

Blog by Pastor Greg Finke

**June 3, 2020**

**"I Am Not Black"**

I grew up in a Black neighborhood in Houston, Texas beginning in 1968.

My father was instrumental in opening up our all-White Lutheran elementary school to Black families after he became principal in the 1970's.

My sister married a Black man.

Over the last 50+ years, I have had many friends who are Black.

However, here's the thing... even though my neighbors and classmates were Black and my brother-in-law and friends are Black, I am not Black.

So even though I lived side-by-side with Black neighbors who were friends, went to school side-by-side with Black classmates who were friends and have had many other Black friends over the years, I am just now realizing that the daily experiences of my Black friends in the wider world have been completely different than my own.

How could I NOT know this?

Simple. It never even occurred to me to ask.

My skin is white and because I never experienced the injustices and slurs my Black friends have had to endure, I never even thought to ask them about their experiences. I thought we were the same. I was oblivious to what my friends were enduring on a regular basis in my city and even in my church body simply because of skin color. (I am so, so very sorry, my friends.)

Because I have so much to learn, I have been reading and listening to a number of narratives about the daily experience of Black people in America. I am embarrassed to say that many of these resources have been available for years. It's humbling to realize how little I was paying attention. Collectively, the stories being shared have helped me realize that there are many layers of racism at play in most communities, from the brutal to the subtle. White people, like me, briefly note the brutal, but have no idea about the subtle. But brutal and subtle both are painful and have a lasting impact on our friends.

And, because I have a lifetime of very different experiences, I didn't have a clue.

If you're White and are starting to have some of the same realizations, what can we do? One of the first things we can do is humble ourselves and realize our Black neighbors, coworkers, friends, schoolmates and church members have more stories to tell than we have heard. We can ask their permission to have a different conversation than we usually have. "If you are willing, I would like to hear what it is like to be Black in our neighborhood or in our city (or in our company or in our school or in our church)."

By asking the questions and hearing the stories, we will gain two very helpful things: insight and indignation. With insight and indignation, we will be more motivated to keep watch and take action when we can. We will become more attentive and less naïve about what is happening to people around us in our community, neighborhood, workplace, school and church. We will be more vigilant about what

our elected and appointed officials are and are not doing to actually change the system and make it fair for all citizens no matter what their skin color. We will become more committed friends who stand by and advocate with our Black brothers and sisters for what is fair, just and right for all Americans.

It's pretty clear in the gospels that Jesus is all-in for all races.

- John 3:16, "For God so loved the WORLD that He gave His one and only Son."
- Revelation 7:9, "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 in front of the Lamb."

Jesus is all-in. How about us?

Pray, yes. But sit down and start a conversation with your Black friend, neighbor, coworker, family member, classmate or church member.

I want to listen and learn because I am not Black but we are all human.

### **Resources Greg shared**

\*\*The following are just a few of the many excellent resources I have found to help us listen and learn from our Black brothers and sisters:

- From Lori Lakin Hutcherson, this was a very helpful article which helped some light bulbs come on for me: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2017/09/08/my-white-friend-asked-me-on-facebook-to-explain-white-privilege-i-decided-to-be-honest/>
- Likewise, from Peggy McIntosh: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>
- From the Black Clergy Caucus of the LCMS, a hugely important perspective for our church body: <https://www.theunbrokencord.com/writings/black-clergy-caucus-statement-on-george-floyd?fbclid=IwAR2f04oLm5njU-Jjfcrlq1XUOnijVN-jGaddKLHjnHE8V2nTweHB7JjoQI>
- On AJ Vega's Facebook page, there is a series of excellent video conversations helping Christ-followers grapple with the reality of racism in our communities: <https://www.facebook.com/aj.vega.37>
- An article illuminating about how systemic change is necessary and how Minnesota government is starting to approach it: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/state-minnesota-files-civil-rights-charge-against-minneapolis-police-department-n1222476>