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Starting the Conversation About Racial Reconciliation in Your Home



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT RACISM?

BY CARLOS SANTIAGO

The scourge of racism is like the ancient Hydra from mythology. Every time we think we've made some progress, it's like we take another step back. Cut off one head, and two more grow in its place.

Palestinians vs. Jews, Black vs. White, Mongolian vs. East Asian, Dominican vs. Puerto Rican. Wherever human civilizations exist, people struggle with racism and ethnic division. Like dust in the air waiting to settle as soon as you turn your back, we can't seem to get rid of it.

But is there a way to break through to a reality where race and ethnicity no longer divides us?

What does the Bible say about racism?

The history recorded in Scripture is rife with ethnic tensions.

The Bible repeatedly warned against treating foreigners badly (Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 23:7). Yet in their quest to live holy lives, many ancient Jews made it socially acceptable to look down on outsiders.

Even Jesus' disciples struggled to follow His example of acceptance and love.

The Apostle Peter needed a direct vision from God before he realized it was OK to associate with a Roman Centurion (See Acts 10). Peter's vision helped him get past this racism.

Thankfully, God left us everything we need in His Word. So what does the Bible say about racism? Plenty.

We are all made in God's image

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

Every man, woman, and child (born and unborn) bears the divine image of

God. His infinite beauty and complexity are reflected in the diverse tapestry of humanity. Removing any one thread prevents us from seeing God as clearly as we should. To reject the full image of God reflected in His creation is to reject God Himself.

“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9).

Every life is precious

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31).

If anyone has the right to look down on someone, it is God. He is infinite, eternal, all-powerful, and perfect. We are not. Yet, for some reason, He values us anyway. He lovingly numbers the hairs on our head (see above verse) and willingly sacrificed His own Son to give us a pathway back to Him (John 3:16).

If our lives matter that much to God, what right do we have to devalue another human life? By God’s example, we should be people who understand that every life is precious.

We are all sinful

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

When you hear a negative story about someone of a different race, is your default to believe it or do you offer the benefit of the doubt?

No one believes they have racist tendencies.

But even if we do not, the potential is there.

The evil we see in others lurks in the shadows of our hearts, too, waiting to be fed, looking for a way to escape. If we refuse to examine our hearts, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the very behaviors we despise. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Like King David, we must continually pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24).

When we confess our sins to God, He forgives us and gives us the ability to live differently.

Racism has two sides.

“The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?’ (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9).

The Samaritans in Jesus’ day were often on the receiving end of Jewish prejudice. When the woman at the well met Jesus, everything she knew about Jewish men told her to expect treatment as a second-class citizen. But Jesus surprised her.

Thankfully, her assumptions about Jesus didn’t keep her from engaging in the life-changing conversation that followed. That “scary” person of another race might just be God’s answer to your prayers.

As a Hispanic man, I cannot allow past experiences of racism to taint my perception of reality. If I assume racist intent without

objective proof, I'm the one who is exhibiting racism and must seek forgiveness. I must be as comfortable walking into a room filled with people of another race as I am walking into a room full of Hispanics. If not, I have work to do.

Christ offers us a new heart

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”
Ezekiel 36:26).

A cold heart in the face of suffering is a sign of rebellion toward God. It is often easier to look the other way if we are not directly involved. Yet Romans 12:15 calls us to “weep with those who weep.”

Racist incidents are traumatic experiences. A single event can scar an individual for life. Repeated incidents can result in something similar to post-traumatic stress disorder[1].

Many within the body of Christ have been forced to carry the burden of these injuries alone. But if racism affects one part of the body, it affects every part—no matter the hue.

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

God can soften our hearts and inspire us to move toward those hurt by racism with the same overwhelming compassion and grace we would offer any other injured person. If we are willing to let Him.

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”
(John 13:35).

Know the difference between righteous anger and sin

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil”
(Ephesians: 4:26-27).

Seeing the innocent suffer should break our hearts and not only stir us to compassion, but to action.

We must hold ourselves and those around us to a higher standard of behavior and call out racist attitudes and assumptions. As we do, we must take care not to allow our anger over injustice to lead us to sinful behavior.

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’”
(Romans 12:17-19).

Even those who perpetrate evil are image-bearers of God and in need of Christ. We can't allow our actions to inhibit our witness.

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

We should offer abundant grace

“Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9).

It would be wonderful if we could outlaw evil, but only God can change a heart. Thankfully, He can use us in the process. When our reactions are directed by the Holy Spirit, they stand in stark contrast to the rest of the world. And people take notice.

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

Our abundant grace can often do more to convict a person of their sin than any passionate speech ever could.

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28).

In Christ there is unity

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both

one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:13-14).

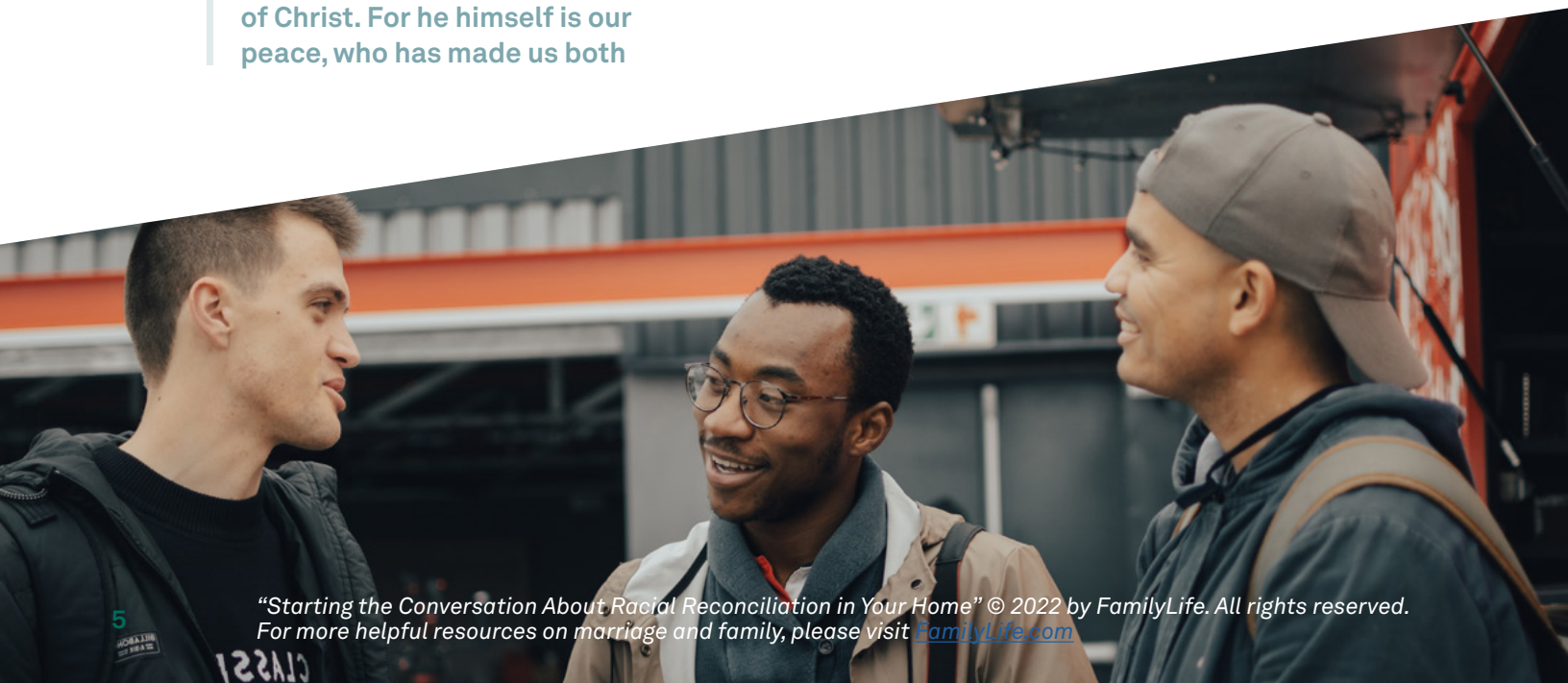
Before the foot of the cross, we are all the same—sinners in need of forgiveness. When we accept the forgiveness Jesus offers, His Spirit lives within us. He gives us unity with Him and the ability to have unity with other believers.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Christ made a way. If we follow His way, our differences turn from a source of tension to a source of beauty—each of us uniquely reflecting a portion of God’s glory.

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne ... crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9-10).

So what does the Bible say about racism? A lot. The question is, will we listen?





Racial Discrimination Ends in Your Living Room

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

Where were you when you heard about George Floyd? Where were you when the gravity of recent racial discrimination sank in your gut like a poison?

I sat on the edge of my bed, sliding through weekend headlines, breath quickening. I ducked around the corner to the bathroom, where my husband perched on a ladder painting, as our kids snoozed in the next room. We talked in low voices about what it looks like to speak up for the marginalized. To be angry, yet not sin (Ephesians 4:26).

I read aloud the social media dialogue between friends and beleaguered police officers, the troubled prayer requests for safety.

Paintbrush in hand, my husband said something wise: mercy and grace are needed on all sides of this discussion. And the most effective, lasting change seems to happen face-to-face.

Stop racial discrimination, but start here

I had a similar conversation that afternoon with a black police officer's wife, her kids

jumping and shrieking with laughter around us as her husband pulled long shifts in riot control, his body bruised.

And it was the kind of convo we'd have Sunday morning as a family. Considering our church was still meeting online, my husband and I led our family's service, the kids accompanied by cereal bowls or blonde bedhead.

Because the end of racial discrimination starts with our own families. In our own living rooms.

And even deeper than that. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn observed in *The Gulag Archipelago*,

If only it were all so simple!

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

In fact, Scripture advises I won't even know the depth of my own conscience (Jeremiah 17:9, 1 Corinthians 4:4).

So my husband and I decided racial discrimination is an ongoing conversation in our home—this week's discussions tumbling out of our Ahmaud Arbery conversation on racial discrimination just weeks ago. I recall a tweet [1]:

“Question for the white folks on my [timeline]: What are you doing to make sure that you're raising children who won't kill mine?”

Racial discrimination is certainly an ongoing conversation in the homes of our black friends—a conversation they don't see as optional. And I openly acknowledge it's an ongoing concern of God's (Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8, Mark 12:31).

What does it look like to stop racism—starting in your own home?

1

Have friends who look different from you, who talk with you about racial discrimination.

For years, I toted my kids along to a refugee center in Africa where I taught near our family's home. I've found when kids know people different from them, it changes their conversations.

Because it's much easier to play armchair quarterback, strategizing about our interactions with people groups ... when you

haven't been swept into the arms of that people group as a friend. When you haven't guffawed together over a cup of tea or shared a plate of their food.

Like Jesus, do we rub elbows and swap food with people from different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and political parties? How diverse are the people, not just whom we know, but who we invite into our homes?

2

Take the lead against racial discrimination.

We cannot assume children aren't developing racist tendencies because we don't (far as we know) say racist things.

And values of God's Kingdom aren't encapsulated by any news network, political party, or activist group. Author Jen Pollock Michel advises, “We don't live kingdom lives ... unless we're imbibing the kingdom story.”[2]

This is not a value construction we leave to media or status quo.

Our children should be angry at racial discrimination. God is (2 Chronicles 19:6-7). We must lament what breaks the heart of God—responding to bring healing.

When these conversations do not happen at home, we communicate these injustices aren't worth our concern. We raise comfortable kids. More accurately, kids comfortable with injustice. Kids who think themselves superior, not “better than yourself” (Philippians 2:3).

Combating injustice is part of raising godly kids.

To start the conversation, consider The Gospel Coalition's list of 5 children's books on racism and the gospel.

With older kids, read verses like Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 58, Micah 6:8, and Luke 11:42. Watch movies together about racial discrimination, like *Just Mercy*. Talk frequently about racial injustice.

As a family, what does it look like to form "the collective resolve to repent, rebuke, and reorient ... against racial injustice,"[3] rather than opting out because the system works for us?

What are the most effective and godly methods to actively stand united with the Church against racial discrimination?

When we're honest, what prevents us from greater action?

3

As a family, make a game plan.

What could it look like for your family to take godly action to stop racism? Perhaps you

- Pray for a set number of days—not only for change, but what God would have you do. This article provides some fantastic ideas.
- Intentionally—yet without making it feel like a project!—reach out for coffee or dinner with a friend of another race. Setting aside defensiveness, ask about their experience and what they wish people understood.

- Make sure none of your family's humor derives from racially based jokes.
- Shop at businesses with diverse ownership. Get to know the owners.
- Strike up conversations in your community, actively building diverse relationships.
- Try saying to a member of another race, "I'm really glad you're part of this community."
- Read books with your kids that expose them to positive images of diversity, as well as experiences with racism and history.
- For younger kids, purchase dolls of ethnically diverse cultures. You might suggest these dolls hold important roles in playtime—a school principal, a mayor, a teacher.
- Confess racist thoughts to your spouse. Ask your spouse to hold you accountable.
- In dialogue, refrain from sweeping statements and stereotypes about other cultures. Call them out in your children, asking them to thoughtfully rephrase.
- Specifically pray for soft hearts in your children toward other races and ethnicities and injustice in all forms.
- Encourage your kids to initiate friendships with kids of other cultures at school.
- Model cross-cultural friendships yourself. Talk about what you love about these friends.





The birthplace of change

If our children’s future can be one without racial discrimination, a future of trust between law enforcement and all races, we cannot placate ourselves that new laws and government will change hearts. (To be fair, even in parenting, it’s God who creates heart change—see 1 Corinthians 3:6.)

But creating a lifelong, repetitive environment of genuine love for all people and a passion for justice?

That starts around your kitchen table.

Notes:

[1] @JahnaRiley. May 7, 2020. Twitter.com <https://twitter.com/jahnariley/status/1258464676754665472?lang=en>

[2] Michel, Jen Pollock. Surprised by Paradox: The Promise of And in an Either-Or World. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press Books (2019), p. 101.

[3] Edwards, Dennis. “The Revolution Will Not Be Videoed.” Christianity Today. 29 May, 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-web-only/dennis-edwards-george-floyd-revolution-will-not-be-videoed.html>

PRAYING WITH YOUR FAMILY FOR RACIAL RECONCILIATION

As the world around us cracks and bleeds with the pain of injustice, how will we allow God to unite our families' hearts with His?

01) PRAY BY YOURSELF

1. Lament racial sin in our world.

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. -NEHEMIAH 1:4

2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any hardness of heart toward those different from you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there

be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! -PSALM 139:23-24

3. Ask God to help you develop a heart of love and compassion for His image bearers of every hue.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. -1 JOHN 4:7-8

02) PRAY WITH YOUR SPOUSE

1. Pray you would be united in a biblical response to injustice.

... learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression ... -ISAIAH 1:17

2. Pray the world's response to injustice be motivated by a fear of God.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? -MICAH 6:8

3. Pray for spiritual revival within our nation in addition to civil change.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions ... This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior. -1 TIMOTHY 2:1-3

03) PRAY WITH YOUR CHILDREN

1. Pray your family will treat every person as God's workmanship.

With younger children:

Pray that God will help us see how He made each person special to him—and help us treat them that way, no matter what.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors....

With [our tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.... My brothers, these things ought not to be so. -JAMES 2:8-9, 3:9-10

2. Pray for revival within the Church.

With younger children:

Ask God to make the Church alive, listening to and bravely obeying His Holy Spirit.

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?... Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'" -ISAIAH 58:6, 8-9

3. Pray against all racism within the church.

With younger children:

Sometimes people are unkind to others because of how they look. That's not God's way! Let's pray Christians treat other people as more important than themselves, like Jesus did (Philippians 2:3).

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. -EPHESIANS 4:30-32