

# A pathway to peace

Working towards peace and reconciliation across racial divides within your church



BEACON CHURCH





We are in historic times. Following the death of George Floyd and during the subsequent Black Lives Matters protests, we have seen that brothers and sisters in our church communities up and down the country are hurting right now, overwhelmed, confused and angry. We have, at least not to my memory been in such a moment as this, where we can address these issues so openly. My sincere hope and prayer is we don't withdraw from or move on from this moment too soon. When I say that, I'm not talking about the world's politicians or the media or society at large- I am talking about the church. My prayer is that the church will be more courageous, more thorough and more

humble in its response seeking to honour the name of Jesus above every other name as we walk through these times together.

It is for this reason that I have put together this Pathway to Peace. I am not of course suggesting that in a couple of weeks we will have solved the problems around racial injustice and inequality, but I hope and pray we will have engaged with the issues, gone through a process of education to a place of common understanding and deeper relationship.

Whilst we believe that this pathway is based on and rooted in Ephesians 2 and Jesus reconciling people to himself and together, we recognise that in issues as deep-seated as racial injustice, what is really required is a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit to break our old mindsets and heal our hearts. So alongside this we are praying for people who use this pathway to have powerful encounters with God, that set them free from the sin of racism and the pain and hurt that racial injustice has caused. We are believing that the other side of the cross is a truly reconciled church, signified by unity and peace in relationships.

Owen Hylton, Beacon Church London

## Why pursue a Pathway to Peace within the local church?

### We are one body

*"...while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."* 1 Corinthians

- » God has put the body together
- » Honour should be given to those that lacked it
- » There should be no division in the body
- » Equal concern should be shown
- » If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; and
- » You (we) are the body of Christ.

### We need a shared understanding of history

In the UK there is an unbroken line of systemic racism that could be traced from the 17th century slavery, through to 19th century colonialism and 20th century racism. The whole purpose of the Race Relations Act 1976 and its latest amendment in 2000 was to ensure that the law protected people who might otherwise be on the receiving end of racial injustice and inequality; were the issue really consigned to the annals of history, this act would not be needed, but sadly it is. Reaching a common and, I would argue, correct understanding of this history is vitally important before we can move on to true empathy.

## We need a shared understanding of the present reality

One of the ways to help begin to bring people to a place of common understanding, is creating space to hear people's stories of oppression, racism and then sensitively reflecting on those stories. This process I believe can be healing and restorative both for the person hearing the stories and the person hearing the sensitive reflections.

### How to use this guide

This guide can be used as a tool to facilitate healing and reconciliation across racial divides as a whole church, in small group settings, or in a particular relationship.

**Whole Church:** preach through the scripture passages for each of the four phases as a whole church

**Small groups:** look at the scripture passages and four phases together

**Individual relationships:** discuss together the scripture passages and four phases together to bring deeper understanding and reconciliation in individual relationships.

## Questions for reflection

Whether you are looking at this within a relationship, a group or a whole church context, we would encourage you to prayerfully reflect individually on these questions, before looking at the pathway to peace to see where you might be; we all have the tendency to put ourselves as being further along on these issues than we might actually be!

Reflecting personally

- » Prior to the death of George Floyd would you have said 'all lives matter' or 'black lives matter', when considering issues of racial injustice? Why is this?
- » What would you say are the most pronounced feelings and emotions you have had following the death of George Floyd?
- » Do you agree that racial injustice and inequality towards black people is disproportionate? Why/ why not?
- » How have you in your own mind explained racial injustice and inequality?

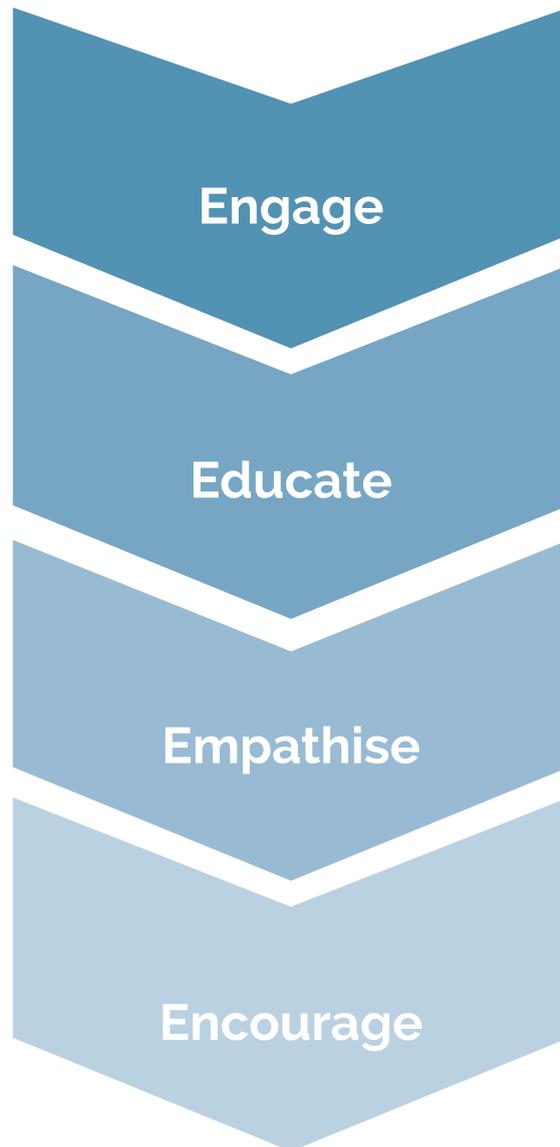
## Reflecting on your church

- » Do you as an individual have a theology or philosophy around race and diversity in the church?
- » Do you have any meaningful relationships with black people who attend your church? Has that relationship shaped your thinking in any way towards issues of race? If not, why do you think that is?
- » Do you know how black people who attend your church are dealing with these issues?
- » Are you prepared to slow down the speed at which you build genuine relationships to engage black people at a deeper level?
- » Are you prepared to slow down the speed at which you grow teams and develop leaders so that diversity influences the way in which things are done?

## A Pathway to Peace

*"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."* Ephesians 2:14-16 NIVUK

**The Pathway to Peace has four stages to walk through:**



At each stage there will be different barriers for individuals to overcome (depending on where they are coming from on these issues) and practical steps to take in order to move forward together towards greater healing and unity. Having worked through the reflection questions above, we encourage you to prayerfully work through the stages, starting from Engage.

| <b>Phase</b>                    | <b>Engage: the place of humility and trust</b><br>1 Cor 12:24-27  | <b>Educate: the place of openness and understanding</b><br>Gal 2:11-12, Acts 11:1-3  | <b>Empathise: the place of reconciliation</b><br>Eph 2:14-16 Barriers to pray through | <b>Encourage: the place of partnership and hope</b><br>Acts 9:26-30, Acts 11:19-26  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| <b>What this looks like</b>     | Some people will need to move from denial and defence to acknowledging and accepting the reality of racism; others will need to move from a place of deep hurt, sensitivity and mistrust to accepting help and begin to have hope. Engaging is not the same as showing empathy. Empathy comes after you've listened enough that you understand. | Some people will need to develop a greater willingness to listen and reflect; others will need a willingness to be open and share experiences. | Some people need to repent; others need to forgive.                                   | Some people will need to get behind, work with, release, disciple and invest in the leadership development of particular people in their church. This may include investing financially.<br><br>Others will need to commit to be trained, learn, make the most of the opportunities, take responsibility and honour leadership. |
| <b>Barriers to pray through</b> | Pride, pain and mistrust  | Ignorance and self-preservation  | Rationalisation and holding onto rights   | Relational separation – continuing to have closer relationships with people who are like you within the church.<br>Culturally different perceptions of what commitment and leadership look like.<br>Distrust of opportunities due to past disappointment.   |
| <b>This leads to...</b>         | Journeying together and growing in deeper relationship  | Acceptance of reality and a common understanding   | Healing and reconciliation.   | People being allowed to fully flourish in the gifts and talents that God has given them. Peace and unity in relationships.  |

## **Working through the Pathway to Peace in practice**

### **Engage**

*"But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."* (1 Cor 12:24-27)

### **Pray**

This may mean bringing our hurt, anger and pain to God, remembering who He is and being honest about how we are feeling. For others it may mean bringing our lack of awareness, ignorance and subconscious avoidance to God, asking Him to open our eyes and see the reality of the lives that we are living. To help us go on a journey of humility, grace and repentance.

### **Don't be afraid of the pain**

I understand the depth of these hurts and emotions but we don't need to live there, yes they are part of our journey toward freedom and reconciliation, but we mustn't be frightened by them.

### **Trust God to bring peace and reconciliation**

It is not necessarily wrong to be an activist and want to protest. This can however often end up being more frustrating than we think, because whilst you might be doing something and you might make some short-term progress, the deep change you want to see rarely comes that way. When you're trusting God, His way of change is inherently better, more fruitful and more lasting. Remember how Moses tried to use his position to deliver Israel out of slavery in Egypt, his efforts led to

him killing an Egyptian and he had to flee. When God's time came, He led two million Israelites out of Egypt without the loss of one life (Israelite) and with great material blessing. God's way took longer to come through but it was more full and complete.

### **Lean into the process**

If we are not leaning into the process, the alternative is subconscious avoidance, which leads to apathy and apathy can lead to a judgmental attitude. The real challenge here is that the reality of conflict can be very uncomfortable and at times confusing. But you must remember, it's not your efforts that make the difference, it's the Spirit at work in you. Please remember engaging is not the same as empathy, you need some understanding before you can empathise with people.

### **Educate**

*"The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."* (Acts 11:1-3)

*"When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group."* (Gal 2:11-12)

### **Listen and educate**

Some people in the church will need to seek to learn. Fight the innate temptation to defend, explain, or problem-solve, just listen. Listening is the key part to educating yourself. This might be humbling and at times uncomfortable, but is really

necessary. The issues we are talking about are not opinions, in the end we have to accept them as facts of the world in which we live and how the world has functionally worked for hundreds of years. If you accept that truth, this phase can be easier than you might imagine.

Others in the church will need to help educate, maybe not personally in everything, but where you are in relationship with people who have got to this phase and are looking to you then try to help them understand.

If you are considering having conversations where stories are shared in a small group setting, there are some guidelines available at [beacon-church.org/pathwaytopeace](http://beacon-church.org/pathwaytopeace)

### **Seek resources**

Some people will need to seek out resources; others might help educate through recommending resources. This may include books, articles people have recommended, movies, speeches, testimonies and interviews. A great way to begin a dialogue, is for a small group to go through a book together, read chapters and discuss things over a number of weeks. We are developing a resource list at [beacon-church.org/pathwaytopeace](http://beacon-church.org/pathwaytopeace) to get you started.

### **Develop a robust theology of diversity and race**

Put your faith in the gospel – the unfolding and revealing message of the gospel is peace with God but also peace with your fellow brothers and sisters. Hostilities are broken down and peace is made.

### **Demonstrate humility and courage**

The truth is many of us are not as far along in these issues as we think we are. It takes humility to admit that you need help in how to respond and then to accept the help offered.

### **Pray together**

Guilt, shame and pain may come up at this stage. Praying together at this stage is a powerful way of bringing these things to God and moving forward together.

### **Empathise**

*“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”* (Eph 2:14-16)

### **Move beyond listening to change**

This is not so much the ability to listen; empathy allows you to identify in a meaningful way with another person. You might never fully understand the pain of racial injustice, but you can understand enough to empathise. You need to be able to show grace, stand in the gap, make changes, advocate for others. All of these things are part of empathy. The incarnation is the main way that Jesus empathised with us, He knew it, He got it. He understood. It helps us when we come to Him, because we know He knows.

### **Repent and forgive**

True repentance is not about easing your guilt, but genuine sorrow for hurt and pain your actions or inactions have caused others. Forgiveness is not forgetting or burying, it is an acceptance of repentance for the purposes of reconciliation.

### **Encourage**

*“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and*

*brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” (Acts 9:26-30)*

*“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” (Acts 11:19-26)*

This phase looks at justice and reparation, righting the wrongs of the past, which is multi-faceted:

### **Make space alongside you**

Some of us need to step aside and make room for people to come alongside us. We must give up control and learn to serve,

without running away. We need to do this with grace and humility and set an example to those who follow us and who look to us. This is not about people trying to take over, as some people fear, but rather to join in fulfilling the purposes of God in this generation.

### **Who is your Paul?**

In the two accounts above Paul in his early days of ministry is supported by Barnabas who makes a way for him and introduces him to the apostles. Thereafter Barnabas recognises that Paul had the necessary gifts and grace to join him in the work at Antioch. In fact, very quickly Paul surpasses Barnabas. There are lessons in this account for us, to help make a way for someone else and also to not hold them back or try and preserve our own position and status. Barnabas and Paul serve together before Paul emerges as the lead apostle to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Some of you have a Paul somewhere within your church or your world, you need to go and find them and bring them back and work with them in leadership development to release them. The new world needs them. This may look like clear leadership development pathway positions for black people within your church, or it may look like training and equipping people who are going back to their home nations to plant churches.

Whilst this point appears straightforward, working this out in practice can be complex and may require a shift in the way you are used to building teams and creating leadership pathways. We tend to develop leaders from our existing relational connections; if you only cultivate relationships with people who are like you, this will be an early barrier to building a diverse leadership team. Similarly, our perceptions of what leadership and commitment look like are influenced by

culture – we may inadvertently discount someone because their leadership style is culturally different to our own, or be looking for particular qualities that are really about culture rather than character.

Some people being presented with such opportunities may not immediately seem to respond to them, either because their outward response doesn't align with our cultural expectations of what 'commitment' looks like, or because past disappointment has led to distrust. To work towards building truly diverse leadership teams, you will need to slow down the way you approach building teams and focus on relationship-building first. This may feel frustrating initially, but in doing so you will build from the beginning in such a way that you have diverse voices shaping how you grow and leaders will naturally emerge.

### **Invest financially**

Something to prayerfully consider is whether you are able to invest financially in black people in your church? Are there black-owned or black-run businesses or organisations, which you could invest in to create opportunities and open doors?

### **Teach on the reconciled church**

Embed clear teaching on the reconciled church within your church membership course, whole church preaching or small group discussion series.

### **Next steps**

We're all at different stages in this journey to racial reconciliation. Having worked through the Pathway to Peace, spend some time reflecting on your next steps:

In my personal relationships I will....

In my work/ ministry/ areas of responsibility I will....