popular book, it's not an academic book. No matter what you do as a black academic it's counted against you. What I would say is, there's a growing recognition of kind of the need for diverse voices. And so what I want to say is, as a black scholar, or a female, the same thing happens to women in the academy too. Oh, you know, if there is a faculty that has 40% of the students there are female, and there are no females on the faculty, it is not a crazy idea that the faculty wants to say, maybe we should have some better representation. But that is seen as, "Oh, you can't get a job anymore." And the other difficulty is, there's not even that many black doctoral graduates. Right? So what I'm saying is, we couldn't even take all the jobs if we wanted to. And so we are in demand. Here's another here's another thing for the Internet to Google, if you listen to the podcast, how many black New Testament scholars are there in evangelicalism? In tenure track positions, in evangelical colleges and seminaries, there might not be 10 in the country. I say this to students as well, students who say we want more black voices. Well, you just can't find a black voice, it takes a long time to get here. There's literally two generations. There's not like a long legacy. You know, I'm like the second generation. I mean, you think of somebody like Bruce Fields, who just passed away at TEDS. I mean, that was the first real generation of, that age group is the first generation of large scale black scholars. So people say, hey, what can I read that's going



to help me from diverse perspectives that I agree with, I say, well, not a lot, because y'all wouldn't hire us in the 80s. And if you hired us, and we spoke about issues of race, then we were in really big trouble. We're really right now, as we speak, really the first generation of African Americans who are giving some freedom to express themselves as relates to racism and injustice in evangelical spaces.

**Maila 37:16**

We're recording this in advance of the national election, but this episode is actually going to air the week of the inauguration. So what if any message will you take from whoever wins about the church's relationship with people of color, and to black Americans in particular.

**Esau McCaulley 37:34**

I think that the role of the church doesn't change, regardless of who wins. The role of the church is to be a prophetic witness of the government, as to what it is and what it should be, regardless of who wins, they're not going to inaugurate the kingdom of God. And the purpose of the church is to call the state to an account when it is not doing the things that God has entrusted it to do. And so whoever wins the election should see the church as a problem. And so what I hope for the election, is that regardless, what happens to the church doesn't lose his voice. And I think that too often, we think that we win or lose elections. The particular issues change, right? So whoever wins are going to raise particular questions for the church itself.

**Maila 38:27**

Awesome. Well, thank you for that. We loved having you on our podcast. And before we go, we wanted to give you a few moments to share with our listeners about our sister podcast, The Disrupters Podcast. So tell us a little bit about season two. And also how people can follow you on social media or website or anything you wanted to add to that,

**Esau McCaulley 38:46**

Oh, by the time they hear this, I think season two will be over. So you should go back and listen to season one and season two of Disrupters. In season one it was, they saw something in the church, and they thought that they should change it. Season two is what happens after you do that. What happens when you are finally given a voice in the church? And how do you build something sustainable? And so it's been, it's really been a reflection on life, basically an uncomfortable life, and in some sense The Disrupters is half biographical, because this is like me. In the first season, I was just new. And I just said, hey, let's do this. And I was actually writing Reading While Black, you know, that was coming out during season one, at least in preparation for it. Season two is aftermath of Reading While Black, now we're here and people gonna listen to you, what do you have to say? So interview other people who are in a



similar place. And so you see that the list now, we had Lecrae, we had Beth Moore, we've had David Swanson. And what we tried to do, actually, was to have a diverse lineup. We don't want to have just big profile people. We wanted to have people who we think are upcoming, and people who are more established, because we want to do what I think is important, which is to lift up their voices. We try to have men and women from different ethnicities and cultures. So that's what we're attempting to do, is to highlight the different voices in the church that are pointing the church towards faithfulness.

**Maila** 40:03

So good. So good.

**Esau McCaulley** 40:05

Oh, you can follow me on Twitter, Instagram. There's only one Esau McCaulley on the Internet, you know, it's easy to find.

**Maila** 40:13

Awesome. Well, thank you so much, Esau. It was great to have you on our show today.

**Esau McCaulley** 40:18

Thank you.

**Maila** 40:20

And now we wanted to share with you all that you can find Esau's book at [ivpress.com](http://ivpress.com). And if you use the code EVN40 you can get 40% off and free US shipping. So that's a great way to get a great deal on Esau's book.

**Ed** 40:36

Thanks everyone for listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast brought to you by IVP. Our producer is Helen Lee. And our sound engineer is Jonathan Clauson. If you are enjoying our show, we'd be grateful if you share about it with your friends, please review and recommend us on iTunes, Spotify or wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts.

**Maila** 40:56

And we love getting your feedback so get in touch with us with your comments, critiques or questions. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @EveryVoiceNow or you can email us at [evn@ivpress.com](mailto:evn@ivpress.com). And join us next time for another inspiring episode of Every Voice Now.



## [More About Esau McCaulley](#)

SPECIAL OFFER | Save 40% on [Reading While Black](#) and get free US shipping when you use promo code EVN40 at checkout.

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