

Voices: Parenting a young Black male

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Two Dallas-area dads provide a glimpse into their concerns for their sons and how they are building relationships between them and law enforcement. Read the companion article [here](#).

Fathering a young Black male in America is one of the most rewarding yet challenging things to do in life. My father and my hero Oza Jones Sr. made it look so effortless. Now, as a father of young Black men myself, it is no secret our nation is dealing with personal tragedy amidst a pandemic, political turmoil and poor policing.

I remember watching and hearing about the shootings and killings of many young Black men—such as Mike Brown, Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, George Floyd, Botham Jean, Ahmaud Arbery and Jordan Edwards, just to name a few—as well as young Black women—such as Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson and others.

But the killing of Daunte Wright. Though I was hurt to the core when hearing of the other killings, this one felt different. As tears streamed down my face while watching the news, something felt very different this time.

Then it hit me. The reason the killing of Daunte Wright felt different was because my own son was much younger when the other killings occurred. But this time, I thought to myself, “In just three years, my son will be the same age as Daunte was when he was killed!”

Twenty-year-old Daunte’s life was cut short due to another senseless murder by poor policing.

What Black parents teach their children

I thought to myself, “My son will graduate from high school in just one year, and he will be an adult.” All I have to depend on is what my wife and I have taught him.

We have taught him the check points when getting pulled over. Always respond with: “Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, ma’am. No, ma’am.” Keep your driver’s license and insurance card on the dashboard at all times. Keep your hands in plain sight on the steering wheel, and make absolutely no sudden moves. Finally, pray things go smoothly.

My relationship with police

I also understand a police officer’s mental check points during a routine traffic stop. My father was a police officer in the U.S. Air Force for nearly 30 years. I saw a gun, badge and police car every single day and had the privilege of riding in the front seat of the police car with my dad.

I remember hearing my mother praying in her room when my dad worked night shifts. My friends also were children of police officers. I am very familiar with the life of a police officer.

I am not insensitive to police officers. Quite the opposite, I love police officers. But that does not change the fact something is severely wrong with policing today.

It does not change the fact I fear for my son’s life as it relates to local police. A father should not fear his son’s dealings with police, when the job of an officer is to serve and protect. Unfortunately, this is the fear of nearly every African American parent.

One of the greatest fears of a parent, in general, is having to bury a child. But when it comes to the killings of young Black men, many parents have experienced this nightmare.

Be involved in change

We as believers must be proactive and not reactive when it comes to the issue of policing. At some point, we must become the change we want to see.

I wanted to be proactive. So, in 2013, I started a program at the YMCA called “Mid-Night Basketball.” I created this program to bring together urban students, local police officers and city leaders to do life together.

For 11 weeks every summer, students and police officers play basketball and interact with each other to build trust and unity in our city. I have walked my son through every step of this program, so one day he could make changes in his areas of influence.

We must create spaces to lament, learn, listen, leverage and love one another. We must be ambassadors in our communities to show love and share Christ.

Our Black sons

My son has a strong love for Jesus and the word of God. He recruits his peers to join Fellowship of Christian Athletes at his school and plays on the basketball team. He is ranked No. 2 in his class of nearly 900 students at South Grand Prairie High School. He will graduate high school with his associate’s degree and plans to study engineering and law.

My son works more than 20 hours a week at Wendy’s and has been saving money to buy his first car on his own. He also gives leadership to his four

siblings and loves to see them excel.

We are so proud of our son. There is no reason we should fear for his life, but we do.

Dear America, my son should not be viewed as a threat because of the color of his skin. Let our young Black men live.

Oza Jones Jr. is a gifted communicator of the gospel with extensive outreach, pastoral and community involvement. He serves as the director of African American Ministries for Texas Baptists and is the founder of Grand Prairie Police and Clergy Coalition.