

How to be Bridge Builder When Racism Persists in the Public Square

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7-16-19

When a flame throwing POTUS uses terms that trigger past racial hurts, what is a bridge builder to do? How does one seek to live out gracism amid a firestorm of racism? When political disagreements turn ugly, rife with name calling, doubling down and ratcheting up prejudicial language, how are we to respond, interact, referee, engage, defend, or stand up as gracists?

As I have thought about this question for my own sensibilities as a follower of Jesus Christ, an African American male, a voice for reconciliation and a pastor of a culturally diverse church, here is what I have settled on to help you and me stay sane, among and above the fray.

1. (P) PAUSE TO PRAY - talk to God first before responding to others on social media, at coffee shops, in waiting rooms, in the hallways, or on the phone. Seriously, before you post, tweet, retweet or start talking to others, ask God for wisdom so that your response doesn't add to the quick sand of division that, like a vortex, pulls you into the sinister schemes of the great divider himself, Satan.
2. (A) ATTAIN THE FACTS - Make sure you hear all sides. Read the tweets for yourself. Read the reports for yourself. Listen to multiple interviews and listen for yourself, not simply excerpts from like-minded feeds, clips, and partisan media outlets. Attaining the fullest perspective in the shortest amount of time is work, but that's what bridge builders do. They don't take one side's point of view at first glance. They must attain as much first-hand information as possible so they can speak intelligently and not just emotionally.
3. (U) UNDERSTAND EMOTION - Gracists are people too. As a black man and a pastor I still feel pain. I am human and it hurts me when I see others like me offended. It hurts me when I feel like people who I love in different skin and from a different culture can't see my perspective. It makes me feel like they can't or won't understand. Then I wonder why? I then begin making assumptions about racial differences. What is seen as okay to say by some is interpreted as offensive to others; and this is usually racially categorized but not completely. When I am offended I have to communicate why I am offended and bring my grievances to the forefront, as scripture says in Colossians 3. In addition, I must be ready to forgive and express love as I try to hold "grace and truth" in balance. Being a gracist is hard work, but it is God's work. Remember, gracism is God's solution to racism.
4. (S) STAND FIRM - Stand firm in your conviction to speak out against racism in any form and to stand up for those who are being put down. Blacks, Whites, Asians, Hispanics, Africans, Arabs, and others can all be racists. Whether politicians, pastors, or presidents, all have the ability to be racists. The good news is that the sin of racism can be repented of and becoming a gracist is possible! Jesus came to lift us all up and it is important that we lift up victims of racial offenses, even if we don't understand why they are offended. Become a learner and discerner empathetically. Also, it is equally important, now more than ever, to lift up our POTUS and Congress in prayer. This is what followers of Christ do. They intercede on behalf of their leaders. No matter how hard it is, pray for the president. Pray for the four congresswomen who the president launched his comments at telling them to go back to their countries. Pray for our country. THIS, my gracist bridge building

friends, is what it means to be not just a bridge builder, but a bridge leader! We must stand steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. For we know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain!

5. (E) ENGAGE THE RAGE - Once you have attained the facts, heard the arguments, and settled your spirit through prayer, engage! The anger is real. The pain is real. The convictions are strong. So when you engage, stand firm and on the facts. Let your emotions come out, but do so with purpose and passion proportionally under control.

If we as bridge builders and bridge leaders P.A.U.S.E before we press send and weigh-in to the public square purposefully with precision, we will not only be heard, we will equip others who are seeking godly methods of engaging in gracist ways as well. Instead of being pulled into the mayhem, the disgust and disdain of racial elbow punching, we can help pull others out of it to higher ground through demonstrating gracist fighting skills. If we move and breathe as gracists who lift up others, honor others and stand firm on behalf of others, we will not become covered with the bitter stench of hate as we battle against racism. Instead, one day we will walk out of the racialized fiery furnace, heated up and stoked multiple times by those in power, smelling like the victors for whom God showed up named Sbadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And friends, THAT'S how you stand when there is racial division in the land!