

# **Arrests, Unrest, Race, and a Call to Rest: The Global Academy for Transformational Leadership Statement on the Death of George Floyd**

Images of George Floyd lying handcuffed, face down, and pleading for his life have been viewed by millions around the world. Floyd begs, “Please, I can’t breathe. My stomach hurts, my neck hurts, everything hurts,” as a white policeman kneels on his neck, shifting his weight while his hands casually rest in his pockets. This disturbing video of Floyd’s death lit a powder keg that has set the world aflame.

Since then, thousands of people across the United States and around the world have held demonstrations to decry this inhuman act. Unfortunately, Floyd’s experience is not unprecedented in African American history, and his dying words resonate with many. African Americans have borne the brunt of racism, police brutality, and systemic injustice in the U.S. for many years, and sometimes the community collectively feels like it can’t breathe, as though everything hurts.

At the same time, the world is still suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, more than 100,000 people have died, and numbers are rising. Health professionals say the infected suffer from difficulty breathing. Thus, we hear the cry “I can’t breathe” from those testing positive for COVID-19 as well as from George Floyd.

The same leadership that provides ventilators to help COVID-19 sufferers breathe must also ensure that right for all humanity, despite skin color or origin. These leaders should aid breathing rather than be complicit in stopping it. As we fight the battle against COVID-19, let us also fight against the oppression of racism. Let humanity breathe!

Breath in Scripture is sacred. It is God-given, and only he has the right to take it away. The breath of God transformed a lump of clay into a living being (Gen. 2:7). Elisha’s breath brought the dead body of the Shunammite’s son back to life (2 Kings 4:32-35). God’s breath on the dry, brittle bones in Ezekiel’s vision gave them life (Ezekiel 37:1-14), and at Pentecost the breath of God empowered the church to rise up in power (Acts 2:1-4).

Breath is sacred, and breath is life. We abhor the casualness of those such as former Officer Chauvin who are entrusted with its protection but instead handle it carelessly. While God deplores and condemns any action that desecrates the “*imago Dei*” in humans, he is particularly aggrieved by those levelled against the vulnerable such as orphans, widows, and foreigners. He pays close attention to the plight of the socially disadvantaged and disenfranchised, and he charges us to intentionally look out for their well-being.

Mahatma Gandhi is quoted to have said, “The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.” If these standards were applied to America today, it would be found greatly wanting.

We lament and weep with our African American brothers—“How long, O LORD?” (Psalm 13:1). This injustice has persisted for too long, buoyed by a system that refuses to reform and aided by the silence of those who should speak up. In his letter from a Birmingham jail, Martin Luther King Jr. decries the silence of the white moderate church in the midst of the struggle for racial equality. He indicts the white moderate who is “more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”

We choose to speak up against these acts of police brutality against our African American brothers and against the systemic racism and prejudice endured by them for centuries. We are also aware of the many white brothers and sisters who have stood

alongside our African American brothers and spoken against these injustices through the years, even when it was inconvenient for them to do so.

We live in an imperfect world with imperfect systems and people, including us. As much as we cry out for it, we understand there will never be perfect justice on this side of eternity. George Floyd will never be returned to his family, and the scars in the community caused by his death may never fully heal. This is true of many other experiences that are ultimately rooted in our fallenness as humans. Sin has eaten into the fabric of our society since its advent, and its manifestations are numerous—from the racist white policeman to the angry black anarchist, from the insensitive politician keen to reap political dividends in this crisis to the partisan media owner who wants to stoke the tension further for economic gain.

The root problem is sin, and the ultimate solution is the shed blood of Jesus Christ who cleanses us from all unrighteousness and calls us collectively to be his body (1 Cor. 12:27). Revelation 7:9 paints a picture of the end we eagerly await. We see people from every nation, tribe, and language standing as one, united in Christ even in their diversity. As we look forward to the day when ultimate justice will be served, we are called to rest in Christ today and build bridges of peace and reconciliation rather than walls that emphasize our differences.

At Global Academy for Transformational Leadership, we are committed to this vision. We have intentionally put together a diverse faculty and student body that reflects and celebrates our differences as we strive together for utmost fidelity to the Bible.

We encourage the church of Jesus Christ, called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, to distance herself from any political or cultural orientation, stay true to the teaching of the Word of God, and effectively play her God-given role of preaching peace, reconciliation, freedom, and equality to all people.

We also call for justice for George Floyd and appeal for peaceful demonstrations as we lament and renew our commitment to living out the ways of Christ by looking out for the the least, lost, and last in our midst.

-Voices of GATL students, alumni, and faculty as compiled by Bill Dindi, GATL  
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