

Creating A Safe Space For Courageous Conversations

Title by Dr. Johnny Parker, author of *Turn the Page*

What an opportunity for husbands and dads to take the initiative to encourage and equip your families during this volatile time of racial tension in America. Every family can do this. Some may want to do this alone or several families may want to gather at someone's house. This could be another 'home church' opportunity as recommended earlier by the Fatherhood CoMission. Having your wife and the children's mother present is crucial. It allows the children to see you as the family leader. Your children seeing their mother respect your leadership is priceless! Do not be a dictator, but a servant leader as you lead your family.

1. SETTING

Create a setting or a "safe place" that works for your family, you and possibly a small group. If you do a small group, be sure before meeting with another family that your children feel safe and comfortable sharing their feelings and thoughts with others. With such a sensitive topic, people may have radically different filters based on their experiences with another culture/race.

Also include talking with the parents in any family you intend or would like to invite before actually meeting. You don't want to have major disagreements in front of children.

"Creating a safe space requires becoming a safe person. Courageous conversations can be messy...Yet, growth is on the other side." used by permission from Dr. Johnny Parker

- Option 1. Sit at a table. Bring a beverage. Have some food. Have bibles available
- Option 2. Sit in the den or living room. Get comfortable. Have a beverage

2. PRAYER

Start your time together with prayer and finish the time together with prayer. Also take advantage of the smaller size group by praying for one another.

- Invite God into your home. Ask another group member, who you know is comfortable with praying aloud to start with prayer. Ask him before the meeting begins about praying out loud in front of the group. Ask him or her to keep the prayer short 2-4 sentences.
- Some people will be ready to pray out loud. Be sensitive to those who may not feel comfortable praying aloud and for those who may not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As you begin to pray as a group, don't pray in a circle. As leader say, "Everyone doesn't have to pray aloud, if you don't feel comfortable and if you are not sure where you are on your spiritual journey. Ask each person for a prayer request. Model a short 1-sentence simple intercessory prayer. Encourage others to do the same. As leader you close the prayer time (5-10 minutes).
- Consider closing with everyone praying aloud the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6) or the leader could close or ask a youth that knows Christ to close in prayer regarding the racial tension and positive next steps.

3. Music

Ask everyone if they know the song, *Jesus Love the Little Children*? Here are the lyrics if you don't know them:

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=jesus+loves+the+little+children+lyrics&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

4. Questions about racial tension, our faith and God's Word regarding this issue

Below are questions that your family and you and/or small group may not be able to finish answering in one meeting. You will have to make that decision during this time. See how questions are being answered and determine which questions require more time.

Dad: You could begin this session by asking each member of your family. Consider asking children first, so they are not influenced by adults' answers:

- Why do you think Jesus loves **all** the children (red, yellow, brown, black & white)?
- Why do you think all the children are precious in His sight?
- How do you think followers of Christ should respond to what happened to these three African Americans? Why?
- How do you feel about those three situations? Why?
- Do you feel safe (whether you are part of the majority or minority race)? Why or why not?
- If you don't feel safe, what can dad and/or family do to help you feel safe?
- How do you think you should respond to the deaths of these three African Americans? Why?
- What do you think of the protests that are happening all over the country?
- Have you or do you want to participate or not? Why?
- How do you think God feels about protests against injustice? Why?
- What do you think about the looting and destruction of property?
- What do you think would cause anyone to loot or destroy property?
- If someone unjustly killed a relative of yours, how do you think you would respond? Why?
- If your culture had or if it has experienced 400 years of systemic injustice, police brutality and murder, how do you feel or how do you think you would feel?
- What role do you think Jesus Christ and your faith play during these times of racial tension? Why?
- How can you reach out to someone who is of a different culture or race than you?

5. What Does the Bible Say about Diversity?

Pay attention to the time and the interest of your family and/or small group. Do you need to break or schedule another meeting time to finish? *"The brain can only handle what the seat can endure."*

Dads let's begin with a biblical cross-cultural example. Samaritans were hated by the Jews, even though they were related. Have several people read Luke 10:25-37 aloud and discuss what took place and any practical applications that can be applied.

Another passage is John 4:1-26, here is discrimination against Samaritans again and women. What did Jesus do to build a relationship with this woman? (clue: He went to her turf, what was important to her became important to Him, Jesus had staying power—He didn't leave at her first rejection or insult). Now, you take it from there. There are six things Jesus did. Don't worry if you don't find them all. (the six cross cultural principles can be found in Dr. Shuler book, *Winning the Race to Unity: Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working?*)

1 Corinthians 12:4-27, look for more applications. Tip: one emphasis of this passage is about interdependency—we all need each other. And possibly the more we do together, the more we glorify God. How can we come together amid today's racial tension?

Look for God-given opportunities regarding biblical diversity (Acts 1:8; 10:1-11:18).

Have someone read Isaiah 11:10; another read Isaiah 66:18; Revelation 5:9; 7:9. Ask why nations, tongues, peoples are all plural? Ask what is the Bible teaching about diversity? Ask can we say that the Bible promotes diversity? Why?

A possible key for diversity to happen could be found in Ephesians 2:14. Who is being reconciled to who? (Tip: the Jews and Gentiles are not being reconciled to each other, but are being reconciled to God—critical point—it is not a racial reconciliation that will improve our relationships. It is only possible when we are spiritually reconciled to God.

Think About It

Are there situations in which you have to relate to someone of another cultural/racial group outside of a superficial relationship?

How well do you relate to other cultural/racial groups? How can you tell?

Consider having another discussion with a family of a different culture or race.

Justifiable Anger

It's important to deal with these issues and also use this as a tool to continue to disciple your family to Christ. Its ok to be angry! (Ephesians 4:26) Be angry, but do not sin. Matthew 21: 12 – 13 tells when Jesus was angered as he entered and cleaned the Temple. Its ok to be angry and to use this for a Godly purpose. Your discussion might focus on allowing members and teens and young adults to feel angered at the current events in America. Within this anger, there is also compassion which all of us know was a trait on Christ. Our anger is involved intimately with having compassion for those who have suffered or are suffering through oppression and racism. This needs to move to empathy. Regardless of how we feel, how can the Lord move us to have empathy for others. This should also be a time of self-reflection. Were there times that we allowed others to use derogatory racial terms in our presence? Were there instances where

we failed to intervene? Were there examples when we were not intentionally inclusive or inviting to others because of race?

How to demonstrate being active

Moving forward, how can we demonstrate activism towards what has angered us? As a father, I accompanied my daughter to some peaceful protest for the killing of George Floyd. However, you and your agreed upon family demonstration maybe to call political members and voice your concern regarding racial issues in America. Maybe your agreed upon demonstration might be to be vocal in your community and church regarding racial reconciliation. You should do something, but to the level of your conviction and comfort. It also maybe an opportunity to reach out to another who may feel personally connected to this travesty knowing they are feeling angered, fear, and helplessness. A supportive word from you and your family can go a long way in healing and allowing them to know that you care and are empathetic with how they might be feeling. In this instance, silence is not golden, particularly with your African-American friends. Your silence is sending a loud a clear message regarding how you look at the issue of racism and how you value them as a friend.

Conclude Meeting

As you conclude, get feedback. What did your family think? What this time together beneficial? Why or why not? What it too long? What did they learn? What did you learn about yourself, wife, children, your faith, and God's Word? Ask several to pray short prayers (no sermons). Ask a person to prayer for each of the following: prayer for the victims' families, non-violent protesters, for law enforcement, those who looted and rioted, for your pastors, churches, and your families. you close with a brief prayer, no sermon.

A video of Dr. Tony Evans leading his family on this topic is available on the Fatherhood CoMission website.

This template for courageous biblical diversity conversations prepared by Dr. Jeffrey Shears and Dr. Clarence Shuler, board members of the Fatherhood CoMission.