

Sacred Resistance

Preface – Introduction – Chapter 1

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, as we start a new study on Sacred Resistance, help us to be mindful of your plan for our work in your Kingdom, and lead us to a better awareness of the steps we should take to draw your people closer to the love you envision through your Son. It is in Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Ginger Gaines-Cirelli Bio**

- *Grew up in Oklahoma*
- *Undergrad at Southwestern in Texas*
- *MDiv from Yale Divinity School (1996)*
- *Served several churches in Staten Island, NY and Baltimore-Washington area*
- *Senior Pastor at Foundry UMC in D.C. since 2014 (first woman senior pastor there)*
- *Husband Anthony is a Catholic theologian who works for the US Catholic Conference of Bishops*
- Play YouTube invitation to Foundry UMC - <https://www.foundryumc.org/pastor>
- Do any of you have personal experiences with Rev. Gaines-Cirelli?

- **Preface**

- On the heels of the 2016 election, Gaines-Cirelli struggled between preaching reconciliation vs. rage
 - Did you have a similar struggle after 2016 (and 2024) or were you all in on one side or the other?
- She talks about an “awakening” toward racial, economic, environmental, gender, and LGBTQ justice happening in 2016.
 - Do you think this got put on hold then and now, or is it still growing in some way?

- **Introduction**

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “resistance”?
- Gaines-Cirelli believes that politics is present in the Bible and thus belongs in church
 - What are your thoughts about this at our local church?
- What do you think about the UMC baptismal vow to:
 - “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves”

- **Chapter 1**

- Review the explanations of “sacred resistance” on page 1.
 - Which resonate most with you? Why?
- Read Matthew 5:14-16
 - When do you feel like your “little light makes little difference”?
 - When do you think it’s making the most difference?
- [2] First exercise in sacred resistance is to incorporate Isaiah 43:1-7 into your daily prayers
 - Read Isaiah 43:1-2
 - Why do you think Gaines-Cirelli offers this as the first step to sacred resistance?
- Read Teresa of Avila’s quote from page 6
 - What are your reflections on this?
- [8] When have you witnessed or personally felt uncomfortable with the notion that God is preferential toward the poor?
- Gaines-Cirelli describes an epiphany when she heard a preacher say “The body of Christ has AIDS”
 - How might this affect our congregation, and you, if said from the pulpit?

- [9] In what ways do you find our culture convicted of emphasizing specific social issues rather than the larger “common good”?
 - Why do you think we do this?
 - Other reflections?
-

References for material:

- *Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent*
(page numbers from the text are noted in brackets [#] preceding quotes or relevant passages; note that e-book page numbers can differ from hardcopy books, but should be close)
- *Discussion Guide for Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent*

Italics imply important points or example answers the leader can convey

Chapter 2

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, help us to ignore the distractions of our own minds and to truly *listen*... to the disadvantaged...to the marginalized...to those with different leanings...and to your gentle nudges. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

- **Chapter 2**

- Gaines-Cirelli describes several practices to work for the common good...
 - *Listening and Humility*
 - [12] Provide an example of when you were truly “heard.”
 - Who are the best listeners in your life?
 - [13] “...white, ‘liberal,’ educated, well-intentioned folks – can often be the worst perpetrators of paternalism and microaggressions.”
 - Where have you seen this?
 - Gaines-Cirelli discusses the challenge of understanding the perspective of someone who holds an opposing point of view and maintaining a human connection with them.
 - Have you ever been successful at this, and if so, what techniques did you use?
 - What friends do you have who do not agree with your political/religious views?
 - Put yourself in the shoes of a political conservative. **Without branding them as negative**, what core beliefs do they share?
 - *Looking for the Human Face in Every Issue*
 - [14] “as soon as a stereotype gets activated, there is no more ‘personal’ connection”
 - What are some of the stereotypes that you find consciously or unconsciously activated in you?
 - How do you combat the trap of stereotyping?
 - [16] Why is it easy to fall into the trap of “intersectional erasure” (i.e., the ignoring of people who fall into multiple marginalized categories – like black women)?
 - “*being front and center in conversations about racism or sexism [e.g., black males or white women] is a complicated privilege that is often hard to see*”
 - *Keeping Crisis in Perspective*
 - Psalm 46:10a – “Be still, and know that I am God”
 - What Bible verses or other things remind you that everything is not all about you, but rather part of a much larger experience?
 - [18] Gaines-Cirelli points out that attention is needed on *both* “the forest” and “the trees.”
 - Are you more of a “forest” or “trees” person? Provide examples why.
 - *Love and Nonviolence*
 - Where do you stand on the use of violence in support of resistance?
 - Are there lines we shouldn’t cross as part of sacred resistance?
 - Where do you think Jesus stands?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 3

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord Jesus, open our hearts to your guidance in discerning your will and putting it into practice. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Chapter 3**

- [26] “congregations and individuals are often forced to look outside their faith for inspiration and resources”
 - Is this the case for you, and if so, where do you look to find inspiration and resources?
- Where have you seen an association between scripture and the conservative right, and theology and the liberal left?
 - When have you felt a hesitancy or even “outright betrayal” when consulting the “pole” opposite from yourself?
- [28] What does it mean to “claim primary citizenship not in America... but in the Kin-dom of God”?
- [29] Gaines-Cirelli asserts that the preferred mode of congregations is to avoid critical debate and assume a “keep the peace” stance.
 - In what ways do you see this as dangerous for our church?
- [31] Do you agree that Christians barely discernible from others in terms of values and priorities? Why?
- [32] What did you think of the concept of the cross being a symbol of God’s determination not to leave us to our own devices?
- [35] “We miss the point if we look at the cross and don’t see who is hanging there”
 - Gaines-Cirelli points out that the oppressed, marginalized, and struggling are there with Jesus
 - How does this change the way you view the cross?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 4

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the prophets of old, and the prophets of new. Help us to take on the mantle of your prophetic witnesses. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Chapter 4**

- Throughout the chapter (and book), Gaines-Cirelli uses the metaphor of “empire”
 - What did this bring to mind when you read it?
- 7 Deadly Sins from scripture: pride, greed, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy, sloth
 - What would you label as today's deadly sins?
 - Do you think they map to the traditional seven or are they different in some way?
- [38] Misconceptions of “prophecy”
 - Conservatives: fortune-telling
 - Liberals: righteous indignation

 - In what way do you share this misconception?
 - Who are your prophets today?
- [40] Gaines-Cirelli cites Brueggemann for identifying four characteristics of prophetic subcommunities:
 - Long and available memory
 - Expressed sense of pain
 - Active practice of hope
 - Effective mode of discourse

 - Which of these are new to you in thinking about prophets?
 - Are there any other characteristics you would add?
- Long and Available Memory
 - [42] “In the present, we hope for the future because we know what God has done in the past”
 - Could this, or does this already, help you in dealing with current troubles?
- Expressed Sense of Pain
 - How do you see the “imperial” serving as an opiate to block out societal pain?
 - In what ways can you allow yourself to feel the pain, rather than being numbed to its presence?
- Active Practice of Hope
 - [46] “How much of your life do you spend feeling disappointed?”
 - What disappoints you most in world affairs?
 - [49] How can we take Gaines-Cirelli's advice and “let the world laugh at our hope”?
- Effective Mode of Discourse
 - [51] What do you see as the most effective ways to cry in the wilderness in modern-day?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 5

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, in this hour and the next, give us the courage to speak truth, no matter how difficult and unsmooth. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Chapter 5**

- Isaiah 30:9-11 – Have volunteer read
 - When are we most guilty of this?
 - Why do we desire to hear smooth things?
 - Why do we desire to speak smooth things?
- [55] Gaines-Cirelli points out our need to “put our ears in” to better hear God’s instruction during troubling times.
 - What techniques do you use to put in your hearing aids to God?
- [58] Michael Gerson is quoted as saying “A faith that makes losing a sin will make cheating a sacrament.”
 - In what ways have modern Christians made losing a sin?
- [59] David Walsh identifies six key values that dominate the media:
 - Happiness is found in having things
 - Get all you can for yourself
 - Get it all as quickly as you can
 - Win at all costs
 - Violence is entertaining
 - Always seek pleasure and avoid boredom
- Is this a modern trend, or have these six values always dominated the media?
- What other media values have you witnessed over your lifetime?
- What are some examples of messages of impending destruction from modern-day prophets?
 - How do you typically respond to these messages?
- [66] Rev. Otis Moss says: “America is living stormy Monday, but the pulpit is preaching happy Sunday.”
 - Is this true at our church?
- [67] What reactions do you have to Wendell Berry’s poem?
- When have you seen resistance efforts more about creating conflict for the sake of conflict rather than “for righteousness’ sake”?
- [74] “Jesus knew that ‘love your enemies’ didn’t mean ‘don’t make any.’”
 - When have your voiced convictions made enemies?
- Other reflections?

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Chapter 6

- **Opening Prayer**
<Consider using “A Prayer for the Journey” on p.103, perhaps as a closing prayer>
- **Chapter 6**
 - [76] Rev. Wilson-Hartgrove – “It is hard to be a Christian in America”
 - What things make it hard to live into being a Christian in our country?
 - *Discernment*
 - What are the best discernment techniques you’ve witnessed?
 - *Staying Informed*
 - How objective do you think you are today vs. being strongly influenced by choosing to live in an echo chamber?
 - What sources can you consult which combat “confirmation bias”?
 - *Overcoming Fear*
 - [83] “To follow Jesus means that personal safety is not our first priority. Instead, the priority is receiving and sharing the love of God.”
 - Is it reasonable to downplay our desire for personal safety, and that of our loved ones?
 - *What Do We Do?*
 - *Word*
 - What have you found to be the most powerful ways in which words are used?
 - What is your expectation w.r.t. pastors preaching on politically charged current events?
 - How effective do you feel church missives are in addressing hot issues?
 - *Deed*
 - How do you discern when to actively engage in the public square?
 - Review the questions posed from pp. 98-104
 - Which of these have you seen used by our church?
 - *Where do the resources and passion of our congregation connect with the concrete needs in the larger community?*
 - *What is already happening in the community that our congregation can support?*
 - *What are the risks involved in our action, and how will we prepare for potential consequences?*
 - *Does the proposed action commit the congregation to ongoing engagement? If so, how will follow-through be assured?*
 - *What training or other resources are needed to equip leaders and members of the congregation to participate in the action?*
 - *Stance*
 - Where do you see our church emulating Jesus’ stance, and where do we stray?
 - Other reflections?

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Chapter 7

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the insight and inspiration we've experienced through this study. We pray that you help us keep these learnings in our hearts as we seek to live our lives according to your purpose for your people. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Chapter 7**

- *Remember the Sabbath*
 - How good are you at remembering the Sabbath?
 - What gets in your way from keeping the Sabbath?
 - What practices do you take to observe the Sabbath?
 - What percent of your "God" time is spent by yourself vs. with others?
 - Do you like your balance, or do you wish it were different?
- *Laugh and Grow Strong*
 - Where does laughter appear in your spiritual life?
 - Do you agree with Gaines-Cirelli that Jesus laughed... a lot? Why or why not?
 - When have you found yourself laughing in the midst of a deep struggle?
 - What ways do you introduce laughter into your life?
- *Notice the Way the World Is*
 - What physical things do you notice in the world that remind you of a hope that only God can provide?
- *Receive Some Good News*
 - What news sources have you found that cover positive stories, vs. the negativity that "sells"? *Gaines-Cirelli mentions "The Optimist" e-newsletter from the Washington Post and a couple of websites ("Daily Good" and "Good News Network").*
- *Hold On to Each Other*
 - [125] "even when I have held aside time to spend with my spouse, he often gets the worst of me since I have been so intent on trying to give my best to everyone else"
 - Have you found yourself mimicking this in any of your relationships?
- *Find Your Strength in Quietness and Trust*
 - What times remind you that you are part of a reality much larger than yourself?
 - When are you successful at being still and at peace, even in the midst of raging storms?
- Other reflections?

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