

# How to Fight Oppression

## ESTABLISH BIBLICAL COMMAND TO CORRECT/FIGHT AGAINST OPPRESSION

### Jeremiah 9:6

*Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the Lord.*

### Jeremiah 21:12

*O house of David! Thus says the Lord: "Execute justice in the morning, and **deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed**, lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil deeds."*

### Jeremiah 22:3

*Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and **deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed**. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.*

### Deuteronomy 24:14

***"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.***

### Psalms 10:17-18

*O LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear **To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed**, So that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror.*

### Psalms 72:12-14

***12** For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. **13** He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. **14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.***

### Psalms 103:6

*The LORD works righteousness and justice **for all who are oppressed.***

### Proverbs 14:31

***Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.***

### Proverbs 31:8-9

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

### Isaiah 9:3,4

**3** You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. **4** For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, **the rod of his oppressor, you have broken** as on the day of Midian.

#### Jeremiah 2:34-35

**34** Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor; you did not find them breaking in. Yet in spite of all these things **35** you say, 'I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.' Behold I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned'

#### Daniel 4:27

*Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."*

#### Isaiah 49:26

**"I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh, And they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine; And all flesh will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."**

#### Micah 2:1-3

*Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. **They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks, and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster.***

(The scripture I'll draw from the most today)

#### Isaiah 1:16-17

**16** Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, **17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.**

## ITS OVERWHELMING

Those are all passages that show how God feels about oppression. That was 15 passages, and I could have easily given you 50 of them.

As Kent just said, I go by "Ant", and I serve as pastor at Midtown Two Notch in Columbia, SC. As a church, we seek to target impoverished communities of color along a street called Two Notch Road. To say it a different way, a large part of my ministry is serving and ministering to communities and neighbors that have been very drastically affected by the effects of the oppression of black people in our country.

It was a few years ago, and I was sitting at my table **studying and preparing to give my first sermon on oppression**, and I began to feel very overwhelmed... so overwhelmed that I just began to cry. I don't think I'd ever experienced that before, but the tears were just rolling because of how overwhelmed I was. And I was overwhelmed in a couple different ways.

1. I quickly began to notice that God's hatred for oppression is a very big theme in the bible, and yet, **I had never heard anyone teach on it in any majority white Christian ministry I had been a part of.** I had been taught many many biblical themes but this one never came up.

I was overwhelmed by the fact that even though this theme was so prevalent, I hadn't heard any sermons on it, even though it was very applicable to our lives in the South here in the United States.

2. And then I became **overwhelmed** by just how clearly I was able to **see that God really does hate oppression.** I had talked with so many people who were suffering in these communities, and just been broken by how devastating the suffering our neighbors were experiencing were. It was such a comforting thing for me to be able to look at the bible and see clearly that God hates oppression so much more than I do! He's angrier about it than I am. I can't tell you how comforting that was for me as a black man...

The more I think about it, the more I realize that this topic that you all have been wrestling with in this sermon series, in some way is overwhelming for many of us, regardless of your race. I know that **many of my white brothers and sisters often feel very overwhelmed** by how much they're being told that they need to do something about it...

And so far you have been talking about a lot of ideas regarding racial injustice, so today I want to offer you some practical hands-level steps you can take to fight against racial injustice in the world around you and to fight against oppressive beliefs that may or may not be in you...

*or to use terms that are consistent with the first passage I read just now, Isaiah 1:17*

**17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.**

I want to take steps today to equip you to *learn* to do good and seek justice and correct racial oppression in our time together today.

## **POINT OUT HELPFUL WAYS TO CORRECT OPPRESSION**

I was talking to a sister I know who's a scholar that has her PhD in education who did her dissertation on how the public school system often fails to adequately educate black students. I was asking her how to think about fighting against racial oppression, and she told me that she sees herself as someone who tries to run interference against oppressive norms.

And since then, I haven't heard a more helpful way to think about it than that. I know Marcus pointed out some ways that racial oppression is still impacting black people today, I want to do some of that today as well, but I want to do it primarily **so you can easily connect some dots and see precisely how the practicals I will give you actually serve to correct oppression.**

## **DISCRIMINATORY LENDING & REDLINING >>> IMPOVERISHED BLACK COMMUNITIES**

So, in Knoxville and many other urban areas in our country, you'll often find highly densely populated impoverished communities that are mostly black that are riddled with poverty. How did that come to be?

DAD'S STORY

I wanna use my dad's story to try to connect some dots for us. In 1954, public schools in the US were mandated to desegregate b/c its unconstitutional to keep people out of schools based on their race. In Chester, SC, my dad's school system wasn't desegregated until 16 years later, in 1970 - when my dad was in 8th or 9th grade. So he grew up going to segregated, under-funded, under-resourced schools. He was very intelligent, graduated from high school with one of the top gpa's in his school. So good, that he went to USC as a black man, which was very rare in 1975 (only 12 yrs after the first black person attended the school). Got a degree in education, and then pursued a master's degree at Winthrop University while working as a teacher in Chester, SC. He'd already met my mom, and wanted to buy a house for his family to be.

So, he went to banks to try to get a mortgage loan, but he kept getting denied because he didn't qualify for a loan. At the same time, he's seeing some of his white friends from high school get approved for loans even though they didn't have a college degree, and their job wasn't as good as his was.

So, he starts asking the bank employees, "why am I continuing to be denied when I know you gave loans to these guys who don't have the credentials I have?"

Eventually one of the bank employees was honest with him and said, "**Because your daddy has the wrong skin color**".

Now, the **Fair Housing Act** was passed in **1968**, preventing banks from refusing to give loans to ppl based on race. It was in **1981 and 1982 when my dad was told this. That's only 40 years ago.** My dad was fortunate, and he was able to find an association that was giving loans to black people, and I remember when he and my mom paid off the loan that he got for that house.

However many were not as fortunate, and weren't able to get a loan to be able to purchase a home, which is one of the most basic ways to build wealth. So, you have a demographic of impoverished people who grew up going to sub-standard educational institutions being denied the ability to access arguably our country's most fundamental means of gaining wealth, home ownership.

REDLINING. On top of that, **redlining** (please research redlining if you don't know what redlining is) is taking place which restricts people of color from living in more affluent/middle class parts of town. So the logical result of that is, areas that are densely populated with impoverished black people who are renting instead of owning homes.

SCHOOLS. Add another layer to it, how do the powers that be determine which schools get the most funding? In many places, its property tax value in the area the school is zoned for. So for the people that are already impoverished, who don't have homes that they own b/c they're denied access to that means of gaining wealth... What type of resourcing are their schools getting, usually? Many of them are under-resourced and underfunded mostly minority schools, which is the type of school my dad grew up in.

## **WHAT WE DID AT 2N**

### READING BUDDIES

So to try to correct oppression, our church started a reading buddies program at a local elementary school where we sought to improve 3rd grade reading scores because 3rd grade reading scores have shown to be a one of the most effective indicators of future academic success. This is believed to be the case because up until 3rd grade, children are learning to read. After 3rd grade, children are reading to

learn. You are expected to be able to use reading skills to help you do well in science, math, social studies, etc...

So, we said that we were going to run interference against the norm of many children that go to under-resourced schools in these impoverished communities not succeeding as much academically by helping to improve 3rd grade literacy in our communities.

In doing this, we were seeking to, as Isaiah 1:17 says, learn to do good and seek justice and correct oppression.

#### HEALTH FAIR - FARMERS MARKET

Also in those impoverished communities, we often see a lot of healthcare discrepancies as there are often more health problems in these communities than most other communities. One of the reasons for this is that often times grocery stores in impoverished communities have to close down because those in the neighborhood don't have enough money to support it, and those in more affluent neighborhoods often go to stores in their neighborhood.

**Food Deserts.** So, you get these healthcare discrepancies because these impoverished minority communities become food deserts. A food desert is a place where many people don't have consistent access to healthy foods. A few yrs ago, our church was leasing a building in a neighborhood that was a food desert. The nearest grocery store was over a mile away and many of our neighbors didn't have consistent transportation on their own so they often used the bussing system..

Its not functional to try to bring a week's worth of groceries home on the bus after going to the store, so many people fill their kitchens with food from places that are in walking distance, which is often fast food restaurants, gas stations, etc...

**Health Fair.** So we decided to try to do a health fair for our community, especially after getting a lot of prayer requests regarding health concerns from the community during our prayer walks. So, we got a local hospital to come out and do over 60 free healthcare screenings in the neighborhood and give resources out to let people know what they can do with many of the health issues they were having.

#### **Farmer's Market.**

On top of that, we had a local farmer come out and set up shop in our yard to sell his produce right in the middle of a food desert. We asked him how much he needed to make in order for it to be worth his time to do it, and we made sure he met his quota.

That went so well, that I eventually went up to the farmer and asked him, how much would it take to get him out to our church on the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month to sell his produce. I said you can set up right here in our yard on Sunday during our service, and I'll encourage our people to buy as many of their groceries as they can from you, and we'll invite people from our partner churches to come out as well.

So we did that for months until the owners sold the building and we had to relocate, and our neighbors were so thankful to have access to healthy food in their neighborhood.

The effects of oppression had lead to the norm of that neighborhood being a food desert, and we just set our minds to loving and serving our neighbors by interfering against those norms. And I wish you could

have seen the joy and appreciation from our neighbors as they would come and purchase their produce and share with me what meals they were gonna make with what they were purchasing.

*So those are some ways we did it on a corporate level... but there are things you can try to do as an individual even if you aren't in a position to start something new like that.*

## WAYS TO FIGHT OPPRESSION (SLIDE)

### Support black businesses

One way that we can practically do racial justice is by educating ourselves on businesses owned and run by black people, **supporting those businesses**, and also **spreading the word about those businesses**. Right now obviously, a lot of small businesses are struggling due to the pandemic. And so obviously, look for ways to support small businesses in general. But multiple studies have confirmed that so far **during COVID-19, black businesses specifically are more than twice as likely to have to close as their white counterparts.**<sup>1</sup> So while to be sure, all small businesses need our support during this time, black businesses are *especially* in need of it.

### knoxvilleblackbusiness.com.

- a working directory for black-owned businesses here in Knoxville. Nationally, you can find something similar at [blackbusinesslist.com](https://blackbusinesslist.com). There are probably countless other places to find black businesses.
- **Google “black businesses” online**, you’ll find all kinds of places pointing you in the right direction.

### Follow and get involved with local government

As we’ve mentioned before, often *local* elections and measures we vote on have way more of an impact on our day to day life than any presidential or national election do. The national elections get all the press, but the local elections are where a lot of significant things for our lives happen.

Specifically, local governments make decisions and policies that directly impact (positively and negatively) people of color. So I would encourage you to follow what’s happening in government at a local level—school boards, city council, city and county mayoral elections, police chief elections. The people who are elected to these offices will have tremendous impact on how we engage with areas of injustice, crime, and the treatment of the least of these in our community. Additionally, a lot of local elections are actually non-partisan—meaning there’s not a *Republican* candidate and a *Democratic* candidate. They are just *candidates*. So you can evaluate their beliefs and policies for what they are, rather than getting caught up in red or blue labels.

So follow what’s happening and a local level, and if you’re able, get involved in some way. Volunteer, attend city council and school board meetings, make your voice heard. If this is a brand new arena for you, a good place to go to educate yourself and find out what’s happening is going to city council meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> You can find one such study [here](#).

## Support organizations doing justice in black communities

The last one I'll give you today is this: there are quite a few organizations here in Knoxville primarily serving black and underprivileged communities. They've already got the understanding of the particular injustices, they have a solid strategy for combating it, they just need resources to do more and more of it.

### Knoxville Area Urban League

<https://www.thekaul.org/>

"OUR MISSION is to enable African Americans, other minority groups and the underserved to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights."

### BECK CULTURAL EXCHANGE CENTER

<https://www.beckcenter.net/> ... You can go here to **educate** yourself on how racism has affected the experience of black people in Knoxville

- you can be a member for cheap / get on their newsletter and such

### Emerald Youth Foundation

[Emeraldyouth.org](http://Emeraldyouth.org)

Looks like a great organization to serve with as they serve urban youth right here in Knoxville

### Thrive Lonsdale

Is an organization that also serves the same demographic and is doing great work right here in Knoxville

<https://thrivelonsdale.com/>

## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

Look up neighborhood associations for impoverished black neighborhoods.

### Historic Holston Hills Community Club & Morning Side Heights

- Neighborhood associations that serve in East Knox. Neighborhood associations like these are always good to look into and see if you can serve alongside because they often have good knowledge of the needs of the neighborhood

And hopefully, as you serve with some of these organizations, and others you find on your own, you can build relationships that open more doors for service... At my church, we've had so many doors opened to us to serve people just because we were consistently present as we served people. And at some point between reaching out to an organization to partner with and serving in that community for 8+ years now, you become a trusted part of the community which just opens so many doors and allows you to gain understanding of the needs of the community.

Those are just some examples of potential organizations you can serve with. Some of you can name more of them to me. But listen, when you're serving with organizations that are serving impoverished black communities, **when it comes to correcting oppression, all of it counts. All of it counts.**

*When it comes to correcting oppression and running interference on oppressive norms, all of those tangible things help. But there's another way to think about doing this that might feel a little less tangible, but is needed nonetheless.*

## **RUN INTERFERENCE ON OPPRESSIVE WORLDVIEWS**

When it comes to the racial oppression of black people, much of the oppression is rooted in belief systems and biases that have led to oppressive norms.

Years ago, during the time of reconstruction in the south after slavery was abolished one of the stereotypes of black people that was taught that black people were savages. That black people were unruly and could withstand more hurt and pain than white people. And people attempted to justify the lynching of black people by saying that it was a way of taming black people.

Even though, the practice of lynching doesn't exist the way it did back then, many of the stereotypes remain. Laws can be changed to prohibit certain practices, but laws don't change worldviews or biases. You can't make a law that prevents people from seeing black people as more dangerous than other people.

### **THE WAR ON DRUGS**

One of the groups that knew this was the Nixon administration. Listen to this quote from John Ehrlichman, who was Nixon's Domestic Policies Chief

*"You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate ... blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities... We could arrest their leaders. raid their homes, break up their meetings, and **vilify them night after night on the evening news**. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."*

- Nixon's Domestic Policies Chief John Ehrlichman

Nixon and his team used their power at the expense of black people. The residual effect of this act and many others is people fearing black people.

Now what does that belief system have to do with racial oppression? Well, I would say that fearing black people because of racial bias is more dangerous than hating black people because of racial bias. Think about it.

Think about it. Hate crimes are prosecuted. If you fear for your life, it's self-defense. Most people are more likely to hurt someone if they're afraid than if they're angry.

- I think most police brutality against black people is because we've been taught to fear black people. Police officers are backed by the law to be able to use lethal force if they fear for their lives. So in an interaction between an unarmed black man and a police officer, if they both are terrified, the black man needs to remain calm and even if he's being restrained by a police officer, he can't do anything that seems like resisting, but if the police officer is afraid, he can use as much force as he deems necessary.

We need to fight against the subtle underlying biases we have against black people... that I think honestly has affected the ways all of us see black people (black people included). This fear has a huge impact on black people and causes suffering that's rooted in the oppression of black people.

People seeing black people as more dangerous than others harmed black people as it was used to:

- justify lynchings after the emancipation proclamation.
- (as it was used to) promote a political agenda during Nixon's Administration,
- and its harming people today as people are killing black people out of fear when they have no reason to fear

Fighting against racial bias protects black people and helps to correct oppression.

#### EXAMPLES OF FIGHTING RACIAL BIAS

And maybe you already notice in yourself racial bias against black people. There are things you can do to fight against it in yourself.

You can:

- Read books that intentionally show black people doing well. I recommend "I'm still here" by Austin Channing Brown.
- Deepening your understanding of the historical plight of black people to help you understand how the economical and health disparities came to be
- Spending time in mostly black communities. Serving through organizations that are serving in black communities is a great way to do that
  - We have a member of our church now that, b/c of biases about black neighborhoods, wouldn't even attend our church b/c of fear when she first felt God calling her to join our church. Then as she started attending, she ended up being one of the most consistent people on our prayer walks. She was going door to door with myself and others meeting people and sharing Jesus with them. **I don't think she would have ever gotten over that fear had she not intentionally spent time in that community without ever experiencing any type of danger.**

Fighting against racial bias starts with the bias in our own hearts, but it also must extend to other that we have relationships with.

#### Proverbs 31:8-9

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

- Letting people know with your words that you disagree with their ignorant, damaging, racially biased views is glorifying to God and it helps to correct oppression

#### TRANSITION TO CONCLUSION

Be an advocate for black people. Speak up and correct people when they say ignorant racial things about black people. I know it can be costly to you to do that...

*It can cost you relationally, socially, and financially. Which is hard, and over time its easy to stop fighting. So I want to encourage us to do this with right motivations that can actually sustain us.*

#### ENCOURAGE PROPER MOTIVATIONS

Its important to be motivated by the love of God and not just the attention that these issues are currently getting in our culture. Because I know quite a few people that are really good at posting on social media,

but actually aren't willing to sacrifice any time, money, or energy to engage in tangible and practical hands and feet work to fight injustice.

Part of the reason I love that y'all are doing this series on the biblical demand for justice is because we too often see this solely as a political thing. When I talk about this kind of thing, some people often ask, "Isn't that Marxist/Communist?" talking about oppression so much. Or "You're just pushing liberal agenda."

1st we need to realize that dealing with oppression was theological and in our bibles before it was political in our society! The fight against oppression predates:

- the current news cycle.
- american slavery.
- our country as we know it.
- This is biblical.

We are a people that are about the bible, and we have motivation that won't end and won't run out. Which is important because this is a tiring work.

And I've even seen a lot of people that think they are more committed to this fight than they actually are.

- Lack of farmer's market participation. Maybe 20% of the people that signed up actually showed up even though they were demanding that I give them action steps and a way to serve.

#### LEAVE PEOPLE WITH A BEAUTIFUL VISION OF GOD FIGHTING FOR THE OPPRESSION

As the people of God, we need our motivations to be rooted in the character of our God.

- The One who frees us from the greatest oppressor/oppression
- Sin is a slavemaster
- Jesus comes and overpowers the Kingdom of Darkness
- Yes, the greatest oppressor is sin, but the Good News is that Jesus has more power to deliver than sin has to enslave.
- He does Good. He seeks justice. He corrects oppression. Frees the oppressed from their oppressor! When He liberates us from the oppressive Kingdom of Darkness!
- If you want to learn to do good and seek justice and correct oppression, look to Jesus!
- And know that we image Him, the liberator of the oppressed, when we seek to correct oppression.
- We show off His goodness and His character
- We should **remember how great it is** and celebrate that we've been freed from our oppression, **and then be compelled by that to go and seek to correct oppression** as a way of communicating to the oppressed and downcast and everyone else that there is a God that hates oppression and He wants nothing more than bring physical and spiritual freedom to all from their oppression.

**Bucket:**




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I'll give you some of the ones we're aware of and have worked with, and I'm sure a lot of people in this room could add countless more too:

- Emerald Youth
- Thrive Lonsdale
- Knoxville Area Urban League
- Compassion Coalition?
- Operation Backyard?
- Others?

A lot of us probably have disposable income that we could give, one-time or on a recurring basis to these fantastic organizations. We've got some exciting stuff I've been working on to roll out this Christmas as far as ways we want to integrate these types of things into the life of our church regularly. But for starters, learn about the work these businesses are doing, give towards it, and if you are able, give some of your time as a volunteer with them. There will be more justice in our city as a result of you doing so.

### 100 Black Men of Knoxville

<https://www.100bmok.org/>

“Founded in 1963, the focus of the 100 Black Men organization is to the advancement of African-American youth and community and developing the leaders of tomorrow. Since its inception, the 100 Black Men, through its affiliated chapters, has mentored and directly impacted the lives of more than 120,000 youth.”

### **Knoxville District Baptist Association, Inc**

<http://kdbainc.org/>

“The Knoxville District Baptist Association, Inc. (KDBA) is made up of 38 bible-based churches who are dedicated to making a difference in our local churches and surrounding communities. We are determined to see through “new eyes” with a focus on missions. We believe that “missions” involves two action words: aiding (helping) and evangelizing. Our definition of “missions” is a service that meets both the physical and spiritual needs of an individual. It is meeting people at their point of need with a view toward persuading them to look unto Jesus as Saviour and Deliverer.”

This one would be all about the application of verses in the bible where God calls His people to fight against oppression. Sermon would serve to winsomely expose (for doubters) how oppression still affects black people today by giving examples from my own family. This would give added benefit of giving people "aha moments" as I help them to easily connect things like the current poverty rate to generations of oppression of black people. I could make the point I made to you before about how harmful it is that we are taught to fear black people. It would also give very practical ways to fight against it ideologically and through acts of service. Could include a note about how if you really want to pursue racial unity and fight against racial injustice, you need to care more about seeing unity and justice happen than you care about being thought highly of b/c you're seen as someone who fights for unity and justice. That would be a good place to include stuff about the need to be patient and longsuffering.

**BECAUSE FIGHTING OPPRESSION IS GONNA TAKE A LOT OF PERSEVERANCE**

You need to be good at celebrating every win!

I want you to know that everything you do that helps fight oppression is worth celebrating.