

A Response to Racial Injustice—Summary

As Grace Church, we want to develop empathy and minister in proximity to our African American community.

First, we must acknowledge the deeply rooted, pivotal role that racism has played in our nation. For generations, African Americans were oppressed, abused, and exploited for the benefit of the white majority. This wound continues to have repercussions. Yes, our present is better in many ways than the past. But there are still compelling reasons to suggest that our nation's infrastructure of education, employment, imprisonment, and housing still contains systemic issues that disproportionately impact poor and marginalized people, including many African-Americans.

It's easy to dismiss racism when it does not touch our daily lives. As a majority white culture, we want to grow in awareness of how our experience of the world may be different than our black brothers' and sisters'. This awareness will help develop empathy in our hearts so we can better love and support people who have different experiences or challenges.

As with all brokenness, we bring this to God and Scripture to ground us, provide wisdom, and move us forward. In Ephesians 2:16, Paul speaks to the division between Greek and Jewish believers: "Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death." Here, we see that unity can be found in Christ.

Indeed, the gospel provides us with the greatest empathizer, includer, and uplifter of the suffering in Christ. Jesus came down from a high place; he put himself in immediate proximity to humanity. In fact, Jesus embraced us to such a degree that he became flesh. John 1:14 states, "So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." Jesus came to us in our brokenness and shared our pain. Hebrews 4:15 says, "This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin." As followers of Christ, we strive to model Jesus' empathy for the poor and marginalized. Although the church neither has the power nor the responsibility for changing the culture, we can live in a way that is compelling to the world by using our strength to lift up the suffering.

Empathy should always give rise to both voice and deeds. Verbalizing truth is good and powerful; however, it is not enough to bring lasting change. We must reinforce our words with actions. It is not wrong to be a voice on social media, but that does not absolve us from taking real steps in real life towards racial reconciliation. Posting about racial injustice may help alleviate the tension we feel, but our goal should be to step into that tension with actions in a vulnerable way.

As a body of believers, we have been working with the African American community through a variety of channels. There are always areas where we can learn and grow, and we want to embrace a posture of humility, empathy, and action. Currently, we are focusing energy and resources in a few key areas: 1) Working with community leaders to provide affordable housing to the African American community and other underserved populations 2) Providing financial support and individual mentorship through Jumpstart prison ministry 3) Supporting parents and children through our foster and adopt ministry 4) Developing community leadership in Allendale County.

We encourage our members to support our efforts with their resources: time, energy, and finances. Furthermore, we hope each of you will take steps in your personal life. Don't settle for verbal agreement or acknowledgment. Move towards our African American brothers and sisters and seek to exemplify the empathy of Christ.

