



EXCERPT



Beyond Ethnic Loneliness
The Pain of Marginalization and the Path to Belonging

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Growing up as an Indian American immigrant in white Southern culture, Prasanta Verma unpacks the exhausting effects of cultural isolation and marginalization as well as the longing to belong and the hope of finding safe friendships in community. Our places of exile can become places of belonging—to ourselves, to others, and to God.

Finding Belonging Is an Urgent Task

People of color have consistently been marginalized in a white-centric society. We have felt invisible and lonely. We have been devalued, attacked, beaten, shot, lynched, enslaved, exiled, killed. Asians have been marginalized and made invisible; Black people have been devalued, enslaved, and murdered; Indigenous people have been erased and oppressed; Latin Americans have been discriminated against and publicly marginalized. This is by no means an exhaustive list of affected groups, and these adjectives are incomplete and inadequate to describe all the trauma, pain, and centuries of oppression. But with increasing loneliness, alienation, disconnection, and polarization not only in the United States but also globally, finding a sense of belonging is an urgent task for the person of color today.

Living in this in-between place lends itself to a peculiar kind of loneliness: specifically, ethnic and racial loneliness. It has taken years to untangle and unpack internal dialogues and assimilation strategies I developed, years of reckoning and soul-searching to reach a place of peace and rest regarding my identity.

There are different kinds of loneliness. Loneliness can be situational, emotional, social, physical, geographic, or spiritual. In this book, I'll focus on racial and ethnic loneliness. This book is about recognizing, living with, and shedding light on this kind of loneliness, and finding hope within it, in spite of it, and beyond it. I'll discuss dis-belonging, marginalization, isolation, othering, and the longing to belong, to be known, to be seen, and strategies for alleviating ethnic loneliness. Together we'll find out that belonging is multitiered, as we discuss belonging to ourselves, to others, to community, and to God, and it is applicable for those with a faith background or those without. In fact, we might even learn that loneliness is often the status quo rather than the exception, and our places of exile are places we find hope and where we can find belonging even in spite of living in exile.

I write to honor my parents' experience, other immigrants' experiences, and the experiences of people of color. I also write from my own perspective; I cannot pretend to understand the many and varied experiences of all people of color. Yet there are aspects we share, and I hope to shed light on how it feels to be in this liminal space, to remind us that we are not alone. By the end, I hope to help us more deeply understand ethnic and racial loneliness, what can be done to help assuage this ache of loneliness, and to find a place of belonging.

There is hope for the person of color who feels marginalized and living in in-between spaces. A path toward healing and belonging is possible as we understand and claim our identity. We'll find the answers to that perennial question "So, what are you?" and answers for when we're told to go back to our own individual Indianas, either directly or indirectly. So, let's travel now from this place to that, from a country with no name to new places where we will build a new concept of home, where we feel seen, where we are known, where we belong.

—taken from the introduction, "A Country with No Name"



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Q & A



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Prasanta Verma (MBA, MPH) was born under an Asian sun, raised in the Appalachian foothills in the South, and now resides in the Upper Midwest. Her essays and poetry have been published in *Sojourners*, *Propel Women*, *(in)courage*, *Inheritance Magazine*, the *Indianapolis Review*, *Barren Magazine*, and the *Mudroom* blog.

Unique Identities a Reflection of God's Character

Why did you decide to write this book?

Prasanta Verma: As an ethnic minority I have experienced dis-belonging, othering, marginalization, and isolation as a result of my ethnic identity. I wrote this book to explain, define, and name ethnic loneliness, to offer strategies to help us overcome the struggles of being an ethnic minority, and to offer hope and ways to find a sense of belonging. As others embark on the journey of embracing their ethnic identity, these pages will offer them a framework for naming and defining their own experience as well as practical strategies for addressing isolation and \ a roadmap to finding belonging.

In what ways is ethnic loneliness distinctive?

Prasanta: Ethnic loneliness is different from racism; it is a feeling, it is an internal struggle, it is an experience that an ethnic minority undergoes while living in a white majority culture. The unique approach I am offering is an attempt to define this experience for the ethnic minority (as well as others who will read) and to offer some strategies to cope, and to show the unique benefits of being an ethnic minority and the gifts we bring to our communities and to this world through our uniqueness. Our ethnic identities are sacred, they are gifts, they are not mistakes. Our unique identities are a reflection of God's character, creativity, and love for humankind.

What type of reader did you have in mind when writing this book?

Prasanta: This book is written for all ethnic minorities. Readers of this book are interested in racial and social justice; they care about immigrants and refugees; they care about representation and diversity; they care about Black Lives Matter; they care about AAPI Hate crimes; they care about living authentic lives in their communities and in their churches; they care about the effects of white nationalism in the church and Christianity.

What key takeaways do you hope readers get from reading the words you put on the page?

Prasanta: I hope readers learn the following things from my book:

- 1) Why it's important to understand, define, and name ethnic loneliness.
- 2) What ethnic minorities experience; what ethnic loneliness feels like.
- 3) Strategies ethnic minorities use to cope.
- 4) The unique gifts to be found in ethnic loneliness; what we have to offer.
- 5) It's possible to find belonging in the midst of ethnic loneliness.



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