



# GOD & RACE

Three sermon outlines to lead a church through moving beyond black fists and white knuckles.

Based on John Siebeling and Wayne Francis's video Bible study *God & Race: A Guide to Moving Beyond Black Fists and White Knuckles*.



# START IN YOUR HEART



## A. Introduction

These days, it's easy to get so caught up in all of the things that are happening in the world surrounding the race conversation. The 24/7 news cycle makes it really easy to sit in the grandstands and throw stones from afar, but these sessions are about taking personal responsibility for being a part of the solution rather than the problem. Internal work is not easy, but it's necessary because we will never heal what we aren't willing to confront.

And that's why before we talk about the church, and before we even talk about our own social circles, we need to talk about our own heart. In Psalm 139:23-24, David prays a dangerous prayer: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

That's one of those prayers that sounds really nice on a Sunday but be careful if you are actually going to pray it because letting God search our hearts and reveal the ugly parts is not comfortable. In this message, we are going to talk about some of the major issues surrounding race. Profiling. Privilege. And Forgiveness.

## B. Teaching

1. Profiling is predicting someone's behavior based on a preconceived prejudice. Wayne Francis shares a personal story of profiling. "Jimmy and I were leaving Tredici, one my favorite Italian restaurants that is in my neighborhood. It was late, and as soon as I pulled out of the parking lot, we saw the lights flashing in our rearview mirror. The cop walked up to the window and the first question out of his mouth was, "What are you doing here?" Not, "do you know why I pulled you over?" But "What are you doing here?"

Now Tredici is my spot. It's like an episode of Cheers every time I walk in, everyone knows my name. We were there because that's my neighborhood. I pastor a church right down the street. But the cop took one look at us and decided we don't belong. Now, that's profiling."

That's a lot. It's heavy. Hearing stories like that will bring up all sorts of different questions and emotions to everyone listening. For some people, that word is full of pain and oppression. For some people, it's anger. For others, it's guilt. Or even a lack of understanding. Imagine having to teach your black sons how to interact with the police.

Whatever you are feeling, don't rush past the emotion. A part of letting God search our hearts is not shying away from the difficult stuff. The Bible tells us in Romans 12:5 to, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." We have to let ourselves get angry, let ourselves get sad, let ourselves feel the pain.

2. Let's talk about privilege. And even more specifically, let's talk about white privilege. The Oxford Dictionary defines white privilege as "Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice."

In other words, if you are white and live in America, there are certain advantages you've enjoyed throughout your life, you didn't have to earn.

That doesn't mean your life has been easy.

That doesn't mean you haven't worked hard for the things you have?

That doesn't mean you've never experienced poverty, persecution, or problems?

White privilege doesn't mean you haven't had any problems; it means your skin color hasn't been one of them. When talking about white privilege, the intention is not to shame you for being white, or invalidate your life experiences, or devalue your accomplishments. But there is a very real reality white people have to understand if they have any chance of empathizing with a person of color in a conversation.

Privilege can be difficult to acknowledge. But we have to. If you can't acknowledge white privilege, you are making it difficult for yourself to engage in conversations with people of color. However, when you do acknowledge it, suddenly, all sorts of carefully constructed walls begin to fall.

Privilege is real. And profiling is real. So my question for you is, how do we move forward and let God heal the things in our hearts that need to be healed?

3. Forgiveness. Wayne tells of sitting in his living room watching Brandt Jean stand up in front of a court room and forgive Amber Guyger, the woman who shot and killed his brother.

Amber Guyger entered the wrong apartment one evening. She thought it was hers, but it was a black man's named Botham Jean. She got scared and shot and killed him. It's a tragic story. But later at the trial, Brandt stood up and publicly forgave Amber.

Now imagine looking the person in the eye who killed your brother. How badly would you want to make a case to the judge and the jury that they should put her in prison and throw away the keys? But instead, Brandt looked Amber in the eyes, acknowledged how real the pain is, and then proceeded not only to forgive her but also tell her, 'I love you just like anyone else.' And he didn't stop there. After speaking his peace, he turned to the judge and asked, 'Can I give her a hug, please?' I lost it. I was sitting in my living room watching this thinking, that is the power of forgiveness. Jesus went to the cross for the very people who were putting nails through his hands. I want to hear more of my black brothers and sisters saying the same thing that Brandt said. I want us to learn the art of forgiveness. And not just saying it but acting on it. It wasn't just Brandt's words. It was the fact that he went to her and hugged her. Can we learn to hope the best for those who have caused us pain?"

What a powerful picture of forgiveness. It sets everyone free. Jesus looked at the person putting a nail through his hand and said, Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do? Can we learn to do the same thing?

And can we learn to do it over and over again? Because forgiveness doesn't have a formula. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he has to forgive, Jesus tells him, "seventy times seven times." There is no formula for forgiveness. You just keep forgiving and forgiving until you feel like you can't forgive anymore, then you forgive again.

After Jesus tells his disciples to just keep forgiving over and over again, they are overwhelmed and ask Jesus to increase their faith. But Jesus tells them in Luke 17:6, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

What I love about that story is, the disciples asked for an increase of faith, but Jesus didn't grant it. Instead, he told them they needed to start exercising the faith they already had. In other words, this wasn't a faith issue; it was a footstep issue. The disciples didn't need more faith; they needed to start taking some steps to put their faith into action.

### C. Application

Mulberry trees were known for having deep roots—removing them was incredibly challenging. Unforgiveness works the same way. The roots run deep and uprooting them is a process. We need to repeat it over and over again.

Practically speaking, that means we need to find some trusted friends or maybe even a paid professional if need be and work through your unforgiveness with them. Revisiting the pain isn't easy, but every time we confront it, we are pulling up the mulberry tree.

We just covered a lot of ground. Profiling. Privilege. And Forgiveness. Remember, the whole point of this message is to let God search our own hearts. Not that political leader you can't stand's heart, not your neighbor's heart, not your boss's heart, YOUR heart. How are you feeling?

Heart work is hard work, but it will pay off in the end!

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# USE YOUR INFLUENCE



## A. Introduction

We talked last week about letting God search our hearts. Once we have looked at our own heart, we are ready to examine our influence in the lives of those around us by asking some questions. Who are you inviting into your home? What kind of example are you setting for your kids? Will diversity be a normal part of life for them?

Did you know you have influence? We all do. The question is when it comes to fighting for racial healing, are we using our influence to be a part of the solution, or a part of the problem? Being an influencer is a thing now.

In a world full of influencers, we need to talk about what it looks like to influence in a healthy way. Today, we are going to talk about how we talk to other people. This includes people we interact with in person on a day-to-day basis, but it also means people we interact with on Social Media.

## B. Teaching

Before we get into Social Media, let's talk about what it looks like to have an influence on the people right in front of us. Every day we have an opportunity to have open-handed conversations with people who don't look like us.

The key is to carry both confidence and calmness with you. I know some people who approach these conversations with a whole lot of confidence, but they aren't calm; they are letting their emotions get the best of them, and because of that, no one listens to them. But then I know some people who are great at remaining calm, but they don't have the confidence to speak up. And because of that, no one hears them.

If you truly want to influence the people in your neighborhood, your work, your school, you have to carry both confidence and calmness.

1. Confidence: Have enough confidence to be who you are! Many black people feel the pressure to code-switch, to change their behavior based on their surroundings. They have the urge to step up their vocabulary and act a certain way when they are around white people. White people do the exact same thing.

It's human nature. At times it feels so much simpler to be like everyone else. But that's a lie. Your job is not to fit a certain mold the world is telling you to fit; your job is to have the confidence to be the person God created you to be!

2. Calmness: When we lack confidence, people won't hear us, but when we don't know how to stay calm, people won't listen to us. The second key to fighting for diversity is calmness. The language Wayne Francis uses with his daughters is that he wants them to be pillars, not pillows. Psalm 144:12 says, "Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace." Think about that imagery. People lay their heads on pillows, but they lay foundations on pillars, so we should want our daughters to be pillars carved to adorn a palace.



Now look, pillars need to be principled, but they also need to be polite. One of the first things we should want people to say after interacting with our girls is how respectful they are. We raised them like that on purpose. They know they have to walk a lot of different lines because of the color of their skin, so we've taught them how to de-escalate things quickly.

The reality is racism is real. Some people will look down on our daughters because of the color of their skin. Until we can get justice, we need de-escalation. So, we teach our kids how to be confident, but we also show them how to stay calm. That's the picture of Jesus. When you read the Gospels, it's clear that he was always a step ahead of everyone and confident that his next step was the right one. And yet, when they persecuted him, He kept His peace. Jesus mastered the art of being both confident and calm. And I'd say he's had quite a bit of influence.

Jesus wasn't a pillow; He is a pillar. He is the pillar—the foundation of the entire church. If you want to use your influence to be a part of the solution instead of the problem, be confident and stay calm.

3. Let's talk about social media. Back in the day, crowds gathered in stadiums or coliseums to discuss social issues, but these days much of the conversation is happening online. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are the new arenas. And these arenas have an open mic policy. But just because we have new arenas doesn't mean we have new rules. The Word of God is still where we turn to learn how to interact with people—even if it's online.

In Ephesians 4:29, Paul reminds us, "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them."

How often do you see someone say something online that they would never ever say in person? But the truth is our words online hurt just as bad. John Siebeling tells of someone in his church who came to him visibly upset. The night before, they had seen a post from another person who attends his church that brought them to tears. They couldn't wrap their mind around how someone who hugs them every Sunday could turn around and say something derogatory about their race online.

Do you see the danger here? People are watching. People are listening. Your platform is a gift; it would be wrong to waste it. But with great power comes great responsibility.

So the question is, how can people continue to speak up about the things they are passionate about without hurting people?

### C. Application

Pick your battles wisely and make sure your posts are constructive. We can't tell you what not to post, but we can offer some guardrails. If you are serious about racial unity and you feel there is any chance that your post may be misconstrued, I'd highly recommend that you put up these four guardrails.

1. Pray before you post. The most important guardrail is to hit your knees before you hit the post button. If we'd just do that, we'd have way less collateral damage online. When social media first came out, it was just a fun way to communicate with each other, but these days the things we say have real ramifications, which means we should get in the habit of sharing the post with God before we share it with the world. Prayer realigns our will with God's will, so pray before you post, and if you don't feel peace, take a step back and reevaluate not just what you are saying but also how you are saying it. Think about these two questions:

Does this post promote peace?

Is this post unifying?

Posting on social media is not just about what we say; it's also about how we say it. You may be right, but if you don't communicate it in love, you're wrong. It reminds me of the famous love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul's opening line is, "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

Without love, your post sounds like someone trying to learn how to play drums. No rhythm. No flow. It's just noise, resounding gongs, and clanging cymbals. And trust me, we have more than enough of that, so pray before you post.

2. Pause before you post. Whether we are posting or responding to a comment, it's good to get in the habit of hitting the pause button before the post button. Just take a couple of deep breaths. And while you do, ask yourself:

Am I reacting emotionally?

Is this post intended to help or to hurt?

Does this post disciple or divide?

Social media is a great tool, but it is a horrible place to vent. Pause and ask yourself if you really want to post or if you are just looking for a place to process your pain. Venting isn't bad; it's a normal part of being a human. But social media is not the place for it. Get a friend, or a counselor, or a dog, but please don't work out your own emotions on such a public and permanent forum.

Do not mistake passion for pain. Are you really passionate about the subject, or do you need to heal from the pain it causes? Quick, emotionally-driven posts are typically a good indicator that it's the latter.

Here's what Proverbs or Ancient Twitter (as Wayne Francis calls it) says about this subject. Proverbs 10:19 says, "Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut."

3. Host before you post. Before you post your opinion, are you willing to host a conversation with someone who has a different viewpoint?

This is a big one because it forces you to ask yourself the question: Am I willing to have this conversation in person, or only when I'm hiding behind a screen? A lot of the arguments and polarizing content filling the world wide web today come from people who are uninterested in meeting with or talking to anyone who has a different opinion.

Hosting before you post helps you avoid falling into that trap. So practically speaking, what does this look like? Well, if you are posting something about a racial issue, why don't you call someone of a different skin color and ask them their thoughts. It requires the ability to be vulnerable and a desire to hear what another has to say on the topic.

Are you willing to host a conversation before you post your opinion? This guardrail takes more time, but it's worth it. If you don't have time, make time. You'll find that hosting the conversation is often even more fruitful than anything that comes out of the post.

4. Maybe just don't post. How many times have you said something, and while it was on the way out, wished you could reel it back? In the heat of the moment, we say things we don't mean, and we hurt people in the process.

If you find yourself hesitating as you go through these ground rules, remember, you don't have to post. Trust me, I know the pressure to speak up about racial injustice. People will tell you you're being complicit if you wait too long before speaking up. And I understand where they are coming from, but sometimes that burden is too heavy to bear. Besides, you are never going to make everyone happy, so take some pressure off yourself.

Yes, your voice matters. Yes, you have something to say. But the sobering truth is, the world will get on just fine without your opinion. Pick your battles wisely. If you aren't feeling peace about it, just don't post.

The beauty of social media is that when we use it wisely, it creates change. Social media is a fantastic tool and will continue to be a necessary ally as we move toward racial healing. When used correctly, it can bear a ton of excellent fruit.

Your timeline is powerful. But before you add to it, take the time to:

Pray before you post.

Pause before you post.

Host before you post.

And maybe, just don't post.

But after you've gone through those four guardrails, if you still feel at peace, by all means, post. Don't diminish your voice. You have something to say; use your voice and say it well!

You have an influence. Whether you know it or not. Whether you believe it or not. Whether you have 5,000 followers or 5 followers. It's true. Be confident in who God created you to be, stay calm, and if you are going to engage in these conversations online, please put these guardrails up.





# A HOUSE THAT LOOKS LIKE HEAVEN

## A. Introduction

In the Bible, the most popular picture of the church is a house. And unfortunately, the House of God can easily fall into the same trap the rest of our homes can fall into. It's so easy to let God's House be a place where everyone starts to look, think, and act the same. The truth about the house is we are all in this together. God's plan for this world is His church. We need to realize we are all part of something much bigger than ourselves. We are a very diverse group of people who are all meant to be the family of God.

Revelation 7:9 paints a picture for where the House of God will end up, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." In fact, diversity is how the church started.

## B. Teaching

1. Fifty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus, His followers gathered together in an upper room. The Festival of Pentecost was at hand, and Acts 2:5 tells us, "There were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." During Pentecost, Jews from all over the world made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate together, which means there were people from every nation present. So the believers were unified together and surrounded by a very diverse group of people, and that is the moment God decided to launch the church.

While they were praying, a mighty rushing wind came through the room, filling all the believers with the Holy Spirit. There were so many different types of people there that the Holy Spirit had to empower them to speak in languages they could all understand. The origin of the church was so diverse that they literally needed translators.

1. Acts 2:44, gives a snapshot into the early days of the church. "And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had." People from different tribes and tongues came together, unified by the cross and shared everything they had with each other. But somewhere along the way, things changed. We got caught up in our tribes and forgot that the cross is the thing that brings us together. So we know the church began (Acts 2) with diversity. And we know where the church is heading (Revelation 7) back to diversity. But here we are between those two points with a whole lot of work to do.

2. When people look at our house of worship, do they see a House that looks like Heaven? The House of God can (and should) lead the way in bringing racial healing to the world! What role do you play in helping your church be a House that looks like Heaven? So what do we do? The first thing we need to do is take inventory and admit the truth. You can't get to where you want to be until you know where you are. If you visited New York and got lost, the first thing you would do is determine where you are located. Because it doesn't matter where you are trying to get to, if you don't know where you are, you won't make any progress. You have to take an honest look at where you currently are. For the church leader, here are three good questions to ask:

a. What are the racial demographics of your church? Even if the results aren't pretty, you'll feel better once you know where you are. So, whether you are a church leader or just part of your church, look at the demographics of your city, and then your church, are they similar or different?

John Siebeling shares the story of arriving with his wife to plant a diverse church in Memphis. "We were a little overwhelmed. We knew we were supposed to plant a diverse church, but we had no idea how. In those early days, our church brochure for first time guests had our mission statement that said we were a diverse church, but we weren't. We started off very white.

I remember one Sunday, during the early years, an African American woman visited our church. At the end of the service, she approached Leslie with our brochure. She pointed at the word 'diverse,' and said, 'I guess I'm the diverse.' And she was right. We certainly weren't diverse. We wanted to be, but we weren't yet. So instead of getting defensive about what was obviously true, Leslie smiled and replied, 'yes, and would you please stay and help us get there?' These days we get too offended by criticism to learn from it. Everyone has something to teach us if we are willing to listen. We wanted to be a diverse church; the only thing missing was all the diversity."

a. The second question is: What message are you communicating to the world? What is your brand? You have to get honest about the message your church is sending to the world. When you look at your church's website and social media accounts, what are you communicating? Every church has a message they are sending to the world. Do you like the message your church is sending?

b. And then the third question is: Do you have diversity in your leadership? Diversity starts from the top. We are seeing a promising trend in the amount of racial diversity present on the stage in many places. But in several churches, leadership continues to be homogeneous. The goal is not just to present a picture of diversity; the goal is to be diverse.

## C. Application

If you are a church leader who is serious about racial healing, you have to take a good, hard look at your leadership team. Are there people around you, at the highest level, who don't look like you? Of course, you can't (and shouldn't) try to change this one overnight. Play the long game by being mindful of who you are hiring and who is around you.

But this message isn't just for church leaders, it's for anyone who is a part of the church in any capacity. If you aren't a church leader, you may feel like you have no role to play. But nothing could be further from the truth. You are the church; you have a part to play.

1. If you are serious about creating more diversity in your church, bring solutions to the table instead of problems. Instead of just presenting the problem, think about some useful solutions YOU are willing to do. Every pastor's dream is to see their people take the initiative and live out the church's mission. You don't need permission from your pastor to have a racially diverse dinner in your own home. Just do it. Are you working to build the type of church you want? Or are you just critiquing from the sideline?

2. No matter what part you play in your local church, I'd challenge you to take on the same ownership. The only way to clean your hands is to open your hands and let go of any old system of oppression you've held onto. Let the old ways fall to the floor and get ready to receive what God has for you next.

Anyone who is a part of the church in any capacity has a part to play should ask the question: Where Do We Go from Here?

Take a cue from an Old Testament Prophet named Micah. Micah spent his life warning that destruction was coming. That's not an easy message to deliver, but in Micah 6:8 we get some insight into how he learned to give it. "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

We have to keep moving forward together to build a House that looks like Heaven. One day every tribe, tongue, and nation will be worshipping together without reserve, but until that day comes, our job is to work to make that a reality today. We must guard our heart and use our influence to share the love of Jesus Christ with each and every person. And we can't do that with closed fists. Unless we make a solid, intentional choice to connect, understand, reach, and love one another, we will remain divided—and we can't afford to stay divided. Let's loosen our grips, unclench our fists, open our hands, and come together.

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