

# WYF\_Ep90\_BestOf\_EkemiUwan

**Rasool Berry:** [00:00:00] Hey y'all, it's Rasool Berry. Thanks for joining me on this special *Best of Where Ya From?* episode. We went back and selected some of our favorite conversations to share with you so that no matter when you started listening to *Where Ya From?*, you could check them out. Today I wanted to share our episode with public theologian Ekemini Uwan from Season Two.

Ekemini is such an inspiration to me because she is so brutally honest about everything. Her own story, America's story, the church's story. She also keeps it real about her own struggles and how she found deep theological answers to them. She shows how much we can grow when we directly face hard questions instead of running away from them.

Since this conversation, Ekemini coauthored an NAACP Image Award nominated book called *Truth's Table: Black Women's Musings on Life, Love, and Liberation*. Check it out and thanks for listening and enjoy this *Best of Where Ya From?* with Ekemini Uwan.[00:01:00]

**Ekemini Uwan:** I did take in those messages, so I wasn't immune, you know, to white supremacy. After a while, you just begin to believe it. Like, maybe I'm not attractive. Maybe I am ugly. There was a lot of self-hate for me. Hating my dark skin, to the point where I started bleaching my skin. Yeah. So I, so I did it and, um, I want to say about freshmen and sophomore year for like a year, maybe about a year or two. You know, thinking that, man light equals pretty. Like, you know, in my own mind, I will be prettier if I am lighter.

Sadly, it's something, it's a common, very, uh, practice, very common among West Africans.

**Rasool Berry:** Yeah. That blew me away. When I listened to that episode, you said something like over 70% of African women, uh, bleach their skin with very disastrous health consequences.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yes, yes. If you go to the beauty supply, you'll see those light, those lightning products right here in Philly.[00:02:00]

**Daniel Ryan Day:** This is *Where You From?*, a podcast for those who believe it's important to stop and listen before we speak. Join us as we ask another Christian thought leader where you're from and discover how their life experiences and expertise. Even if we may disagree with something they say, offer us an important perspective that's worth thinking about.

**Rasool Berry:** Welcome to *Where Ya From?*. I'm Rasool Berry. Everyone struggles or has struggled with issues of identity. Maybe it's the way we look, or the amount of success we have achieved, or wanting to change who we are to please someone else. The question, who am I, is fundamental for us. And the way we answer that question can determine what we think about ourselves and our place in the world.

Sometimes, when we allow others or our culture to answer that question for us, it can lead to devastating consequences. Today, I'm talking with Ekemini Uwan, one of the hosts from *Truth's Table*, a popular [00:03:00] podcast for Black women. She's a public theologian who has dedicated her life to understanding and combating racism and will help us unpack terms like colorism, white supremacy and microaggressions.

Ekemini's experience with racism began in elementary school. And over time those experiences of being treated as less than led to an identity crisis that sadly included self-hate and even bleaching her own skin. But before we get into those difficult details, Ekemini shares what life was like growing up in California with first generation immigrant parents from Nigeria. You're listening to *Where Ya From?*.

**Ekemini Uwan:** No, I'm from Cali.

**Rasool Berry:** Ooh, killer Cali. . .

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, exactly. From Cali. From the Bay. Um, but lived in LA for 12 years. So I'm a true Cali girl.

**Rasool Berry:** Okay. Okay. And what about your parents?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Parents originally from [00:04:00] Nigeria. Yeah. And so, they came in the early seventies, so they've been here a really long time.

**Rasool Berry:** What was that like growing up in the West Coast, in the Bay, but also the daughter of immigrants, in that case, first generation?

I

**Ekemini Uwan:** I guess that's all I knew. So I didn't, I didn't really think it was odd or unique, um, in that way. And even being the child of, um, Nigerian immigrants, I was raised black. And they did install Nigerian pride, we're like born with that. But they didn't do it in a way to where we should think of ourselves as better, you know, than our black brothers and sisters. So I never

thought that way. I just thought I was, I'm a black girl, like everybody else with a unique name.

But yeah, that was it, you know, we had, we had our foods, even my mom would make Nigerian food for my mom and dad and she would make American food for us, barbecue chicken, spaghetti. So, so they, I think in, I don't know if it was intentional or inadvertently, but they just really, [00:05:00] um, assimilated and they really blended both cultures for us, um, pretty seamlessly for us. And so I'm, I'm grateful.

**Rasool Berry:** Now, when you say the Bay, are we talking Oakland, San Fran, somewhere?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Actually, technically, um, Silicon Valley, San Jose-ish, home of Apple.

**Rasool Berry:** So that, I don't know a whole lot about the demographics, but that would seem like you would find yourself as a minority in a significant way. How do you think that experience shaped who you are?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, yeah, definitely a minority for sure. Um, you know, the Bay, it's diverse in some ways and in some ways not, you know. Um, so we grew up in, um, Silicon Valley in schools that were predominantly white, um, then probably Asian, and then Hispanic, and then Black, right?

There weren't tons, you know, of black people. Um, and then growing up where I grew up, [00:06:00] because we didn't have a lot of money, we were actually technically grew up in the projects there and every city pretty much has that. And so that's where we grew up. And that's where that's where I and a lot of the black folks lived, you know, and we were among them. But we were in those like good schools, right?

We went to the same junior high as Steve Wozniak, I think, you know, not the same time, obviously. Uh, he's much older than me.

**Rasool Berry:** Make that, make that clear. Make that clear.

**Ekemini Uwan:** That's a different generation. But you know, that just to kind of let you know that, um, you know, some dissonance there if that makes sense. You know, um, uh, but you know, that definitely shaped me being a minority, um, a black girl, a dark-skinned black girl um, in California. It's definitely going to shape you. It's going to definitely give you hopefully a good critical

race lens. And I, I think that's what it did for me. Um, because of a lot of the microaggressions you'd experience.

**Rasool Berry:** Microaggressions, break that down for me.

**Ekemini Uwan:** [00:07:00] Yeah. Well, um, an a rudimentary sense is it's, um, these little racial digs, racist digs, right? So like, oh, um, you're pretty for a dark girl. Right? You'll hear that. Um, or, oh, um, oh that's a funny sounding name. I'm gonna give you a nickname. No, you don't get to name me like this is the name I was given. So yeah, so those that. . .

**Rasool Berry:** The touching of hair for an example?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, even touching hair. You know petting in right thinking, you know, so so things like that. Or you know judging you like Oh, can you use a regular comb? Is that all your hair?

**Rasool Berry:** Right

**Ekemini Uwan:** Microaggressions, you know. So micro because they're

**Rasool Berry:** So micro because they're not like these big moments. . .

**Ekemini Uwan:** It's not the n word. The person's not calling it n word. . .

**Rasool Berry:** But it is a thing a slight that also offends and rose up against

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah. You leave that person's presence with internal bleeding. I call internal. You're like. . .

**Rasool Berry:** Oh like a little cut?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah it's a oh cuz you might not catch it in the moment. And then you [00:08:00] leave you're like, how do I feel this way after leaving this person's presence. And it's like oh, okay, you experience a microaggression.

**Rasool Berry:** Do you remember like your first experiences of like, wait a minute, that's not how people out there experience me?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Right. Yeah, I mean there were, I mean there were times where You know, I'd be playing with friends that were not black, right? You know, um, and then one of the older siblings of that one peer, of my friend

would call me a name, a racial slur, a racial, you know, term, or compare me to, like, something that's not a human being, you know?

And so those things would happen. Or you'd be really close, you know, to, to somebody that you consider to be a friend, maybe even your best friend, right? In school, but that best friend could never come to your house. You always had to go to their house because you know, our, our, um, area was deemed not safe according to them.

But it was, it was safe. Like, you know, it was always safe to me anyway. So, you know, things like that. You would [00:09:00] notice it's like if I'm gonna hang out with this person, how come I have to go to their house, but they can never come to mine? You know, they're never willing to come or they're never willing to sleep over, right? So you notice those things.

**Rasool Berry:** Do you remember how you felt about that? I mean, at elementary school, that's a very young age to be confronted with racism. Like, how did that?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Oh yeah, it was, um, uh, obviously demoralizing, uh, hurtful. Um, you know, feelings of like maybe some worthlessness. So you didn't have anything to, um, to necessarily counteract, you know, the messages that you were getting at school. You know, that, uh, you're not, your hair is not like that. You're not, you're not pretty. Like, your friend Tina whatever I'm just throwing out an arbitrary name, you know, you're darker you're this, you know You're that so you get those those messages and there's nothing to really. . .

**Rasool Berry:** Counteract that?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Counteract that. Or to balance it. Or to help to heal that or to undo you know, you use those internal messages.

**Rasool Berry:** Yeah. You use the word colorism that yeah, a lot of people may not know what that is. Could you break that down?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, colorism is where people with lighter skin, you know, are given preferential treatment over those with darker skin. So they get more of the perks and the benefits, you know. Maybe higher pay in a job. Better mate selection with that, uh, just preferential treatment.

Sometimes some parents treat their other kids better because this one's lighter, this one's darker. Sometimes it happens in the reverse because there's some internalized issues with regard to that happened to Malcolm X, um, with his

mother. His mother could not stand him, was very hard on him because he was light, had red hair, um, but often by and large, It goes in the other direction.

And so that's what colorism is. And it happens within most minority groups, so it's not just black folks. You know, it happens within the Asian community, it happens within the, um, Latinx community. But within those minority groups. And then [00:11:00] sometimes it's practiced, um, outside of our groups, so where white people will get preferential treatment. And they may not know that they're doing this, but that's besides the point of what's happening. You know, where the light skinned person will get, you know, the skirt.

**Rasool Berry:** It reminds me of the, um, the doll experiment that Dr. Kenneth Clark did that part of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* where they had a white doll baby and a black one. And they asked black children which one was more beautiful, they would pick the white one. Which one is smarter, they would pick the white one, which one is good. And what, you know, they would pick the white one. Which one's bad, they would pick the black one. And then which one is more like you. And then they would pick the black one. And it's just this heartbreaking thing. And they actually on YouTube, somebody redid this experiment this time with multiple ethnicities a few years ago.

And it was the same thing, you know. And so, but that's something that a lot of people don't know. So in addition to what you were saying is the external outside dealing with, you know, just [00:12:00] whiteness. Uh, there was also within even your own community, you know, uh, man, that's not, that has to be tough.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah. It's a lot. I mean, it's so intrusive, right? You know, so it just, it invades every part of your life. Even with regard to colorism, there's sociological studies too, about like, this, this is not just anecdotal things. Where like, literally like light skinned people will actually make 6, 000 more than dark skinned people.

They are actually higher rates of marriage, you know, because of that. So these are actual legitimate, like, you know, these are real things. Regionally, in some regions, it's not as intense as other places, you know, like. Um, in California, there is just this, um, a lot of black men had a preference. Um, there would be, um, a desire, at least among black men, um, to be with women that were lighter or even racially [00:13:00] ambiguous, right?

You know, so, and this is back when videos were big. You know, and so you had the whole video girl, right? And the ideal video girl was light, um, she had curly hair, maybe like Mariah Carey's curl pattern. And even, I guess you could say for women that look like them. And, or if you, and if you weren't, didn't

quite look like them, then you could have, you know, you know, some brown skin, but you couldn't be too, too dark.

Right. So, so that eliminates me. I'm, I'm a dark-skinned woman, you know. So that would eliminate me from a lot of dating prospects if that made sense, they're in LA. So you have to contend with those things

**Rasool Berry:** And the interesting thing is that's you would connect colorism with white supremacy. Even though it's not white people doing the discrimination. A lot of people don't get that when they hear the phrase white supremacy. They just think it's like people with like Klan hoods on and torches or tiki torches, right? And it's like no this is even. . .

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, yeah, because once it's [00:14:00] internalized, right, that mechanism of oppression is, the wheels are turning, right. Because it's already, the victims, you know, of white supremacy have imbibed that ideology to some degree, to varying degrees. You know, and that ideology seeps out in the way that we treat each other. Um, our fellow black neighbors, other people, you know, people that are not black, you know, so we begin to make those, um, demarcations and those distinctions.

**Rasool Berry:** So you're, you're experiencing these challenges. Middle school, high school, like how do you cope? How do you respond? And where does faith come into this picture?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, I mean, um, so for me, I did take in those, those messages. So I, I, I wasn't immune, you know, to white supremacy. After a while, you just begin to believe it. Like, maybe I'm not, maybe I'm not attractive. Maybe I am ugly, you know, and believing those things. There was a lot of self-hate for me, particularly, I'd say, about junior high, high [00:15:00] school.

I'd say I carried a lot of self-hates, a lot of self-loathing, hating my dark skin, um, to the point where I started bleaching my skin.

**Rasool Berry:** Really?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah. So, I, and, which, sadly, is something, it was just a common, very, uh, a practice very common among West Africans. Yeah, that blew me away

**Rasool Berry:** Yeah. That blew me away. When I listened to that episode, you said something like over 70% of African women, uh, bleach their skin with very disastrous health consequences.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yes, yes. If you go to the beauty supply, which I'm going to go to after this. You'll see those light, those lightning products right here in Philly, you know. Any beauty supply, actually, you will see lightning soap, um, lightning lotions, uh, you'll see it. So anyway, so that it was not hard for me to get ahold of those lightning products. And so, um, I mean, to the point where it's just used as a lotion. Okay. And so, um, so it was just there in my house, actually.

And so that's how I just started doing it. [00:16:00] So I did it in, um, I want to say about freshman and sophomore year for like a year, maybe about a year or two, you know, thinking that man, light equals pretty. Like you know, in my own mind, I will be prettier if I am lighter. Um, and I remember just seeing images on television thinking, oh yeah, she's really, really pretty.

And every time, everybody that I thought was pretty was light. Right. I don't know what caused me to just stop doing it, but I did stop doing it. Um, but I knew that I needed to begin to love the skin that I was in. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I was like, I knew I needed to start to do that. But, um, so I started listening, of course, you know, back in the nineties and the, um, yeah, I'd say 90s more so. We had a lot of good conscious, you know, music. Oh, yeah. Conscious rap. You know what I'm saying? You had Diggable Planets. Diggable Planets. You had Fugees. Tribe

**Rasool Berry:** Tribes Called Quest. Yeah, yeah.

**Ekemini Uwan:** So there was a lot of stuff in there that I could latch onto to kind of help to affirm you and to help build you up. I wasn't yet like a believer yet. I mean, I grew up [00:17:00] in the church, but the faith hadn't yet become my own right. And I, the way this faith came to me, it was just like I didn't see room for myself anyway in there really. So I was like I can't, white Jesus is not going help me with myself loathing. So what am I gonna do about this? But and then when I came to faith I really had to begin, uh, give this to the Lord, you know. And I came to faith in a senior year in college. So. . .

**Rasool Berry:** Okay. Pause. What happened that will cause that to be a timeframe in which you would come to know the Lord?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah. Um, my dad passed away in 2001, which obviously was very, uh, life changing. You know, um, disorienting. And so I think in some



ways I, I was obviously angry with God. Um, even though I wasn't yet a believer, but I knew the faith. I grew up, you know, I grew up Lutheran, so I knew, you know, I was catechized, baptized, you know. And I'm grateful for those things because that helped to at least [00:18:00] anchor me and keep me from drifting into other doctrines of demons.

But yeah, but my, my father passed away. I was angry with God. I did what, you know, smoke, drink, those things. Um, and I remember being in my dorm room smoking a blunt, um, by myself and just thinking, man, like if Jesus were to come back, like right this moment, cause I know the doctrines, I know the faith. I'm like, I would not be going back with Jesus. Like I'm not, my life does not in any way reflect that I love Jesus, that I live for Jesus, that I even care about what He did for me. Um, and that was really scary to me. And so, uh, I remember it had to be a Saturday night because the next day I went to a church, um, Black Baptist Pentecostal Egalitarian Church and heard the gospel, it felt like for the first time. Obviously it wasn't the first time I heard the gospel, but it felt like it was the first time I heard it. Pastor, uh, Andrea Smith, she gave the call [00:19:00] for, um, salvation and I went down and by God's grace, I haven't looked back.

**Rasool Berry:** Wow.

**Ekemini Uwan:** I've been running for Jesus since then, you know. . .

**Rasool Berry:** So where, what, what was the trajectory? Cause senior year, that's when you're starting to make decisions about the future and whatnot, if you haven't already. So where, what was that trajectory before that weekend?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Um, I thought the trajectory was still, I was gonna get out. I did some business marketing. And I chose my major because of *Boomerang*, the movie. That's how I chose my major.

**Rasool Berry:** The classic!

**Ekemini Uwan:** I told you I have a very black childhood.

**Rasool Berry:** Yo. That's, that's in the canon. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Ekemini Uwan:** That's what I was saying. Representation actually does matter. So I, I literally chose my, uh, college major based off of *Boomerang*. I was like, oh, they were marketing executives.

They had money. I grew up, I didn't have money. Okay. I want money. So is that, you know, not to worship it, but I was like, I want money. I don't want us to be struggling like we've always been struggling, you know? So that's how I chose my major. So my trajectory, even before I got saved was still corporate, get a job, [00:20:00] right, get stability.

You know, and get married, have kids, like that was really my plan, to be honest. And then I got saved and that was my plan, my trajectory until it wasn't.

**Rasool Berry:** Okay, what happened to make it change?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, well, um, yeah, so I did, you know, sales for many, many years. Um, so in, uh, 2011, uh, the day before my birthday, I was at this point I was working with a pharmaceutical company. So I was doing pharmaceutical sales.

And with that job, it's a cushy job. You get a, you get a, um, a car. You get, um, a gas card, literally. So you just swipe the card. Gas is paid for. Everything is paid for, right? Um, company credit card, all these things. They call it the golden handcuffs because nobody leaves this job.

You know, like, because it's too good. Um, and day before my birthday, they got rid of our whole sales team, including my boss. And so it was, it was very traumatic. Um, [00:21:00] very, very traumatic. Cause you're like, what's happening? What, wait, what? Just what's going on? You know, at that time people were like, oh, the devil.

I was like, this ain't the devil. This is God. And I don't, I need to know what is going on. So I was praying, praying, asking the Lord. What's going on? What is the deal? And I just sensed that the Lord was saying ministry, and I'm like, okay. I was like, if that's the case, then maybe I need to go to seminary.

And so I ended up, you know, going to an open house, you know, in Philly, and sensing like that was where the Lord was leading me. And so that's what I did. So I went to, so I moved to Philly to go to seminary in 2012.

**Rasool Berry:** From L. A. to Philadelphia.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah.

**Rasool Berry:** Across the country to go to a seminary.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yep, that I never heard of.

**Rasool Berry:** Wow.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Never heard of, didn't know anything about it at all.

**Rasool Berry:** That's big. That's a huge life shift.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Oh, my whole life changed. Yeah, I didn't know anything about it. I just was like, okay. This is where the Lord is leading me, then that's where I'm going to go. [00:22:00] So sold the condo, sold everything. Like it was tough. It was traumatic. I mean, you know, because I was so attached to LA. I always thought I'd live there. Like I never wanted to leave LA, you know. I had family. I had friends there who had really become family. My godchildren were there. Everything that I wanted. You know, for the most part was there, you know.

And so it was, again, that was a traumatic, like nobody really talks about the trauma of following God. It's very traumatic actually, um, because when God is, when God takes you into the pit and leaves you there for a minute, like He's there with you, but you can't, you can't hear Him. You can't see Him and you can't feel Him. That's traumatic.

**Rasool Berry:** When we come back, Ekemini Uwan will share how God never really took her out of tense situations. But led her to seminary and a career that has been anything but easy. You're listening to *Where Ya From?*. [00:23:00]

**Midbreak:** If you're enjoying *Where Ya From?*, would you take a moment to write a quick review and give us some stars? Podcast platforms like iTunes and Google promote highly rated shows. So, a one sentence review of what this episode or show means to you, and a quick five-star rating, will help these important stories reach more people.

Thank you for your help and keep listening for more of *Where Ya From?*.

**Rasool Berry:** Before we hit play on part two of my conversation with Ekemini Uwan, just a quick reminder that the show notes are podcast description. There, you will find not only the talking points for today's show. But also a link to learn more about Ekemini, and a link to a free episode of the *In Pursuit of Jesus* documentary series.

On this free episode, I engage with people in South Africa who have been impacted by the racial injustices of apartheid, and discover how Jesus [00:24:00] speaks to issues of racial segregation. Again, that episode is yours for free. Just copy the link in the podcast description or visit [whereyafrom.org](http://whereyafrom.org).

That's where y-a from dot o r g. Before the break, Ekemini described the moment God called her to move from L.A. to Philadelphia for seminary. The move itself was difficult, but once she got to seminary, she ran into what she called a wall of whiteness, which was isolating, painful, and yet one of the most important experiences of her life.

Here's Ekemini Uwan describing the wall of whiteness on *Where Ya From?*.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, the wall of whiteness, um, well, it was literally a wall of a lot of white people. It was a predominantly white institution, you know, and then Asian, you know. But, um, and then also the assignments, you know, on who we were, our bibliographies, who we read. All white men. [00:25:00] Uh, to down to, um, the, the lessons and ideologies that will be, um, taught in class, right? Like I mentioned the benevolent slave masters, you know, and, um, which that would, that came out of the Asian professors, right? Um, um, and then, um, you know, of course the, the, um, revisionist history just with the, uh, um, church history, you know, whitewashing, you know, uh, African theologians. So yeah, wall of whiteness, like in just about every direction,

**Rasool Berry:** Right. So it's not just even the, uh, percentage of people who were white, but also the kind of ideology, the perspective, kind of the, the lack of awareness of the dominance of this culture and all the assumptions that come with it.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah. It was very traumatic. Like talking about how, you know, there were benevolent slave masters. And, you know, and I had me having to legitimately take on my professors on my own, [00:26:00] confronting them in front of everybody. Because that's very dangerous. That's white supremacy ideology. I can't let that go. No, we were not better off enslaved.

No, there were not benevolent slave masters. No, we should condemn all of it. And so there were things like that, that I'd have to endure.

**Rasool Berry:** You endured.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Oh yeah.

**Rasool Berry:** Cause I was at the graduation. So I saw you.

**Ekemini Uwan:** By the grace of God. I, yeah, I made it.

**Rasool Berry:** How, how did you do that? And what did you learn? What, why did you stay like, you know?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Well, I, I may, um, the only way I made it through was because I knew the Lord had called me there. That was it. That was the only way I knew. I knew. I knew. Like, you know what I'm saying? This, this was not something that I made up. It was something that was confirmed by my mentor and other people. Like it seemed like the Lord was going in this direction with my life. And so I was able to endure because I knew the Lord.

I knew I knew. Like He called me here. Cause I surely didn't choose this. I know the devil, sure enough, wasn't his bright idea for me to go, you know. [00:27:00] There's something that like, he's not going to suggest that. Um, and so I've set my face like Flint, honestly.

**Rasool Berry:** Got an award. Green award.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, yeah, apologetics and things, you know.

**Rasool Berry:** An award for apologetics?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, so I mean, I did do well there by the grace of God. Um, but it was tough. But I left with a lot of, a lot of sociological scars, you know. So, on the, sociologically, I got out by the skin of my teeth. You know, academically, no. But, but I had, there was a lot of work I had to do.

**Rasool Berry:** And sorry, so you graduate. You know, what's the distinction and then what's next?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, I graduate. Um, the seminary is happy. I'm happy. I'm like, okay, this is done. Because it's four years, four-year program. Take the meat, spit out the bones, you know, and move on. I'm thinking new chapter. Surely I'll get a job.

You know, that's why I was like, let me go back to what I know. I was like, so maybe, maybe I guess maybe pharma, you know, or maybe sales in some regard. Because that's what I did [00:28:00] before. Because I got paid off the student loans, right? Because I got a, I incurred loan debt because of seminary. Um, you know, so I'm thinking that a job will await me at some point. Now in the midst of my time there, what I started to do was gear a lot of my papers and my writings, you know, um, really in anti-racism, you know, work. And, um, so trying to, um, combat the white supremacy that was so steeped in the institution there.

So, I was working as an admissions counselor there, you know, doing, getting, you know, But you know, that's not like a lot, but paying rent, you know.

Things like that. And I'm graduating, that job's going to be done. Um, so anyway, so I, I applied, applied, never got callbacks for jobs. And so I'm like, okay, God, what are we doing?

Cause you know, when you graduate and I, I mean, I incur a lot of trauma, you know, so you graduate and you think, okay. Uh, so I'm surely a job's going to be waiting for me. Something's going to happen. And that never came, you know, so I would get some speaking gigs and things like that. And I'm [00:29:00] just like, is this what we're going to do?

Like, I'm just going to be an itinerant speaker, you know, and, you know, and, you know, whatever else that comes with that. Um, 2016, 2017, very depressed about just like, what's happening? Like I don't understand what's happening, like, I mean, I'm like in abject poverty to be quite honest. I'm like, what's happening?

I don't understand. What are we doing? God? Like, I don't know. You know, so 2017 was really, really hard, you know? And so, and I guess you could say my visibility I think was going up. Because I had been on Lecrae's album. And I was grateful for the opportunity, but there was real struggles. Like, you know what I'm saying?

Like, because I didn't choose this life. To be honest, um, really it was chosen for me. You know, I'm not, I really always wanted to just live a really quiet, simple life, to be honest. Like I said, be in my local church, do discipleship, have a job, get married, have kids, [00:30:00] the end. Serve the Lord until he calls me home, or until He comes back, or either one. The end. Like, and that's just not what happens.

So I know people seek after these things, or maybe even covet what I do, but I'm like, y'all, ain't nothing glamorous about what I do. Like, you know what I'm saying? It's not, it's hard. Like, you know what I'm saying? I have to say hard things, you know? So 2017, *Truth's Table* coming around was a lifeline for me to be honest.

I'm a reluctant entrepreneur. I wasn't really like, let me start a podcast. You know, actually the podcast producer Bo York for *Pass the Mic* came to me at a conference and said, hey, you should do a podcast. And I was like, nah, I'm not interested in just talking, you know, in having my own podcast. I just don't want, you know, I just don't want to be upset, self-centered or just have the complete focus on me. I just don't want to do that.

He said, okay, what about you Michelle and Christina doing podcast together? I was like, hmm, that [00:31:00] could work. I said we have a group chat. We talk like every day like, okay. I don't know much about podcasting. I didn't know. I didn't really listen to podcasts. Okay, fine. Let's try it out.

**Rasool Berry:** Yeah, so you do the podcast.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Mm hmm

**Rasool Berry:** Are you prepared for. . . did you anticipate the nerve that it struck and the reaction that it got?

**Ekemini Uwan:** I didn't really anticipate that it would be such a big deal in people's lives, you know. I thought it would matter but I didn't think it would matter as much as it does to people. Where people really do actually care what we have to say about things. Or they really want to know what is *Truth's Table* have to say about this. I wonder what they think about even what I say about even this movie like, you know. Like, you know, so I did I wasn't prepared for that And then of course the flip side to that is the controversies that come, you know, because of the subject matter. So I think we all take great gravity and seriousness what we do at *Truth's Table*, [00:32:00] not a game.

You know, I think we see it more than just a podcast. It's a ministry. And I approach it, and I believe the other women approach it, with that same gravity and seriousness, you know.

**Rasool Berry:** I mean, I know for me personally, uh, you know listening, it's this rare opportunity that I get to be like wow. Here are these women who are solid in their faith, who are insightful in their perspectives on culture and who are unapologetic, um, which is in its way an apologetic, right? All of those things bring together.

And I've learned so much. I've laughed so much. You know, it's, uh, incredible to see. But, like, I'm curious, like, for you, what's been a moment where you realize, maybe from a personal interaction that you've had. Maybe a personal thing that somebody shared with you, email, at a, you know, now you guys are doing retreats, where you were like, wow, this is really impacting people [00:33:00] in a deep way.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah, I mean, I, yeah, we get, I mean, we get a lot of emails, right? We've gotten emails like from people saying, I had left the church, hadn't been in the church for so long, but because of your podcast. Because specifically of the *Why the Church Matters* episode, I now go to church. I've

joined a local church. That's huge. Like, you know what I'm saying? Like, that is so amazing, meaningful and so big. Or God's use your podcast to revive my faith, you know, or I do things like. That's huge, you know. Beyond identity things. Um, you know, and just feeling affirmed and, you know, somebody may, that might be self-loathing.

I feel like they see themselves in *Truth's Table*. They know they have, particularly the black woman, they know they have a seat at the table and that's for them, right? And everybody else that listens has standing room, including you, Rasool. But you're in the room. But, you know, but, but because there's, there's, it's, we don't ever have a space, particularly as black women, that's just for us. Because oftentimes the [00:34:00] things that we create are co-opted, you know. We're erased, we're silenced, you know, uh, uh, worse, you know, rape culture has ravaged us in so many profound, horrific ways. We did intercessory prayer. And so every week we had a prayer call, you know, to pray about the specific subject matter we were tackling.

So the first week was medical apartheid, you know, women that have experienced racism in the medical industry, you know. Praying about even women that have had, have been steered toward hysterectomies far too soon. And so now they can't have children. Like what? And praying, you know, just about healing about those things or women, you know. Of course the, um, the infant mortality rates, you know, and, and, and mortality rates for black moms, you know, dying to give life, literally. Praying about for pregnant women on the line who are scared, right, to give birth.

Praying for doulas, black doulas, that the Lord will [00:35:00] raise up just a remnant even more. Or really an army of black doulas and midwives, um, and we call ourselves midwives of culture for grace and truth, you know. Um, so yeah, so these things, you know. So we, we, we try to figure out ways that we can shore them up and shore ourselves up too. So it's like, let me, we're going to hold intercessory prayer. We gonna pray, you know, for all of us. And it was just such a sweet time. It was beautiful.

**Rasool Berry:** One of the most powerful moments you shared about Tatiana Jefferson's, uh, you know, uh, being killed by a police officer when her neighbor was concerned about her well-being.

And I remember you weeping and, um, and it was, uh, it was this moment that jarred me into being present in that moment. Because it's so easy with this just constant stream of the news cycle to just become a little bit detached. And I [00:36:00] think that moment of listening to how, how deeply impacted you were by it caused me to stop and realize I need to pray for her family. I need to



be there and just lament. There was nothing I could do. But it was a, it was a gift to invite me into that. Why do you think that that impacted you so much?

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah. I mean, I think, I mean, it's just the, just visualizing like the whole scene. I mean, just, just playing there with her nephew. Playing video games. Like you're not even, you're not safe in your own home. That's unsettling, you know? Um, I think there was a lot of, um. Um, you know, you see yourself in her, you know. She's a single black woman, and a black aunt, you know. We know black aunties matter. And I'm a black aunt, you know. I'm a single black woman that could have happened to me. That's really scary.

Like you know, um, the whole circumstance is just so jarring, you know. And I, and, and, um, and so it was just my soul really cried out, you know, um, because of that. Um, and I, and then we don't weep over black women the way that we ought to. And to know that the neighbor really cared about the well-being of this woman and called the non-emergency line for a wellness check. Like, how come our doors open at two, whatever time in the morning it was? You know, and he didn't know, so it's heartbreaking on so many levels.

**Rasool Berry:** Yeah. And so I, you know, it reminded me of the importance that we have of just sitting with those things and not just moving on.

**Ekemini Uwan:** Yeah.

**Rasool Berry:** And when we think about where we are in the world right now, it's important to sit with people, and feel the weight of injustice. And then to speak out, to take action, to look for every opportunity [00:38:00] to point out ideologies that devalue other human beings. And to stand up for the dignity of our brothers and sisters who are black and of every color.

You're listening to *Where Ya From?*. I'm Rasool Berry, and if you'd like more info about Ekemini Uwan, including more information about her work as a public theologian, check out the show notes which are located in the podcast description. I'm Rasool Berry reminding you that it's not just about where you're at, it's also about where you're from.

This show was produced by Ryan Clevenger, Mary Jo Clark, Daniel Ryan Day, and Jade Gustafson, and was engineered by Gabrielle Bauer and Kevin Burgess. I also want to give a quick shout out to Diana and Mary for their help in supporting and promoting *Where Ya From?*. Thanks y'all.