

Difference Makers

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In recent weeks, troubled by escalating civil unrest, I'm wondering how those of us who follow Christ can actively demonstrate the "ministry of reconciliation" described in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Amid the complexity of current concerns, we can appreciate the beauty of diversity. As Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey explained in *Fearfully & Wonderfully Made*, "the Negroid race derives its rich shade from a mere one-thirtieth of an ounce of melanin." We have collectively allowed less than a teaspoon of biological "difference" to fuel chasms of inequity, mistreatment, and misunderstanding for centuries! We have collectively forgotten that each of us, created in the image of God, bears the responsibility to treat one another with the respect our Creator designed.

We can be change agents instead of apathetically watching the world spiral into the destruction Arnold Toynbee described: "An autopsy of history would show that all great nations commit suicide." A friend's June 21 Facebook post reminded me there are people actively at work to prevent our country's untimely demise. On Father's Day, Focused Community Strategies (FCS) board member Robert Fowler (pictured above, right) and his wife Beryl joined a diverse group of FCS staff and neighborhood volunteers to help paint murals on temporary window coverings at the Carver Market building in Historic South Atlanta (pictured, left & center). Created to offer affordable groceries in an area once known as a "food desert," this market is near the burned down Wendy's where Rayshard Brooks tragically died on June 12.

Long-term Atlanta resident and respected architect, Bob describes why they were helping. "A couple days after the Rayshard Brooks killing, the violence came around the corner—and someone—it appeared to be an individual—broke several windows in the Carver Market building and painted graffiti on the walls. This was just not at all the thing we would expect in South Atlanta these days," Bob added. "Initially, there were peaceful demonstrations around the Wendy's. Peaceful demonstrations more in keeping with the legacy of Dr Martin Luther King Jr., are understandable... The riots and property damage are not acceptable, and not generally thought of as part of the community response to these events.

In his book *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*, FCS founder Robert D. Lupton wrote, "The food we ship to Haiti, the well we dig in Sudan, the clothes we distribute in inner-city Detroit—all seem like such worthy efforts. Yet those closest to the ground—on the receiving end of this outpouring of generosity—quietly admit that it may be hurting more than helping. How? Dependency. Destroying personal initiative. When we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them."

Responding to current events, interracial couple Brandon and Jeanette Brown recalled Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. saying, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The Browns urge people of all colors to "stop painting with a broad brush. We don't want our actions to be assumed because of the colors of our skin. As Christ followers and as a married couple, we operate with the outlook that we are ambassadors for Christ. Every person we interact with is either a fellow brother or sister in Christ or someone who needs to experience God's love and hope amidst the challenges of a sinful world."

Describing FCS's volunteer work in Atlanta, Bob Fowler writes, "What we are doing is (mostly) not emergency triage, but long-term neighboring, counseling and loving. That may be a positive path toward preventing the suicide of the nation, and toward helping some individual residents along the way." Instead of escalating violence, those rebuilding the Carver Neighborhood Market in Atlanta are working to effect positive change and growth, applying what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a better person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."

What can we do to make this "a finer world" for everyone to live in? How can we help prevent our nation's suicide? **We can carefully listen** to one another, and after we've heard— **we can work together to build** one another's skills, looking beyond symptoms and searching diligently for solutions to build rather than destroy our nation. And those solutions need to include working to **help stop injustice and intolerance, daily living as God's ambassadors of reconciliation.**

We can pray. Pray for our leaders, pray for our communities, pray for one another. **We can also fast**, intensely focusing on God in this time of crisis. In **2 Chronicles 7:14**, God says, *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

We can relax so we can wisely think and act. The escalating violence and civil unrest is being described by mental health professionals as a global amygdala hijacking—with thousands of people controlled by trauma stored in their brains' amygdalae rather than by logical thought. When activated by any of our five senses, the amygdala releases neurochemicals, an internal "fire alarm" initiating a complex stress reaction. In less than 1/12 of a second, an amygdala "hijacking" moves us into the Five Fs of Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fornicate, or Feed. But we can move back into the brain's CEO, the prefrontal cortex, as rapidly as we left it by utilizing [Mental Soothing or Physical Grounding](#) (you can read more about this in my book, *Core Healing from Trauma*, available on [Amazon](#) (in English or Spanish)). We can work together for equal rights with what 2 Timothy 1:7 describes as a sound, calm mind instead of a "hijacked" mind.

As a psychotherapist, **an important aspect of my work is helping individuals believe their lives have meaning, that they matter.** It's a beautiful thing to watch a human being realize he or she can enjoy life and move into a future of hope. When clients tell me they're considering suicide, I immediately assess the urgency of the situation. For imminent danger, I secure immediate help. However, most people experiencing suicidal ideation will respond to caring, practical support. Often it helps to make lists: three people they can call for help, three things they can do for themselves until they can get the help they need, three places they can go to be safe, etc. With a plan in place, they know how to prevent escalating thoughts of self-harm. They know who to call and where to go if thoughts of harm increase.

In the Bible, there are many stories where one person made the difference in a time of crisis. Deborah. David. Gideon. Joshua. Esther. And more (many more).

You are one person. And one person can make a difference!

What difference will you make where you are during this pivotal time of history?

What will you do today?