

How You Can Be a Fountain of Blessing in a Racial Firestorm

The ethnic tension in America is at code red. The intensity of relationships between white, black, law-enforcement officers, government officials, etc. is as heated as the summer.

Although the thought of cooling the racial temperature at a national level can easily discourage us, our ability to bring relief to our own local context is profoundly encouraging. Here are four every-day action-steps (laid out in the acronym, “.”) that can help you and your family become fountains of interracial tenderness and compassion within your own community.

“Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He will judge the world, and the peoples with justice” (Psalm 98:8-9, MEV).

1. Care – Make space in your day to be kind to someone from a different ethnic background. Look for simple ways to extend the message *“I care about you as a person.”*

I frequent a very crowded gas/convenience store several times a week. It’s become a thirst-quenching station in more ways than one for me. It’s a place where I can refresh construction workers, police officers, hurried secretaries and harried moms with small acts of kindness: holding the door a bit longer, smiling, looking people in the eye, telling someone I like their shirt, using the word “sir” and “ma’am,” letting others go first. Each action is a cup of water that says *“I see you,”* and *“I respect you.”*

The wonderful thing is, in the Lord’s economy (Matt. 10:42)

the exchange rate on these cups of water is fabulous! Try it! Jesus does miraculous things with containers of water.

2. Listen – It's no mystery that social media has compounded the ability of isolated, sinful people to curse each other. One of the enemy's great snares is that he's largely succeeded in reducing our national racial dialogue to 3-word hash-tags that we launch into each other's camps. Huddled in our silos we quickly lose perspective on what adult, mature conversation sounds like. Beloved, in this hour, the Lord is zealous to anoint the supernatural gift of listening!

We're called to be followers of the Man Who stopped at the well, and repeatedly interrupted His demanding schedule to listen to others. I don't care how important your ministry is, no one was more in demand than Jesus, right? The truth is, when we listen, we become witnesses to the fact that Jesus is someone Who listens, and is ready to have a personal conversation with every lost, angry, fearful and wounded heart.

My hometown is approximately half white and half black. I have options about where I shop, but I choose to buy groceries at the market where most of my black neighbors go, simply for the sake of getting into one or two natural conversations. Listening doesn't have to be participating in a multi-racial panel discussion. Listening can be asking questions, or opening conversation with the grandpa behind me who is buying Popsicles for his two bouncing grandchildren.

"Looks like there's going to be a party."

"Yup. And there's two more at home waiting."

"You're a blessed man! Must be a good grandmother in there somewhere too, huh?" And we're off talking about family, the weather, local sports teams, or the price of Popsicles. The point is, I'm communicating that who they are matters to me—and if they talk to me long enough, to God!

Find regular places to engage people of different races in your community. Ask them questions, be prepared to listen to stories, and learn names. If we're fortunate, they'll entrust us with treasure that deconstructs our stereotypes and binds us to very familiar passions.

Somewhere in the conversation I always ask: "*My name's Jon. What's your first name?*" I know the names of most of the check-out cashiers at my grocery store. They've begun to recognize me as someone who will be friendly. I think some even suspect I *respect* them.

All dialogue doesn't have to be long or heavy to be significant. But all heart and soul conversations begin there. Developing small patterns where you can listen to people of different racial backgrounds can reap big kingdom dividends.

3. Affirm – Bless wherever you see, hear and encounter good. My wife, daughters and I are one of two white families on our block. Because we've taken a couple of steps to meet our neighbors, we've been granted the privilege of speaking truth into our neighbors lives—and we use the entitlement liberally! We praise the kids playing ball at the end of the street. We glow about the new cars, the new babies, the new toys, and the quality of lawns and gardens. We share ice-cream and extra pizza. We mow lawns and clip hedges together. We've visited our neighbors' churches. And the whole time, we're praising *the true, the noble the just, the pure, the lovely, the excellent ...* (Phil. 4:8).

The vortex of my vision of revival in my city is my neighborhood. I call forth the good and the righteous, and build enjoyable friendships where the kingdom can grow and thrive.

Eight times Jesus calls down blessing on the dynamics of the human heart in the beatitudes. (Matt. 5:1-10) When I affirm these qualities at the community center, in our schools, our city hall and our work places I am being like Jesus—blessing

what Jesus is blessing. My blessing also calls forth the Holy Spirit's viral capacity to multiply those qualities throughout my community!

Look for the good all around you—especially in the lives of those from a different race. Rejoice and bless them! The place of unity is the place where the Lord commands His blessing (Ps. 133:1-3).

4. Pray – Granted, I'm biased. I belong to a community that is centered around prayer. But the truth remains: *there's nothing that'll build better bridges between people than when they take the opportunity to pray together*. When we share our hearts and bring our common needs before the power of the King, something intimate and unifying happens!

Look for opportunities to pray with someone from a different ethnicity. If you're invited to a citywide prayer gathering where believers from different traditions will be attending, I have a Word of the Lord for you: GO!

But don't wait for the big events. Seize the spontaneous opportunities to demonstrate your care through prayer. Simply *saying* that you'll personally pray for someone can soothe the flames of alienation.

For the last two years, I have been attending a prayer meeting at a black church across town. They don't pray like my church does. The first time I visited, a sparkly-eyed deacon named Joseph welcomed me. When it was time to start praying, he turned to me and kindly advised me of his church's protocol: "*Here.*" Joseph whispered, "*We like to pray on our knees.*" And together we bent down, clasped hands and began to share the needs of our families, our churches and our community with our Lord.

There are few things that are sweeter than praying on Fridays at Joseph's church. United in prayer, appealing to His exquisite leadership, Jesus is channeling the course of a

supernatural river of life in our community.

There are prayer meetings gathering all over your city this week. Want to be a dynamic part of establishing revival in your city? Find one! Yes, they'll do things differently than you're used to. But one of the most transformational things that can happen to us in this hour is that we would get used to the "different!" I guarantee you, it'll become precious to you—precisely because it's precious in the heart of the Father.

Clap your hands, O rivers! Let the mountains sing His praises in unity!

Jesus, the living water Himself, loves our heated and cracked communities. As thousands of us pray, bless, listen and extend millions of cups of water in His name, we can actually become His river of life to our nation. Perhaps this is the context that we've been praying for all along.

Jon Boegl *has served as a pastor at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City for the past five years.*