

The inspiration for the series came to me while attending the Alliance's 2020 Juneteenth Vigil online. At one point, participants were asked to state our commitment to opposing injustice. Immediately my mind jumped to the word "transformation" because everything we're doing and everything going on is not going to be the change agent without a transformation, first inside of us, and then a transformation of society so that individually and collectively we will be experiencing the gospel of Jesus Christ in new ways.

Recently, I heard an interview with [Brittany Packnett Cunningham](#) on MSNBC. Her words were eloquent pleas for justice. She spoke about how persistent and all-encompassing racism is in our country and about the murders and the protests and the political rancor that fuels it. She acknowledged racism's strong, unrelenting hold on this nation, a hold that is virtually impossible to break. And she said something I have said for a long time, "Racism cannot be reformed. It must be [transformed](#)."

To me that means a transformation of the heart and soul that compels each of us to lament, to comfort, to speak truth in government's halls of power, to stand openly against any form of racial injustice.

So I offer this study of *Transforming Injustice!* beginning with the first watercolor in the series. I know that many of us were in deep lament after the murder of George Floyd, wondering what we could do to make a difference. Recently, I was in an identity caucusing meeting with four experienced racism advocates. The experience changed me in very real ways. I realized that there *really is* something we can do, actually several things we can do:

As a start, we can maintain our passion about transforming racial injustice by:

1. staying focused on the systemic racism we encounter every day;
2. owning the many ways we experience White privilege; and (with our black and brown brothers and sisters);
3. keeping our eyes on the prize;
4. making sure we continually recognize what the “prize” looks like.



Play Introductory Video.



Show Watercolor Painting: (Larger image at end of document.)

Try to put yourself inside this scene. Maybe imagine yourself nearby when it happened, close enough to see and hear.

Watercolor #1 in the *Transforming Injustice!* Series

“I Can’t Breathe!”

The art is foreboding and heavy, depicting the murder of George Floyd. In the midst of the darkness of the painting, a tree spreads its branches. The verdant green of the leaves reach across the darkness as if to say,

“Hate and violence will not prevail over all that’s just!”

George Floyd pleaded as police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck and pinned him to the ground on a Minneapolis street until he died. His death sparked protests in cities all over the world.

The New York Times reconstructed the death of George Floyd from security footage, witness videos and official documents. On May 25, 2020, The Times

created a video entitled “8 Minutes and 46 Seconds: How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody,” which was published on June 4, 2020.

This painting is based on a frame from that chilling video.

Floyd’s desperate, final cries of “I can’t breathe” are not only the same words uttered by Eric Garner as he was being choked by police officers in New York in 2014, but also by Jimmy Mubenga who in 2010 died on a plane on a Heathrow runway while being restrained by three immigration officers.

For all of us, it was hard to breathe while watching the video of George Floyd unable to breathe, calling out to his mother.

It is hard to breathe when we have seen the stark reality of racial injustice.



Questions for Discussion:

The questions I hope we can talk about are not:

- How did such a thing happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Who bears responsibility for it?
- What will the public response be?
- What should we do about the problem of violence perpetrated by law enforcement?

All of those questions are *analyzing* injustice, when what we really want to do is *transform* it! Transforming injustice is something completely different — a different lens from which to view racial injustice, white privilege and injustice against *any* person or thing. Transformation won’t start by asking any of those analytical questions.



Draw attention to the watercolor painting:

Sit with this image for a few more minutes.

Transformation is not asking you to figure out — to analyze — why this happened or what needs to be done about it.



Put up “Who Are You?” (Below / larger image at end of document)



Guided Discussion:

Transformation might instead ask you something like this:

Who are *you* inside or nearby this terrible scene?

Who are you inside or nearby this terrible scene?

The perpetrator

The bystander

The mourner

The activist

The advocate

The comforter

Other_____



Discuss: Who were you in this scene?

Discussion . . .



Put up “Lament” Image: (full image at end of lesson)



Meditation:



Lament may well be the beginning of transforming injustice.

Spend a moment lamenting the unjust, violent deaths of our brothers and sisters.

George Floyd could not breathe as he was being murdered. Meditate on the times when danger, pain

or suffering caused you to feel as if you could not breathe.

In what ways did you experience suffering of the soul?

Could your soul's suffering move you to deeper concern for those harmed by racial injustice?

Can you acknowledge any complacency in yourself, even refusing God's call to work for justice?



Reading of Scripture:

Jesus rebuked this in the Pharisees:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin.

*But you have neglected the more important matters of the law —
justice, mercy and faithfulness.”*

(Matthew 23:23 NRSV)



Prayer of Lament:

*O God, who created each of us in your image,
comfort us in our own times of suffering.*

*When deep pain causes us to cry out, “I can’t breathe,”
God, give us hearts that lament the sufferings of those who are oppressed.*

*Infuse us with Spirit breath,
that we might rise and stand firmly against injustice.*

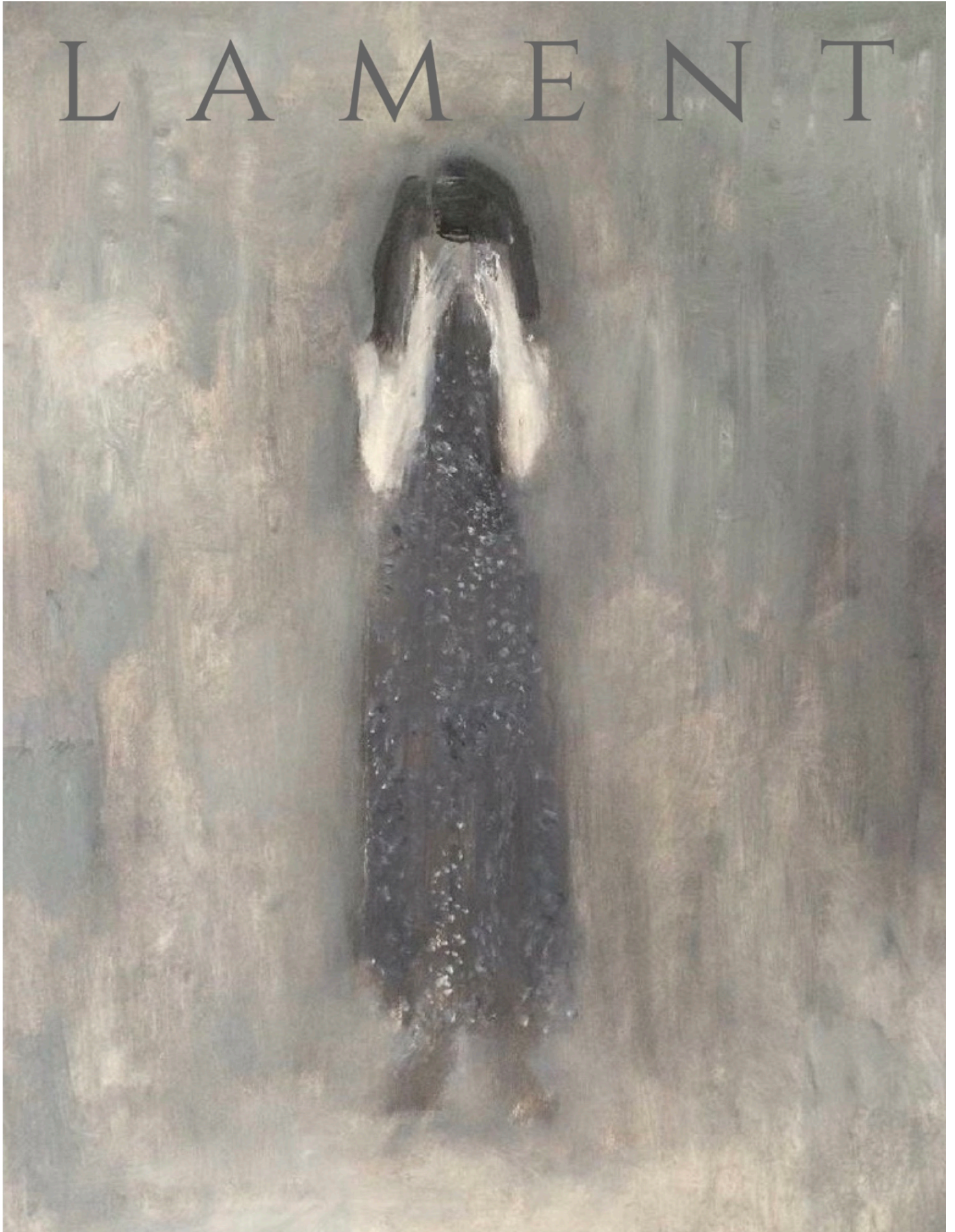
*May our soul’s lament stir us to transform injustice,
in every place, for every person, whenever racism threatens,
for this is your will and our holy mission. Amen.*



Resources: (Images may be enlarged by color photocopying.)



L A M E N T





“Transforming Injustice!” A Watercolor Series
Watercolor #1: “I Can’t Breathe!”

Who are you inside or nearby this terrible scene?

The perpetrator

The bystander

The mourner

The activist

The advocate

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Other_____

