

# HEALING THE --- HEALERS

**Reverend Tawana Davis**

Reflection

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The Naked Sparrow

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Lilly Endowment Inc.  
A Private Philanthropic Foundation

# Reflection

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THE  
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## *The Naked Sparrow*

**Reverend Tawana Davis**

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*Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from God's will.* (Matthew 10:29, The New Testament of the Christian Scriptures)

*Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.* (Luke 12:6, The New Testament of the Christian Scriptures)

It was Sunday morning. Time to prepare for church. I didn't particularly feel like going. I was up late embroiled in an emotional battle with my (then) husband. He had bipolar disorder. He was abusive. We had good days but more bad days, and Saturday night was one of those rough nights. I put on my Sunday best, all black, which is the attire for a licensed preacher. I felt as dark as the color I was wearing. But I had to be in place by 10:45 am to march in with the Stewards and sit in my rightful place.

I drove to church with tears in my eyes, trying to "release" before I walked through the doors of the church. I felt like I weighed 300 pounds due to the layers draped on me – the issues, stress, hurt, pain ... the drama. My vision was blurred by tears. My mind was clouded with the replay of my husband's tirade. My ears were on mute because all I could hear was yelling and screaming. And as Howard Thurman was fond of saying, I had the smell of life heavy on me.

I walked into the church, pasted on a smile, made sure the one dimple showed, and began to serve. The worship experience was over, and I bid peace and blessings to fellow congregants. As I walked toward the door, I found I had 500 pounds of garments draped on me, and the status of all of my other senses had not changed. I got in the car, knowing I had to go home and deal with my husband, who may or may not have been in a good mood.

In one of his many profound reflections, Howard Thurman wrote about garments, rebirth, and the act of surrendering in and during the religious experience. Thurman used garments to depict life, the life we carry with us to church, in church, and possibly when we leave the church. I wanted to be free like the sparrow. I wanted someone to see me. I wanted to be affirmed, safe, and healed. I desired to be ministered to without judgment like Chaplain Jennie. She meet victims and survivors with unconditional positive regard, not knowing if she will ever see them again. I wanted to be seen and sincerely listened to like Imam Magid. Imam avails himself to victims, survivors, and faith leaders, honoring and galvanizing them all through talks, sermons, guidance, and unapologetic advocacy. I wanted to be in love with the G-d of faith, hope, trust, and courage like Reverends Bonita and Regina, both survivors of domestic violence who live daily their call to ordained ministry.

They lead and serve others with grace. I wanted to be liberated from being sexualized and dehumanized through scriptures and toxic masculinity, particularly by faith leaders who were men. I longed to turn my pain into purpose like Rev. Cary.

Through his own childhood domestic violence experience, he is committed to being an advocate and never lay hands on a woman. I wanted to be sustained by the sacred text, and the people called to revere the sacred text that liberates, not oppress. I wanted this and so much more during my abusive relationship.

I followed the rules. Made a safety plan. Relocated to another state. Received a protective order. I missed family functions in New York, including my daughter's baby shower. Then I was re-victimized by the justice system. The re-victimization almost cost me my life. After receiving my protective order, a copy was sent to my abuser who waited in jail. He was sentenced to one year for terroristic threats and harassment. The copy of the order did not remove my address. I received a letter from my abuser stating he would be released in a week, and he was coming to see me.

My seminary classmates miraculously packed our things, and I was in a new place within a week. I never received a call from VINE, the victim notification service telling me that he was released. As only G-d could do, he ended up spending an extra two weeks in jail for non-payment of child support, although he does not have children. This is the justice system.

Today, I take deep breaths and no longer smell the stench of life; the smell has become fragrant, causing an air of peace. The naked sparrow – free to love, free to worship, free to grow, learn, give, and receive. The sparrow represents empowerment, care, compassion, persistence, community, joy, and protection.

May faith leaders rise up and raise awareness about domestic violence through advocacy, prayer, dignity, honor, and knowledge. May faith leaders lead like the sparrow who is never forgotten by G-d or fallen from grace. May faith leaders serve victims, survivors, and all those impacted by domestic violence with patience, active listening, and affirmation. May faith leaders garner the courage to delve into this series on domestic violence, to lead in ways that obliterate the violence happening within our congregations, and to dismantle binary gender roles that degrade, demean, and disregard those experiencing domestic, sexual, childhood, and intimate partner violence.

I hope this series will be a healing companion for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, for faith leaders and congregants, for the family and friends of the many victim-survivors whose lives are changed by violence.

*Healing begins when someone bears witness – I see you – I believe you.*  
(Olivia Benson, Law and Order SVU)