

## **Chick-fil-A CEO, Rapper, and Atlanta Pastor Discuss Race** *The Wired Word for the Week of June 28, 2020*

### **In the News**

Following the death of a black man, [Rayshard Brooks](#), at the hands of a white police officer, three Christian leaders gathered at Atlanta's Passion City Church (PCC) to discuss how God's people should respond to the compound crises of racial tension and the coronavirus pandemic, and the trauma of the African-American community in particular.

Dan Cathy, CEO of the fast food chain Chick-fil-A, Louie Giglio, PCC founder, and Lecrae, a black Christian rapper, conversed for over an hour. The Rev. Bernice King was unable to participate as planned, since she had been called upon to speak at Brooks' memorial service.

On the Chick-fil-A website (see link below), the company accepted responsibility to "have intentional, difficult conversations with co-workers and strangers ... to be curious to understand the needs of others. It's ok to say, 'I'm not sure I'm saying the right things right now.' A lot of people don't engage in hard conversations, because they're afraid they'll say something wrong. A dialogue is better than no conversation at all."

During the roundtable, Cathy mentioned that a dozen Chick-fil-A restaurants had been vandalized in the past week, but he urged white people "to see the level of frustration and exasperation and almost a sense of hopelessness that exists among some of those activists within the African-American community."

TWW team member Malia Miller observed that Cathy's comments highlighted the power of deflection. "The vandalism that has accompanied the protests often overshadows the angst of the protesters, but the focus needs to remain on addressing the real suffering occurring in the black community," Miller wrote. "Deflection is inherently an avoidance mechanism, and when we fall prey to these distractions, we can fail to act on the issue of which the deflection is a symptom."

Cathy said he thought the world needed to hear "expressions of a contrite heart, of ... humility, a sense of shame, a sense of embarrassment, [that] begin with an apologetic heart."

The two white men on the set, Cathy and Giglio, were excoriated for some of their statements, while Lecrae was at times the subject of pity and/or admiration, by many who left comments about the YouTube video, [The Beloved Community - Dan Cathy, Lecrae, Louie Giglio \(Video 1:10:37\)](#).

Some called Cathy's gesture of shining Lecrae's shoes "pandering" to leftists, progressives and/or "thugs," "demonic" worship of a man rather than worship of God, "self-flagellation," "clever marketing" or "contrived," manipulative putting on a show. Others felt insulted by what they

interpreted as a call to humiliating repentance for "collective guilt" for sins such as racism that they felt they had not committed.

On the other hand, some viewers resented remarks from Giglio meant to show empathy for police, as well as his characterization of slavery as "white blessing," rather than white privilege.

A couple of respondents were more willing to overlook poor word choices and missteps from people who were at least trying to have difficult but necessary conversations.

Chick-fil-A has been blasted and lionized for its conservative views regarding same-sex marriage and observing a weekly Sabbath. After protests from the LGBTQ community, during which Chick-fil-A operators gave protesters free food and drinks, Cathy met quietly with activists and discontinued donations to most organizations that oppose same-sex marriage, except for the Salvation Army and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA).

TWW team member Bill Tammeus wrote that Chick-fil-A has a reputation as a conservative Christian organization that doesn't seem to take public stands that might be called progressive. "And yet here's the CEO saying things that seem quite in harmony with messages coming from Black Lives Matter movement leaders," Tammeus observed.

"All of us are complicated people -- part devil, part angel, part lukewarm," Tammeus added. "So the lesson here to me is to listen carefully (even slowly) before reacting and not assume you know all about someone or some organization based on public reputation."

Lacrae said that it's important for people to humble themselves and listen and learn from people who have a different life experience than they have. "If you want to hear from God," he said, "You'll hear from other people." Maybe you don't need your shoes shined. So it behooves us to ask, "What is it that you need in this moment?" And then listen to the answer.

"You're only going to be as wise as the relationships that you have," the rapper added.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Chick-fil-A Responds to Recent Events. \*Chick-fil-A.com\*](https://www.chick-fil-a.com/press-releases/2017/07/14/chick-fil-a-responds-to-recent-events)

[The Church of Chicken: The Inside Story of How Chick-fil-A Used Christian Values and a 'Clone Army' to Build a Booming Business That's Defying the Retail Apocalypse and Taking Over America. \*Business Insider\*](https://www.businessinsider.com/chick-fil-a-church-of-chicken-2017-7)

## **The Big Questions**

1. Think of a time when you have avoided a difficult topic by deflecting attention from the big picture to focus on a relatively insignificant issue. What motivates people to choose deflection and avoidance rather than confrontation of big issues?

2. Reflect on this, from Louie Giglio: "For him who knows what is right and doesn't do it, to him it is sin' [James 4:17]. So I can't just sit back and say, 'I didn't do this,' or 'I didn't offend

somebody,' but to know that there is an offense that needs to be repaired and addressed, and to just turn away from that, that's called a sin of omission versus a sin of commission, and God wants us to be sensitive for both at the same time."

How might Giglio's remark apply to the way your church has dealt with (or neglected to deal with) issues of race and injustice?

3. What steps has your church taken to develop deep relationships with people of different life experiences and backgrounds from most of your congregants? What next steps might God be calling you to take, as a group, and as an individual?

4. How can you be sure that you see yourself accurately? What can you do to make sure self-evaluation doesn't turn into self-admiration or excusing of your attitudes or actions? How can you ensure that your self-reflection is done humbly?

5. What role, if any, should a person's faith have in the way he or she builds and conducts business or a career?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Psalm 139:19, 21-24**

*O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me --  
... Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
I hate them with perfect hatred;  
I count them my enemies.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
See if there is any wicked [Hebrew "hurtful"] way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting. (For context, read 139:1-6, 19-24.)*

The psalmist marvels at how thoroughly God knows the human heart and mind (vv. 1-6). He exalts God's omnipresence and omniscience. Then his tone turns dark, as he lashes out at those who delight in bloodlust, who hate God and God's ways of justice and mercy (vv. 19-22).

Then the psalmist stops dead in his tracks. It is as if he suddenly looked in the mirror and recognized that he was on the brink of sanctimonious boasting, when, if the truth were known, he could just as easily descend into bloodthirsty violence, if the conditions were right. We may not think of ourselves as "wicked," but who among us has never said or done something "hurtful"?

So the psalmist asks God to examine his heart and mind, to reveal anything within himself that might be hurtful to others, anything that might pain God's heart and grieve the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). He wants to forsake that way and follow God in the way that leads to everlasting life.

At the roundtable, Giglio said, "I don't know what I don't know." According to this psalm, God knows us better than we know ourselves. For that reason, Giglio said, we should ask God to search our hearts, and humble ourselves to learn what God has to teach us.

**Questions:** When, if ever, have you been caught up short while at prayer or worship, suddenly convicted of some sin, some hurtful thing you said or did that you had forgotten or minimized? How did you react? Why might we *not* want to pray for God to search our hearts and test our thoughts? Why is it necessary?

### **Luke 5:8-11**

*But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. (For context, read 5:1-11.)*

Once a crowd came to hear Jesus preach the word of God beside the lake. After teaching the people from Simon Peter's boat, Jesus told him to go cast their nets in deep water. Simon said they had caught nothing after fishing all night, but he followed Jesus' direction anyway. They were dumbfounded at the size of their haul, which began to break their newly repaired nets and threatened to swamp his boat as well as that of his partners.

Simon recognized that he was witnessing something more than an angler's dream. The miracle of the catch of fish caused him to see himself and Jesus with new eyes. Simon sensed that he was in the presence of holiness, and in that light he saw his own sinfulness in sharp contrast.

At the roundtable, Lacrae said "The gospel calls first and foremost for self-reflection, for us to look at ourselves in light of what Jesus has done, and say, ... 'I am wrong.' It's hard to look at your own stuff, and then look at the cross, and say, 'I'm undone.'" But before we can open ourselves up to the complete sufficiency of Christ, we first have to come face to face with our own inadequacy, as Simon did.

**Questions:** Why did Simon Peter beg Jesus to leave him? Why didn't Jesus do what Simon asked him to do? What changed in Simon's life after this experience of self-reflection?

When, if ever, have you had an encounter with Jesus that caused you to reflect on your own life with new eyes? What did you discover about yourself? What did you discover about Jesus? What, if anything, changed for you after that encounter?

Lacrae commented, "America's undone in a lot of ways." Do you think he's right? In light of how Jesus interacted with Simon in this text, what might God want to accomplish in our nation as we reflect on our history with its promise and its flaws?

### **John 13:3-5, 14-15**

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from*

*God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ... [Jesus said,] "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (For context, read 13:1-5, 12-17.)*

Before the Passover festival, while Jesus and his disciples were eating supper, he showed his love for them by taking on the lowest task assigned to the lowest servant, that of washing their dusty, smelly feet. Afterwards, he asked them if they understood what he had done for them.

In Jesus' time, foot washing served a useful purpose, while foot-washing services in our country, when practiced, may be more symbolic than necessary, since many of us have ready access to clean water for bathing.

Pope Francis has on occasion washed the feet of prisoners, immigrants and the homeless poor, who may enjoy a foot bath in ways we can not appreciate.

During the roundtable at Passion City Church, Cathy said he bought about 1,500 shoe brushes some years ago for Chick-fil-A managers and staff. (We think Cathy wanted to encourage company operators and employees to remember that they are called to serve the community.)

Cathy said a friend told him about a revival in a small Texas town, in which a young man was so gripped with conviction about the racism in the community that he knelt before an elderly African-American man seated in the front row, and with tears began to shine his shoes.

After sharing that story, Cathy walked across the platform and knelt before Lacrae to brush his shoes. He awkwardly hugged the rapper, suggesting that white Christians should put their faith into action by humbling themselves to serve their black brothers and sisters who are suffering, shining their shoes and offering them hugs. Lacrae responded, "And some stock in Chick-fil-A."

**Questions:** Have you ever participated in a foot-washing service? Did you wash someone else's feet, did someone wash your feet, or did you observe others in this practice? How did the experience impact you?

What do you think Cathy was trying to convey by brushing Lacrae's shoes? How did you interpret his gesture? What point do you think Lacrae was making with his comment about Chick-fil-A stock?

If Jesus were sharing a meal with his disciples today, here in America, do you think he would wash their feet, or choose some other way to make his point? What might be a modern equivalent of footwashing?

Do you think foot washing should be a sacrament? Does it meet the qualifications of being started by Jesus and him telling his followers to do it? If so, why isn't it a sacrament?

### **Matthew 23:1, 23-24**

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ... "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!"* (For context, read 1, 23-36.)

At the PCC roundtable, Cathy noted that several Chick-fil-A restaurants had been vandalized during protests against violence inflicted on unarmed African-Americans. While the property damage was disturbing, he urged whites not to lose sight of the centuries-long trauma experienced in the black community.

It should also be noted that the identity of those who damaged property or looted stores during protests in various localities may not be known in every case. While some crimes appear to have been committed by African-Americans, others may have been perpetrated by white supremacists or others intent on causing more pain to the black community.

Most of the protesters against excessive use of force by law enforcement and vigilante violence agree that those who committed such crimes should be held accountable. But they also want vigilantes and those who injure or kill people of color without cause to be held to account.

"The vandalism that has accompanied the protests often overshadows the angst of the protesters, but the focus needs to remain on addressing the real suffering occurring in the black community," wrote TWW team member Malia Miller. "Deflection is inherently an avoidance mechanism, and when we fall prey to these distractions, we can fail to act on the issue of which the deflection is a symptom."

"The Pharisees, Scribes and Jewish leaders were masters of deflection," Miller continued. "For example, they tried to entrap Jesus into breaking their laws and decrees when they challenged him with healing on the Sabbath and again when they were about to stone the adulteress woman. They wouldn't open their minds to his message, but put plenty of energy into trying to discredit his teachings."

"I have been guilty of this type of thinking when I encounter evidence that challenges values to which I am desperately loyal," Miller admitted. "It is very tempting to find that one item that most people would agree is wrong, so I can focus on that and hold on to my beliefs -- even if that item is infinitesimally unimportant to the big picture. Christ challenges us to be big-picture thinkers when he made statements like 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' The focus shifts immediately from self-righteous judgment of the adulteress to our own sin."

One term people sometimes use to describe deflection is "whataboutism," which Merriam-Webster describes as "a rhetorical device that involves accusing others of offenses as a way of deflecting attention from one's own deeds." It's what we sometimes do when someone criticizes us or calls us out for a mistake or misdeed: We change the subject, raise a different issue, or offer a counter-accusation.

What Jesus said in the Matthew text about tithing herbs while neglecting weightier matters of justice, faith and mercy is akin to majoring in the minors and minoring in the majors. We try to make ourselves look good ("See? I even tithed my herbs!") while neglecting the greatest commandments, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

**Questions:** Give an example of whataboutism. Share an illustration of majoring in minors and minoring in majors (or as Jesus said, "straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel").

How can you intentionally focus on "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" rather than things of relative unimportance?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Respond to this, from Louie Giglio: "The gospel is a justice proposition at its core. ... Our gospel message at its core was a murder. A man got murdered in broad daylight in the street and they say that he died (speaking of Jesus) by suffocation for the weight of our sin. Even our identification with our Savior lets us know that the gospel proposition is not detached from the justice proposition. They're connected inherently and woven together from the very beginning."

2. On June 3, the Chick-fil-A website posted a statement recognizing that "words are not enough" of a response, but that the company could not be silent about racism, which "should have no place in society. Not now, not ever. It cannot be tolerated. Our hearts are breaking, for our black Team Members, Operators and Staff and all those in the Black community who are suffering and who have suffered for too long because of racism."

Dan Cathy told the Chick-fil-A staff that "This is a time that we must love our neighbors more than we have ever done before, with greater empathy than ever before."

Cathy said he is inspired by the Old Testament leader Nehemiah, who learned of the devastation of the city of Jerusalem, and used his own position of proximity to the center of power, wealth and privilege to fund the reconstruction of Jerusalem with the sweat equity of his people (See Nehemiah 1-2).

Cathy acknowledged that, as a white man who has achieved a level of wealth and position attained by only a few in America, he could not "fully appreciate and understand the gross injustices that are all around us," but said he is committed to use his privilege, riches, power and influence "with policymakers and friends" to address inequities in their city and to benefit those who are less fortunate. To that end, he said Chick-fil-A has been investing in "the equitable re-development and renaissance" of distressed neighborhoods in Atlanta "so that all of our communities can participate in the rising tide of prosperity and hope."

What privileges can you leverage to help your brothers and sisters in communities that are hurting?

3. Comment on this, from rapper Lacrae: "The gospel is bigger than racism." How might this statement inspire hope on the one hand, and be used to deflect attention away from the problem of racism on the other hand?

4. Do you believe that all people were made in the image of God? Is it possible to see the image of God in people of color, but not in members of the LGBTQ community, or vice versa, for example? How do you arrive at your view on this issue?

5. Chick-fil-A operators invest just \$10,000 to open a restaurant, compared to the \$1-2.2 million plus a \$45,000 franchise fee McDonald's franchisees pay in startup costs. Purchase of property, restaurant construction and equipment costs are all covered by Chick-fil-A.

How does this aspect of Chick-fil-A's business model strike you? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, in terms of expressing Christian values?

6. Read and discuss [this post](#) from poet, actress, filmmaker and pastor Tinasha LaRayé.

### **Responding to the News**

1. Lacrae recommended that more white people need to educate themselves about those who have experiences different from their own. He noted that as a black man he is "double-read" compared to his white brothers and sisters, because he has read the literature that speaks to white culture, while many white people have little knowledge of literature that speaks to black culture or other minority experiences.

Consider what steps you could take to learn more about people who have different life experiences than you have had. You might start by doing a search on the internet about "What should I read to learn more about race?"

2. Lacrae also urged God's people to "pray fervently" for God to show us any hard-heartedness, and to ask God to change our heart. He called the matter of race "a gospel issue." Gaining knowledge is good, he said, but it is not enough, "if your heart is set on seeing things the way you want to see them, then you're not able to hear from God. If you can't hear from God, you definitely won't want to hear from me."

Take time to humble yourself before God in prayer, asking that God shine the light of Christ upon the innermost workings of your heart, to show you where you still need to learn, to repent, and to grow in Christlikeness. Ask God to open your heart to the Spirit's voice, and to the hearts of your brothers and sisters in Christ from different backgrounds who have something to say that you need to hear.

3. Consider this: Giglio said preacher Tony Evans advised white people to partner with people who are from a different life experience "to do something for someone who needs to be lifted, so it's not just, 'I got to know a black family, but the black family and our family went together to help another family.' Working together for the common good can make a huge difference."

### **Prayer** (suggested by Psalm 139)

Search us, O God, and know our hearts. See if there be any hurtful way in us. Cleanse us from every sin, that we may be useful to you and of service to our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially to those who are in great pain right now. Help us to be open to learn from them how to love them as they deserve and need to be loved. For the honor of the holy name of Jesus who died for us all. Amen.

