

Top 10 Ways to Change the Story and End Racism in the Church

As more and more white Americans—especially in the church—are starting to learn and acknowledge the realities of systemic racial injustice, the mantra from the OneRace Movement out of Atlanta—“Know the Story, Own the Story, Change the Story”—is beginning to resonate much farther afield. Following those “knowing” and “owning” steps, here are 10 suggestions for following through on actually changing the story:

1. We will be people of God who never stop at integration, who never settle for toleration and who always strive for reconciliation, which is made possible only by the love of Jesus that makes us one people under one blood.
2. We will be people of God who seek to understand rather than demanding to be understood. That means decommitting from social media feuds and committing to coffee shop conversations with those different than we are, where we listen to the one hurting, empathize with the one who needs healing and weep with those who weep.
3. We will be people of God who resist the pull of the rage machine and cancel culture in which we find ourselves, who will be known by grace and peace more than offense and unfriending. When one stumbles, we will pick them up. When one seeks understanding, we will inform with graciousness. We will have grace when it comes to race.
4. We will be people of God who are daily Good Samaritans, living by the truth that every person is our neighbor, whether they look like us, talk like us, vote like us or are from our side of the tracks. We will love all people as we love those who are like us.

5. Leaders, we will be pastors who create environments where our congregation doesn't feel as if they must code-switch or forsake their culture for the sake of the majority culture, but instead are honored and valued for who they are. Where all are welcome, all are loved, and all know the Father's love.

6. We will be pastors who don't have token minorities in our pulpits, platforms and teams, but rather promote and install diverse voices who have true influence in the church. Our churches will not be echo chambers but rather will reverberate with the whole counsel of God. We will not be intimidated by racist or prejudiced individuals in our midst who threaten to pull their tithe or attendance because we won't capitulate to their demands. Our allegiance belongs to Jesus! We will lose sleep, members, reputation and whatever else we must to see breakthrough in this area.

7. We will be pastors who are not content with homogenous church gatherings, who strive to create a culture where every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and language are welcome and valued inside our walls and loved outside our walls. Oneness is not sameness. We are unique and beautiful and together we are the *imago dei* (image of God). As it is in Heaven, let it be on earth.

8. We will be pastors who lead our congregations to gospel reconciliation, even when the news and social media aren't talking about it. We must care about this concept day in and day out, because God cares about it day in and day out. We will create environments of dialogue and healing and oneness. We will be individuals who love what God loves and hate what God hates, even when—and especially when—it's not popular.

9. We will be the people of God who value, honor and embrace our differences. Yet we will not be known by black, white, Latino or Asian. We will not be known by Republican or Democrat. We will be known by the fact that we are sons and daughters of the living God. And we will be known by our love!

10. We will all be the people who labor, who fast and pray, who witness, who lobby and vote, who march and raise our voices to heaven and our fellow man, that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and instilled with immense, eternal value by a good Father who gave His perfect Son so we could be filled by His Holy Spirit. We will rejoice when our children grow up with children of other cultures, become best friends with children of other cultures, fall in love with children of other cultures, marry children of other cultures and have children with children of other cultures! Not shrinking back from controversy. Not following the popular opinion of the day. Not saying things to get likes and follows. We will do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

We do this because the answer to a divided nation is a united church. We will do this so our brothers and sisters won't become hashtags. We will do this so our brothers and sisters know that the Father loves them as much as the Father loves the Son. We will do this because government will not and cannot be the answer because God will not allow the government to get the glory—only Jesus!

This movement will not be confined inside the church walls, but we will gather and then scatter to the streets. If not us, who? If not now, when? And we will do this until His kingdom comes or until He calls us home. In Jesus' name, amen! {eoa}

Johnson Bowie is lead pastor of Victory Church in Norcross, Georgia, and serves on the board of the OneRace Movement. Pastor Bowie shared these remarks at the closing of the Juneteenth March on Atlanta, where 13,000 participants across cultural and denominational divides joined in prayer and protest, petitioning God and civic authorities for an end to racial systemic injustice.