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Racial Discrimination Ends in Your Living Room

When it comes to talks about racial discrimination, mercy and grace are needed on all sides. But the most effective change happens face-to-face.

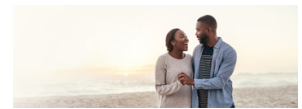


By Janel Breitenstein

Where were you when you heard about George Floyd? Where were you when the gravity of recent racial discrimination sank



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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.

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... We stand with and for every home to learn and lament, pursuing gospel-centered reconciliation & unity. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

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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).

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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->

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Janel Breitenstein is an author, freelance writer, speaker, and frequent contributor for FamilyLife, including Passport2Identity®, Art of Parenting®, and regular articles. After five and a half years in East Africa, her family of six has returned to Colorado, where they continue to work on behalf of the poor with Engineering Ministries International. Her book, *Permanent Markers: Spiritual Life Skills for Work-in-Progress Families* (Zondervan), releases March 2021. You can find her—"The Awkward Mom"—having uncomfortable, important conversations at JanelBreitenstein.com, and on Instagram @janelbreit.

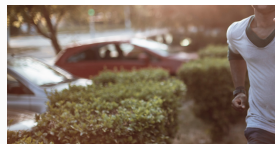
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