



Racism & The Church

Pastor Gil Michel of That Church Downtown in South Bend, IN, shares the following thoughts on recent events and what we as Christ-followers can do personally in response to the tension.

As I think about how the church has entered the year of 2020, it started out with great enthusiasm and excitement. Then, COVID-19 happened. We had to learn how to convey the gospel and maintain community while physically distancing from one another. We had to continue to convey the truth of God's Word and reimagine how to "do church" when we couldn't touch the people we worship with.

And then a couple weeks ago a number of events rocked our nation to its core. We learned of the violent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. And then we watched, in horror, the needless death of George Floyd while we were glued to our computers and smartphones. As countless Americans flooded the streets in protest, we were grieved to witness even more violence and devastation at the hands of rioters, instigators, looters and law enforcement. There have been commentaries from all manner of politicians, celebrities and faith leaders; while posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have made some of us seriously consider who our real "friends" are.

As Marketo and I have offered our own hearts to comfort and help people process,



we have been inundated by words of encouragement from a plethora of people. We have also been asked what they can do and say to help alleviate the tension and shock they are sensing in our society. From my vantage point, can I ask that you do one thing? Do what Jesus did.

One of His names is Emmanuel or "God With Us." God climbed into flesh and entered a world that although it was unlike Him, He was compelled to redeem it by identifying with it. He redeemed the issue of sin by taking on sin. So, how are you seeking to "enter into" the perspectives of those who are affected by the racism that seems to be either intentionally or systematically at work in these recent killings and (in the cases of Ahmad Arbery and Breonna Taylor) the extended inaction of authorities in seeking answers and justice for the victims' families? When you see black brothers and sisters who have cried every single day, as one woman in my church recently conveyed, is your curiosity piqued? If these are our brothers and sisters, we have a wide-open opportunity to

walk as redeemers, and repairers of that which has been breached.

At one point I didn't understand why I wasn't moved by the sin of abortion as much as my other brothers and sisters. I sought the Lord about it and He revealed some blind spots in me that were hard to swallow. I saw abortion, as a political football kicked around and used to raise great amounts of money toward the cause of babies and not dealing with "other lives." The church works hard to restore its image and how we present ourselves to the world. However, the Bible tells us that the greatest way to display our true discipleship is by loving one another well. You don't need to move into an all-Black neighborhood to do this. You could simply spend an afternoon googling the history of Africans in America and understand why Black people are in pain about recent events, and then listen. I mean, really listen, to the Holy Spirit and what's being said. And maybe God will reveal some blind spots in you too. Ask him to break your heart with things that break His. And like a Great Physician, may He reset the break in a way that brings substantive healing to our nation and the church. *

Gil Michel co-pastors That Church Downtown in South Bend, Indiana, with his wife Marketo. Both Gil and Marketo are credentialed pastors with the Evana Network.

Resources for Learning and Resistance

1. A statement responding to the death of George Floyd from Evana can be found on Workplace as well as the Evana Network Facebook page.
2. You can listen to Gil share more about his experiences on the Dudes and Dads podcast hosted by Joel DeMott and Andy Lehman at www.dudesanddadspodcast.com.
3. Greg Boyd is the pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. A convinced Anabaptist, Greg gave an emotionally raw sermon ("Please, I Can't Breathe") reflecting on the death of George Floyd and racism in the church on May 31, 2020. His sermon is followed by a panel discussion by members of the Woodland Hills congregation and can be found at www.whchurch.org/sermon/.
4. The National Association of Evangelicals' video response and statement on racial unrest and a call to action can be found at www.nae.net/racialjustice/. Several other resources can also be found on the bottom of the same webpage.
5. Consider reading the following:
 - a. Wayne Jacobsen, Arnita Willis Taylor, and Robert L. Prater, *A Language of Healing for a Polarized Nation* (Blue Sheep Media, 2019)
 - b. Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0* (InterVarsity, 2020).
 - c. Barna Research, *Where Do We Go from Here?* (2019 research report on racism and the church currently available as a free download from Barna's website: www.barna.org.)