



A Special Juneteenth Message from Dee Dee Mayer



Human Resources

A large graphic of the Juneteenth flag, which consists of three horizontal stripes of red, black, and green. The word "JUNETEENTH" is written in gold, serif, all-caps letters across the black stripe, with a gold horizontal line underneath the text.

JUNETEENTH

When I was asked to write this devotional, I prayed. I then reflected on my experiences and reviewed articles, podcasts, movies, and documentaries, like *Juneteenth Faith and Freedom* (which was screened on campus last year), to gain more context for this important national holiday.

On June 19th, 1865, two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, freedom finally reached Galveston, Texas. Union troops arrived and announced that the Civil War had ended and that all enslaved people were free. That day became known as Juneteenth. We celebrate this day because it commemorates the end of chattel slavery in America. Despite Juneteenth, freedom did not come instantaneously. For many, the promise of freedom was met with resistance, delay, and uncertainty.

Juneteenth, now recognized as a national holiday, is a moment to pause and remember not only the declaration of freedom, but also the long, painful road toward it, and we are still on this road. Juneteenth invites us to reflect on how injustice can persist even after laws change and how easily people can hold onto power and control, even when reality dictates otherwise.

In our RelateStrong workshop at the Boone Center for the Family, we teach the importance of human dignity and worth, that all people are born with inherent worth and value. This is because Genesis 1 teaches all humankind are made in the image of God. Therefore, all humankind are worthy of honor and respect. And yet, history shows us all humankind have not experienced this biblical truth. Juneteenth celebrates an end to slavery; but it is a sobering reminder of the devastating multi-faceted impacts of slavery. It should remind us how deeply our world suffers when we fail to see and honor the Imago Dei in everyone.

Juneteenth calls us to remember the resilience, dignity, and enduring faith of Black Americans who waited, hoped, and persisted through generations of injustice. Coretta Scott King communicated the importance of sustained diligence in these efforts when she said, "Struggle is a neverending process. Freedom is never really won; you earn it and win it in every generation." The Bible consistently reminds us that God sees, hears, and draws near to the oppressed. Our God is a God of truth and justice. And the freedom we find in Christ isn't just for us; it calls us to remember, walk humbly, listen deeply, and act justly for the sake of our neighbors and ourselves.

Today, as we celebrate Juneteenth, let us honor its legacy by remembering the past, recognizing the present, and recommitting ourselves to the daily work of truth and justice—in our hearts, our communities, and our world.

I reached out to some friends and colleagues to learn more about how we might honor the celebration of Juneteenth. J. Goosby Smith, Vice President of Community Belonging, and Rudy Hagood, Associate Director of Student Ministries, offered some suggestions:

- Celebrate the contributions of Black authors, scientists, researchers, doctors, teachers, speakers, pastors, artists, and leaders.
- Watch documentaries, such as [*Juneteenth: Faith and Freedom*](#) to further understand the significance of Juneteenth as Emancipation Day for Black Americans.
- Take time to reflect deeply and purposefully on Romans 12:15—"Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." Meditate on what it means to rejoice with someone when you might be mourning, or mourn with someone when you might be rejoicing. Meditate on the juxtaposition of freedom and independence considering the distinctions in larger systems and in the impact of both freedom and independence on daily life.
- Visit a museum and learn about the humanity and contributions of the African diaspora.

- Spend time in communities with people who don't look like you... and interact with the people you meet.

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