

Hope for Our LIBERATION



“He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.’

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:16-21

The founder of Black liberation theology, Rev. Dr. James Cone, points to this passage from the Gospel of Luke as the time when Jesus proclaims His mission is to comfort those who are poor, liberate people held captive, and free the oppressed. Indeed, the story of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection is the story of a life lived on the margins of society, befriending and serving people who were outcasts, and a cruel, public execution at the hands of the state. There is also, however, unimaginable redemption and triumph over death. As people of faith then, particularly for Catholics and followers of Jesus, we cannot live out our faith without addressing and working for an end to racism.

Throughout life, Jesus chose to be in community with people who were harmed by the dominant systems of oppression in society. Today, we know that people of color have suffered from the structural racism that infects our nation. The effect of this systemic racism is apparent in our healthcare system, immigration policies, economic system, treatment of Native Americans, mass incarceration, and many more aspects of life.

Racism in our country and our failure to end it is social sin. If we are truly believers in the message of the Gospel—in Jesus choosing the marginalized over the powerful—then we must reject and act against racism wherever we experience it. Additionally, those with white privilege must recognize the benefits that their whiteness grants them and use it to act for racial justice.

Living and Acting for Racial Justice

Because everyone’s identities and lived experiences are unique, working for racial justice will look different for each person. Your race, immigration status, education level, income, physical ability, and other aspects of your identity will inform the ways you work and act to end racism. For people of color, resisting racism may sometimes look like self-care and building healthy community with other people of color. White people, on the other hand,

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Words of Wisdom

We should hope not for a colorblind society but instead for a world in which we can see each other fully, learn from each other, and do what we can to respond to each other with love. That was King's dream—a society that is capable of seeing each of us, as we are, with love. That is a goal worth fighting for."

— Michelle Alexander,
The New Jim Crow

Living cont.

are not forced to deal with the effects of racism every day and need to be more conscious of bringing race to the forefront and actively choosing actions that will dismantle white supremacy instead of uphold it.

Being aware of the ways that racism is still at work in our society today is crucial to begin addressing racism in the United States. As James Baldwin said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." For too long, white people have avoided the topic of race or chose "colorblindness." This inaction, ignorance, or apathy has failed to reverse the effects of racism. People of color are still disproportionately impacted in our society, and white people must acknowledge that before we can we begin to address it together. The best way to gain this awareness and face the problem is by listening – and believing – when people of color share how structural racism has affected themselves and their families. People of color have been speaking out against racism that harms their communities for centuries, do you listen?

When speaking and acting for racial justice, it is important to listen and follow the lead of members of the most affected communities. Whatever the issue is, members of that community have first-hand experience and are the most knowledgeable about how to liberate themselves. And, members of multiple marginalized communities have the best understanding of how to make our work for justice intersectional. Do not neglect to listen to their wisdom.

Responding to Racism

As you become more conscious about the ways that racism works in our society, you will see and hear ways that systems or people around you are racist. You may also notice instances of cultural appropriation, microaggressions, or "white savior complex," which we covered in the first chapter of this guide. When you do, it is important to speak up and register your disapproval. There are two different approaches you can take to do this, which activists have termed "**calling out**" or "**calling in**."

When there is little or no chance of receiving a response, then you would call someone or something **out**. If the situation is one in which you believe the other party is willing to have a conversation and possibly change their actions, then you may choose to call them **in**.

There are numerous examples for circumstances that call for the two different responses. For example, if the perpetrator is a celebrity (and you are unlikely to receive a response) or an avowed racist or nationalist (in which case they are unlikely to change their actions), then **call them out** publicly, by taking actions such as commenting on their social media or writing a letter to the editor. If you experience a coworker or friend say something racist or see something problematic happen within your faith community, then you should try to **call them in** with a personal conversation (if you have enough energy and emotional capacity). Understanding your social positioning is important in these contexts as well. If you have privilege, then being willing to be the person to call that person in could be a beneficial use of your privilege.

Calling Out

- Publicly pointing out that another person is being oppressive¹
- Issuing a direct challenge to something they've said or done, usually in public, with the intent of exposing the person's wrongdoing to others²
- Lets a person know they're being oppressive, and it lets others know that the person was being oppressive³
- Can be powerful at drawing attention to problematic behavior, particularly among high-profile individuals, businesses, or institutions as well as in more immediately dangerous situations⁴

Example: President Trump's zero tolerance policy at the U.S.-Mexico border is racist and xenophobic ...

Calling In

- “The act of checking your peers and getting them to change problematic behavior by explaining their misstep with compassion and patience”⁵
- Can be a useful way of addressing bigotry and oppressive behavior among people you know, trust, and want to continue associating with⁶
- Still holds people accountable, but is done with a little more compassion and patience⁷
- Not for everyone or every circumstance. It's not fair, for example, to insist that people hurt by cruel or careless language or actions be responsible for the personal growth of those who have injured them⁸
- For white people, helps to dismantle a culture of white guilt and shame and transform fear into positive actions that center on the white community calling each other in⁹

Example: Mom, I don't agree with that stereotype you just used, can we talk about it?

Whether you **call in** or **call out**, it is important (especially for white people) not to let racist acts pass without saying anything. When we choose to do nothing to address racism day after day, we are complicit in upholding white supremacy in our society.

Choosing to Be Anti-Racist

Being anti-racist is a daily choice. When white supremacy permeates the daily society, structures, and systems we encounter daily, it is not enough to be passive – we must actively counter the presence of white supremacy in our daily lives. However, when you do join a conversation about racism, participate in an action, or just go about your daily life mindful of race, you may slip up. We all have racial biases that we are working to overcome, and sometimes there are things that you just haven't educated yourself on yet. The important thing is that how you choose to react when you mess up.

It can be overwhelming when someone calls you out (or in). The first thing you should do, however, is resist the temptation to feel defensive and react. Instead, slow down. Don't respond with the first thing that comes to your mind. Listen and accept what you are being told. It may be uncomfortable, but try not to avoid the discomfort. Don't let your hurt feelings override the negative impact your action has had on a person or community of color.

Impact over Intent

“*Impact over intent*” may be a useful phrase to remember in the context of racial justice discussions. No one likes to admit that they've done something wrong, and other times you may not even have realized that something you said or did would be hurtful. It is easy for someone to deflect and say, “Well I didn't mean it that way.” This does not negate the impact that your actions had.

When the impact of your actions brings further harm to people of color, that takes precedence over your own comfort, privilege, experience, or explanation. Instead of centering yourself and your experience, focus your attention on the harm that was done. If harm was done to a marginalized community, then harm was done. That's the most (and only) important thing.

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Words of Wisdom

We must dissent. We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent from the apathy. We must dissent from the hatred and from the mistrust. We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better.”

— *Thurgood Marshall*

Choosing cont.

Try to look at the feedback someone has offered you “as an offering, not an attack.”¹⁰ It takes a great deal of courage and energy to discuss race with someone. The other person could have chosen to ignore it and let you continue making this mistake in the future, but instead they have taken their time to give you the opportunity to learn. Remember: we do this anti-racism work because people’s lives are at stake in our current system of white supremacy.

So, if you are called in on your words or actions, apologize sincerely, acknowledging the impact of your action. Do not put conditions on your apology, try to diminish the impact, or shift the focus to your intention by providing a lengthy explanation.¹¹ Take responsibility for the mistake. Finally, commit to changing your behavior, educating yourself further, remaining accountable to others, and/or taking any additional steps necessary to rectify the situation.¹² By following these steps, you can learn from this experience, build trust between yourself and others, and continue working together.

Working for Our Shared Liberation

Developing the skills and relationships to continue increasing our capacity to oppose racism is critical. For too long, white people have chosen to deny the full humanity and individual human dignity of people of color. This damages our relationships with one another, with our world, and with God. Our current systems – of unjust healthcare, the racial wealth and income gap, continued harm against Native Americans, harsh immigration policies, and more injustices—spreads undue harm throughout our communities and across our country. And we know that when people at the margins of our society do better, we all do better.

As we renounce systemic racism then, we recall that all systems are upheld by individuals. The systems that oppress people of color are allowed to remain in place through the apathy of the many individuals that make up a society. By educating yourself and advocating for federal policies that mend the gaps with NETWORK, you can do your part to reject systemic racism and social sin in our country.

Sources

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We Pray

Take a deep breath in. Center yourself.

Open your heart to the call of Christ to live in love.

Listen to that call for 5 minutes in stillness.

Spirit of God, you brood over the waters of chaos in our lives.
 You call us to surrender any vestige of privilege and renounce all discrimination.
 Give us the strength to continue working for racial justice.
 Spirit of God you call us into community where we are one family, one in your Love.
 May we respond to this call and turn toward conversion.
 May we live in your inclusive love and trust in the promise that we will be healed!

Spirit of God, you brood over the waters of chaos in our nation and our world.
 You challenge us to dismantle white supremacy and create a nation and world of
 inclusion for all people.
 Spirit of God, free us to live without fear in the promise of our oneness in you.
 May we respond to your call and turn toward conversion.
 May we live in your inclusive love and trust in the promise that we will be healed!

Written by Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some examples in your life where you could call people out? What about calling people in?
2. What aspects of your identity inform your work for racial justice? How can you, in your own life, acknowledge and understand instances of structural racism before addressing them?
3. Think of your entire Lenten journey with this resource. What are your biggest take-aways? What challenged you? What more do you want to learn about?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Read

- “Why James Cone Was the Most Important Theologian of His Time”
 May 2, 2018
<https://sojo.net/articles/why-james-cone-was-most-important-theologian-his-time>

Following the passing of Rev. Dr. James Hal Cone, known as the founder of Black liberation theology, this article honors his work and explains the context out of which Rev. Cone’s work came.

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Additional Resources cont.

- “Asking New Questions”

June 12, 2016

<https://collectyourpeople.com/asking-new-questions-ff57825ab126>

Writer Angus Maguire invites us to move beyond overly simplistic questions and instead ask better questions that lead to more consequential conversations of impact and action.

- “What can you do about racism? Call it out for a start...”

July 29, 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jul/29/what-can-you-do-about-racism-call-it-out-for-a-start>

A personal story about a woman’s experience with a boss who would make racist comments and her coworkers’ silence demonstrates the importance of speaking up about racism, especially when it happens right in front of you.

- “Calling out racists is actually good for your health, according to science. Here’s how to do it”

January 16, 2018

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2018/01/16/calling-out-racists-is-good-for-your-health-according-to-science-heres-how-to-do-it>

This article highlights research that shows that when people speak up about racism or sexism, they generally feel better about themselves. When people don’t say something, they may feel guilty and frustrated.

- “Speaking Up Without Tearing Down”

Spring 2019

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2019/speaking-up-without-tearing-down>

Teaching Tolerance provides guidance for people, especially teachers in the classroom, about how to turn a mistake someone makes into an opportunity for that person, and everyone around them, to learn.

- “Nine Phrases Allies Can Say When Called Out Instead of Getting Defensive”

May 29, 2017

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/05/allies-say-this-instead-defensive/>

Helpful phrases to remember such as ‘I’m going to take some time to reflect on this’ or ‘I recognize that I have work to do’ to avoid defensiveness when you make a mistake and are called out, and how to use them to build relationships and continue your learning and progress.

- “Six charts showing race gaps within the American middle class”

October 21, 2016

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2016/10/21/6-charts-showing-race-gaps-within-the-american-middle-class/>

Six examples of ways that Black people are disadvantaged compared to white people—even when they have higher incomes and more education.

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Additional Resources cont.

- Project Implicit

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>

This test will assess your conscious and unconscious preferences for race, gender, sexual orientation, and other topics. The test is free, but the website requires you to register your email address and provide some personal demographic information.

Watch

- “What happens when I try to talk race with white people”
November 30, 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SynR1NYcpo>

In this 3 minute video PBS NewsHour with Renni Eddo-Lodge, author of *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, she shares insight she has gained from talking about race and feminism with white people. While her identity as a woman of color makes it impossible to separate the two, white women can shut down conversations about race out of fear of being wrong. Eddo-Lodge shares her wisdom: “You can’t ask me why I’m not invited to the party, you have to ask the host”

- Understanding My Privilege
December 9, 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlRxqC0Sze4>

Sue Borrego, a lifelong educator, shares her first-person account of “White Privilege” and “Black Lives Matter” to underscore the responsibility each one of us has to bring about change. This video is 13 minutes long.

- Getting Called Out: How to Apologize
March 31, 2008

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8xJXKYL8pU>

This video from Franchesca Ramsey explains how to apologize if you’ve been called out on something, with an example of an apology.

Listen

- Black Liberation Theology, in its Founder’s Words
December 9, 2016

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89236116>

Rev. James Cone, the founder of Black liberation theology, explains the movement, its history, and its inspiration in an interview with Terry Gross. He describes Black liberation theology as “mainly a theology that sees God as concerned with the poor and the weak.”