

Lamenting, Listening, and Leading: A White Person's Response

I have no idea how to say this. I've been wrestling with it for several days now. This isn't even the finished product, but it's coming from a heart searching for answers, searching for solutions, searching for hope.

Like you, I was stunned, shocked, appalled, horrified, disgusted, furious, crushed, confused, and heart-broken. The range of emotions was wild. The video footage took me in one direction, the cries for justice from the family in another, the collective FB and IG posts in another, and the sound of George Floyd's voice, as he uttered the words "I CAN'T BREATHE" and gasped for his life, took me to a place I've not been before.

But this is not about my feelings as a white man of privilege or about our collective emotions and words. Our black friends are tired of suffering, and I'm done with seeing my friends have to suffer and go through this every week. A response is required. The scriptures lay it out clearly...I must do what is right; I must love mercy, and I must walk humbly with the Lord.

For a while now, I've committed specific time to praying over this, and these thoughts have been pulsing through my mind. This has been my personal journey and what I'm learning on it, but I hope that it might serve you in some way. So, I offer it for consideration...

Lamenting—We must lament...we need to feel the deep sorrow, grief, frustration, and anger that the black community is living with right now. Lamenting is a passionate expression of deep grief over the loss of something. Lamenting is an agonizing disappointment over something that is seen as "unsatisfactory, unreasonable, or unfair." It moves beyond sympathy, or even empathy, to another level of connectedness with pain...it's a sorrow that moves one to complaint. It's not just acknowledging the hurt, suffering, and anguish, but it's crying out that "THIS IS WRONG."

Yet, lamenting is not enough. Lamenting must move us to...

Listening—We must listen...we need to lean in and truly hear the real-time realities of the black community. Listening is about active engagement with their story. Listening is a setting aside of personal assumptions, biases, and privileges, and opening up our heart and our mind to the daily experiences of what it means to be black in 2020. It moves beyond reading words, liking posts, and retweeting compelling messages, to an honest and genuine effort to face the truth about racism, and about systemic issues that marginalize/mistreat/murder our black sisters and brothers. It's not just saying, "I hear you," but it's shouting out that "THIS IS WRONG."

Yet, listening is not enough. Listening must move us to...

Leading—We must lead...we need solutions; we need answers; we need results; we need change. Leading is a recognition that unless someone steps up, evil will continue unabated.

Leading is understanding that this is not a black person problem, and it is not their issue to fix (though they are more than capable to do so). It moves beyond blaming, or excusing, or rationalizing, or ignoring because it's inconvenient, or controversial, or too complicated, to becoming a purpose and a mission for which you are willing to give your life to in order to save black lives. It's not just thinking that it's someone else's problem to fix, but recognizing that this is on us white folks, and we must scream out that "THIS IS WRONG."

This is on me.

Lamenting, listening, leading.

These are things I want to get better at.
These are things I hope to improve on.
These are things I must explore.
These are things I will do.

Are there others who will join me in this response?
Are there others who are ready to lament, to listen, and to lead?

I don't think it will be easy, but love, mercy, and justice WILL prevail.

I have been reading Psalm 13 (one of David's laments) for the last 4 days and attempting to do so through a particular lens, through a completely alternative perspective than my own. Rather than "I'm" and "me" and "I," I've inserted the names of people I know, people of colour, for whom constant grief and the shaking of the soul, have become all too commonplace for them. Go ahead and read it for yourself...

"I'm hurting, Lord—will you forget me forever? How much longer, Lord? Will you look the other way when I'm in need? How much longer must I cling to this constant grief? I've endured this shaking of my soul. So how much longer will my enemy have the upper hand? It's been long enough! Take a good look at me, God, and answer me! Breathe your life into my spirit. Bring light to my eyes in this pitch-black darkness or I will sleep the sleep of death. Don't let my enemy proclaim, "I've prevailed over him." For all my adversaries will celebrate when I fall. Lord, I have always trusted in your kindness, so answer me. I will yet celebrate with passion and joy when your salvation lifts me up. I will sing my song of joy to you, the Most High, for in all of this you have strengthened my soul. My enemies say that I have no Saviour, but I know that I have one in you!" (Psalms 13:1-6 TPT).

To my friends in the black community, I am lamenting with you, I am listening to you, and I will lead for you...because I love you. In the midst of your cries of "how much longer, Lord," may you feel your soul strengthened and may you be able to confess that HE is your Saviour.

#ipicturechange

—PAOC, Rev. Rich Janes, President of Masters College and Seminary in Ontario