



## Race, Equality and Justice

As I've listened to people of color recently, I hear the exhaustion they feel from enduring years of racism.

One woman I talked to shared how her husband attempts to make himself smaller in public because he is big and black. He can see in the eyes of some white people that they are uncomfortable around him. He brings his arms in close to his sides and stoops to make himself shorter. He brings his voice up an octave rather than let loose his deep baritone. She once challenged him on why he does these things – his reply was simple – “It’s just easier.” Because he is big and black people feel threatened. In fact, he is a big teddy bear, a very gentle spirited person. It is exhausting to constantly manage a public image rather than to simply be one’s self.

Another woman I talked to shared how she is afraid – afraid to raise her son as a black man. She says, “Right now he is 5 years old and very cute. But when he is 21, he’s not going to be cute anymore. He’s going to be big and black. Between now and then, I need to teach him how to stay alive.” I heard the quiver in her voice. It is exhausting for a mother to fear for her son.

I recall my disbelief at the precautions a man took in travelling to meet me in a small, rural West Michigan town where he had heard the police were reputed to pull over any black person that hadn’t left by 5pm. It is exhausting to watch the clock and fear an unpublished curfew.

A man shared with me how some neighbors have been welcoming of him and his wife as the only black people in their affluent neighborhood – and other neighbors have not. After the death of George Floyd, a couple that had silently kept their distance met him outside in his driveway and with tears in their eyes admitted that they had kept their distance for no good reason other than skin color. “We are sorry. We shouldn’t have done that. We want to do it differently going forward.”

It takes courage to face into the real difficulties and the real unfairness faced by people of color in our day and age. It takes courage to walk across the street and be part of the healing process rather than a silent bystander to injustice.

The murder of George Floyd in police custody is an extreme example of injustice that must be stopped. It is not an isolated incident. All injustices must be stopped. The big injustices must be stopped, and the small injustices must be stopped. The injustices caught on camera must be stopped, and the injustices hidden from view must be stopped.

70x7 Life Recovery has always sought to play an active part in building systems of justice. We have worked to undo the damage of mass incarceration that has disproportionately impacted people of color. We have worked to build strength into the lives of people returning from incarceration. We bring police officers and recently incarcerated people together for candid question and answer times as part of every class. It is good to hear the officers in our community talk about how their leaders won’t tolerate police brutality or racial profiling and how their departments value engaging positively in the community. The images of George Floyd’s death have reinvigorated the staff of 70x7 Life Recovery to press on for criminal justice reform and to combat police brutality wherever it might be lurking.

It is understandable for people of color to be exhausted by injustice. It is time for all of us to link arms together in order to take this unnecessary burden from people of color. “Let us not become weary in doing good.” Galatians 6:9

In His Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Koning', written in a cursive style.

Tim Koning  
CEO