

Last week, our VP for Racial Righteousness, Wayne Stapleton, from our North American Baptist (NAB) Conference, shared these insights with the NAB Family:

Racial Righteousness in a World of Racism



by Wayne Stapleton

NAB VP of Racial Righteousness

As followers of Jesus and as members of the Executive Team of the North American Baptist Conference, we deplore the brutal killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. It was an egregious and sinful act and an overt abuse of power. In the United States, we just celebrated those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in the armed forces on Memorial Day, because life is precious. Soon after we witnessed the life taken from a man who was signaling to the police that he could not breathe while an officer's knee remained on his neck.

This news comes after a seemingly regular cycle of reports of unarmed Black people dying at the hands of police. To question whether the motives in these cases were racial is at least disingenuous considering the history of the United States. Racism is sin and has deep, extensive roots in the States. Let us as followers of Jesus recognize racism and its corrosive impact as an affront to the Gospel and to the Lord Himself.

Does racism matter to the church?

Absolutely. Racism matters because some who are hurting ARE the church. Many Black people and other people of color, and even many White people, are hurting. And many are our brothers and sisters. Christ followers are called to weep with those who weep. Right now, there are tears.

Racism matters because every single human life – of every color, of every age, in every socio-economic category, and of every brand of religion or none at all – is made in the image of God. George Floyd’s inherent dignity given by God was brutally trampled upon, as was the human dignity of Ahmaud Arbery and so many others.

Racism matters because of our mission.

The mission of the NAB is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ at home and internationally. At the same time, we are on a missional and formational journey, being transformed more and more into His character. Because we are seeking to make disciples of people IN North American culture, we must recognize that these people come with sins of all types. One of them is racism, because they come from a culture infected with racism. The time is past for believing that issues of race are NOT Gospel issues: they are central to any kind of Gospel transformation and witness we can do in North America. To ignore the roots of racism while carrying out ministry is to allow it to grow unchecked. How credible can we be with our witness to a world that is suffering in pain and strife if we are numb to its injustice, silent about its brokenness, or selective in our treatment of its sin? How credible is our testimony to the love of God for the world if we ignore the world’s sinful stratification of people and their worth? To be on the mission of Christ in a culture is to deal with that culture’s brokenness with prophetic energy and passion.

For the United States, a large part of the brokenness that must be dealt with is racism.

Racism is an issue of formation. Each of us must face our own biases and idolatries in light of the cultural ground in which we have grown. If we are truly to be shaped into the image of the God who was made flesh, we often have just as much to unlearn as we have to learn. How is Christlikeness forged in each of us in a racialized culture? What does it require of us? Where are we challenged? Are there idols that need to be toppled? How would you know?

We should stop pretending that we don't see the world racially. We do. It should not have to count against people of color to BE people of color, it should not be held against them. It is offensive for a White person to look at a person of color and pretend that person's ethnicity has no bearing or meaning to who that person is. It is not a compliment to say you are color blind; it is hurtful. Our ethnicities most certainly shape us and inform our approach to the world and should not be disregarded.

Does racism matter to you? If so, here are some things you can do:

- Pray for eyes to see and ears to hear, asking God to show you what He wants you to see in yourself.
- Be led by the Lord and His love for all people.
- Be humble, resisting the idea that you know how those unlike yourself should feel.
- Be open to the notion that you have something to learn about yourself and your own biases, as well as others and how they see the world.
- Please do NOT look for a political angle; get your information about people different from you from the people themselves and not the media, and seek your guidance from the Lord.
- If you are White, truly love and respect somebody you know who is Black or of color; care about how they feel, care about their hurt, ask your questions, and seek understanding and not just to be understood.
- If you are a person of color, develop a friendship with someone who is White; listen and share your heart, build an honest and open friendship in which you can discuss your perspectives, be a person of grace for their questions, and seek understanding and not just to be understood.

As a church we take Christ's marching orders from the Great Commission, but what motivates the Great Commission is the Great Commandment. *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 22:37–40 ESV).

Let each of us ask ourselves what Christian love looks like to God. What SHOULD Christian love of neighbor look like? Does it depend on what our neighbor looks like?

