

“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. To not speak is to speak. To not act is to act.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

To our fellow white sisters, siblings and brothers:

It goes without saying that people of color in our nation continue to suffer abuse, discrimination, and murder at the hands of white people, including those in positions of incredible authority. It goes without saying that this violence is not just tragic or unfortunate or senseless, but criminal and inhumane. It goes without saying that many of us who are white feel a sense of getting it without really getting it, of feeling angry without really feeling outraged, of caring without knowing how to express that care.

It goes without saying. And that’s part of the problem. It’s going on without us saying anything about it. We do, of course, say *some things* about it. It’s sad. It’s scary. It makes us frown and shake our heads and ask why, in the year 2016, things haven’t gotten better. We think and feel and say these things. We even write letters, social media posts, and statements such as these, but at the same time acknowledge that it doesn’t touch our lives, collectively and in many cases individually, as it does our fellow sisters, siblings and brothers of color. Many of us don’t know what it’s like to bring a child into this world knowing that their very life is threatened simply because the color of their skin is darker than ours, the constant fear of them being killed gnawing at us day and night. We don’t know what it’s like to live and work under the same sky, breathing the same air, yet having our every statement, action, and motivation questioned and scrutinized with zero regard for who we are as human beings.

We should be grateful that we don’t know what these things are like, that we do not feel the constant sting of racism and oppression. This is privilege. We cannot change our privilege, nor should we feel guilty that we possess it. Instead, we should feel a hunger for no one to have to experience the things that we don’t have to experience, for the freedoms that we take for granted every minute of every day to be extended to everyone as our Constitution and Bill of Rights require. We should demand as loudly and passionately as our sisters, siblings and brothers of color for racism to be called out, for all those who break the law to be held accountable, and for our fellow white sisters, siblings and brothers – *for us* – to no longer sit idly by, wringing our hands and shaking our heads.

We often hear some of our white sisters, siblings and brothers respond defensively that “all lives matter.” We don’t disagree that everyone matters, but the lives of white people have never been called into question for not mattering and the safety we experience daily tells us that we do matter. Our systems and structures are set up to protect us and protect our privilege. What is painfully apparent in this country is that much work needs to be done so that Black lives do in fact matter, to every person and institution. It must be said, and we must be the ones to say it, because Black lives frankly don’t matter enough. In some cases, in too many places, they don’t matter at all. And that is and should always be unacceptable. So say it: Black lives matter. Say it, believe it, and act like it. We can do that much. That, and so much more.

We stand in support of Black Lives Matter and we also stand in support of the many police officers who are honest, caring people invested in protecting everyone. As advocates committed to ending sexual violence, we are committed to ending oppression, the roots of so much hurt and pain in this country, holding us back from realizing the full potential of a world that elevates the voices of our incredible sisters, siblings and brothers of color who have so much to contribute and must be recognized and valued. *Because they matter.* We can start today by sincerely looking at and acknowledging our own biases, discussing what white privilege means and how we can actively use our privilege to speak out when we witness injustice, to listen and support our sisters, siblings, and brothers of color, and to encourage peace when tensions are high.

To our white sisters, siblings and brothers: do not remain silent. Speak boldly and loudly.

To our sisters, siblings and brothers of color:

We fully acknowledge and understand we must do better. We must not abandon you for yet another generation to fend for yourselves in a system, in a nation, in a world that continues to benefit us and punish you with no justification for either. We pledge to speak more, to do more, and for our words and actions to mean something more. We endeavor to stand with you in outrage, in love, and in solidarity for a shared vision: that your life and the lives of your children will be valued as much as ours already are. The fear of using our privilege for good will no longer be an obstacle or an excuse. What do we know of fear? Most of all, we cannot allow this statement to be our response, our answer to anything. Instead, it can be a beginning. It's not that we cannot afford to be silent any longer. *You* cannot afford it. Black lives matter. Your life matters. It's time we start acting like it.

Sincerely,

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