

You Can Be the Surprising Answer to the Race Problem

Do you think we don't have a race problem in the U.S.? Maybe your thoughts would change if you talked to someone different than you.

Or maybe you know there is a problem, but you don't know what to do to help.

There are many ways you can build friendships and connect with others across ethnic and cultural lines. Here are seven ways you can be the answer to the race problem, taken from my book *Walk It Out*.

1. **Ask God to change your heart.** Pray and ask that He helps you see the joy of unity and diversity in relationships. Ask Him to help you notice.
2. **Get to know your neighbors.** My neighbor Tracey is much better at this than I am. She owns a boxer and walks him in the morning and at night. As she walks, she stops and talks to people also out walking or who are working in their yards. She knows people all around our neighborhood, and she's been key in bringing people together.

Who lives in your community? Who is being included and who is being excluded? Whose voices are loud, and whose voices are silent? What are their challenges? What are their needs? Whom might you take a step toward to build or grow a friendship? Can you invite someone into your home or join a new friend in an activity you both enjoy?

3. **Reach out to your local college or university.** Every year in the United States, over one million international students come to study. They attend small community colleges and large universities and often

struggle to connect with people beyond their campuses.

According to one study, 40 percent of students report they have no close American friends. A statistic I've often heard quoted says that 80 to 90 percent of international students visiting the United States never enter an American home. The world is coming to our door, and we're ignoring it.

4. **Connect with a coworker.** Do you have a coworker whose race or cultural background differs from yours? Go out of your way to open up conversations and build a friendship.
5. **Host an exchange student.** Our family hosted an exchange student from the Czech Republic the year after our first mission trip there. She lived in our home for nine months, during the school year. Andrea is forever considered one of our kids, and our family learned so much about her life and culture during her stay with us.
6. **Build family relationships with the families of kids on your child's sports team or in their school.** Make an effort to reach out to families whose children have similar ages and hobbies as yours. Most children naturally look beyond race and cultures when making friends, and we should follow their example.
7. **Try to understand another's history.** See your new friend as an individual and not a stereotype. And even if you mess up and commit a cultural faux pas, the relationship you've created will make it easier for both of you to laugh off your mistakes. One of my favorite books of recent years was *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson. This book chronicles the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities, in search of a better life. The stories shared were lovely, heartbreaking and shocking.

Reading books like this has helped me understand the injustice and fear in my community and my country. The racial and socio-

economic issues in the news today didn't happen overnight. Instead, they are old issues that society has pushed under the surface for too long. Laws or government programs won't fix them. They will only be solved by individual people changing and asking God to show them His heart. When our awareness of God's heart for diversity and unity expands, we realize reconciliation is not someone else's problem, but ours.

Unity within the body of Christ—and within our communities—isn't something to tack on; it must become who we are. And what happens when we make this a priority? We become light to a dark world. A world that since the beginning of recorded history has been divided by race and social status.

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