

Lou Engle: My Open Letter to African-American Pastors and Leaders

To African-American pastors and leaders,

I humbly submit this letter for your gracious consideration. Over the last six months I have been greatly provoked by the loving challenges of my brother, Fred Berry, with whom I previously had a falling out. This happened in 2008 when I sent a letter to 50 African-American pastors and leaders challenging their support for now President Obama in light of his stance on abortion. In my fervor, I spoke in a manner that I now realize was both insensitive and proud.

For 20-plus years, I have felt burdened to both intercede for revival and pray for the turning of America back to God. Together, Jesus called His church the salt and light of the earth, so overturning abortion has been a clear focus of my prayers. I still seek this because I do not see abortion as primarily a political issue dividing Democrats and Republicans, but a moral issue which the righteous must undertake. However, in my passion for the cause, I believe my zeal overshot my wisdom. I missed the heart of love.

I have been on a learning journey. It began in 2004 when 70 young people and I prayer walked the infamous 750 mile Trail of Tears by which the native peoples were forcibly removed from their lands to Oklahoma. We felt the Lord was telling us that we could not deal with the issue of abortion unless we had first walked in the sandals of Native Americans to better understand their suffering and pain. The Lord was instructing me in a principle. Again, prior to TheCall Detroit I lived in a shuttered elementary school in that broken city, fasting for 40 days with my Hispanic and African-American brothers and

sisters. I glimpsed the difficult realities of inner city life and began to touch more of the pain and promise of the African-American story. Then in 2014, prior to TheCall Berkley, the Lord spoke to me that I should reconcile with Fred Berry of the Azusa Street Mission, one of the recipients of the original 50 letters. Fred had previously tried to reconcile with me. Sadly, I did not immediately respond. When I finally called him, we were joyfully reconciled. It was so good. From this reconciliation Azusa Now 2016 was born.

I now feel deeply that the body of Christ must unite first and foremost around the Lord Jesus and the power of the gospel to transform lives. Obviously biblical standards help inform our unity. But in 2008, I spoke in ultimatums, not friendship; in unintended presumption rather than humility. I realize that I need to walk in the shoes of the African American community if I am to understand their story. To the degree that I mobilized parts of Christ's body in such a manner that left others feeling uninvited or unheard at the table of fellowship, I would like to confess my failure in speaking beyond our sphere of relationship together. It is easy to speak as Job's counselors without having walked in the suffering of Job.

With whatever measure of influence I possess in the fellowship of the saints, I beg the forgiveness of my African-American brothers and sisters. I am moving forward in a different spirit, one with no less clarity and conviction on abortion, but with my personal code also wedded to humility, dialogue and partnership. I am convinced that the Lord is shouting to His body that the time for John 17 is now. We must be one as He and the Father are one. I am afraid for our nation if we don't get this right, and I beg your mercy and grace toward me and to the whole body of Christ as we work out the great challenges of our day amid an increasingly fractious culture.

I feel like in 2008, I lost many dear African-American brothers and sisters due to my insensitivity. The Holy Spirit has gripped me with a desire to walk in unity so that we can

believe together, with all God's family, for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Of this I am convinced. Love conquers all. Jesus is Lord. And now, more than ever, only a united church can heal a divided nation.

Thank you,

Lou Engle