

If you are a white pastor and have not heard this already this week, you very likely will this Sunday. Some pastors will be tempted not to discuss this week's tragic events at all from the stage, but it is my personal opinion that would be a huge miss.

I have found that well meaning pastors have a difficult time finding the right language for such times as this. While by no means comprehensive, below is a quick guide to help ensure healthy conversation during this season.

Talking Points for the White Pastor +

Racist VS Racialist* – One of the biggest missteps amongst the white community is a misunderstanding of what is being communicated. Often the same words are being used, but without the realization that two different languages are being spoken. When a white person talks about racism, most often what he or she is saying is, “I don't personally harbor any negative feelings, therefore I don't see the problem.” When an African American is talking about racism, most often he or she is referring to what is sometimes called Racialist. Here, racism is referring to less about an individual emotions and opinions, but rather a systemic issue. The system at large is poised against minorities, a reality that is a constant tension in their day to day lives. For example, if my son were to be pulled over for a routine traffic violation, the last thought that comes to my mind is about law enforcements guns being drawn on him. To my African American friends, it is a reality all too common, regardless of their economic status. I have an African American friend who lives in a predominately Anglo community who takes her sons to the local police station about twice a year to introduce them around. Even though these young men are very polite and well educated, this mother lives with the constant fear that they will be falsely accused of trespassing when simply walking home from school. Another example is what happened in Baltimore last year. I was familiar with the neighborhoods that the riots broke out in. These neighborhoods were filled with generational poverty. The young men initiating the riots grew up with fathers who could not break out of the economic poverty system, and they themselves seeing no hope of breaking out of the economic and educational barriers they grew up in. This hopelessness was a major fuel that had been burning within for years, long before the death of Freddie Gray. What Anglos see on the news from time to time is the heavy weight that African American fathers and mothers carry over fear for their children everyday. Even if, as an Anglo, you determine that you don't really understand this, compassion demands, as followers of Christ, to seek to understand, rather than channeling our energy over defensiveness because it is not understandable to him or her.

Historical Context VS Isolated Context – Anglos have a tendency to look at each incident as an isolated event. African Americans see each event as evidence of a long term systemic problem that shows very minimal progress. What happened in Minnesota, for example, is not a shooting that just randomly happened to a black male by a white police officer. Rather, for the African American community, it is an actualization of their daily fears for their friends and family.

Black Lives Matter VS Blue Lives Matter – In every movement there are extremists. If you agree not to equate me with Westboro Baptist Church as an Anglo Baptist pastor, I need to agree not to hold anyone else to the beliefs of the extremists that look like them. Black lives and Blue lives have been devalued and feel violated. Each are simply validating that their lives matter as well. One is not mutually exclusive of the other. Of course it is true that all lives matter. The irony is that this truth is often used to demean the outcry of our brothers and sisters when we get defensive and cry out, “Oh no, not just black lives! All lives matter!”. Instead, how about we empathize with them and say, “I hear you, your life matters to me.”

Responding VS Reaction – Dr. Phil Philips, a Haitian American pastor in Ft Myers FL, recently challenged that all races need to think towards responding over reaction. Let’s not be obsessed over our rights, but rather have compassion over the pain felt by our brothers and sisters. Let’s not take to social media with our nose in the air. Hear the cries of others and let them know you care.

Silence VS Violence VS Solution – Anglo churches have a long history of remaining silent until there is minimal controversy to do so. Yes, violence is wrong. Riots are not of God. Let’s at least acknowledge and confess that silence is just as evil. Dr. Michael Henderson, an African American pastor in Charlotte NC, challenged a multi cultural Converge pastors group that we should work together towards a solution.

Seek to understand VS Thinking it is understood. – Regardless of the color of your skin, diversity is not about losing our culture or identity, but rather celebrating our uniqueness, all the while seeking to understand and appreciate those who are different than us. It is incredibly arrogant to make broad statements, particularly disparaging ones, because we think our own cultural perspectives is the norm.

Folks, as President Scott Ridout of Converge is known to say frequently, “**We are better together.**” We are the body of Christ. Let’s not take the position

that the rest of the world is quick to take. Instead, lets take the job description the apostle Paul gave us in 2 Corinthians 5 very seriously. Because we have been reconciled in Christ, we are called to the ministry of reconciliation.

+ Before posting, this article was reviewed by Dr. Michael Henderson, a prominent megachurch African American pastor in Charlotte NC, as well as VP of National Ministries of Converge.

* Term coined by Michael Emerson

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