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# Race Matters: the Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

RACE MATTERS: THE GOSPEL, RACIAL RECONCILIATION, AND THE CHURCH



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY/DOCTOR OF LEADERSHIP  
PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

TERRY CRIST

PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

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## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

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the Evaluation Committee on March 9, 2023  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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## Dedication

Forty years ago, as a seventeen-year-old pastor's kid, I enrolled in a small denominational college. While there, I met and married my wife, forged a couple of deep friendships, and began an academic trajectory of studying at unaccredited colleges. Over the years, despite earning graduate degrees, a lingering feeling of unfulfillment regarding my academic achievements persisted. I will leave it to others to determine whether that was an innate desire for validation or recognition. However, at age fifty, I began another academic journey that resulted in accredited degrees and, ultimately, this dissertation. That journey was not made without the support of many people, and it came at a cost to other pursuits, but it was a worthwhile endeavor. This work is dedicated to all who have contributed to my spiritual formation and understanding of God's mission in the world, accredited or otherwise.

## Acknowledgments

I am profoundly grateful to the numerous individuals who have offered their support throughout my academic journey. The assistance from Hillsong Church's global staff and team, as well as the City of Grace staff, has been indispensable to my research endeavors. This work was driven by my aspiration to serve these communities and the church more effectively.

I must specifically recognize the unwavering support and inspiration from my wife, Judith, who has been my partner in every aspect of my life. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to Dr. Leonard Sweet, who has played a significant role in shaping my academic pursuits and molding my perspective on the world and the Word. I also appreciate Dr. Gregg Borror's guidance and wisdom during my tenure in the doctoral program.

I honor those pastors across the nation who have made contributions to the development of multiethnic churches under the most challenging of circumstances. Furthermore, I must acknowledge the priceless camaraderie and support of my close friends, Scott Jones, Jeremy Deweerdt, and Donna Pisani, who have provided consistent comfort and encouragement throughout my academic journey. We embarked on a master's program as mere acquaintances and emerged as "the four horsemen of the apocalypse." Over the past five years, we have shared laughter, tears, prayers, and each other's triumphs and tribulations. Our academic journey together may be over, but we have a lifetime of friendship ahead.

.

## Epigraph

"The responsibility for promoting racial healing rests with all Americans, but especially with the Christian Church; and especially with that segment of the Christian Church in which Pentecost is the essential metaphor that defines its vision." Ithiel Clemmons

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# Glossary

"The beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms."

—Socrates

**BIPOC.** BIPOC is an acronym for "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color." It is used to describe individuals who identify as non-white and non-Indigenous. The term is intended to be inclusive of many different identities, cultures, and experiences. The term is often used in discussions related to race and racism.

**Black.** The term "Black" can have different meanings in different contexts. Generally, it is used to describe people of African descent. It has also been used historically to describe people belonging to certain ethnic groups, such as Black Americans, Black Canadians, and people from the African diaspora. I have capitalized Black as a descriptor though leaving white in lowercase. This is in keeping with leading publications, including the Columbia Journalism Review.

**Colorblind.** Racial colorblindness refers to the idea that race should not be noticed or acknowledged in social interactions. This perspective is often used as an argument against diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and is based on the belief that not acknowledging race will create a more fair and just society. However, many scholars and activists argue that racial colorblindness is problematic because it ignores the ongoing effects of historical and structural racism and fails to address how race shapes the experiences and opportunities of people of color.

**Conscious Bias.** Conscious bias refers to the intentional or deliberate attitudes, stereotypes, or prejudices that a person holds about a particular group of people.

**Diversity.** Racial diversity refers to a variety of different racial or ethnic groups that make up a population or community. This can include differences in skin colors, cultural backgrounds, and experiences.

**Ethnicity.** Ethnicity refers to a person's cultural identity and heritage, which can include factors such as language, national origin, customs, and traditions. Ethnicity is different from race, which is a social construct designed to describe a person's physical features.

**Hamartiology.** Hamartiology is the study of the biblical doctrine of sin. It is a branch of theology that examines the nature of sin, its origin, effects, and the biblical solutions to it. Hamartiology is concerned with understanding the biblical teaching on why and how humans sin, the various forms that sin can take, and the consequences of sin for individuals and the world.

**Hegemony.** Hegemony refers to the cultural, ideological, or social influence that one group exerts over others. Hegemony is characterized by the ability of one group to shape the beliefs, values, and actions of other groups, often without the use of coercion. It can manifest in various ways, such as in the dominant culture and norms that shape society, the disproportionate distribution of resources and opportunities, or the portrayal of certain groups in the media.

**Implicit Bias.** Implicit bias refers to the unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that can influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions towards certain groups of people. These biases often operate outside of an individual's awareness or conscious control and can have a significant impact on decision-making and behavior.

**Systemic Racism.** Systemic racism refers to the ways in which racial bias is embedded in the policies, procedures, and systems of organizations such as the government, education, and criminal justice. This form of racism may not be deliberate, but it stems from the historical patterns of discrimination and prejudice that have shaped the evolution and upkeep of these institutions.

**Multiethnic Church.** A multiethnic church is a congregation made up of people from a diverse range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. They strive to create an inclusive and welcoming environment, where people from different backgrounds can come together to learn from one another and build relationships across racial and ethnic lines. They often focus on addressing issues of race, racism, and reconciliation.

**Pentecostalism.** Pentecostalism is a religious movement that is characterized by an emphasis on the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2. Pentecostals are known for their enthusiastic worship services, which often include speaking in tongues, the display of spiritual gifts, charismatic preaching, and prayers for the sick. The movement has grown rapidly in recent years and has become one of the largest and most diverse branches of Christianity.

**Race.** Race refers to a classification of people based on physical characteristics such as skin color, eye shape, and hair texture. The concept of race has been used throughout history to justify social and political hierarchies, but it has been widely discredited as a scientific concept by the scientific community. It is now understood that race is a social construct, rather than a biological reality, and that all humans belong to the same species.

**Racial Inclusion.** Racial inclusion refers to the active efforts to foster an environment in which people of all races feel valued, respected, and included. This can include policies, practices, and actions that promote inclusion within organizations, institutions, and communities. Overall, racial inclusion is about creating a sense of belonging for people from all racial backgrounds, and actively working to address and eliminate the barriers that prevent that belonging.

**Racial Reconciliation.** Racial reconciliation refers to the process of addressing and overcoming the lingering effects of racism, discrimination, and prejudice by promoting understanding, forgiveness, equality, inclusion, and equity. It involves acknowledging the harm caused by past and present discrimination and working towards creating a more just and equitable society. Racial reconciliation is an ongoing process that requires a commitment from individuals, organizations, and society as a whole.

**Racism.** Racism is the belief that some races are inherently superior or inferior to others, and that this conviction is utilized to condone discrimination, bias, and mistreatment of individuals based on

their race. Racism manifests in various ways, including individual acts of discrimination, as well as systemic and institutional practices that promote unequal treatment.

## Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

## Abstract

The modern Pentecostal movement has been marred by racial incongruence and division. Defying the segregationist laws of the day, the earliest revivals of the twentieth century were racially integrated, reflecting a biblical vision for the oneness of a new humanity in Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. And yet, the unity born from these early revivals proved insufficient to sustain racial equity within the movements. A century later, Pentecostal (and Charismatic) churches fail to reflect racial diversity at the highest levels of authority, direction setting, and power-sharing. The lack of clarity surrounding key theological concepts such as the *imago Dei*, our new humanity in Christ, the significance of Pentecost, and the mission of the church as an instrument of reconciliation are contributing factors to this issue. Further, this legacy of inequity is rooted in the lack of sociological imagination.

This dissertation examines the pathway to creating racially equitable churches, denominations, and movements. The central question of the research is, "Why do Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation but often fail to reflect minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction setting, and decision-making in their churches?" This question expands over time to encompass related questions and unexpected conclusions.

The research was initiated within the Hillsong Phoenix community and expanded globally through Hillsong Church. During the concluding stages of my study, my leadership context changed; I now serve the same congregation under the name City of Grace.

The outcome of this doctoral project is a biblically based racial reconciliation curriculum consisting of twenty-two online sessions and a corresponding small group study. The curriculum, titled "Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church," is designed to transform racialized mindsets by delivering a biblical framework for diversity, equity, and inclusion with an emphasis on Pentecostal distinctives.

## Introduction

Researchers, like archeologists, sociologists, and theologians, are responsible for identifying the context in which their work has been conducted and documenting it for those who study their findings. My research began in the immediate aftermath of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Eric Garner, and George Floyd. These murders were prominently featured in the global news as video footage of their deaths was widely circulated on social media platforms leading to a national wave of peaceful protests and civil unrest. Three words, "I can't breathe," provoked the conscience of a nation, and we bore witness to the unresolved business of the civil rights movement at a level not seen in a generation. And for many white millennials, this was their first exposure to the prolific and systemic nature of racial injustice.

In the midst of this tsunami of grief, trauma, and public outrage, another story began to emerge. There were minority leaders within our own global church who felt marginalized. Many of these leaders had served our congregations faithfully but had been overlooked for advancement and promotion within our church. On the surface, our global community appeared to be the model for racial diversity. We had positioned ourselves as such, using our international platform, conferences, marketing materials, and television programs to showcase the beauty of a multicultural congregation where everyone was included. However, the deeper reality was that we failed to promote minority leaders into the highest levels of power sharing for many of the reasons uncovered in this research.

Following the revelations of inequity within our own congregation, and as a response to the increasing demand for just pathways to racial equity within our leadership community, the global senior pastor created a global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. This DEI Committee was comprised of lead pastors, resident theologians, and international experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion on four continents. As a secondary, and yet equally important measure, committees were also established by several lead pastors in their respective countries. I was assigned to the global committee and tasked with researching and writing the biblical framework for our emerging diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy.

My task on the committee was situated in an even broader context. As a fifth-generation pastor with roots in the soil of classical Pentecostalism, I have spent the past four decades planting and pastoring multiethnic churches. This is born of a deep conviction that the church is a new humanity formed and completed in Christ and, as such, is tasked with the responsibility of reconciling others to God and to each other. From my earliest days in ministry, I have endeavored to build fully integrated churches engaged in sharing power at the highest levels of decision-making. While this hasn't always been easy, and the evidence of my successes and failures is a matter of public record, my passion for establishing multiethnic churches is integral to my calling to pastoral ministry.

I embarked on this journey intending to interrogate my own denominational history and ended up examining my own soul. Along the way, I realized that both my personal progress and my denomination's efforts to extend equity to racial minorities were insufficient. Despite being given

the biblical example of an ethnically integrated church, cultural, social, and theological challenges have impeded our efforts toward this outcome.

The root causes of racial inequity in ecclesiastical structures are complex and interwoven with the history of race relations, power dynamics, implicit biases, a lack of cultural awareness, and the absence of sociological imagination in Christian leaders. This is not unique to Pentecostals. Although the global church embraces the ideal of a fully integrated, equal, and just heavenly Kingdom, it continues to be shaped by the cultural forces of the earthly kingdoms it dwells in.

To address these root causes, I recommended several strategies for my global church to adopt. Firstly, I suggested that we need to acknowledge the historical legacy of racism and its ongoing impact on the church and society. This requires us to engage in honest and transparent conversations about race, power, and privilege, and to develop a shared understanding of the systemic nature of racial injustice.

Secondly, I recommended that we need to cultivate a culture intolerant of racism, where every person in our church is biblically equipped to recognize and challenge racism in all its forms. This requires us to provide training and resources to help people understand the dynamics of race and racism and to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to be effective allies.

Finally, I recommended that we need to actively work to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in our church. This requires us to be intentional about creating an inclusive culture and to take concrete steps to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and lead. This involved implementing policies and practices that ensure diversity at all levels of our church, from our volunteers to our staff.

## Discover

I began this research as the lead pastor of Hillsong Phoenix, a multisite megachurch with campuses in Arizona and Nevada, and as the North American Director of the Hillsong Leadership Network. During the final stage of my study, the context for leadership changed. Nevertheless, I continue to serve and lead the same congregation under a new name, City of Grace.

The thesis statement for my research was: “Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making.” Although I set out to research racial dynamics in Pentecostal movements, I quickly realized that the sharp distinctions between Pentecostals and those who attend non-denominational churches have been blurred. The characteristics that once made Pentecostals unique within evangelicalism have changed, and fewer adherents identify by the descriptor. Just as the modern worship movement has universalized the worship experience, many Pentecostals have adopted a neutral way of describing their religious affiliation and identity.

As my study deepened, I narrowed my focus to large, multiethnic, multisite, Pentecostal (and Charismatic) churches. The hypothesis was that large churches have the resources needed to employ racially diverse staff at the highest levels of decision-making within their organizations.

Further, the racial composition of a church staff often reflects the demographics within the church since leaders are developed from within the church communities. However, the scope of my research was restricted by the slower pace at which predominantly non-white churches resumed onsite worship services following the covid-19 pandemic. Many large churches led by non-white pastors are in the early stages of returning to in-person worship as this dissertation is being written.

To explore my thesis further, I convened a racially and generationally diverse group of community-based stakeholders in a Discover and Design Workshop. Each participant had personal experiences with discrimination, prejudice, and racism, along with a deeply held commitment to the biblical ideal of racial reconciliation. The participants included a professional marriage counselor, a consumer credit manager, a trauma-informed specialist, a community college faculty member, a paralegal, an insurance executive, and a college principal. The workshop was conducted over three hours, all stakeholders were present in the room, and it consisted of three exercises.

In the first exercise, the stakeholders looked at the key issues surrounding my research, including the biblical and sociological frame, the cultural forces in favor or opposition, and whether any practical outcome might be realized from the continued research.

The second exercise was based on collaborative visualization. In this exercise, the stakeholders created an empathy map exploring the question: "If this issue is effectively addressed and a solution is found, what would the audience (non-whites) think, feel, say, or do that is different than what they presently think, feel, say, and do?"

In the third exercise, the stakeholders focused on the root causes. The group then compiled the outcomes of the exercises into the following Discovery Statement:

Considering 'non-whites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean this group of individuals could lead with confidence, be accepted, and be reconciled to one another and to God.

The Design Workshop was complemented by a series of in-depth interviews with prominent experts in the fields of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The participants comprised of a Senior Diversity and Inclusion Specialist from the United Nations, a Policy, Strategy, and Design Advisor in the UK Home Office, a young theologian in a developing country, a DEI consultant in a reputable NYC firm, and a lead pastor who acts as a racial diversity advisor for an executive placement firm. These experts showed strong support for biblical and multicultural education as a means to achieve racially integrated teams, exploring several approaches to implementation. Through prayerful consideration, engaging discussions, and strategic exercises detailed in the appendices, three recommendations were reached.

The analysis of data gathered through the Discovery Workshop and personal interviews yielded a crucial insight: fear plays a pivotal role in perpetuating conscious and unconscious biases, prejudice, discrimination, racism, and white supremacy, thus hindering the advancement of



minority groups into leadership positions in predominantly white congregations. Fear contributes to the formation of blind spots in the perception of white leaders, which prevents them from fully comprehending the value and impact of minority contributions. This fear also causes white congregants to abandon integration efforts and to resist new minority leaders, who are perceived as potential threats to the financial stability of the church. Moreover, fear prompts minorities to accept the status quo instead of pushing for change and exercising their agency. Whether examining the phenomenon of the "bamboo ceiling," "white flight," or majority suppression, the underlying factor is fear.

## Design

The research for the project design was undertaken through a Design Workshop that involved the participation of community stakeholders and professionals specializing in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The objective was to identify a feasible solution to address the issue of a lack of opportunities for minority leadership in religious organizations.

A mentorship program for aspiring pastoral leaders was identified as a promising prototype. The research involved a survey of ten Generation Z Bible College students, who were asked to contribute to the development of a training course that would encompass biblical principles of racial diversity, inclusion, and equity. Additionally, a one-year program schedule was proposed, along with the creation of a written "racial reconciliation covenant" to ensure the participants' commitment to applying the learned principles in their future pastoral leadership.<sup>1</sup>

A partnership model for churches was identified as another promising prototype. This research involved a survey of six pastors, who were asked to share their views on topics such as racial sensitivity, leadership diversity, and their willingness to educate their congregations on racial reconciliation and minority promotion efforts. A twenty-question survey was administered to the participants.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, a film series was identified as a potential solution to educate churches on the biblical and sociological basis of racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and the historical role of Pentecostal movements in promoting racial reconciliation. This research involved a survey of three experts, who were asked to assess the potential of changing mindsets through the virtual delivery of biblical content, primarily through film and television.<sup>3</sup>

At the outset of my research, a crucial question came to the forefront, broadening the scope of my inquiry: "Is biblical education sufficient in and of itself to address and alleviate the issue of racial inequality in the leadership structures of religious institutions, or is it necessary to adopt a more comprehensive approach to transform racialized perspectives?" The data suggests that biblical education alone is insufficient in changing racialized perspectives, unless it is contextualized in culture, time, and place. Transformation in individuals and communities occurs when biblical teaching is combined with a context-sensitive approach that addresses the setting in which the inequity exists. This requires more than biblical information and a missiological conviction; it necessitates a situational awareness of the sociological dynamics at work within a community.

To further explore this question, I convened a second focus group comprised of six leading experts in the field of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), who had experience working across multiple sectors including business, non-profits, government, and religion. Their expertise spanned four continents and included individuals occupying key positions of influence, such as at the United Nations and the UK Home Office. These experts concurred that a synthesis of biblical and multicultural education is the most effective means of creating racially integrated congregations and leadership teams.

The most viable prototype agreed on was a synthesis of the first and third prototypes.

As my research evolved, so did my understanding of the problem and the corresponding solution. Initially, I believed that the leadership of large religious institutions held the primary power to bring about change. However, my research led me to conclude that the next generation of leaders, at the grassroots level, represent the true catalyst for change. Considering this, I intend to achieve my objective of encouraging racial diversity, inclusion, and equity in churches, denominations, and movements, through the virtual delivery of biblical teachings and sociological training materials specifically tailored for the next generation of leaders. Hence, my final project is an online educational series that will impart a biblical and sociological framework for racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and the historical significance of racial reconciliation efforts within the Pentecostal tradition.

## Delivery

The conclusion of my research posits that the emerging generations of Generation Z and Alpha possess the potential to bring about change regarding racial inequities within institutions. Being raised in a globally connected society, these emerging generations possess an innate sensitivity to the diversity of the world and an appreciation for the agency of all individuals. Although these emerging generations may exhibit confirmation biases, their perspectives are less entrenched than those of previous generations and are more amenable to challenge from those advocating for a just and equitable society.

The research findings suggest that these emerging generations value both virtual and personal connections. As digital natives, they are inclined to learn in an autonomous fashion using virtual delivery systems, yet they also yearn for personal interactions and the sense of community provided by physical interactions. Additionally, this demographic seeks ongoing improvement, feedback, and highly interactive relationships with mentors who have demonstrated expertise in their respective fields. Based on these findings, the final project presents a blended program that encompasses online instruction and a study guide intended for use in small group settings.

The Discover, Design, and Deliver process has resulted in a collaboration with a preeminent, faith-based online educational organization to film, produce, and host the *Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church* course. This comprehensive program includes 21 instructional sessions that are the basis for a theology of racial reconciliation, a bonus session

specifically tailored to church staff and teams on constructing and leading multicultural churches, two thought-provoking interviews with a non-white millennial pastor who sheds light on promoting equity among minority leaders, a complementary small group study guide aimed at fostering spiritual growth, and a survey that assesses the effectiveness of the course and the engagement of its participants.

The target audience encompasses individuals who are seeking a biblical and sociological understanding of racial division and the foundation for reconciliation, small groups seeking to stimulate conversations among their members, aspiring leaders who envision building multicultural churches, and senior leaders striving to establish multiethnic teams within Pentecostal churches and movements.

This course will be marketed on the website and social media platforms of the online educational organization, as well as my church and personal social media outlets. The learning organization's proprietary web analytics will provide demographic information about those who access the digital page, while subscriber data will offer further insights into those who enroll in the course, their intended use, level of engagement with the content, and recommendations for future course modules.

## **Summative Reflection**

Racial inequity in the church is a complex and persistent problem that has far-reaching impacts on individuals, communities, and society at large. The root causes of this issue are intricately interwoven with the historical context of race relations, power dynamics, conscious and unconscious biases, and cultural awareness. Despite the church's ecclesiology that embraces the ideal of a fully integrated and just heavenly Kingdom, it continues to be shaped by the cultural forces of the earthly kingdoms in which it dwells. This means that homogeneous congregations must undertake a deliberate and diligent effort to integrate and include diverse perspectives and experiences within their leadership hierarchies. The negotiation of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity within the broader organizational framework must be done in a context-sensitive manner that acknowledges the underlying sociological dynamics of the society in which the church operates.

Transformative change towards racial equity cannot be achieved through biblical exposition alone. It requires a commitment to situate the application of scripture within the specific context in which racial inequity is experienced. This requires a deep understanding of the sociological dynamics at work, an awareness of power structures, and an openness to engage in ongoing dialogue and reflection. Only when biblical instruction is combined with a context-sensitive approach, can true transformation take place. This transformation can lead to a more inclusive and equitable church community that serves as a model for broader society and has the potential to bring about transformative change on a larger scale.

# Doctoral Project

## Introduction

*Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church* is a biblically based racial reconciliation course offered as online teaching and a corresponding small group curriculum based on a dynamic web platform. This course is designed to transform racialized mindsets by establishing a biblical framework for racial diversity, equity, and inclusion in ecclesiastical organizations, with an emphasis on Pentecostal distinctives. The course has been filmed and produced by a faith-based learning organization and offered on a subscription basis.

## Presentation of Project

The *Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church* project includes: twenty-one teaching sessions on a theology of racial diversity, equity, inclusion, and reconciliation; a bonus session for church staff and teams on building and leading multiethnic churches; two interviews with a non-white millennial pastor on extending equity to minority leaders; a corresponding small group study guide to support spiritual formation; and a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the course and the engagement of the participants.

## Introduction

The root causes of racial inequity in ecclesiastical structures are complex and interwoven with the history of race relations, power dynamics, explicit and implicit biases, a lack of cultural awareness, and the absence of sociological imagination in Christian leaders. Although the global church embraces the ideal of a fully integrated, equal, and just heavenly Kingdom, it continues to be shaped by the cultural forces of the earthly kingdoms in which it is situated. As homogenous congregations undertake the challenging task of diversifying their leadership, issues surrounding race, ethnicity, and cultural identity must be dealt with in the context of the broader organizational landscape. This transition from racial exclusion to inclusion demands more than a mere theological explanation; it necessitates a nuanced understanding of the sociological dynamics present within society.

The present study is founded on three overarching principles: (1) biblical teachings, while indispensable for racial harmony, are inadequate in remedying racial disparities when detached from cultural context, (2) racial reconciliation must be fostered through mutuality within congregations, otherwise diversity will be unsustainable, and (3) the emerging generations, namely Generation Z and Alpha, possess the most significant potential to effect change in institutional racial imbalances, as they have been raised in a globalized world and possess an innate inclination to imagine a world in which all individuals are granted agency. This research delves into both the biblical foundations and the sociological underpinnings of equality, inclusiveness, and fairness within religious institutions, denominations, and movements.

Emerging generations value high-tech and high-touch connections. As digital natives, they prefer to learn at their own pace and in the comfort of their own space through virtual delivery systems. Conversely, they crave physical companionship and the emotional satisfaction of belonging to a community. Further, they are committed to continuous improvement, frequent feedback, and

highly interactive relationships with mentors who have proven themselves in any field. As a result of these findings, my final project presents a synthesized program incorporating online instruction and a study guide designed to be used in a small group setting.

## Artifact Description

The Table of Contents, Lesson Summaries, Digital Sessions, Website, Study Guide, and Instagram Social Media Marketing Posts are presented in this section.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

The table of contents is displayed in this section. Additionally, the course features two interviews with a prominent millennial pastor of a multiethnic church following the sessions.

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## SESSION SUMMARIES

The following summaries provide a comprehensive overview of the course material and represent the entire curriculum.

### Session 1: Introduction

As a dedicated advocate for racial reconciliation, my passion stems from my faith in Jesus, my understanding of the gospel message, and my personal encounters with racial tensions in society. This course represents an opportunity for me to delve into a comprehensive examination of the scriptural witness, from Genesis to Revelation, as I strive to address the complex questions surrounding race in our modern context. As a Christian, I believe that the scriptures represent an indispensable starting point for understanding any topic. As a minister, I then aim to examine how the church has expressed these teachings. Finally, as a student of culture, I am interested in exploring the practical application of these scriptures to the specific cultural context of our time. I believe it is imperative that, as the people of God, we engage in this conversation at this critical moment in history and not defer it to future generations or leave it exclusively in the hands of secular society.

As ambassadors of God's Kingdom, I am convinced that we are entrusted with the mandate of reconciliation in all its forms - encompassing not only individuals reconciling with God, but also the reconciliation of human beings with one another as it was intended to be. To me, racial reconciliation is not simply a social or cultural issue, but a gospel issue of the utmost importance that calls for our attention and action.

### Session 2: Creation and the *Imago Dei*

I am deeply concerned about the state of race relations in the world, particularly in light of recent events. Despite efforts to rectify past injustices and establish a more just society, much work remains to be done. In the ongoing discourse around racial reconciliation, it may seem as if there are two steadfast and conflicting viewpoints, and neither will be reconciled to the other. Nevertheless, as Christians, we are summoned to embrace a "third way" of approaching these issues, one that is anchored in the teachings of the gospel and the principles of God's Kingdom.

The story of creation is a crucial starting point in this conversation. Genesis reveals a beautiful diversity in God's world, with a wide range of plants, animals, landscapes, and human beings, each with unique features and characteristics. All human beings, regardless of ethnicity, are descendants of our same ancestors and thus equally bear the image of God. The command to multiply and fill the earth demonstrates God's intention for humanity to procreate and migrate - thus filling the earth with diversity. It is through this diversity that God delights, and the fullness of His image is reflected. As we examine the *imago Dei* considering the creation mandate and Pauline literature, we will see the basis for racial diversity as a divine intention.

### **Session 3: Race, Ethnicity, and Colorblindness**

To effectively engage in discussions concerning race, it is imperative that we have a common understanding of the terms being used. Ethnicity refers to the shared cultural, linguistic, and ancestral characteristics of a group of people, while race is a societal construct that categorizes individuals based on physical appearance. However, it is important to note that race has no scientific basis and is not a reflection of genetics. Understanding that race is a social construct and that we all equally bear the image of God might make us wonder why we shouldn't all just be "colorblind." The concept of being "colorblind" may seem reasonable, but it disregards God's intention for diversity and can also be seen as disrespectful and dehumanizing. Closing our eyes to color is shutting them to the very real atrocities that have happened in our history and injustices that still exist in our world. Instead of trying to be blind to color, we should see, honor, and celebrate what makes each of our different ethnicities uniquely beautiful. We are called to live with eyes wide open to racial injustice so that we can fight it everywhere we see it.

### **Session 4: Deconstructing Misconceptions in Genesis (part 1)**

Throughout much of the annals of Christianity, misinterpretations of scripture have been utilized to justify racist ideologies and actions. A common misconception pertains to the Fall and its implications. Some proponents of this viewpoint argue that sins such as racism are only rooted in the individual, and cannot manifest in systemic, structural, or communal forms. However, the Fall demonstrates that sin operates at a systemic level from the outset. It engendered a power struggle within the first human system, that of marriage, resulting in a desire to exert mastery over others rather than to rule together as God's people. This pattern of power struggles, often based on differences such as ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, or social class, has continued to pervade all human systems. Scripture does not depict sin as solely individual and personal, but instead portrays it as affecting individuals, as well as systemic, structural, and communal realms. The divine imperative to dismantle systems of injustice and the calls for entire nations to repent, as seen throughout scripture, underscore the responsibility of the church to comprehend and tackle both individual and systemic, structural, and communal forms of racism.

### **Session 5: Deconstructing Misconceptions in Genesis (part 2)**

In the biblical narrative prior to God's choice of Abraham, four accounts have been distorted to justify racist ideologies and practices. Firstly, the notion that Cain's wife was of an inferior race and that there were separate "Adams and Eves" for each race is unsupported by scripture and completely undermines the concept of the unity of humanity descended from a single couple. Secondly, the story of the "sons of God" taking the "daughters of men" as wives has been perverted to suggest that interracial marriage is an abomination in the eyes of God, a notion that is not supported by the biblical text. Thirdly, the belief that the descendants of Canaan were destined to serve the Israelites as slaves, due to Ham's sin, ignores the historical context and the role of human agency in shaping events. Lastly, the notion that the division of people groups was a punishment for the sin at the Tower of Babel is a misinterpretation of scripture, as the command to procreate and migrate was given by God from the beginning and was aimed at fostering diversity, not



division. It is imperative for believers to approach scripture with proper interpretation and avoid manipulating the text to align with their preconceived biases.

### **Session 6: Racial Reconciliation and the Foreigner (part 1)**

In Genesis and Exodus, God's people were often foreigners and immigrants themselves. God chose Abraham's family to be His people, but God's plan wasn't about making any one people group or ethnic group more significant than any other. His intention was always to use Israel to bless the whole world. After God called Abraham, he lived as a sojourner for the rest of his life. He never owned his own land. He always lived as an immigrant among foreign people. Then, hundreds of years later, Abraham's descendants lived as foreigners in the land of Egypt. At first, they were treated well because of Joseph's status and power. But after many generations, a new Pharaoh arose who didn't know anything about Joseph and only saw the people of Israel as a threat. He enslaved them, oppressed them, and even committed genocide on their children. Pharaoh was able to treat them this way because he had dehumanized them. He didn't see them as part of his people, as fellow Egyptians, but as immigrants who had invaded his land. He saw them as "other," which can easily lead to "less than." Othering paves the way for dehumanizing people, which leads to committing all kinds of evil against them. As God's people, we have no justification for othering. We see people of every ethnicity as part of our one big human family, all equally made in the image of God.

### **Session 7: Racial Reconciliation and the Foreigner (part 2)**

The scriptures offer clear and abundant guidance regarding the appropriate treatment of foreigners residing within a community. When God rescued His people Israel from slavery in Egypt and brought them to their own land, He gave them His law, which guided them in what it looked like to be His people and reflect His character to the world. Among hundreds of other laws, God specifically commanded them not to mistreat the immigrants who may come to live among them as Pharaoh had oppressed them. They are even commanded to love the foreigner as themselves. God's law describes His own special love for the foreigner, along with three other categories of the most vulnerable people in their society - widows, orphans, and the poor. Once God had given them the law, the people went in to take over the land from the people groups who were living there in the Conquest. At first glance, this sounds like God is choosing one people group over all others, or even as if God Himself is committing genocide. But throughout the book of Joshua, we see God welcoming any foreigner who turns to Him in faith into His covenant family. And at the same time rejecting any Israelite who did not have faith in Him. The story of Scripture is not a story of God choosing one particular ethnic group over all others. It's the story of God creating a diverse Kingdom for Himself made up of people of faith from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

### **Session 8: The Prophets and Social Justice**

In recent years, we've heard a lot of talk in our churches about social justice, but the biblical idea of justice is not new. The call for justice has been a rallying call for the people of God throughout all of scripture, both Old and New Testaments, and all of Church History. In the Old Testament, the

role of a prophet was to remind God's people of the stipulations of His covenant, show them where they were breaking it, and call them to repent and turn back to Him. The prophets preached a lot of messages, but they all boil down to two main issues – idolatry and injustice, each of which relates to the two foundational laws, which encapsulate the rest of the law. Idolatry is not loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and injustice is not loving others as yourself. In Scripture, justice means giving someone what they are due – whether the negative side of punishing someone for a crime or the positive side of giving someone the human rights they deserve. The prophets' call for justice was to repair the inequities in their society which allowed the most vulnerable among them to be oppressed by others. To create a Kingdom in which all people are treated justly. Justice is at the very heart of the Law, what it looks like to be the people of God in the world. Our God is a God of justice, and He expects His people to act justly.

### **Session 9: The Ethnic Composition of the New Testament World (part 1)**

The Greco-Roman world at the time of Jesus's birth was an interesting mix of many different cultures all living together under one united empire. The Greeks had come before the Romans and when they conquered a new nation, they forced the local people to learn Greek and adopt Greek culture. When the Romans took over, they didn't want to change everything again, so they added Roman culture onto it and fused them together into Greco-Roman culture. Like every other nation in the Roman Empire, Israel had their own native Jewish culture, but also Greco-Roman culture too. The label "Greek" meant you had been "Hellenized" or conformed to Greek culture. "Barbarian" meant you did not learn Greek or adopt Greek culture but retained your own native language and customs. Being "Greek" wasn't really about your race or ethnicity but your culture. The line between Barbarian and Greek was mostly about education – educated people learned Greek while the uneducated didn't. Another distinction was between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jews were descendants of the Southern Kingdom of Israel or Judah, who considered themselves the pure line of God's people because they had the Davidic dynasty, Jerusalem, and the Temple. The Samaritans were descendants of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who had split off from Judah after the reign of King Solomon. Those Israelites also intermarried with many different nationalities of Gentiles who the King of Assyria had sent to live in their land when Assyria conquered them in 722 BC. The Jews had been exiled to Babylon in 586 BC but had come back 70 years later to rebuild Jerusalem and had not intermarried with other people groups. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be half-breeds and not really God's people. But Jesus didn't allow any of these cultural barriers or ethnic distinctions to dictate who was allowed to become a part of God's people. Anyone who had faith of any ethnicity, race, or culture was welcome to join the Kingdom.

### **Session 10: The Ethnic Composition of the New Testament World (part 2)**

The Jews hated the Samaritans because they were descendants of intermarriages between the northern tribes of Israel and at least five other Gentile nations. Scripture describes how God banned intermarriage between His people and the people of pagan nations. This was not due to ethnicity, race, or nationality, but rather because of faith. If Gentiles were willing to convert to the faith of the Jews, they could marry into the covenant family. Rahab the Canaanite was welcomed into God's

covenant people because of her faith, even when the rest of Jericho was destroyed. Ruth the Moabite married into the family of Israel and even became the great-grandmother of King David. Both of these women, along with Tamar and Bathsheba who were also Gentiles, appear in the lineage of Jesus. Scripture doesn't hide the fact that Gentiles were welcome to marry into the family of faith; it highlights it! God did not want His people marrying Gentiles who would pull them away from faith in Him (like Solomon's wives did), but He welcomed any Gentile of faith who wanted to marry into His people. Both the genealogy of Jesus and the story of the Gentile Magi coming to worship Him at His birth highlight that the Kingdom of God is open to all people of any nation, tribe, or tongue who come to Jesus in faith.

### **Session 11: Jesus and the Marginalized (part 1)**

The life and teachings of Jesus Christ fundamentally challenged the prevalent honor/shame culture of his time. Within this cultural context, there were strict norms and regulations dictating the social interactions that individuals were deemed "permissible" to engage in, such as eating, conducting business, marrying, touching, or even speaking with others. The status of honor was typically ascribed based on one's family background but could be influenced by one's actions or even events that befell an individual or their family.

However, Jesus defied these societal norms, engaging with individuals from all walks of life and disregarding the established hierarchies of honor. This is exemplified in the narrative of the woman at the well, a Samaritan of low honor who Jesus made a deliberate effort to engage with, engaging her in a profound and extensive theological discussion, and revealing himself as the Messiah to her. This encounter ultimately led to her becoming the first evangelist, converting not just herself but also her community, who were traditionally considered unacceptable for association by Jews.

Through these actions, Jesus shattered the conventional notions of honor, and dismantled the barriers that humans had erected between one another, effectively inviting all into the Kingdom of God. This serves as a reminder that in the eyes of the Lord, honor is not determined by societal constructs but by one's relationship with God.

### **Session 12: Jesus and the Marginalized (part 2)**

The ministry of Jesus Christ is replete with instances of His reaching out to those who were marginalized and deemed as outcasts by society. A striking example of this is recorded in Capernaum, where Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion, a figure who was considered both unclean due to his Gentile background and hated due to his association with the Roman oppression in Israel. Despite this, Jesus was moved by the centurion's profound love for his servant, one of the marginalized "least of these," and his remarkable faith. In fact, Jesus declared that He had not encountered such faith among any of God's people in Israel. Additionally, Jesus also commended the faith of a Canaanite woman, who, due to her ethnicity, was considered unclean and sin-ridden due to her daughter's demonic possession. Yet, Jesus engaged in a profound theological conversation with her, healed her daughter, and praised her faith. Another instance of Jesus reaching out to the marginalized was when He healed a Gentile man who was possessed by

numerous demons. Despite his uncleanness, mental instability, and violent tendencies, Jesus was not afraid to approach him. He cast out the demons and commissioned him as the first evangelist in Mark, and the individuals he reached out to were also Gentiles in that region. These instances demonstrate that entrance into the Kingdom of God is not determined by social status, honor, lineage, nationality, race, or any of the other human-made categories. Salvation is a gift of grace received through faith alone. This serves as a reminder for us, as followers of Jesus, to actively strive to break down barriers and reach out to those who are marginalized in our world.

### **Session 13: Diversity and the Church in Acts (part 1)**

The theological significance of diversity and unity within the church is evident in the book of Acts. Despite the fact that the early church in Jerusalem was comprised of individuals from an array of nations, they were able to maintain a remarkable degree of unity and cohesion. This is demonstrated through their shared experiences of prayer and communal action. The event of Pentecost, in which the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and enabled them to speak in various languages, serves as a powerful symbol of the unity that can be achieved despite differences in ethnicity, race, culture, and language. In a reversal of the division created by the Tower of Babel, God celebrated the diversity of His followers while unifying them through their shared faith. Despite the tendency for modern-day churches to remain segregated, the biblical narrative provides a hopeful vision for a unified church that transcends ethnic, racial, and cultural differences.

### **Session 14: Diversity in the Church in Acts (part 2)**

The early church, comprised of followers of Jesus who transcended barriers to bring unity, encountered challenges in maintaining this unity in the face of diversity. In the book of Acts, it is noted that despite its composition of individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, tensions soon arose between the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews. The Hellenistic Jews complained of discrimination perpetuated against them by the Hebraic Jews in the distribution of aid to widows. This initial division within the church along ethnic lines was in direct opposition to the message conveyed by the prophets.

However, what is noteworthy about this situation is the way the church leadership addressed the issue. Instead of ignoring the problem or attempting to resolve it through silencing the affected parties or dividing the church, the leadership took responsibility and acted collectively to find a solution. The church remained unified, and steps were taken to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future, including the inclusion of individuals from the oppressed group in leadership positions to ensure that their voices were heard, and their well-being protected. This is a clear and undeniable example of racial equity being extended to a marginalized group.

This serves as a powerful example for contemporary churches, particularly those in America, on the importance of working through conflict and promoting equality and equity within a diverse, multiethnic community of faith. The early church serves as a model of how to address challenges while remaining committed to preserving unity in diversity.

### **Session 15: Diversity and the Church in Acts (part 3)**

As the early Christian church faced persecution in Jerusalem and began to expand into the Roman Empire, an increasingly diverse array of individuals came to embrace the gospel. In Samaria, Philip the Evangelist challenged traditional notions of race, ethnicity, and religion through his preaching and conversions, such as the Samaritan sorcerer and the Ethiopian eunuch. Meanwhile, Peter and Paul's efforts brought the gospel to the far reaches of the Roman Empire, leading to a diversity of leadership within the church at Antioch, encompassing socio-economic and ethnic differences among Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews, Gentiles, and sub-Saharan Africans. These events culminated in the first church council, where leaders officially declared that Gentiles did not need to adopt Jewish customs to become part of the body of Christ, signaling a unified stance that there is no partiality in the Kingdom of God, regardless of race, ethnicity, heritage, or nationality. This pivotal moment in church history underlines the fundamental tenet that all individuals, regardless of their background, are equal in the eyes of Christ and equally part of His body.

### **Session 16: Race and the Modern Pentecostal Movement (part 1)**

The modern Pentecostal movement was born from an outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the early 20th century. The most noteworthy of these revivals took place in Los Angeles, California, in 1906 at Azusa Street. At the time, while slavery had officially been abolished in the United States, segregation laws still perpetuated racial divisions and people of color were denied equality. Los Angeles was rapidly expanding and was characterized by its diverse population. What was particularly remarkable about Azusa Street was not only the outpouring of the Spirit, but also its remarkable racial integration, with members of various ethnicities, including blacks and whites, worshiping together and equally participating in leadership. However, not all leaders in the Pentecostal movement approved of this integration, leading to divisions along racial and theological lines by 1914. Despite its initially diverse and unified nature, the Pentecostal movement eventually became as segregated as any other denomination. Azusa Street serves as a reminder that God desires a unified and diverse Church and that it requires the transformative power of the Holy Spirit to achieve this.

### **Session 17: Race and the Modern Pentecostal Movement (part 2)**

The Azusa Street revival of 1906 gave rise to two major Pentecostal denominations, the predominantly African American Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and the largely white Assemblies of God (AG). Despite attempts at reconciliation in the 1970s and 1980s, and the "Memphis Miracle" movement of the 1990s, racial segregation remains prevalent within the Pentecostal Church. Further, according to a 2015 study by Lifeway research, most worshipers prefer it that way: "Two-thirds of American churchgoers (67 percent) say their church has done enough to become racially

diverse. And less than half think their church should become more diverse.<sup>1</sup> However, individualistic approaches to racial reconciliation, which focus on personal relationships rather than systemic change, are inadequate in addressing the deep-rooted structures that perpetuate racial inequality. To achieve lasting and meaningful progress, the church must engage in difficult and honest dialogue that leads to transformative action. Waiting for the older generation to pass on or relying solely on prayer for change will not bring about the necessary change, but rather a concerted effort to make systemic and cultural shifts is required.

### **Session 18: Racial Reconciliation in the New Creation**

The reconciliation of humanity to God is a central tenet of the teachings of the apostle Paul. Through the transformative power of the gospel, individuals are reconciled with God and transformed into new beings. This reconciliation extends not only to humanity, but also to all of creation, which is being brought back into harmony with its Creator. As representatives of the Kingdom of God, it is our obligation to actively promote reconciliation in all its forms, including racial reconciliation. The cross, through its reconciling power, dissolves barriers and distinctions between individuals, including those based on race, uniting all believers in a single body. Paul asserts that in Christ, ethnic differentiation no longer holds any significance, and all followers are united as a single humanity. This mirrors God's original design in Creation, as all humans were created in His image and trace their ancestry to a common origin. The church, as a reflection of the Kingdom of God, is charged with fostering reconciliation, equality, and unity, promoting the flourishing of humanity in its diverse forms. As new creations in Christ, it is our duty to embody and spread the message of racial reconciliation, an integral aspect of the church's overarching mission.

### **Session 19: Race and Slavery**

The interpretation of the Bible regarding the institution of slavery has been the subject of much debate, especially during the era of slavery in America, where many Christian slave owners utilized Scripture to justify their actions. It is crucial to acknowledge that a surface-level reading of these passages without an understanding of the cultural context and literary style of the time may lead to an erroneous conclusion that the Bible supports slavery.

In ancient Israel, the concept of "slavery" was closer in nature to indentured servitude, where a slave would work to pay off their debt and was treated as a member of the household by their owners, in accordance with God's law. Through this, God transformed a sinful human system into a means of providing for the less fortunate while fostering a sense of community.

Moreover, an analysis of Paul's writings, within the patriarchal society in which he lived, reveals that when he instructs slaves to obey their masters, he is in fact subverting the power dynamic by exhorting slave owners to treat their slaves with the same care and respect. As both slaves and slave

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<sup>1</sup> "Americans Less Optimistic About Race Relations," *Lifeway Research*, February 9, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/02/09/americans-less-optimistic-about-race-relations-2/>

owners are ultimately servants of the true Master, who recognizes no distinctions between them, Paul's words serve to erode the foundations of slavery as an institution.

In the case of Philemon, Paul advocates for the release of his runaway slave, Onesimus, and encourages Philemon to welcome him back as a beloved brother, rather than as a slave. This serves as evidence of Paul's opposition to slavery in general.

A comprehensive understanding of the cultural context, literary style, and the overarching narrative of the Bible, reveals that the gospel message is inherently opposed to slavery. While a complete interpretation of these complex passages may require effort and contemplation, it is necessary for believers to engage in this work with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to continually seek clarity and understanding through an examination God's Word.

## **Session 20: Racial Reconciliation and the Eschaton**

The Bible, in its comprehensive portrayal of God's plan for humanity, presents a story of diversity and inclusivity in the realization of God's Kingdom. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible emphasizes the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of God's people, depicting a multiethnic congregation of individuals from every nation, tribe, and language, worshiping together at the throne of God. This assembly mirrors God's original design for humanity, as evidenced in the genealogy of Genesis 10, which highlights the diversity of God's people through the four-fold formula of tribe, language, people, and nation. Rather than viewing differences such as skin color, facial features, and hair type as deficiencies, the Bible celebrates them as expressions of the rich diversity of God's creation. The New Creation in Heaven represents the ultimate fulfillment of God's intent for humanity and the diversity of His people.

## **Session 21: Conclusion**

The task of reconciliation is not a task that can be completed through one conversation or a single act. It is an ongoing journey that requires constant effort, reflection, and prayer. John Perkins rightly noted that "reconciliation in our country and our churches is much too big to be wrestled to the ground by plans that begin in the minds of men. This is a God-sized problem... We've sought help from social service agencies and government programs. But this is something that requires divine power.<sup>2</sup> The power of the gospel and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are essential for this work to be accomplished. The church is called to promote reconciliation in all its forms, including racial reconciliation, and to embody the message of the gospel by promoting equality, unity, and justice.

The work of racial reconciliation cannot be achieved through social service agencies or government programs alone, but it requires the collective effort of individuals who are willing to engage in intentional, prayerful, and sustained action. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that "the moral arc of the

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<sup>2</sup> John M. Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018).

universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” Sometimes it seems like the “arc” is more like a bell curve that repeats itself over and over. Progress is often slow and requires persistent effort. In our world, the issue of racial injustice is often addressed reactively, with bursts of attention and calls for change, followed by a decline in attention and action. This pattern must be broken if we hope to achieve lasting and meaningful change.

As ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, we must be proactive in our work for reconciliation, bringing the message of hope and renewal to the world. The end goal of the gospel is a future vision of a throne surrounded by multitudes from every nation, tribe, and tongue, and it is our duty to work towards this vision in the present. The journey towards racial reconciliation requires hard work, intentional effort, and a steadfast commitment to the gospel, but it is a journey worth taking.

## **Session 22: Racial Reconciliation and Church Leadership**

It is imperative to consider the significance of racial reconciliation in the context of Scriptural teachings, historical events within the Church, and the ultimate realization of the Kingdom of God. With this in mind, we must reflect upon the practical steps that can be taken to cultivate and foster a multiethnic staff, team, and church community. The early church in Jerusalem provides a valuable lesson on the consequences of neglecting to ensure representation from diverse ethnic groups in positions of leadership. When this occurs, marginalized and oppressed groups may emerge within the community. Therefore, if contemporary churches are committed to promoting racial reconciliation, it is crucial to intentionally strive towards diversity in their leadership and decision-making bodies.

This session offers ten practical tips for building a multicultural team.

1. Do thorough research on theology, sociology, and history.
2. Reflect on your motives, biases, and presuppositions and engage in prayer.
3. Make a long-term commitment to the cause, as change may take decades.
4. Take the time to listen and learn before taking action.
5. Broaden your social circle by diversifying your friendships and community.
6. Explore new cultures by experiencing their music, food, and other cultural elements.
7. Embrace diversity in all aspects of leadership, including staff, graphics, sermon illustrations, and outreach activities.
8. Stay centered in the gospel and evaluate all information through its teachings.
9. Maintain a focused effort on this specific issue and resist the temptation to let other matters detract from it.



10. Celebrate all progress made, no matter how small, and honor other cultures in the process.

## DIGITAL SESSIONS

The following section features a sample of the course film work. The thumbnail images are hyperlinked to a private YouTube channel featuring the introduction and lessons 1-6.

### INTRODUCTION



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnqX2HUYXzk>

### LESSON 1



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16XKrEIY\\_Qc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16XKrEIY_Qc)

## LESSON 2



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O946seTopZs>

## LESSON 3



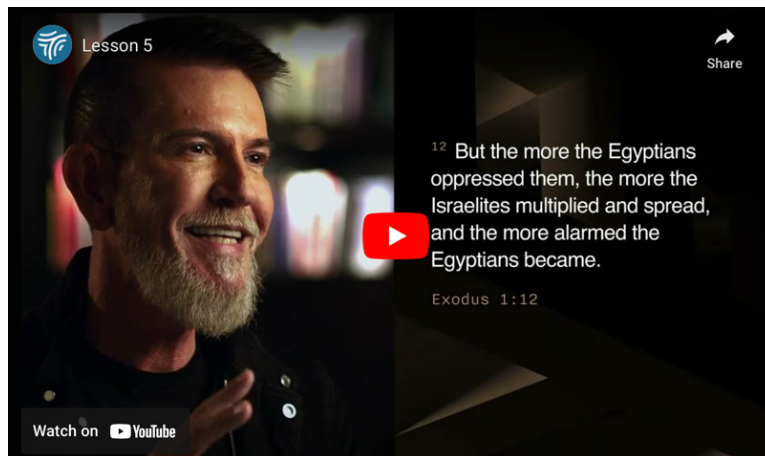
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fpVCFdf0uY>

## LESSON 4



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b39WOWWqLF4>

## LESSON 5



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7Lx8rPsYz0>

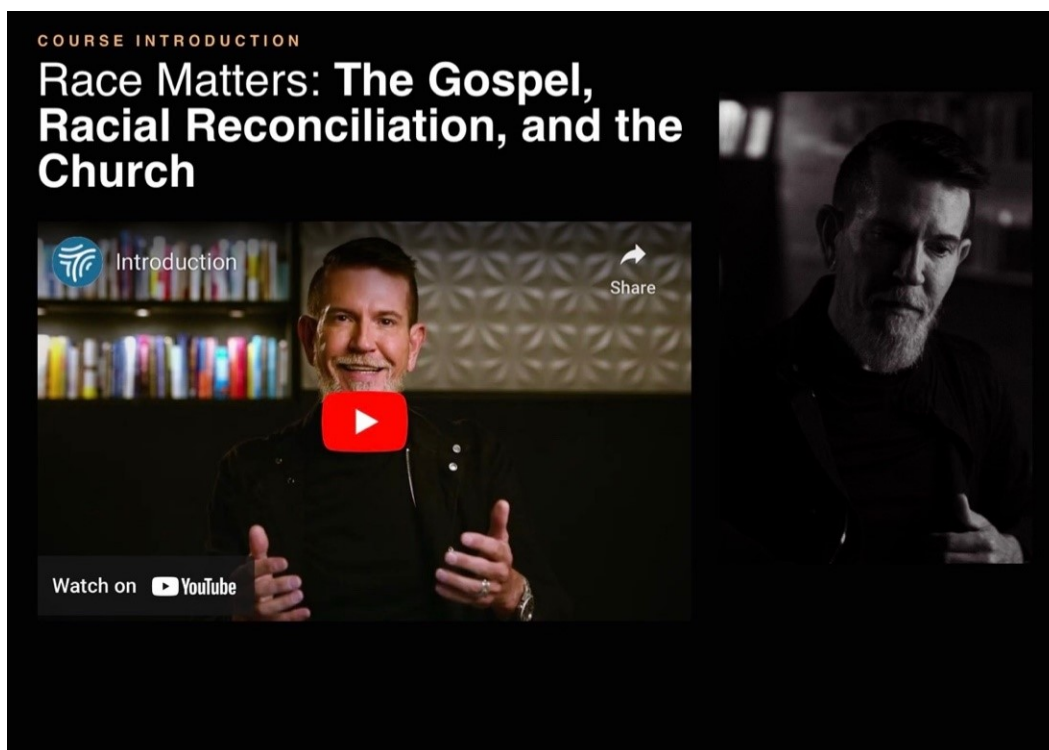
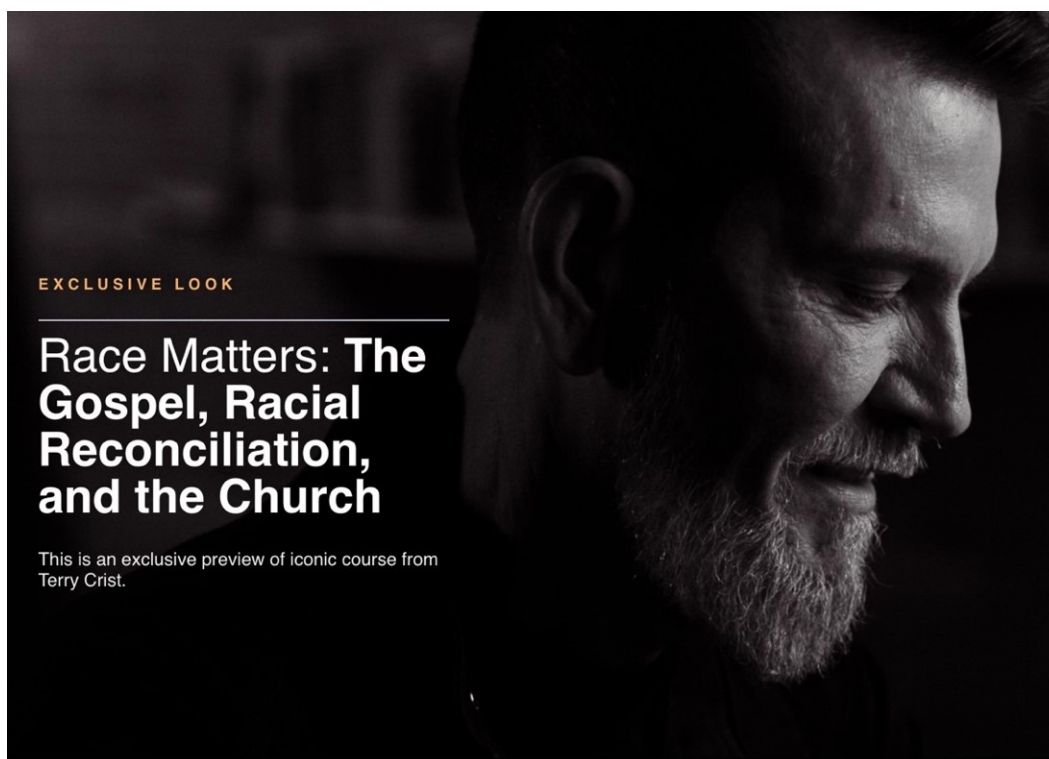
## LESSON 6



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srp9VxTqcLU>

## COURSE WEBSITE

The following section features the website landing page, introduction, lessons 1-6, a bonus leadership session, and an endorsement by a millennial pastor of a multiethnic church. The website is: <https://courses.tomeapp.com/crist>



## Lesson 1

There is so much to this topic of "The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation & the Church"—so much pain, hurt, disappointment, and so much hope as it relates to diversity, inclusion, and equity. This course was specifically designed for those who have the willingness to sit at the table together and have this conversation with one another based on the gospel. Terry believes that lasting change can only happen with people who are not afraid to enter into this dialogue. This course is designed to help leaders learn how to answer many of the pressing questions around racial dynamics, across racial lines.

The summer of 2020 became a distressing reminder that America has a painful history that has yet to be resolved. Following the public murders of Ahmaud Auberry and George Floyd in the spring of that year, the nation's summer erupted in a tsunami of pain, confusion, outrage, and even despair, that summer. Since then many have wondered how to chart a new path toward a fair and just society. And unfortunately, the church has not been in a position to lead the way.

It seems like there is a growing divide worldwide in the conversation of racial reconciliation. On one side there are those who are deeply passionate about addressing racial injustice. They are the ones who see racism as systemic and those who are in power are committed to perpetuating this divide.

On the other side, there are those who believe that we live in a post-civil rights era where racial injustice no longer exists in America.

In this course, you will find a path toward reconciliation that is faithful to the Bible. We all must admit that we have unconscious biases and certain predispositions and be open to the work the Gospel can do in our thoughts, emotions and behaviors.



## Lesson 2

Terry teaches that historically, our culture has had five categories of "races": African, European, Asian, Oceania, and Native American. And it was believed that each of these races had characteristics that were very distinct from the other races.

But research from Harvard has found the lines dividing us racially/ethnically aren't hard and fast as they once thought. Human populations *do* reflect regional differences, but *genetically* speaking, the variation between regions is relatively small, blurring the lines between the races.

Now the Bible instructs us that all people have been created in the image of God and this informs us on how we are to view the concept of race.

Pastor Terry reminds us how our theological understanding of God's image in our lives will inform our understanding of anthropological understanding of humanity which in turn informs our social relationships.





## Lesson 3

Terry guides us through a study of some obscure Old Testament passages that have been distorted to support oppression. Beginning with the first 11 chapters of the Bible where God's promises and punishments were all focused on the entire humankind. At this point, all of humankind was one people group with one common language.

The primary theological theme related to race/ethnicity is that sin infiltrated humanity creating division among people's groups. It wasn't God's original design for us to be divided. His original design was for unity in our diversity. But our sin, selfishness, and pride destroyed all of that.

It is the role of the church to properly understand and address both individual and structural racism. Racism is a subcategory of the sin of partiality.

*James 2:8-9 (ESV) If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

Racism is one of these power-struggle types of sins. It comes directly from the brokenness caused by the Fall. It comes from this sinful desire to "rule over" one another instead of ruling over God's creation together. And fallen humans create fallen systems.



Lesson 3



## Lesson 4

**The first misconception is related to the Fall of humanity.** A misconception of the Fall positions sin as only personal and not as communal and structural.

**The second misconception is related to the story of Cain.** It all started with the question of where did Cain find a wife? *If Adam and Eve were the first couples, who did their son Cain marry?*

**The third misconception relates to the Flood** –the explanation of the story of the "sons of God" intermarrying with women before the Flood.

Before the Flood, Genesis 6:1-4 describes that the "sons of God" saw that the "daughters of men" were beautiful, and they took whoever they wanted from among them and had children with them. This "taking" was violent language, not typically a consensual, mutual relationship.

**The fourth misconception relates to the curse of Ham.** Perhaps the most prominent racist teaching from Genesis comes from the "Curse of Ham." This occurred after the Flood after Noah had planted a vineyard and made wine from its grapes. One night, he drank too much and fell asleep naked in his tent. His son Ham saw his nakedness, which was a shameful thing in the ancient world, and told his brothers. The other two took a blanket and walked backward into the tent to cover up their father without seeing his nakedness. When Noah awoke the next morning, he cursed Ham's son, Canaan, promising that he and his descendants would be servants to his brother's descendants.



Lesson 4



## Lesson 5

What does the Bible say about how to treat the immigrant? Which is really the question of how we treat the "other"? In the second part of Genesis, then Exodus, and finally Joshua, to hear the story of how God chose one of those people groups to be His people.

The fact that God chose one nation to be His people does not mean He doesn't care about the rest of the nations. In fact, it means just the opposite. His purpose in choosing one nation was to *bless* the whole world through them. Someone had to be chosen for that role.

Throughout the Bible, from the very beginning, from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David to Christ, we see God *choosing* one person and forming a special relationship with them, called a covenant, in order to bless the whole world through them.

The topic of immigration has been politicized throughout many countries over the years, however, as Christians, we can rise above the polarization and model what it means to welcome the *foreigner* into our church family.



## Lesson 6

The laws on the treatment of foreigners rested on two key themes: 1) the vulnerability of the sojourner and 2) God's heart for the sojourner.

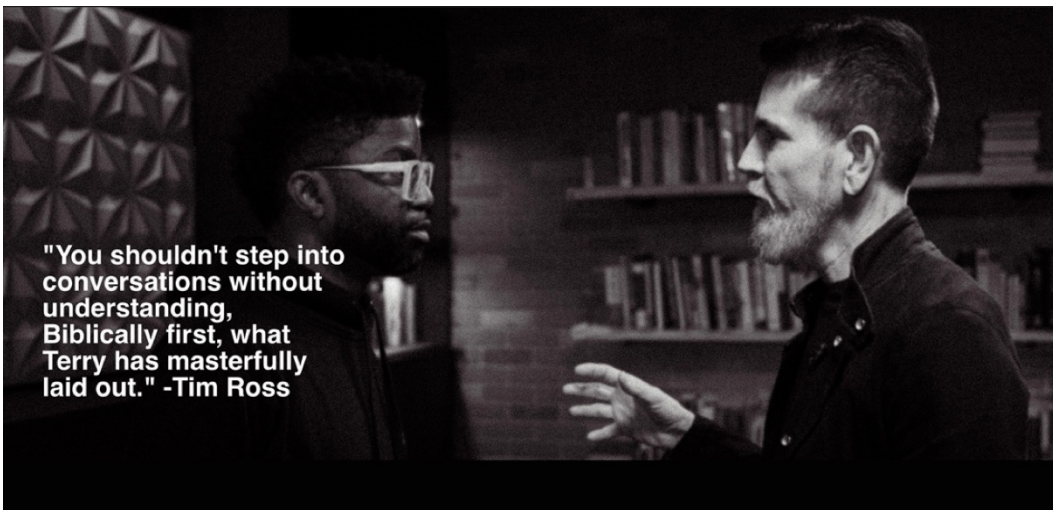
Throughout the Old Testament, but especially in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the foreigner is listed with other vulnerable people, such as widows, orphans, and the poor. These four groups are called the "quartet of the vulnerable." Foreign residents—even those who hold to the covenant—were vulnerable to exploitation. We see God's recognition of this as early as the Exodus. When God gives Abraham the Law at Mt. Sinai, he not only gives the 10 commandments but a host of laws to define the ethics of his people. These laws included how they treated vulnerable people groups, including foreigners.

Even more significant, we later see in Scripture that Jesus Himself was an immigrant in Egypt for a brief time. As a refugee, fleeing his homeland because it was not safe for him there. The Son of God, our Messiah, our Lord, and Savior, was a refugee, a displaced person within the Roman Empire.

So, how are we treating the foreigners among us? Are we "othering" them? Or are we welcoming them into our homes and our lives as brothers and sisters?







## COURSE STUDY GUIDE

The study guide is designed to be a companion resource for the online course. It follows a pattern of an opening prayer, group discussion topics, scriptural readings, a closing prayer, and a call to action. The twenty-one lessons and bonus session are featured in this section.

STUDY GUIDE

**Race Matters:**  
**The Gospel, Racial**  
**Reconciliation, &**  
**the Church**

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WITH TERRY CRIST

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# Session

01

# Session 01

## Opening Prayer

*O God,  
you created all people in your image.  
We thank you for the astonishing variety  
of races and cultures in this world.  
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,  
and show us your presence  
in those who differ most from us,  
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect  
in our love for all your children;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

- Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion

In this introduction session, Dr. Terry Crist, pastor, author, and course presenter, shared his heart on why he developed this course on racial reconciliation. In concert with him, we want to open our first discussion by sharing our own personal reasons for taking it. These opening questions may feel more vulnerable than those in a typical small group, but this is not a typical small group. Racial reconciliation is a highly charged subject, both in our culture at large and in the church. We have all had deeply personal experiences with racial tension and have deeply personal feelings about it. It's not a light topic, so our discussions may feel heavy from the very beginning. But as Terry said, we cannot learn, grow, and change the world if we cannot discuss openly, honestly, and vulnerably. We have avoided the matter and tiptoed around it for far too long. It's time to have the hard conversations.

- Why have you chosen to take this course? What are you hoping to gain from it?
- What things would you like to discover or resolve in our small group?
- What has been your personal experience with racism? What have been the most impactful experiences in making you think differently or opening your eyes to racism?
- How have you seen racism at work in our culture? Which instances of racism in our culture have made you think differently about it or opened your eyes?
- Describe relationships you have had with people from other racial backgrounds and how they have influenced you to think differently about the racial tension in our culture.
- What questions do you have about what the Bible says about race and ethnicity?

There are a million ways we could discuss racial injustice, racial tension, and racial reconciliation. We could talk about it from a political, moral, or economic standpoint. We could talk about studies and statistics or personal experience, which we will. But as Christians, what matters most is what the Bible has to say. As believers, the Bible is our standard, our canon, the standard by which we measure all other things.

**Read: 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:3**

- In what ways is the Bible useful for our lives? How does the Bible equip us?
- How has God given us everything we need to live a godly life?
- What does this tell us about why we should study what Scripture has to say about race?

One of the essential tenets of our faith is the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture—that the Bible tells us everything we need to know to live a godly life, to love God and love others. This doesn't mean the Bible tells us everything we need to know about every topic. It doesn't include instructions for changing the oil in your car or filling out your tax returns. But it does tell us all we need about living a life that pleases God, including relating to those of other races.

**Read: Galatians 3:28**

- What does Galatians tell us about how people of different races are valued in God's kingdom?
- What basic principle for relating to other races does this verse give us?

The Bible has a lot more to say about race than we might imagine. It doesn't just answer the big-picture questions, like "Does God value all races equally?" but also the finer points, like "Is race a social construct?" and "Are race and ethnicity the same thing?" or even "How did we get different races?" As we study what the Bible has to say about race from Genesis to Revelation, we'll find it has more to tell us about race than just basic principles and practices. When we look at the whole biblical story from beginning to end, we find a clear picture of how we started out unified, when we became divided, and how we can make the journey back to a reconciled world.

- When you think about the term "racial reconciliation" what comes to mind?
- What baggage does our culture have surrounding the term?
- How have you heard people respond to it on both sides of the aisle?

"Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish." —Brenda Salter McNeil<sup>2</sup>

We will unpack that definition more as we go through this course, but for now it's enough to focus on the phrase "God's original intention." Reconciliation is a politically charged word that has been twisted and distorted in our world, but all it really means is getting us back to what God originally intended. God's original intent was for all of creation to flourish. For every person to flourish. Every nation, tribe, and tongue. Every race.

**Read: Isaiah 2:2-4 and Revelation 7:9-10**

- What do these passages tell us about the racial makeup of the kingdom of God?
- What does it tell us about how these different people groups will relate to each other?
- What does this tell us about God's heart when it comes to racism, inequality, and injustice?



Ultimately, racial reconciliation is not just a political or moral issue, it's a gospel issue. And it isn't a side bar or one of the finer points of theology where we can agree to disagree. The fact that the imagery in these passages about the eschatological kingdom of God includes people of every nation, tribe, and tongue means racial reconciliation is central to the very heart of the gospel.

Which means we can't ignore it, we can't defer it to the next generation, and we can't look the other way thinking it will resolve itself. You've chosen to take this class because you know this. Terry's sessions will offer thought-provoking questions and challenging ideas, but the really hard work will be done in your small group discussion time. The more you are willing to let go of preconceived notions and hold back from being defensive or jumping to conclusions and really listen to one another and to what God's Word is teaching us, the more you will get out of your discussions. And the more you will be equipped to join God in making our world look more like His reconciled kingdom with every nation, tribe, and tongue together as one.

- What are your concerns about the way the church has handled issues of race in the past? What are your concerns about how the church is handling issues of race right now?
- What positive things have you seen the church doing related to racial reconciliation?
- How can the church be a light to the world when it comes to racial reconciliation?
- How would it impact our culture for the gospel if the church were to lead the way in racial reconciliation?
- What are some ideas of ways that we as individuals and as a small group can make a difference in our community towards racial reconciliation? We will discover more ideas as we move through the course, but it's good to start thinking now.

## Closing Prayer

When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial justice,  
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.  
When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,  
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.  
When we try our best but say the wrong things,  
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.  
When the chaos of this dies down,  
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.  
When it becomes easier to point fingers outwards,  
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.  
God of truth, in your wisdom, Enlighten Us.  
God of hope in your kindness, Heal Us.  
Creator of All People, in your generosity, Guide Us.  
Racism breaks your heart,  
break our hearts for what breaks yours, O Lord.

Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures. Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith.

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>3</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for your church, our nation, and world regarding issues of racial injustice and racial reconciliation. You can pray for individuals too if you feel led, but specifically, at the beginning of our study, we want to think big-picture about what is going on in our culture. As important as our discussion is, we don't just need to discuss. We need to pray. Every great spiritual movement in church history started with prayer. Unified, focused, heartfelt, passionate prayer asking the Holy Spirit to move in our world. Prayer is the most powerful thing we can do to change our culture. This week our prayers will be more general, asking the Holy Spirit to move and work in our hearts, our small group, our churches, and our world. In future weeks, our prayers will become more specific.
- **Act:** This week, at the start of our study, take some time to simply listen to someone from another racial background. Take a friend out for coffee or a meal or invite them to your home and tell them you intentionally want to hear about their personal experience with race in our world. Do not turn the conversation back to your own experience, just listen to theirs. You can ask open-ended questions that help draw out their experience more deeply. Otherwise, don't talk, just listen.



# Session

## 02



# Session 02

## Creation and the Imago Dei

### Opening Prayer

*Leader: Dear heavenly Father, Creator of every nation, tribe, and tongue, we come before you in humility asking you to penetrate our hearts with your Word. We want to know your truth, not the half-truths of our culture or the lies of the evil one, but your truth. We are willing to do the hard work of letting your Word rebuke us, correct us, and transform us. We invite you to cut open our hearts with your double-edged sword and ask you to strip away any lies, half-truths, preconceived notions, and presuppositions as we pray together the words of Psalm 139:23–24 (NIV):*

*All: Search me, God, and know my heart.  
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.*

### Discussion

Terry opened this session by talking about the summer of 2020 and how the murder of George Floyd rocked our nation and much of the world. We told you this course would jump right into the hard stuff, didn't we? Think back to the summer of 2020 ...

- How did you first hear about the murder of George Floyd?
- If you watched the session, how did it make you feel? If you didn't watch it, why not?
- How did the people around you react, both in person and online? What reactions did you see from different groups of people?
- How did the Christians in your circle react? What about church leaders and Christian organizations?
- How did people react to the events after the murder—the protests, riots, boycotts, etc.?

The murder of George Floyd was a catalyst that led to the greatest period of civil unrest in the United States in generations. The world was already in upheaval because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was a presidential election year involving some very volatile personalities. All these stress factors revealed deep cracks looming beneath the surface of our society and contributed to the two sides of the political aisle becoming more deeply entrenched in extremist views.

This course seeks to find an alternative “third way” of thinking about, talking about, and acting on the issues of racial injustice and racial reconciliation in our world. Not a “middle way” between the two extremes, not a compromise, but an alternative way. The way of the kingdom, the way of Jesus. Instead of trying to strike a balance between the two extremes, we seek to start with Scripture as the foundation for what we believe and how we should respond, independent of what either side says. Our goal is not to appease any person or group but to please God. To do so, we must do the hard work of stripping away our presuppositions—some of which we don't even know we have—and make room for the gospel to do deep work in our hearts.

**Read: Hebrews 4:12-13 and Philippians 2:12-13**

- We read in our last lesson that the Word of God is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16–17). How do these passages add to that?
- How does God's Word have the power to judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart?
- How have you personally experienced God's Word penetrating deep into your heart and revealing things that you didn't realize before?
- Why might the process of working out our salvation involve "fear and trembling"? What does this tell us about the process of letting God's Word penetrate our hearts like a sword?
- How might using the voice of Scripture as our guide rather than the world affect our views of race?

We all have deeply entrenched presuppositions about race, whether we realize it or not. This doesn't mean we've done anything wrong, it's simply a result of growing up in a highly racially charged culture. We seek to let God's Word cut open our hearts and divide between the things that come from the culture, our own personal experiences, or even the lies of Satan and the truth of God's Word. In this way, God's Word is less like a battle sword and more like a surgeon's scalpel operating on our hearts. The process may hurt, just like surgery does. But it is the only way to bring healing.

This is what this course is about. Cutting open our hearts with the sharp blades of Scripture and revealing what needs to be healed there. We do that by trying our best to let go of our presuppositions, preconceptions, and attitudes and come to His Word humbly and openly and look at what God has to say about race from Genesis to Revelation, beginning to end.

**Discussion**

The issue of racial reconciliation is parallel to the big-picture story of the whole Bible, the reconciliation of all things to the way God intended them to be. Racial reconciliation is one part of that. This is the overarching story of the Bible:

- Creation: God created the world good (Genesis 1–2).
- Fall: Sin marred God's good creation, both mankind and creation itself (Genesis 3).
- Redemption: Jesus came to redeem the world, not just human beings but all of creation (Romans 8:22–25; Galatians 3:13).
- Consummation: In God's future kingdom, all will be made new and perfect (Revelation 21).

In the session, Terry asked, "How did we get here?" in three different ways, parallel to the four phases of God's redemptive story above:

1. How did we arrive here on this planet? (Creation)
2. How did we end up here in a divided world? (Division)
3. How did we land in the story of a church united by God's grace? (Reconciliation)

When we look at the story of the Bible, we can see the creation, division, and reconciliation of the races right along with the story of the creation, fall, and redemption of all of creation.

## 1. Creation:

Read: Genesis 1:26-27, 31

- *In the context of this passage, what does it mean to be created in God's image?*
- *What does the passage say about creation at this point?*

Terry reminded us that when God created the world, He didn't make just one kind of bird, one kind of fish, and one kind of land animal. He made about nine million different animal species. Instead of a single topography, He created mountains and valleys, lakes and oceans, and deserts and rain forests. All of creation reveals the diversity of the brushstrokes of God, including humanity. When God created mankind, He placed within that first couple the genetic potential for every ethnicity—every facial feature, hair texture, every nose, face, and eye shape. Every skin color and pigmentation, every shade and hue. Every ethnicity of humanity reflects the image of God. And every ethnicity is good. We are all the imago Dei.

- *What did God tell humanity to do? What was their relationship with creation to be?*
- *How does this reflect the image of God?*

Read: Genesis 1:28

As creatures made in God's image, humanity was charged to rule the earth as God's representatives and care for creation the way God would. And to this first couple, God told them to multiply and fill the earth, to procreate and migrate. Both of those things led to greater diversity. As they procreated, more and more genetic combinations developed. And as they migrated, different environmental conditions led to varying adaptations. Warmer conditions meant more exposure to the sun, therefore darker skin. Colder and dryer conditions led to narrower noses.

But none of this caught God by surprise. He planned it from the very beginning. He built the genetic potential for every possibility into that first human couple, and He commanded them to procreate and migrate. He commanded them to diversify. God delights in a diverse tapestry of every skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and body type. The God who made every single person's fingerprint unique certainly delights in the diversity of humanity.

## 2. Division:

Read: Genesis 11:1-9

- *How does this story show the division of the different races? Why did God divide the people?*

The story of the Tower of Babel explains that the whole world was once unified as one people. They all spoke the same language and lived in one common place. They weren't migrating over the earth as God had commanded. And then, like Adam and Eve in the garden, they tried to become their own gods. They decided to build a city and a tower to make a name for themselves, rather than ruling the world as God's representatives as they were called to do as the imago Dei. So, God confused their languages and separated them as a punishment for their sin. Just as the fall brought brokenness into the world, so this division brought brokenness between nations, tribes, and tongues. Division wasn't God's desire; it was the result of their sin.

### 3. Reconciliation:

**Read: Acts 2:1-12**

- How does this story show the reversal of what happened at Babel?
- What brought about this reconciliation?

The story of Pentecost shows us that in Christ, all nations, tribes, and tongues are reconciled as one. There is no Jew and Gentile or Roman and Egyptian in Christ; we are all one body (Galatians 3:28). God divided them by language at Babel, but He enabled the disciples to speak in every language at Pentecost so the people could understand them. He didn't take away the diversity of the languages, but He took away the division between them. This is the picture of the reconciled kingdom of God—unity in our diversity—so that in the final consummation of the kingdom, we see every nation, tribe, and tongue, worshipping God together at Mt. Zion (Isaiah 2:2–4; Revelation 7:9–10).

This reconciliation step is where the church is called to be. The story of Pentecost is the very beginning of the church age. The first thing God did was take away the division between the languages, between the nations, between the races. Creation—Division—Reconciliation, right here in the pages of Scripture.

**Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17-20**

As ambassadors of Christ's kingdom, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Not just reconciliation of individual people to God, but reconciliation of all creation to the way God intended it. This includes racial reconciliation. And it is a significant part. Significant enough to be specifically mentioned at all the critical points in God's story of reconciling the world to Himself, not only each of us individually but all of humanity. Racial reconciliation not just a political or social issue; it's a gospel issue, central to the very heart of the gospel.

Every one of us is made in God's image. We are the imago Dei. We all have the responsibility to be His representatives in ruling over and caring for this planet. To rule over it and care for it the way He would and reconcile it to the way He intended it to be. All of us, together. As one body, every different body part together making up the body of Christ. Unity in diversity. The imago Dei.

- In your thinking, conversations and actions about race, what difference does it make to believe that every human being is made in the image of God?
- What difference does it make to believe that we all descended from one pair of human parents?
- What difference might it have made if Derek Chauvin had believed these things about George Floyd?
- In what ways have you seen the church reflecting God's design of "unity in diversity"?
- Where have you seen divisions in the church along racial lines? Or divisions in the way that we think about racial injustice and reconciliation?
- What result do these divisions have in our churches? In our witness to the world?
- Think about the imagery of the diversity of the body of Christ. How do we need each other to bear God's image to the world? How is there unity in that diversity?
- In a world that is so divided when it comes to these kinds of issues, what kind of witness would it be to the world if our churches were to truly reflect unity in diversity when it comes to race?
- What practical steps can we take to get the American Church to that point?

"There is no institution more equipped and capable of bringing transformation to the cause of reconciliation than the church. But we have some hard work to do." – John Perkins<sup>4</sup>



## Closing Prayer:

### A Prayer of Lament

O Lord, how long will your church be divided along racial lines? How long will the lingering effects of animosity, injustice, and pride mark your blessed bride? How long, O Lord, will my white brothers and sisters not understand the pain in those whose experience is different than ours? How long, O Lord, will my minority brothers and sisters struggle with distrust and feel ostracized?

God, grant us the heart to weep with those who weep. Give us empathy and understanding. Create trust where there is pain. Make your church the united bride you want her to be. These divisions of mistrust and historical bias run deep, O God. Without you, nothing will ever change. In our pain and our weariness, we express our hope that Jesus can change our hearts and unite the church. We believe the gospel is greater than our divisions. And we long for the day when the world will take note of how we love each other. So help us to meet each other in this prayerful journey. We come to learn to lament. Hear us as we weep together, that we might walk together.

In the name of Jesus, our King. Amen.<sup>5</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional prayer time this week to pray for your church as a body to reflect the imago Dei to the world. Pray for your church to seek unity in diversity. If your church is not already ethnically diverse, pray for God to grow and stretch your church in ways that will bring more diversity. Pray for the church leadership to have wisdom and guidance from the Lord about how to grow in diversity. Pray for them to be open to partnering with other churches or starting new outreach ministries or other out-of-the-box but Spirit inspired ideas to “diversify” their community. Also, pray for your own individual life to reflect the imago Dei – to love and care for the world as God’s representative and to work towards the reconciliation of all of Creation to how God intended in to be, including racial reconciliation.
- **Act:** This week, make a list of different ways your church can increase in diversity and work more towards unity in that diversity. How can you bring more diversity into your church body and/or reach out to ethnically diverse groups in your ministries? How can your church partner with other churches to reflect unity in diversity? Share your lists at the beginning of your next small group meeting time and pray over them for the Spirit’s leading.

# Session

## 03



# Session 03

## Race, Ethnicity, and Colorblindness

### Opening Prayer

*O God,  
you created all people in your image.  
We thank you for the astonishing variety  
of races and cultures in this world.  
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,  
and show us your presence  
in those who differ most from us,  
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect  
in our love for all your children;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

- Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition<sup>6</sup>

### Discussion

- What has been your experience with people talking about the desire to be “colorblind” regarding race?
- How did the concept of being colorblind make you feel before you watched this session?
- How do you think it would make you feel if you were a different race?
- What questions do you still have about race, ethnicity, and colorblindness, even after watching this session? Did any new questions arise for you?

Terry opened this session by talking about the distinction between two highly charged words in our conversations about racial reconciliation—“ethnicity” and “race”—and what they really mean:

- Ethnicity – belonging to a people group defined by language, culture, history, customs, cuisine, and art. Within what we call “white” or “black” there are dozens of ethnicities.
- Race – a social construct, based on physical features and often constructed in contexts of hierarchy and power. It's something humans made up to separate people into groups based on appearance, not on genetics, which is how a light-skinned person from a black ethnic group can “pass” as white.

Genetically, scientifically, there are no “races” at all. The variation between what we call “races” is very small, and there is no uniform identity for each race.<sup>7</sup> Science tells us the same thing the Bible teaches—we all descend from one first couple; we are all one human race.

And yet, it's not so easy to say, “Hey, we're all just one big human race, why can't we all just be colorblind?” It seems logical in theory, but there are a couple of problems with “colorblindness” as our goal:

1. It's a departure from what God intended. We find the exact opposite in Scripture. God celebrates ethnic diversity! God isn't a vanilla-only God. He's a 31,000-flavors God. And He values every different type of person equally, no matter what kind of hierarchies the world has.



**Read: 1 Corinthians 12:18-25**

God doesn't pretend that every part is the same; He honors our differences. But He values every part the same. Even the parts that humankind may not think are valuable. And He says the body doesn't work without every part working together. The imagery of the body of Christ shows us God's desire for diversity, equality, and unity among His people.

2. It's dishonoring and dehumanizing to those who experience suffering based on their race. Closing our eyes to color is closing our eyes to the inequalities that exist in our world.

Race is "just" a social construct, but that doesn't mean it's not a real problem. Race isn't a "real thing" genetically and scientifically, but it's a real thing in our culture. It's a social construct that causes real injustice, pain, and suffering in real people's lives. And as Christians, we are called to live with eyes wide open to the injustices and suffering in our world so we can do something about it.

**Read: Romans 12:15**

- Why is seeking to be "colorblind" not "mourning with those who mourn"?
- How does it make people feel when we minimize or dismiss their suffering?
- Why is it important to empathize with those who are suffering and seek to understand their pain?
- What difference can it make to someone to sit with them in their pain?

As believers, we are called to mourn with those who mourn, to first recognize that they are suffering and that their pain is real. Then we are to seek to understand their suffering. We are called to empathize with their suffering, which sometimes can mean to just sit with them in their pain. But Christians are not only called to mourn with those who mourn; they are also called to actively fight injustice.

**Read: Isaiah 58:1-12**

- Why did God say He wasn't listening to His people's prayers or accepting their sacrifices?
- What would He rather them do than offer sacrifices, fast, and worship?

Throughout the Prophets, God called His people to open their eyes to the injustice going on around them. He told them their worship and prayers and sacrifices were meaningless if they were not actively fighting injustice in the world.

**Read: Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Psalm 10:14, 17-18; and Proverbs 31:8-9**

- How does God react to the pain of the afflicted?
- What does it tell us about God that He defends the oppressed?
- Why does God command His people to also defend the oppressed and love the foreigner?
- Why do we need to speak up for the rights of the needy and destitute?

As the imago Dei, we should reflect who God is. As the people of God, we are supposed to act like Him, to love people the way that He loves them. God has a heart for the oppressed, the marginalized, and the afflicted. He sees their pain, hears their cries, and defends their cause. And He calls us to do the same.

If we seek to be colorblind, we are whitewashing the atrocities of racism in our culture. We are closing our eyes to the reality of some of our fellow brothers and sisters in our human family, pretending those inequalities don't exist, telling them their pain isn't real. This is the exact opposite of what God does.

Though the imago Dei teaches us that we are all equally valuable in God's eyes, we can't simply declare that we're all unified and equal, hold hands, and pretend everything's all right. When a married couple has experienced brokenness and hurt but want to reconcile, they don't just "forget the past" and ride off into the sunset. They go to counseling and do the hard work of evaluating what happened and why and how they are going to fix the brokenness to move forward in a healthy way.

The only way to true reconciliation is to work through the mess. We must deal with the past and work through it. And we must be honest about the present injustices, broken systems, and inequalities in our communities, nations, and world. Like reconciliation in a marriage, it takes a long time and a lot of hard work.

The only way to true reconciliation is to work through the mess. We have to deal with the past and work through it. And we have to be honest about the present injustices, broken systems, and inequalities in our communities, nations, and world. Like reconciliation in a marriage, it will take a long time and a lot of hard work.

"In order for reconciliation to occur, there must be repentance, justice, and forgiveness."  
— Brenda Salter McNeil

- What mistakes and missteps have you made when talking and thinking about race, ethnicity, and color blindness? What changes would you like to make going forward?
- If you have been on the receiving end of hurt by someone trying to be "colorblind," describe how that made you feel and how you responded.
- As the church, how can we change the conversation surrounding race, ethnicity, and colorblindness in our culture? How would a focus on the imago Dei change the way we talk about it?
- How can you celebrate and honor the unique beauty of the other ethnicities of your friends, family, and others in your community?
- In what ways is God leading you to celebrate the diversity in His body and our world?
- What would it look like practically for you to sit in the pain with a friend of another race? What might you learn from it? How might it affect your relationship?
- What would it look like practically for you to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves?
- What would it look like practically for you to defend the cause of the afflicted and oppressed?
- In what ways is God leading you to actively fight for justice in the world?

## Closing Prayer

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a band aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.

Instead...

Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice.

Convict me for my indifference.

Forgive me when I have remained silent.

Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

- Dr Yolanda Pierce<sup>8</sup>

## Respond with Action

**Pray:** Take some intentional prayer time this week to pray for God to open your eyes to the racism in the world around you – both individual acts of racism as well as racism built into our very systems and institutions. Ask God to search your own heart and reveal any ways that you have biases and prejudices surrounding race that you may not even realize. Ask the Lord to help you see if there is any way that you need to change your language surrounding race, ethnicity, and colorblindness. Pray for the strength, wisdom, and love to sit with others in their pain. Pray for the courage and love to defend the afflicted and oppressed and actively fight for justice.

**Act:** This week, take some time to celebrate the diversity of our world. Take the time to find out about someone else's culture and then intentionally experience some part of it – music, food, art, customs, etc. If you personally know someone from another culture, ask them to help you – take you to their favorite restaurant or show you art they love or play traditional music for you. For this week, simply enjoy and celebrate the diversity of the human race.

# Session

# 04



# Session 04

## Deconstructing Misconceptions in Genesis Pt. 1

### Opening Prayer

*Oh Lord, please open our societies eyes to all that goes on around us that contributes to racial injustice. Please help us recognize the systems in place that hurt our minority communities. Grant us the power to change them! We do not know all the answers, but You do. God, guide us on the path to righteousness so that all of Your children can live without fear. Help push us in the right direction so that we can find the truth for ourselves. With Your help, we will overcome. Amen!*

—Megan Bailey<sup>9</sup>

### Discussion

- What is your reaction when you hear the phrase “systemic racism?” How have you seen or heard other people react to that phrase or concept?
- What messages have you heard in our culture about systemic racism?
- How would you explain the fact that most of the neighborhoods and school districts of our country are still mostly segregated, even though segregation “ended” legally in 1964?
- What have you been taught about affirmative action? What about generational wealth? What about “welfare queens”? What about the inequality and bias in standardized testing? What about “good” and “bad” school districts in our public school system? What about the school-to-prison pipeline? What about gerrymandering? What about the cycle of poverty in our country?

All these questions (and many more) are issues brought up by systemic racism in our country and in many other places around the world. Systemic racism means that even if we are not intentionally and individually racist, there is an implicit racism that exists in the systems and structures of our society so the people in power (in America’s case, white people) naturally benefit from systemic injustices in our culture whether they realize it or not. This doesn’t mean all white people are privileged and all people of color are struggling. It doesn’t mean white people haven’t worked hard for what they have. It doesn’t mean white people don’t have struggles. It just means that the color of their skin isn’t causing more struggles.

There are a lot of people who deny that systemic racism even exists. In this session, Terry not only tells us that it does, he also describes how the Bible shows us that it does.

### Read: 2 Chronicles 7:11-14

- Why does God tell the people they need to humble themselves, pray, and repent?
- Is the sin described in this passage individual sin or corporate sin? How do we know?
- Why would God tell them to repent as a nation if there was so such thing as systemic sin?

Passages like these, which talk about the whole nation of Israel or other nations like Assyria or Egypt needing to repent, are talking about corporate sin, not individual sins. When God brought the plagues to Egypt, it was not only a way to rescue His people, it was also punishment on the Egyptians for enslaving and oppressing His people (Exodus 9:17; 12:12). The plagues affected every single person in Egypt whether they owned Hebrew slaves or not. The whole nation bore the responsibility of the corporate sin of the nation. The whole nation had to repent.

Terry showed us how many people have a misconception of the fall of mankind. They believe sin is only individual and personal. But the story of the fall shows us that sin operated on a systemic level from the moment it infiltrated humanity. It caused a power struggle in the most basic of human systems: marriage.

**Read: Genesis 3:16**

- Why is it significant that this “ruling over” is a result of the Fall, not part of creation?

At creation, male and female were equal partners in bearing the image of God (Genesis 1:27). They were commanded to rule over the world together as God’s representatives (Genesis 1:28). Only after the fall does Scripture describe one of them ruling over the other, only as a result of sin.

Then, generation after generation, we see power struggles affecting every human relationship and every human system. What begins in the heart and the individual eventually expresses itself in the community. Our human systems are really made up of relationships, so any sin we fail to address within ourselves will be expressed in the systems of society. The sin of racism, like any sin, can be personal and individual, but over time it has also become structural and institutional. Not just in explicit ways like the legalization of slavery or Jim Crow laws in our nation’s past, but still in implicit ways in every system in our culture.

Racism is one of these power-struggle type of sins. It comes directly from the brokenness caused by the fall, the brokenness among one another. It comes from this sinful desire to “rule over” one another instead of ruling over God’s creation together. This is why racism is not only an individual sin but also a corporate and systemic one. It’s not just one guy calling another guy a racial slur. It’s any system or structure we have in place that keeps one race above another.

And when a sin is corporate and systemic, we are all guilty of it. Even if we’ve never personally done or said or even thought anything racist. We are all guilty. So, we’re all called to repent, in sackcloth and ashes. We’re all called to humble ourselves and pray. And we’re all called to actively fight for justice to be done and equality and equity to be restored.

To understand this concept, let’s just look at one human system in our culture: public education.

- What does it say about our culture that in our public education system, there are some school districts that are “good” and other school districts that are “bad”?
- Why aren’t all public schools equally good?
- Why are the “good” public schools in the more affluent areas?
- Why are there fewer children of color in more affluent areas, and therefore fewer children of color in the “better” schools?
- How does our real estate market contribute to these inequalities in our school districts?
- Why would those who benefit from the real estate market not want to change our school districts so they are all equally good?

In theory, the public education system should be the great equalizer for children from all walks of life. If our schools were all equally good, a child born to a crack addict in the projects would have the same educational opportunity as a child born to educated, successful parents in the suburbs. Of course, parents influence a child’s success in education more than anything else, but at least they would be receiving the same level of education at school. As it is, children born into at-risk situations in poorer neighborhoods are already at a disadvantage because their parents aren’t as likely to help them with their homework or support their education in other ways, but then they are also put into subpar schools, making their chances of success even worse. Which means they are more likely to continue a cycle of poverty into the next generation. Which is why this issue is racial—because poverty takes generations to overcome. Statistically, these communities have a higher number of people of color because only five generations ago we had slavery and only two generations ago, Jim Crow laws.

What makes this sinful is the fact that those of us in the real estate industry or any related industry (banks, construction, etc. — really every industry) benefit financially from this inequality. Whether they realize it or not, realtors want to keep our schools unequal because if there weren't "good" school districts, they wouldn't be able to charge more money for houses in those districts. This isn't to pick on realtors. Most of them have probably never even thought about it this way. When it's the water you're swimming in, you can't always see it.

And this is just one aspect of the brokenness in our public school system, not to mention the inequalities of standardized tests, how little representation there is among teachers and administration for children of color, inequalities with disciplinary issues, and on and on. The more you dig into the systems and structures of our society and ask the hard questions, the more you can see it.

So, what is our response as followers of Jesus? What are we supposed to do?

**Read: Amos 5:6–15 and 21–24**

- How does God respond to those who disdain justice and righteousness?
- How does God feel about people who take advantage of the poor and benefit financially from the oppressed? What does He call them to do?
- Why did God reject the worship and sacrifices of the people during the time of Amos? What does this say about how God feels about our worship?

As believers, we are to dismantle any systems of oppression in our world so that justice can roll down like a mighty water. It's not enough for us to just not be racist, individually. We have to be actively anti-racist. That means taking a hard look at the world around us, analyzing where the system is broken, and working to fix it. It means listening to those experiencing oppression and can see it in our systems in ways we may not be able to. It means looking for opportunities to enact change.

The hard thing about systemic racism is that because we don't create systems on our own, we feel like we can't fix them either. Our generation didn't create these systems, we inherited them. But that doesn't mean we can't enact change, one step at a time.

- How do you feel about the task of dismantling racist systems in our culture? Overwhelmed? Frustrated? Inspired? Confused? Unsure? Passionate? Something else?
- What questions do you have about systemic racism? What doubts do you have about whether it is really a problem in our culture? Or whether it has been blown out of proportion?
- How can we find accurate information on these issues from trustworthy sources, not inflammatory political rhetoric from either side of the aisle?
- How can building relationships and listening to someone who is ethnically different from you help you to see systemic racism more clearly?



- Does the task of fighting systemic racism seem like a distraction from our gospel mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20) or does it feel like an important part of it? Or something in between? Why or why not?
- As an individual, how can you work to fight systems of oppression in the world? What about as a small group? As a church? As the “big C” church?
- How is God specifically leading you to respond to this lesson?

## Closing Prayer

### Prayer for Dismantling Racism

Dear God, in our efforts to dismantle racism, we understand that we struggle not merely against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities – those institutions and systems that keep racism alive by perpetuating the lie that some members of the family are inferior and others superior.

Create in us a new mind and heart that will enable us to see brothers and sisters in the faces of those divided by racial categories.

Give us the grace and strength to rid ourselves of racial stereotypes that oppress some of us while providing entitlements to others.

Help us to create a Church and nation that embraces the hopes and fears of oppressed People of Color where we live, as well as those around the world.

Heal your family God, and make us one with you, in union with our brother Jesus, and empowered by your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

- Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team<sup>10</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for God to open your eyes to systemic racism in the world around you. Ask Him to give you an open mind and empathic heart to listen to those who are trying to educate us about systemic racism. Pray for humility to listen and learn from them. Pray for those who are affected by systemic racism around the world. Pray for God to reveal to you ways you can help dismantle systems of oppression in the world.
- **Act:** This week take some time to research systemic racism in our culture. If the concept is new to you, stick to general articles and resources that explore what it is and how we can see it in our culture. If you are already familiar with it, choose one system or institution to focus on. Do research on systemic issues in our world and identify steps we can take toward change.



# Session

# 05



# Session 05

## Deconstructing Misconceptions in Genesis Pt. 2

### Opening Prayer

*Good and gracious God, you invite us to recognize and reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbor. Enable us to see the reality of racism and free us to challenge and uproot it from our society, our world and ourselves.*

*This we pray. Amen.  
- Sisters of Mercy of the Americas<sup>1</sup>*

### Discussion

- Why is it so common to talk past each other in conversations about race, instead of really hearing each other and responding to what was said?
- Why are there so many misconceptions when it comes to race?
- What were you taught as a kid concerning race and the Bible?
- How have you seen people misuse Scripture to justify racist beliefs and systems?

In the last lesson, we looked at one misconception that people often have about the stories in Genesis which leads to a misunderstanding of what God says about race. In this lesson, we're going to look at four more misconceptions in Genesis. The first one was more like an innocent misunderstanding, but these four are more like people intentionally misusing Scripture to try to justify racism.

Many of us misinterpret Scripture to justify our thoughts or behaviors unintentionally because we come to God's Word with already preconceived notions about what is true. So we tend to find things in Scripture that seem to back up what we already believe. Or we may even twist it just a little bit, not even realizing it, to fit what we want to believe. Some people believe that this is what Christian slaveowners in America and Europe did back in the 1800s. Their misuse of Scripture wasn't intentional, but because slavery was something that felt as normal to them as breathing, when they read Scripture with that lens, they only saw justification for slavery in its pages.

But some people misuse Scripture very intentionally. They go to the Bible looking to pull a verse out of context, twist its meaning, and use it to justify ideas or behaviors that God would never condone.

## 1. Cain's Wife

**Read: Genesis 4:16-18**

- Why did Cain have to go out from the Lord's presence?
- If Adam and Eve were the only first couple, where did Cain's wife come from?

The only logical answer that is consistent with Scripture is that he married his sister. That this early in human history, marriage of siblings was a simple necessity and likely not yet a genetic problem. But those who are looking for a defense for racism in the Bible look at Genesis 4 and used it to say that Cain must have found a wife for himself in Nod, which must have meant there were other people, not descended from Adam and Eve, living in that land. But the Bible nowhere says that. At all. It doesn't say he found his wife in Nod, just that he went and lived there. There is no reason to think he didn't already have his wife and bring her with him to Nod.

And yet, there are people who take this one little verse out of Genesis 4, add to it something that isn't really there, and then construct a whole racist ideology on the basis of it. And then try to say that this is God's Word! One such theory is called "Pre-Adamism." They argue that Adam and Eve were not the only "first couple," but that there were separate acts of creation for each race – a white Adam and Eve, a black Adam and Eve, and so on. Not only is that adding something to the Bible that isn't there, it's the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches. The Bible literally gives us genealogies of the whole world descending from Adam and Eve to Noah. Then being wiped out and starting again with Noah and his sons and their wives and multiplying from there. And only later, in Genesis 11, does this one community of humankind separate into different people groups with different languages. Pre-Adamism is literally making stuff up that is nowhere in the Bible, just to justify a divisive, racist point of view.

From there, these racists argue that the Adam and Eve of Genesis 1-2 were white, but their son Cain went off to Nod and married into an inferior tribe of non-white savages. Many of them have even suggested that the "mark" that God gave Cain was "blackness" – making him black. Again, nowhere in the Bible. This is just totally made up.

You may think this stuff sounds crazy – we hope you do! But this kind of thinking was shockingly common in America in the 19th and 20th centuries. And there are people who still argue this stuff today. Some of whom call themselves Christians. But there is absolutely zero evidence in the Bible for other first couples of different races. These theories were made up by people who were trying to justify their racism and twisted the Bible to do so.

- Describe any other ways you have heard people twist the Bible to justify racism.
- What might motivate people to do that? Why twist the Bible, why not just say that you disagree with the Bible's story that we all descended from one couple?
- Thinking about the ethnic makeup of people in the Middle East, what skin color would Jesus have most likely had? What would He have looked like?
- Why then, do so many pictures in our churches show a white Jesus?

We have no idea what Adam and Eve's skin color looked like, but it is pretty unlikely that they were what we call "white" today. Mostly because such light skin is most likely an adaptation that came from humans migrating from the Middle East and Africa north into Europe where the sun wasn't as strong. One logical theory is that Adam and Eve were kind of "middle of the road" brown, so their genes included the potential for every skin color from very dark to very light. Another solid theory that Terry explained in our first video is that they were a "ruddy" reddish-brown color – the color of the ground from which he was made, and what the word "Adam" means.

## 2. The Sons of God

**Read: Genesis 6:1-4**

- Who do you think the "sons of God" were in this passage?
- Why was what they were doing wrong?

A traditional reading of this passage would say that the sons of God were angels because that's what the term typically referred to in the Bible. There are other scholars who believe that the term refers not to angels, but to kings or noblemen, since it was customary in the ancient world to call kings "sons of God" too. But those who want to justify racism interpret this in a totally different way. They believe that this story was really about interracial marriage, which God found an abomination, and is why he sent the Flood. Again, there is literally zero biblical evidence for this belief. Nothing about this story would make anyone think that, unless they were just making stuff up to try to defend their racist views. Again, this may sound crazy to us, but this misinterpretation was common enough that it was part of the teaching of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1980s – not that long ago.

### 3. The Curse of Ham

**Read: Genesis 4:16-18**

- What does this passage say the curse of Canaan (Ham's son) actually was?
- Who are the Canaanites in the Bible? How did the story of Scripture fulfill this?

Again, those who want to justify racism put something in this passage that just isn't there. Those who want to justify racism say that Canaan's descendants became the black people of Africa and use this passage to justify slavery in the United States. They say that enslaving the Africans was actually the fulfillment of God's punishment on the descendants of Ham! Again, this interpretation has absolutely no basis in Scripture whatsoever. And it's just flat out wrong.

The descendants of Canaan were the Canaanites, not Africans. The Canaanites were the people group living in the Promised Land when the Israelites (who were the descendants of Shem) conquered them in the book of Joshua and beyond. This is what God is referring to, not anything to do with what we call "race" in the modern world at all.

### 4. The Tower of Babel

**Read: Genesis 11:6-9**

The last misconception is a misunderstanding of the story of the Tower of Babel, which we studied in lesson 2. Those who want to justify racism say that because God divided them into different races and languages, that means that the diversity of the races is a punishment, a bad thing. But that's actually the exact opposite of what this story teaches, what we learned earlier about this story. God had originally commanded Adam and Eve to procreate and migrate. To diversify. And the people of Babel weren't doing that. They were staying in one place all together. So God dispersed them out. The punishment was the division, not the diversity. God intended diversity from the very beginning!

*So what is our response to these misconceptions as followers of Jesus? What are we supposed to do?*

**Read: 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and 2 Peter 2:1-3 and Matthew 7:15-20**

- What does it take to study and preach the word accurately?
- Why do people tend to turn away from the truth?
- How can false teaching destroy a community?
- How can we tell when a teaching is false? How can we recognize a false prophet?

As believers, our calling is to carefully study the Scriptures to make sure that what we are hearing from other people is true. In Acts, the Bereans were commended for examining the Scriptures daily to make sure the Apostle Paul was speaking truth (Acts 17:11). Paul spent three years studying the Scriptures for himself before he went to see Peter and learn from him (Galatians 1:18). Then, after fourteen years of teaching, he met with the disciples to check his own teaching (Galatians 2:2). We aren't to take anyone's word for granted. We are to search and study the Scriptures for ourselves.

False teaching can be extremely dangerous. In the case of racism, it can lead to oppression, dominance, supremacy, and abuse. All supposedly justified and ordained by God! This kind of misuse of Scripture is evil and blasphemous and can wreak havoc on our world. Lies and half-truths and twisting of the truth are attacks of Satan, which is why we must stand firm on Scripture (Ephesians 6:10-18).



- In what ways have you unintentionally misused or misinterpreted Scripture in your life?
- Describe any ways you were taught something as a child that you now realize isn't consistent with Scripture.
- Where might you be unintentionally adding something to Scripture that isn't really there or twisting what is there to fit your own prejudices or biases?
- How can reading Scripture with other people in community help us see those areas?
- How can listening to other people from other cultures, backgrounds or perspective help challenge interpretations we may have been taught that are not from the Lord?
- How can reading different interpretations outside of our own denomination or communities help challenge assumptions, preconceived notions, and biases?
- How should we respond when we hear someone twisting Scripture to justify racism?
- How is God specifically leading you to respond to this lesson?
- Closing Prayer

## Closing Prayer

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees,  
that I may follow it to the end.  
Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law  
and obey it with all my heart.  
Direct me in the path of your commands,  
for there I find delight.  
Turn my heart toward your statutes  
and not toward selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes away from worthless things;  
preserve my life according to your word.  
Fulfill your promise to your servant,  
so that you may be feared.  
Take away the disgrace I dread,  
for your laws are good.  
How I long for your precepts!  
In your righteousness preserve my life.

- Psalm 119:33-40 (NIV)

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional prayer time this week to pray for God to open your eyes to ways that people have twisted and misused Scripture to justify racism. Ask God to dig deep into your own heart and reveal any ways that you may be twisting His word to justify your own biases and prejudices. Ask God to give you His wisdom to understand His word. Pray for humility and grace to listen to people from different perspectives to see if they may challenge your views. Through it all, ask the Spirit to keep you focused on listening for His voice, not trying to make His Word fit what you want to believe or wish were true or have always been taught.
- **Act:** This week, take some time to listen to someone from a different theological or church background from you. Ask them what they were taught concerning race and the Bible. Share what you were taught as a child concerning race and the Bible. Compare and contrast those different interpretations and then examine the Scriptures together.

# Session

## 06



# Session 06

## Racial Reconciliation and the Foreigner Pt. 1

### Opening Prayer

*Merciful God, we pray to you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.*

*Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished. May we never forget them, but honor their sacrifice with deeds more than words. We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.*

*Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection. In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.*

*Merciful God and Father of all, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centeredness. Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.*

*May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.*

- Pope Francis<sup>12</sup>

## Discussion

Terry opened this video by describing how immigration is one of the most hotly contested issues in our country today. It seems like everyone has a different opinion on how to treat immigrants today, both outside and inside the church.

- Describe ways that you have heard people talk about immigrants on the news, on social media, in your community, or around your dinner table.
- How have you heard your church talk about immigrants? In what ways is it similar or different from what you hear about immigrants in the media?
- Describe any personal experience you have had with first generation immigrants to our country.
- How would you describe the real people you have known? How are they similar to or different from the way immigrants are described in the media?

Immigration is a complicated issue and there are a lot of logical arguments, strong emotions, and deep compassion on both sides of the conversation. But immigration is also an issue through which some people's racism can be revealed. Because their ideas about immigration are founded on their view of "the other" and their deeply held beliefs about different races not mixing.

**Read: Exodus 1:5-14**

- Why did the new king of Egypt enslave the people of Israel?
- What does this tell us about how he viewed them as “other” from the Egyptians?

A new king arose who didn't know Joseph. He didn't have a personal relationship with the Israelites. And he was threatened by how strong they were, so he enslaved them. Even though the Israelites had been living in Egypt for generations, Pharaoh didn't consider them part of his people. To him, they were foreigners living in his land. Other. And it was because he saw them as other that he was able to dehumanize them enough to enslave them.

Racial injustice begins with othering. When we see other nations, races, and people groups as anything less than our brothers and sisters in one human family, made in the image of God just as we are, that's when we justify treating them as less than. But the Bible teaches the exact opposite.

**Read: Leviticus 19:33-34**

- How does God command Israel to treat foreigners living among them?
- How is this connected to the way they were treated when they were foreigners in Egypt?
- What does this say about God's ways and His kingdom's values?

God's way is not like the ways of the world. Pharaoh, like other ancient rulers, treated foreigners living among his people as “other.” But God says to treat them just as you would anyone who was born in your country, like one of your own. God's ways are always, always defined by love.

- What would it look like for us to “love them as yourself” when it comes to foreigners living in the United States today?
- What difference would it make in the way people treat immigrants in our country if they considered them as “one of our own” instead of an “other”?
- What difference would it make in the way people treat immigrants in our country if they loved them as they loved themselves and their own families?
- Think about the things people say and believe about immigrants to our country. How would you feel if someone said those things about you or your family?

**Read: Philippians 2:1-4**

- What would it look like for you to look out for the interests of immigrants and seek their good above your own? What would look like for you to esteem them as more important than yourself?
- Is this typical for the way that people think and talk about immigrants in our country?
- How is it similar to the way that Jesus has treated us and has loved us?

**Read: Romans 15:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-2**

- Why does Jesus want the strong to reach out and help the weak and build them up?
- Why are Christian's lives supposed to be about seeking the good of others rather than themselves?
- How can we live that philosophy out in the way we talk and think about immigrants?

There are so many ways we can “other” someone else without even realizing it. Often, when we hear someone speaking somewhat broken English in a foreign accent, without even thinking about it, we assume they aren't as intelligent as us, which is ridiculous! If they're speaking two languages, however broken it is, they are already doing more than most Americans. But it's one way “othering” is deeply imbedded in our culture's consciousness. Some of us may other people based on their clothing or hairstyles or something else.



- What are some other ways that we “other” people from other cultures and backgrounds?
- Pharaoh’s “other”ing of the Israelites led to slavery and genocide. Those things probably seem way out of the realm of possibility for us, yet we all are capable of dehumanizing other people in other ways. What things do our “other”ing of people lead to?
- Terry gave some examples of ways people have allowed terrible things to happen to others without speaking up because they think of them as “other” or not “one of us” – the Holocaust, the genocide of Native Americans, Jim Crow laws, Japanese internment camps, etc. In what ways have you allowed people to be mistreated without speaking up in your life?

When we see people as “other” from us, it’s really easy to dismiss the way they are mistreated, or not even really think about it. When we think about the way immigrants are treated in our country or laws regarding them, it’s not really our concern, because it’s not happening to us. But loving people as we love ourselves means we have to think about how we would feel if we were being treated the way they are. Or how we would feel if that person were our close family or friends.

Imagine if your best friend started dating an immigrant and you really liked that person a lot. Now, immigration laws are suddenly personal. They mean something to you. They matter because they affect a person you care about. That’s what it means to love the foreigner as we love ourselves. Except we’re not supposed to wait until we have a personal relationship with an immigrant to care.

As Christians, we are called to love all people as we love ourselves – friends, family, enemies, strangers. We are commanded to welcome the stranger and advocate for them (Deuteronomy 10:17-20). As believers, we cannot turn a blind eye to what is happening to immigrants in this country.

- What are different possible reasons people may have emigrated to this country? What might they need from us to feel welcomed, loved, and safe?
- What kind of difference may it make in your own heart’s attitude to actually get to know real immigrant families? How can you build personal relationships with immigrants?
- When we get to know people as actual people and not just see them as “issues” how does that change the way we see them? How can it help us to stop seeing them as “other” and understand they are a lot more like us than we realize?
- How can it help us have more compassion for their situations? How can it help us think differently about the issues and politics?
- How can you empathize with immigrants in your community, to try to understand what their life is like and where they are coming from and what their experiences have been?
- Be honest with yourself. In what ways have you been “other”ing people in your life?
- In what ways is God calling you to re-evaluate the way you think, talk about, and treat immigrants?
- When we stop othering people, how does that free us up to see what they can offer to our communities, rather than what they are “taking from us”?

## Closing Prayer

Lord God, help us to remember those who tonight will go to sleep unfed and unwelcome, strangers in foreign lands, people who have fled for their lives and are far from their homes.

We lift up to you those who are escaping persecution and conflict, having fled death, torture or ruthless exploitation.

So many carry wounds; mental and physical. So many have suffered greatly. Lord Jesus, give us more of your compassion for their plight, soften our hearts to their situation, and help us follow your lead in seeking justice and mercy on their behalf.

We pray for an end to the wars, poverty and human rights abuses that drive desperate people to become refugees in the first place.

We give thanks for people working in troubled countries and ask for more of your blessing so we can bring life, dignity and hope to those that remain.

We thank you that you are Lord of all the earth and all its people are loved by you.

We pray these things in the name of your Son who was himself born into the troubled life of a refugee.<sup>13</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional prayer time this week to analyze your own heart and see if there are any ways that you are “other”ing people. Pray for the Lord to reveal those things to you and change your heart. Pray for the Spirit to fill you with His love for people. Ask Him to give you His eyes to see people the way that you do. Pray for the ability to see everyone in the whole world as a brother and sister in our one human family and really, truly care about what happens to them.
- **Act:** This week, intentionally befriend a new person who has immigrated to your community from another place. You may do this through a ministry or organization or it may be as simple as talking with someone who works at your grocery store or your bank or an ethnic restaurant you love. It may be another parent at your kid’s school or someone who lives in your neighborhood or goes to your gym. It may feel awkward at first, but ask them if you can take them out for coffee or dinner and ask them some questions about their experience moving from another place. Just try to get to know them and understand their personal experience and motivations for coming, to get a better idea of who they are, so you can see them as just like you, not “the other.”

# Session

# 07



# Session 07

## Racial Reconciliation and the Foreigner Pt. 2

### Opening Prayer

*Lord Jesus, today you call us to welcome the members of God's family who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear and doubt and even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds. Help us by your grace,*

*To banish fear from our hearts, that we may embrace each of your children as our own brother and sister;  
To welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity, while responding to their many needs;  
To realize that you call all people to your holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice;  
To share of our abundance as you spread a banquet before us;*

*To give witness to your love for all people, as we celebrate the many gifts they bring.  
We praise you and give you thanks for the family you have called together from so many people. We see in this human family a reflection of the divine unity of the one most Holy Trinity in whom we make our prayer.*

*- Immigrants and Refugee Prayers, Xavier University<sup>14</sup>*

### Discussion

In this video, Terry brought up some really hard questions people often ask about the stories in the Bible. We've been going through Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, talking about what God says about race. We are now getting to Joshua, to the point in Israel's history called The Conquest, when the Israelites who God rescued from slavery in Egypt entered the Promised Land and conquered the people groups who were already living there.

Joshua can be a tough book for modern readers, especially in light of what we saw in the last lesson – that God has a heart for the foreigner and wants us to love the foreigner as ourselves. If God loves foreigners, why did He tell the Israelites to go into the land and utterly destroy all of these different people groups there? Isn't that God being racist against the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, and so on? Is this God Himself committing genocide?

- Describe how you have wrestled with this image of God as what seems like a wrathful, vindictive, war-hungry God who seems ready to destroy all Gentile (non-Israelite) nations. Please note there are also a lot of times He was ready to destroy Israel too!
- How do these stories make you feel about God? How do you reconcile them with the God of grace, mercy, compassion and love?
- How have you heard other people try to separate "The God of the Old Testament" from "The God of the New Testament" and/or Jesus because of this? Why is that not biblically sound theology?
- How have you heard unbelievers use these stories to speak against Christianity and/or people use it as a reason to walk away from the faith?

Terry explained how Joshua tells us that these cities were "set apart to the Lord" for destruction.

**Read: Joshua 6:15-19**

- What does it mean to be “set apart” for the Lord? What about “set apart for destruction”?
- Why were only Rahab and her family allowed to live out of all of Jericho?
- What does this tell us about why these cities were destroyed?

**Read: Leviticus 18:1-5 and 24-30 and Deuteronomy 20:16-18**

- Why did God say they should completely destroy the cities of the foreigners who were living in the land they were to inherit, not just live alongside them?

**Read: Leviticus 18:1-5 and 24-30 and Deuteronomy 20:16-18**

- Why did God say they should completely destroy the cities of the foreigners living in the land they were to inherit, not just live alongside them?
- How did the abominable acts of these nations affect the land?
- Why did God say they were “vomited out” of the land?
- What did God say would happen to Israel if they did the same?

Destroying these cities wasn't racially motivated. It wasn't about genocide, it was about purifying the land from the sin they had brought upon it. And yet, this is still really hard for us to accept. Why did these cities have to be destroyed as a sacrifice? What happened to the God of mercy, forgiveness, and steadfast love? Are these things they did really so detestable that God wouldn't forgive them? Does this mean there are some sins that are beyond God's forgiveness?

**Read: Joshua 6:17 again.**

- Why was Rahab and her house spared?
- Why is it significant that the story mentioned that Rahab was a prostitute?

Not all of Jericho was destroyed. Rahab was saved. So it wasn't genocide. It wasn't about their race or ethnicity. In the very next battle after Jericho, God would destroy any Israelites who turned against Him. It also wasn't because their sins were beyond forgiveness. If it were, a prostitute wouldn't be forgiven. This wasn't about having the right ethnicity or being good enough. It was about faith.

**Read: Joshua 2:8-13**

- How do we know that Rahab had faith in Israel's God?
- How do we know that the other people in Jericho also knew about God and had an opportunity to believe? What was their response instead?

Everyone in Jericho had heard about God's awesome power, but the other people responded in fear. Rahab responded in faith. Instead of being afraid of God, she asked His people for salvation. And the spies welcomed her into the community, an option that was open to anyone in Jericho who believed.

In the Old Testament law, God welcomed any foreigner who wanted to join the Israelites and commit to follow their God. And as we saw in the last lesson, they were to be treated just as the native-born Israelite, as one of their own. God never denied anyone of any people group who wanted to join the covenant family. All were invited. Even those who were originally hostile to God or His people. No matter who they were, enemy or ally, God promised all foreigners that if they committed to follow Him, they would receive His blessing just like any native-born Israelite.



He proved this when He sent one of his prophets (Jonah) to preach to Israel's greatest enemy at the time (the Assyrians in Nineveh), asking them to repent and turn to Him. When they did, God relented in His punishment and showed them mercy instead. Jonah was furious. He didn't think they deserved God's mercy and grace. They didn't, but no one does, including the Israelites! God told Jonah flat out he had no right to be angry. God would show mercy to anyone and everyone who repented in faith.

The stories of Nineveh and Rahab show us that God's destruction or salvation wasn't about which people group someone belonged to. God spared those who had faith, no matter what nation, tribe, or people group they were from.

**Read: Acts 10:34-36**

The story of the Conquest was a story of God creating a people who would be faithful to His covenant. No matter what people group they were originally from. The foundation of that people were the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt. But any Israelites who were unfaithful to God were destroyed and any foreigner who wanted to join God's people, like Rahab, were welcomed in. So that only the faithful survived. God was creating a holy nation, set apart for Him. A nation of people of faith, regardless of ethnicity or culture or language.

Scripture has a recurring motif of God's people being immigrants in other nations. Abraham was a migrant sojourner traveling through the land of Canaan. Jacob and his sons were refugees, fleeing a famine to Egypt. The twelve tribes were foreigners living in Egypt, and became enslaved for it. When the Israelites were in exiled in Babylon, they were immigrants in a foreign land again. Even Jesus spent some time as a refugee in Egypt during his lifetime. It may sound harsh, but however you treat immigrants today is how you would be treating Jesus if you were living in Egypt in the first century.

**Read: Matthew 25:31-40**

- Why is welcoming the stranger something by which Jesus measures our faith in Him?
- How does caring for the "least of these" show our love for Jesus?

The stranger is just one category of the "least of these" that followers of Jesus should care for. This is a consistent theme throughout Scripture from beginning to end. God has a special heart for the vulnerable and anyone who knows and loves God will too (Deuteronomy 10:17-21). This parable isn't about doing good works to get into heaven. It's about the fact that those who love Jesus will have a heart like His for the least of these. Jesus's whole life and ministry was about serving and loving the least of these in His world – the sick, the sinners, the marginalized, the foreigners. We can argue about policies and politics all day long, but the real question is do you have the heart of Jesus for people?

- Do the actions of the Church in America and our church in particular reflect the heart of God for the least of these? Why or why not?
- As the Church, we don't make laws and policies for our nation, but what other ways can we affect change in the way that foreigners are treated in our country?
- What specific things could our individual church do to help immigrants in our community?
- How can we advocate for immigrants and refugees in our country?
- What kind of impact would it make on our community if the Church was the place that immigrants felt welcomed and loved? If the Church were the people who advocated for them? What kind of witness would it be to the ways of God?
- In what ways is God calling you to welcome immigrants into your home, church, and community?
- What specific people or groups of people is God calling you to welcome into your life? If you don't already have an idea of who He wants you to reach out to, pray about it!
- How can your small group partner with ministries to help welcome and support refugees and immigrant families? Not just with getting people resettled in your community, but helping with resources like tutoring children, ESL classes, job connections, childcare, and so on.

## Closing Prayer

*God of love and compassion: may we always recognize your spirit:*

- in the refugee family, seeking safety from violence;
- in the migrant worker, bringing food to our tables;
- in the asylum-seekers, seeking justice for their families;
- in the unaccompanied child, traveling in a dangerous world.

*Give us hearts that break open whenever our brothers and sisters turn to us.*

*Give us hearts that no longer turn deaf to their voices in times of need;*

*Give us eyes to recognize a moment for grace instead of a threat.*

*Give us voices that fail to remain silent but which decide instead to advocate prophetically.*

*Give us hands that reach out in welcome, but also in work, for a world of justice until all homelands are safe and secure.*

Bless us, O Lord...

- Fr. Dan Hartnett S.J.<sup>15</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional prayer time this week to pray for immigrants coming to our country and all of the different situations and struggles they may be experiencing. Pray for them to be welcomed and supported by those in our community, not pushed aside, ostracized, or even victimized. Pray for their safety and provision. Pray for the countries in which people are still experiencing slavery and genocide like the Israelites did in Egypt. And pray for the general attitude towards immigrants in our country – that people's hearts will be softened and they will see the real people and real lives behind the issues and politics.
- **Act:** This week, volunteer with and/or donate to a ministry in your area that welcomes and supports immigrants and refugees. You may have to do a little research to find a local ministry you can support, but no matter where you live in the U.S., there are immigrants and refugees in your community and there are ministries which are focused on helping them. Here is just one place to start - [How to Help Refugees | Get Involved Today | World Relief](#)

# Session

# 08





# Session 08

## The Prophets and Social Justice

### Opening Prayer

*Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and forever. Amen.*

—The Book of Common Prayer<sup>16</sup>

### Discussion

- What do you think about when you hear the term “social justice”? What about “justice” in general? What about “biblical justice”? What are the differences between these terms?
- How has the term “social justice” been used in our generation?
- What do you think God thinks about “social justice”?

Terry opened this session by describing the fountain in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. and the inscription matching the visual of the water running down from the cylindrical fountain in the middle of the room.

#### Read: Amos 5:24

- How does the imagery of justice rolling on like a river make you feel? What does it say about God's desire for justice in our world?

This verse has been a battle cry for believers throughout history as they fought for justice in their communities. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted this verse as a battle cry more than 2,700 years after Amos wrote it. Though the details of the injustice of each time period may have been different, the hearts of the Old Testament prophets and the heroes of the civil rights movement were the same.

As Terry told us, the idea of social justice is not new. The term “social justice” may have been co-opted by certain groups and become aligned with certain political ideologies in our culture, but the concept that God cares deeply about justice and so should His people is woven into the pages of Scripture from the very beginning. And people who love and follow Jesus have been fighting for social justice throughout church history.

- Amos 5:24 starts with a “but,” contrasting it with the verses before it. Look back at verses 21–23.

#### Read: Amos 5:21–23

- What was God telling us about what He wants from His people?
- How was this different from what the people thought He wanted from them?
- What does this tell us about God? About what it means to be His people?

Worship through song or offerings or festivals isn't a bad thing; it's a good thing to do. It's something God commanded His people to do. But their religious rites had become a “stench” to the Lord instead of the “sweet aroma” they were supposed to be (Numbers 29:2). Why?

**Read: Amos 5:10–13**

- What were they doing to the poor and the vulnerable in their land?
- How/why did this make their worship unacceptable to the Lord?
- How are worship and justice connected?

God was telling His people that He would not accept their worship because they were oppressing the poor and depriving them of justice. When we think of the word “prophet,” many of us think of a person who tells the future, but in the Old Testament, a prophet was more like a preacher. They received messages from God to preach to the people. They were brought onto the scene when God’s people were not living the way they should. He sent the prophets to remind the people of His covenant, tell them how they were breaking it, and call them to repent. The prophets preached lots of messages to the people, but they all boil down to two main issues:

- Idolatry
- Injustice

Why these two issues? Because of how they are connected to the two overarching laws of the covenant. As Jesus told us in the New Testament, all of God’s covenant law can be summed up in two basic ideas: love God and love others (Matthew 22:37–40).

- Idolatry meant they were not loving God.
- Injustice meant they were not loving others.

God’s people weren’t just breaking some arbitrary rules He had set up. They were missing the very heart of His law. Love is at the heart of God’s law because love is the very essence of who God is. God isn’t just loving, God is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus echoed what the Old Testament prophets had told the people: if we really loved God, we would love others as ourselves; we would not allow them to be mistreated. It’s a harsh truth, but not loving others means we don’t really love God. No matter what we say, how many psalms we sing, how many sacrifices we offer, or how many prayers we pray. God sees right through our empty religion straight to our hearts.

**Read: James 1:27**

- Why is “pure” religion connected to caring for the vulnerable?
- What does this tell us about the heart of God? About what it means to love people?

In the Bible, “justice” means to give someone what they are due. It has both a negative and a positive sense. Punishing someone for a crime is giving the criminal what they are due, and it also brings justice to the victim’s family. But justice isn’t only about what happens in court. It’s about giving someone what they are due in all things. So, doing justice in business means charging a fair price and paying a fair wage, not exploiting people. Doing justice socially means giving people their inalienable human rights—everyone, not just certain groups of people. In God’s kingdom, justice is a communal issue. We are one human family and justice is done only when every one of us is receiving what we are due. This is why justice is especially focused on helping the vulnerable and the oppressed, because they are the ones who are not receiving what they are due. Our God desires justice for all. But He fights for justice for those who have been treated unjustly. It is God’s desire for all people to flourish. If there is injustice anywhere for anyone, it is our responsibility to fight for justice for them.

**Read: Micah 6:6–8 and Proverbs 31:8–9**

- How are justice and mercy connected?
- How are they both connected to walking humbly with God?
- Why are Christians called to defend the rights of those who cannot defend themselves?

Walking humbly with God means walking the way He would walk, living and loving the way He would. Because our God is a God of justice and mercy, His people should be defined by justice and mercy. Justice is much more than a political buzzword. It is at the heart of what it means to be God's people in the world. It is love in action. You cannot divorce justice from Christianity. Loving God and loving others go hand in hand. You cannot say you love God and oppress others or support people being treated unjustly in any way, shape, or form. That is why the prophet's tones were so harsh in their condemnation of injustice.

The literary form of Micah 6 is that of a covenant lawsuit. Micah 6:8 might sound good in a worship song or printed on a bookmark, but the original tone of this passage was intense. God was bringing His people to court for breach of contract, for breaking their covenant with Him. Justice and mercy are not optional for the people of God. Seeking justice isn't an extra project we take on if we feel led to that part of the church's ministry. It is a foundational part of what it means to be God's people—to love God and love others in the world.

- How would you respond to a person who says that the Bible doesn't talk about social justice?
- How would you describe a biblical view of social justice? How does that view compare to the way the term is used in our greater culture? How can we help redefine the term in a biblical way?
- How does it affect your understanding of social justice to know that in the Bible, justice was not just an individual issue, but a communal one?
- In what ways have people of color been treated unjustly in the past? How are they being treated unjustly in the present? How can we rectify that for the future?

Research indicates that, statistically, people of color in the U.S. often experience unequal pay, unequal property values on their homes, unequal tax rates on their homes, unequal cost of insurance, unequal treatment by police, unequal treatment by teachers, and more, including just the way people of color are treated at restaurants, hotels, and other businesses. You may try to explain away some of these statistics by other things, but experiments have been done regarding unequal property values. A bi-racial family had their home appraised with all their family pictures in the home, then they changed nothing else about the property but switched out their family pictures and removed books written by black authors. They brought in another appraiser who valued their home for 40% more than the first.<sup>17</sup> You cannot argue with that.

- Why should those of us who aren't being treated unjustly speak up for those who are? What kind of difference would that make, rather than only them speaking for themselves?
- As the church, we don't make laws and policies for our nation, but how else can we seek justice for all people, care for the least of these, and defend the vulnerable? How can we advocate for social justice in our nation in a biblical way?
- How can we seek social justice when it comes to issues of race in our culture? What responsibility do we have as individual believers? What about the church as a whole?
- What kind of impact would it make on our community if the church were a place that stood for justice for all people of every race and defended the rights of those who were oppressed? What would that say to unbelievers in our world about who God is?
- In what ways do you see injustice in the world around you? How is God leading you to respond?

## Closing Prayer

*Spirit of God,*

*We have heard your call to share in building up the Kingdom of God.*

*Fill us with the desire to change ourselves and to change the world.*

*Enflame our passion for justice into a commitment to address unjust situations and structures.*

*Deepen our concern for our sisters and brothers in America and overseas who endure the burdens of poverty, war, exploitation and persecution.*

*Let us enthusiastically play our part in the mission of the Church in the modern world.*

*Banish any complacency in our hearts and minds.*

*Teach us to recognize the lack of justice.*

*May we always act in the Spirit of justice.*

*May we envisage, pray about and create a different sort of world*

*in which injustice is replaced with a renewed sense of solidarity and care.*

*Enlivened by the Spirit, may we go forth in the peace of the Holy Spirit to love and serve the Lord.*

*Amen*

—Australian Catholic Social Justice Council<sup>18</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for justice for all those who are being oppressed or treated unjustly in our nation and around the world. Pray specifically for issues of racial injustice and those who are affected. Pray for your eyes to be opened to ways people of color are treated unjustly in your community and ways you can help. Pray for courage and boldness to speak up for those who are being oppressed.
- **Act:** This week choose one issue of racial injustice to research. It may be the way children of color are treated differently in our school system. It may be racial profiling, harassment, or police discrimination. It may be how people of color are treated in the workplace or businesses, or unequal punishments people of color receive for the same crimes. Or inequality in real estate and loan qualification. There are many. Think and pray about ways you can advocate for those who are being mistreated or oppressed.

# Session

09





# Session 09

## The Ethnic Composition of the New Testament World Pt. 1

### Opening Prayer

*Almighty God, through your Holy Spirit you created unity in the midst of diversity;  
We acknowledge that human diversity is an expression of your manifold love for your creation;  
We confess that in our brokenness as human beings we turn diversity into a source of alienation, injustice, oppression, and wounding.  
Empower us to recognize and celebrate differences as your great gift to the human family.  
Enable us to be the architects of understanding, of respect and love;  
Through the Lord, the ground of all unity, we pray. Amen.<sup>19</sup>*

### Discussion

- How ethnically diverse is the area in which you live? Does it reflect the ethnic diversity of our nation as a whole?
- How ethnically diverse are your circles of friends or the groups/communities you are a part of?
- Why are our individual communities often not as diverse as our nation as a whole? Why do people tend to stick to their “tribes”?
- Do you think this is healthy or unhealthy? Why or why not?

In this session, Terry explained that the world Jesus lived in was very ethnically and culturally diverse, much like our world today.

#### Read: Acts 2:5–11

- How many different ethnicities does this passage list as living in Jerusalem?
- What does this tell us about the city of Jerusalem in the first century?

Like Jerusalem, every city in the Roman Empire was multi-ethnic. Each city would have had their own culture and language from before the Romans took over, but people would have also spoken Greek as their second language and would have adopted much of Greek (Hellenistic) culture as well, especially those who wanted to be influential in the Roman world. Most people lived with one foot in each world.

It was called “Greek” because before the Romans took over, the Greeks had ruled much of the empire. When the Greeks conquered a nation, they forced the people to learn Greek and adopt Greek culture. When the Roman Empire took over, they didn’t change everything all over again. They blended some of their own things with the Greek culture to make a “Greco-Roman” culture that people still referred to as “Greek.”

- “Greek” didn’t refer to your race or ethnicity, but the fact that you had adopted the Greco-Roman culture, which had more to do with your level of education than anything else. Uneducated people tended not to learn Greek and therefore kept more of their own cultures, while more educated people learned Greek and adopted Greek culture.
- “Barbarians” were those who, no matter where they were from, did not have a Greek education. Again, this referred not to ethnicity or race but education.

These were the two main distinctions between people throughout the Roman Empire; you were either “Greek” or “barbarian.” Even within the Jewish people there was this same distinction:

- “Hellenistic Jews” had adopted Greek culture.
- “Hebraic Jews” rejected Greek culture in an attempt to stay separate from the world.

The Hebraic Jews considered the Hellenistic Jews to be “less than,” but the disciples welcomed them into the early church with open arms and taught that they should be treated equally (Acts 6:1).

In Israel specifically, there were two different people groups, the Jews (descendants of the southern tribe of Judah) and the Samaritans (descendants of the northern tribes of Israel who had intermarried over time with Gentiles). The Jews did not consider the Samaritans to be real Israelites for two reasons:

1. After Solomon’s reign, they broke away from the “true people of God” in Judah (930 BC). After they were conquered by Assyria (722 BC), they intermarried with pagans that the king of Assyria sent to Israel to live among them.
2. God did speak against the Samaritans mixing with these other people groups, but it was about their worship of false gods, not their ethnicity or race.

**Read: 2 Kings 17:24–41**

- What was the real problem with these foreigners who intermingled with the Israelites?
- How did they influence the Israelites (northern kingdom people) living in Samaria?
- What does this tell us about how God feels about worshipping anything in addition to Him?

God tells us consistently throughout Scripture that His commands against mixing with other people groups aren’t about race or ethnicity but about faith. He had zero problem with Rahab, Ruth, and other Gentiles joining Israel and converting to their faith. It was not about keeping the Jewish bloodlines pure; it was about keeping the people of God “holy” (set apart) for Him.

**Read: 2 Corinthians 6:14–18**

God’s command to be separate from the other peoples of the land wasn’t about ethnicity it was about their faith. Jesus specifically reached out to Samaritans. His longest recorded individual conversation in the Gospels, in which He discussed deep theological issues, was with a Samaritan woman. And she became the first evangelist for the gospel in the book of John. And He specifically included Samaria in His instructions to His disciples about where they were to go to witness and bring people into the kingdom of God.

**Read: Acts 1:8**

Jesus didn’t allow cultural barriers or ethnic distinctions to dictate who was allowed to become part of the people of God. His invitation was and is open to all people. That first group of people who came into the kingdom at Pentecost were from every nation in the Roman Empire and they heard the invitation to come to Jesus in their own languages (Acts 2). They didn’t have to change who they were to come into the kingdom. God met them where they were. As the people of God, the church should be the most radically inclusive place on the planet, welcoming people of every nation, tribe, and tongue to join us in the beautiful tapestry of the kingdom of God.

**Read: Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11**

You all—every nation, tribe, and tongue—are one in Christ Jesus. This is the unity in diversity God longs to see in His kingdom, diverse people from every nation, tribe, and tongue, with different languages, food, style of clothes, and cultures. But unified as one body by faith in Christ.

- Review: How ethnically diverse is your neighborhood? Your school district? Your church? Your circle of friends? Groups to which you belong? Workplace? Other communities?

As diverse as our country is, most of our communities and circles of friends tend to be less diverse. If we want to put ourselves or our kids in a diverse environment, we must be intentional about it. If we don’t make intentional choices to put ourselves in diverse situations, we will find ourselves in the same communities with the same people.

- If you don't have a lot of ethnic diversity in your friends or community groups, how can you intentionally try to put yourself in situations in which you are around more diverse people?
- Could you join a diverse church or volunteer with diverse organizations or even go to work for a more diverse company? If you have kids, could you join a more diverse soccer team, cub scout pack, dance or theatre group, or other activity? Might you even consider moving your family to a more diverse neighborhood and/or school district?
- What do you think could be gained from intentionally putting yourself and your kids in a more diverse environment so you can naturally build friendships with different kinds of people?
- What do you think you could learn or how could you grow from having real relationships with people of other races, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds?
- What might you have to sacrifice to pursue more diversity in your life?
- How ethnically diverse is your church? Does it reflect the ethnic diversity of the kingdom of God—every nation, tribe, and tongue?
- If your church isn't diverse, how can you find other ways to interact with believers of different races and ethnicities?

## Closing Prayer

*O God,  
 you created all people in your image.  
 We thank you for the astonishing variety  
 of races and cultures in this world.  
 Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,  
 and show us your presence  
 in those who differ most from us,  
 until our knowledge of your love is made perfect  
 in our love for all your children;  
 through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—*Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition*<sup>20</sup>

## Respond with Action:

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for racial diversity in our world. Pray for yourself and others to break down barriers between communities that are still mostly segregated. Pray for people's hearts to change and be given the desire to have relationships with and learn from people of other races and ethnicities. Pray for people to have empathy to try to connect with and understand people from a different background. Specifically pray for how God is leading you to pursue more racial diversity in your life, how you can get involved in more diverse communities.
- **Act:** This week choose one way to put yourself in a more diverse environment. It may be as simple as taking your kids to a playground on the other side of town or going to a fast-food place in another neighborhood and striking up conversations with people there. It may be visiting a church with a different racial makeup than yours or going to a racially diverse church. It may be joining a book club, running group, volunteer group, or other community group that is more diverse. Whatever it is, be intentional about putting yourself in a situation to interact with a diverse group of people. Pray for opportunities to interact and then start conversations and build relationships naturally and see what the Lord does with it.



# Session 10



# Session 10

## The Ethnic Composition of the New Testament World Pt. 2

### Opening Prayer

*God and Father of all,  
in your love  
you made all the nations of the world  
to be a family,  
and your Son taught us to love one another.  
Yet our world is riven apart  
with prejudice, arrogance, and pride.  
Help the different races  
to love and understand one another better.  
Increase among us sympathy,  
tolerance, and goodwill,  
that we may learn to appreciate the gifts  
that other races bring to us,  
and to see in all people  
our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died.  
Save us from jealousy, hatred, and fear,  
and help us to live together  
as members of one family at home in the world,  
sons and daughters of one Father  
who live in the liberty of the children of God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland <sup>21</sup>

### Discussion

- What have you heard people say about having a “pure bloodline”? Why do you think people think that way?
- How have you heard people talk about interracial marriage? Why do you think people think that way?
- How many people statistically do you think have “pure” bloodlines in our country if we’re really honest and look back far enough?

Terry opened this session by talking very openly about his sister-in-law’s interracial marriage and how some people in their family did not accept it. It’s a sad reality that even in our modern world, some people still don’t accept interracial marriage. But what does God say?

Most of us aren’t excited about reading the genealogies in the Bible, but if we study them, they have important things to tell us. The genealogy of Jesus is the very first chapter in the New Testament for a reason, as it sets the stage for who Jesus was and why He came. In the ancient Jewish world, genealogies were important to show that you came from a Jewish bloodline and belonged to your tribe. The more honorable people you had in your bloodline, the more honorable you were in society. People took it so seriously that they often just removed the unsavory characters from their genealogies. Jesus’s genealogy was especially important because the Messiah was supposed to be a son of David. It needed to prove He was a direct descendant of King David. But Jesus’s genealogy was surprising in a number of ways.

**Read: Matthew 1:1–6 and 16**

Genealogies typically only included the names of the men: so-and-so fathered so-and-so. But Jesus's genealogy included four women in addition to naming His mother at the end. And these were not just any women. All four were Gentiles—Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba was a Hittite. Jesus's bloodline wasn't purely Jewish. They also all had untraditional, even scandalous, stories of how they became a part of Jesus's bloodline.

- What does it say about Jesus that His disciples didn't try to hide the sordid past of His ancestors?
- What does it say that they called attention to Gentiles in Jesus's genealogy?

Jesus's bloodline was wildly inclusive and intentionally so. There was no reason to include these women in the list at all unless Matthew was purposely telling us something—that the kingdom of the Messiah is open to "sinners" and "saints" alike and to people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Based on faith and regardless of ethnicity, honor, or status.

The presence of these women in Jesus's genealogy tells us that God had absolutely no problem with Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba marrying into the Jewish bloodline. God's law welcomed any foreigner to join Israel if they were willing to convert to their faith and commit to the covenant.

**Read: Isaiah 56:3–7**

- What does it mean that God would give these faithful foreigners an everlasting name? That their sacrifices would be accepted? That He would give them joy in His house?
- What does this passage say God's temple will be called?

Any foreigner who bound themselves to the Lord would receive the blessings of the covenant just like any native-born Israelite who kept the covenant. As we learned from the stories of the conquest, the people of God started with the foundation being the Israelites, but any native-born Israelite who was unfaithful to God was cut off (like at the battle of Ai) and any foreigner who believed (like Rahab) was brought in, making the people of God a people of faith from every nation, tribe, and tongue. It was about faith, not ethnicity. We saw in our last lesson that God had concerns about His people mixing with other people groups, but not because of their ethnicity, because of their religion.

**Read: I Kings 11:1–8**

- Why did God warn the people not to intermarry with people from other nations?
- What happened to Solomon when he did?
- How could he let this happen if he was the wisest man to ever live?

God did not forbid interracial marriage, but He did forbid intermarriage with those who would lead His people astray from following Him.

**Read: Nehemiah 13:23–27**

- Why did Nehemiah warn the exiled Jews who had returned to rebuild Jerusalem not to intermarry with foreigners?

**Read: (as review) 2 Kings 17:29–33**

- How did the pagan people influence the Samaritans when they lived among them?
- Why is God not okay with being worshipped alongside other gods?

Looking at all these stories together, the whole witness of Scripture is that it was fine for foreigners to marry into the people of God when they committed to following and worshipping Israel's God alone. What God was against was marrying someone who would lead them astray from following Him, no matter what race or ethnicity that person was.

**Read: (as review) 2 Corinthians 6:14–17**

- What did Paul mean by being “yoked together”?
- Who was he telling us not to be yoked with and why?

A yoke is the wooden bar that holds two oxen together at the neck so they can work together and walk at the same pace pulling the same load. This passage has often been quoted to try to argue against interracial marriage, but the context is broader than just marriage. It's about partnering with unbelievers in any way. And it is explicitly about partnering with unbelievers. It says absolutely nothing about race or ethnicity.

**Read: Ezra 9:1–4**

Why did Ezra not want the Israelites to intermarry with the pagans?

This is another passage people have often used to argue against interracial marriage. But again, the issue was not these people's race or ethnicity, it was their “detestable practices,” their idolatry and other sins. People with racial biases reading this in English see the term “holy race” in verse 2 and use it to justify their superiority and disapproval of interracial marriage. First, even if this did mean “race” as in ethnicity, that would mean the holy race are the Jews, not white people. But the word in this verse doesn't mean “race” like we think of as race. The literal word is “seed,” not race, meaning the children of God, the family of God, the people of God.

**Read: Galatians 3:26–29**

- Who did Paul say are all “children of God” and “Abraham's seed”?

All people of faith are Abraham's seed: the “holy race.” And “holy” doesn't mean better than other people. It's about being “set apart” for the Lord, not superiority. So, the children of God, Abraham's seed, means any person who is set apart for God by their faith, regardless of race or ethnicity.

**Read: 1 Peter 2:9–10**

Peter calls all believers a “holy nation,” both Jew and Gentile together. This word is *ethnos*, from which we get our word “ethnicity,” and yet it's being used to talk about all believers of all different ethnicities. The message is clear. It is faith that makes the people of God, not race or ethnicity. There is absolutely nothing in the Bible that speaks against intermarriage based on race or ethnicity.

Share any personal experiences you have had with interracial marriage (or dating) of a friend, loved one, or yourself. How did people react? How did the couple feel? What hurdles did they have to overcome? How did it make them stronger?

- In what ways can it be hard for children of interracial couples in our culture? What personal experience do you have with friends, loved ones, or yourself who are biracial?
- How would you respond to someone who told you they are against interracial marriage?
- How would you respond to someone who talked about wanting to keep their bloodline pure?
- How can you personally support interracial families and their children?
- In what ways might making a big deal out of being supportive be hurtful too?
- How is God specifically calling you to respond to this lesson?

## Closing Prayer

*Yes, Jesus,  
I want to be on your right side  
or your left side,  
not for any selfish reason.  
I want to be on your right or your best side,  
not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition,  
but I just want to be there  
in love and in justice and in truth  
and in commitment to others,  
so we can make of this old world a new world. Amen.*

—Martin Luther King Jr. <sup>22</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for interracial couples and their children in America and around the world. Pray for our culture to be kinder and more accepting. Pray for biracial children to experience love, support, and acceptance. Pray for the Lord to reveal how you can support and encourage interracial families. Pray for the wisdom to know how to respond when someone is not supportive or even hurtful.
- **Act:** This week talk to a friend or loved one who has been in an interracial dating relationship or marriage. Ask them what was hard about it, what was great about it, and how other people could have supported them more. Ask them what they learned about themselves, their culture, and their partner and their culture. Just listen to their experience and perspective.

# Session

11





# Session 11

## Jesus and the Marginalized Pt. 1

### Opening Prayer

*Lord, I ask that you would increase in me a love for all people.  
I pray that you would give me a heart for those who are oppressed as well as those who oppress. I ask that you would increase in me an awareness of my own tendencies to favor one kind of person over another. Awaken in me a sensitive heart for all those who bear your image.  
Forgive me for playing favorites. Forgive me for judging and for using my voice to perpetuate violence of any kind. Turn my heart toward you. Give me a soft heart and moldable spirit in you. Increase in me. May my hands be emptied of self and be full of the love you've offered. May my feet quickly carry me to places where hatred seeks to destroy and may your love increase through me.  
Amen*

—Cari Jenkins <sup>23</sup>

### Discussion

Terry opened this session with a reminder of the question Christians have been asking for centuries, that lots of us wore on those bracelets from the 90s, “What would Jesus do?” And he asked, “What do you think Jesus would do about racism if He were in our world right now?”

- What would Jesus have done if He had been on that street corner when that police officer had his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds?
- What would Jesus have done in your middle school gym class when that kid made a racial slur about your classmate? Or when as an adult you said something about a racist joke someone made, and everyone told you to lighten up?
- What would He have done at your workplace when a qualified person of color was overlooked for a promotion in favor of someone less qualified?
- What would He do about systemic racism in our culture? What would He do about the inequities that exist in our education system, criminal justice system, economic system, and elsewhere?

The Gospels paint a pretty clear picture of the kind of guy Jesus was and give us a pretty good idea of what He would have done. Jesus would have always done the most loving thing, and He would always have reached out to the marginalized.

In the ancient world, a person's level of honor was a big deal. It affected everything in your life—who you could marry or do business with and what spaces you were welcome in. You started with a certain level of honor at birth based on your family's honor, but you could gain or lose honor based on things you did. If you did well in school, were successful in business, or were invited to dinner by honorable people, you gained honor. If you committed adultery or cheated someone in business, you lost honor. You could also lose honor by something happening to you through no fault of your own—if you got a disease like leprosy, were in an accident and lost a leg, or even if a family member did something shameful. With everything they did and said, people in the ancient world were constantly trying to gain honor and minimize shame.

By the world's standards, Jesus would have been considered an honorable man. He was born into an average carpenter's family, but He excelled so much in school that He became a rabbi. There were no blemishes on His character, and He constantly won debates with other scholars. If He had been playing the honor game, He would have been winning. But Jesus consistently ignored the honor game and ate dinner with dishonorable people, touched lepers, spoke to Gentiles and women as equals, and called out the honorable for their hypocrisy.



**Read: Matthew 8:1–4**

In the law, lepers were quarantined from the rest of society for practical reasons so the disease wouldn't spread. But people began to believe that lepers got leprosy because of some sin in their lives, so they treated them like outcasts, not with compassion like you would someone with a debilitating disease. By law, you weren't supposed to touch a leper or it would make you unclean as well, but most people wouldn't even go anywhere near a leper.

- In other stories, Jesus healed people with just His words, without having to touch them or even be in their presence. Why do you think He touched the leper?
- What does this tell us, that Jesus touched the untouchables? What does it say about Jesus's care for those the world has rejected?

**Read: Luke 7:36–50**

- Why was Simon a man of high honor? Why would it have been significant that Jesus was invited to his house for dinner?
- Why was Simon so offended that Jesus let this woman touch Him?
- Knowing about this honor system in their culture, why would Jesus's words to Simon about this sinful woman have been shocking?
- What does Jesus's parable (in which both characters owed a debt) tell us about Simon's view of this woman as a "sinner" and himself as an honorable person?
- What does this tell us about what God is really looking for in people as opposed to what the world finds honorable or successful?

This story contrasts a very honorable person in their culture with a very dishonorable person. Yet Jesus leveled the playing field between them. Simon thought he was an honorable person and she was a sinner, but Jesus said they were both sinners. And then He praised the "sinner" for the way she showed Him honor and love, giving her more honor than Simon. Jesus was showing Simon what God thinks is honorable as opposed to what the world defines as honorable. Jesus allowing this woman to touch Him would have been absolutely shocking in their culture. But to then praise her above this honorable man? The way that Jesus treated people broke down barriers that human beings had set up between each other and turned upside down what it meant to be honorable.

**Read: John 4:4–10**

- Why was it unusual for Jesus to be speaking to this woman?
- What does it say about Jesus that He answered her fairly simple question with a deep theological truth about Himself?

As Terry explained, it was unusual for Jesus to be talking to this woman for two reasons—first, she was a woman. Men weren't supposed to talk to women except for family. Second, she was a Samaritan. The text tells us plainly that Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Yet Jesus went out of His way to meet with this seemingly insignificant Samaritan woman and even entered this deep theological discussion with her. He spoke to her like an equal. He spoke to her with the same respect and honor with which He had spoken to the Pharisee Nicodemus just a chapter before. This is yet another example of Scripture comparing the way Jesus treated an honorable man and a dishonorable woman.

There are so many examples in the Gospels of stories like this, stories where Jesus reached out to the person the world had rejected, showing them care and compassion, treating them with respect and honor, and valuing their worth in a way that no one else in the world ever did. This is the kind of God we serve. This is the answer to “WWJD?” in our world today. Especially significant about this story for our study on race is that this woman is not only an outcast, but she was also a Samaritan, the very people group the Jews despised because they were “half-breeds.” Yet, in the very beginning of the book of John, one of the first things Jesus did was go to Samaria. And He didn’t go to the city capital to meet with the governor or the other honorable men of the city. He went to the city well at an off time, when only those considered dishonorable by the rest of the community would be there. Jesus was making a bold statement about who God values.

**Read: John 4:25–26, 28–30, and 39–42**

- Why might it be surprising that the townspeople listened to the word of this woman? What does that say about how believable her message must have been?
- Why did the rest of the town come to believe that Jesus really was the Savior of the world? Why is it significant that this particular text explicitly says, “of the world”?
- What does it tell us about Jesus that He intentionally went to share the gospel with the people group the Jews hated?

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a beautiful picture of His heart for the outcast, but it wasn’t just about her. It is amazing to realize that this Samaritan woman was the first missionary in the Gospel of John, but the story doesn’t end with her going off to tell everyone about Jesus. Jesus stayed in Samaria for two days and taught the Samaritans about God’s rescue plan to save the world. Not just the Jews, but the whole world—Samaritans, Gentiles, every nation, tribe, and tongue. It’s right here in the beginning of John and it was His plan from the moment He called Abraham (Genesis 12:3). It was never just about Abraham’s family; it was always about the whole world.

What would Jesus do? Jesus would reach out to the rejected, the outcast, and the oppressed. Jesus would break down barriers and systems the world has set up to keep “dishonorable” people in their place. Jesus would defend those who are being mistreated and abused. Jesus would preach good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). We know Jesus would fight for racial reconciliation in our world today because He fought for racial reconciliation in His day. The question is, will the church do what Jesus did?

- In what ways does our culture categorize people as “honorable” and “dishonorable”? Specifically, how do we do this regarding race and ethnicity?
- How does our culture try to keep “dishonorable” people in their place?
- Describe any experiences you have had with people making racist jokes or racial slurs around you or to you. How did you respond? Do you wish you had responded differently? How do you think Jesus would have responded?
- Describe any experiences you have had with people of color being left out, overlooked, or mistreated. How did you respond? Do you wish you had responded differently? How do you think Jesus would have responded?
- How does asking ourselves what Jesus would do change the way that we think in moving toward racial reconciliation?
- What racial barriers are there in your community? Between different social groups, school districts, neighborhoods, other places? How can you break down those barriers and step into the “other” communities? What might you gain from doing so? What might you have to risk or sacrifice to do so?
- Who are the “Samaritans” in your world? People who are hated, despised, looked down upon, maybe even by the religious people? How can you reach out to them in love?
- How is God specifically calling you to respond to this lesson?

## Closing Prayer

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let us sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is discord, union; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

—St. Francis

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to ask God to reveal how you can be more like Jesus, in every way but particularly in the way He loved the marginalized, broke down barriers, and intentionally went into the “other” communities in love. Pray for our churches to be more like Jesus, that our witness to the world would show them who Jesus is. Pray for wisdom, grace, and humility to love others the way Jesus did, to stand up for what is right the way Jesus did, and to let go of concern, power, or position to befriend sinners and outcasts. Thank Jesus that He did that for you when He stepped down from His position of power and glory in heaven to come down to earth, humble Himself, and die for you (Philippians 2:1–8).
- **Act:** This week, make an intentional choice to go into a place that is considered “other” from your community, like Jesus intentionally went into Samaria. It may be simply spending time in another neighborhood, volunteering in a different school district, or going to a different church. It may a deeper way of building relationships with someone from that “other” place. Like Jesus, how can you go out of your way to enter their world and reach out to them in love?

# Session

# 12



# Session 12

## Jesus and the Marginalized Pt. 2

### Opening Prayer

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

—Ephesians 3:14–21 (NIV)

### Discussion

Terry closed this session by asking us to be honest with ourselves about what kinds of people we may not want to move into our neighborhood. Who we struggle to love. Who we see as “other.”

- Who don't you want moving into your neighborhood? I don't mean just one nice token neighbor. I mean who might you not want to move into your neighborhood in a large group?
- What part of town do you avoid and why? Be honest with yourself.
- What people make you feel uncomfortable? Who do you want to dismiss?
- Do you find yourself being willing to go serve certain kinds of people on a mission trip or service project, but not really feeling comfortable being their friend? If so, who? And why?
- What racial or cultural prejudices might keep you from loving those Jesus loves?
- What relationships do you have with people of a different ethnicity or race? How have those relationships impacted your understanding of issues of racial injustice in our world?
- What relationships do you have with people of different social classes or socio-economic levels? How have those relationships impacted your understanding of issues of injustice in our world?

Relationships are the key to bringing justice to the injustices in our society. Relationships make “issues” personal. They give them a face and a name. They make us care. They help us understand what is really going on behind all the political posturing and media sound bites. It's hard to know how to love people well if we don't have authentic relationships with them. In this lesson, we'll look in the Gospels at more stories of Jesus building authentic relationships with people from different races to see how He loved and cared for those who were despised by most Jewish people of His day.

**Read: Matthew 8:5–13 (Note: This is just after the story of the leper we read in the last lesson.)**

Roman centurions were hated by the Jews because they were very visible reminders of the fact that Israel was under Roman rule. At the time of Jesus, Israel was a Roman territory and Rome had stationed soldiers there to keep the people under control. Romans would have also been seen as unclean simply because they were Gentiles.



- Why is it surprising that a Roman centurion would be so humble before Jesus, a Jewish rabbi? What does that say about his faith?
- What does it say about the Roman centurion that he was asking for healing for his servant?
- How would the Jews have felt when Jesus praised a Roman centurion's faith as greater than that of anyone He had seen in Israel?
- How would they have responded when Jesus claimed that the centurion (and anyone with faith from any nation) would have a place at the table in the kingdom of God?

The Roman centurion was asking for healing for his servant. This already shows us he was not a typical man in power in his culture. Typically, servants were considered expendable. Your servant was sick? So what? Just get another. But this man cared deeply about his servant. He also showed great humility. Even though he was the one in power by the world's standards, he recognized that Jesus was much greater than he was. Jesus's words to the Roman centurion about people "from the east and west" taking their "place at the table" shows us without a doubt that the kingdom of God is people from every nation who put their trust in Jesus.

**Read: Matthew 15:21–28**

- Why did the disciples ask Jesus to send the Canaanite woman away? What does this say about their hearts toward the marginalized?
- Why would Jesus say He was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel if He had already helped the Roman centurion and gone to Samaria?
- How would the disciples have felt when Jesus praised her for her great faith?

This woman would have been marginalized for three reasons. She was a woman, a Canaanite, and her daughter was demon-possessed, which many people would have believed was the result of sin. Remember our lesson on "the curse of Ham" and how some people with racist agendas try to use it to justify enslaving Africans in America? The Canaanites were the people group who were cursed in that passage, where God said they would serve the Israelites who were the descendants of Ham. The Canaanites were the people who lived in the promised land when Israel took over during the Conquest in the days of Joshua. The Israelites did take them over, as the curse said they would, but they didn't rid the land of them, and throughout Israel's history the Canaanites continually led them astray from the Lord into following other gods.

The way Jesus treated this woman may seem strange. It's unusual that He ignored her at first; it was not typical for Jesus to ignore anyone. But He wasn't really ignoring her; He was waiting to see what the disciples would do. And they reacted in a way that was unkind but typical, based on how Jews felt about Canaanites. They begged Him to send her away the same way they shooed the children away from Him. In their eyes, neither was worth Jesus's time as an honorable rabbi and the future king of Israel.

It also seems out of character for Jesus to call anyone a "dog," but to prove a point, He used language a typical Jew would have used about a Canaanite. Jesus didn't see her as a dog, but the Jews did. His disciples did. And this woman got the point while His disciples didn't. This is why Jesus was amazed by her faith—her persistence in believing God loved her too, regardless of what anyone else said. In His praise of her great faith, Jesus proved she would eat at the table with disciples in the kingdom of God, not beg for scraps under it. In this encounter, Jesus broke down all the barriers—religious, cultural, social, gender, and racial barriers.

**Read: Mark 5:1–20**

How did the man who was demon-possessed know who Jesus was?  
Why didn't Jesus let the man come with Him? What did He tell him to do instead?

Scholars disagree about exactly where the "region of the Gerasenes" was, but it had to be a Gentile land if there were pigs. Pigs were unclean for Jews. This man was in a desperate situation, crying out day and night, cutting himself with stones. It also would have been dangerous for Jesus and His disciples to even approach this man. No one could bind him, even with a chain. Yet Jesus wasn't scared. Jesus was in total control. It was the demons who were terrified of Him. Jesus sent the demons into a herd of pigs like they asked, but ironically, they rushed off a steep bank and were drowned. The people were afraid of Jesus and asked Him to leave their region. The formerly possessed man asked to go with Him, but Jesus told him to go back and tell the people of his village what Jesus had done for him, the way the Samaritan woman at the well had done. In the Gospel of Mark, this man was the first evangelist to the Gentiles through the Decapolis. Jesus didn't want to save just this one man; He wanted his whole community of Gentiles to be saved.

These stories are a lesson for those of us who come from a position of power or privilege in our world, like Jesus did in His. It is our responsibility to actively tear down barriers for those who are marginalized.

**Read: Proverbs 31:8**

- How can you use your voice and your position in your community to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves?

You may think you don't have position or privilege or power, but we all have a voice. In this country, we all have the freedom to speak up for those who are being oppressed. And those of us who are followers of Jesus also have the responsibility to do so.

- Jesus was not scared to go into the tombs and the hills where this scary demon-possessed man lived. Be honest with yourself about your fears when it comes to helping people from "the wrong side of the tracks." Why is it scary to go into certain neighborhoods? Why would it be scary to reach out to those on the streetcorners? Those involved in drug dealing, prostitution, or gangs?
- How might it change your fears to imagine that the people living in those conditions are trapped in that situation, like this man was possessed by a demon? That before they were a drug dealer, a prostitute, or a gang member, they were someone's child? That they can be freed from their situation, restored, and healed?
- How might God be calling you face those fears and reach out to people in those scarier places?
- What kinds of people in our world would others say are like "dogs" or "trash"? Be honest with yourself— which people do you see as "trash"?
- How would it change your view of them to remember that they are someone's child?
- How would it change your view to remember that God sees them as His precious child?
- How might God be leading you to reach out to someone the world considers "trash"? How might He be leading you to rethink the way you see people? How can you show people the world considers "trash" that they are precious in His sight, valuable to Him, worthy of love? How can you build authentic relationships with them?
- How is God specifically calling you to respond to this lesson?



## Closing Prayer

*O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*<sup>24</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for your own heart toward the “least of these” in our world. Ask God to break your heart toward those you may see as scary, less than, or even “dogs” or “trash.” Ask Him to change your perspective, to give you His eyes to see these people as He does. To love them as He does. To value them as He does.
- **Act:** This week make a choice to not only go into a place that is considered “other” from your community like you did last week but to go into an area you find uncomfortable or even scary. Bring food or supplies to a homeless “tent city.” Join a ministry that reaches out to strip clubs, those caught in sex trafficking, gang members, or people in prison. You may even choose to be really bold and reach out to those on a streetcorner, like drug dealers, prostitutes, or gang members—however God leads you to reach out to those the world considers “less than,” “trash,” or even scary. Like Jesus, go out of your way to enter their world and reach out to them in love.

# Session

# 13



# Session 13

## Diversity and the Church in Acts Pt. 1

### Opening Prayer

*Almighty God,  
Through your Holy Spirit you created unity in the midst of diversity;  
We acknowledge that human diversity is an expression of your manifold love for your creation;  
We confess that in our brokenness as human beings we turn diversity into a source of alienation, injustice, oppression, and wounding.  
Empower us to recognize and celebrate differences as your great gift to the human family.  
Enable us to be the architects of understanding, of respect and love;  
Through the Lord, the ground of all unity, we pray.*<sup>25</sup>

### Discussion

Terry opened this session by talking about the continued segregation of modern American churches. It has been said that the most segregated hour in the United States is 11:00 am on Sunday morning, the time most churches meet.

- Why do you think churches in the U.S. are one of the most segregated spaces in America, even generations after the civil rights movement?
- What do we lose by having our churches segregated by race and ethnicity?
- Describe any experiences you have had with a racially diverse group of believers meeting together, whether it was a small group, two different churches meeting together, or a diverse congregation. What did you learn from that experience? How did it help you to grow in your faith?
- Do you think intentionally trying to make our churches more racially diverse would be beneficial for the church? Why or why not?

The segregation of American churches does not reflect the diversity of the future kingdom of God in the age to come. But it also doesn't reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the early church in the beginning of the book of Acts, the first group of believers in Jerusalem right after Pentecost. In some ways, the book of Acts is a kind of template for what the church should be like. Lots of churches today say they want to be a "first-century church," meaning they want to be like that first generation. And that's a good goal to have for some things, but not for everything. The first generation of Christians did a lot of things right, but they weren't perfect either. They struggled with many of the same things we do when it comes to racial and ethnic diversity, especially as the church grew and moved out from Jerusalem. But at the very beginning, when the Lord poured out His Spirit on them at Pentecost, they were a model of His desire for unity in diversity in His body.

### Read: Acts 1:12–15

- How many disciples of Jesus were in that original group of believers?
- Why do you think the text specifically mentions women?
- How often did they pray together? How did they pray?

This original group of disciples numbered about 120 and included both men and women. The text explicitly tells us so to point ahead to the fulfillment of the prophesy of Joel, that "your sons and daughters will prophesy" and "even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour of my Spirit" (Acts 2:17 NIV). Jesus had told them the Holy Spirit would come upon them, so they were waiting but not just sitting around twiddling their thumbs. They were "joined together constantly in prayer." Have you ever known a group of 120 people to do much of anything "with one mind"? Unity and seeking God in prayer was key in this supernatural event.

**Read: Acts 2:1–11**

- How many different ethnic groups are mentioned here in Jerusalem at the time?
- What does it tell us that God enabled the disciples to speak in all their different languages, not that He made them all understand the disciple's native language?
- How is this a reversal of the division at the Tower of Babel?

In this moment, God was reversing the division of the Tower of Babel. But He didn't make them all speak the same language again. He kept the diversity but brought unity to it. If God had wanted His church to be homogenous, all conforming to the same culture, He would have enabled the people to understand the disciple's native tongue. Instead, He enabled the disciples to speak many different languages, both celebrating the diversity of all these different groups of people and showing us that our God is a God who meets people where they are. He doesn't expect us to change who we are to come to Him.

Yes, God changes our hearts when He brings us into the body of Christ. He makes each of us a new creation. But He doesn't change our race, our ethnicity, our culture, or our background. Instead, He weaves all of us together into a beautiful tapestry of colors, cultures, and styles. This was God's design for the church from the beginning, and it is what the final kingdom of God will look like in the end (Revelation 7:9). A diverse body, unified in worship and mission.

**Read: Acts 2:41–47; Acts 4:4; and 4:31–35**

- How many people joined the original group of 120 disciples that first day? And in Acts 4:4?
- What details in this text show us how the early church was unified in their diversity?

That first day of Pentecost, the day we call the "birthday" of the church, the Lord added 3,000 people to that original 120. In chapter 4, it grew to 5,000. Acts tells us they were "one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32 NIV). Five thousand people! And yet, they were still incredibly unified. Not only in prayer, teaching, and fellowship, but they even lived economically and socially as one family. They shared everything they had in common, so there were no needy people among them. This description of the early church is idyllic. It sounds impossible, doesn't it? With mankind it is impossible, but with the Holy Spirit, nothing is impossible (Matthew 19:26). This is why the church is the only answer for racial reconciliation in our world. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly find unity in diversity and live together in this kind of community.

**Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12–14**

We often think of this passage about the body of Christ in terms of the "different parts" being the different spiritual gifts people have and for good reason, because verses 7–11 talk about the different gifts given by the spirit. But in these verses, Paul also specified that we form one body, Jew or Gentile, slave or free. He specifically applied this same concept to the unity we have in the Spirit between ethnicities and socio-economic classes. This kind of unity was unheard of in the ancient world. People of different social classes didn't associate with one another at all, much less live together in community and share their possessions and property in common. Neither did Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans. This kind of unity in diversity was only accomplished by the supernatural unifying power of the Holy Spirit.

The same thing is true for us today. The secular world will never accomplish unity in diversity on its own. It's simply not in our human nature, not since the fall. Human nature is selfish and greedy, looking out for itself and pushing others down to get ahead. Only by the Holy Spirit changing our hearts can we have the humility and care for others that is required to have unity in diversity.



**Read: Philippians 2:1–5**

- How did Paul say they could accomplish being of one mind and one spirit?
- Who did they have to imitate to do that? How could they?

"We've been looking in all of the wrong places for help in fighting this battle for reconciliation. We've sought help from social service agencies and government programs. But this is something that requires divine power."  
—John M. Perkins <sup>26</sup>

The only way human beings can be truly united in community is by the Holy Spirit. Being united in our diversity requires the kind of empathy and humility that can come only through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, only through His Spirit living in us, changing our hearts, and working through us. This is why the church is the hope of racial reconciliation in our world. Or should be. It is only by the humility and self-sacrificing love of Christ that we can accomplish racial reconciliation. But we can only be the hope of racial reconciliation for the world if we are really following Christ.

People argue about whether it's okay that so many of our American churches are segregated by race. Some people say it's just because people tend to gravitate toward those who are like them. That people of different races tend to like different styles of music and have different styles of worship and liturgy. Some may even have worship in their native language. Others argue that this segregation is sinful because it doesn't reflect the diversity of the kingdom of God.

- What is the ethnic and racial makeup of your own church? How does it compare to the racial and ethnic makeup of your community?

If you live in a geographic area that is relatively homogenous, it makes sense that the church there is homogenous. A church in Latin America would have a mostly homogenous Hispanic congregation. In some areas in the East, you would have a mostly homogenous Asian congregation. In India, you would have a mostly Indian congregation. It makes sense that the churches in those places are relatively homogenous racially because that's what those communities look like.

But what doesn't make sense is how often the churches in ethnically diverse areas are also ethnically homogenous. In an American city that is home to black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and so on, shouldn't the local churches contain all those races as well? But statistically speaking, in most places in America, we have separate churches for each race, even in racially diverse communities. Whether it's a big city or a small town, there are not only churches separated by denominations but also by race and ethnicity. Some churches are racially diverse, but they are not the norm. And if that diversity exists, it's only because the leadership of that church was very intentional about diversity being a value in their church and worked very hard to make it so. Statistics tell us that Christian churches are still the most segregated places in America. Let that sink in. Churches are the most segregated places in America.

Church. The place that is supposed to be a body made up of many different members all working together. A family who loves each other unconditionally. The place that is supposed to be open and welcoming and inclusive of all who want to come to Jesus. The place that is supposed to be a foretaste of heaven here on earth. In the area of reflecting the racial diversity of the kingdom of God, the American church is failing miserably.

- What do you think about the segregation of American churches? Do you think it is a sin or just something that's not ideal? Or do you think it's fine, just people having cultural preferences like music and style? Do you think it's okay for individual churches to be segregated, but that they should work together to form a diverse "big C" church community in their area? Or something else? Explain your answer.
- If our individual churches are segregated because of differences in style of worship and culture...
  - How can we still practice unity in diversity as a "big C" church? How can we still be a witness to the diversity of the kingdom of God?
  - How can different individual churches partner with other churches of different ethnicities to create a more diverse community as a whole?
  - How can churches with different cultures and ethnicities work together toward a unified mission in their communities?

- What kind of witness is it to the world for our churches to be segregated? What does it tell the world about Christianity? Is that an accurate reflection of the kingdom?
- If you feel convicted that individual churches should be racially diverse, how can you help your church leadership take steps toward diversity? Remember, it must be intentional, it won't just happen. What can you do to make all people feel welcome? What would you need to change about your church's life and ministries to bring different people in?
- What might happen if a white church, Hispanic church, Asian church, and black church decided to combine into one? What obstacles might they face? How might things change? What growth might they see in their people?
- How is God leading you to personally respond to this lesson?

## Closing Prayer

*Almighty God,*

*We know that a choir sounds better when each of the four different parts are singing in harmony, which sounds so rich to the ear. In the same way, in the church, unity in diversity is more powerful and more beautiful than unity in uniformity. When we recognize the wide differences that exist within the human race and allow for their expression nothing is more profound. Let our congregations be communities that believe in hearing all voices and believe that no one voice is more powerful than the next. May our country be a place where we celebrate our differences rather than allowing them to tear us apart. Amen.* <sup>27</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for God's wisdom and leading about how to respond to the lack of unity in diversity in the American church. Pray about what He is calling your individual church to do or become. Pray for wisdom for your church leaders. Pray for wisdom and inspiration about what you can personally do to help. Pray for the American church in general, that we can be a light to the world of what unity in diversity looks like.
- **Act:** This week meet with your church leadership about their vision for racial diversity in your individual congregation and in your city or community. First ask them what their vision is. Then share what you have been hearing from the Lord about your church's role and responsibility toward unity in diversity. Offer to help them move toward God's vision for your church individually and for all the churches in your community.

# Session

# 14





# Session 14

## Diversity and the Church in Acts Pt. 2

### Opening Prayer

*Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart [and especially the hearts of the people of this land], that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—*Book of Common Prayer* <sup>28</sup>

### Discussion

In this lesson, Terry talked about how saying “Black lives matter” isn’t saying that all lives don’t matter. It’s simply intentionally focusing on a point of injustice and addressing that particular problem. It’s really saying, “Black lives matter too,” because the world is acting like they don’t matter.

- How have you heard people react to the phrase “Black lives matter,” not the organization or the movement?
- Why do you think it offends black people when people respond that “all lives matter”?
- Think about how you would react if one of your kids broke their leg. Would you spend time reassuring your other kids that you care about their legs too or would you just focus on the kid whose leg is broken? What does that tell us about why it is important to intentionally focus on the needs of those who are being hurt or mistreated?
- In what ways can you show black people that black lives matter to you, not just say it?
- In what ways can the church show them?

In the last lesson, we saw how the early church was a model of unity in diversity, at least at first. In chapters 2–4 of Acts, the description of the early church was idyllic. But it didn’t take long for things to fall apart. Human nature, remember? Even in those of us who love the Lord. Almost right away, in Acts 5, we see a couple who lied about sharing their possessions with the community. Then in Acts 6, we see that idyllic unified church already perpetuating injustice, and against the most vulnerable among them. This is exactly what the prophets preached against. Exactly what the new covenant was not supposed to be like. Weren’t they supposed to be able to keep God’s law and reflect His character because He would change their hearts? Didn’t He pour out His Spirit on them in a mighty way? Yet here they were, already making divisions and playing favorites.

#### Read: Acts 6:1–4

- What was the difference between the Hebraic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews? Why might the Hebraic Jews consider themselves better than the Hellenistic ones?
- What does the disciples’ reaction tell you about what they thought about this division?
- What does the fact that they created a new role of church leadership to oversee the distribution of food say about how much they valued justice, equity, and providing for the whole community?

We saw in the last lesson that the early church was living in community, sharing all they had. Those who had property or possessions sold them and shared with the community so that no one was in need, like widows. Biblical scholars often talk about the “quartet of the vulnerable” in Scripture—widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. These were people who were unable to provide for themselves and therefore depended on the generosity of others to survive. In God’s law in the Old Testament, His people were expected to provide for any of the vulnerable in their midst. In Acts, the early church immediately set up a system to provide daily meals for the vulnerable.

But right away, they started making divisions between the Hebraic and Hellenized widows. Remember, "Hellenized" meant they had adopted Greek culture and language. The Hebraic Jews looked down on the Hellenized Jews for not staying pure to their Jewish culture, and they were leaving their widows out of the daily food distribution. The disciples' reaction was to create a whole new church leadership team to make sure this didn't happen anymore. They were making a value statement that this was not okay. This was not the way the church should operate. It was not the way of the kingdom of God.

They didn't ignore the conflict, hoping it would just go away. They didn't silence those who had raised the issue. They didn't split the church into Hebraic and Hellenistic congregations. Those who were upset didn't leave the church in a huff. They worked through the conflict in a healthy way that brought justice to those who were being mistreated and maintained unity in their multi-ethnic community.

**Read: Matthew 18:15–17**

- Why does Jesus's method for dealing with conflict start with going directly to the person first?
- What does the fact the person who is sinning is given three chances to repent say about Jesus's desire for reconciliation among His people? What does it tell us about grace? What does it tell us about our human nature?

Jesus gave us a method for confronting conflict in the church in a healthy way because conflict in a church should never be ignored or swept under a rug. The only way to unity is working through conflict. The only way to reconciliation is to be honest with ourselves about where we have sinned, how we have hurt one another, and how we can make it right. The Lord desires unity in His body (John 17:21), but not a false unity where some people are mistreated and everyone just pretends it's not happening. Real, true unity. That can only come by working through our conflict together with honesty and humility. The first church didn't ignore their conflicts and they didn't split the church over them. They worked toward a solution that would bring healing and justice. This was accomplished by strong leadership and the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit.

**Read: Acts 6:3–5 again**

- What qualifications did they require for these new leaders?

The leaders who oversaw the equitable distribution of food were to have good reputations, have wisdom, and be filled with the Spirit. Remember, the Holy Spirit is the only way we can have the wisdom and humility to really find unity in diversity. But also, all seven of these names were Greek. To protect the rights of the Hellenized widows, they chose leaders from the Hellenized group.

The American church can take notes here. To defend the rights of the people of color who are being mistreated and marginalized, we need to raise up leaders of color. White leaders in the American church like Terry aren't just speaking out themselves. They are seeking to amplify voices of color in the church who can speak from their own perspectives. Like the disciples in the early church, we're not virtue signaling; we're seeking authentic reconciliation and healing in the kingdom of God.

- Why is it helpful for white people to listen to voices of color when it comes to racial reconciliation?
- How can you amplify voices of color in the fight for racial reconciliation in the church?
- How can you support black stories being told in our culture? Why might it be important to fight for representation for people of color in books, movies, classrooms, and other spaces?
- What would it look like for white Christians to step back and let voices of color lead the fight for racial justice and racial reconciliation in the church?
- What difference would it make to listen to what those who are being hurt have to say instead of those in power trying to decide what they need?
- What difference would it make for churches to put people of color in leadership positions?
- What difference would it make to publish books or podcasts or other media by believers of color? To hear from them on all topics, not just race?
- What difference would it make for white people to support a candidate of color for political office rather than a white candidate who is passionate about racial reconciliation?

It's not that white people can't or shouldn't speak up and speak out about racial reconciliation. They absolutely should. We need white voices speaking out to bring more awareness to the white community. This is exactly what church leaders like Terry are doing. But we can't only have white voices. We need to hear from voices of color to understand their experience and learn what they really need, not what the white church thinks they need. Jesus was able to read peoples' minds and know what they were thinking, yet He still took the time to listen to their stories from their own perspectives and give them a chance to be seen and heard.

"I'm just now seeing clearly that the black church can't fix this, and the white church can't fix this. It must be the reconciled church, black and white Christians together imaging Christ to the world." —John M. Perkins <sup>29</sup>

#### Read: Acts 6:7

- What happened after the church in Jerusalem worked through their conflict and brought reconciliation in a way that maintained the unity in diversity of the body of Christ?

The church grew. The Word of God spread. The number of disciples increased rapidly. The early church in Jerusalem was an incredible witness to the world around them of what it looked like to be the people of God. Even in their conflicts. Maybe especially in the way they worked through their conflicts. Nobody needs a glossy image of a perfect church where no one ever disagrees. Everyone knows how fake that is. What they need to see from us is a model for working through conflict and building greater unity through it. This is the message and the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel in action, the Lord bringing healing and reconciliation through the power of His Holy Spirit.

- How can your church be a model for working through conflict between the races and bringing reconciliation and unity?
- What would it say to the community around us if church were the place where the races came together, worked through their conflict, and joined together in unity?

"There are artificial divisions that we have here on Earth but we are unified in Him. I believe the church should be leading when it comes to what we call racial reconciliation, or what we call unity. It should be coming from the church because if any people—church people who understand that their sins are forgiven, who understand where they fall short—they have no reason whatsoever to think they are better than anybody else, because of race, or because of skin or because of economics or because of talent or anything like that. Because we understand that we all fall short before God. So the church should be leading and sadly in many churches that's simply not the case." —Benjamin Watson <sup>30</sup>

What does Watson say it would take for the church to step up and lead the movement for racial reconciliation in our world? Just like the first church, it would take strong leadership.

"Leadership in churches has to make a concerted effort to even speak about these things. A lot of times they don't because it's uncomfortable for the people that's sitting in pews. But these are the uncomfortable conversations that need to come from the pulpit as well as in the small groups, as well as around the dining table as well as in the homes—there needs to be an honest conversation about race—that's how things change. Things change through repentance." —Benjamin Watson <sup>31</sup>

How can you support and encourage your church leaders to speak out and lead the charge toward racial reconciliation in our culture? How can you pray for them?

## Closing Prayer

*Almighty God, who created us in your image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom. Help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer* <sup>32</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** This week pray for leaders of color to be given platforms to speak into the American church and really be heard. Pray for both white and black church leaders and Asian and Hispanic and every other ethnicity to come together and work through conflict, pain, and hurt to build unity in our diversity among the body of Christ. Pray for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of these leaders to have the boldness to speak truth even when it's uncomfortable and to challenge God's people to really be the people of God in our world.
- **Act:** Take some time this week to listen to the voice of a person of color speaking out about their own experience and what they think needs to be done about racial reconciliation in America. You may read an article or book, listen to a podcast or a sermon, or simply talk to a friend. If you don't know where to start, Benjamin Watson's book, *Under Our Skin*, quoted above would be a good choice. Or episode #54, "Let's Talk About Race," of the Watson family podcast, "Why or Why Not with the Watsons."



# Session

# 15



# Session 15

## Diversity and the Church in Acts Pt. 3

### Opening Prayer

[Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–20 aloud together as a prayer]

*“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”*

*Dear God, make us one body. Help us to value the other parts of the body equally. Help us to see how much we need each other. Help us to be a complete body with every part represented, not a body of just eyes or just ears or just arms. Amen*

### Discussion

In this lesson, Terry asked us to ask ourselves some more tough questions:

- Are there any ways that I am standing in the way of God integrating His church?
- What am I doing to dismantle systems of oppression that keep people from sharing in power and privilege in our world?
- Am I cooperating with God’s plan to unite nations, generations, and genders with full and equal authority in His kingdom?

**Read: Acts 2:16-21**

Sons and daughters. Old and young. All people of every nation, tribe, and tongue. From the very moment that He poured out His Spirit at Pentecost, God has been on a mission to unite nations, generations, and genders with full and equal authority in His kingdom. The book of Acts can be outlined by how the disciples pursued God’s mission to build His kingdom all over the world.

**Read: Acts 1:8**

This verse is kind of a thesis statement of the whole book and gives us both a theological and a geographical outline for what will happen:

- In Acts 1-7, the disciples preach the Gospel in Jerusalem and grow the church there, among Jews who had been dispersed to every nation on earth.
- In Acts 8-9, the disciples spread the Gospel to the Samaritans, that group of people who were descendants of the northern ten tribes of Israel but mixed in with pagans? The ones the Jews hated.
- Then in Acts 10, God tells Peter directly through a vision that this Gospel is for everyone and there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

That’s when things really exploded. In the rest of the book, the disciples take the Gospel all over the Roman Empire, to the very ends of the earth. This is the core theological message of the book of Acts. The Kingdom of God includes people of faith from every nation, tribe, and tongue – to the ends of the earth. Starting with Samaria. Jesus had told them to be His witnesses in Samaria, so Philip went there, even though Jews did not associate with Samaritans. Like Jesus did back in John 4, Philip broke all kinds of barriers to bring the gospel to the Samaritans. Philip came with the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, he cast out demons and healed diseases and the people listened to him because of these signs.



**Read: Acts 8:14-17**

- What does it say about the mission of God that the apostles sent their top leaders to Samaria?
- Why was it important for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit too?

In the kingdom of God, Samaria was not a second-class group of people. The disciples sent their top leaders to Samaria to pray for them and bring the Spirit. God didn't pour out His Holy Spirit only that one time at Pentecost. He didn't limit His Spirit to only the disciples or only the leadership of the church. He didn't limit it to only the Jews. Like we read in Joel's prophecy, He pours out His Spirit on all people.

**Read: Acts 8:26-40**

- How is Philip having a deep theological conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch similar to Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well?
- What does it say about the Gospel that he does not hesitate to baptize the eunuch immediately?

In the same way that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman with respect and took time to talk theology with her, Philip spoke to this man as an equal even though Jews would not have because of his ethnicity, his religion, and his status as a eunuch. In the Roman Empire, Ethiopia was considered "the ends of the earth." Even though Philip was still only geographically in Samaria, he was already fulfilling the whole promise to be Jesus's witnesses to the ends of the earth. Already including the Gentiles, even before God spoke to Peter in a vision. Both geographically and because of his status as a eunuch, this story shows us that the Gospel is for even those who are farthest from God.

**Read: Acts 10:1-2, 9-16, 27-29 and 44-48**

Cornelius was a Roman centurion much like the one for whom Jesus healed his servant. He was a God-fearer, he prayed constantly, and he gave generously to the poor. God used both Cornelius and a vision about unclean animals to show Peter that the gospel was not just for Jews, but anyone who believed. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentile Cornelius in the same way it was poured out on the Samaritans, the same way it was poured out on the Jewish disciples. The Holy Spirit started the Church in Jerusalem, but was moving out all over the whole earth.

**Read: Acts 11:26 and 13:1**

Antioch was the homebase from which Paul was sent out on his missionary journeys. It was an extremely diverse city because of its location on several major trade routes. It served as a capital city for the area and an economic and intellectual center for the Roman Empire. At the time, there were at least eighteen different ethnic groups in Antioch, yet they each kept to their own communities. The secular world stayed divided by ethnicity, maybe because it was comfortable, it was easy. They understood each other, they had a common language and culture.

But the Church in Antioch was a mix. Just among those church leaders listed here, there was a mix of both ethnicity, nationality, and socio-economic levels. Manean was an influential politician, close friends with royalty. Lucius was an immigrant from Northern Africa. Simeon called "Niger" which meant "dark" or "black." Paul and Barnabas were from different sects of Judaism and different countries.

Even when the secular world was divided by ethnicity, the church lived as one body with many different members. Because what bound them together wasn't the ethnicity and culture or language they had in common, it was their faith in Christ. This wildly diverse church at Antioch was where followers of The Way were first called "Christians." Their identity as the people of God superseded their cultural or ethnic identities. Instead of being separated by their ethnic kingdoms, they created a whole new kingdom in Christ, one in which people of faith from every nation came together as one.

Our calling as the people of God does not mean we give up our ethnic identities, but it does mean that our truest identity is found in Christ. That is how we can have unity in our diversity. That is what binds us together, across racial and ethnic divides, even when there has been hurt and oppression and injustice. But that doesn't mean we just hold hands and sing kumbaya and close our eyes to the oppression of the past and the injustice of the present. It means we hold hands and sing, "Let justice roll down like a mighty water!" together as we work towards reconciliation with eyes wide open.

- How can working towards reconciliation together as a body of Christ actually bring us closer together and make us more unified?
- In what ways are we as the American Church standing in the way of God integrating all nations, ethnicities, and races into His kingdom?
- How can integrating our churches make us stronger? How can it serve our mission and purpose as the body of Christ?
- What things might we have to change about our churches to become more integrated and diverse? How would we have to make our churches more inclusive? More open to different mindsets, different ends of the political spectrum, and different styles and cultures?
- How can the American Church become more globally minded? Not seeing ourselves as the center of the world and sending missionaries out to other places like a "Savior complex," but actually seeing how God is working and moving in the global Church in a mighty way and appreciating other outposts of the kingdom of God as equally important in His body? And perhaps healthier, stronger, and more impactful for the mission of God right now?
- How do we as a culture perpetuate the idea of American superiority? How does our culture perpetuate white superiority in both overt and subtle ways?
- What do we need to change about the American Church in order to cooperate with God's plan to unite nations, generations, and genders with full and equal authority in His kingdom?
- How can the American Church work to dismantle systems of oppression that keep people from sharing in power and privilege in our world?
- How is God calling you individually to respond to these last three lessons about unity in diversity in the church? What is He showing you about how you can advocate for change? What is He leading you to personally do to change your church and your community?

## Closing Prayer

My prayer is that the church will find her way back to Jesus. That we would remember our highest call is to love God and our neighbor. Loving our neighbor looks like voting and fighting for their rights while being willing to give up some of the privileges we've grown used to.

I pray that God would open American Christians' eyes as they are reading their Bibles to see that we have more in common with Egypt, Babylon, and Rome than with Israel. Let this revelation of how we have chosen power and oppression over the ways of Christ lead us to repent in sackcloth and ashes.

I pray that God would give us the boldness to speak out against hate, especially when we see it in our communities and homes.

I pray that he would give us the humility to admit where we have chosen the way of empire over the path of Christ.

I pray that he would encourage us to walk away from behind the glowing shield of our screens to have real conversations in which we look into the eyes of another, witnessing the image of God that dwells within them.

I pray that He would remind us that the earth is a sacred gift and not a floating rock to be raped of resources to fulfill our incessant need for more. Teach us to live with less so that everyone has enough.

I love the church. I want her to thrive. My hope is that this will be a year of repentance and revival for the American church.

- Lindsay Hufford <sup>33</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** For the American Church to seek the heart of Jesus when it comes to racial reconciliation. Pray for repentance, humility, and wisdom for our leaders. Pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our people. Pray for revival in our churches. Pray for God to raise up new leaders who have a passion and a heart for racial reconciliation – leaders from every different ethnicity and culture. Pray for people of different cultures to be given a voice and a platform.
- **Act:** Go to a restaurant of a different ethnicity from you, a type of food you've never eaten before. Don't only eat the food, make conversation with your server, the manager or owner, or whoever else you come into contact with. Ask them authentic, natural questions about the food, their culture, and the region they are from. Ask them for suggestions of what you could try that might be new to you. Ask them what their favorite dish is and why. You never know what other conversations this could lead to. Most people tend to open up when you show an interest in their food and culture. As you continue to go back to that restaurant over time, you can build a deeper and deeper relationship and perhaps discuss spiritual things, ask them how you can pray for them, or even invite them to your home and/or find out how your church can serve them and their community.

# Session

# 16



# Session 16

## Race & the Modern Pentecostal Movement Pt.1

### Opening Prayer

*Leader: In this time of prayer, we invite people everywhere to return to God; to maintain love and justice; and always patiently live with hope as we wait for God (Hosea 12:6).*

*All: Lord, Jesus Christ  
who reached across the ethnic boundaries  
between Samaritan, Roman and Jew  
who offered fresh sight to the blind and freedom to captives,  
help us to break down the barriers in our community,  
enable us to see the reality of racism and bigotry,  
and free us to challenge and uproot it  
from ourselves, our society and our world. Amen*

- John Bucki, S.J.<sup>34</sup>

### Discussion

- What is the history of racial relations in your denomination? If you don't know, make a note of that as something you want to research.
- How has your denomination and/or your individual church reacted to the racial tensions in the last few years? Has their reaction been any different recently than it was historically?
- Which churches or individual pastors/leaders have you seen come forward publicly to speak out about racial reconciliation? What denominations are they? What races are they?
- Is there any particular denomination or churches that you know of who have a reputation for racial reconciliation? Are there any who have a reputation for segregation or racism?

In this lesson, Terry looked at racial diversity and integration in the birth of the modern American Pentecostal movement, his own denomination. In the next lesson, he will look more at the current state of the American Pentecostal Church, but this lesson is focused on its history and roots. There were two different sides to the beginning of Pentecostalism – one which celebrated diversity and integration and one which was very much against integration.

The Azusa Street Revival of 1906 was an unusually racially diverse movement for the time period. Not only was the crowd diverse and integrated, fellowshiping and worshipping together, but the leadership of the movement was also equally shared by black and white and men and women – long before the Civil Rights Movement or Women's Suffrage. A Pentecostal writer who was at Azusa Street and wrote about its history called Los Angeles "a new Jerusalem" because the diversity of the movement mirrored that first church. He wrote that "the color line has been washed away in the blood."<sup>35</sup> Leaders of this movement saw the intermingling of the races as "a sign of God's purpose for the Mission."<sup>36</sup>

On the other side of the roots of Pentecostalism was Charles Fox Parham, a white pastor from Kansas who had been a mentor of one of the black leaders of Azusa Street, William Seymour. When Parham had moved to Houston, TX to start a Bible College there, Seymour had asked if he could study there because he had heard about Parham's experience with speaking in tongues. Parham allowed him to, but only if he remained segregated, listening outside the door of the classroom. Later, Seymour moved to L.A. and was part of Azusa Street and eventually invited Parham to come see what was happening there. When Parham arrived, he was horrified by the mixing of the races and rebuked the church publicly. Seymour denounced him and they never reconciled. People debate over which of these two men was the "Father of Pentecostalism."



- What does it tell us about the Pentecostal Church that it had two such opposite sides, even at the very beginning? What does it tell us about humanity in general? What does it tell us about God?
- What does that tell us about how strongly the culture was committed to segregation at the time?
- What does it tell us about how movements of God break barriers?

**Read: Ephesians 2:14-22**

- Who put up the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile?
- How did Christ put to death the hostility between the two groups?
- What does this tell us about hostilities and barriers that exist between other people groups?
- What does it tell us about God's desire and plan for His people and His kingdom?

Though God called the family of Abraham to be His unique people in the world, He never intended there to be a dividing wall of hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles. His intention was to bless the world through Abraham's family (Genesis 12:3). They were called to be priests to the rest of the world, showing them who God is. That means they were called to serve the rest of the world, not think themselves superior. It was the Jews who put up that dividing wall of hostility, not God. And Jesus came to break it down. Yet human beings still keep putting up dividing walls of hostility, between different races, different social groups, different nations, different political views. Our nation had put up these walls of hostility between black and white and other people of color. At Azusa Street, when the Holy Spirit was poured out in power, those walls of hostility came crashing down.

**Case Study: The Story of G.B. Cashwell at Azusa Street**

G.B. Cashwell was a white holiness preacher from Dunn, NC who had been hearing for months about how the baptism of the Holy Spirit was being poured out at a little mission on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. He sought the Lord for the baptism of the Spirit but didn't receive anything. Frustrated, he decided the only way he would experience it was to actually go to L.A., so he hopped on a train. It was the fall of 1906, segregation was still very much the norm. When Cashwell entered the Azusa Street Mission, he was mortified by the mixing of the races that he saw. He could not bring himself to allow a black man to lay hands on him in prayer. He left offended, but spent the night wrestling alone with the Lord in prayer. Daniel K. Norris wrote about Cashwell,

"He came to the conclusion that if he wanted to experience Pentecost, he would have to crucify his own prejudice. He went back to the mission and straight to the altar. There he prostrated himself in the dirt and sawdust and repented before the Lord. As Cashwell wept and prayed, William Seymour, the black pastor leading the revival, came and laid hands on the white preacher. Cashwell was immediately baptized in the Holy Spirit. This man's life was forever changed because he took down the wall that stood between him and the blessing. Cashwell spent the next six days at the mission before making his way back to the Carolinas where he would eventually rent a warehouse and begin holding his own services. These meetings became known as Azusa East. Today hundreds of spirit-filled churches on the east coast trace their roots directly back to G.B. Cashwell and his meetings in Dunn, North Carolina. Oh, how things could have turned out differently had Cashwell not humbled himself that first night at Azusa. So many have been blessed because of the willingness of a man to surrender his own prejudice and find the reconciliation afforded by revival."<sup>37</sup>

- What did it take for Cashwell to actually experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- What does this tell us about how the Spirit moves in our lives?
- What does it tell us about the hearts of those who have been changed by the Spirit?
- What do you think: Can someone be Spirit-filled and racist at the same time? Explain your answer.

No one is perfect, even those of us who have the Spirit dwelling in us. We still make mistakes, we still struggle with sin (Romans 7). But this story and so many others like it tell us that racism and segregation of the body of Christ is not God's desire. It is sin. It is something the Spirit wants to cut out of our hearts and tear down in our communities. When we let His Spirit move and take control of our lives, we will want to tear down the walls of hostility just like Jesus did. But it takes humility. It takes repentance. It takes being uncomfortable. It takes deep self-reflection, being able to look deeply at your own heart and be honest with yourself about what you find there.



**Read: Psalm 139:1-6 and 23-24**

We are now over 100 years past Azusa Street and some of us like to think we are “beyond” the kind of racism they had back then. That we wouldn’t walk into a multi-ethnic room and have the same kind of reaction that G.B. Cashwell had. We are beyond it in some ways. We don’t have separate drinking fountains or separate bathrooms or separate swimming pools. Yet our world is still very segregated, including our churches. Research from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA even says that school segregation is more severe now than it was in the late 1960s.<sup>38</sup> Segregation is no longer mandated by the government; we have done it to ourselves. We have segregated ourselves into different neighborhoods, different churches, different kinds of activities and social networks. Our systems and society have racial inequality woven into their very fabrics, but we also all have biases and prejudices deep down in our hearts, whether we realize it or not.

We may not have the same kind of reaction that G.B. Cashwell did, just walking into a multi-ethnic church, but what kinds of reactions do we have driving into certain neighborhoods? What views do we have about certain school districts? What comes to mind when we hear the word “urban” or the word “immigrant” or the phrase “at-risk youth”? What do we assume about kids hanging out on streetcorners or people begging for money? How do we feel when a young man in a hoodie is walking towards us or when we hear someone speaking with a foreign accent? Our biases may be even subtler than those examples, we can only really know them when we come before the Lord in deep prayer like Cashwell did and ask Him to examine our hearts.

- Think about your day-to-day activities – work, shopping, taking kids to activities, meeting up with friends, and so on. How racially integrated are each of those places?
- In what places do you most often interact with people who are different from you, either by race, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic level, or background?
- Which places that you regularly go are more homogenous? Why?
- How deep are your interactions with those who are different from you? Casual, like chatting with the cashier at the grocery store or more intimate like a close friend? Or something in between?
- When you do try to build relationships with people who are different from you, what barriers do you find exist between you? How can you overcome those barriers? In what ways could you be more intentional about building relationships with people who are different from you?
- Do you think our attitudes can limit the movement of the Holy Spirit, why or why not? Will the Spirit move in our cities if we don’t humble ourselves like Cashwell did?
- Do you think our culture needs a movement of the Holy Spirit when it comes to racial reconciliation? Why or why not? How can we bring one about?
- How can you pray for the Spirit to move in your city? Your neighborhood? Your church?
- Why is it so hard to admit that we might have biases or prejudices? Why is it important to do so?
- What will it take for you to become willing to be changed by the Spirit like G.B. Cashwell?

If we don’t examine our own hearts and lives to find where we have biases and prejudices, we’ll never be able to fix them. We can’t just ignore the problem and hope it will go away. It won’t. The only way we can fix it is to meet the problem head on. Starting with our own hearts.

## Closing Prayer

You have searched me, Lord,  
 and you know me.  
 You know when I sit and when I rise;  
 you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
 You discern my going out and my lying down;  
 you are familiar with all my ways.  
 Before a word is on my tongue  
 you, Lord, know it completely.  
 You hem me in behind and before,  
 and you lay your hand upon me.  
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
 too lofty for me to attain.  
 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
 Where can I flee from your presence?  
 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
 if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.  
 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
 if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
 even there your hand will guide me,  
 your right hand will hold me fast...  
 For you created my inmost being;  
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
 your works are wonderful,  
 I know that full well.  
 My frame was not hidden from you  
 when I was made in the secret place,  
 when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.  
 Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
 all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
 before one of them came to be...  
 Search me, God, and know my heart;  
 test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
 and lead me in the way everlasting.

- Psalm 139:1-10, 13-16, 23-24 (NIV)

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Take some time in honest, reflective prayer to ask God to reveal to you any biases you may have that you may not even be aware of. Do you find yourself thinking that a certain “look” is more beautiful than other skin tones or facial features or hair textures? Do you find yourself scared when a certain type of person walks toward you on the street? Do you find yourself assuming that a person speaking with an accent is not as intelligent? Do you tend to think of America as superior to other nations? Do you not bother to pronounce people’s names the way they should be said in their language but automatically “Americanize” them? What other biases might you have? How do you perpetuate stereotypes? How do you unconsciously think of your own race or culture as superior? If you cannot be honest with yourself about ways you unconsciously perpetuate racism, you will not be able to fix them. And the best way to examine ourselves is by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Act:** Pray with your small group or another group of like-minded friends for revival in your city, community, and/or church. Remember, prayer is an action! Every great movement of the Holy Spirit throughout Church History, from Pentecost to the Protestant Reformation to the Great Awakening to Azusa Street, was started by the intentional, passionate prayers of the people of God. By people inviting the Holy Spirit to move in their hearts and the world. By people being willing to be changed by the Spirit. Not because our prayers control the Holy Spirit but because in order for God to work in our hearts, we have to humble ourselves before Him (2 Chronicles 7:14).

# Session

# 17



# Session 17

## Race & the Modern Pentecostal Movement Pt. 2

### Opening Prayer

*Leader: in 2 Chronicles 7:14, God tells Israel, "If my people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." When we find ourselves in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty all around us, Scripture is clear that the church's primary response must be one of prayer. We firmly believe that any move of God begins with us humbly coming to Him in repentance for sin and seeking revival.*

*All: Lord God, We repent of our racism. Racism is a huge issue in society and politics today. It is a subject that can be both confusing and convicting. Whatever is going on in the world around us, we are obligated personally to get on our knees before God and ask Him to forgive us of our personal transgressions of racism, whenever and however it has been manifested. Our gracious Father, You created all people in Your image. Each person in this world is so precious and so valuable that Jesus came to earth to die for them. Forgive us for losing sight of that precious Truth. Lord, If we've wronged someone and racism is the root of that wrong, lead us to repent. Show us our own prejudices so we can seek Your forgiveness. Guide us to act in ways that lead to true justice. By Your grace, help us to see racial tension and hatred as a tool Satan uses to keep us from experiencing and sharing the richness of Your love. Lord, Help us to love the way you love and to spread the good news of reconciliation through Christ to our families, our city and our world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

- Outward Church, Salem, OR <sup>39</sup>

### Discussion

According to a 2014 Pew Research survey, the top five most racially diverse religious groups are Seventh Day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, and the religiously unaffiliated. The five least diverse groups all are Protestant denominations: National Baptist Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and United Methodist Church. <sup>40</sup>

- How does this information make you feel about the American church?
- What kind of message do you think it sends to the world?

"Black and white divisions are probably the deepest divisions in American religious life. Anything that tries to break through that will be meaningful." — Mark Noll <sup>41</sup>

- What has been your experience of racial integration or segregation in different churches and denominations across America? Do you find it to be different in different areas of the country? Does it seem to be different in urban versus rural areas? What other factors affect whether a church is racially diverse?
- Why do you think our churches are segregated? Do you think people like it that way? Why or why not? Do you think God likes it that way?
- How do other factors (worship style, tradition, etc.) affect whether a church is diverse? How might changing those factors make a church more diverse?

In this lesson, Terry looked at racial diversity and integration in the history of the American Pentecostal church since its inception. In his research paper on the history of Pentecostalism, Christian writer Philip Chan said that "while [Azusa Street] began as a movement of the Spirit as well as one which broke many different social boundaries erected by men, it ultimately was destroyed by the very thing it was trying to get rid of—racism. The revival meetings [of Azusa Street] were ended by three successive conflicts, all of which dealt with issues of race." <sup>42</sup>

The original Pentecostal denomination to come out of Azusa Street was the Church of God in Christ, which was integrated and multi-ethnic, led by the black bishop Charles Harrison Mason. But in 1914, the white pastors pulled out and formed their own denomination—the Assemblies of God. From that point on, Pentecostalism was just as segregated as any other Christian denomination in America. Pentecostal leader B. E. Underwood said, "The manifestation of racial reconciliation survived at Azusa Street for about three years—from 1906 to 1909. But they succumbed to the pressures of a racist culture, rather than surrender to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit." <sup>43</sup>



In 1942, a “National Conference for United Action among Evangelicals” started new thinking about how black and white Pentecostals should relate to each other. In 1945, the Assemblies of God developed a branch of their denomination called “Assembly of God—Colored Branch.” In 1957, they wrote a report on “Segregation versus Integration” in which they said all races were equal, but they had a lot of concerns about what would happen if they tried to integrate their churches. In 1970, the Assemblies of God held a conference with a group of black pastors to get advice about how to minister effectively within the black community.<sup>44</sup>

In 1994, the leaders of twenty-one white Pentecostal groups gathered in Memphis to close the racial rift with their black brothers and sisters. After three days of meetings, black and white Pentecostals were hugging, washing one another’s feet, and joining forces in a new commitment toward racial integration in their churches. B. E. Underwood, head of the Pentecostal Holiness denomination declared at the opening of the conference, “Racism in the Pentecostal-charismatic community must be eradicated. What a difference it would have made during the civil rights movement in American if all the children of the Pentecostal revival had stood together.”<sup>45</sup> This event has been called “The Memphis Miracle.”

- What does the history of these different steps toward integration and the years in which they took place tell us about the way the culture can influence the church?
- Why is the church so influenced by the culture instead of letting the Word of God and the Holy Spirit move us? How can we change that?

**Case Study: The Story of Don Evans [Memphis Miracle 25th Anniversary session, starting at 4:09]**<sup>46</sup>

Don Evans was invited to come to the meeting even though he wasn’t an official leader of any church, university, or other organization. Yet the Spirit stirred him to make an incredible gesture of contrition, repentance, and reconciliation.

Don Evans (white): Most of us who were white would have rather just prayed over the past and gone on to the future. And that’s why I had this sense that if God didn’t do something, we were raking the scabs off of some old wounds. To the minorities among us, they weren’t old scabs, they were running sores. And that’s why it had to be said. I was being stirred on the inside to be used to do something. I approached the head table, I knelt on one knee by the edge of Bishop Underwood’s seat, and I explained, “I perceive that the Holy Spirit is asking me to make an act of contrition on behalf of whites to blacks. If Bishop Clemens would approve, I am offering to publicly wash his feet as this act of contrition.” Bishop Underwood said, startled, “I think this is God,” and he motioned to some handlers he had to come over and help me get situated. I remember praying ... [video clip] As it was the act of one Brother Parham who caused an offense to our Brother Seymour, so there can be one act ... it will not erase all that has been, but it will establish a new beginning in the name of Jesus and I would represent white humanity in all of its ugliness and all of its honorable effort to begin anew and do something to begin to write a new story.<sup>47</sup>

Charles Blake (black): He washed my feet and I washed his, and it was a time of tears and weeping before the Lord and repentance and begging God to forgive us, and that was the tone that was created. ... Walls were broken down. We ate together, we talked together, and we found ourselves coming together in a very special way.<sup>48</sup>

George Wood (white): There was such a spirit of tenderness and forgiveness and reconciled that we really felt we had sensed again what they had experienced at Azusa. That there was an equality among us, we were united by our faith, not by our color, and that was very, very meaningful.<sup>49</sup>

- How is the story of Don Evans similar to the story of G. B. Cashwell?
- Why did he say they couldn’t just pray about the past and move on? What does this tell us about the steps we need to talk toward reconciliation today?
- What does it tell us about the kind of attitude we have to have?
- What type of attitude did Don Evans have? What did he have to let go of to have that attitude?



**Read: John 13:12–17**

- Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet? What did it say about Him?
- Why did He tell them to wash each other's feet? What did He mean for them to do for each other beyond the literal task of foot washing?
- Why would this have been such a meaningful gesture for a white pastor to do for a black pastor at a conference for racial reconciliation? What would it say to them?
- What would it point to them doing beyond the literal foot washing?

For Jesus, foot washing was an act of humbling Himself. It was the job of the lowliest servant in the household, yet Jesus did it for His disciples. It was so lowly that Peter initially refused to let Him do it. But Jesus said if Peter didn't, he would have no part with Him. Foot washing was a symbolic gesture that said Jesus came to serve, not to be served. He wasn't just asking them to go around washing people's feet. He was asking them to live their lives as servants, humbling themselves and putting others' needs ahead of their own. This is why it was significant for a white person (who had historically been in power) to wash the feet of a black person (who had historically been the servant). It flipped the culture on its head and pointed to the Christian call to humility and service. This is how the Scriptures tell us we can have unity in the body of Christ, by serving each other in humility.

**Read: Philippians 2:1–8**

- What would it look like to look to the interests of others when it comes to racial reconciliation?
- What would it look like for white Christians to put the needs of people of color ahead of their own?
- How does this relate to tenderness and compassion?
- How does this unite us with Christ?
- How did Don Evans's attitude at the Memphis Miracle demonstrate the mindset of Christ?
- Why do we have to put others' needs ahead of our own to have reconciliation?
- It has been almost thirty years since the Memphis Miracle. How has the church grown and changed since then? How are we doing on racial reconciliation?
- What is the world trying to tell us about racial integration and reconciliation right now? How are there multiple conflicting messages from different sides of the aisle? What are we hearing from the media? From social media? From friends and family?
- How are those messages affecting the church? How is the church responding? How can we lean into what the Holy Spirit is leading us to do rather than the movement of the world, on either side?

## Closing Prayer

With complete bold and courageous honesty, we mutually confess that racism is sin and as a blight in the fellowship must be condemned for having hindered the maturation of spiritual development and mutual sharing among believers for decades. We openly confess our shortcomings and our participation in the sin of racism by our silence, denial, and blindness. We admit the harm it has brought to generations born and unborn. We strongly contend that the past does not always completely determine the future. New horizons are emerging. God wants to do a new thing through His people. We admit that there is no single solution to racism in the fellowship. We pray and are open to tough love and radical repentance with deep sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as Liberator ... We commit ourselves not only to pray but also to work for genuine and visible manifestations of Christian unity. We hereby commit ourselves not only to the task of making prophetic denouncement of racism in word and creed, but to live by acting in deed. We will fully support and encourage those among us who are attempting change ... We commit ourselves to leaving our comfort zones, lay aside our warring, racial allegiances, respecting the full humanity of all, live with an openness to authentic liberation which is a product of Divine Creation, until the shackles fall and all bondage ceases. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Azusa Street Mission was a model of preaching and living the gospel message in the world. We desire to drink deeply from the well of Pentecost as it was embodied in that mission. We, therefore, pledge our commitment to embrace the essential commitments of that mission in evangelism and mission, in justice and holiness, in spiritual renewal and empowerment, and in the reconciliation of all Christians regardless of race or gender. Amen.

—The Racial Reconciliation Manifesto of the Memphis Miracle, 1994 (excerpts) <sup>50</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Pray to have the humility of Jesus. Pray to be able to humble yourself and really serve those who are different from you. To see yourself as a servant, to be ready to give up your own privilege and power to help others. Pray for wisdom and insight to see how you can do that. But most of all, pray for a heart that wants to serve and is willing to let go of your own status.
- **Act:** Serve. Do something that is an act of service for a person or group of a different ethnicity or background than yourself. Maybe it's going into a different neighborhood from yours and picking up trash or raking leaves. Maybe it's tutoring or volunteering at another elementary school or a non-profit in another area. Choose something that would require a sacrifice of your time, money, or even status and power to serve someone else.

# Session

# 18



# Session 18

## Racial Reconciliation and the New Creation

### Opening Prayer

*Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men's mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us—the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty—all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifices and death. Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish. Amen.*

—W. E. B. Du Bois <sup>51</sup>

### Discussion

In this lesson, Terry shared the heart of what many black Christians have said, that they don't want to be part of a multi-ethnic church because the Black church has been the only safe space for them. In a world that oppressed them, they found love, community, and a sense of self-worth and dignity there. They wouldn't have gotten that in a white church or even a multi-ethnic church.

As Raphael G. Warnock wrote,

The black church has always served as a focal point for the black community. When things were bleak, the black church was a bastion of hope. When black people were left hungry and homeless, the black church provided food and shelter. When our country created social divisions for people based on race, the black church formed a base of solidarity. The black church has doubled as school, community center, political hall, and community theater for both religious and secular programs. To accomplish this, many black churches developed a variety of social services including libraries, job training programs, basic education programs, and health care programs. <sup>52</sup>

Besides the social services they offered, the black church was the center of the civil rights movement. It may not have even happened without the black church.

- If you are from a black background and grew up in a black church, share your experiences with the black church and what it meant in your and/or your family's life.
- How would making your black church multi-ethnic affect its identity and mission? Would the church lose something if it were to become multi-ethnic?
- Even if you didn't grow up in that kind of environment, how do you think having a racially homogenous church might be a good thing in this case?
- What contributions has the black church made to American society and culture? Would they have been able to do that if they had been part of a multi-ethnic church? Why or why not?
- What are some other examples of situations and communities in which it might be helpful to have a racially homogenous church?

Think about first-generation immigrant families coming to America, whether Hispanic, Korean, Chinese, Italian, or whatever.

- Why might it be important to have a church service spoken in your native language?
- How might it be helpful to have a built-in community of people who share the same culture?
- Can a single-ethnicity church meet the needs of immigrants more effectively than a multi-ethnic one? Why or why not?
- How can a multi-ethnic church intentionally work to be more effective at serving different kinds of communities? What would it require to do so?
- What other reasons might people want to be involved in a single-ethnicity church?
- Why do people like being in churches with people who are like them? What do we gain by doing that? What do we lose?

In this lesson, Terry took us through some of Paul's epistles to see what he had to say about race and the body of Christ.

**Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17–20 and Philipians 3:20**

- What does the image of being citizens of the kingdom of God living in a foreign land tell us about what it looks like to walk with Jesus in the world?
- What does it mean to be ambassadors for Christ's kingdom?

We are citizens of heaven living in a foreign land (earth). And that foreign land is hostile to us; it is ruled by the enemy of our king (Ephesians 6:12). But instead of being hostile toward the world, we are called to be ambassadors of the kingdom, to bring a message of peace from our king. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation, not only to preach the gospel of individual reconciliation to God but also to work toward reconciliation of all people to one another.

**Read: Ephesians 2:14–22**

- What did Paul say was Christ's purpose in tearing down the dividing wall of hostility?
- What does it mean that Jew and Gentile are no longer strangers but fellow citizens of the kingdom of God? What does this say about our highest allegiances?

No matter what barriers we put up or lines we draw between countries, races, socio-economic levels, or people groups, Christ tears them down. They do not exist in His kingdom. This doesn't mean that ethnic distinctions don't exist. The Bible describes the kingdom as a mixture of nations, languages, and cultures. He keeps our diversity, but He tears down the divisions between us: which is the ideal of what America is supposed to be.

In the early 1900s, the term "melting pot" was popularized by Israel Zangwill's play by the same name, which illustrated the American dream as people from all different countries melting together into a new race of people.<sup>53</sup> This assimilation was some people's "ideal" in the early 1900s—people coming to America, letting go of their old ethnicities and identities, and becoming "American." And some people still think that today.

The image of a melting pot is not what Scripture describes as the goal of God's kingdom. God's kingdom is more like a salad bowl than a melting pot—everyone being mixed together but maintaining their own ethnic identities and cultures. God does demand that our allegiance is to His kingdom above our earthly kingdoms, but He doesn't expect anyone, in America or anywhere else, to let go of their ethnic identity to become a citizen in the kingdom of God.



### Case Study: Western Missionaries

Unfortunately, instead of recognizing and celebrating the diversity of different cultures as part of the body of Christ, the Western church has a history of demanding assimilation into Western culture when they witness to other nations. Like when European missionaries went to Africa and demanded that the native women wear ankle-length dresses. Or demanded they learn English. Or stop their traditional dancing. As if they had to take on Western cultural traits to be good Christians. Never mind that the first church wasn't Western or white. The original Christians were Middle-Eastern Jews. And the first Gentile converts were Egyptian, African, Greek, Roman, and Asian. No one in the early church looked like those 18th-century European missionaries. Or a modern white American.

A Christian missionary once traveled to a remote area and took a cab from the small airport. He asked his cab driver if he was a Christian and the driver told him no. The driver said he knew all about the Christians though. The locals called them "the church of pants." The men in his culture wore robes, but the cab driver said the missionaries thought robes were too feminine, so they convinced their male converts to wear pants. These missionaries had focused more on converting them into "Westerners" than converting them to Christ. Instead of focusing on the gospel, they had focused on a cultural standard that didn't even make sense biblically. Jesus Himself wore robes. Instead of assimilating into their culture and meeting them where they were, these missionaries offended many of the people of that area and ruined their chances to share the gospel with them.<sup>54</sup>

This may seem like an extreme example of missionaries who were completely tone deaf and needed some major missiology training, but how many times do we do the same thing in less obvious ways? How often do we mistake things for gospel issues that are really just cultural standards? When we do that, we are unconsciously saying that "our way" of being a Christian culturally is the "right way." And we inadvertently demand that people "become like us" instead of becoming like Christ. We could apply that a million different ways today. Bikers don't have to start wearing suits to come to our churches. Immigrants don't have to let go of their native language. No one has to change their cultural traditions to become a Christian. Because the church is a beautiful tapestry of every nation, tribe, and tongue. And we not only tolerate those differences, we celebrate them! Our cultural differences only add to the beauty of the kingdom.

- What other ways have you seen churches try to assimilate people into their culture rather than celebrating their diversity?
- What kind of damage does it do to the gospel message when we do that?
- What damage does it do to the body of Christ?
- How can we learn more about God from different people's backgrounds, understandings, and experiences?
- How is our understanding of God and His Word limited when we only relate to believers who are like us?
- How can we celebrate and foster diversity in the American church?

The church is called to be a salad bowl, not a melting pot. We are citizens of the kingdom of God, a "new humanity," a new people group committed to Christ and His kingdom, but that doesn't mean we lose our ethnic identities in the process. Instead, God celebrates our diversity and uses it to accomplish His mission and vision for the world. We are the body of Christ, many different body parts that work together for His mission to reconcile the world to Himself. If we were all the same, we would be limited in what we could do and who we could reach. Being the body means Christians of other races are not only equal to us, they are joined to us. We are one. We need each other to function as the body. Racial reconciliation is not just a ministry we can choose to take part in if we feel so led. It is an essential part of being the body of Christ. If we segregate ourselves from any other part of the body of Christ, that's like cutting off our own legs or arms. And yet, we can certainly see the positives of having a Black church or a Korean church or a Puerto Rican church in America to more easily serve those communities. But is it what God wants us to do? Is it really being the body of Christ?



- Is it possible to have a network of different single-ethnicity churches that work together to meet the needs of multiple different communities? So that all those churches together form the diverse body of Christ like a salad bowl?
- Would that accomplish the same thing as having one multi-ethnic church? Why or why not?
- Discuss the pros and cons of these two methods of being the church in one city/area.
- Which is more faithful to what God calls us to do in His Word and why?
- Is it possible that both options are okay with God or is there only one right answer? Why/why not?
- Whether your churches are multi-ethnic or not, what does this tell us about how different individual churches should be working together as one body in their communities?
- Why is there often competition instead of cooperation between different churches in an area?
- How does that affect the mission of the body of Christ?
- What would it take for the churches in your area to all work together as one body?
- What can you personally do to help make that happen?
- How can you pray for the churches in your area to work together as one body?

Coretta Scott King wrote,

Throughout the epic freedom struggle of African Americans, our great sustainer of hope has been the power of prayer. We prayed for deliverance in a dozen African languages, chained to the holds of slave ships, on the auction block, in the fields of oppression, and under the lash. We prayed when we “followed the drinking gourd” on the Underground Railroad. We prayed when our families were torn asunder by the slave traders. We prayed when our homes and churches were burned and bombed and when our people were lynched by racist mobs. So many times it seemed our prayer went unanswered, but we kept faith that one day our unearned suffering would prove to be redemptive. As a young child growing up in Marion, Alabama, I remember my pastor at Mt. Tabor Church responding to the racial abuse of one of our congregation by saying, “God loves us all, and people will reap what they sow. So just keep on praying. Don’t worry. God will straighten things out.” I believed he was right then, and I believe it still ... My parents made sure that prayer would be a regular part of my life, and it has been to this very day. Prayer is how we open our hearts to God, how we make that vital connection that empowers us to overcome overwhelming obstacles and become instruments of God’s will. And despite the pain and suffering that I have experienced and that comes to all of our lives, I am more convinced than ever before that prayer gives us strength and hope, a sense of divine companionship, as we struggle for justice and righteousness. Prayer was a wellspring of strength and inspiration during the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the movement, we prayed for greater human understanding. We prayed for the safety of our compatriots in the freedom struggle. We prayed for victory in our nonviolent protests, for brotherhood and sisterhood among people of all races, for reconciliation and the fulfillment of the Beloved Community.”<sup>55</sup>

Now let us pray together Coretta Scott King’s, “A Public Prayer for Divine Perspective”:

## Closing Prayer

Eternal and everlasting God, who art the Father of all mankind, as we turn aside from the hurly-burly of everyday living, may our hearts and souls, yea our very spirits, be lifted upward to Thee, for it is from Thee that all blessing cometh. Keep us ever mindful of our dependence upon Thee, for without Thee our efforts are but naught. We pray for Thy divine guidance as we travel the highways of life. We pray for more courage. We pray for more faith and above all we pray for more love. May we somehow come to understand the true meaning of Thy love as revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Thy Son and our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. May the Cross ever remind us of Thy great love, for greater love no man hath given. This is our supreme example, O God. May we be constrained to follow in the name and spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

—Coretta Scott King <sup>56</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Pray for every church in the body of Christ to work together to accomplish His mission, whether those churches are multi-ethnic or single ethnicity, whether they are different denominations, different worship styles, or have any other differences. Pray that they don't let their differences divide them but instead find unity in their diversity and even use their diversity to reach more people for the kingdom of God. Pray for the church in your area to be unified. Pray for church leaders to be inspired to join forces and work together for the kingdom.
- **Act:** Visit a church where a language other than your native language is spoken. Immerse yourself in the experience and pray for the Lord to speak to you through it even if you don't understand everything they are saying. Connect with anyone you can in any way you can. Afterward, reflect on your experience in prayer and write down your thoughts and what the Lord showed you.

# Session

# 19



# Session 19

## Race and Slavery

### Opening Prayer

During each slave's escape, Harriet Tubman uttered the same prayer: "Lord, I'm going to hold steady onto you, and you've got to see us through."

*The North Star leads and guides my way.  
O Lord, show me favor now I pray,  
For I'm walking to freedom day by day.  
It's more than a fight, more than a dream,  
It's the fact we're all created equal, so let freedom ring.  
So I'm not giving up, I'll keep fighting still.  
I'll die for this cause if that is Your will.  
It is my hope for the next generation to see,  
What it's like to truly be free.  
So there's no time for worry, no time for fear,  
For the light of independence is far too near!*

—written by an anonymous black teen about Harriet Tubman <sup>57</sup>

### Discussion

In this lesson, Terry shared how many American slaveowners believed that Scripture supported their ownership of slaves. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America said in his inaugural address, "(Slavery) was established by decree of Almighty God ... it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation ... it has existed in all ages, as has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts."<sup>58</sup> Many modern critics of the Bible say the same thing, that it condones slavery. And they often use this as a reason to not follow God. And if you take some biblical passages at face value, without doing any interpretation work at all, we can see why they would think that.

#### Read: Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22

This seems straightforward at first. But let's do some exegetical work.

First, Ephesians and Colossians were written by Paul at the same time, along with Philemon. These letters were sent with Tychicus, who was accompanied by Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus. Now this immediately gets more interesting, doesn't it?

Paul was in prison, on house arrest in Rome, when he wrote these letters. Philemon lived in Colossae and owned the home where the Colossian church met. His slave, Onesimus, had run away, fleeing to Rome, where he met Paul and became a Christian. He became like a son to Paul and worked alongside him in Rome. Now Paul was sending him back to Philemon with this letter. At the same time, Paul wrote a letter to the whole church at Colossae to address some issues they were having there and then wrote a similar but more general letter (Ephesians) that would be sent to every church in the area. Ephesians and Colossians both contain some instructions about how slaves and masters should relate to each other in the body of Christ because it would have been a universal issue in their culture. But we cannot really understand what Paul said in those more general letters without understanding what he said specifically to Philemon about Onesimus.

**Read: Philemon 1:8–21**

- Why did Paul send Onesimus back? Does this mean he condoned slavery? Why/why not?
- How did Paul expect Philemon to receive Onesimus and treat him moving forward? What does this tell us about Paul's beliefs about slavery?

Paul told Philemon that he wished he could keep Onesimus with him because he had become so useful in his mission, making a play on words because "Onesimus" means "useful." Since Paul was in authority over Philemon as an apostle, he could have just told Philemon he was keeping Onesimus with him, but Paul wanted Philemon to do his "good work" voluntarily, not by compulsion. Then Paul said perhaps Onesimus's running away happened for a reason, so Philemon could receive him forever, "no longer as a slave" but as a beloved brother. He added that he had confidence in Philemon's obedience, "knowing that you will do even more." Paul was telling Philemon to free his slave. And not only to free him but to see him as an equal, a brother in the family of God. This is consistent with what Paul wrote in Galatians, that there is "neither slave nor free" in the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28).

**Read: 1 Corinthians 7:20–24**

- Paul said if you can gain your freedom, to do so. What does this say about his views on slavery?
- What did Paul say to do if you couldn't? What does this tell us about his views on slavery?

Paul told slaves to gain their freedom if they could, but if they couldn't, to know that even if they were enslaved, they were free in the Lord in the same way that even though he was in chains in prison, he was free in the Lord. This doesn't mean he condoned slavery! In fact, the opposite. Paul was saying that in the kingdom of God, there is no slavery. We are all free people who are servants of God. That's why, when he wrote to Philemon, who was a Christian, he told him to welcome Onesimus back as a brother, not a slave. Because Philemon was a member of the church, and the church is the earthly manifestation of God's kingdom, there should be no slavery in the church, especially among believers. In the kingdom of God there is no slavery, yet we still live in the world, so we may be stuck in an earthly situation like slavery or prison or sickness, things that will not exist in God's final kingdom but do exist here. If their slaveowner was a believer, he should free them. If they were not believers but could gain your freedom, to do it. If not, they could put their hope in Christ and His final kingdom in which there will be no slavery.

**Read: Ephesians 6:5–9**

- What does it mean that Paul said masters should treat slaves "in the same way"?
- What does this tell us about what Paul thought about slavery as an institution?

This passage is hard because it sounds like Paul was condoning slavery, but when we read it with these other passages, we can see he was not. He was telling Christian slaves that if they couldn't become free, they should serve "with sincerity of heart." This would have been a revolutionary way to tell slaves to obey their masters, in this culture or any culture where slavery is practiced. Most of us would obey our masters with bitterness and anger, not sincerity of heart. But Paul told these slaves that the attitude of their heart was between them and the Lord, not their human master. Even though their position was the result of oppression, they should do their work wholeheartedly. This is similar to God's command to His people to seek the peace of Babylon while they were living as exiles there (Jeremiah 29:7). Remember, Paul wrote this letter while he himself was wrongly imprisoned, in chains, which he rejoiced about because God was using him to preach to the Roman guards (Philippians 1:12–19). No matter where you find yourself, even if it's a horrible, unfair, or even an oppressive situation, do the best you can while you are there and know that God will use you in it until He saves you from it.



What we can't always see about these passages when we read them with modern eyes is how revolutionary what Paul wrote would have sounded to the slave masters. This is where we can see what Paul was really saying about slavery. In both Ephesians and Colossians, Paul addressed three different relationships in the ancient world in which there was a very patriarchal authoritarian power structure—husband/wife, father/child, and master/slave. In all these relationships, the wife/child/slave was considered property of the patriarch and had zero rights or value. In the eyes of the world—but not so in the kingdom of God.

In each of the three parallel sections, Paul wrote what the culture at the time would have said (slaves obey your masters), but then added a second line addressed to the patriarch, about how they were to treat the person over whom they had this authority. This would have been absolutely countercultural. In the world, the patriarch had zero responsibility to treat his wife/child/slave with any respect or kindness. But in the kingdom of God, they were to treat the person over whom they had authority with the humble, self-sacrificing love of Christ:

- Husbands love your wives in a way that gives yourself up for her.
- Fathers, don't frustrate your children with unfair expectations and capricious behavior.
- Masters, treat your slaves "in the same way" they treat you, with respect, love, and humble service.

This would have been a revolutionary thing to tell slaveowners. Each of these examples is a description of the person in authority intentionally giving up their human-given power and loving the person under their authority with humility and self-sacrifice, just like Jesus did. Christ had all authority in heaven and on earth, yet He chose to give it up to come to earth, become a human being, and die for us (Philippians 2:1–8). Read again the last line Paul wrote to the slave masters:

#### Read: Ephesians 6:9

Not only is God the real Master, "there is no favoritism with him." In God's eyes, there is no power structure. In God's kingdom, there is no master/slave. With this one last line, Paul destroyed all the human power structures we have set up. The world creates power structures and hierarchies, but in the kingdom of God, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. There are no higher or lower levels of authority and power between humans. All human beings are the same, and God is the authority over them all. God is the Husband, and all believers together are His wife. God is the Father, and we are all His children. God is our Master, and we are all His servants.

In this world, there are relationships of unequal authority, but in the kingdom of God, there are no different levels of power and authority between humans, we are all one in Christ. The whole section is introduced with the revolutionary line, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Not just the one under authority submitting to the one in power. Submit to one another. In the kingdom of God, there is no oppression, no slavery, no dominance. All human beings are called to submit to one another and love one another with the humble, self-sacrificing love of Jesus.

Any Christian reading these passages cannot support slavery as an institution. Because even if slavery exists in the world, there is no slavery in the kingdom of God, and we are citizens of the kingdom of God. Paul wrote this way because his desire was for Philemon to come to conclude on his own, voluntarily, that he should free Onesimus. He wanted him to see it for himself and make the decision for himself, not just command him to do it. When we really understand the cultural context of Paul's writings, we can see that he was telling Christian slaveowners to free their slaves and treat them as equals and brothers, because slavery is not of the kingdom of God.

- If slavery is not part of the kingdom of God, how could Christians of the past let it exist among the church, which is the earthly manifestation of the kingdom?
- Why do you think those Christian slaveowners used Scripture to justify slavery? What does this tell us about how easy it is to misuse Scripture to justify what we want to believe?
- In what ways are we tempted to do that today?
- If Paul felt strongly about slaveowners like Philemon freeing their slaves, why do you think he didn't speak out against slavery as an institution more openly and clearly in their world?



**Case Study: “Amazing Grace”** may well be the most well-known hymn in America. It was included in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and has been recorded by Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Elvis, and many others. It inspired a movie about the abolition of slavery in England and a Broadway musical about the hymn’s author. John Newton was a British former slave trader turned Anglican priest. He wrote the hymn out of his own conversion experience after a near-death experience when his slave ship was hit with a violent storm. Newton was, by his own admission, “a wretch.” He lived an extremely immoral life and even tortured slaves. He wrote, “I sinned with a high hand, and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion.”<sup>59</sup> When the storm arose and he feared he might die, Newton cried out to God even though he felt too sinful for God to save. God saved him, and yet he continued as a slave trader for several more years until he became violently ill on another sea voyage and nearly died again. This time, Newton finally abandoned his former life and became a priest. About twenty years later, in 1773, he wrote “Amazing Grace” for a New Year’s Day service, about how he felt he was the last person who deserved God’s grace. Eventually, he began writing and speaking out against slavery in England. He wrote, “I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me ... that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”<sup>60</sup>

- How is Newton’s experience similar to the other case studies we have read?
- How did the Holy Spirit move in Newton’s life and change him?
- What does Newton’s life experience show us about what God thinks about slavery?

It’s hard for us today to imagine there were ever Christians who justified slavery, but notice that in Newton’s story, there was a period of time after he became a believer that he still participated in slavery. It wasn’t until later that he was really convicted and changed. We all have areas in which we still need to grow and places where we harbor sin in our lives and even justify it to ourselves.

- How can we as the church make amends for the Christians of the past who condoned slavery?
- What is our responsibility today to look at our own blind spots and try to stop ourselves from doing the same thing those Christian slaveowners did?
- What does this tell us about how important it is to be really humble and really honest with ourselves when we are discussing issues of racial reconciliation?
- How can we encourage one another to be open, honest, and vulnerable in our discussions? How can we work to create a safe space to discuss?

Newton’s describing himself as a “wretch” is similar to Paul describing himself as the “worst” (1 Timothy 1:15). Newton was converted from an abusive slave trader into a man who spoke out against slavery. Paul was converted from a man who was killing Christians and into the man who expanded God’s church throughout the known world. The difference was the Holy Spirit changing their hearts. There is no shame in admitting that you used to think or feel differently about these things we’ve been discussing or that you used to behave differently, but now that you know better, you can do better. That’s called growth, and that’s a good thing!

## Closing Prayer

Loving God,

We call to you with hearts in pain for all in our world  
 who suffer the horrors of modern slavery;  
 for all who dream of a better life in another place  
 only to be trapped, tricked and traded;  
 for all those who labor, forced and unseen, to make our everyday possessions;  
 for all who agonize for loved ones lost into this trade in humans.  
 Your Son came to bring good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed—  
 may we too be voices against oppression, channels of good news;  
 may our eyes be opened wide to all who suffer in our midst but out of sight.  
 All this we pray to you, loving God, for whom no one is invisible. Amen.

—Reverend Rachel Carnegie <sup>61</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Pray for those who are living in slavery today—both internationally and even in America, people who are enslaved in sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and other situations. Pray for the release of those captives. Pray for Christians to rise up as modern-day abolitionists. Pray for the world to see what is happening, and fight against it. Pray for the hearts of the slaveowners to be changed and the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sin the way he convicted Newton.
- **Act:** Support a ministry that is working to fight modern-day slavery around the world. If you don't know where to start, you can look at this information from the U.S. Department of State - [What is Modern Slavery? - United States Department of State](#) or Slavery No More - [Slavery No More | Working to End Modern Day Slavery](#).

# Session 20



# Session 20

## Racial Reconciliation and the Eschaton

### Opening Prayer

*Father God, I know that your heart is that there be complete reconciliation racially. Father, your Word teaches me that one day, people from every nation, tribe and tongue will gather before your throne. Search my heart, Oh God, and show me any hint of prejudice that lingers there. I pray that I would see every person as a beautiful creature created in your image. Lord, thank you that each race reflects some aspect of your glory. I praise you that you created different skin colors, eye colors, cultural traditions, and tribal rituals. Yet, you long for each one to come to know you personally and to be included in the family of Christ. Thank you that for all eternity, there will be no division. People from every nation, tribe, and tongue will praise your Holy Name. Amen.*

—Becky Harling <sup>62</sup>

### Discussion

- Discuss what you imagine heaven will be like. Will there really be streets of gold? What will our houses be like? Our bodies? Will there be unlimited ice cream and pizza or something even better we haven't even imagined yet? What will we do all day?
- What will it feel like to be in the presence of God?

We have lots of different ideas about heaven, some which come from the Bible, some from popular culture, and some just from our own imaginations. The Bible doesn't give us every detail about heaven, but it does tell us some things. One thing we consistently see in every description of the final consummated kingdom of God is the diversity of people from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

#### Read: Revelation 7:9–10

- How many people does this passage describe? How does this fulfill the promises to Abraham?
- What does it tell us about the kingdom of God that all the people are wearing white robes and yet still maintain the diversity of their different nationalities and people groups?

#### Read: Isaiah 2:1–4 and Micah 4:1–4

- Why will all the nations stream to the mountain of the Lord?
- How do these passages describe peace between the nations and prosperity for all?

In the kingdom of God, people from all the nations who had turned away from God and scattered all over the earth have come back to Him, realizing that He is not only the God of Israel but the God of all nations, Creator of the universe. They want to learn His ways and follow His paths. And when they submit to Him as king, He settles their disputes so there is no longer any need for war between the nations. There is peace and prosperity for all people. There are no more dividing walls of hostility between us. All of humanity is one united kingdom under the reign of God.

We are united, and yet we do not lose our diversity. Everyone wears white robes to symbolize our righteousness and purity before the Lord, but the skin colors, facial features, and hair styles that make us unique are still diverse. In Corinthians, Paul described our bodies being resurrected and changed from perishable bodies to imperishable ones, but he didn't say we lose the ethnic characteristics that make us diverse.

**Read: 1 Corinthians 15:35–54**

- What are the differences between our earthly bodies and our heavenly bodies?
- What was Paul telling us about our heavenly bodies when he said that each of the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars) have their own kind of splendor?

Paul uses the metaphor of seeds to describe how our earthly bodies must die so we can be raised with imperishable bodies. We don't know what those bodies will be like other than that they will be imperishable and immortal. They will not die, nor will they have pain or sickness (Revelation 21:4). But being changed from perishable to imperishable does not mean we will lose the identifying characteristics that make us us. God gives each kind of seed its own body as He has determined. The descriptions in Micah, Isaiah, and Revelation all show a diverse group of every nation, tribe, and tongue, each with its own kind of splendor. God's universe is diverse, from mountains to valleys to plains to rainforests, with myriad different birds, animals, and fish, with sun, moon, and stars. Every individual star differs from all the others. So it is with our bodies. Every human body has its own kind of splendor.

We won't lose our skin color, our language, or our ethnic distinctions when we rise again with our glorified bodies because these are not things that need to be fixed. They are not the result of sin or the fall. They are not deficiencies God is dissatisfied with; they are differences He is glorified by. We are different by design.

- Describe any time that you have been in a multicultural group of believers, whether a small group, a worship service, a conference, a group of churches together, or another experience. What did it feel like to be in a diverse but united group?

If you've ever had the pleasure of being in a big worship service where the crowd is diverse and people are truly pouring out their hearts to God in worship, it's a beautiful experience that can give us a glimpse of what heaven will be like. A little taste of heaven on earth. Which is what we (the church) are supposed to be, right? An outpost of the kingdom of God here on earth.

**Read: Matthew 6:9–13**

- What does it mean to pray for God's kingdom to come? For His will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven"? How are these two things connected?
- What does this tell us about racial diversity in our churches? About our mission and calling toward racial reconciliation?

Praying for God's kingdom to come doesn't just mean praying for the second coming of Jesus, the day of judgment, and the final kingdom to come. It means praying for God's kingdom to come now, into our hearts, our families, our communities, and our world.

**Read: Luke 17:20–21**

- How is the kingdom of God in our midst? What does that mean?

Yes, the final kingdom of God where evil has been destroyed and there is no more mourning, crying, or pain is in the future, as described in Revelation. But at the same time, the kingdom of God is already here, "in our midst," among the people of God. Scholars call this the "already, not yet" of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the reign or rule of God. The kingdom is already here in the hearts, lives, and communities of those who believe. But it is not yet here in all its fullness, when every knee will bow and everything will be made new. Until that day comes, believers are called to be ambassadors for the kingdom of God here on earth. Which means we are to live as citizens of the kingdom. And our lives, families, and church communities should look like the kingdom of God, even now. We don't have to wait for heaven to experience a diverse community of believers worshipping God together as one. We should not wait. We should be intentionally creating that community now.



The church is supposed to be the kingdom of God in the here and now. If that is what heaven will look like, that is what our churches should look like. It's really that simple.

The overarching story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is the story of reconciliation. Theologians summarize this story in four steps: Creation – Fall – Redemption – Consummation:

- Creation: In Genesis 1–2 God created the world good.
- Fall: In Genesis 3 mankind chose sin and all of creation was broken.
- Redemption: Genesis 4 through the rest of the Bible is God's rescue plan. Christ conquered death and redeemed the world from the bondage of sin.
- Consummation: Revelation is the ushering in of the new creation.

At the very end of the story, we have a picture of what the new creation will be like.

**Read: Revelation 21:1–5**

This is our future hope—a new creation. The world was broken in Genesis 3. It is recreated in Revelation 21. And everything between those two chapters is the story of God's rescue plan to save the world, the "missio Dei," the mission of God. The goal of the missio Dei is the consummation, the perfect, completed kingdom of God, what most of us imagine when we think of heaven. The story of the Bible is God's plan to get us there, which happens in three stages:

- The mission of Israel (Genesis 4 through the Old Testament)
- The mission of Jesus (the Gospels)
- The mission of the church (the rest of the New Testament and all of church history until the second coming)

We are a part of this story. We are a part of the mission of God to reconcile the world to Himself. God doesn't need us to build His kingdom, but He delights in using us as part of His plan to build His kingdom.

**Read: 1 Corinthians 3:9–17 and Ephesians 2:19–22**

- What are we building together as believers with our lives? What does this tell us about the value of each believer's life and work for the kingdom?
- What does it mean that every believer is a different stone in the building? What does that say about the diversity of the kingdom of God?

And this kingdom He is building is multi-ethnic.

**Read: Revelation 5:9–10**

- Who did Jesus purchase for God with His blood?
- What does it mean for them to be a kingdom of priests?
- If God's kingdom includes every ethnicity on earth, what does this tell us about God?

The imagery of Revelation makes ethnocentrism unthinkable. The biblical imagery of the kingdom of God is a picture of all the colors of humanity worshipping together as one body. To think ethnocentrically about the kingdom of God would be like trying to paint a picture of the sunset with only one color. It is clear that God desired a multi-cultural body of Christ from the start. Every image of heaven in Scripture describes a diverse body from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Every ethnicity and every culture are celebrated as an equally important, equally beautiful part of the kingdom of God. You simply cannot think in an ethnocentric way and be a member of the kingdom of God. We are one body. To think that your race or culture is superior to any other race or culture on earth would be like thinking your toes are superior to your fingers or your hip bone is superior to your clavicle. No part of the body is better than any other; they are just different. And they need each other to make a unified whole.



- Does the American church today look like these images in Isaiah, Micah, and Revelation, with every nation, tribe, and tongue worshipping God together? Does the church universal?
- Does it still reflect this imagery if we have a bunch of single-ethnicity churches within the “big C” church or should each individual church be diverse? Why or why not? Is that answer different in countries where ethnicities are more homogenous than in America?
- How are we living out the rich vision of the missio Dei in the American church? Are we living faithfully as a “kingdom of priests” to the nations? Are we being a light to the world? Are we showing them Jesus? Why or why not?
- Are we living out unity in diversity? Or are we closing ranks around our individual little parts of the body of Christ? Are we drawing dividing lines, either within the church or outside of it?
- In what ways are we living as if our own race, culture, or tribe is superior to others?
- In what ways are we limiting our picture of the body of Christ to only one color, one nation, or one part of the world instead of seeing that we are part of a worldwide body of Christ?
- How would our churches be different if we saw ourselves as a tiny part of a worldwide church with a worldwide mission?
- Why is it tempting to think we can wait for heaven for God to create this diverse kingdom rather than pursuing it now on earth? Why can't we?
- How are you personally contributing to building the kingdom of God? What are you building in your part of the temple with your life?
- How is your life reflecting the missio Dei? What things may you need to change to realign your purpose to God's purposes?

## Closing Prayer

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

—Jesus (Matthew 6:9–13 NIV)

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Pray for His kingdom to come, not just in the final sense, though you can pray for Jesus to come back soon too. Pray for His kingdom to come in our world today, for the church to be the light of the world and a kingdom of priests. Pray for the church to live out their mission to build the kingdom of God. Pray for your own life's purpose, that the Lord will reveal to you how He wants you to contribute to building the kingdom and that you will have the courage, the passion, and the desire to live out your calling with your whole heart.
- **Act:** As a small group, plan a "Big C" church "Prayer for Purpose" meeting for your area. Contact every church in your area—every denomination, every ethnicity, big and small—and tell them about your desire for the body of Christ in your area to work together on mission for the kingdom. You can even describe a bit of what you have been studying and how God is showing you that His desire is for unity in diversity in His body and to break down barriers between different churches. There may be other meetings and ministries that come out of this, but this first meeting should just be a meeting to pray and seek God's purpose for the "Big C" church in your part of the world. How is God leading you to work as one body to build His kingdom and serve the world? Be sure to include all churches who come to the meeting equally. Don't let the bigger or more prominent churches in your area take over. Don't advertise it as something your church is putting on for the other churches but rather something you are calling all churches to participate in equally. (This is why something like this can be better coming from an outside group of people like your small group rather than one church's leadership) Perhaps you can even host it in a neutral location rather than at one church.

\* Be aware that you may not get 100% participation for this meeting. You may not get 50% or even 10%. Unfortunately, American churches are often divided not only along racial lines but along denominational and other lines as well. They don't always see the need to work together as one body. They may even feel competitive with one another. Even if you only get a few responses to your invitation to pray, have the meeting anyway. You've got to start somewhere, and the Holy Spirit will honor even the smallest beginnings and multiply them. Then watch and see what the Lord will do with it.

# Session 21



# Session 21

## Conclusion

### Opening Prayer

*O God, we thank you for the lives of great saints and prophets in the past, who have revealed to us that we can stand up amid the problems and difficulties and trials of life and not give in. We thank you for our foreparents, who've given us something in the midst of the darkness of exploitation and oppression to keep going. Grant that we will go on with the proper faith and the proper determination of will, so that we will be able to make a creative contribution to this world. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray ... O God, make us willing to do your will, come what may. Increase the number of persons of good will and moral sensitivity. Give us renewed confidence in nonviolence and the way of love as taught by Christ.*

—Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>63</sup>

### Discussion

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" —Martin Luther King Jr.

In this lesson, Terry suggested that the moral arc of the universe may look a little more like a bell curve. Instead of steadily moving upward, each time we see another instance of racial injustice on the news or social media, the curve spikes. People start to respond and demand change, and intensity builds until a critical mass forms. It hits a crescendo, and then, whether justice is received or denied, it isn't long before people's attention turns to something else and the curve drops off. And the whole thing starts over the next time something happens.

- Why do you think our culture's responses toward racial injustice are so reactionary?
- Why is it so easy for some of us to forget about racial injustice between dramatic events? Why is it harder for other people to forget about?
- It has been said that white people in America can walk through most days without having to think about their race, that this is one of the privileges of being white in our culture, but that's not true for people of color. What are some day-to-day situations in which a person of color might have to think about their race while a white person wouldn't? What does this tell us about our culture?
- How can we keep issues of racial injustice at the forefront of our minds and lives?
- How can we fight racial injustice in our day-to-day lives, not just react when things happen?

"The arc of the universe may bend toward justice, but it doesn't bend on its own." —Barack Obama<sup>64</sup>

In 2013, on the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech, then-President Barack Obama delivered an address from the same steps in which he paid tribute to the civil rights activists who made his story possible.

"Through boycotts and voter registration drives and smaller marches, far from the spotlight, through the loss of four little girls in Birmingham, the carnage of Edmund Pettus Bridge and the agony of Dallas, California, Memphis—through setbacks and heartbreaks and gnawing doubt, that flame of justice flickered and never died," Obama said, offering a historical perspective but little personal reflection. "And because they kept marching, America changed. Because they marched, the civil rights law was passed. Because they marched, the voting rights law was signed. Because they marched, doors of opportunity and education swung open so their daughters and sons could finally imagine a life for themselves beyond washing somebody else's laundry or shining somebody else's shoes. Because they marched, city councils changed and state legislatures changed and Congress changed and, yes, eventually the White House changed."<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, Obama said that while he didn't want to minimize the work they had done to change our culture, it would dishonor their legacies to suggest that the work was complete. "The March on Washington teaches us that we are not trapped by the mistakes of history, that we are masters of our fate," he said. "The arc of the universe may bend toward justice, but it doesn't bend on its own."<sup>66</sup>

We cannot trust that the world will get better over time. We must work to make it better. Things only changed during the civil rights movement because those activists did something. Left to our own devices, human beings will mistreat one another and push one another down to get ahead. This is what human nature does. Our natural sinful human nature will lead us to oppress the poor and vulnerable. It takes the influence of God to desire and fight for justice. Even Israel, who were called to be God's people and given His law to show them His way of doing things, when they turned away from God, began to oppress the poor and deprive people of justice.

**Read: Isaiah 5:22–25 and 10:1–4**

- Why did Isaiah pronounce woe to those who oppressed the poor and deprived people of justice?
- How does this dishonor God? Why does it make Him angry?
- Why is it significant that these passages talk about unjust laws and systems, not just individual injustice from one person to another? What does this tell us about our calling to fight for social justice in our modern world?

**Read: Micah 5:4–15**

- Why did Micah talk about those who oppressed the poor and deprived people of justice in the context of seeking the Lord and seeking good, not evil?
- What does this tell us about who God is and what He cares about?
- What does this tell us about what it means to be the body of Christ and do His work in the world?

**Read: Micah 3:5**

- Why did God list those who oppressed the vulnerable and deprived foreigners of justice and laborers of a fair wage along with adulterers, sorcerers, and perjurers? What does this tell us about how seriously God takes justice?

**Read: Micah 6:1–4 and 10–12**

- What did the Lord do for Israel? What does this tell us about God? About them?
- What charge was He lodging against them? What had they been doing? How had the rich among them mistreated the poor?
- Why does this happen in every society, even this one that was originally built on God's laws and His ways? What does this tell us about America?

**Read: Micah 6:5–8**

- What does the Lord require of us? What makes Him truly pleased?
- Why are justice and mercy connected to walking humbly with God?



Tim Keller's book, *Generous Justice*, talks about this passage in Micah and the connection between mercy and justice and between both and walking humbly with God:

If a person has grasped the meaning of God's grace in his heart, he will do justice. If he doesn't live justly, then he may say with his lips that he is grateful for God's grace, but in his heart he is far from him. If he doesn't care about the poor, it reveals that at best he doesn't understand the grace he has experienced, and at worst he has not really encountered the saving mercy of God. Grace should make you just ... For indeed, grace is the key to it all. It is not our lavish good deeds that procure salvation, but God's lavish love and mercy. That is why the poor are as acceptable before God as the rich. It is the generosity of God, the freeness of his salvation, that lays the foundation for the society of justice for all. Even in the seemingly boring rules and regulations of tabernacle rituals, we see that God cares about the poor, that his laws make provision for the disadvantaged. God's concern for justice permeated every part of Israel's life. It should also permeate our lives.<sup>67</sup>

- How does truly understanding and appreciating God's grace give us a heart for justice?
- What does this tell us about those who call themselves Christians but don't have a heart for justice?
- What does it tell us about how important it is for Christians to fight for justice not only when we hear something dramatic in the news but every day?
- What would it look like for justice to permeate our lives? What would have to change about the way we think, what we spend our time and money on, and how we act?

Terry said in this video that now that we're at the end of the class, he would love to hear our thoughts, leanings, and ongoing questions. We have talked about so many different aspects of racial injustice and reconciliation over the course of this class, it may feel overwhelming to go back and review them all. Below are some questions that revisit the highlights of each lesson so you can check in to see how your thinking and your heart have been changed by this course.

- What were you hoping to gain from this course? Did you learn and grow in the way you hoped? How did God challenge you beyond that?
- In what ways did your thinking or understanding change throughout this course? What new things did you learn? What old patterns or ways of thinking did you change?
- What questions do you still have about what the Bible says or what God thinks about race?
- How would you describe what the Bible has to say about race and racial reconciliation to someone who asked you?
- Why is racial reconciliation not just an optional side ministry Christians can work toward if they feel so called but an issue that is central to the gospel?
- What are your concerns about the way the American church is handling issues of race? What can we do to change that?
- How would you describe the Christian alternative "third way" of handling issues of race in our world, as opposed to the ways the two political sides are handling it?
- What questions or doubts do you still have about systemic racism? What concerns do you have about the church's role in fighting systemic racism?
- What questions or concerns do you still have about the term "social justice" and the way it is used in our culture? What is the church's role and responsibility when it comes to social justice?
- What is the church's role in ministry to immigrants to our country? What should we be doing to tangibly welcome and support refugees and immigrant families? How should we be trying to make an impact on our nation's laws and systems?
- Why is the church the only hope for true racial reconciliation in our world? What does the church have that other non-profits, political groups, and economic groups do not have? What does that tell us about our responsibility and how much work we have to do?
- How can we get the rest of the church on board with their responsibility to this mission?
- How can we ask the Holy Spirit to move in our churches? In our world?
- How might the church need to repent and humble ourselves to accomplish racial reconciliation? How might we individually need to repent and humble ourselves? How might our attitudes and desires need to change?



Reflect on Your Personal Experience:

- Which of the prayer times you participated in over this course were most impactful and why?
- How did God speak to you through your intentional times of prayer?
- Which of the action steps you participated in over this course were most impactful and why?
- What did you learn through those action steps? How did God work through you?

## Closing Prayer

God of love, we pray for your church ... for all lay and ordained ministers; and for all who seek you in the community of the faithful. Equip us with compassion and love, to carry out your work of reconciliation in the world. God of freedom, we pray for our nation, and all the nations of the world: For peace and unity across barriers of language, color, and creed; for elected and appointed leaders, that they would serve the common good. Inspire all people with courage to speak out against hatred, to actively resist evil. Unite the human family in bonds of love. God of justice, we pray for the earth, your creation entrusted to our care: For the animals and birds, the mountains and oceans, and all parts of your creation that have no voice of their own. Stir up in us a thirst for justice that protects the earth and all its resources, that we may leave to our children's children the legacy of beauty and abundance that you have given us.

God of peace, we pray for this community: For our local leaders; for our schools and markets; for our neighborhoods and workplaces. Kindle in every heart a desire for equality, respect, and opportunity for all. Give us courage to strive for justice and peace among all people, beginning here at home.

God of mercy, we pray for all in any kind of need or trouble: For those whose lives are closely linked with ours, and those connected to us as part of the human family. For refugees and prisoners; for the sick and suffering, the lonely and despairing; for those facing violence; for all held down by prejudice or injustice. Awaken in us compassion and humility of spirit, as we seek and serve Christ in all persons.

God of grace, we pray for those who have died: For the faithful in every generation who have worked for justice; for prophets who called us to racial reconciliation; for martyrs who died because of hatred; and for all the communion of saints. Make us faithful to your call to proclaim your Good News, by word and example, and bring us at last into the glorious company of the saints in light.

Hear our prayers, Holy God. Breathe your Spirit over us and all the earth, that barriers would crumble and divisions cease. Make us more fully your co-healers of the broken world. Unite us with all people in bonds of love, that the whole earth and all its peoples may be at peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— The Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis Committee on Racial Reconciliation <sup>68</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Pray for the Holy Spirit to move in the American church specifically, but truly all over the world. Pray for the Spirit to pour afresh over all of us in the way it was at Pentecost, in the way it was at Azusa Street. Pray for our leaders to be inspired to make the changes necessary in our churches to work toward racial reconciliation. Pray for all our hearts to be broken for the things that break His. Ask God to give us His eyes to see people the way He does, His heart to love people the way He does, and His wisdom to know how to be His hands and His feet in the world. Pray against all the forces of wickedness and evil in the heavenly realms that are trying to keep our church divided (Ephesians 6:10–18).
- **Act:** As a small group, choose one thing you can do to work toward racial reconciliation in your community. After all you have learned and discussed, ask the Lord where He is leading you to make a difference in your community, listen for His voice and His leading, and then DO IT.

# Session

# 22



# Session 22

## Racial Reconciliation & Church Leadership

### Opening Prayer

*Leader: "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15 NIV).*

*All: Father in these selfish times, raise selfless shepherds for your people!  
Lord, reveal your heart to your people. Raise pastors after your own heart.  
We come against the spirit of arrogance and self-centered aspiration.  
Father, remove the spirit of greed that is eating at the heart of our churches today. May our churches be known for being your hand in our communities.  
We pray that you would pull down those who have strayed away from your will and seek to profit off the gospel.*

*Leader: "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2 ESV).  
Lord, we banish the spirit of prayerlessness among our leaders. May they be men and women of prayer, more than they are doers.  
Let their actions be birthed in the prayer closet.  
We pray for our church prayer meetings to be uplifted.  
Let our church prayer meetings become incubators of your glory.  
We pray for overflow in the miraculous. Overflow in healing, in testimonies from time vested in prayer.  
Our prayer closets will never be neglected.  
Lord, may your eternal word be shared relentless among us.  
Bring unity and harmony beyond our religious and denominational divides.  
Bring a prayer revival into our homes, into our workplaces, into our schools and more than ever, into our churches. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

— The Prayer Relay Movement <sup>69</sup>

## Discussion

In this lesson, Terry gave us some very practical steps to doing the hard work of racial reconciliation in our own lives and in our churches and building multi-ethnic leadership teams in our churches. We have already seen how the early church realized early on that if they wanted to keep minority groups from being oppressed among them, they had to put people from those groups in leadership positions and amplify their voices.

**Read: Acts 6:1–6**

- How were the Hebraic Jews oppressing the Hellenistic Jews? Why did they see them as "less than"?
- Why did the disciples let the people choose their own leaders from among themselves?
- What were their requirements for leadership?

This was the very first church in Jerusalem, which was made up of Jews from every nation and language and people group in the Roman Empire. Later, the church expanded to also include Gentiles from all over the world. In Acts 13, we are introduced to the church in Antioch, which became Paul's homebase as he went out on his missionary journeys. And we already saw that there was a diverse group of church leaders at Antioch, both ethnically and socio-economically.

**Read: Acts 13:1–3**

Antioch was a multicultural city of about 250,000 with at least eighteen different ethnic groups who each kept to their own communities. In Antioch, the secular world stayed divided by ethnicity, but the church was a mix. The church was a light to the culture around them, just as God had called them to be. And their leadership was also a mix. It wasn't Hebraic Jews in leadership over everyone else. There was a diversity among the church leaders that reflected the diversity of the church. But two chapters later, in Acts 15, we see the church having a council over whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised, or become "fully" Jewish, in order to join the church. It was like a step backwards.

**Read: Acts 15:1-4**

- Why might the church at Antioch be a place where this (circumcision) wouldn't be well received?
- This happened right after Paul had completed his first missionary journey and was back in Antioch. Why would Paul and Barnabas, who were both Jews, be so upset about this teaching?

Paul and Barnabas had been out on mission preaching to the Gentiles, which had not only been sanctioned by the church at Antioch but had also been approved by the original leaders at Jerusalem. Paul had specifically gone to meet with them and make sure they all agreed it was God's will to teach that Gentiles did not have to become circumcised. Peter, James, and John had all agreed with Paul (Galatians 2:1–10). More than ten years prior, Peter had had his vision from God about there being no partiality between Jews and Gentiles and had baptized the Roman centurion, Cornelius, without requiring him to be circumcised. There had been debate about this same issue back then, and Peter had settled it definitively:

**Read: Acts 11:15-18**

And yet, Paul described a time years later that Peter came to Antioch and was pressured by this circumcision group to separate himself from the Gentiles there.

**Read: Galatians 2:11-21**

- Why did Paul consider this issue to be so integral to the gospel message?
- How did he react to Peter's hypocrisy? What does this tell us about how church leaders should relate to other church leaders?

It's strange to hear that Peter was "afraid" of the circumcision group. He was Peter, one of the three pillars of the church. Why was he afraid of anyone? There was clearly some kind of power play going on here. Here's the backstory. In Acts 7, Stephen, one of the seven Hellenistic Jews who had been chosen to be deacons in the church, was the first Christian to be martyred. As a result, many Christians scattered from Jerusalem, which was great for the mission of the church—it helped the gospel spread into the world—but it wasn't good for the church in Jerusalem, because most of those who scattered were the Hellenistic Jews. So, the Jerusalem church became predominantly Hebraic, those committed to keeping the Jewish culture pure. As they became less diverse, they became more inbred in their thinking. Because there weren't a lot of other people sharing different opinions or challenging them, this "circumcision group" gained more and more influence over the church in Jerusalem until they went to Antioch and tried to teach these things there, and Paul and Barnabas put a stop to it. Then they called a meeting in Jerusalem about it and all the church leaders agreed to put a stop to it.

**Read: Acts 15:7–19**

- Why was it significant that James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, made a statement?
- What does it tell us that he went back to the prophets of the OT to justify his position?



Both Peter and James agreed with Paul, again, and made an official statement to that effect as the “Big C” church universal, that the leaders of the churches in Antioch and Jerusalem as well as Paul and Barnabas, who were preaching and teaching all over the world, were all in agreement. Paul and Barnabas could have just told the circumcision group, “Fine, let’s split the church. The center of the Gentile church is now at Antioch, and you can keep yourselves as the Jewish Christian church.” But they were committed to unity in diversity. They were committed to one united church, made up of people from all nations, tribes, and tongues. Which is the same reason they wouldn’t back down on this issue of circumcision. For Paul, this wasn’t something they could agree to disagree on; it was a core issue of the gospel. To require circumcision was to deny that we are saved by grace through faith alone.

What happened with the church at Jerusalem shows us how unhealthy it is to be in a church where there is little to no diversity. Where everyone has the same background and experience, where your ideas and views are never challenged. For the body of Christ to be the body of Christ, we need diversity. If the whole body were made up of ears, it wouldn’t work so well, would it? We need people who are different from us to bring in different perspectives, different views, and different experiences. To keep us from going off the deep end like this.

It also shows us what happens when church leadership caves to pressure from certain factions within the church. Peter knew what was right, but he tried to “keep the peace” by avoiding conflict with the circumcision group. But it didn’t keep unity or peace or avoid conflict at all. Avoiding conflict only lets the bullies win. Keeping silent isn’t staying neutral; it’s siding with the oppressor.

“We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” — Elie Wiesel <sup>70</sup>

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor” — Desmond Tutu <sup>71</sup>

We need our church leadership to be bold and stand firm on the gospel, be led by the Spirit, and be peacemakers, not peacekeepers. If we really want to protect the vulnerable and fight for justice, our church leadership must be diverse, representing all different cultures, ethnicities, and socio-economic levels equally so that all parts of the body have a voice and one part can’t dominate the others. And we must have church leaders who are willing to stand up to other church leaders when they are not doing what is right, like Paul stood up to Peter. In the church, those in power have a great responsibility to protect and defend the vulnerable. Leadership in the church isn’t about gaining power and privilege for yourself; it’s about caring for your people as a servant “shepherd” leader.

**Discuss Terry's 10 Points:**

1. **Do Your Homework:** In which areas do you need to do more research? What issues do you still have questions about? How do you still need to learn and grow? How can you learn about these issues from trusted sources, not extremist or politicized rhetoric?
2. **Do Your Heart Work:** Assess your motivations and biases, evaluate your language and accidental micro-aggressions. In what ways does your heart need to change, deep down inside? How do you need to pray for yourself, your church, and your community?
3. **Make Your Commitments:** How deeply do you believe in this mission? Are you willing to be criticized, misunderstood, and mischaracterized? Are you willing to persevere over years and decades without seeing much fruit?
4. **Lay the Groundwork:** How do you need to listen, ask questions, and build foundations? What foundations does your church need to lay before they can build upon them?
5. **Enlarge Your Personal Relational Circle:** How can you build relationships with more people who are different from you? Where do you need to go? What is God leading you to do?
6. **Expand Your Playlist:** How can music, food, art, and other cultural expressions help you understand people from different backgrounds? How can you expand your playlist of worship music to get a fuller experience of the diversity of the church? How else can you experience other cultures, languages, and people groups?
7. **Diversify Your Leadership:** How can you help diversify the leadership at your church? How can you help create greater representation for people of color in your church? How can you listen to and amplify voices of color in your own world?
8. **Stay Anchored in the Gospel:** How can you keep your discussions, thinking, and action rooted in God's Word? How can you always point back to Scripture as your guide and authority?
9. **Keep This Issue Confined to This Issue:** In what ways can the secular world's messages about racial injustice and reconciliation pull us away from the actual issue? How do both sides of the aisle try to distract us from what God is calling us to do? How can we stay focused on the alternative "third way" of Jesus and not get pulled in either direction by the world?
10. **Celebrate Your Progress:** What is your plan to reevaluate your progress regularly and celebrate together with this group and your church? How can we keep our progress moving forward past this class and these small group meetings?



## Closing Prayer

In closing, read the following excerpt from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and then pray for the American church of today to rise to the challenge he presented.

"I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but 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; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection ... We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation ...

Let me take note of my other major disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions ... But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen ... I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows ... In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: 'Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern.' And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular ...

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being 'disturbers of the peace' and 'outside agitators.' But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were 'a colony of heaven,' called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be 'astronomically intimidated.' By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests.

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent—and often even vocal—sanction of things as they are. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true ekklesia and the hope of the world ... I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future."

—Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>72</sup>

## Respond with Action

- **Pray:** Pray again for the Holy Spirit to move in the American church specifically, but truly all over the world. Pray for the Spirit to pour afresh over us in the way it was at Pentecost, in the way it was at Azusa Street. Pray for our leaders to be inspired to make the changes necessary in our churches to work toward racial reconciliation. Pray for all our hearts to be broken for the things that break His. Ask God to give us His eyes to see people the way He does, His heart to love people the way He does, and His wisdom to know how to be His hands and His feet in the world. Pray against all the forces of wickedness and evil in the heavenly realms that are trying to keep our church divided (Ephesians 6:10–18). It may seem repetitive, but Jesus told His disciples the parable of the persistent widow “to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1–8 NIV). We need to continue to persevere in prayer and not give up.
- **Act:** As a small group, make a concrete, specific plan for where you will go from here. Will you continue meeting and study other books and resources together? Will you form new groups and study this material again with them? Will you take your ideas to your church or a group of churches to put them into action? All the above? How is God leading you to continue your work toward racial reconciliation beyond this course?

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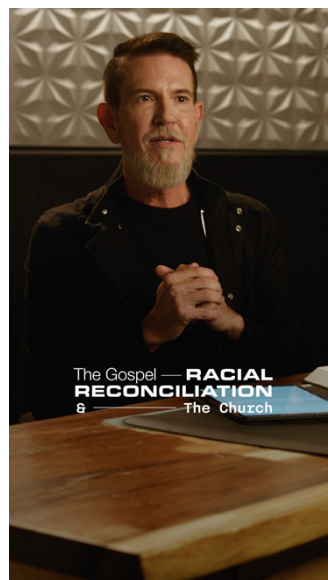
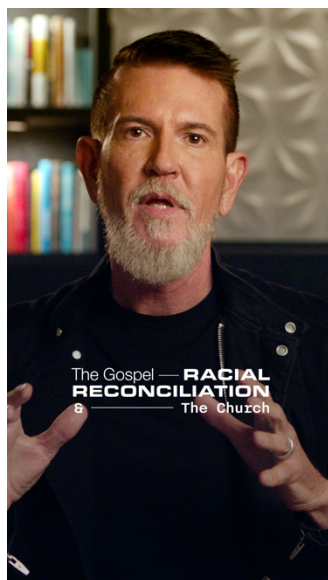
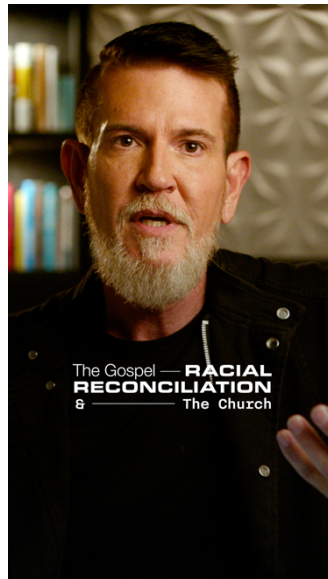
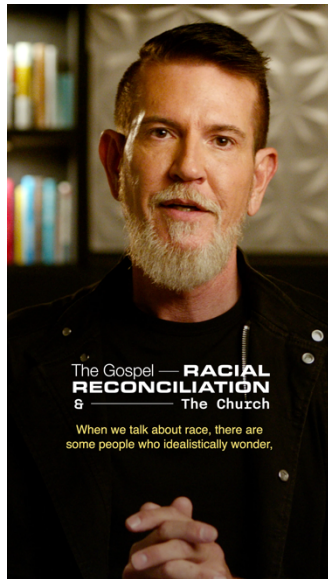


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## SOCIAL MEDIA

This social media marketing campaign features thirty-two Instagram posts. Four of those posts are featured as an example with hyperlinks embedded in the thumbnail images.



## **PARTICIPANT SURVEY**

The participant survey will be required for the completion of the course.

### **Participant Survey**

1. How did you hear about this course?
2. Why did you attend this course?
3. Have you attended similar courses before?
4. Did the course meet your expectations?
5. How extensively had you studied racial reconciliation prior to this course?
6. What impacted you most about the course?
7. How likely would you be to enroll in another module with additional content?
8. Would you recommend this course to a friend?
9. What would have made this course better?
10. Did you view the course alone or with a small group?
11. How helpful was the small group study guide?
12. Was the production quality of the course satisfactory?
13. What are some themes related to racial inequity that could be explored in the next course?
14. Is it necessary for church leadership to address racial reconciliation using a sociological analysis as a supplement to biblical teaching? If so, why? If not, why?
15. Would you describe the church you attend as multiethnic? If so, what has contributed to that accomplishment? If not, what has hindered it?
16. What needs to change to bring about multiethnic churches engaged in the work of sharing power and authority at every level of leadership?
17. Is reconciliation possible in the current political and social climate? If not, why? If so, why?
18. Is a solution possible with the current generation of church leaders in power? If not, why? If so, why?
19. What can be done to disciple the next generation in multiethnic leadership?



20. What contribution can you personally make to integrating minority leadership at the highest level of decision-making in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches?

## ASSESSMENT

The critical success indicators I am using to evaluate the success of the project are related to strategy and performance.

### Strategic Benchmarks

The creation of twenty-two lessons covering the story of creation, division, and racial reconciliation, including Pentecostal distinctives.

*The course was written and edited from June through September 2022. The course evolved from my original conception of 13 lessons in a 28:30-minute format following a conventional television episode to 22 lessons in a 15-minute format. This change was designed to engage younger viewers who predominantly view online content in shorter segments and to allow time for the viewer to engage with the small group study. After completing the background research, the course was scripted in an informal tone to connect with the broadest potential audience.*

The negotiation of a contract with a state-of-the-art production company.

*The production partnership agreement was negotiated with the assistance of a literary and entertainment attorney. After three revisions, the contract was finalized to the satisfaction of all parties involved and was executed in July 2022.*

The design and construction of a film set.

*The film set was thematically designed with the course content in mind. I envisioned a modern, minimalistic aesthetic that would feel more like a therapist's office than a classroom. The idea was to create a psychologically comforting space for what some might consider a stressful topic while also presenting a subtle reference to interracial relationships with warm, rich tones.*

The filming, editing, and scoring of the course.

*The course was filmed October 16-21, 2022, in Dallas, Texas using the production company's film crew. The crew consisted of an executive director, a floor director, first and second camera operators, an audio technician, a lighting technician, a photographer, and a teleprompter operator. The first six sessions were edited to provide a sample for this doctoral project, and the remaining eighteen sessions will be edited and scored before the project launch on February 14, 2023.*

The creation of a static website to host the course.

*The website landing page was designed to be thematically consistent with the film set design and small group study guide aesthetic. The website wireframes were designed and presented as a draft in December 2022. After one minor modification, the website was approved, coded, and tested in*

*January 2023 in preparation for the course launch. The next iteration will offer a dynamic web platform, which will be developed in future iterations in conjunction with additional course modules.*

The creation of a small group study guide to support spiritual formation relating to racial reconciliation, including scripture readings, guided prayers, and community engagement.

*The small group study guide was written in collaboration with an editor who has previous success in publishing small group study guides. The course sessions were synopsized, and the following was added to form each chapter: an opening prayer, discussion topic, scriptural readings, a closing prayer, and a call to action. This was completed in January 2023.*

The creation of a twenty-question digital survey designed to evaluate the participant's engagement and additional course modules.

*The twenty-question participant survey was designed to assess the effectiveness of the course in four areas: participant engagement, theological insights, sociological relevance, and future modules. This survey was created in January 2023.*

### **Performance Benchmarks**

To enroll 50 participants within the first thirty days and to grow 10 percent each following month. This expansion pace will place enrollment at 105 in the first year.

*The enrollment will be evaluated one month following the launch of the course, in April 2023.*

To have each student participate in the study guide exercises related to spiritual formation, including scripture readings, guided prayers, and community engagement.

*The engagement of the participants will be evaluated six months after the online launch, in August 2023. Participation is evaluated by the survey responses.*

To prepare future course modules based on the data acquired through the participant questionnaire, which is a requirement for a completion certificate.

*The engagement of the participants will be evaluated six months after the online launch, in August 2023. Participation is evaluated by the survey responses.*

To see this course become a standard for staff and volunteer training in twenty church plants annually by partnering with existing church planting organizations.

*This course will be offered gratis to the executive leadership of church planting organizations and special discount packages will be extended to their church planters. This will be evaluated one year after the launch in March 2024.*

# Project Launch Plan

## Doctoral Project Description

This doctoral project is the conclusion of a three-year journey involving qualitative and quantitative research. The research question has been refined to the following Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) statement: “Most Pentecostal (and Charismatic) churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making within their ecclesiastical structures.”

The project is a biblically based racial reconciliation course that includes online video teaching and a corresponding small group curriculum based on a dynamic web platform. The *Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church* course is designed to transform racialized mindsets by establishing a biblical framework for racial diversity, equity, and inclusion with an emphasis on Pentecostal distinctives. The course will be filmed and produced by a leading faith-based learning organization and offered on a subscription basis.

## Audience

The intended audience will be individuals in search of a biblical and sociological understanding of racial division and the basis for reconciliation, small groups interested in facilitating conversations among the members, emerging leaders who desire to build multiethnic churches, and senior leaders seeking to develop multiethnic teams within Pentecostal churches and movements. Further, the marketing engagement strategy will target the emerging generation of millennial leaders through a compelling social media marketing campaign.

## Development Plan

The following development plan includes the timeline for the milestones and key deliverables. In addition, the critical success indicators will be presented in the Doctoral Project in a narrative form.

- The course was written and edited from June through September 2022.
- The partnership agreement was negotiated in July and finalized in September 2022.
- The course was filmed October 16-21, 2022.
- The small group study guide was written in November and December 2022.
- The website landing page was designed in December 2022.
- The first six episodes of the course were edited and produced in January 2023.
- The small group study curriculum was designed and formatted in January 2023.
- The website landing page was coded and tested in January 2023.
- The remaining eighteen sessions will be edited between January and February 2023.
- The course will launch online on February 14, 2023, on a static website as the dynamic platform continues to be researched and developed.

The original project timeline is represented in a graphic in Appendix E.

## Development Process

The *Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church* course has undergone an accelerated development process to bring it to market. The process began with the writing and editing of the course content from June to September 2022, followed by the negotiation and finalization of the partnership agreement with a leading online faith-based learning organization.

The filming of the course took place in October 16-21, 2022, and the small group study guide was written in November and December 2022. The website landing page was designed in December 2022, and the first six episodes of the course were edited. The small group study curriculum was also designed and formatted in January 2023, and the website landing page was coded and tested to ensure a smooth user experience.

The remaining eighteen sessions were edited in January 2023, and the course was launched on February 14, 2023. The course will be hosted on a static website, with the dynamic platform still being researched and developed. The timeline for the milestones and key deliverables can be found in the graphic in Appendix E.

The partnership with the online faith-based learning organization will provide a platform for promoting the course on their website and social media platforms, as well as provide valuable insights through their proprietary web analytics. The data collected will reveal demographic information about visitors to the digital page, and subscriber data will provide additional details about course enrollees, their plans for using the course, engagement with the content, and recommendations for future course modules. This data will be assessed against the critical success indicators presented in the Doctoral Project to measure the success of the course.

The development process for *Race Matters: The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and the Church* has been carefully planned and executed to ensure that the course meets the highest standards of quality and relevance. The partnership with the leading online faith-based learning organization has been a key factor in ensuring that the course reaches a wide audience and provides a valuable learning experience for all participants.



# Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

## PERSONAL RESEARCH MANIFESTO

I will conduct my research with humility, curiosity, and intellectual honesty as I explore the complex and sensitive matters of racial diversity, inclusion, and equity within the leadership hierarchies of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.

## NPO STATEMENT

Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making.

## NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

I am exploring the apparent lack of racial diversity at the highest levels of decision-making within multiracial and multiethnic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. Although this dilemma is not unique to these congregations, there are enough distinctions within these communities to merit this research. This research will not encompass the broader evangelical nor mainline denominational context.

This research will become the basis for a film series designed to educate churches on the biblical mandate and social benefit of embracing racial diversity and the unique history of the Pentecostal Church as it relates to such matters. A guidebook will be written as a companion resource.

## NPO CONTEXT

My NPO context includes Pentecostal/Charismatic churches seeking to create pathways for minorities to be included as key decision-makers. Despite being given the biblical example of a racially integrated church in the New Testament, many pastors face a uniquely complex set of cultural, social, and theological challenges that impede racial diversity, inclusion, and equity in leadership, today. As a lead pastor in a church that serves as a model for thousands of churches globally, I am positioned to assist pastors in embracing diversity and extending equity to minority leadership.

## ROOT CAUSES

The NPO's root causes are complex and interwoven with the history of race relations, power dynamics, conscious and unconscious bias, and a lack of cultural awareness within churches. Although the global church embraces the ideal of a fully integrated, equal, just, Heavenly Kingdom, it continues to be shaped by the cultural forces of the earthly kingdoms in which it is situated. As homogeneous congregations undergo the painstaking work of integration and inclusion in their leadership hierarchies, race, ethnicity, and cultural identity must be negotiated within the context of the broader organizational framework.

## DISCOVERY WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

The demographic composition of my stakeholders is essential in light of my NPO and included a Black Ph.D. candidate, a Black counselor, a Black credit manager, a white care pastor, a Black insurance executive, a Latina paralegal, and a white college principal.

#### ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

My one-on-one interviewees included a global social justice strategist, a diversity, inclusion, and equity consultant, and a pastor specializing in race relations, apologetics, and conflict resolution.

#### KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'" (Acts 17:26-28).

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28).

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10).

#### ACADEMIC RESOURCES

The primary sources within my field of research include the writings of Michael O. Emerson, University of Illinois at Chicago; Mark DeYmaz, Mosaix Global Network; Amos Yong, Fuller Seminary; Craig S. Keener, Asbury Theological Seminary, Fazi Whandi, United Nations; Femi Olu-Lafe, YSC Diversity and Inclusion Consulting. Other areas of research will include the history of race in Pentecostalism and leadership development pipelines within those churches.

#### DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

On October 18, 2020, I convened a group of seven participants in a Discovery Workshop designed to explore the following NPO Statement: "Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making." The workshop participants were identified as stakeholders within the church and community. The following individuals participated in my research:

- Marriage counselor, member of Hillsong Mesa campus, Black female.

- Consumer credit manager, former pastor at Hillsong Phoenix, Black male.
- Hillsong Phoenix City-Care Pastor, trauma-informed care specialist, white female.
- Community College faculty member, Ph.D. candidate, Black male.
- Paralegal, member of Hillsong Phoenix Español, Latina.
- Insurance executive, member of Hillsong Scottsdale campus, Black male.
- College principal, member of Hillsong Mesa campus, white male.

The workshop was conducted over three hours, and it consisted of three primary exercises setting the stage for a robust conversation around the NPO topic.

#### DISCOVERY STATEMENT

First, in the *Discovery Exercise*, the stakeholders looked at the key issues, intended audience, social/cultural factors, and possible outcome of the findings related to the initial NPO Statement. In the second exercise, the stakeholders filled out an *Empathy Map*. To do so, they were asked if this issue is effectively addressed and a solution is found, what would the audience think, feel, say, or do that is different than what they presently think, feel, say, and do?" Finally, the stakeholders completed a *5 Whys Exercise* to determine the root cause of the NPO. They reframed the statement that developed out of the *Discovery Exercise* into, "There is a lack of racial diversity in the senior levels of leadership and influence within Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in the US." Following that, they worked backward to determine the root cause of this revised statement. After determining their individual root causes, the stakeholders reached a consensus on the most accurate and encompassing root cause of the NPO. The stakeholders then compiled the outcomes of each exercise into the following Discovery Statement:

"Considering 'non-whites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean these individuals would be accepted, could lead with confidence, being reconciled to one another and to God."

#### CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE DISCOVERY WORKSHOP

The most surprising insight from the Discovery Workshop was the primary root cause the stakeholders arrived at – fear. At first, this seemed like too narrow of a conclusion to draw; however, the stakeholders made their case for the destructive ways in which fear has manifested throughout history including: slavery, segregation, discrimination, redlining, systemic and structural racism, conscious and subconscious bias, and the ongoing lack of opportunities for minorities.

Over the course of the discussion, a few key questions were raised, including: How can we help both the Black and white communities get past their misperceptions of one another? Where are diverse leaders found? And can we build a multicultural church that doesn't push underrepresented groups to assimilate?

Finally, the stakeholders recommended that I further my research by considering how corporations address this issue. They also suggested that I keep my research particularized (focused and narrow) at first so that a solution can develop before I attempt to universalize the resolution.

### ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DISCOVERIES

I conducted three one-on-one interviews following the Discovery Workshop. In each interview, I began by summarizing the NPO and findings from the workshop. Then, I asked each expert three questions: With what do you agree, and why? With what do you disagree, and why? What is missing here? All three experts agreed that fear is a legitimate cause of the NPO, and, although it may not be the only cause, it is significant enough to research. Expert 1 spoke from a global perspective as a consultant to governments, describing how a lack of diversity near the top is an indicator of a larger problem, such as difficulty recognizing talent or resistance to change. Expert 2 spoke from a business perspective, focusing on how an organization may appear diverse, even though there is a lack of actual influence by non-whites. This indicates that diversity is present and possible, but not fully realized. Surveys, such as an equity index survey, can reveal those underlying realities. Expert 3 spoke as a pastor, apologist, and justice advocate, highlighting the concern that as more non-whites are invited into senior leadership in churches, studies have shown that white congregants tend to leave the church, pulling their financial resources with them.

### SYNTHESIS

The common thread between the Discovery Workshop and all three expert interviews is the notion that fear has contributed to conscious and unconscious bias, prejudice, discrimination, racism, and white supremacy, and it has prevented minorities from leading in multiracial and multiethnic congregations. Fear contributes to the biases that create blind spots which prevent white leaders from recognizing the significance of the contribution of minority groups. Fear motivates white congregants to leave churches that are actively working towards integration and the provision of equity amongst minority groups. Fear makes white leaders resistant to emerging minority leaders who might somehow disrupt the financial base of the church by their involvement. Whether we consider the "bamboo ceiling," "white flight," or majority suppression, each phenomenon can be traced to some expression of fear.

### NEXT STEPS

Areas for further research include: 1) how racially diverse corporations, which serve as a model of the equity index, achieved such results, 2) how multiethnic worship services can become an experience diverse cultures resonate with, 3) how international churches have modeled racial diversity and inclusion with whites being the minority group, and 4) whether the most common leadership pipeline and processes (often informal) utilized by Pentecostal/ Charismatic churches are adequate for identifying and developing minority leaders.

### DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

(The following responses were recorded and transcribed.)

#### Researcher introduction

"This research is for a project I am putting together as part of my DMin program in *Semiotics, Church, and Culture*. As I became more involved with the topics of racial injustice, inclusion, and diversity, I became increasingly aware that this an arena God is calling me to engage in on some level. In light of that, and your experience in this area, I am here as a researcher to learn from you. I am inviting a level of honesty."

"The purpose of this research, program, and project is to come up with a practical creative solution for the NPO to be discussed. Today we will ask ourselves, is this a valid NPO? What are some creative solutions that can be explored? NPO: Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minorities at the highest levels of decision-making."

#### Activity 1: Discovery Phase

The first exercise is designed to address the NPO by asking four basic questions concerning: Key Issues, Audience, Social/Cultural Factors, and the Outcome.

#### Key Issues

What is the key issue that we're trying to address with this NPO and why is it important?

- Missed opportunities that could advance the mission of the church if people with different perspectives were involved in leadership and decision-making.
- The culture within the Black and brown communities is uniquely different from white communities.
- When people from different cultures come together, there is a difference in their perception of things. What can we do to get past those perceptions?
- Cultural isolation breeds relational isolation.
- Relational circles: Who we do life with will impact our perspective on the world and culture. If there is little to no diversity in our circle of friends, isn't our perspective going to be limited?
- Unfamiliarity and apprehension: people of minority groups don't want to even try coming to a white church. It's not comfortable and they enjoy their own church where they are accepted without being pushed to assimilate. This can lead to intimidation and apprehension resulting in no one taking the risk to get to know one another. It takes courage to press into an unfamiliar leadership culture. It takes courage to press into leadership that has subtle or overt bias undercurrents. It takes courage to trust and delegate decision-making to others who are unlike you.



- As a majority group, we ask minorities to leave their culture behind but don't make the sacrifice ourselves. The assimilation risk group is those who are at risk of having to change to be included. We must all make cultural sacrifices to some extent in order to be Jesus to the world.
- Historically, churches in America have been segregated. In the last 40 years, evangelicals have been actively trying to make inroads into changing that. Since the church has been segregated for 400 years, it's an uphill battle to change that course.
- When we use the term "Black," we more broadly mean "non-white." The things we must do to desegregate the white church will also benefit other minority groups.
- We're good at stating the vision of an integrated church, but not good at outworking the vision. Few places are actually desegregating well at all, mostly we are seeing the "Black exodus" of minorities leaving the church in droves.
- There is a risk involved with non-white individuals speaking out to try to help the white church they find themselves attending. Many have grown tired of "stirring the pot" and are equally exhausted from being the "token" minority friend. Whites aren't willing to be offended to get to the truth they need to hear.
- A need for courage amongst those pursuing diversity, inclusion, and equity.
- The pressure to conform to the historical culture causes some to step back. Culture is embedded in every organization. If you're a marginalized person, there is a measure of assimilative work that has to take place. Without cultural work, it might ring hollow. Sacrifice will have to be involved.
- Intimidation is real and present. Many people have a fear of being labeled. In this community, assumptions are made about immigration status along with race and ethnicity.
- Fatigue is an issue.
  - Fatigue of the minority-issue conversation.
  - As the token representative for minorities in a dominant white culture, I'm tired of being the cultural navigator.
  - Fatigue of the burden of being the cultural navigator for others, the "token Black friend," thinking they must do the work to represent an entire minority.
  - Fatigue of being put in the "questionable reputation" status.
  - Fear of the differences becoming a label.
  - Fear of the diversity representation becoming a label.

- Fear of the cultural difference as being interpreted as a lack of intelligence, education, or emotional intelligence (EQ).
- Fear of the unknown systemic bias and racism that may exist under the surface.
- Systemic racism is embedded in the power structures of our country and our community.
- Conforming and assimilating to the status quo does not open opportunities for leadership to diverse people or to those with diverse perspectives; therefore, growth is limited to those who are already inclined to align. If we do not do the work that transcends the aesthetic of diversity to the true expression of diversity, we will not be able to convince potential leaders that this is a genuine objective of this church.

### Audience

Who are we addressing when we work to solve this NPO? Who are we hoping to help?

- Everyone? We should work to create a place where everyone feels equal, valued, and heard.
- Non-whites who are left out of the corridors of power.
- The assimilated group? The group of those who currently feel they have to assimilate to be accepted. Assimilation has a negative connotation.
- The dissimilated group? Those who in a perfect world would not have to be dissimilated.
- Non-whites? There are differences between the subgroups in this audience, but this encompasses a larger culture of the body of believers, a wider net to cast.
- This group faces enough challenges just to stay and persist in the church, much less to lean into leadership. People want to lead where their views are valued.
- Our audience must feel safe in order to be willing to step up into leadership.
- Does this audience want to be included at all? It will depend on the friction scale, how challenging it is to step up depending on how smoothly their culture fits in with the dominant one.

### Social/Cultural Factors

What social and cultural factors are impacting this NPO and the audience?

- Diversity: Where are they? If not in leadership, where are they? How do you foster leaders? How do you find diverse leaders in a white church? Where are we pulling from when hiring leaders for senior levels of leadership? The HR perspective is different than developing leaders from within. If seeking leadership diversity in a white church, we might need to hire

leaders from a different church and bring in the culture we are seeking. If they are in the church already, why are they not in leadership already, or at least in leadership development? If they are in leadership development, why are they not in decision-making roles?

- Are there leaders in Latino and Black churches but not in an integrative setting? What are they losing in order to attend a multiethnic church, and what are they losing to step into leadership at that church?
- Politics does have an impact on the culture of a church. There is a level of political agency within the Black church. Black churches do not see politics as static.
- Tracing the moves of the Black churches. What are we doing to track them? Tracing this can help us to know how to adapt.
- Liberty, equality, and civil rights are the standard political goals in Black churches. There is a loss of political agency when moving from a Black church to an integrated church that doesn't carry the same political values. Often the integrated church does not allow politics at all, or it is catering to too many different stances.
- Sometimes minority political views are suppressed just due to the predominant political views within a church.
- Considering bussing practices, when bussed kids were sent to other schools, they still went home to their broken communities. Similarly, if we desegregate churches but don't help the minority neighborhood, we don't make progress.
- Are we making the investment to include them and are we making the investment into their communities? There has to be work done to bring healing.
- We have to get out of the "white gospel" box to reach out to minorities.
- Christian nationalism is a major deterrent to integrating churches. Americanism has been conflated with the gospel. What we perceive to be Christian might just be culturally American. We have prioritized American nationalism over the gospel. It marginalizes certain peoples.
- Where the intersection of races meets, the 80/20 ratio of majority to minority people in multiethnic churches has not created change, how we communicate, listening vs talking.
- It's not about losing your culture, but about exalting a higher culture, Kingdom culture. To properly address this problem, we have to remember that the gospel takes precedence over culture. We also have to define Kingdom culture, because it means a different thing to each people group, and often we think the Kingdom looks just like us.

- No matter the circumstances, there will be some level of conforming to the culture. There is good conforming and bad conforming. Good conforming is reaching towards a common goal without losing our individuality.
- For example, considering child separations at the border, the church was quiet. We're citizens of heaven first, citizens of nations second. The church was silent on justice. Families have been separated for generations; the church has to take note. The church has to speak up on these issues, diversity being a *need* not a *luxury*.
- The church focuses on spiritual gifts and personal growth. It should be loving the marginalized. The church is imbalanced with too much focus on one thing, and not the main thing. Leadership needs to be defined across cultures and demographics. This means different things in different cultures, even between both genders.
- Our goal is not to lose the culture but to lift the culture to a position where it is just as valued as the other, dominant culture. Like Luke 4 states, the gospel is not just for the Jews.
- The church has to become a safe place. Race influences how discipline is perceived. The hearts of the people in the congregation have to be cultivated in order for minority leaders to be accepted as authority figures. Race becomes a wedge issue when you're dealing with leadership.

## Outcomes

What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?

- The outcomes will be determined through the *Empathy Map* and *5 Why's Exercises*.

## Activity 2: Empathy Map

If the issue stated in the NPO is effectively addressed, what would the audience (non-whites) think, feel, say, or do?

## Think

- Everyone is made in the image of God and is worthy of equal opportunity.
- The gospel is being outworked in this church through racial reconciliation.
- The culture of the Kingdom is more important than nationalism.
- The church is the solution to the divisions which exist within society.
- Respect is not afforded to people on the basis of skin color.
- My gifts, talents, and abilities will be valued and expressed here.

- Love is greater than fear.

#### Feel

- I am safe to be myself without conforming to the dominant group.
- I can rise to my full potential.
- I can be a part of something bigger than myself or my race or ethnicity.
- I am accepted on the basis of my contribution.
- I am loved, accepted, affirmed, included, and rewarded.
- I can think and speak freely without judgment or retribution.

#### Say

- If I am accepted, included, and rewarded, others can be as well.
- No one has to settle for limitation and division if we all work together.
- This is what God planned from the beginning for humanity.
- This is what the gospel can accomplish in our communities.
- This is the hope for humanity.

#### Do

- They contribute to the building of the church.
- They stay engaged in community throughout difficult seasons.
- They extend grace and forgiveness to those in leadership.
- They lead with confidence.
- They carry out the vision.
- They bear witness to culture.

#### Activity 3: 5 Why's?

This exercise was conducted to get to the root cause of the NPO, restating it as "There is a lack of racial diversity in the senior levels of leadership and influence within Pentecostal/ Charismatic churches in the US" and asking "Why?"

Stakeholder 1: Under-represented churches -> Do not promote equality -> More segregated churches -> More segregated communities -> More segregated nation

Stakeholder 2: Lack of cultural work -> Preeminence of Christian nationalism -> Produces a system that deifies the social status quo -> Security of whites that only understand racism in the malice of the bigot -> Notions of lone race and culture are myopically understood and rarely challenged -> Fear

Stakeholder 3: The majority has built a cultural DNA that is worthy of respect -> The marginalized expect to get their "40 acres and a mule" from the wrong party -> When the majority is truly willing to listen, the minority must be willing to talk constructively -> Equity is gained through shared sacrifice -> Fear of not being accepted greater than the reward of being accepted

Stakeholder 4: Those who can lead are not being considered -> They're not being sought after -> There doesn't seem to be a need -> There is a great denial -> There is a lack of honesty or a refusal to self-assess -> Fear

Stakeholder 5: American/white-centric view of the church/Bible -> Because applying/calling scripture costs me/church a lot -> I will lose the flock and my status -> It will end up dividing not uniting -> Fear

Stakeholder 6: Lack of diverse cultural interest -> Point of view of cultural values -> Lack of encouragement -> Afraid to speak up about your culture -> Not being biased

Stakeholder 7: Focus -> Distracted -> Culture -> Value -> Gospel

What is the Root Cause of this NPO?

All of the tier five root causes are rooted in a manifestation of fear in some form or another. Some of the apprehensions felt by minorities aspiring to the highest level of decision-making are fear of assimilation, fear of the loss of agency, fear of manipulation, fear of tokenism, fear of losing cultural identity, fear of abuse or misuse, fear of failure, and fear of the cultural difference being interpreted as a lack of intelligence, education, or EQ.

Some of the apprehensions felt by those who are in the dominant racial group are fear of the unknown, fear of the other, fear of loss, fear of change, fear of discomfort, fear of seeing the vision/mission/style change, and fear of losing support amongst others in the dominant racial group.

- Perfect love casts out fear, so a strong way to fight the NPO root is to teach true love.

Conclusion: Filling in the Blanks

"Considering 'non-whites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership, which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean these individuals would be accepted and could lead with confidence, being reconciled to one another and to God."



## Researcher

"Do you anticipate any areas of research I need to explore further? Are there opportunities to be discovered? What pitfalls should I be aware of? Are there any areas of research to avoid?"

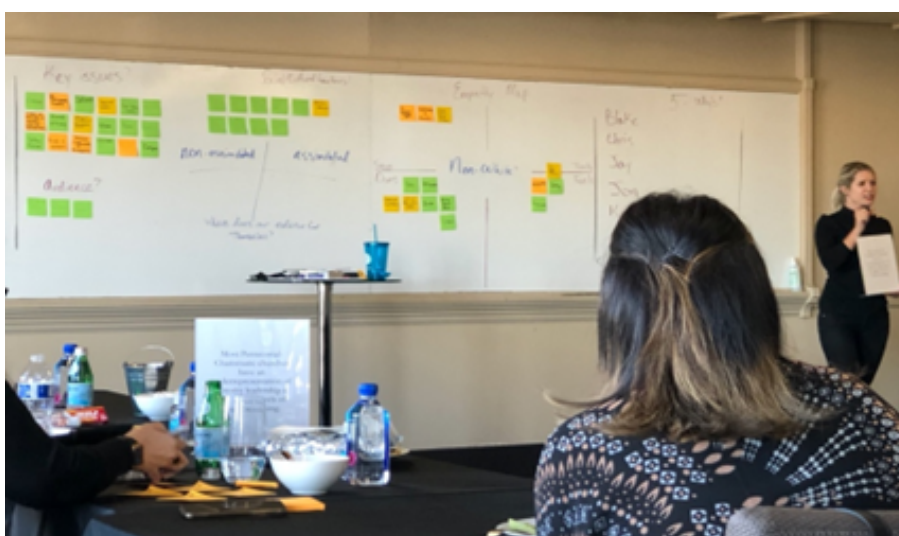
### Pitfalls:

- If you get stuck on a question, push through to find the solution, and don't give up on that area.
- The church that I serve, Hillsong Church, plants churches in areas where they don't know the culture. Using leaders from other locations can make it hard to break into the different groups in the area.
- Not defining leadership for the different cultures we are targeting with the solution. Need to look at the cultural models of leadership for these different groups and make sure we are defining leadership in a way that the other groups can understand, while also adapting our definition of leadership to include them.
- Not recognizing that the Hillsong model of leadership is specific to AUS culture, not even to US culture, so it needs to be adapted even further to be relatable to the minority groups we are targeting with the NPO solution.
- Considering this NPO as just a Black and white issue. Don't narrow the problem too far down to just one tension.

### Opportunities:

- The root of the fear requires education. Why are minorities fearful of integration? Dig further into how to break through that fear.
- Look into how diversity in leadership is accomplished in the business world. Research the differences between Black and white CEOs of major US companies and how they lead.
- We can seek out research starting with a narrow scope, then can transfer that knowledge to similar problems as experience develops. A solution for the African American community can lead us to a solution for the Hispanic community.

## DISCOVERY WORKSHOP PHOTOGRAPHS





## POST WORKSHOP REVIEW WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Portland Seminary, Doctor of Ministry in Church, Semiotics, and Culture

Discovery Workshop Summary

November 11, 2020

I am reaching out to send a quick summary of our Discovery Workshop last weekend to see if you have had any further thoughts, comments, or input since we gathered. Through our group discussion last weekend, we reached the following NPO Statement describing Pentecostal/Charismatic churches:

"Considering 'non-whites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership, which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean these individuals would be accepted and could lead with confidence, being reconciled to one another and to God."

We discussed how some of the key issues surrounding the lack of racial diversity in the senior levels of church leadership are: unfamiliarity and apprehension, historical segregation, the great risk involved with change, systematic racism, and fatigue.

A few major social and cultural factors surrounding this issue are the difficulty of finding diverse leaders in a majority-white church, the loss of political agency experienced when moving to a multiethnic church, the need to invest in minority neighborhoods, Christian nationalism, and the need for safety so minority leaders can lead confidently.

Finally, we discussed that the main root cause of this NPO is fear. Fear can show itself in different ways, through bias, refusal to self-assess, considering one culture superior to others, and even segregation. To fully address this NPO, we must first address fear.

If you have any feedback or corrections regarding this summary, please feel free to share additional information.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this conversation. Your input, insight, and expertise are invaluable, and we are grateful for the time you gave to be a part of this workshop.

Sincerely,

Terry M. Crist

## DOCUMENT PROVIDED TO EXPERTS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW

### Discovery Workshop Summary

November 11, 2020

On October 18, 2020, I convened a group of participants in a Discovery Workshop designed to explore the following NPO Statement: "Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making." The workshop participants were identified as stakeholders within the community.

The demographic composition of my stakeholders is essential in light of my NPO. They included a Black Ph.D. candidate, a Black counselor, a Black credit manager, a white care pastor, a Black insurance executive, a Latina paralegal, and a white college principal.

The workshop was conducted over three hours and consisted of the following exercises:

Exercise One - Discovery: In this exercise, the stakeholders looked at the key issues, intended audience, social/cultural factors, and possible outcomes of the findings related to the initial NPO Statement.

Exercise Two - Empathy: In this exercise, the stakeholders were asked, "If this issue is effectively addressed and a solution is found, what would the audience (non-whites) think, feel, say, or do that is different than what they presently think, feel, say, and do?"

Exercise Three - The 5 Why's: In this exercise, the stakeholders reframed the statement that developed out of exercise one: "There is a lack of racial diversity in the senior levels of leadership and influence within Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in the US."

### Core Learnings:

- The stakeholders determined that some of the key issues surrounding the lack of diversity in the hierarchies of church leadership include: unfamiliarity and apprehension, historical segregation, the great risk involved with change, systematic racism, and fatigue.

- A few major social and cultural factors surrounding this issue are the difficulty of finding diverse leaders in a majority-white church, the loss of political agency experienced when moving to a multiethnic church, the need to invest in minority neighborhoods, Christian nationalism, and the need for safety so minority leaders can lead confidently.
- The stakeholders discussed how the main root cause of this NPO is fear. Fear can show itself in different ways, through bias, refusal to self-assess, considering one culture superior to others, and even segregation. To fully address this NPO, first address the fear surrounding it.

#### Questions Raised:

- How can we help both the Black and white communities get past their misperceptions of one another?
- Where are diverse leaders found? If we do find a leader from an underrepresented group, how does a church that is striving to be multicultural foster them and help them to grow? Where do Pentecostal/Charismatic churches pull from when they're looking to hire for senior levels of leadership?
- How are we tracing the movements, passions, and ministries of Black churches?
- Are we seeking to help and improve the minority neighborhoods with the same fervor with which we are seeking attendees from these communities?
- Can we build a multicultural church that doesn't push underrepresented groups to assimilate?
- Why is it that many congregations are fearful of integration?
- How do CEOs in the secular world deal with these same questions of diversity and inclusion?

#### Big Ideas:

- To increase diversity at the highest levels, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches may need to consider more outside hiring from churches with a more diverse representation of races.
- Tracing the moves of Black churches can help Pentecostal/Charismatic churches adapt.
- There is a loss of political agency when moving from a Black church to an integrated church that doesn't carry the same political values. Often it is not possible for the integrated church to speak of politics at all, as it is catering to too many different stances.
- If we desegregate churches but do not also help the minority neighborhood, then we don't make progress.

- Increasing diversity is not about losing one culture but is about exalting a higher culture, Kingdom culture. To properly address this problem, remember that the gospel takes precedence over culture.
- Leadership needs to be defined across cultures and demographics.
- Fear is at the root of this issue.

To conclude this Discovery Workshop, the stakeholders worked together to develop the following summary statement:

"Considering 'non-whites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership, which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean these individuals would be accepted and could lead with confidence, being reconciled to one another and to God."

1. With what do you agree? Why?
2. What do you disagree with? Why?
3. What is missing?

Sincerely,

Terry M. Crist

## DOCUMENTATION OF ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

### Interview Notes, Experts 1 & 2

(The following responses were recorded, transcribed, and edited for clarity.)

#### Introduction and Scope of Research:

While some doctoral programs require a dissertation, the program I am enrolled in is "project-based." The purpose of this interview is to help determine the focus of my research and the corresponding project that will develop out of it. My research begins with a need, problem, or opportunity (NPO), which is a 15-word or less observation designed to center one's research. I am approaching this NPO without any solution in mind, recognizing that I may not even be asking the correct questions.

I will read a summary from the workshop I recently conducted and then ask you each a few questions to gather a bit more information. The questions are: What do you agree with, and why? Do you disagree with anything here, and why? Do you have any other observations on what we might be missing? Finally, I would like to have you share the story of your own experience of being a part of a church that didn't have diversity in its highest levels.



I have sent a document for us to review beginning with my NPO:

"Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making."

We all know this issue is not limited to Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, but I need to particularize at first and can later universalize this NPO if it proves valid.

The demographic composition of my stakeholders is essential in light of my NPO. They included a Black Ph.D. candidate, a Black counselor, a Black credit manager, a white care pastor, a Black insurance executive, a Latina paralegal, and a white college principal.

The Discovery Workshop included a *Discovery Exercise*, followed by an *Empathy Map* to determine what would change if this NPO is properly addressed, and concluding with the *5 Why's Exercise* where we repostulated the NPO statement and worked to determine the root cause of the issue.

I was surprised by the conclusion of the workshop, that the stakeholders defined "fear" as the underlying root of the NPO. This seems like a very complex issue to reduce down to something as simple as fear.

#### Expert 1

- I agree with the NPO statement. It landed at a good place.
- The need here with this NPO is real and relevant.
- Fear as a root cause... I'm trying to understand that more deeply. That is a root cause for many people, why they aren't intentional about broadening their lives and engaging with others. It's not the only issue, but it is a KEY issue in this NPO. People have blind spots and those can often be caused by fear.
- Another big issue is lack of awareness.

#### Expert 2

- I also agree with the statement but am also surprised by the root cause being fear. I personally would not have come up with that, but I can see how your stakeholders would come to that conclusion.
- Even in diverse churches, there is a lack of representation. This is due in part I think because I see elements of racism even at an unconscious level, due to the hierarchy in society. It plays out over decades and generations, even just at a subconscious level, it is present. And yes, that may be caused by fear, but can fear be the root of subconscious bias? Can it be blamed for that? I think it's more the hierarchies in society that breed these biases.

- We see the White Savior mentality in a lot of US churches too, and I believe that is caused by subconscious biases.
- If we look at the pictures of Jesus and the disciples, they're all white. The perception is that Jesus was white and the people around him were white. That impacts how we treat people in church.

Researcher

- The idea of fear as we discussed in the Discovery Workshop was connected to a lot of layers within church: white supremacy, racism in general, the economics of racism, and suppression. All of these factors are caused by fear.
- Could it be that fear is more relevant than we first thought and is something to consider at a deeper level?

Expert 1

- In thinking about fear, there are so many elements to it. Even considering a scarcity mentality, that's rooted in fear and makes you feel like your people need to be in power or you won't get your share. That's definitely part of the root of racism, that sense of the "scary other" and the lack of familiarity. It's definitely something to explore further.
- If you're in the middle of the system, it's hard to realize what you're dealing with. The most impactful work I do is to get people to realize that we may not intend to be racist, but we're just not aware that we are because the system is blinding.
- Consequently, the impact of that blindness, if you're a leader, is that you will build a system that looks and acts like you. The intention isn't underrepresentation, but that is the outcome.
- In this situation, fear is at the root of racism. But awareness of our blind spots being a reality is also at the root of systemic racism. That's why we see no diversity.

Researcher

- Do you have a metric or definition of how you describe a fully integrated, inclusive, multicultural, healthy company or church? When do we know we have become a multicultural church?

Expert 1

- My perspective is from the business side. There are representation stats we can consider, and that is one goal. We also have surveys we do to measure what is actually going on in the system by quantitative factors like a scaled sense of belonging, a sense of inclusion, and

a sense of purpose. We run these surveys as we roll out the inclusion program to use as a guide for when to move to the next stage of the process.

- These surveys help us to know what ground we've taken now, a year from now, and five years from now. These key questions focus on having an inclusive culture, so we know if we are making real progress.

## Expert 2

- Similarly, in terms of representation and visibility, are you reflective of the community you're serving in? Within a church context, ask the same question. You have a church, Hillsong South Africa, the country is predominately Black, but the leadership team is all white and mostly from Australia. That's a problem right there because the leadership team and church are not reflective of the community they find themselves in.
- Things like that, similarity in composition between the organization and the local community, we look at to track progress.
- Also, on the surveys measuring equity index, you can have a church that LOOKS diverse, but how do the people feel? The equity index tells us how comfortable they are, what levels they serve in within the company, and how influential they are. You might have a company that looks diverse, but those individuals are not in influential or leadership roles.
- This is what we do every day in our field, ask what we can do to both look diverse and truly be diverse at an operating level.
- From a business perspective, it's the same in nonprofit organizations. Consider Australia where 75% of the staff at nonprofits are women, but 80% of the nonprofits are led by men. That doesn't even bring into consideration people of color but is an example of how the staff may be composed in a specific way that doesn't uncover the rankings of the individuals in the context.

## Researcher

- Considering the NPO and this process I am in, is there anything that stood out to you that you disagree with?

## Expert 2

- Think about the cultural aspect and how we attract who we are like. You know how people find similarities and gravitate towards similar people? One thing I've noticed about African churches here, while their people don't always like what happens in these churches, they gravitate towards them because it is at least similar to what they know.
- In African cultures, there is a belief that white churches don't know how to pray effectively, and that alone would be a reason they will not come into a white church. Or maybe they'll

go to a white church, but cling to an African group so that they can pray the way they want to and feel safe.

- We can't just ask, "Are we open enough to have people of color here?" We have to ask, "Are we open enough to allow their cultural leanings to flourish here?" In a "Black church" they feel the preacher will follow the Holy Spirit's leading and there is no set ending of the service, no timetable. Then they go to a white church and feel that the church cuts the Holy Spirit short. On this point, we need more education on both sides. We need education on how we do church and what is important when we do church.
- Further, people want to feel a sense of belonging. In church, we assume that being brothers and sisters in Christ means we love everyone by default. But if we aren't making space for people with a different cultural background, we are not fully loving them, and they don't feel like they belong.

#### Researcher

- Our culture here is that we bring up leaders from those who have been around us. This works great if you are in the inner circle so to speak, but not so great if those that are in the circle are not different from us.
- The notion was brought up in our workshop about how we may need to hire people from outside our world to help bring in the diversity we need.
- Is there a risk with this method? Is it a risk worth taking, to intentionally hire people into the culture who were not "born into" the culture?

#### Expert 1

- I think if you don't have diversity in your congregation to begin with, to the point that you have to look outside your church to find diversity, that's a much larger problem that must be addressed before you start thinking about hiring from outside. Unless you're in Switzerland where there is no diversity in the community to begin with, if your church is reflecting the community's composition, you shouldn't need to hire from outside.
- Some of the companies I work with face this issue. At the top, they have no diversity, but at the lower levels of the company there is representation. The leaders think they need to externally hire, but they haven't addressed the question of why hasn't their talent pipeline brought diversity towards the top already? Bringing in outside hires to the top doesn't address the root issue.
- Further, if those leaders don't know how to look for talent and figure out who would be a good leader and who has the skills needed, they lazily default to tapping on the shoulders of people who look like them. They think, "Hey, I'm a good leader and you look and think

like me, so I'll bring you up too." That's a major problem. That's why we may see a lack of diversity at the top.

- The bottom line is if you already have some diversity in the church and have a healthy leadership pipeline development system, by all means externally hire and bring in new talent and culture. But if the reason there is no diversity at the top is stemming from one of these issues, those must be addressed first.
- You might need to use one of the tools we mentioned, like using the equity index survey to determine if there are deeper issues that must be addressed prior to increasing diversity.
- Another reason we just tap someone on the shoulder who is near us is because we haven't been intentional up to that point in our leadership development.

#### Expert 2

- Recently, we started a networking group at work for people of color. One of the problems raised in this group is that many of the Asian employees feel that they are being passed over because they are not as assertive or loud. One gentleman has been in the same position for 25 years and wants to move but feels he has been passed over because he is too quiet. We call that the bamboo ceiling.
- If the culture is stagnated and we are doing the same things over and over, bringing in or up someone from a new culture sometimes is just what is needed to shake things up a bit. It brings in fresh thoughts and ideas.
- Many companies do just hire whatever kind of person they need, as a diversity hire, but they haven't fixed the problem. Then that new hire is just set up to fail because they were hired into an unhealthy environment.
- I suggest adding to your research the question: How willing are we to change once we have determined the problem and solution? Are companies actually willing to do something different? Human nature is to stick with the same, and people are resistant to change especially in this area.

#### Expert 1

- A lot of this issue you brought up is because of leadership. If the top leadership is fully on board and is willing to say, "Follow this or get out," that's when true change will happen.
- Grassroots solutions can be helpful, but really it has to be a top-down mission.

Researcher concluded meeting.

### Interview Notes, Expert 3

(The following responses were recorded, transcribed, and edited for clarity.)

Researcher

"The purpose is to determine if the statement I am investigating is worth pursuing, why it is, and how can we begin to consider solving it.

I have sent a document for us to review beginning with my NPO.

"Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making."

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The demographic composition of my stakeholders is essential in light of my NPO. They included a Black Ph.D. candidate, a Black counselor, a Black credit manager, a white care pastor, a Black insurance executive, a Latina paralegal, and a white college principal.

The Discovery Workshop included a *Discovery Exercise*, followed by an *Empathy Map* to determine what would change if this NPO is properly addressed, concluding with the *5 Why's Exercise* where we repostulated the NPO statement and worked to determine the root cause of the issue.

I was surprised by the conclusion of the workshop, that we landed on fear as the main cause, the overall root cause of the NPO. The entire conversation landed on fear being the cause of the entirety of this widespread, multi-level issue.

In the conclusion of the workshop, when the stakeholders repositioned my original NPO statement they concluded:

"Considering 'non-whites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean these individuals would be accepted, could lead with confidence, being reconciled to one another and to God."

This was interesting to me because at first, I felt this conclusion was reduced down to a small and simple place. It was a unanimous conclusion from the stakeholders that if this had to be distilled down to one root cause, that would be fear. Fear as the cause of this NPO includes fear of other, fear of economic loss, etc. The stakeholders concluded that if there has to be an underlying cause that hasn't been well addressed, it would be fear.

I want to ask you three questions today. What do you agree with, and why? Do you disagree with anything here, and why? Do you have any other observations on what we might be missing? Finally, I would like to have you share the story of your own experience of being a part of a church that didn't have diversity in the highest levels of church.



## Expert 3

- First, the big picture idea of having a lack of minority representation at the highest level of leadership is interesting to me. Where I am in South Africa, the majority of the community is Black, so they are not a minority group, technically. However, there is a link between the term minority and lower economic status, lower power. Consider that point when using the terms "majority" and "minority." In our case here, again, there is a suppression of the numerical majority by the minority group because of the unequal balance of money and power.
- That being said, within the church there is an underrepresentation of these majority groups in the highest levels of leadership.

## Researcher

- As a note, because of the many and varied opinions on descriptors like "Black," "minority," and "People of Color," the stakeholders quickly landed on using the term "non-whites." The hope is that we are able to generalize so we can universalize eventually.

## Expert 3

- Further, this problem is not just narrowed to the two, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. There may be denominations in which the issue is more prevalent than in other denominations, but it is widespread overall.
- Recently we were discussing the concept of white flight. This is where the top leadership is predominately white. Two factors play out. First, Black people may not have much of a problem with going to a church where the leadership is predominately white. However, white people do not want to attend a church that has predominately Black leadership. Studies have shown that when a church diversifies its top leadership, fear will permeate the white community to the point that they leave the church to find another church that is less accommodating and, most importantly, has white leadership. The white group is fearful that when Black leaders move in, they will no longer be accommodated or have a safe space, or that their cultural needs will not be met.
- White leaders, similarly, can be hesitant to make room for Black leaders because they fear the loss of financial support from the white church members that would leave the church. The status quo is then maintained out of fear. As a result, Black leaders may be raised up, but only in nonvisible roles. In one case, bands were created so that white leaders were raised up a level again, so that Black leaders could be raised into those newly vacated levels. It would appear that Black leadership was brought up to an equal level, but in reality, the white leaders were still in superior roles. The whole unbalanced system just moved up a level.

- At another church, Black leaders were invited into high-level meetings among the white leaders. At first glance, this seemed like a positive solution, but soon we realized that Black leaders were invited to attend but not to participate in the meetings or have any sort of influence. The move was more fashionable than authentic. It was apparent we were token Black leaders, not actual leaders with influence. The real issue was that the white leaders were spinning an inaccurate narrative to the congregation, leading them to believe that the church was moving in a healthy direction.

Researcher

- As it relates to my NPO statement, is this a subject worth researching and attempting to find a solution for?

Expert 3

- Yes, because of what is at stake here. The gospel message itself is at stake. The church is a liturgical space where we gather, there is a message which elicits a particular response, and then a commissioning to go and live out this message. At the core though is the gospel message. That message is being threatened. By not solving this issue, we undermine the work Christ has come to do, which is to bring heaven to earth. Christ wants a world where superficial differences are not dividers or hindrances to the gospel. In James, there is an argument about the incompatibility between holding back sharing the gospel with those who are different, and what Christ is calling us to do. Those are completely incompatible. We show favoritism and partiality, treating people differently based on their outward appearance. If that becomes the measure of leaders in our community, that is an affront to the gospel message itself, rendering it unbelievable. The people who have left the church over this are the prophetic warning that we are doing something wrong when we preserve the status quo in church.

Researcher

- Do you believe a solution is possible?

Expert 3

- Yes, I do believe it because I've seen success in micro-communities, not on a larger scale. But when it happens, even on a small scale, it is a powerful witness. Jesus didn't give us just a message, He gave us a method for how it should be preached - to all equally. We address the issue of fear and all that comes along with it: ignorance, isolation, distance, disinformation, and propaganda. If we address these issues and the root of fear, I really think it is possible. We just need a systematic way to think through it so that communities can finally get it right.

Researcher

- Any immediate thoughts on something I should research further? Are there fear dynamics that deserve further research?

#### Expert 3

- Yes, fear is a big part of it. I might have answered the root cause question differently, but when I think of what my other answers would have been, I realize that fear is the systematic summary of those reasons.
- Diana L. Eck from Harvard has a pluralism project that would be worth researching. She goes on to describe how there is a better framing of pluralism that includes an energetic engagement with diversity. I would highlight how we have these conversations as very important, and her work on the topic could be worth looking into.

Researcher concluded meeting.

## Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

## INTRODUCTION

The Spanish philosopher George Santayana is attributed for the dictum, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>3</sup> This notion has proven absolutely true when it comes to matters of racial equality, inclusion, reconciliation, equity, and justice.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the pathway forward related to these objectives must be based upon a clear understanding of humanity’s origin story, personal and corporate sin, and the good news of the redemption of all creation—that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The outworking of the good news requires a biblical foundation for how the church responds to matters of racial reconciliation. While I acknowledge that it is essential for Christians to engage politically for the sake of human flourishing, the purpose of this paper is not to offer political or sociological solutions. This essay examines why the church—the redeemed community—has yet to become the model for racial reconciliation that God intended from the beginning.

The driving question at the heart of this essay is: Why do Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation but often fail to reflect minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches? The answer to that question is complex and layered and can only be understood against the backdrop of scripture, the history of race relations, the origin of the modern Pentecostal movement, white hegemony, and the dynamics of power-sharing in church leadership.

The movement towards pluralism and multiculturalism in the late twentieth century has heightened international awareness of unresolved racial tensions. These ongoing tensions are set in the context of persistent racial inequity, the resurgence of white supremacy, and the rise of the “Black Lives Matter” movement.

The church is also experiencing a significant transformation as global Christianity is becoming increasingly diverse. Church leaders are generally divided over the reality and severity of racial division, and when it is acknowledged, the solutions are elusive.

## SECTION 1: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

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<sup>3</sup> George Santayana, “Life of Reason, Vol 1: Reason in Common Sense,” (New York: Scribner’s, 1905), 284.

<sup>4</sup> There is a debate in academic circles over which single term adequately encompasses the work of equality, inclusion, reconciliation, justice, and equity. I have chosen to use “reconciliation” as an umbrella descriptor, with full appreciation for the inadequacy of the word. Brenda Salter McNeil offers a comprehensive definition of “reconciliation” when she writes, “Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.” Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 21.

The story of scripture begins and ends with a description of the unity of creation (Genesis 1:31; Revelation 22:1-5). Though each chapter within this story is dynamic, the arc of scripture is bent towards racial reconciliation.

## Old Testament Foundations for Racial Reconciliation

### Before the Beginning: The Nature of God

If, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. paraphrased, “the arc of the moral universe... bends toward justice,”<sup>5</sup> it is only because there is a Sovereign God who has made equality, inclusion, reconciliation, and justice His priority. The sublime example of diversity within unity, and unity within diversity, is found in the nature of the triune Godhead.<sup>6</sup> As three persons in one being—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the triune Godhead eternally models perfect harmony between the one and the many. The oneness of the Trinity and their cooperation foreshadows their intention for human relationships. Tim Keller elaborates on this, “If this world was made by a triune God, relationships of love are what life is really all about.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, how we perceive and relate to the Trinity becomes the basis for how we see and treat others.

A robust understanding of the Trinity will lead to thriving relationships, but failure to grasp the trinitarian nature of God can have devastating effects. As Richard Rohr explains, “The widespread Christian failure to understand and experience God as Trinity has provided a breeding ground for both implicit and explicit racism.”<sup>8</sup>

### In the Beginning: The Image of God

The good news of the gospel originates in Genesis 1-3, which recounts how the triune God created a “good” world. His crowning act of creation was to make this world “very good” by creating humans *in His image—imago Dei* (Hebrew: *צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים*, Latin: *imago Dei*). The diversity of humanity is first mentioned in Genesis 1:27: “So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”<sup>9</sup> The text’s singular term, “human” (Hebrew: *אָדָם*), is specified as diverse in gender, male and female. Genesis scholar John Walton understands

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<sup>5</sup> The original quote, by Unitarian pastor and abolitionist Theodore Parker, reads: “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. .... And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.” Theodore Parker, “Of Justice and the Conscience,” *Ten Sermons of Religion* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols and Company, 1853), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:1-2:22; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matt 28:18-19, John 1:1-3,14; John 14:9; Acts 7:55-56; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 John 5:7.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2013), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Rohr, “How God as Trinity Dissolves Racism,” *Sojourners Magazine*, August 2016.

<sup>9</sup> New Revised Standard Version.



Genesis 1:26 as *generic*: "God said, 'Let us make generic humanity (the human species) in our image.'"<sup>10</sup>

Genesis establishes that the *imago Dei* is expressed in both genders of every race, ethnicity, culture, and language. The diversification of the planet is of particular note in the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it..." The *imago Dei* expresses the nature of God by *filling* and *ruling*.<sup>11</sup>

In Genesis, we see that human beings are made in God's image *individually* and *collectively* and serve as His representative rulers on the earth in both ways simultaneously. The ontological significance of this is that no one should hold a prominent place over another because of racial or ethnic identity.

Brenda Salter McNeil describes the diversification of the planet in this manner:

"The first human beings were directed to fill the earth and bring under it the reign of God. To achieve this, people would need to procreate and multiply in number, and this would make it necessary for them to move out and migrate throughout the earth. As this migration took place, these nomads would begin to encounter different types of environmental conditions, and as they adapted to their surroundings, different cultural lifestyles start to emerge... When God commanded the first human beings to "fill the earth," it was a decree to create different cultures, because no one culture, people, or language can adequately reflect the splendor of God."<sup>12</sup>

A biblical understanding of the *imago Dei* establishes the context for *missio Dei*—the mission of God. Christopher Wright connects the two when he observes,

"God's creative intention for human life, right from the start and projected into the new creation, includes social relationships. ... Our missional objective is not limited to the vital and urgent evangelistic task of helping individuals come to a right relationship with God that will secure their individual eternal destiny. We also share

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<sup>10</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 60.

<sup>11</sup> "We have seen that the idea of the 'image of God' in Genesis implies an aspect of human 'rule,' whatever that entails. Yet the occurrence of the concept in other passages in Genesis suggests that it cannot be construed in functional terms alone. ... In 5:1, however, the idea of 'likeness' is led by the expression *dēmût*, not *šelem*, and is not attended by the mandate to "rule." ... The distribution of terms in this passage, which tells against any sharp distinction between *šelem* and *dēmût*, suggests that the humans bear the 'image' of God not only in terms of a mandated function but in some sense intrinsically." J. Gordon McConville, *Being Human in God's World: An Old Testament Theology of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 21.

God's passion for healthy human relationships here and now-between individuals, in families, in the workplace, throughout society, and between nations."<sup>13</sup>

### The Fall: Rejecting God's Rule

In the beginning, the world was created for what the Hebrew prophets called *shalom*. Cornelius Plantinga describes *shalom* as "the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment and delight..." In this state, humanity flourished together in harmony (Gen. 1:31).<sup>14</sup> Tragically, this *shalom* was shattered by the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3-11).<sup>15</sup> The Fall separated humanity from God and from one another. The Fall was comprehensive and systemic. Fallen people organize societies and perpetuate cycles and systems of brokenness. Every system since the Fall has been impacted by sin—from the ecosystem to human economic, political, and educational systems. Therefore, sin is portrayed in individualistic and systemic levels throughout scripture.<sup>16</sup>

Although God's covenant with Israel is unique, He expects all societies to order themselves justly. He is especially concerned about justice towards the vulnerable—the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the foreigner (Isa. 19:20; Jonah 1-4; Joel 3:19). This makes the work of justice nothing less than the restoration of *shalom*. Just as *shalom* is more than the absence of conflict, justice is more than punishing the guilty; it requires a comprehensive solution to systemic evil.

### God's People: Called to Bless the World

From the beginning, God sought to reconcile humanity to Himself. Therefore, He met humanity in their fallenness and created a sacrificial system for their sin and shame (Gen. 3:14-21; Lev. 19:1-18). Even in the aftermath of the Fall, God maintained His commitment to the flourishing of humanity.

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018), 428. Wright also cites Michael Schuler and John Ashcroft, ed., *Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda & Strategy for Christian Social Reform* (Leicester, UK: IVP, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> "Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be." Cornelius J. Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 10.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 1-11 describes the impact of the Fall on human relationships. Two examples of this are Cain's murder of Abel (Gen. 4:1-11) and the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).

<sup>16</sup> The sins of an individual often have consequences beyond that person, especially if the person holds a position of power (Gen. 4; Exod. 1-12; Judg. 17:6; 19:1; 21:25; 2 Sam. 11-12; 1 Kings 5:27-28; 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 10:19).

Genesis 10 is the genealogical record of the descendants of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. It is sometimes referred to as "the Table of Nations."<sup>17</sup> This record confirms that "all mankind known to Israel is descended from a single stock. All men are sons of Noah as well as sons of Adam."<sup>18</sup> Genesis 10 affirms the oneness of humanity amidst the diversity of races and ethnicities and refutes any concept of racial, ethnic, or cultural superiority. Each section summarizing the genealogies of Shem, Ham and Japheth contains a statement indicating that the groupings are based on "family/tribe/clan (mišpāḥāh), language (lāšôn), land/country/territory ('ereṣ), and nation (gôy) (Gen. 10: 5, 20, 31)."<sup>19</sup>

Despite the divine injunction to fill and rule the earth, Noah's descendants, united by a common language, were unwilling to separate.<sup>20</sup> Their attempt to protect homogeneity is seen in their efforts to build the Tower of Babel.<sup>21</sup> Genesis 11 describes their actions and God's response, all of which anticipate the subsequent dispersion of humanity and the rise of the Babylonians who will exert world domination by conforming all to their own likeness (language and name; see Dan. 1). Just as God made humans in His image and likeness, Babylon sought to exert itself, crossing the divine/human boundary, to be like God (see Isa. 13). In this way, Babylon becomes a counter-kingdom to God's Kingdom. In contrast to the one universal language spoken by humankind, the Babylonians will speak many languages.

There is an academic debate over the reason for the diversification of humanity on the planet. Some scholars hold the belief that this phenomenon is a result of divine retribution towards the individuals at Babel due to their prideful behavior, as indicated in Genesis 11:4 where it is stated that they desired to make a name for themselves. This perspective asserts that God intended human beings to be homogeneous and that the diversification of humanity is a demonstration of His judgment.

On the other hand, other scholars propose that the sin being punished was not pride, but instead the disobedience to God's command in Genesis 1:28 to fill the earth.<sup>22</sup> If this argument is valid, then the confounding of human language and the scattering of humans across the earth should not

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<sup>17</sup> Hays, J. Daniel. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003. Kindle.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1987), 215.

<sup>19</sup> Hays, *From Every People*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 23

<sup>21</sup> The common translation of Babylon as *Babel* in Genesis 11 is unfortunate and does not reflect the Hebrew (בבל), which in all other places is rendered as Babylon (Gen. 10:10; 2 Kings 25:1).

<sup>22</sup> The Babel account ends with the declaration twice that the Lord "scattered them all over the earth" (v. 8, v. 9). Perhaps this emphasis is meant to highlight the echo of Gen 1:28.

be seen as an act of judgment, but rather as a benevolent correction by God to prevent humankind from continuing to reside in one location at Babel.

Sailhamer takes this view when he writes, "God, who saw that their plans would succeed, moved to rescue them from those very plans and return them to the land and the blessing that awaited there."<sup>23</sup> This alternative reading of Genesis 11 is significant to the topic at hand: God is not opposed to the diversification of the planet; He is the architect of racial and ethnic diversity. Both readings contain important lessons concerning the dispersion of humanity, the diversification of the planet, and the future work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts.

In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to become the Father of many nations in response to the disastrous human situation described in Genesis 3-11. Abraham's location is important to note. God calls Abraham out of Babel.<sup>24</sup> According to Hays,

More specifically, Genesis 10-11, the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel, stands as a prologue for those nations described in Genesis 10. Recall that Genesis 10 described the division of the world according to family/tribe/clan (*mišpāḥāh*), language (*lāšōn*), land/country/territory (*'eres*), and nation (*gōy*) (Gen. 10: 5, 20, 31). The call of Abraham picks up on three of these terms: "Go from your country (*'eres*)" (12:1); "I will make you a great nation (*gōy*)" (12:2); and "in you all the families (*mišpāḥāh*) of the earth will be blessed" (12:3).<sup>25</sup>

The call of Abraham shows the heart of God towards all humanity. When God called Abraham, He instructed him to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, encompassing every race, ethnicity, and culture (Gen 12:2-3).

Christopher Wright suggests that while the *imago Dei* leads to a *creational* commission, Genesis 12 initiates a *redemptive* commission.<sup>26</sup> God's mission for the redemption and reconciliation of the whole world is evident in Abraham's calling. God has always intended to form a group of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Isa. 2:2-5; Isa. 66:19-21). Though sin scatters and divides humanity, God's blessing reunites and restores them.

#### New Testament Foundations for Racial Reconciliation

The arc of racial reconciliation continues through the New Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, God expected His leaders to act justly, and He held unjust societies accountable (Gen.

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<sup>23</sup> John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 136. "God, who saw that their plans would succeed, moved to rescue them from those very plans and return them to the land and the blessing that awaited there."

<sup>24</sup> Although the precise location is unknown, Ur was relatively close to Babel, if not the same.

<sup>25</sup> Hays, *From Every People*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 212.

19:20-32, Jer. 46:13-28, 51:1-5). The New Testament expands, actualizes, and further prophesies the reconciliation of all things to Himself.

#### God's Plan: Salvation and the Restoration of Humanity

Jesus took on flesh and became a man. He assumed an ethnicity, settled into a culture, and lived as one of the oppressed (John 1:11). He began His earthly ministry among His own people but had significant encounters with non-Jews, pointing to the universality of the gospel for all peoples (Matt. 8:5-13; Mark 5:1-20; 7:24-30; John 4:1-42). He not only welcomed Gentiles but entrusted them with proclaiming His good news (Matt. 8:5-13, Matt. 15:21-28, John 4:1--42).

Sin is the fundamental reason that humanity is racially divided; therefore, Jesus's substitutionary death for sin is the heart of the solution to racial division and oppression (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:38; Eph. 2:14-16; 1 Tim. 5:21). With humanity now restored into a right relationship with God, the practical work of being reconciled to one another is made possible (2 Cor. 5: 18-20). God is a reconciling God; therefore, the gospel is a message of reconciliation with profound implications for the whole of civilization.

#### The Church: Ambassadors of Reconciliation

God designed the church to be the earthly expression of His heavenly Kingdom. The church is called to model reconciliation, advocate for equality and justice, and promote human flourishing in every sphere of influence.

The account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-9) is a seminal event in the history of the church. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the one hundred twenty disciples, thereby giving birth to the church, there was something more at work than the endowment of supernatural power. The first expression of the Spirit having been received was the manifestation of speaking in other tongues. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit, the judgment of humanity at Babel was reversed as humanity is given one new language—the language of the Spirit.

Craig Keener summarizes:

"God scattered nations at Babel for trying to deify themselves (Gen 11:4), paralleling Adam's revolt and his expulsion from the garden (3:5, 22-23). By contrast, the disciples at Pentecost are waiting in obedience to a divine command (Acts 1:4-5); instead of trying to reach heaven, they are waiting for their Lord, who *has* ascended to heaven (1:9-11), to send them the Spirit. In Gen. 11:7, God descended to confound the transgressors (the wording reflects their rebellion in 11:3-4), but at Pentecost, God descends ... in a different way (Acts 2:33). In Genesis, God

descended and scattered tongues to prevent unity; in Acts, the Spirit descends and scatters tongues to create multicultural unity (1:14; 2:1, 42, 44-46)."<sup>27</sup>

There are at least five dynamics at work on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2: (1) The supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit for witness (2:4), (2) the motif of ethnic integration (2:7-8), (3) the eradication of socio-economic classism (2:44), (4) the cooperation of generations (2:17-18), and (5) the partnership of men and women as co-laborers in the gospel (2:17-18).

In many ways, the book of Acts is the beginning of a new story that involves the breaking down of racial disharmony as the first century church bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The church, having been born primarily among Jews, expanded rapidly among non-Jews and in the early days wrestled with a radical vision of "one new humanity" that transcended ethnic boundaries (Eph. 2:13). Eventually, these first-century Christians came to embrace it, wholeheartedly. They opened their arms to Jews and Gentiles, men and women, and slaves and Roman citizens alike (Acts 8:4-8, 26-40; 10:1-48; 16:6-15), acknowledging that all who believed had become "fellow citizens and saints with the members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

Though Paul went "to the Jew first," he consistently ministered across ethnic lines, and in a manner that showed cultural intelligence (Acts 17:16-34). In his powerful discourse at the Areopagus on Mars Hill, Paul draws on cultural images to proclaim the gospel to the Athenians (Acts 17:24-28). Howard Marshall explains that this text demonstrates the "goodness of God in providing for the needs of mankind."<sup>28</sup> Paul affirms the sovereignty of God, confirms the *imago Dei*, and offers the hope of a gospel that transcends ethnic distinctions. Paul declares, "From one man God made every nation (Greek: ἔθνος) of mankind to live on the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). Darrell Bock suggests that "the reference to Adam is intended to show that all people have their roots in the Creator God."<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, the apostle Paul employs the concept of Zeus and presents the idea that humans are created as children of God by the Divine Creator, referencing the notion of being made in God's image as stated in Acts 17:28. Through this passage, Paul articulates the doctrine of the *imago Dei* using the cultural framework of his listeners, emphasizing its significance for comprehending the actions of God and the identity of humanity. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* does not permit any room for nationalism or ethnic supremacy.

The apostle Paul offers a significant contribution to the understanding of race and ethnicity through his letters, particularly in Galatians 3:26-28. Here, he highlights the transformative power of our

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<sup>27</sup> Craig Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 60.

<sup>28</sup> I. H. Marshall, *Acts* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 305.

<sup>29</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 566.



identity in Christ, transcending any humanly constructed identity. As noted by Timothy George, the Bible underscores the common humanity of Jews and Gentiles alike, all being under sin, the curse, and in bondage. However, through the redemptive work of Christ, this distinction of race, rank, and role is relativized.<sup>30</sup>

Paul emphasizes that faith in Jesus Christ grants us our true identity as sons and daughters of God, rather than any particular ethnic distinction. This profound truth serves as a foundational principle for approaching race and ethnicity from a biblical perspective, emphasizing that the love and grace of God extend to all, regardless of cultural or ethnic background.

Alan Cole observes, “the phrase implies a closeness of communion which is neither absorption nor complete identification; for while human personality may be changed by the new relationship, it is not obliterated.”<sup>31</sup>

In verse 28, we discover a profound and life-changing proclamation: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This radical language harkens back to God’s original design in Genesis 1:26-27. George characterizes it as a “startling declaration of Christian unity.”<sup>32</sup>

Ephesians 2 goes further than Galatians 3:26-28, grounding reconciliation between ethnic groups in the work of Christ Himself.<sup>33</sup> This text begins by describing humanity as “the walking dead,” estranged from God and incapable of resurrection. But God, completely out of His grace, has saved us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul goes on to explain that God, entirely out of His grace, has saved humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Verses 11-22 show how Christ’s work on the Cross has accomplished reconciliation vertically, between humans and God, and horizontally, between people groups. Verse 11 uses explicitly ethnic language, showing the previous exclusion of the Gentiles from the covenant, and verses 13-14 reveal that the atonement of Christ has broken down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>34</sup> Verses 15-16 continue

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 274.

<sup>31</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 9), TNTC 9 (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 153.

<sup>32</sup> George, *Galatians*, 282.

<sup>33</sup> Ephesians 2 weaves substitutionary atonement and reconciliation together. Some of the leading Evangelical leaders (led by Craig Keener, current President of the Evangelical Theological Society, and including Gregg Allison, Darrell Bock, D.A. Carson, Timothy George, Michael J. Kruger, Albert Mohler, Michael Thigpen, and Daniel B. Wallace) crafted “An Evangelical Statement on The Gospel and Racism,” published on the site entitled “The Broken Wall of Hostility.” <https://www.evangelicalstatement.com/about>.

<sup>34</sup> There is some exegetical debate regarding the referent of “the wall of hostility.” Some take

to explicitly link the Cross to reconciliation "making one new man in place of the two, so making peace."

Paul continues by illustrating the new community of people that Jesus has formed as "no longer strangers and aliens" (Ephesians 2:19). The access to God has been granted to a united group, transcending ethnic boundaries, through the sacrifice of Christ. As Paul's Gentile audience is a part of this group, as stated in verse 18, they are not considered as "strangers" or "aliens" but rather they are deemed as "citizens together" and "members of the household" of God.

According to Barth, the terms "stranger" and "sojourner" have been debated as referring to two distinct legal groups. However, he asserts that "a stranger could be, and sometimes was, treated as an outlaw or spy (Gen 19:1-10). A sojourner, or resident alien, was subject to only a portion of the land's laws and held corresponding legal protection (Lev 25; Deuteronomy passim)." <sup>35</sup> Thielman adds that both groups were "outsiders without full legal rights and social acceptance in the communities in which they lived." <sup>36</sup> Paul uses these terms metaphorically and loosely, not focusing on the technical distinction between them. Instead, he aims to highlight the transformation of his Gentile readers, who were previously outside the people of God but are now full members of God's household. <sup>37</sup>

To further expand on who makes up this "one new man," the term "saints" (Greek: ἅγιος) refers to believers without ethnic distinctions. As Andrew Lincoln writes, "The readers [the Ephesians] are to see themselves as fellow citizens with the rest of believers."<sup>38</sup> That is, they form *one* citizenry with all other believers, set apart from the world (Eph. 1:4; 5:3, 27) as appropriate inhabitants of God's "holy temple" or "dwelling place." They are, as Frank Thielman puts it, "'members of [the] household' (Greek: οἶκος) over which God presides as Father, a thought that forms a skillful contrast with the former plight of Paul's readers as 'resident aliens,' people who stood outside the 'household' that forms God's society."<sup>39</sup>

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the image of the "wall" to be a reference to a wall in the temple, e.g., T. K. Abbot, J. Armitage Robinson, and Margret Y. MacDonald. Others take it as a metaphorical reference to the Jewish law which excluded Gentiles, e.g., I. Howard Marshall, Frank Thielman, Andrew T. Lincoln, BDAG). Some take it to be a metaphorical reference to the hostility between Jews and Gentiles (Ernest Best). Regardless, these views stress an ethnic/religious tension that Jesus has utterly destroyed to unify two hostile groups.

<sup>35</sup> M. Barth, *Ephesians*, ABC (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 268.

<sup>36</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 178.

<sup>37</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 178.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 151.

<sup>39</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 178.

While Paul's use of "temple" language in this verse would be intelligible in terms of *any* temple (Paul's listeners would have been surrounded by various temples), Thielman as well as Wright argue that Paul was probably thinking "specifically of the Jewish temple and, even more specifically, of the role that the temple would play in the days of Israel's restoration according to Scripture."<sup>40</sup> However, in general, Paul does not seem all that interested in the restoration of the Jewish temple; in other words, nowhere in Paul's letters do we see him referring specifically to the Jewish temple and the hope of its eventual restoration. Rather, it's the community of Jews and Gentiles together in Jesus that now constitutes Paul's thinking about the temple, not a specific building in Jerusalem that needs rebuilding. What an astounding idea for those once barred from entering the temple, Gentiles are now making up the temple!

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul presents a theological perspective on the issue of race and ethnicity, emphasizing the transformative power of faith in Jesus Christ. Through his words, Paul invites his audience to envision themselves as integral components of a growing structure, held together by a unifying bond that transcends ethnic boundaries. This building is characterized by diversity, yet it is a diversity that coexists within the unity that Christ has established.

Contrary to popular belief, Paul argues that diversity and unity are not mutually exclusive but are both achievable in the body of Christ. In other words, the diverse backgrounds, races, and ethnicities that make up the Church are not obstacles to unity, but rather, they enrich and strengthen it. The Church is not comprised of individuals who are all identical, but rather, a diverse community united in their common faith in Jesus.

Craig Keener summarizes the implications of Ephesians 2 for evangelicals:

"... Racial reconciliation and justice are *gospel* issues and thus close to the heart of what must be evangelical commitments. Racial and ethnic prejudices, mistreatment, and neglect are thus not topics to be addressed merely optionally in evangelical teaching and preaching; unity in Christ is a foundational principle with moral demands."<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, the essence of the church's priorities and obligations must center on the work of reconciliation.

Summary

Through the arc of scripture, we see humanity created, fallen, redeemed, and restored. The creation story is the genesis for a biblical theology of racial equality, inclusion, reconciliation, equity, and justice. The *imago Dei* was given the Cultural Mandate to occupy and fill the earth, thereby

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<sup>40</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 183.

<sup>41</sup> "Why this statement?" Evangelical Statement accessed February 19, 2020, <https://www.evangelicalstatement.com/about>.

populating it with a diverse humanity. Genesis 3-11 describes the sin of the human race against God. The result of this rebellion was the scattering of people and the separation of tribes, languages, and nations described in Genesis 10. In the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12-22, God demonstrated His kindness and His desire to bless all of humanity. This covenant finds its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. Paul associates the salvation of the Gentiles with the blessing of Abraham, highlighting the fact that, as per the Abrahamic covenant, the incorporation of individuals from all ethnic groups into the community of God has always been a component of God's grand scheme from the outset. The unification of all the peoples of the earth is not a secondary consideration, but instead has always been central to God's plan for humanity.

## **SECTION 2: NPO TOPIC HISTORY AND KEY VOICES**

While many historians have documented the rise of Pentecostalism, only a few have examined the racial dynamics within the movement(s) and their ongoing influence on churches and denominations. This section will examine several sources to explore how the historical and racial context in which Pentecostalism emerged has led to the movement's current attitude towards racial integration within its leadership structures.

At the turn of the 20th century, racial division ran deep in the United States despite the numerous religious institutions working to promote unity. Blaine Hamilton, in his examination of racial ideologies and the establishment of early 20th century Pentecostal organizations, explains how segregation was on the rise due to the growth of railroads and urban areas.<sup>42</sup> By 1900, communities were increasingly segregating neighborhoods, transportation, and public spaces. However, African Americans often pushed back against these restrictive regulations imposed by white authorities. Likewise, some religious groups challenged the flawed theology behind racial segregation and formed new organizations that advocated for racial integration and cooperation. One notable movement that attempted to bridge the racial divide was Pentecostalism, but their efforts faced challenges, as will be shown in the following section.

Pentecostalism traces its roots to the Holiness movement of the late 19th century, with a focus on distinctive spiritual practices, particularly the manifestation of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Thomas Bremer says Pentecostalism was:

"Made possible by the movements of the Great Migration was having a profound impact on Christianity in America and around the world. Pentecostalism originated on the plains of Kansas, but it experienced its most conspicuous beginnings in Los Angeles, California... its most direct religious influences came from Holiness

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<sup>42</sup> Blaine Charles Hamilton, "The Spirit in Black and White: Early Twentieth-Century Pentecostals and Race Relations, 1905-1945," (PhD diss., Rice University, 2013), 1, Rice Digital Scholarship Archive.

churches, a distinctive tradition developed in the nineteenth century by radical Methodists."<sup>43</sup>

Pentecostals held the belief that God would endow them with supernatural linguistic abilities through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This experience, known as being "filled with the Holy Spirit" or "baptized in the Holy Spirit", is referenced in Acts 2 and takes its name from the Jewish celebration of Pentecost. The term "Pentecostal" is used to refer to those who focus on speaking in tongues. Along with their unique beliefs, early Pentecostals were known for breaking down racial barriers, viewing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues as a reversal of the dispersion of humanity at the Tower of Babel. White Pentecostals sometimes admitted African American students into their Bible schools, while Black Pentecostals often accepted white ministers into their denominational structures. In some instances, people of different races sought the Holy Spirit's baptism at Pentecostal altars together. We will explore the growth of this movement in more detail later.

### African American Religion

According to Iain MacRobert, a Pentecostal historian, there are strong ties between West African folk religion and Pentecostalism. MacRobert's observes that religion in Africa was essentially musical – "danced and sung, beaten out in the rhythms and tones of 'talking' drums, the swaying of bodies and the stamping of feet..."<sup>44</sup> The vibrancy of this expression of worship carried over into Pentecostalism and became a feature of the movement.

Although African Americans contributed significantly to the rapid growth of Pentecostalism, it should be recognized that Blacks were present in various religious denominations prior to the advent of the Pentecostal movement.<sup>45</sup> Cecil Robeck, a foremost scholar on the Azusa Street Revival, highlights how Black Christians can be divided into two distinct worship traditions, which were often based on their respective social classes.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas S. Bremer, *Formed From This Soil: An Introduction to the Diverse History of Religion in America* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 333.

<sup>44</sup> Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 12.

<sup>45</sup> "Within a generation [of Azusa], Afro-Pentecostalism would attract more than 500,000 adherents, becoming the largest religious family among Black denominations after the Baptists (3,782,464) and Methodists (1,099,375) by 1936." David D. Daniels III, "Navigating the Territory: Early Afro-Pentecostalism as a Movement within Black Civil Society," in *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, ed. Amos Yong and Estrelda Y. Alexander (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 43.

<sup>46</sup> Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches: Two Worlds in Conflict in Lost Angeles' African American Community," in *Afro-Pentecostalism: black Pentecostal and*

The first tradition, represented by historic African American churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (established in 1787), the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion (1820), the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (1870), and the National Baptist Convention (1880), represented a more assimilated group that leaned towards the dominant white culture in which they lived.<sup>47</sup>

The second tradition, as described by Robeck, comprised a group that embraced the "folk church" tradition and often worshiped in "Wesleyan Holiness churches, in tents, in cottage prayer meetings, or in storefront facilities." This community was significantly impacted by the experiences of Black Christians in Africa and was distinguished by a minimal use of formal expressions and ceremonial aspects commonly observed in the more well-off African American congregations within historic Black churches.<sup>48</sup>

### The Azusa Street Revival

In his landmark publication "The Souls of Black Folk," published in 1903, sociologist W. E. B. Dubois identified the "color line" as the most pressing issue of the 20th century.<sup>49</sup> Three years later, William Joseph Seymour, a Black pastor, ignited the modern Pentecostal movement. This inspired Frank Bartleman, "the foremost chronicler of Pentecostal origins in Los Angeles,"<sup>50</sup> to later claim the color line "was washed away in the blood."<sup>51</sup>

The revival that took place under Seymour's leadership at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles set the stage for the exponential growth of the Pentecostal movement in the twentieth century. It occurred at a time when reports were being widely circulated of a revival in Wales, led by Evan Roberts,

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*Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, ed. Yong and Alexander (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 30.

<sup>47</sup> Robeck, "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches," 30.

<sup>48</sup> "Black Christianity, which had their origins either in Africa or in slavery, continued to echo in early Black inspired Pentecostalism: Spirit possession and spiritual power (accompanied by trances, dreams, prophesying, healing and exorcism); the integration of the seen and unseen worlds; freedom; racial equality; Black personhood and dignity; community; and belief in the imminent Second Advent of Christ." MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 79.

<sup>49</sup> W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Classic, 1903), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Robeck, "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches," 21.

<sup>51</sup> Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: As it Was in the Beginning* (Printed in Los Angeles, 1925), 54. Bartleman was present at Azusa Street, and his writings about the Revival have been very influential for scholars of Pentecostal history. He was involved in the founding of the Assemblies of God in 1914.



where 100,000 people were converted to Christ between late-1904 and mid-1905.<sup>52</sup> The Welsh Revival inspired many Christians in Los Angeles to fast and pray for a revival of their own. There was also an increasing eschatological urgency following the massive earthquake that devastated San Francisco on April 18, 1906. The earthquake caused mass casualties and its shockwaves were felt across greater Los Angeles.

On April 9, 1906, after weeks of fasting and prayer, William Seymour laid his hands on Edward Lee, who had been faithfully praying with him, and Lee began speaking in other tongues. Later that evening, as Seymour was preaching, Jennie Moore experienced the same phenomenon, and on the third day of the revival, its founder, Seymour, was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Crowds began to gather as word of the revival spread. To accommodate the growth, the revival meetings were moved from a prayer meeting in the home of an African American couple on Bonnie Brae Street to an abandoned African Methodist Episcopal church on Azusa Street, thereby giving the revival its name.<sup>53</sup> The *Apostolic Faith* newspaper reported that "13,000 people received" the Pentecostal experience in the first few months of the Revival.<sup>54</sup> Entire congregations visited Azusa Street seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit and then took the experience back to their own communities. Many other Pentecostal revivals sprang up across Los Angeles, setting the stage for Bartleman to describe Los Angeles as "the American Jerusalem."<sup>55</sup>

The Azusa Street Revival marked a seminal moment in the history of the modern Pentecostal movement. What began as a gathering of "colored people" in the city of Los Angeles quickly attracted individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and nationalities. The attendees, described as a "queer mixture of rich and poor" by a 1906 Los Angeles Times article, defied the prevalent racial segregation of the time by worshiping, fellowshipping, and ministering alongside one another, regardless of skin color.<sup>56</sup> According to one observer, "This work began with poor ignorant colored people (what more appropriate instrument could God choose?) and has spread until some of the educated, refined, and intelligent white people are filled with the Holy Ghost and have received other languages..."<sup>57</sup> This display of unity between white and Black

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<sup>52</sup> Gary B. McGee, "William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival," *Enrichment Journal* (Fall 1999), [http://ag.org/enrichmentjournal/199904/026\\_azusa.cfm](http://ag.org/enrichmentjournal/199904/026_azusa.cfm). The Welsh Revival was at its height between 1904 to 1906. Many scholars attribute the Azusa Street Revival to the Welsh Revival.

<sup>53</sup> "Weird Babel of Tongues," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1906.

<sup>54</sup> Charles F. Parham, *Apostolic Faith* [Baxter Springs, KS] 1.8 (September 1906), 6, cited in Hamilton, "The Spirit in Black and White."

<sup>55</sup> Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> "Rolling and Diving Fanatics 'Confess,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1905.

<sup>57</sup> Etta Auringer Huff, "A Scriptural Pentecost," *A Herald of Light*, July 14, 1906, in Larry Martin, ed., *Azusa Street: The True Believers Part 2* (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1999), 104.

Christians would soon be challenged by racist ideologies held by some key leaders within the burgeoning Pentecostal movement.

The history of Pentecostalism can be divided into three phases: the relationship between Charles Parham and William Seymour, the Azusa Street revival, and the division between the predominantly white Assemblies of God and the predominantly Black Church of God in Christ.<sup>58</sup> The debate over the true originator of Pentecostalism, whether it be Parham or Seymour, sheds light on the underlying racial tensions that plagued the movement. Despite these challenges, the Azusa Street Revival remains a powerful symbol of interracial unity and serves as a reminder of the possibilities for racial reconciliation in the church.<sup>59</sup>

### Charles Parham

Charles Parham is recognized by many as the father of modern Pentecostalism for his association of speaking in tongues with the "manifestation of being baptized in the Holy Spirit". During the early 1900s, Parham was a prominent figure in the Christian community in the United States. He was raised in the Methodist Church and served as a Methodist pastor in Kansas for a period of time, but after exposure to speaking in tongues, also known as glossolalia, in Holiness churches during a visit to the Northeast, he ventured out as an independent Holiness evangelist.<sup>60</sup> He later returned to Topeka and established Bethel Bible College, which emphasized personal spirituality, divine healing, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues as the primary physical manifestation.

Parham's students came from different denominations, but "they all shared Parham's desire for a new experience of the Holy Spirit. Their 'only textbook was the Bible' and their understanding of it ultra-literal."<sup>61</sup> During a Watch Night service on January 1, 1901, Agnes N. Ozman asked Parham to lay his hands on her and pray for her to be filled with the Spirit. Though Parham had not yet spoken in tongues, he did, and she began speaking in a heavenly language. Over the following three days, the other students began fervently seeking this Pentecostal experience in prayer and 12 of them were baptized in the Holy Spirit. On the third night of the revival, Parham had his own heavenly encounter and began speaking in tongues. Though there are other recorded instances of believers speaking in tongues before Parham's students, this was the first time the Pentecostal experiences was described as the "initial physical evidence" of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>58</sup> Hamilton, "The Spirit in Black and White," 26.

<sup>59</sup> Disagreements over the movement's founder and the location of its birthplace are framed in a racial context according to Newman, *Race and the Assemblies of God Church*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Bremer, *Formed From This Soil*, 333-34.

<sup>61</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 44.

Parham eventually moved his college to Houston, Texas, in 1905, and began calling his movement the Apostolic Faith Movement. It was there that an African American Holiness evangelist by the name of William Seymour became familiar with Parham's doctrine of tongues and showed up at Parham's school requesting to be admitted. Parham reluctantly allowed Seymour into his Bible school on the condition that he remain segregated from the white students, as was required by Jim Crow laws in the state of Texas. Seymour sat in the hallway and listened to Parham's teaching through an open door.

In their early period in Houston, Parham and Seymour preached together in Black churches and tent revival meetings. But as Parham grew older, his racial bias became more entrenched. He was a Ku Klux Klan sympathizer, and he wrote for "a racist, anti-Semitic periodical," spoke in Klan gatherings, and even rereferred to the members as "those splendid men." According to Parham, the Klan, "if converted and revived, would 'realize their high ideals for the betterment of mankind.'"<sup>62</sup>

Charles Parham's theological views were radically inconsistent. He believed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, but he also held racist ideologies. He believed he should "preach to people of color, but he remained doubtful about their ability to perceive the truth and act accordingly."<sup>63</sup> Thus, "although Parham maintained a paternalistic attitude towards African Americans in his early ministry, this attitude did not negate his belief in white superiority and... segregation."<sup>64</sup> Parham gained a following in Texas and Arkansas and influenced those who would go on to establish the Assemblies of God; however, his ministry came to a dramatic and dishonorable end. In 1907, in San Antonio, in the middle of a Pentecostal revival, he was arrested on charges of "the commission of an unnatural offense,"<sup>65</sup> with a young man. Though the charges were eventually dropped, accusations of homosexuality plagued him for the remainder of his ministry, and he was never able to recover from the stigma.

William J. Seymour

William J. Seymour was born in Centreville, Louisiana, in 1870, just five years after the end of the Civil War. Though not much is known of his background, his parents were emancipated slaves. In his mid 20s, Seymour relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he encountered the "holiness" teachings of the Evening Light Saints. The Evening Light Saints believed they were living in the final hours of human history and that the rapture of the church, though imminent, would be preceded by an

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<sup>62</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 62.

<sup>63</sup> Hamilton, "The Spirit in Black and White," 33.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, "The Spirit in Black and White," 36.

<sup>65</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 106.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This teaching deeply impacted Seymour's life, and he embraced a call to ministry.<sup>66</sup>

After a decade as an itinerate evangelist with the Evening Lights Saints, Seymour left Cincinnati for Houston, Texas. During his first summer in Houston, he delivered sermons at Pastor Lucy Farrow's Holiness Church. Farrow was away at the time, serving as a governess for Charles Parham's family in Kansas. Upon her return to Jackson in October, she related to Seymour her experience with the phenomena of speaking in tongues while in the Parham household. This prompted Seymour to enroll at Parham's Bible school in search of further understanding of glossolalia.<sup>67</sup>

After departing from Houston, Seymour established the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles. At the outset, the meetings at the mission were racially inclusive. In April 1906, just five months after the revival started, he began publishing a newspaper, called *The Apostolic Faith*, to document the events of the revival. The first edition of the paper "noted the cultural and ethnic diversity of the participants. ... [and] claimed the revival began 'among the colored people' and eventually spread to the whites, 'Ethiopians, Indians, Mexicans, and other nationalities.'"<sup>68</sup> Thus, Hamilton argues that the "racial equality and interracial worship that took place at Azusa Street was not a mere coincidence or accident." Seymour "frequently referenced the interracial character of the meetings and the racial equality that accompanied the gift of speaking in tongues." In that way, Seymour and other early Pentecostals recognized how "their movement was a melting pot of races and nationalities; but instead of seeing the racial mixing as scandalous, they saw it as a sign of God's purpose for the Mission."<sup>69</sup>

The Azusa Street Mission's inter-ethnic makeup set it apart from other Black congregations in Los Angeles. According to Robeck, this distinction can be best understood through the lenses of class and culture. While other Black congregations in the area served primarily middle- and upper-middle-class members, the Azusa Street Mission accommodated a larger number of less educated and economically disadvantaged African Americans.<sup>70</sup>

Charles Parham visited the Azusa Street Mission, but he was shocked by what he found. Hamilton notes that in Parham's view, "the Azusa services were marked by gross fanaticism, and he accused

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<sup>66</sup> Roberts Liardon, *Revival: When the Fire Fell*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2006), 90.

<sup>67</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 50-51.

<sup>68</sup> Newman, *Race and the Assemblies of God Church*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Hamilton, "The Spirit in Black and White," 111.

<sup>70</sup> Robeck, "The Azusa Street Mission and Historic Black Churches," 21-22.

Seymour and the other leaders of hypnotizing the participants.”<sup>71</sup> It was the ecstatic behavior that bothered him the most— “like falling into a trance, dancing, jumping and shaking”—because these sorts of things “were practiced by Negroes in the Southland.” Parham said these were now “pawned off on people all over the world as the working of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>72</sup> Parham also criticized the “race mixing” he witnessed—in vile and degrading terms. Parham writes, for example: “Men and women, whites and blacks, knelt together or fell across one another; frequently, a white woman, perhaps of wealth and culture, could be seen thrown back in the arms of a big buck n----r, and held tightly thus as she shivered and shook in freak imitation of Pentecost. Horrible, awful shame!”<sup>73</sup>

Charles Parham, after his return to Texas, distanced himself from the Azusa Street Mission. In turn, William Seymour repudiated him in his written works. Hamilton explains that Parham's opposition to racial integration in the Pentecostal movement was evident from his initial visit to Azusa Street. Parham grew increasingly frustrated over his rejection at the mission and declining influence within the movement and came to view Azusa as detrimental to the progress of the entire movement. He held the belief that in order to maintain the recognition and approval of the broader white community, it was imperative to uphold the prevailing racial norms of American society, and that the integration of races at Azusa Street would compromise this objective.<sup>74</sup>

While Parham's views might seem uniquely repugnant today, his reaction to the Azusa Revival was not dissimilar to the reaction of many others. Hamilton says his response was consistent with “the wider context of American racial ideology, which permitted generosity towards individual African Americans without undermining an essential belief in African-American inferiority.”

In late 1906, Elmer Fisher established the Upper Room Pentecostal mission in Los Angeles, triggering the first departure of white attendees from the Azusa Street Revival, according to MacRobert. Despite the initial breaking down of racial barriers at the revival, persistent rejections, internal conflicts, and the separation of white leaders eventually eroded Seymour's dedication to promoting racial integration.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, Seymour altered the articles of incorporation for

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<sup>71</sup> Charles F. Parham, *Apostolic Faith* [Baxter Springs, KS] 1.8 (October 1912), 6, cited in Hamilton, “The Spirit in Black and White,” 115.

<sup>72</sup> Charles F. Parham, *Apostolic Faith*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Charles F. Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel* (Baxter Springs, KS: Apostolic Faith Bible College, 1911), 72-73, cited in Hamilton, “The Spirit in Black and White,” 115.

<sup>74</sup> Hamilton, “The Spirit in Black and White,” 211.

<sup>75</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 62, 64.

the Azusa Street mission to "to stipulate that black men and women would be the leaders and major benefactors of the ministry." <sup>76</sup>

### The Legacy

Despite the challenges posed by racism and division, the Azusa Street Revival set the stage for the exponential growth of Pentecostalism throughout the twentieth century. From 1906 to 1910, visitors came from all over the country to experience the Azusa Street Revival, and many took the Pentecostal experience back to their own regions, igniting revival fires and starting denominational movements. Notable figures who attended the Azusa Street Revival or were directly influenced by those who did include Charles Harrison Mason (Church of God in Christ), Frank Bartleman (Assemblies of God), G.B. Cashwell (Pentecostal Holiness Church), G.T. Haywood (Pentecostal Assemblies of the World), and Charles Parham.

The racist beliefs held by Parham and his followers significantly influenced "every major Pentecostal denomination in the United States," according to Hamilton. Within merely two decades after its founding, the Pentecostal movement experienced divisions along both racial and doctrinal lines. While the "Oneness" movement persisted as the most racially integrated among all Pentecostal groups for an extended period, it too ultimately succumbed to racial divisions by 1931.

The Azusa Street Revival was a seminal moment in the history of modern Pentecostalism. It brought together people of different ethnicities, socio-economic classes, and nationalities in a remarkable display of interracial worship, fellowship, and ministry. The legacy of the Azusa Street Mission continues to influence the Pentecostal movement to this day, as many historians and leaders recognize its crucial role in shaping the denomination as we know it today. James Tinney notes that "without the important role of blacks, there might be no Pentecostal movement of any magnitude today in the United States or the world." <sup>77</sup> Bishop Ithiel Clemmons goes even further, stating that "Pentecostalism is the only denomination of the Christian faith in the United States founded by African-American people." <sup>78</sup> These statements serve to underscore the significance of the Azusa Street Revival in shaping the history and identity of modern Pentecostalism.

The modern Pentecostal movement was just beginning in the first few decades of the twentieth century, but the wounds of division would continue despite repeated attempts to reconcile by the

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<sup>76</sup> Blaine Charles Hamilton, "Crossing the Color Line: The Church of God in Christ, The Assemblies of God, and the Civil Rights Movement," (MTheol thesis, Brite Divinity, 2008), 11, <https://repository.tcu.edu/bitstream/handle/116099117/4064/Hamilton.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Ithiel C. Clemmons, *Bishop C. H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ* (Largo, MD: Christian Living Books, Inc., 2012), 83.

<sup>78</sup> Clemmons, Bishop C. H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ, 83.



Assemblies of God in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>79</sup> along with the "The Memphis Miracle" in the 1990s, and continued efforts in 2013 and 2014.<sup>80</sup>

### The Movements

The most prominent movements to directly originate from Azusa Street were the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and the Assemblies of God (AG). In 1924, the Assemblies of God was established as an independent, predominantly white denomination, separate from the largely African American Church of God in Christ.

The Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ will forever be linked, particularly since COGIC played a role in the birth of AG. However, this connection is not characterized by unity and equality. Hamilton asserts, "whether or not the founding of the Assemblies of God marked a formal separation between the two churches, it is clear that a de facto segregation was instituted which has yet to be overcome."<sup>81</sup> Estrela Alexander, a leading scholar of Black Pentecostalism and President of William Seymour College, describes the racial ideologies of the Assemblies of God during these years and throughout the twentieth century:

The pre-civil rights attitudes and behavior of white Pentecostal leaders toward black constituents can best be described as condescending and paternalistic and at worst outright patronizing. Yet, following the lead of secular society, the civil rights movement caused white Pentecostal bodies to gradually remove most vestiges of de jure segregation, while elements of de facto segregation remained – especially in the areas of leadership and allocation of resources.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Newman, *Race and the Assemblies of God Church*, 11. Under the leadership of Thomas Zimmerman, "The church's colleges and universities began to aggressively recruit African American ministerial students. In addition, Zimmerman opened a dialogue with the small group of African American ministers licensed and ordained by the Assemblies of God in the 1960s in an effort to understand their concerns. Less than 10 African Americans were listed as Assemblies of God ministers before the early 1960s when, after a protracted effort, Robert Harrison was finally ordained and became the first African American Assemblies of God missionary since the 1920s."

<sup>80</sup> Harry Bruinius, "Pentecostal Denominations Move Toward Racial Reconciliation," *The Christian Science Monitor* (February 20, 2014),

<https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2014/0220/Pentecostal-denominations-move-toward-racial-reconciliation>. There were also important efforts at reconciliation in 2013 and 2014 as the AG entered an agreement to share resources and include one another in national events with the United Pentecostal Council of the Assemblies of God, "a small but worldwide consortium of Black churches."

<sup>81</sup> Hamilton, "Crossing the Color Line," 34-35.

<sup>82</sup> Estrela Y. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 253.

This “de-facto segregation” related to “leadership and the allocation of resources” continues to limit the promotion of minorities who seek to serve at the highest levels of authority and decision-making within the structure of predominantly white churches.

Where do we go from here?

Hamilton has suggested that the racial cooperation at the Azusa Street Revival may have been exaggerated and idealized.<sup>83</sup> Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that Pentecostals are still racially segregated today. According to Alexander, white Pentecostal churches have implemented measures to promote racial cooperation in the twenty-first century. However, despite these efforts, “African American enfranchisement still lags behind mainline churches, and blacks are still locked out of full participation and marginalized to varying degrees.”<sup>84</sup>

To restore the interracial cooperation of the movement, Pentecostals must reconcile the theological and cultural dynamics of the Azusa Street Revival. This involves examining several issues beyond the scope of this paper, such as whether the Pentecostal expressions of worship at the Azusa Street Revival were contextualized for those who inherited cultural practices from African religions. Additionally, it is essential to understand how white rejection of Black Pentecostal practices may be influenced by cultural differences rather than the rejection of theology. Lastly, why have Pentecostal beliefs and practices resonated throughout numerous Majority World contexts?

These are critical questions, but the central issue at the heart of this paper remains: why is there a power-sharing inequality at the highest levels of authority within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches?

## **SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION**

Without a candid assessment of the origins of Pentecostalism, there may be no viable path forward for contemporary Pentecostals. By neglecting the past, the persistent cycles of division, oppression, and injustice are perpetuated. While the history of modern Pentecostalism includes numerous chapters worthy of celebration, there are also moments that demand reflection, repentance, and a commitment to the principles that initially exemplified God's plan for diversity and unity among humanity, as manifested in the Azusa Street Revival.

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<sup>83</sup> Hamilton writes, “the claims that early Pentecostal revivals were an idealized, racial utopia are clearly false.” He continues: “While a few white and African American Pentecostals, as well as people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, may have interacted with one other, these occasions were rare and uneventful. In fact, most white Pentecostals approached these encounters with attitudes of paternal benevolence, bestowing the wisdom of Pentecostal doctrine upon their African-American counterparts. On other occasions, they faced such outright persecution for their violation of the color line... that they avoided future interracial encounters.” Hamilton, “The Spirit in Black and White,” 205.

<sup>84</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire*, 253.

The Azusa Street Revival and other early Pentecostal movements were transformative for marginalized black individuals, who were often "poor, dispossessed, disenfranchised, poorly-educated, and powerless people who were despised and constantly being told that they were inferior by white society."<sup>85</sup> Through the influence of the Holy Spirit, these individuals could reject the dehumanizing messages of white society and perceive themselves as empowered and created in the image of God. Their spiritual experiences, characterized by an ecstatic awareness of God's presence, power, and love, affirmed their dignity and elevated them beyond the ordinary.<sup>86</sup> However, despite this initial unity, the revival was ultimately unsuccessful in bridging racial disparities, which eventually led to divisions between white and Black Pentecostals.

Reflecting on the history of early Pentecostalism, Iain MacRobert writes:

"Black Pentecostals - in practice if not always in theory - perceive the Spirit as working through them in the gifts of story and song, testimony and prayer, vision and dream, dance and motor behavior, shouting and the drama of the sermon - all manifestations of the power and love of God. For white Pentecostals, the charismata were soon restricted to the nine referred to in 1 Corinthians 12, and even they were understood in the narrowest and most limited sense. Tongues and physical healing were exalted, but they rejected the power and love which transcended race and color, could create the interracial community of God's people and could bring healing for the hurts caused by the social diseases of slavery and racism."<sup>87</sup>

The assertion that white Pentecostals rejected "the power and love which transcended race and color" may appear overstated, but the current divided state of white and Black churches lends it credibility. Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in our society, with 80% of congregations comprising one predominant racial group. Moreover, a 2015 study by Lifeway research found that most worshipers prefer it that way: "Two-thirds of American churchgoers (67 percent) say their church has done enough to become racially diverse, and less than half think their church should become more diverse."<sup>88</sup> Many churches, including but not limited to Pentecostal and Charismatic ones, have no interest in being multiethnic or multicultural.

Soong-Chan Rah, Professor of Church Growth at North Park University, explains how American Protestants in the latter half of the twentieth century were heavily influenced "by a ministry philosophy called the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP)." This view maintained that "churches

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<sup>85</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 90.

<sup>86</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 91.

<sup>87</sup> MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*, 90.

<sup>88</sup> "Americans Less Optimistic About Race Relations," *Lifeway Research*, February 9, 2021, accessed April 9, 2021. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/02/09/americans-less-optimistic-about-race-relations-2/>

grow faster when they are homogeneous."<sup>89</sup> Early pioneers in the 20th-century "church-growth movement" encouraged de facto segregation based on their desire to see churches experience numerical growth. Religious scholar Kathleen Garces-Foley states that the main reason the HUP is so prevalent among churches that subscribe to seeker-sensitive/church-growth methodologies is the notion that "unbelievers prefer to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."<sup>90</sup> The idolization of church growth has become an obstacle to realizing the biblical vision of a fully integrated church that does not discriminate based on gender, race, or socio-economic class.

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith argue that the inadequacy of most racial reconciliation efforts today stems from their excessive focus on individualism and interpersonal relationships. They amount to "become a Christian, love your individual neighbors, establish a cross-race friendship, give individuals the right to pursue jobs and individual justice without discrimination by other individuals, and ask forgiveness of individuals one has wronged." They note that while "evangelicals discuss the personal sacrifice necessary to form friendships across race, their solutions do not require financial or cultural sacrifice." In essence, "they do not advocate or support changes that might cause extensive discomfort or alter their economic and cultural lives. In short, they maintain what is for them the non-costly status quo."<sup>91</sup> This reluctance to disrupt familiar behavioral norms in homogeneous churches is the driving force that prevents them from becoming racially diverse. New people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds bring new ways of doing things, which disrupt established practices and create discomfort.

According to Emerson and Smith, most evangelicals are waiting for a miracle to heal the racial divide. They term this a "miracle motif"—a "theologically rooted idea that as more individuals become Christians, social and personal problems will be solved automatically." This is how it works: "what is the solution to violent crime? Convert people to Christianity because Christians do not commit violent crimes. What is the solution to divorce? Convert people to Christianity because Christians are less likely to get divorced."<sup>92</sup> This approach is inadequate, as statistics show that Christians grapple with the same social issues as non-believers. While the primary focus of the gospel is to reconcile God with humanity, its secondary work involves obedience to Christ. This secondary work is the intentional act of reconciling humanity to one another on the basis of Christ's

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<sup>89</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 83.

<sup>90</sup> Kathleen Garces-Foley, "Multiethnic Congregations," *Racism* (Baylor: CCE, 2010), 68.

<sup>91</sup> Michael O. Emerson & Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 130.

<sup>92</sup> Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 117.

love. Thus, racial reconciliation is the continuation of the gospel at work. Until an intentional and consistent move towards racial reconciliation and equality and brotherhood that transcends all human divisions is normative in churches and society, the gospel has not completed its work.

Further, a merely individual approach to racial reconciliation is wholly inadequate, as it fails to address the structural and institutional aspects which have allowed racial inequity to flourish for centuries. The work of the gospel as it relates to racial reconciliation involves speaking truth to power (Eph. 4:15) and confronting principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12) that seek to enslave humanity.

It is not enough to hope things will be different in the future. The emerging generation is insistent on seeing change, and Edward Gilbreath is right to say, "if we expect to see God move us toward a place of true and lasting unity, we cannot do business as usual. Nor can we wait for an older generation to pass away."<sup>93</sup> This is because racial reconciliation requires "creating a climate where people deal honestly with racial and cultural issues. It should put an emphasis on action, so that leaders make changes based on feedback learned through dialogue (both formal and informal)."<sup>94</sup>

Gilbreath makes it clear that many evangelicals sincerely desire a form of racial reconciliation even if they expect it to miraculously transpire apart from any effort on a societal or structural level. This longing for reconciliation, however, does not guarantee it. For one, this can even lead some Christians to "come on too strong. In their desire to have a cross-cultural friendship, they unknowingly perpetuate the classic dynamic that gives the white person the upper hand."<sup>95</sup> White Christians can re-traumatize Black Christians in *how* they seek their voice. By putting the burden on Black Christians to educate them on matters related to racial injustice, white Christians are demonstrating an unwillingness to learn and grow. On the other hand, many do not understand what the process of reconciliation entails. Thus, they may give up when the process becomes uncomfortable or comes at a cost to those who have previously had power. If we want to see genuine and lasting change at both the individual and structural levels of society, we must be willing to demonstrate humility and embrace discomfort.

In a 2020 NPO (Need/Problem/Opportunity) Research Workshop conducted at Hillsong Church, Phoenix, a diverse group of community stakeholders were surveyed regarding their experiences related to multiracial and multiethnic leadership within a large church context. Over the course of

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<sup>93</sup> Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity*, (IVP Books: Downers Grove, 2006), 83. Gilbreath also writes: "many books and articles have noted that the younger generations of evangelicals have already mounted a formidable challenge against the tired status quos of our various institutions. Some predict that, as younger evangelicals rise into greater leadership roles, things will indeed change for the better... what's more likely to happen is that, once given power, those younger generations will settle into the habits of their predecessors," 79.

<sup>94</sup> Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues*, 91.

<sup>95</sup> Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues*, 91.

a day, these experienced church leaders expressed concern that most racial reconciliation efforts are hindered because of one single factor: *fear of loss*.<sup>96</sup> Though this may seem to be a narrow conclusion, fear of loss has been a constant driving force throughout history, including slavery, segregation, discrimination, redlining, systemic and structural racism, conscious and subconscious bias, and the ongoing lack of opportunities for minorities.

This position is also held by the historian Jemar Tisby in his groundbreaking work surveying the history of the American church and its ongoing legacy of racial injustice. Tisby writes, "In my experience of talking to hundreds of Christians—black and white, men and women, young and old—I have observed one primary reason more of us do not exhibit the strength and courage required to root out racism: fear."<sup>97</sup> Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders should be positioned to face the dynamics of fear and loss since the foundation of the movement was built on the loss of social status in the community by its early adherents. And yet, the desire of modern Pentecostals to find social acceptance by the broader culture has made the movement vulnerable to fear and a desire to maintain the status quo.

Pentecostal and Charismatic leadership often fails to reflect racial diversity at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches because of a lack of biblical clarity concerning the *imago Dei*, our new humanity in Christ, the purpose of Pentecost, and the ongoing mission of the church in the world as an agent of reconciliation. A return to these essential truths will lead to repentance from the sin of racism, spiritual renewal in individuals and churches, and an ongoing commitment to pursue racial reconciliation for the sake of the gospel. On that foundation, churches must become intentional about modeling racial reconciliation by including and promoting minorities as an act of biblical equality and justice. This will require the formation of new friendships that extend beyond the dominant racial group, the discipleship of minorities in a manner that develops them to their full potential in Christ without imposing the prevailing cultural identity of the church upon them, and a willingness by leaders to allow them to contribute to a multiethnic and multicultural identity consistent with the Kingdom of God.

Here is how we will know when we have arrived: The proof of racial reconciliation is when the leadership culture of a church, religious organization, or denomination, welcomes, includes, values, and promotes every person without minimizing their cultural distinctiveness.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The revised NPO statement framed by the community stakeholders is: "Considering 'nonwhites,' we have discovered a lack of opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership which is caused by fear. If solved, it would mean these individuals would be accepted, could lead with confidence, being reconciled to one another and to God."

<sup>97</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 213.

<sup>98</sup> Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues*, 91.

# Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report



## INTRODUCTION

This report documents research on racially integrated leadership in Pentecostal movements. The driving question at the heart of this research is: “Why do Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation but often fail to reflect minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches?” The answer to that question is complex and layered and can only be understood against the backdrop of scripture, the history of race relations, the origin of the modern Pentecostal movement, white hegemony, and the dynamics of power-sharing in church leadership.

A focus group that was convened to consider this issue overwhelmingly viewed biblical and multicultural education as an effective solution in creating racially integrated teams, and several forms of delivery were considered. Three recommendations were arrived at through prayer, guided conversations, and Gamestorming and are presented in this paper.

This research was conducted in a Design Workshop with community stakeholders and through personal interviews with experts in the field of racial diversity, inclusion, and equity with the intent of discovering a practical solution to this ongoing issue.

## NPO STATEMENT

Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making within their ecclesiastical structures.

## NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

I am exploring the lack of racial diversity at the highest levels of decision-making within multiracial and multiethnic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. Although this situation is not unique to these congregations, there are enough distinctions within these communities to merit this research. This research will not encompass the broader evangelical or mainline denominational context.

## NPO CONTEXT

My NPO context includes Pentecostal/Charismatic churches seeking to create pathways for minorities to be included as key decision-makers in church leadership. Despite being given the biblical example of a racially integrated church in the New Testament, many pastors face a uniquely complex set of cultural, social, and theological challenges that impede racial diversity, inclusion, and equity in leadership today. As a lead pastor in a global church that serves as a model for thousands of other churches, I am positioned to serve many pastors in their efforts to build multiracial and multiethnic churches.

## ROOT CAUSES

The NPO’s root causes are complex and interwoven with the history of race relations, power dynamics, conscious and unconscious bias, and a lack of cultural awareness within churches. Although the global church embraces the ideal of a fully integrated, equal, just, Heavenly Kingdom,

it continues to be shaped by the cultural forces of the earthly kingdoms in which it is situated. As homogeneous congregations undergo the painstaking work of integration and inclusion in their leadership hierarchies, race, ethnicity, and cultural identity must be negotiated within the context of the broader organizational framework.

### THREE BIG IDEAS

- 1) Develop a mentorship program for the next generation of pastoral leaders, equipping them to engage in the work of racial reconciliation and advancing equity within the churches they will serve.
- 2) Design a partnership model for churches that desire to collaborate towards racial reconciliation and the empowerment of minority leadership in their congregations.
- 3) Produce a film series designed to educate churches on the biblical and sociological basis for racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and the unique history of Pentecostal movements in racial reconciliation efforts and to devote multiple episodes to the empowerment of minority leadership within churches and movements.

### DEFINITION OF 'DONE'

According to sociologist Michael Emerson, *"The twenty-first century must be the century of the multiracial congregation,"* which he defines as *"one having less than 80 percent of any single racial group."*<sup>99</sup> Therefore, for the purposes of this undertaking, the objective has been reached when every Pentecostal and Charismatic church situated in diverse communities has representative leadership at the highest levels of influence and decision-making.

### 3 CONCEPT PITCHES

#### Mentorship Program

*Big Idea:* Develop a mentorship program for the next generation of pastoral leaders, equipping them to engage in the work of racial reconciliation and advancing equity within the churches they will serve.

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<sup>99</sup> Multiracial congregations are described by scholars as religious gatherings in which the composition of the group consists of no more than 80% of individuals belonging to a single racial identity (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Wadsworth, 2010). This figure is considered to be the threshold for ensuring unavoidable interactions between the majority and non-majority racial groups within the congregation (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Emerson & Kim, 2003). The presence of a diverse demographic within the group, represented by at least 20% of individuals from underrepresented racial groups, helps to shape and influence the overall dynamic of the congregation.

*Audience:* This program would be suited for young adults 18-25 who are situated within Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and movements and desire to see racial inequity abolished in the future church.

*NPO:* Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making.

*Benefit:* The lack of education and discipleship within most churches related to matters of racial diversity, inclusion, and equity is problematic. This program holds the potential to establish racial reconciliation as an essential ethic in spiritual formation. The participant would benefit by developing an awareness of the biblical and sociological basis for racial diversity, inclusion, and equity, thereby positioning them to advance racial justice in their future leadership roles.

*Risks:* The risk involved is that this work is often misunderstood, outright rejected, and opposed by spiritual forces. Therefore, the participant will need to be committed to the disciplines of prayer, hospitality, and peace-making.

*Assumptions/hypotheses to test:* This concept will be tested by identifying five to seven young adults and leading them through a six-month discipleship program based on the objectives identified in the NPO.

*Benchmarks of success:* The measures of success are: (1) each participant should be able to define why inequity exists, (2) each participant should be able to explain the biblical narrative for sin, redemption, and reconciliation, and (3) each participant should commit to the ongoing work of racial reconciliation within their community as a Kingdom priority.

*Other Approaches:* This NPO has been addressed by mainline and evangelical denominations but not the Pentecostal movement. Because Pentecostalism is not monolithic, this will require bridgebuilding across denominational lines.

### Church Partnership Model

*Big Idea:* Design a partnership model for churches that desire to collaborate towards racial reconciliation and the empowerment of minority leadership in their congregations.

*Audience:* This model would involve multiracial and multiethnic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches within a community who are committed to the work of reconciliation but need mutual encouragement, support, and the exchange of resources to succeed in this mission.

*NPO:* Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making.

*Benefit:* The issue addressed is the lack of support that pastors feel within their congregations and from other churches within their community regarding their commitment to racial reconciliation. This lack of support and a feeling of isolation makes the work of reconciliation even harder than it needs to be. Collaboration among churches working in this space results in increased confidence,

clarity of purpose, and the sharing of best practices that benefit the communities in which they are situated. The benefit is that this church partnership program will strengthen churches in the work of racial reconciliation.

*Approach:* This model is based upon creating synergy between white, Black, and minority pastors within a community, which would lead to an exchange of resources and best practices with a common goal of seeing each church become racially integrated at the highest levels of power-sharing and decision-making. This approach includes shared meals, guided conversations, combined worship services, pulpit exchanges, and prayer meetings between pastors and emerging leaders within a community.

*Risks:* The risk involved is that this work can be perceived as symbolic but lacking in a commitment to address the structural issues of racial disparity and white supremacy within a community; therefore, the participants will need to be committed to the practice of humility, honesty, authenticity, and a commitment to mutual submission. Further, the participants will need to be prepared to encounter spiritual resistance and equipped to stand against it in prayer.

*Assumptions/hypotheses to test:* This concept is to be tested by connecting with one or more Black and Hispanic pastors in the community and inviting collaboration. Since this process is highly organic, its success will be primarily measured by the participation of pastors over the course of a year and the corresponding impact on the leadership structures within their churches.

*Benchmarks of success:* The measures of success are a willingness of pastors to participate in this model, which involves: (1) shared meals that facilitate guided conversations, (2) a combined worship service, (3) a pulpit exchange, and (4) occasional prayer meetings which include pastors and emerging minority leaders within the community. After one year, each pastor should be able to genuinely attest to an enriched quality of life and ministry and a sense of being equipped to extend equity to minority leaders.

*Other Approaches:* This model has been attempted in various forms by mainline and evangelical churches, but not in the Pentecostal movement in Phoenix, Arizona. Because Pentecostalism is not monolithic, this will require bridgebuilding across denominational lines.

#### Television Film Series

*Big Idea:* Produce a film series designed to educate churches on the biblical and sociological basis for racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and the unique history of Pentecostal movements in racial reconciliation, and to devote multiple episodes to the empowerment of minority leadership within churches and movements.

*Audience:* This film series would be oriented towards pastors and leaders within Pentecostal churches and movements who desire to end the injustice of racial discrimination.

*NPO:* Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making.

*Benefit:* The viewer would benefit from an understanding of the biblical basis for racial diversity, inclusion, and equity which would position them to participate in the gospel work of racial reconciliation.

*Approach:* The lack of education and discipleship within churches related to racial reconciliation and the extension of equity in leadership is the greatest problem in ending racial discrimination. This film series holds the potential to establish racial reconciliation as an ethic in spiritual formation and to offer practical ways to extend equity to minorities within churches.

*Risks:* This series will require substantial resources, creative imagination, and credible leaders willing to tell their stories with humility and vulnerability, thereby contributing to a new paradigm related to extending equity in leadership. Additionally, there is a risk of not completing the project at a level of excellence that positions it for wide distribution.

*Assumptions/hypotheses to test:* This concept is to be tested by surveying a sample of Christian television networks and/or Christian film distributors to determine whether there is a viable market and a willingness to participate in this project.

*Benchmarks of success:* The measures are: (1) an openness by Christian television stations or Christian film distributors to the project, (2) a willingness of credible contributors to tell their stories and share their wisdom, and (3) sufficient resources to complete the project.

*Other Approaches:* This approach has been taken in various forms on “secular” television, but not on Christian television with a Pentecostal audience as the intended market.

## DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

The focus group included the following: (1) one Black female Community Engagement Coordinator, (2) one Black female Certified Life Coach, (3) one Black female Business Process Analyst, (4) one Black male graduate student, (5) one Black female Ph.D. candidate in Pharmacology and Toxicology, (6) one Black male Financial Advisor, (6) one white male executive pastor, (7) one white female Diversity and Trauma Educator, and (9) one Latino campus pastor. All were adults within the age range of 21-50.

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

The one-on-one interviews included: (1) a Senior Diversity and Inclusion Adviser for the United Nations, (2) a Policy, Strategy, and Design Advisor in the UK Home Office, and (3) a Lead Pastor who serves as a racial diversity consultant for an executive placement firm.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Michelle Oyakawa. “Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame in Evangelical Multiracial Churches,” *Sociology of Religion*, Volume 80, Issue 4, (Winter, 2019): Pages 496–517. <https://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/80/4/496/5480032>

This research paper, published in the esteemed "The Sociology of Religion" journal by Oxford University Press, delves into the strategies employed by pastors of multiracial churches in addressing racial issues. Through conducting interviews as part of the Religious Leadership and Diversity Project (RLDP), the study explores the various perspectives, or "frames," that church leaders adopt when addressing racial issues within their congregations. Findings reveal that, instead of adopting a racial justice frame, most pastors utilize a racial reconciliation frame. This approach posits that racial conflicts can be ameliorated through shared faith, thus avoiding political and divisive discussions within the church. However, the research also suggests that this racial reconciliation frame may be limiting, as it discourages meaningful discussions about racial inequality and obstructs progress towards racial justice.

Harrell, D. Clark. "Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice," Trevecca Nazarene University. Ann Arbor: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011. 3460553.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/7f09e40eddd85f1e8c49bca456c6cca8/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

This scholarly study aims to analyze the influence of multicultural and biblical education on reducing prejudice and promoting more positive attitudes towards racial diversity. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the impact of these education courses was assessed among a purposively selected sample of students from a Southern Regional Christian University. Participants were asked to provide demographic information and underwent four surveys to assess their attitudes and biases. The study found a noteworthy improvement in the attitudes and biases of the group who received multicultural and biblical education in comparison to the control group, serving as evidence of the efficacy of these education courses in fostering greater cultural understanding and acceptance.

Wolf, Shannon Marie, "The Separation of Church and Race: The Role of Intent in Creating a Racially Integrated Church" Southeastern University. Lakeland (2019). Selected Honors Theses. 100. <https://firescholars.seu.edu/honors/100>

The purpose of this honors thesis is to examine the current state of racial relations within the American church. The research seeks to address three primary questions: how has the American church historically responded to issues of race; what is the current response of contemporary churches to the issue of race; and, what initiatives are being taken by contemporary churches to promote racial integration? This study provides an in-depth analysis of the church's involvement with slavery, segregation, and the Civil Rights movement and also evaluates contemporary attitudes and efforts towards promoting racial integration. The significance of the mission of the church in achieving this goal is also emphasized.

## APPENDICES

### DESIGN WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

The Design Workshop, held at the Hillsong Phoenix downtown campus, was executed in accordance with the methodology prescribed in the Design Exploration Plan. The proceedings commenced with a warm welcome to the workshop participants, followed by an introduction of stakeholders to one another. This was followed by a moment of prayer, calling upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct the focus of the workshop towards the objective of racial reconciliation.

I then proceeded to present an overview of my NPO and shared the key insights and learnings from my Discovery Workshop. Additionally, I provided a summary of my topical essay on the subject. Following this, we conducted a brief review of the Pew Research Center Report on "Deep Divisions in Americans' Views of Nation's Racial History - and How To Address It,"<sup>100</sup> as well as the Barna Group's Research Report, "Where Do We Go From Here?"<sup>101</sup>

Subsequently, I invited participants to suggest questions or research areas that we might have overlooked in our findings on racially integrated leadership in Pentecostal movements. This was followed by a series of thought-provoking questions designed to stimulate discussions. The workshop was concluded with a series of exercises, including 3-12-3 Brainstorming, Post-Up, and Dot Voting.

In conclusion, the participants were given two weeks to reflect on the proceedings of the workshop before submitting a concept pitch for the three identified models.

## DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

(Transcript)

Welcome:

Thank you for attending this Design Workshop. I am extremely grateful that you would take time out of your busy schedule to help me focus on a very important issue. As we get started this morning, I would like to take a couple of minutes to go around the room to have each of you introduce yourself and tell us what you do.

Introductions:

Prayer:

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<sup>100</sup> Pew Research Center. "Deep Divisions in Americans' Views of Nation's Racial History - and How To Address It." Accessed September 13, 2021.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/08/12/deep-divisions-in-americans-views-of-nations-racial-history-and-how-to-address-it/>

<sup>101</sup> Barna Research. "Race Today." Accessed September 13, 2021.  
<https://www.barna.com/raceandthechurch/>



### Overview:

As you know from the invitation letter I emailed you, I am a doctoral student at George Fox University in Portland (Portland Seminary). The purpose of this workshop is to solicit your input into my doctoral project, but even more to help me find a solution to an issue that is near and dear to my heart. And to some degree, each of you is either doing work in this space, or you have life experiences related to the subject matter to add something valuable.

Portland Seminary is attempting something out-of-the-box in this particular doctoral program in that the research is centered around an NPO—that is, a real-world “Need, Problem, or Opportunity.” And the outcome is not necessarily a dissertation, although they will reluctantly accept one. What they want is for their students to discover practical solutions. For example, they would rather see their students design, build, and operate a food truck than write a paper on “food insecurity in marginalized communities.” They would rather see you design a website that networks missionaries in developing nations rather than write a thesis on “networking missionaries in developing nations.” The goal of the program is to come up with a real solution or a contribution towards a solution that relates to the NPO I have selected.

My NPO statement is: Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making. The word “minority” is an imperfect one, and I considered several other terms, including BIPOC, but I landed back on “minority” when a Black pastor asked me why I wasn’t advocating for integration at the highest levels of leadership in churches led by people of color where whites are in the minority. And I am. I’m advocating for “Racially Integrated Leadership” in Pentecostal Movements. So, the term is imperfect, and we all have our feelings about it, but it’s what I’m working with.

I’m also working with the term “racial-reconciliation,” even though it’s imperfect as well. There is a lot of debate in academic circles over which single term adequately encompasses the work of equality, inclusion, reconciliation, justice, and equity. I have chosen to use “reconciliation” as an umbrella descriptor, with full appreciation for the inadequacy of the word. I’m using it because I have Bible verses to back it. And I’m using Brenda Salter McNeil’s definition of “reconciliation.” She writes, “Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”<sup>102</sup>

This is the second workshop. The first was the Discovery Workshop, which explored whether my NPO statement was valid. I met with a racially diverse group of leaders, both from our church and our community, and we spent a couple of hours discussing the NPO.

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<sup>102</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 21.

This second workshop is the “design” stage of my research. I hope you can help me develop three potential solutions to address this problem of the underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making in large Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. And then, I will spend the next year testing those solutions and reducing them down to just one, which will be my final project. No pressure! Actually, I want this to be informal and free from any stress because I think our best ideas come from being relaxed, engaged, and at peace with one another and the subject.

Also, my NPO is narrowly defined because of the idea that we need to particularize before we can universalize. Meaning that if your solution doesn’t work in the neighborhood, it won’t work 11 time zones away. And in this case, since I am a global leader in the Pentecostal/Charismatic world, I want to focus on finding a solution here.

Here’s what I have planned for today: I will take 30-40 minutes to read and comment on a couple of sections of an essay I wrote on the topic we are here to discuss. Then we will review a couple of related reports, and then we will spend the remainder of our time going through some brainstorming exercises and having a conversation.

#### Select Readings

- Topical Essay
- Pew Research: *Deep Divisions in Americans’ Views of Nation’s Racial History – and How To Address It*,
- Barna Group’s Research Report: *Where Do We Go From Here?*

#### Questions for the Design Exploration Workshop

1. What does racial equity look like in a perfect world?
2. How can we engage in the work of racial reconciliation in a fallen world?
3. Is racial reconciliation predicated on an acknowledgment of past injustices?
4. What do we need to acknowledge about our racial history to move forward?
5. Is reconciliation primarily about repairing relationships between parties? Why or why not?
6. Who should be the initiator of racial reconciliation in churches?
7. What obstacles stand in the way of racial reconciliation in our community? In our church?
8. What are some positive signs you’ve observed that suggest racial reconciliation is possible?
9. Why does a reproductive approach matter in the work of racial reconciliation?

10. Would you describe the churches you've attended as typically segregated along racial lines? If so, what has contributed to that division? If not, what has created those conditions?
11. What are some reasons churches tend to segregate along ethnic lines?
12. What excites you about the possibilities of experiencing a multiethnic church?
13. What are the benefits and/or strengths of belonging to a multiethnic church?
14. Why might it be incredibly challenging for minorities to create multiethnic churches?
15. What prevents churches from being fully integrated at every level?
16. What power dynamics might be preventing a multiethnic church from flourishing?
17. Why don't we see many explicit models of racial integration at the highest decision-making levels in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches?
18. What needs to change to bring about racially integrated churches engaged in the work of sharing power and authority at every level of leadership?
19. Is a solution possible in the current political and social climate? If not, why? If so, what?
20. Is a solution possible with the current generation of church leaders in power? If not, why? If so, why?
21. What practical solution(s) might be offered to resolve the racial inequity seen in churches?
22. What can be done to disciple the next generation in racially integrated leadership?
23. What contribution can I make to integrating minority leadership at the highest level of decision-making in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches?

### Gamestorming

As we begin brainstorming some possible solutions or contributions towards a solution, there are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- This is a blue-sky zone: think big, think bold, and pretend money, time, and talent are not objects.
- This is a safe zone: there are no wrong answers and no ridiculous suggestions.
- This is a "more is better" zone: the more ideas we generate, the better chance we have of discovering a solution.

### White Board

How do we contribute to racial inclusion (equality/equity/justice) at the highest levels of decision-making within Pentecostal/Charismatic churches?

- 3-12-3 *Brainstorming*
- Post-Up
- Dot Voting

#### Review Topical Essay

"The driving question at the heart of my research essay is: 'Why do Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation but often fail to reflect minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches?' The answer to that question is complex and layered and can only be understood against the backdrop of scripture, the history of race relations, the origin of the modern Pentecostal movement, white hegemony, and the dynamics of power-sharing in church leadership."

"Pentecostal and Charismatic leadership often fails to reflect racial diversity at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches because of a lack of biblical clarity concerning the *imago Dei*, our new humanity in Christ, the purpose of Pentecost, and the ongoing mission of the church in the world as an agent of reconciliation. A return to these essential truths will lead to repentance from the sin of racism, spiritual renewal in individuals and churches, and an ongoing commitment to pursue racial reconciliation for the sake of the gospel."

"On that foundation, churches must become intentional about modeling racial reconciliation by including and promoting minorities as an act of biblical equality and justice. This will require the formation of new friendships that extend beyond the dominant racial group, the discipleship of minorities in a manner that develops them to their full potential in Christ without imposing the prevailing cultural identity of the church upon them, and a willingness by leaders to allow them to contribute to a multiethnic and multicultural identity consistent with the Kingdom of God."

#### Review Pew Research Center Report

FOR RELEASE AUGUST 12, 2021

# Deep Divisions in Americans' Views of Nation's Racial History – and How To Address It

*Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say increased  
attention to history of slavery and racism is bad for the country*

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Pew Research Center, August 2021, "Deep  
Divisions in Americans' Views of the Nation's Racial  
History – and How To Address It"

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## How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this study to understand how the American public views the country's progress toward ensuring equal rights for all Americans, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. For this analysis, we surveyed 10,221 U.S. adults in July 2021. Everyone who took part in this survey is a member of the Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories. Read more about the [ATP's methodology](#).

Here are [the questions used for the report](#), along with responses, and its [methodology](#).



4  
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## Deep Divisions in Americans' Views of Nation's Racial History – and How To Address It

*Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say increased attention to history of slavery and racism is bad for the country*

A little more than a year after nationwide protests erupted after George Floyd's murder at the hands of the Minneapolis police, the public is deeply divided over how far the nation has progressed in addressing racial inequality – and how much further it needs to go.

Opinion on the current national reckoning over the history of slavery and racism in the United States casts these divisions into stark relief:

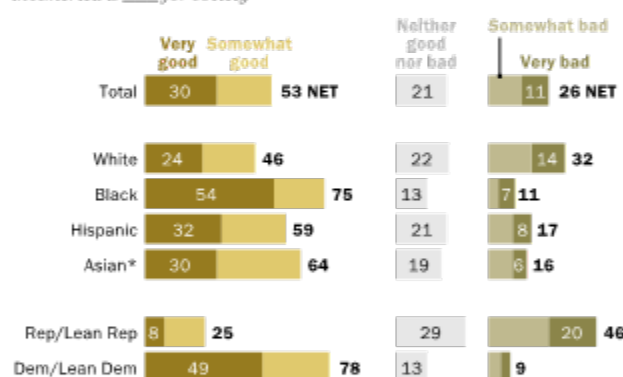
Among U.S. adults overall, 53% say increased attention to that history is a good thing for society, while 26% say it is a bad thing and another 21% say it is neither good nor bad.

Among Black adults, 75% say heightened public attention to this topic is a good thing, with 54% saying it is “very good” for society. Majorities of Asian American (64%) and Hispanic (59%) adults also view this positively, though much smaller shares say it is a very good thing, compared with Black adults. Among White adults, however, fewer than half (46%) say greater attention to the history of slavery and racism in the U.S. is good for society, with just 24% saying it is very good – about a third (32%) say it is bad.

The partisan divide in these opinions is even wider: Just 25% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say greater attention to the history of slavery and racism is a good thing; far

### Wide racial, partisan gaps on whether more attention to the history of racism in the U.S. is good for society

% who say increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism in America is \_\_\_\_ for society



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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more (46%) view it negatively, while 29% see it as neither good nor bad. Democrats and Democratic leaners – across racial and ethnic groups – express overwhelmingly positive views of increased attention to the topic (78% say it is good for society).

The latest national survey by Pew Research Center, conducted July 8-18 among 10,221 adults, finds sizable differences between parties – as well as differences within parties – over how to ensure equal rights for all Americans, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Half of all adults say “a lot” more needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of their race or ethnicity, while about as many say either that a little (34%) or nothing at all (15%) needs to be done.

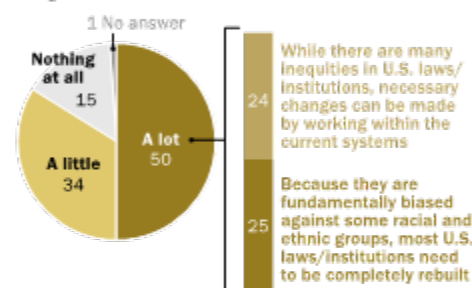
The half of Americans who say a lot more needs to be done to ensure equal rights are split over how this can be achieved. About a quarter of the public (24%) says that while there are many inequities in U.S. laws and institutions, necessary changes can be made by working within the current systems, while roughly as many (25%) say that most laws and major institutions need to be completely rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased against some racial and ethnic groups.

Nearly eight-in-ten Black adults say a lot more needs to be done to ensure equal rights for Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. This includes 58% who say that in order to achieve this goal, most of the nation’s laws and major institutions need to be completely rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased and 19% who say needed changes can be made by working in the current systems.

Smaller majorities of Hispanic (59%) and Asian American (56%) adults say a lot more needs to be done to achieve racial equality; just 30% of Hispanics and 24% of Asian Americans say laws and institutions are fundamentally biased and need to be completely rebuilt.

### Those who say ‘a lot’ more is needed to ensure racial equality are split over what needs to be done to make changes

% who say \_\_\_\_ needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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Among White adults, 42% say a lot more needs to be done to ensure racial equality: 18% say most laws and institutions need to be completely rebuilt, while 24% say necessary changes can be made within the current systems.

Republicans overwhelmingly think only a little (47%) or nothing (30%) needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Just 22% say a lot more needs to be done, with only 7% saying that most major institutions need to be rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased.

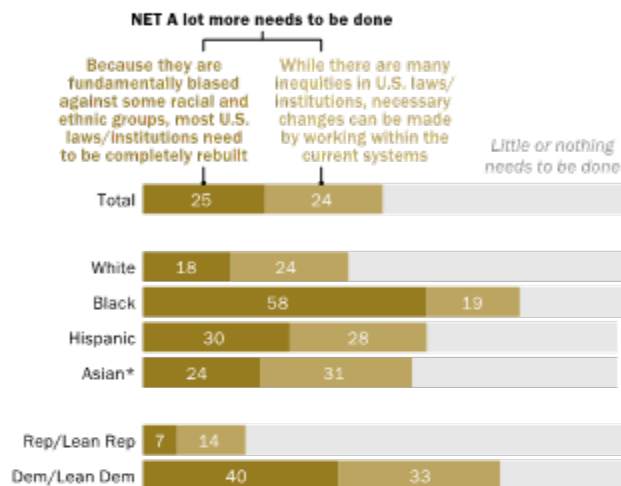
Democrats, by contrast, generally agree that a lot more needs to be done to achieve racial equality (74% say this).

Yet Democrats are divided over whether this will require rebuilding most laws and institutions (40%) or can be achieved working through existing systems (33%).

Many of the partisan and racial differences on how much still needs to be done to address racial inequities in this country stem from divergent opinions on how much *has* been achieved: Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to say the nation has made a lot of progress toward racial equality over the past half-century.

### Majority of Black Americans say most U.S. institutions and laws need to be completely rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased against some groups

% who say \_\_\_\_ to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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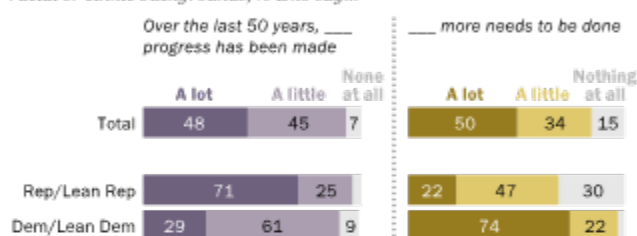
About seven-in-ten Republicans (71%) say the U.S. has made a lot of progress over the last 50 years in ensuring equal rights for all Americans, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, while just 29% of Democrats say this. A 61% majority of Democrats say a little progress has been made to ensure equality among Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

These views are almost the reverse of opinions about whether more needs to be done to bring about racial equality; more than three times as many Democrats (74%) as Republicans (22%) say a lot more needs to be done.

Black adults are broadly skeptical about the progress the U.S. has made on this issue over the past 50 years. Only 19% say the country has made a lot of progress, while 64% say it has made a little and 16% say the country has made no progress at all. A majority of White adults (56%) say the U.S. has made a lot of progress on racial equality in this period, as do smaller shares of Asian American (44%) and Hispanic adults (38%).

### Republicans more likely than Democrats to see a lot of progress on race in the last 50 years; Democrats more likely to say a lot more needs to be done

When it comes to ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, % who say...



Note: No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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The survey finds little change in the past year in opinions about whether White people benefit from advantages that Black people do not have. But there has been an increase since 2016, especially among Democrats, in the share saying White people benefit a great deal because of their race.

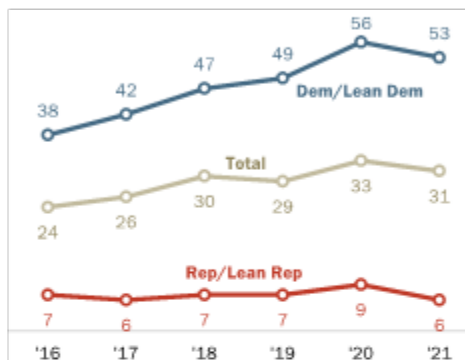
Overall, 31% of the public says White people benefit a great deal from societal advantages that Black people do not have; 27% say they benefit a fair amount, while 40% think White people derive little or no benefit from advantages that Black people lack.

A 53% majority of Democrats say White people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have. While that is little changed in the past year, the share of Democrats expressing this view has increased 15 percentage points since 2016 (from 38% to 53%).

There has been very little change in Republicans' views over the past five years: Just 6% of Republicans now say White people benefit from advantages that Black people do not have. Nearly three-quarters of Republicans (73%) say White people get little benefit (39%) or no benefit at all (34%) from advantages that Black people do not have.

### Since 2016, rise in share of Democrats who say White people benefit from advantages that Black people lack

% who say White people benefit a great deal from advantages in society that Black people do not have



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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## Public sees progress ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of racial or ethnic background – also says more needs to be done

Reflecting back over the last 50 years, more than nine-in-ten Americans say the country has made progress toward “ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds” – about half of the public (48%) says a lot of progress has been made, while nearly as many (45%) say a little progress has been made. Only 7% say the country has not made any progress toward racial equality.

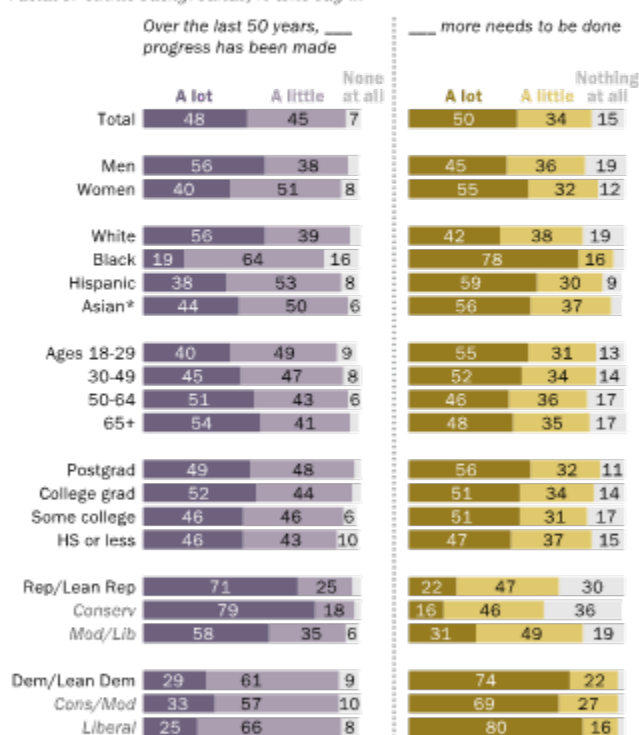
However, while many Americans say the country has made at least some progress toward racial equality, many say there is more to be done: 50% say a lot more needs to be done, while another 34% say a little more needs to be done. But 15% say nothing at all still needs to be done.

There are wide differences in how Americans view the country’s progress toward racial and ethnic equality across demographic groups.

For example, adults ages 50 and older (52%) are more likely than younger adults (43%) to say the country has achieved a lot of progress toward ensuring

### About half of U.S. adults say the country has made ‘a lot’ of progress toward racial equality and a similar share says a lot more needs to be done

When it comes to ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, % who say ...



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No response answers not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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equality for all Americans. And adults under the age of 50 are slightly more likely than older adults to say there is a lot more progress needed (53% vs. 47%).

Black adults, in particular, stand out for their views on progress on racial equality in the country. Just 19% of Black adults say the country has made a lot of progress toward ensuring equality for all Americans regardless of racial or ethnic backgrounds over the last 50 years, compared with much larger shares of White (56%), Asian American (44%), and Hispanic adults (38%). Nearly two-thirds of Black adults (64%) say the country has only made a little progress toward racial equality.

Black adults also are the most likely to say that a lot more needs to be done to ensure equality for all Americans: Nearly eight-in-ten Black adults (78%) hold this view. Smaller shares of Hispanic (59%) and Asian adults (56%) say a lot more needs to be done to achieve equality for all Americans. And while 42% of White adults say the country has a lot more to do to achieve racial equality, 38% say only a little more needs to be done. About two-in-ten White adults (19%) say the country does not need to do more to ensure equality for all Americans regardless of racial or ethnic background – much higher than any other racial or ethnic group.

Republicans and Republican leaners (71%) are far more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners (29%) to say the country has made a lot of progress toward racial equality over the last 50 years. About six-in-ten Democrats (61%) say the country has made a little progress over the last half-century toward ensuring equality for all Americans regardless of racial or ethnic backgrounds.

In contrast, while about three-quarters of Democrats (74%) say there is a lot that needs to be done to achieve racial equity, just 22% of Republicans hold this view. About half of Republicans (47%) say a little more needs to be done to ensure racial equality and 30% say nothing more at all needs to be done.



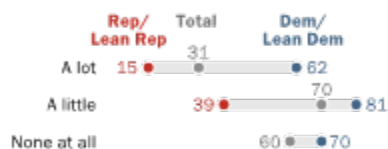
Those who say the country has only made a little progress in ensuring equal rights for all Americans are more likely than others to say a lot more needs to be done to continue the progress.

Overall, 70% of adults who say the country, over the last 50 years, has made a little progress toward racial equality say *a lot more* still needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans. A much smaller share of adults who say the country has made a lot of progress in the past (31%) say the same. Six-in-ten adults who say there has been no progress toward racial equity in the country say there is a lot more that needs to be done to ensure this equality.

And while this pattern occurs among both Republicans and Democrats, large partisan gaps are evident in the shares who say a lot more still needs to be done to achieve racial equality. About eight-in-ten Democrats who say a little has been done in the last half-century (81%) also say a lot more needs to be done, as do 62% of Democrats who say a lot has been done and 70% of Democrats who say no progress has been made. By comparison, the opinion that a lot more needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans is held by 39% of Republicans who say little progress has been made in the last five decades and an even smaller share (15%) of Republicans who say a lot of progress has been made.

### Those who say a lot of progress has been made on racial equality are least likely to say a lot more needs to be done

Among those who say \_\_\_\_ progress has been made over the last 50 years to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of racial and ethnic background, % who say *a lot more needs to be done*



Note: Insufficient sample size to show views among Republicans who say no progress has been made.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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## Americans who say a lot has to be done to ensure equal rights for all split over whether many laws and institutions need to be 'completely rebuilt'

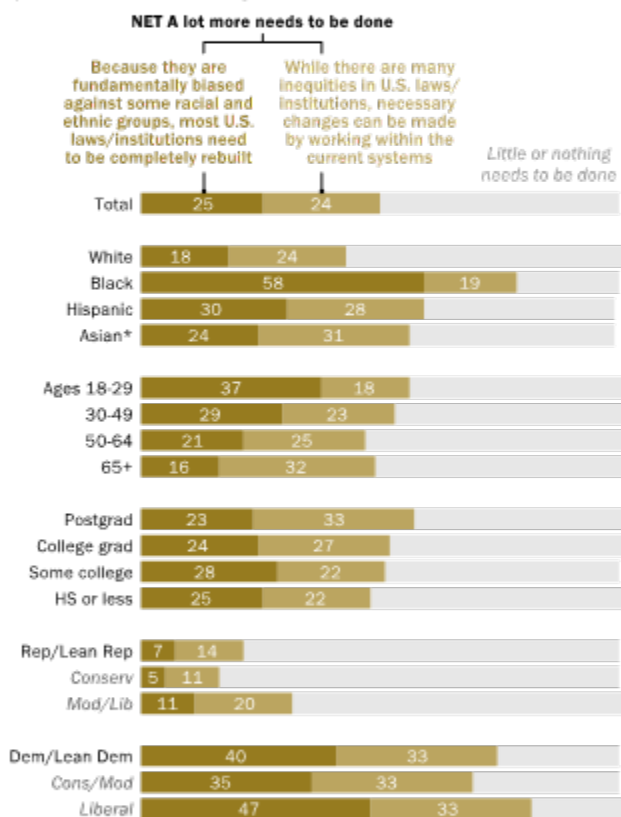
While half of Americans say that a lot needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans, those who express this view are divided over what needs to be done.

A quarter of Americans say that to ensure equal rights for all Americans, "most U.S. laws and major institutions need to be completely rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased against some racial and ethnic groups." A nearly identical share (24%) says "while there are many inequities in U.S. laws and institutions, the necessary changes can be made by working within the current systems."

Overall, nearly six-in-ten Black adults (58%) say that in order to ensure equality for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, most major U.S. institutions need to be completely rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased against some racial and ethnic groups, while just 19% say necessary changes to address inequities can be made within the current systems;

### A majority of Black adults say most U.S. laws and institutions need to be rebuilt to ensure racial equality

% who say \_\_\_\_ to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No response answers not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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about two-in-ten say little or nothing at all needs to be done. Among other racial and ethnic groups, smaller shares overall say a lot more needs to be done; those who do are roughly evenly split between those who say changes can be made within current systems and those who think most institutions need to be completely rebuilt because they are fundamentally biased. As a result, Black adults (58%) are significantly more likely than Hispanic (30%), Asian American (24%) and White (18%) adults to say most institutions and laws need to be completely rebuilt.

There also are substantial age differences in these views: Younger adults are not only more likely than older adults to say a lot more needs to be done to ensure racial equality, but those who do are also more likely than their older counterparts to say most U.S. major institutions need to be rebuilt to ensure racial equality. Nearly four-in-ten adults ages 18 to 29 (37%) say this, compared with 21% of those 50 to 64 and 16% of adults 65 and older.

About three-quarters of Democrats say a lot needs to be done to ensure equality for all Americans, including 40% who say that achieving this requires rebuilding most major institutions and 33% who say changes can be made by working within current systems. Among Democrats, there are ideological differences in these views: About half of liberal Democrats (47%) say most laws and institutions need to be completely rebuilt to address fundamental biases against some racial and ethnic groups; 35% of conservative and moderate Democrats say this (a third of each group says necessary changes can be made within the system).

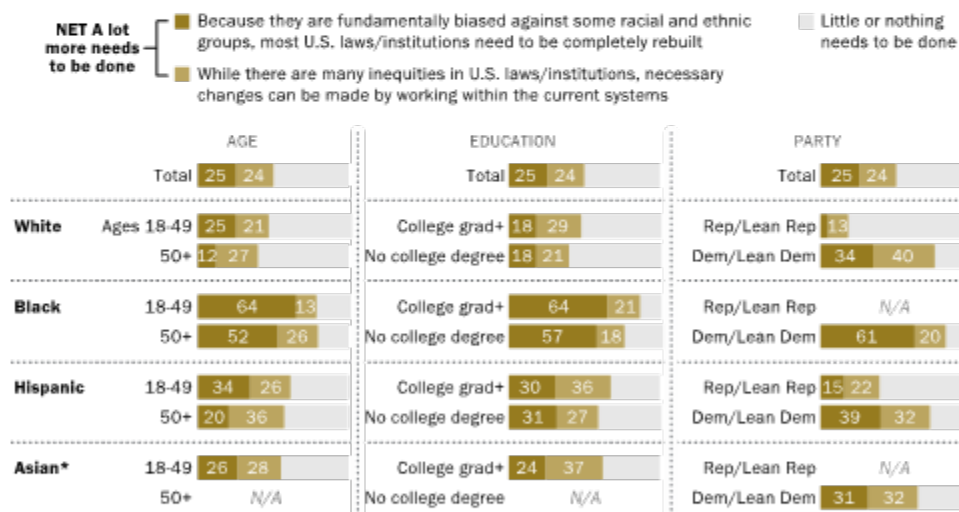
Only about two-in-ten Republicans (22%) say there is a lot more that needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all racial and ethnic groups, with 14% saying that necessary changes can be made from within the system and just 7% saying that institutions need to be rebuilt in order to ensure equality for all Americans.

Across racial and ethnic groups, younger adults are more likely than those who are older to say the best way to ensure equality for all Americans is to rebuild most major U.S. laws and institutions. Still, both Black adults under 50 (64%) and those ages 50 and older (52%) are more likely than those in other racial or ethnic groups to say that in order to ensure equal rights for all Americans, most institutions need to be rebuilt.

White and Hispanic Democrats are more likely than their Republican counterparts to say a lot more needs to be done to ensure equality for all Americans. And this pattern holds among partisans when looking at shares who say the way to ensure equality for all Americans requires rebuilding most U.S. laws and institutions.

### Black Democrats more likely than White, Hispanic and Asian Democrats to say most U.S. laws and major institutions need to be completely rebuilt to ensure equality for Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds

% who say \_\_\_\_ to ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Groups labeled 'N/A' due to insufficient sample size. No response answers not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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Among Democrats, however, there are differences by race and ethnicity on whether necessary changes to ensure racial equity can come from within current systems or require fundamental changes: Black Democrats (61%) are far more likely than Hispanic (39%), White (34%) and Asian Democrats (31%) to say that major institutions in the country need to be completely rebuilt in order to ensure equal rights for all Americans. Four-in-ten White Democrats say that although there are inequities within U.S. laws and institutions, it is possible for necessary changes to be made by working within current systems, while equal shares of Hispanic and Asian Democrats (32% each) say the same. Two-in-ten Black Democrats hold the view that racial inequities can be addressed by working within current systems.

## Narrow majority of the public says increased attention to history of slavery and racism is good for society

As the country continues to grapple with the issue of race, about half of American adults (53%) say that the “increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism” is good for society, including 30% who say it is very good for society.

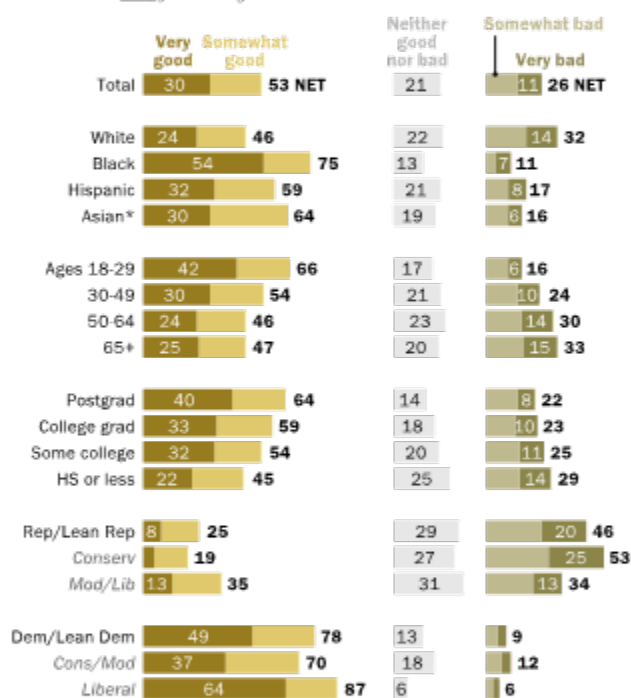
About a quarter of adults say this increased attention is somewhat bad (14%) or very bad for society (11%). Another 21% say it is neither good nor bad.

Views on whether the public's increased attention to the history of slavery and racism is good or bad for society are divided by age and education, as well as by race and political affiliation.

Black adults are most likely to say that increased public attention to the history of racism is good for society. Three-quarters of Black adults say this increased attention is good, including more than half (54%) who say it is very good for society. Smaller majorities of Hispanic (59%) and Asian adults (64%) also say greater attention to the history of racism is good for society. Among White adults, 46% express this view; about a third of White adults (32%) view this as a bad thing, while 22% say it is neither good nor bad.

### Democrats view increased attention to U.S. history of racism positively; Republicans are far more skeptical

% who say increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism in America is \_\_\_\_ for society



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No response answers not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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Younger adults hold a more positive view on the public's increased interest in America's racial issues than do older people: Two-thirds of adults ages 18 to 29 view the public's increased attention to the history of slavery and racism as a good thing for society, compared with about half of adults over the age of 30.

Those with higher education are more likely to say the public's increased attention on racial issues is good for society than those with less formal education. For example, 61% of adults with a college degree or more education say this is good for society, compared with about half of those without a college degree (49%). This pattern is evident among both White and Black adults; Hispanic adults with a four-year college degree are about as likely as those who do not have a degree to view the increased attention to the history of slavery and racism as a good thing for society.

While partisanship is a major factor in these opinions, both parties are divided ideologically in views of the impact of increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism. While large shares of both liberal Democrats and conservative and moderate Democrats view the increased attention as good for society, liberal Democrats are far more likely to say it is very good (64% vs. 37%). Among Republicans, 35% of moderates and liberals express positive views of the impact of increased attention to racism, compared with just 19% of conservative Republicans.



There also are demographic differences in these opinions within partisan groups, especially among Republicans.

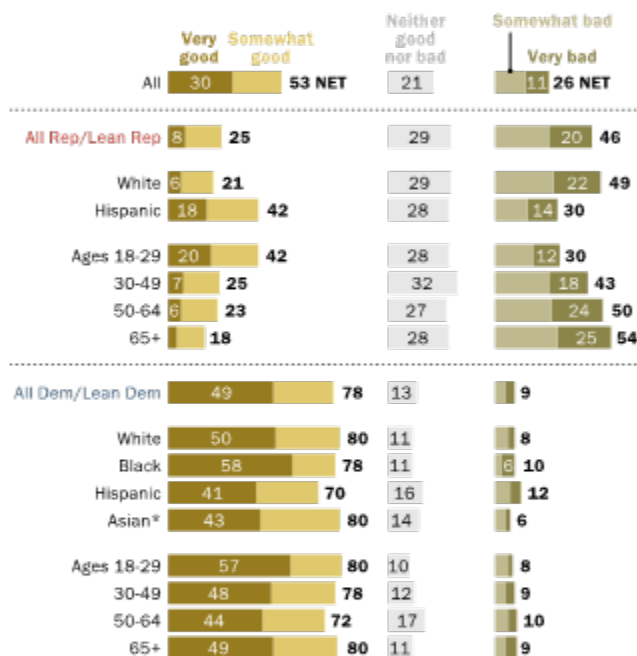
Hispanic Republicans are about twice as likely as White Republicans to say the increased public attention to historical racial issues is good for society (42% vs. 21%).

And while 42% of Republicans under age 30 say the increased attention to America's racial history is good for society, only about quarter of older Republicans say the same. About half of Republicans ages 50 and older (52%) say this increased interest is bad for society, with 24% saying it is very bad for society.

By contrast, Democrats and Democratic leaners across age and racial and ethnic groups are largely united in their views that the increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism is a good thing for society.

### Republicans' views of increased public attention to the history of racism differ by age and ethnicity

% who say increased public attention to the history of slavery and racism in America is \_\_\_\_ for society



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Black and Asian Republicans not shown due to insufficient sample sizes. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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## Black adults overwhelmingly say White people benefit from advantages because of their race; White adults are divided

About six-in-ten adults say that White people benefit a great deal (31%) or a fair amount (27%) from advantages in society that Black people do not have. About a quarter say that White people benefit not too much and another 17% say White people do not benefit at all from advantages in society that Black people do not have.

Black adults, in particular, stand out for the view that White people benefit from societal advantages: About nine-in-ten Black adults say White people benefit at least a fair amount, including 71% who say they benefit a great deal.

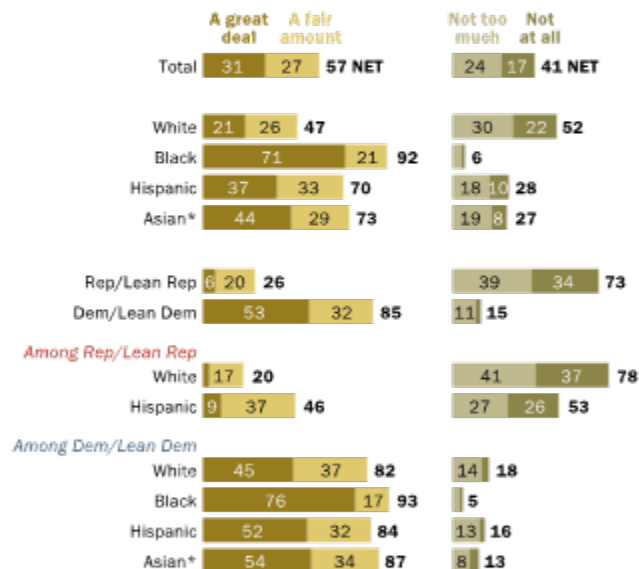
And while smaller majorities of Hispanic (70%) and Asian adults (73%) say White people have advantages over Black people, White adults are divided: 47% say White people benefit at least a fair amount from advantages that Black people do not have, compared with 52% who say they do not benefit much or at all from any advantages.

Nearly three-quarters of Republicans (73%) say that

White people do not benefit much or at all from advantages in society that Black people do not have, while 26% say that White people benefit at least a fair amount from advantages. However, among Republicans, views on whether these advantages exist differ by ethnicity.

### Large majority of Black adults say White people benefit 'a great deal' from societal advantages that Black people do not have

% who say White people benefit \_\_\_\_ from advantages in society that Black people do not have



\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Black and Asian Republicans not shown due to insufficient sample size. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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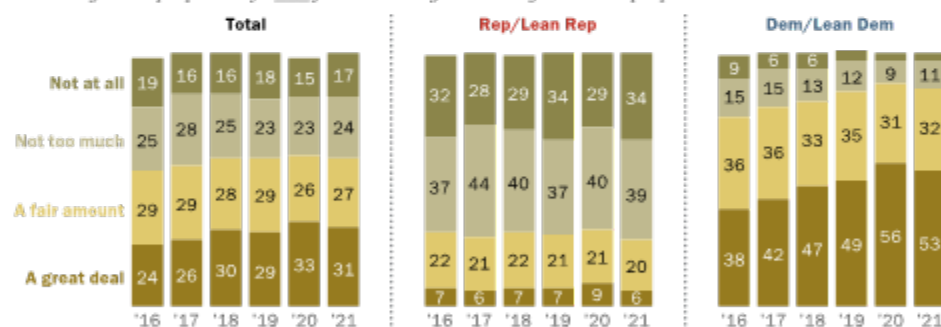
While a large majority of White Republicans (78%) say that White people do not benefit much or at all from advantages Black people do not have, views among Hispanic Republicans are more divided: 46% say White people benefit at least a fair amount, while 53% say that White people do not benefit much or at all from advantages Black people do not have.

Sizable majorities of Democrats in all racial and ethnic groups say that White people benefit at least a fair amount from advantages that Black people do not, but there are differences over whether White people benefit a great deal from these advantages. About three-quarters of Black Democrats say White people benefit a great deal from advantages in society that Black people do not have, compared with smaller shares of Asian (54%), Hispanic (52%) and White Democrats (45%).

The public's views on whether White people benefit from advantages Black people do not possess have changed only modestly since 2016. Yet Democrats increasingly say White people benefit a great deal from these advantages, while Republicans' views are largely unchanged.

### Democrats increasingly say White people benefit 'a great deal' from advantages that Black people do not have; little change in Republicans' opinions

% who say White people benefit \_\_\_\_ from advantages in society that Black people do not have



Note: No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

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Currently, 53% of Democrats say that White people benefit a great deal from societal advantages Black people do not have, up from 38% in 2016. Over the past year, however, there has been little change in Democrats' views.

The shares of Democrats who say White people have a great deal of advantages over Black people have increased among all racial and ethnic sub-groups since 2016. About three-quarters of Black Democrats (76%) say White people benefit a great deal from these advantages today, compared with 68% who said this in 2016. The share of White Democrats who hold this view has also risen sharply – from 26% in 2016 to 45% today.

Views among Republicans have largely remained unchanged over the last five years. A sizable majority of Republicans (73%) continue to say White people benefit only a little or not at all from advantages that Black people lack.

## Acknowledgments

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

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## Methodology

### The American Trends Panel survey methodology

#### Overview

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted from July 8 to July 18, 2021. A total of 10,221 panelists responded out of 11,692 who were sampled, for a response rate of 87%. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 10,221 respondents is plus or minus 1.5 percentage points.

#### Panel recruitment

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 9,942 (50%) agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same

#### American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	1,693
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	988
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	500
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS	9,396	8,778	4,690
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS	5,900	4,720	1,752
June 1 to July 19, 2020; Feb. 10 to March 31, 2021	ABS	3,197	2,812	2,069
	<b>Total</b>	<b>38,211</b>	<b>26,252</b>	<b>11,692</b>

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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method in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Across these three address-based recruitments, a total of 18,493 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 16,310 (88%) agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. Of the 26,252 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 11,692 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.<sup>1</sup> The ATP never uses breakout routers or chains that direct respondents to additional surveys.

### **Sample design**

The overall target population for this survey was non-institutionalized persons ages 18 and older, living in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii.

### **Questionnaire development and testing**

The questionnaire was developed by Pew Research Center in consultation with Ipsos. The web program was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the Ipsos project management team and the Center's researchers. The Ipsos project management team also populated test data which was analyzed in SPSS to ensure the logic and randomizations were working as intended before launching the survey.

### **Incentives**

All respondents were offered a post-paid incentive for their participation. Respondents could choose to receive the post-paid incentive in the form of a check or a gift code to Amazon.com, or could choose to decline the incentive. Incentive amounts ranged from \$5 to \$20, depending on whether the respondent belongs to a part of the population that is harder or easier to reach. Differential incentive amounts were designed to increase panel survey participation among groups that traditionally have low survey response propensities.

### **Data collection protocol**

The data collection field period for this survey was July 8 to July 18, 2021. Postcard notifications were mailed to all ATP panelists with a known residential address on July 8, 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling, 2016. "AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling."



Invitations were sent out in two separate launches: Soft Launch and Full Launch. Sixty panelists were included in the Soft Launch, which began with an initial invitation sent on July 8, 2021. The ATP panelists chosen for the initial soft launch were known responders who had completed previous ATP surveys within one day of receiving their invitation. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking panelists were included in the Full Launch and were sent an invitation on July 9, 2021.

All panelists with an email address received an email invitation and up to three email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. All ATP panelists that consented to SMS messages received an SMS invitation and up to three SMS reminders.

Invitation and reminder dates		
	Soft Launch	Full Launch
Initial invitation	July 8, 2021	July 9, 2021
First reminder	July 12, 2021	July 12, 2021
Second reminder	July 15, 2021	July 15, 2021
Final reminder	July 18, 2021	July 18, 2021

### Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, the Center's researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing clear patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for very high rates of leaving questions blank, as well as always selecting the first or last answer presented. As a result of this checking, three ATP respondents were removed from the survey dataset prior to weighting and analysis.

### Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of selection for their initial recruitment survey (and the probability of being invited to participate in the panel in cases where only a subsample of respondents were invited). The base weights for panelists recruited in different years are scaled to be proportionate to the effective sample size for all active panelists in their cohort. To correct for nonresponse to the initial recruitment surveys and gradual panel attrition, the base weights for all active panelists are calibrated to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table to create a full-panel weight.

For ATP waves in which only a subsample of panelists are invited to participate, a wave-specific base weight is created by adjusting the full-panel weights for subsampled panelists to account for any differential probabilities of selection for the particular panel wave. For waves in which all active panelists are invited to participate, the wave-specific base weight is identical to the full-panel weight.

In the final weighting step, the wave-specific base weights for panelists who completed the survey are again calibrated to match the population benchmarks specified above. These weights are trimmed (typically at about the 1st and 99th percentiles) to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

### Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age x Gender	2019 American Community Survey
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metro/Non-metro	2020 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2019 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	2020 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Frequency of internet use	
Religious affiliation	

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population.

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The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey.

*Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Weighted %</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	10,221		1.5 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	4,833	44	2.2 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	5,139	51	2.2 percentage points
White	7,127		1.7 percentage points
Black	836		4.9 percentage points
Hispanic	1,481		4.7 percentage points
Asian*	343		7.7 percentage points

\*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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**Dispositions and response rates**

<b>Final dispositions</b>	<b>AAPOR code</b>	<b>Total</b>
Completed interview	1.1	10,221
Logged onto survey; broke off	2.12	147
Logged onto survey; did not complete any items	2.1121	66
Never logged on (implicit refusal)	2.11	1,247
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	8
Completed interview but was removed for data quality		3
Screened out		0
<b>Total panelists in the survey</b>		<b>11,692</b>
Completed interviews	I	10,221
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	1,463
Non-contact	NC	8
Other	O	0
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>11,692</b>
AAPOR RR1 = $I / (I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)$		87%

<b>Cumulative response rate</b>	<b>Total</b>
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	12%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	69%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 92	45%
Response rate to Wave 92 survey	87%
<b>Cumulative response rate</b>	<b>3%</b>

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**2021 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL  
WAVE 92 JULY 2021  
FINAL TOPLINE  
JULY 8-18, 2021  
N=10,221**

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ADDITIONAL QUESTION PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****ASK ALL:**

WHADVANT In general, how much do White people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have?

	A great deal	A fair amount	Not too much	Not at all	No answer
July 8-18, 2021	31	27	24	17	1
July 27-Aug 2, 2020	33	26	23	15	1
Sep 3-15, 2019	29	29	23	18	1
Feb 25-Mar 11, 2018 <sup>2</sup>	30	28	25	16	2
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017	26	29	28	16	1
Jun 7-Jul 5, 2016	24	29	25	19	2

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

On a different subject...

**ASK ALL:**

PROG\_RRETRO How much progress, if any, do you think the country has made over the last 50 years toward ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds?

July 8-18  
2021  
48 A lot  
45 A little  
7 None at all  
1 No answer

<sup>2</sup> In Feb 25-Mar 11, 2018 and prior, question was worded: "How much, if at all, do white people benefit from advantages in society that black people do not have?"

**2021 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL  
WAVE 92 JULY 2021  
FINAL TOPLINE  
JULY 8-18, 2021  
N=10,221**

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**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

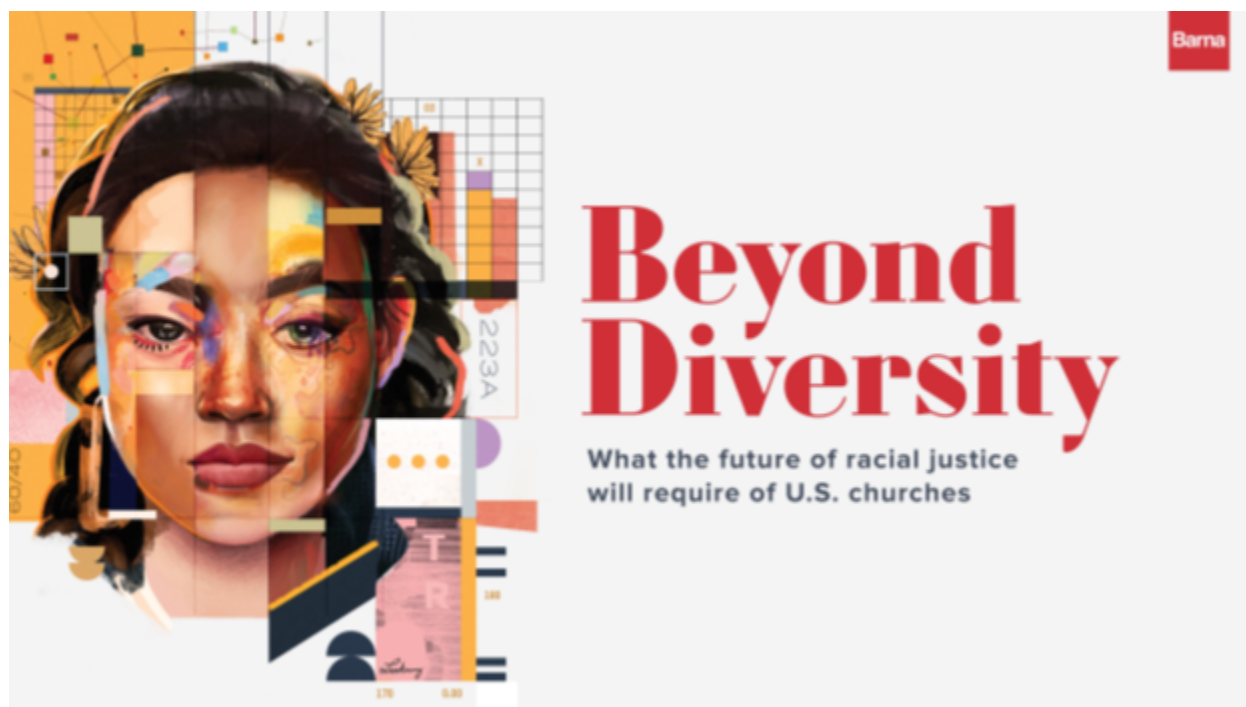
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## The Race, Religion and Justice Project (RRJP) Team



<p><b>Dr. Michael Emerson</b> RRJP PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Professor of Sociology and Dept. Head, University of Illinois at Chicago</p>	<p><b>Brittany Wade</b> RRJP RESEARCH DESIGN/ANALYSIS, INTERVIEWER Founder of Wildfire Research; Researcher for Barna Group</p>
<p><b>Dr. Glenn Bracey</b> RRJP PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Assistant Professor of Sociology at Villanova University</p>	<p><b>Brooke Hempell</b> RRJP RESEARCH DESIGN/ANALYSIS, INTERVIEWER Senior Vice President of Research, Barna Group</p>
<p><b>Chad Brennan</b> RRJP DIRECTOR Director of ReNew Partnerships</p>	<p><b>Daniel Copeland</b> RRJP RESEARCH DESIGN/ANALYSIS, INTERVIEWER Director of Research, Barna Group</p>

**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

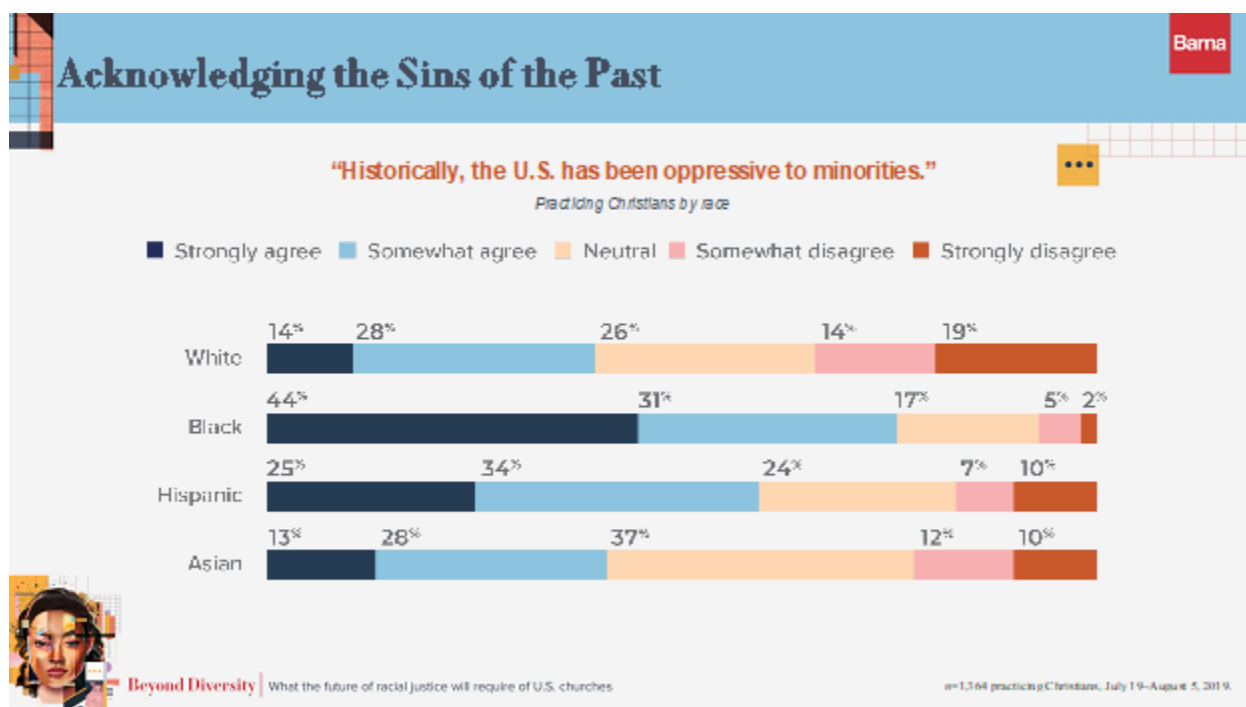


Barna

## Know the Story

**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

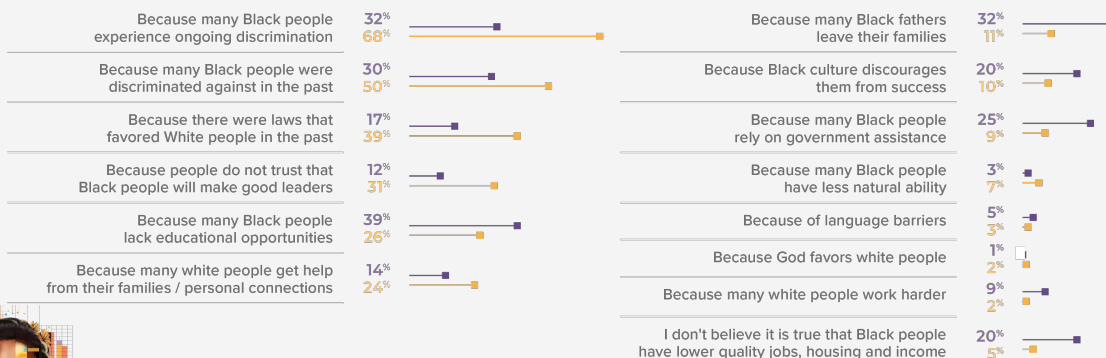


## Many White Christians Misunderstand the Barriers faced by Black Americans

Barna

Based on Statistics, on average Black people have lower quality jobs, housing and income than white people. Why do you think this is?

■ White practicing Christians ■ Black practicing Christians



Beyond Diversity | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

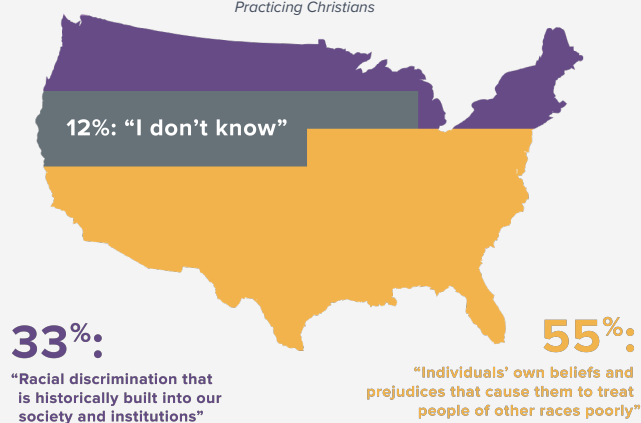
n=978 U.S. practicing Christians, July 19–August 5, 2019.

## Is It Personal or Societal?

Barna

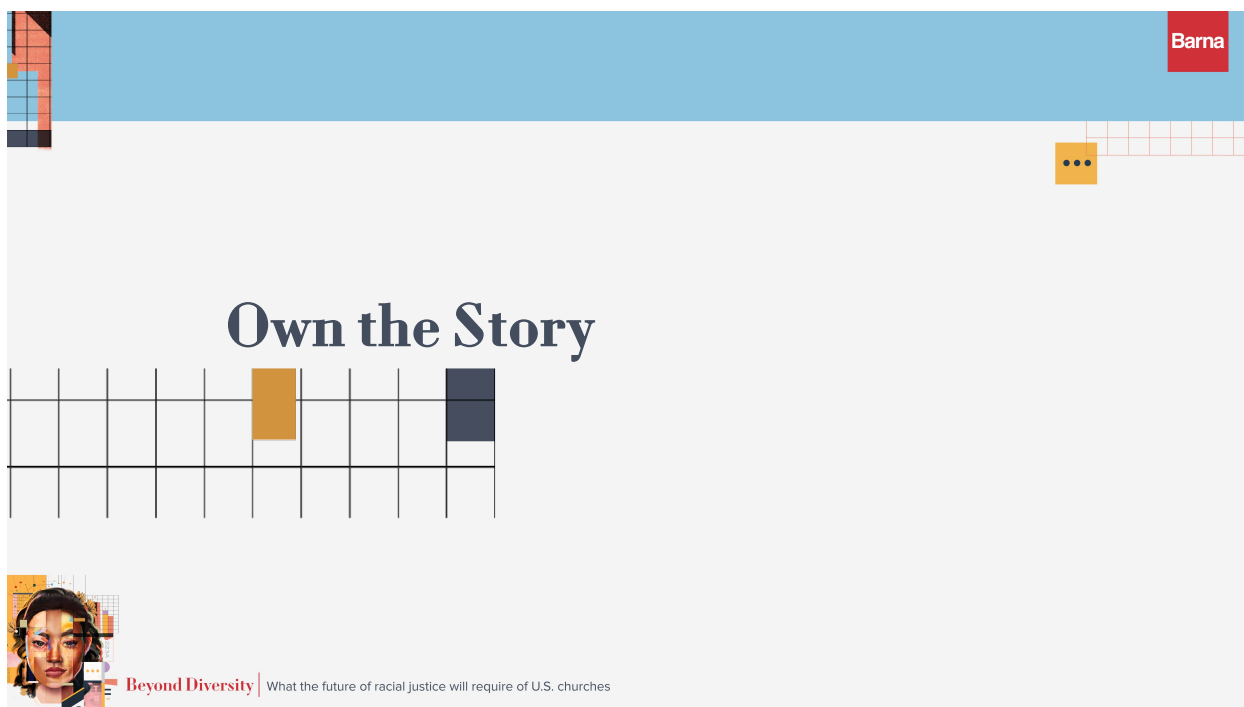
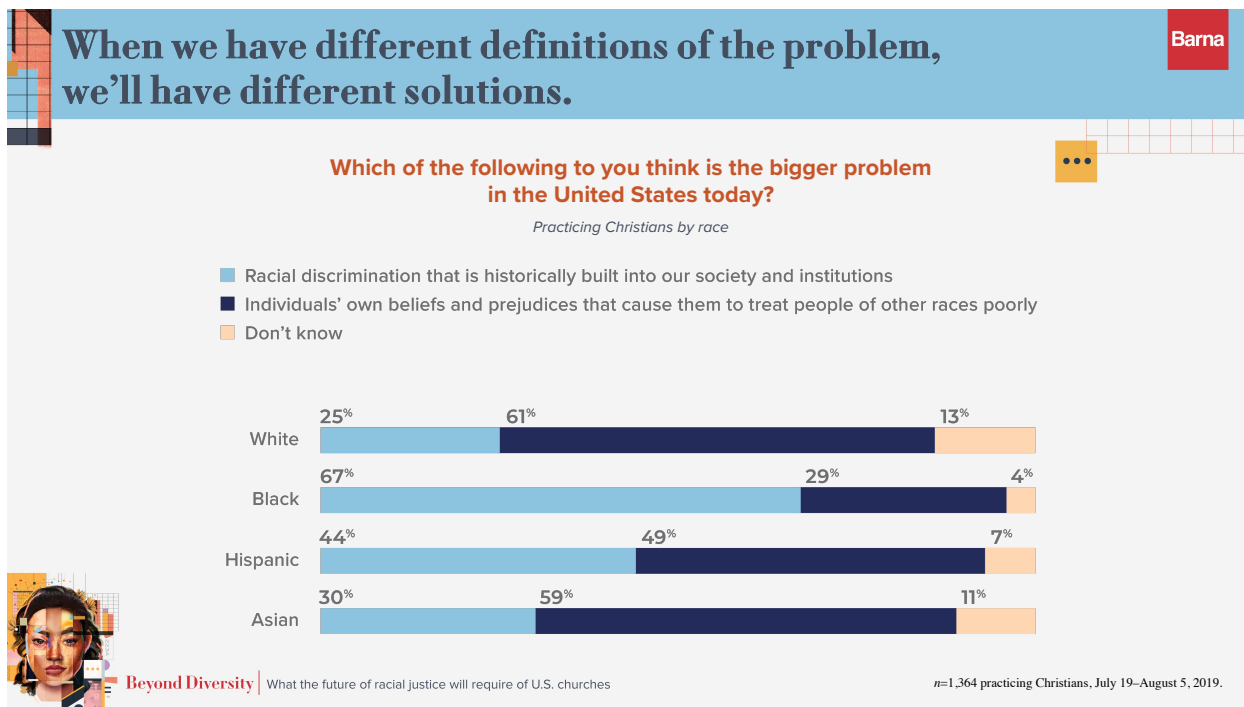
Which of the following do you think is the bigger problem in the United States today?

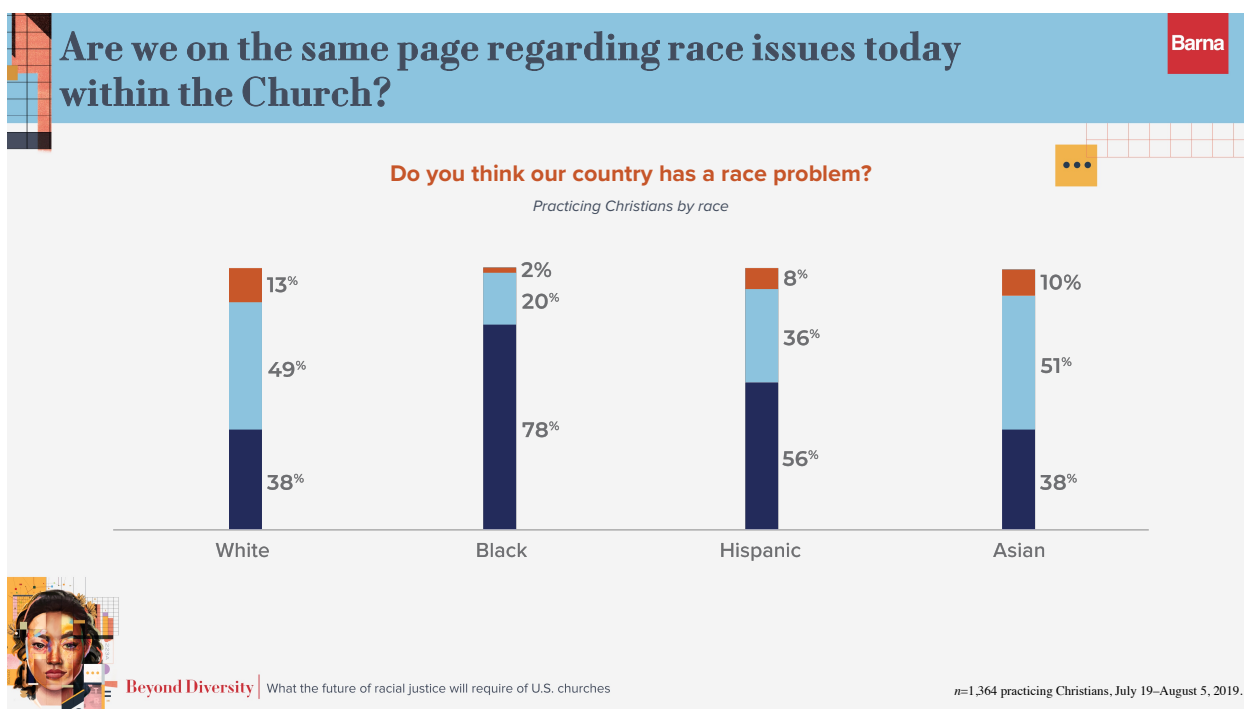
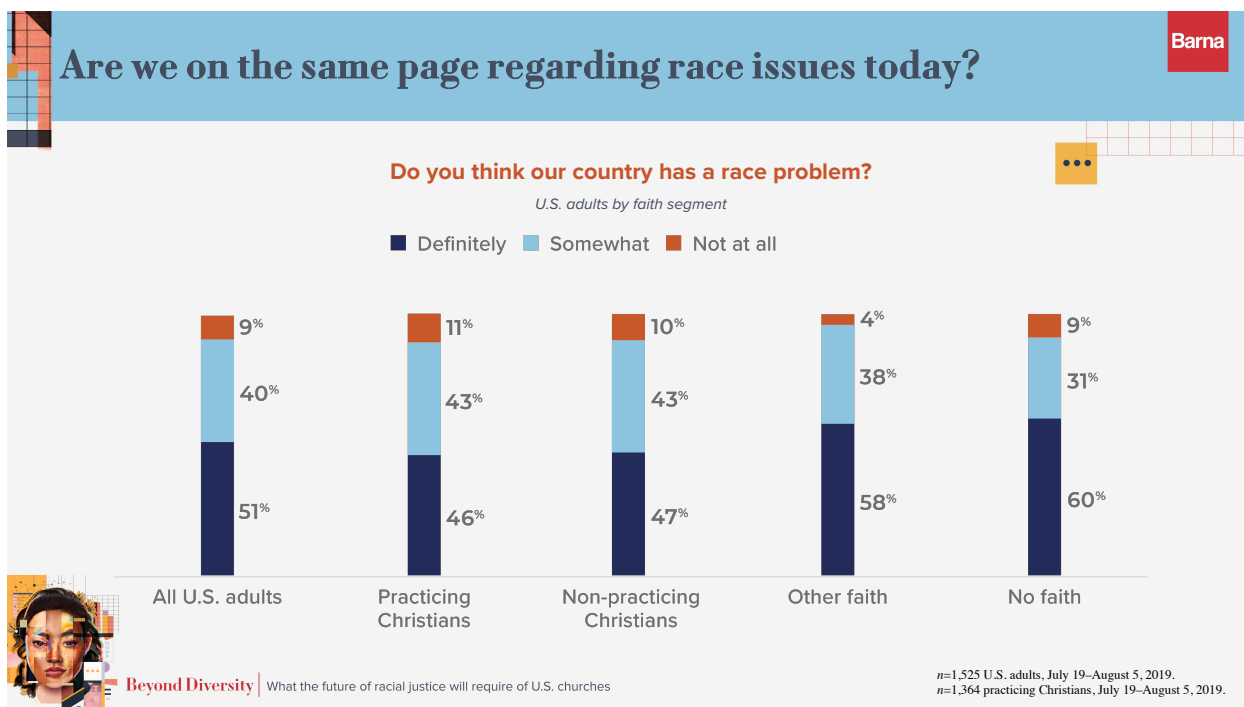
Practicing Christians



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n=1,364 practicing Christians, July 19–August 5, 2019.





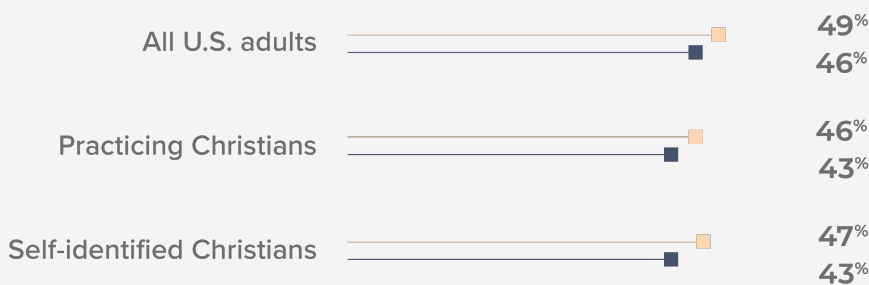
## How has the last year impacted opinions?

Barna

### Do you think our country has a race problem?

% says "definitely"

2019 2020



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n=2,289 U.S. adults, July 19–August 5, 2019.  
n=1,525 U.S. adults, June 18–July 20, 2020.

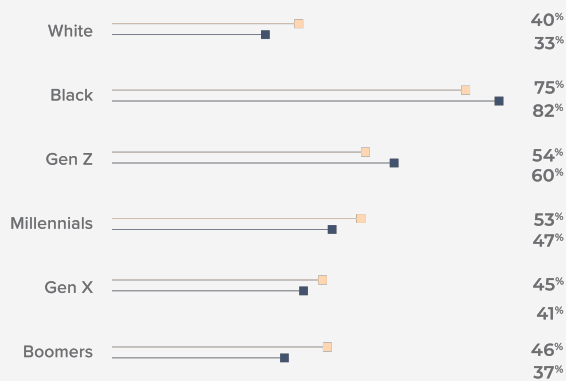
## How has the last year impacted opinions?

Barna

### Do you think our country has a race problem?

Among self-identified Christians, % says "definitely"

2019 2020



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

n=2,289 U.S. adults, July 19–August 5, 2019.  
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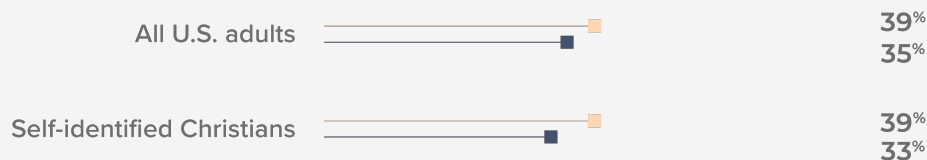
## Motivations are low and dropping among White Christians

Barna

### How motivated are you to address racial injustice?

% says "very motivated" + "motivated"

2019 2020



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n=2,289 U.S. adults, July 19–August 5, 2019.  
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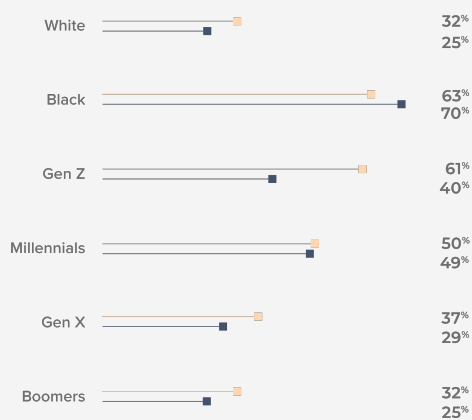
## Motivations are low and dropping among White Christians

Barna

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2019 2020



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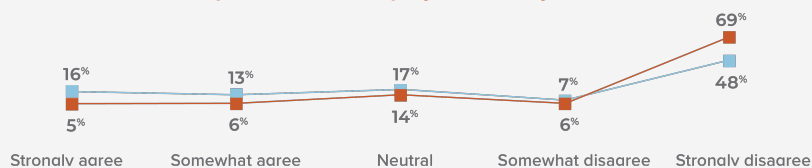
n=2,289 U.S. adults, July 19–August 5, 2019.  
n=1,525 U.S. adults, June 18–July 20, 2020.

## Our churches aren't always a welcoming environment

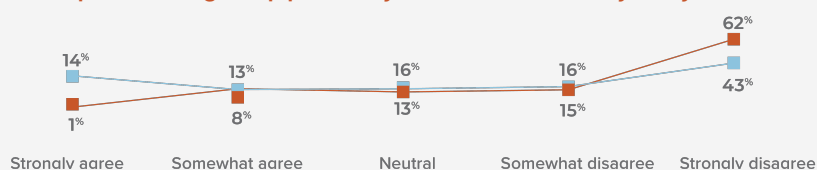
Barna

■ Black practicing Christians in multiracial churches ■ Black practicing Christians in monoracial churches

**"I have experienced racial prejudice in my church."**



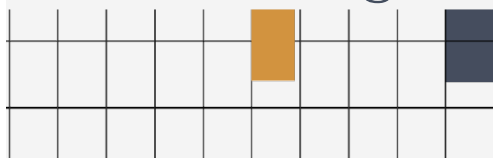
**"I feel pressure to give up part of my racial / ethnic identity in my church."**



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*n*=258 Black practicing Christians, July 19–August 5, 2019.

## Change the Story



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches





“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

Revelation 7:9, NIV



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

## Having a few leaders of color isn't enough to impact opinions



Views on Race in Churches with Completely or Mostly White Leadership	100% white staff	80% white staff
Historically, the United States has been oppressive to minorities (% strongly agree)	13%	13%
Our country “definitely” has a race problem	39%	40%
The bigger problem is racial discrimination that is historically built into our society and institutions	27%	21%
The bigger problem is individuals’ own beliefs and prejudices that cause them to treat people of other races poorly	56%	68%



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*n*=588 Practicing Christians attending a church with at least 80% white leadership

**But when congregants have leaders who look like them—and represent and advocate for them—they have a better experience in multiethnic spaces**

Barna

#### Reflecting the Community: Congregants' Experiences by Racial Resemblance with Leadership

% Strongly + somewhat agree

Unlike

Alike

Varied

I find it difficult to move into leadership positions in my church

30%

20%

23%

I find it difficult to build relationships in my church

26%

15%

20%

I feel pressure to give up part of my race / ethnic identity in my church

24%

7%

14%

I have experienced racial prejudice in my church

25%

10%

18%



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

n=1,364 practicing Christians, July 19–August 5, 2019.

## 4 Steps to Lead Toward Healthier Multiracial Congregations

Barna

### #1 **ACKNOWLEDGE DIFFERENCES IN CULTURES**

FEND OFF ASSIMILATION

KNOWLEDGE INCREASES EMPATHY



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

## 4 Steps to Lead Toward Healthier Multiracial Congregations

Barna

### #1 **ACKNOWLEDGE DIFFERENCES IN CULTURES**

FEND OFF ASSIMILATION  
KNOWLEDGE INCREASES EMPATHY

### #2 **DEAL WITH RACE, NOT JUST CULTURE** ACKNOWLEDGE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

## 4 Steps to Lead Toward Healthier Multiracial Congregations

Barna

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FEND OFF ASSIMILATION  
KNOWLEDGE INCREASES EMPATHY

### #2 **DEAL WITH RACE, NOT JUST CULTURE** ACKNOWLEDGE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

### #3 **SACRIFICE COMFORT**



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches



## 4 Steps to Lead Toward Healthier Multiracial Congregations






- #1 ACKNOWLEDGE DIFFERENCES IN CULTURES**  
 FEND OFF ASSIMILATION  
 KNOWLEDGE INCREASES EMPATHY
- #2 DEAL WITH RACE, NOT JUST CULTURE**  
 ACKNOWLEDGE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM
- #3 SACRIFICE COMFORT**
- #4 PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH**  
 LEADERS MUST MODEL WHAT THEY SAY THEY VALUE



**Beyond Diversity** | What the future of racial justice will require of U.S. churches

### Workshop Discussion:

- The group discussed how some of the key issues surrounding the lack of diversity in upper church leadership are: unfamiliarity and apprehension, historical segregation, the great risk involved with change, systematic racism, and fatigue.
- A few major social and cultural factors surrounding this issue are: (1) the difficulty of finding diverse leaders in a majority-white church, (2) the loss of political agency experienced when moving to a multiethnic church, (3) the need to invest into minority neighborhoods, (4) Christian Nationalism, (5) and the need for safety so minority leaders can lead confidently.
- The group discussed how the main root cause of this NPO is fear. Fear can show itself in different ways, through bias, refusal to self-assess, considering one culture superior to others, and even segregation. To fully resolve this NPO, fear must be addressed.

### Questions Raised:

- How can we help both the Black and white communities get past their initial perceptions of one another?
- Where are diverse leaders found? If we do find a leader from an underrepresented group, how does a church that is striving to be multicultural foster them and help them to grow? Where do Pentecostal and Charismatic churches pull from when they're looking to hire for upper levels of leadership?

- How are we tracing the movements, passions, and ministries of Black churches?
- Are we seeking to help and improve the minority neighborhoods with the same fervor with which we are seeking attendees from these communities?
- Can we build a multicultural church that does not force minority groups to assimilate?
- Why are many congregations fearful of integration?
- How do CEOs in the secular space address these questions of diversity and inclusion?

#### Conclusions Reached:

- To increase diversity at the highest levels, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches may need to consider more outside hiring from churches with a more diverse representation of races.
- Tracing the moves of Black churches can help Pentecostal/Charismatic churches adapt.
- There is a loss of political agency when moving from a Black church to an integrated church that doesn't carry the same political values. Often, it is not possible for the integrated church to speak of politics at all, as it is catering to too many different stances.
- If we desegregate churches but do not also help the minority neighborhoods, we do not make progress.
- Increasing diversity is not about losing one culture, it is about exalting a higher culture—Kingdom culture. To properly address this problem, remember that the gospel takes precedence over culture.
- Leadership needs to be defined across cultures and demographics.
- Fear is at the root of this issue.

## WORKSHOP PHOTOGRAPHS



Summary: Whiteboard "Post It Notes"

Participant 1

1. Preach as if Jesus wasn't white and teach others to do the same.
2. Make all leadership positions equity-based.
3. Pay staff competitive wages to attract talent.

4. Invite minorities to the table for their gifts and talents, not just for racial diversity.
5. Don't question the qualifications of minorities more than white people.

#### Participant 2

1. Open the table to people who are not like-minded.
2. Reimagine church liturgy to resonate with minorities.
3. Redefine high levels of leadership based on something other than white Western models.
4. Celebrate diversity through Hispanic Heritage Month, Black Heritage Month, etc.
5. Throw out what we know as it relates to leadership structures. Start all over again.

#### Participant 3

1. Offer racial education that helps people discover their bias and prejudice.
2. Create an educational film series to teach the biblical position on race and reconciliation.
3. Offer surveys to have a vital sign on where we are as a church.
4. Change the structure of leadership to allow for more diversity.
5. Expand the highest decision-making to be able to represent more of who we are trying to reach.

#### Participant 4

1. Form community partnerships and work together with other churches in this space.
2. Listen to the stories and experiences of minorities who have been prevented from opportunities.
3. Tell stories to every age and stage about racial reconciliation: children, youth, college connect groups, seniors.
4. Exercise boldness and courage in intentionally restructuring the leadership.
5. Create a college-level course for minority leaders to learn how to navigate white structures.
6. Offer a seminar to white pastors and churches on creating space for minorities.
7. Broaden worship by singing songs written by people of color.
8. Help churches reconsider what image they are projecting to the community in every way from website to platforms.



9. Help create safe spaces for minorities in predominantly white churches.

#### Participant 5

1. Start an employment firm to help churches hire diversity in experience and race.
2. Build systems that are conducive to inclusion.
3. Disciple key staff members in how to partner with minorities.
4. Hiring from within: Evaluating congregants and volunteers.
5. Create a program to partner with local churches.
6. Build a local coalition focused on racial reconciliation.
6. Encourage key leaders to build relationships with faithful volunteers.
7. Hire minorities in positions of decision-making.

#### Participant 6

1. Publish educational materials (books or videos) telling the whole story of race, sin, and reconciliation.
2. Encourage people to build a diverse circle of friends.
3. Cast Kingdom vision towards reconciliation.
4. Create a model to facilitate healthy racial reconciliation conversations.
5. Pursue diversity at governance and staff leadership levels.
6. Provide training resources for other pastors and churches.
7. Provide clear pathways for leadership development that are equitable for all.

#### Participant 7

1. Help people remove pride and fear from mindsets.
2. Teach people to see, acknowledge, and appreciate diversity.
3. Create a forum for honest and open conversations.
4. Pay attention to how the church is changing and adjust with it.
5. Create a diversity council.
6. Create a film series that awakens people to their unconscious bias.

## Participant 8

1. Start a membership program with those in leadership and the next generation.
2. Bring in diversity and inclusion experts to speak to leadership and the congregation.
3. Create more opportunities for minorities to lead even if they aren't on staff.
4. Facilitate conversations with those with different experiences related to race.

## Participant 9

1. Form a diversity and inclusion council and offer educational resources to churches.
2. Offer education and counsel to churches: panels, testimonies, education, and film resources.
3. Teach people how to get along and create space for each other.
4. Utilize the difference that each minority brings.
5. Educate people on navigating discomfort in racial conversations.

## ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope this note finds all well with you.

Thank you for participating in my recent "Design Workshop" as a part of my doctoral research for George Fox University. Your contribution was extremely helpful, and I am humbled and grateful that you would take time out of your busy schedule to contribute to this critical conversation. As I mentioned in our time together, my research is focused on "Racially Integrated Leadership in Pentecostal Movements."

The driving question at the heart of my research is: "Why do Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation but often fail to reflect minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches?" The answer to that question, as I have discovered, is complex and layered and can only be understood against the backdrop of scripture, the history of race relations, the origin of the modern Pentecostal movement, white hegemony, and the dynamics of power-sharing in church leadership.

The purpose of our Design Workshop was to uncover three potential solutions that will address the "Need, Problem, or Opportunity" I have chosen to research. I will spend the next year testing those solutions in the interest of selecting one as my final research project.

At the conclusion of our Design Workshop, we agreed on four concepts, and I have elevated the three most practical for your consideration. They are as follows:

- 1) A high-quality documentary incorporating teaching and personal interviews.
- 2) A mentoring/ development program designed to lead to racially integrated leadership.
- 3) A program partnering with local churches.

Would you be willing to give some further thought to one of these three recommendations and fill out the attached "Concept Pitch Worksheet" with your ideas? Feel free to use your family and friends to brainstorm. And, if it doesn't prove too difficult, could you return the attachment to me by November 15?

Thank you for your consideration.

Blessings,

Terry Crist

#### DOCUMENTATION OF ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

##### Researcher

My Design Workshop left me with unanswered questions. In convening a racially diverse group of highly accomplished leaders, most of whom were young, I expected them to be brimming with potential solutions. Unfortunately, they weren't. They were all deeply engaged and passionate about the need for racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice, but put forward very few practical solutions apart from the need for continuing education related to matters of race. In reflection, I wonder if that had to do with their age and stage of life. Do you have any sense as to why younger people might even be less clear on solutions that relate to racial diversity, inclusion, and equity than previous generations?

##### Participant 1

My introduction to civil rights and justice work was right around age 23. I was a young, passionate, Black man. I wanted to make a difference in the world and my connection to justice work was through the writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I emailed his daughter, Bernice King, and she invited me to The King Center in Atlanta. In our first conversation, she said, "I know you want to change the world, but do you know *how* to change it?" I didn't. So, for three years she walked me and my friends through King's philosophy for cultural revolution and it really impacted us on a very

high level, because we were the people like the students and the young people that you're talking about right now. We were hot.

We had strong opinions and were passionate to quickly act upon them.

So, like your description of your workshop participants, at that stage of life, I was slow to strategize. To be honest, we just didn't know how to strategize. And no one taught us how to create a strategy for change. Today, this is something I'm really passionate about because even as we talk through what has happened over the last five years in America, in terms of Black Lives Matter, it started off as a hashtag, and then it grew until it was something the mainstream embraced and finally some policies started being formed. At some point, it had to move from a cry for change to a strategy for change.

We live in a culture of outrage and the immediacy of our ability to respond is it creating a dynamic where people can create a hashtag and protest online and then feel as if the work is done. That's unfortunate. The further we get away from the hard work of the civil rights movement and the more we move into this new world that is sound-bite driven, we've got to dig deeper to create lasting change and not assume that the work is done just because we've said it.

Researcher

At the conclusion of the workshop, there were three ideas that finally emerged as potential solutions.

- 1) Develop a mentorship program for the next generation of ecclesiastical leaders equipping them to engage in the work of racial reconciliation.
- 2) Design a partnership model for churches who desire to collaborate towards racial reconciliation in their communities.
- 3) Produce a film series designed to educate churches on the biblical and sociological basis for racial diversity, inclusion, and equity and the unique history of Pentecostal movements in racial reconciliation.

Would you encourage me to focus on any one of these three ideas and if so, which one and why?

Participant 1

If education was a common theme that came up in your workshop, my question to you is: what role does education continue to play in eradicating bias and prejudice and discrimination and injustice? And why hasn't it worked until this point, or is it working? Perhaps you could focus on educating those you have the greatest influence with. It's not a matter of fixing Black or brown people, which is usually the way people approach education on race matters. You need to understand the experiences and the narratives that Black or brown people face and then use that as the basis for educating others. Also, you could create a space for reverse mentoring and create opportunities for Black or brown people to share their experiences and create partnerships with churches.

## Participant 2

I think the church has a lot to answer for in terms of the division that we're seeing now. If we think about the roots of colonization and slavery, it was based on misunderstood and misapplied Christian principles. And to some degree that continues now under the so-called virtue of being colorblind. We claim that because we are hiding behind misunderstood scriptures. The problem is that if you don't see my color as a Black woman, I'm going to shut down. A lot of Black and brown people don't feel at home in these white charismatic churches because we just don't feel seen, heard, valued, and connected.

When we talk about the issue of education, the question quickly arises: whose version of education? The dominant culture advocates for their education and philosophy as being right, but it's incomplete. Solutions are always based on our own experiences, and I can't give you a solution to experiences that I'm not familiar with. I think there's a disconnect with the kind of education needed.

I would prioritize mentorship over everything, and you could accomplish that using any one of the recommended projects. The reason I would encourage this approach is that I am the product of a one-on-one relationship with someone who walked with me and taught me to be better. This is also something I have done with clients at the corporate level. One-on-one mentoring provides accountability.

In consulting majority-white organizations, I've discovered that the real challenge is often in the middle of the structure. For example, let's say the guy at the top is passionate about changing things, and he's trying to get it downline. A year later, he has delegated things to someone downline who is not so passionate and the energy dissipates or the objective morphs into something different. One-on-one mentoring keeps the objectives clear all throughout the organization and requires a high degree of accountability. The challenge is in making it scale, but I believe it is possible.

## Participant 3

An education-based mentoring approach will only work if there is accountability for that mentorship. Whether this is one-on-one, a collective staff, or a church mentoring another, it needs to be a highly focused, curriculum-based program that should take a year or so to walk through. It needs to begin with history, background, fears, biases, and exactly what reconciliation should look like. I believe that kind of education can create lasting results. You could accomplish this using any one of the three ideas.

## Researcher

The one thing I'm going to take away from this is that it's increasingly clear to me that my final project has to be focused on leveraging change with my peers. My goal is not to teach Black people how to fit into anything because that isn't what is wrong nor is it what is needed. My purpose is to

teach white leaders who are my peers and who are privileged to pastor large churches to change their hearts and their systems so that equity is extended to minority leaders.

# Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report



## INTRODUCTION

This report documents research on three prototypes designed to address the lack of racially integrated leadership in churches, denominations, and movements. The driving question at the heart of this research journey is: “Why do Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation but often fail to reflect minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches?” This research stage involved prototyping three solutions that were presented to three groups of stakeholders to determine which was most viable. The methods employed were: (1) a written survey with a diverse group of college students as respondents, (2) a written survey with a diverse group of pastors as respondents, and (3) personal interviews conducted with three experts in the field of racial diversity, inclusion, and equity.

## PROTOTYPE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The first prototype was to develop a mentorship program for the next generation of pastoral leaders equipping them to engage in the work of racial reconciliation and the advancement of racial equity within the churches they will eventually serve. This research involved a survey of ten Generation Z Bible College students, with the following: (1) an outline of a biblical training course on racial diversity, inclusion, and equity, (2) a definition of the results that will be achieved through this mentoring program, (3) a proposed schedule for a one-year program, (4) a written “racial reconciliation covenant” committing them to apply what is learned in this program to their future pastoral leadership.<sup>103</sup>

The second prototype was to design a partnership model for churches that desire to collaborate toward racial reconciliation and the empowerment of minority leadership in their congregations. This research involved a survey of six pastors related to their racial sensitivity, leadership diversity, and willingness to educate their congregations on racial reconciliation and minority promotion efforts. A twenty-question survey was provided to the participants.<sup>104</sup>

The third prototype was to produce a film series designed to educate churches on the biblical and sociological basis for racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and the unique history of Pentecostal movements in racial reconciliation efforts. This research involved a survey of three experts on the potential of changing mindsets through the delivery of biblical content virtually, primarily through the medium of film and television.<sup>105</sup>

## NPO STATEMENT

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<sup>103</sup> See Appendix 1 for proposed biblical training course and Gen Z survey and responses.

<sup>104</sup> See Appendix 2 for pastoral survey and responses.

<sup>105</sup> See Appendix 3 for biblical training course and expert interviews.

Most Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have an underrepresentation of minority leadership at the highest levels of decision-making within their ecclesiastical structures.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION

Is biblical instruction sufficient in and of itself to address and resolve the problem of racial inequity in the leadership structures of churches, denominations, and movements, or is something more needed to change racialized mindsets?

#### BENCHMARK

The most viable prototype raises awareness of the lack of opportunities for minority leadership in churches, denominations, and movements, and it provides a pathway to increasing engagement through biblical instruction in a context-sensitive manner.

#### PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

The first participant group comprised a diverse group of Bible College students, including three Black females, two Black males, one Latina, two white males, and two white females.

The second participant group comprised of six pastors, including a mixed-race couple pastoring an urban church, a white pastor in a working-class neighborhood, a Latino pastor in an economically depressed community, a white pastor in an affluent suburb, and a Black pastor in an urban context.

The third participant group comprised three “diversity, equity, and inclusion” experts. This group included a Senior Diversity and Inclusion Adviser for the United Nations, a Policy, Strategy, and Design Advisor in the UK Home Office, and a Senior Pastor who serves as a Racial Diversity Consultant for a leading Christian executive placement firm.

#### SUMMARY

My conclusion is that emerging generations (Generation Z and Alpha) hold the greatest potential to change racial inequities within institutions over time. Having been raised in a global society, emerging generations have an innate ability to see the world through the lens of a diverse community in which everyone should have agency. Though emerging generations are influenced by their own confirmation biases, their views are less entrenched than their predecessors, and they seem willing to allow them to be challenged by those who advocate for a fair and just society.

My views of the problem and corresponding solution have expanded through my research. I began this semester believing that those who lead large churches, denominations, and movements hold the power to affect change instead of seeing the tipping point in the next generation of leaders. Though I will continue to advocate for structural change in large churches, denominations, and movements, investing in the next generation is the most effective way to influence generational transformation.

Emerging generations value high-tech and high-touch connections. As digital natives, they prefer to learn at their own pace and in the comfort of their own space through virtual delivery systems. Conversely, they crave physical companionship and the emotional satisfaction of belonging to a community. Further, they are committed to continuous improvement, frequent feedback, and highly interactive relationships with mentors who have proven themselves in any given field. As a result of these findings, my final project will offer a synthesized program incorporating on-site and on-demand instruction and mentoring to transform mindsets related to racial inequities in the leadership structures of churches, denominations, and movements. I will synthesize prototypes one and two into one final project.

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH ESSAY ON THE EMERGING SOLUTION

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of racial inequity remains unresolved in the U.S. despite increasing efforts by corporations, academic institutions, and even the faith community. In recent years, experts in diversity, inclusion, and equity have proposed a wide range of solutions with varying degrees of effectiveness. Still, the problem remains.<sup>106</sup> This essay explores whether biblical instruction related to special creation, the *imago Dei*, hamartiology, redemption, and the racial reconciliation of the new creation is sufficient to address the problem of racial inequity in ecclesiastical structures. Although the answer might seem surprising to biblicists,<sup>107</sup> there is sufficient evidence to support the notion that biblical instruction alone is ineffective in changing racialized mindsets unless it is intentionally contextualized in culture, time, and place. Transformation in individuals and communities occurs when biblical teaching is combined with a context-sensitive sociological approach that addresses the setting in which inequity exists.

### ANALYSIS OF APPROACHES

Antiracism training has gained prominence in corporations and academic institutions following the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent nationwide protests against systemic injustice.

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<sup>106</sup> D.E. Lund and R. Paul, "Antiracist Education," *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education*, (Sage Publications: 2009), 48.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963992.n28>

<sup>107</sup> Michael Bird, "What is Biblicism?" *Patheos*, August 15, 2020.  
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/euangelion/2020/08/what-is-biblicism/>

Bird defines "Biblicism" as "an approach that regards the Bible as the exclusive source for formulating Christian belief and practice with explicit rejection of the need for historical background, garnering wisdom from wider tradition, recognizing the influence of one's cultural location, and attaining insights from out-group perspectives **even as** it unconsciously replaces historical background with revered historical figures, rehearses its own tradition, reifies certain cultural values, and reinforces in-group boundaries."

However, there is a noticeable unease surrounding antiracism training within the broader evangelical community, encompassing Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

In a 1985 research paper, author and activist A. Sivanandan traces the origins and evolution of antiracism training in the U.S., which began in the late 1960s. This training emerged in response to the turmoil in Black communities and the opposition of minority groups to participating in the Vietnam War. As a result, the Department of Defense developed racial awareness training as a means to disassociate racism from the Black struggle and present the solution to racism as a matter of managing interpersonal relationships. Consequently, from its inception, antiracism training has been focused on altering individual attitudes through therapeutic methods within the context of a secular society, rather than addressing structural inequalities.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the broader trend in society in the ensuing years, there is a conspicuous absence of antiracism training within evangelical churches in the early 21st century. In churches and denominations where racial division is viewed as a problem, it is rarely seen as structural or systemic, and little effort is invested in bringing about institutional changes. Instead, many pastors continue to believe that the Bible supports racial “color blindness,” a concept that they think is sufficient to negate racism. Further, many churches have an overtly negative view of antiracism training. The reaction toward antiracism training often depends on how accepting the church or denomination is to secular and sociological influences on their ideology, polity, and praxis.

In 2011, D. Clark Harrell conducted a study on the impact of multicultural education and biblical instruction on college students.<sup>109</sup> Harrell found that “students educated in multicultural and biblical learning are more motivated and better able to participate in a complex, heterogeneous society.” Further, he concludes, “diversity leads to a broader range of perspectives, different perspectives, and confronts stereotypes.”<sup>110</sup> Other researchers have challenged this view, and I will review their findings in this essay.

The influence of biblical teachings on race relations has been positive throughout history. As demonstrated by Terence Keel, Christian beliefs about history, human nature, and the natural world have significantly shaped modern scientific understandings of race, particularly since the Enlightenment era. Specifically, he notes that three Christian ideas “have shaped the assumptions

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<sup>108</sup> A. Sivanandan, “RAT and the degradation of black struggle,” *Race & Class*. 1985;26 (4) :1-33. doi:[10.1177/030639688502600401](https://doi.org/10.1177/030639688502600401)

<sup>109</sup> D. Clark Harrell, “Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice,” EdD Dissertation (Trevecca Nazarene University: 2011), 51.

<sup>110</sup> Harrell, “Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice,” 15. See also American Council on Education, *Does Diversity Make a Difference? Three Research Studies on Diversity in the Classroom* (Washington DC: American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors, 2000).

and reasoning styles of early modern and contemporary scientific theorists of race"<sup>111</sup>: common human descent, the ontological uniqueness of human life, and the longevity of racial traits.<sup>112</sup>

Shalyse Iseminger has explored how a "hidden curriculum" can be communicated in Predominantly White Christian Organizations (PWCOs) through a general form of biblical instruction. She argues that the introduction of multicultural education is needed for PWCOs "to function as sites of combatting racism."<sup>113</sup> At issue are the unconscious biases present in Christian leaders and educators and how they influence the way in which biblical material is taught and applied. This does not reflect any inadequacy within the biblical content, as the bias lies within the educator.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Harrell's research focused on exploring the impact of cultural and biblical education on reducing racial prejudice among college students. The study found that combining a sociological and historical perspective to examine diverse cultures, along with biblical education, can have a positive effect on reducing racism among students. The research also demonstrated the effectiveness of emphasizing diversity in institutional policies, as well as in the research and teaching practices of faculty. The study concluded that providing students with opportunities to engage with racial and multicultural issues through both curricular and extracurricular activities is linked to cognitive development benefits.

Harrell's study involved three groups of first-year students from a southern Christian college. The control group did not participate in any multicultural or biblical education classes, while the second group exclusively took multicultural courses. The third group took courses that addressed race from a biblical perspective for one semester. The results indicated a significant difference in tolerance scores between the control group and the other two groups. Both the multicultural studies and biblical studies groups had significantly higher tolerance scores than the control group. However, there was no significant difference in tolerance scores between the multicultural studies and biblical studies groups.

According to Harrell's findings, multicultural studies and biblical studies could have a similar degree of effectiveness in influencing racial mindsets. However, he also discovered that "the mean Intercultural Tolerance Scale" total score of the biblical studies group reflected the most significant

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<sup>111</sup> Terence Keel, "The Religious Pursuit of Race: Christianity, Modern Science, and the Perception of Human Difference," PhD Dissertation (Harvard University: 2012); iii; [https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9572089/Keel\\_gsas.harvard\\_0084L\\_10471.pdf;sequence=1](https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9572089/Keel_gsas.harvard_0084L_10471.pdf;sequence=1).

<sup>112</sup> Keel, "The Religious Pursuit of Race," iii.

<sup>113</sup> Shalyse Iseminger, "Converting White Christian Congregations to Sites of Anti-Racism," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 1.16 (April 2020): 1.

change. These scores, established at the beginning of the semester, were significantly different at the end of the semester. Thus, these scores “increased significantly after the participants took the Biblical education class, indicating significantly higher tolerance levels towards intercultural attitudes.”<sup>114</sup>

Similarly, Harrell used the Universal Orientation Scale to measure students’ progress on racial, equality, and equity issues. He found the scores on this scale were significantly higher after the participants had taken the biblical studies class, indicating “more positive attitudes towards inclusion and diversity.” He concludes, “the Biblical group had significantly lower racism scores than the control group at the end of the semester.”<sup>115</sup>

Harrell also utilized the Pro-Black/Anti-Black Racial Attitudes Questionnaire with his samples and discovered no significant difference in the racial attitudes between the control and multicultural groups. There was, however, a substantial difference between those two groups and the biblical studies group, with the latter scoring significantly higher.<sup>116</sup>

In summary, Harrell found in his study that multicultural education and biblical education courses are both effective in reducing racism, prejudice, and biases.

These results reflect the mindset of Christian college students in a classroom setting. However, what happens when young adults receive biblical instruction in churches post-college? The research results are mixed.

One study reviewed by Harrell concluded that “church attendance has a complicated curvilinear relationship to prejudice: the more faithful attendees, those who attend church weekly, are less prejudiced than those who attend often but not quite every week.”<sup>117</sup>

This argument aligns with a 2019 study from the Cato Institute conducted by Emily Ekins. Elkin states, “Trump voters who attend church regularly are more likely than nonreligious Trump voters

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<sup>114</sup> Harrell, “Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice,” 125.

<sup>115</sup> Harrell, “Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice,” 126, 128-29.

<sup>116</sup> Harrell, “Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice,” 140-41.

<sup>117</sup> Harrell, “Effects of Multicultural Education Courses and Biblical Education Courses in Changing Attitudes and Prejudice,” 54.

to have warmer feelings toward racial and religious minorities, to be more supportive of immigration and trade," and also "to be more concerned about poverty."<sup>118</sup>

A study by the Cato Institute investigated the relationship between conservative views on different racial groups and the frequency of church attendance. The study hypothesized that the correlation between biblical teachings and church attendance would have a positive impact on the racial inclusiveness of conservatives towards Black people, Hispanics, and Asians. The results showed that among conservative voters, favorable views towards Black people increased from 48% among those who never attend church to 73% among those who attend church more than once a week, a 25-point increase.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, the study found a correlation between frequent church attendance and increased acceptance of other races among conservatives. In contrast, conservative voters who were not religious were three times more likely to consider their white racial identity as "extremely important" to them (26%) compared to churchgoing conservative voters (9%).<sup>120</sup>

Ekins offers a couple of explanations for why attending weekly worship services caused conservatives to be more "moderate." First, biblical teaching instructs people to treat others with kindness and compassion. Second, "religious participation instills in churchgoers a sense of personal agency and a belief in a just world. By extension, they may feel less inclined to blame 'out-groups' for the challenges they face."<sup>121</sup> This notion of taking personal responsibility to create a better society empowers many conservatives to work towards racial reconciliation.

The conclusions of the Cato study have been met with criticism from other researchers, including Robert Jones, the founder and CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute and the author of "White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity."<sup>122</sup> Jones conducted surveys that utilized a "Racism Index" to gauge perceptions of structural injustice and the results indicated that white Christians had higher median scores on the Racism Index compared to non-religious whites, suggesting that religious affiliation and identity play a crucial role in shaping racist attitudes. Jones concluded that white Christian subgroups differ primarily in degree, with white evangelical Protestants having the highest median score (0.78) on the Racism Index, followed closely by white Catholics (0.72) and white mainline Protestants (0.69).<sup>123</sup> Even after controlling for

<sup>118</sup> Emily Ekins, "Religious Trump Voters: How Faith Moderates Attitudes about Immigration, Race, and Identity," *Cato Institute* (February 5, 2019); <https://www.cato.org/public-opinion-brief/religious-trump-voters-how-faith-moderates-attitudes-about-immigration-race>.

<sup>119</sup> Ekins, "Religious Trump Voters."

<sup>120</sup> Ekins, "Religious Trump Voters."

<sup>121</sup> Ekins, "Religious Trump Voters."

<sup>122</sup> Jones, "Racism Among White Christians Is Higher Than Among the Nonreligious."

<sup>123</sup> Jones, "Racism Among White Christians Is Higher Than Among the Nonreligious."



demographic characteristics such as political affiliation, education levels, and region, the correlation between racist attitudes and white Christian identity remained significant.

According to research conducted by R. Khari Brown of Wayne University, worship attendance among white Christians is associated with an increased support for racial segregation.<sup>124</sup> This is due to the fact that secular and younger adults, who attend worship services less frequently, tend to be more racially progressive. Brown contends that higher church attendance is linked to a reduction in opposition to racial segregation, and that racial attitudes are more closely tied to age than to church attendance and biblical instruction.

Although there are some variations between the research of Harrell, Iseminger, Elkins, Jones, and Brown, it is evident that churches, denominations, and movements have a long way to go in changing racialized mindsets. Despite the good intentions, much of the ongoing inequities exist because of unintended learning outcomes. For instance, when predominantly white churches use biblical instruction to support, ignore, or diminish racism, it reinforces white normativism. On the other hand, when we avoid the issue of race, we allow structural inequity to continue from one generation to the next. According to Iseminger, "knowledge of how White people of the past intertwined racism with Christianity is crucial to understanding the current social divide between Blacks and Whites." This is particularly valid "if Christian congregations are to be a potential space where that divide can be overcome."<sup>125</sup> Therefore, biblical teaching on race must be combined with a truthful assessment of history and a sensitivity to the context in which the principles are to be applied.

## CONCLUSION AND SYNTHESIS

While biblical education and church attendance cannot guarantee the transformation of racialized mindsets, they are most effective when coupled with a biblically consistent, contextualized approach. When biblical instruction is combined with a context-sensitive sociological approach that addresses the setting in which inequity exists, there is a real possibility for transforming individual mindsets and uprooting structural inequities.

### MOST VIABLE PROTOTYPE

The Most Viable Prototype incorporates elements of prototypes one and three. Lasting change will be most effectively accomplished by working with the next generation of pastoral leaders who have an innate orientation towards diversity, inclusion, and equity. I plan to achieve this through the virtual delivery of biblical teaching and biblically consistent sociological training materials. Thus, my final project will be a film series designed to educate on the biblical and sociological basis for

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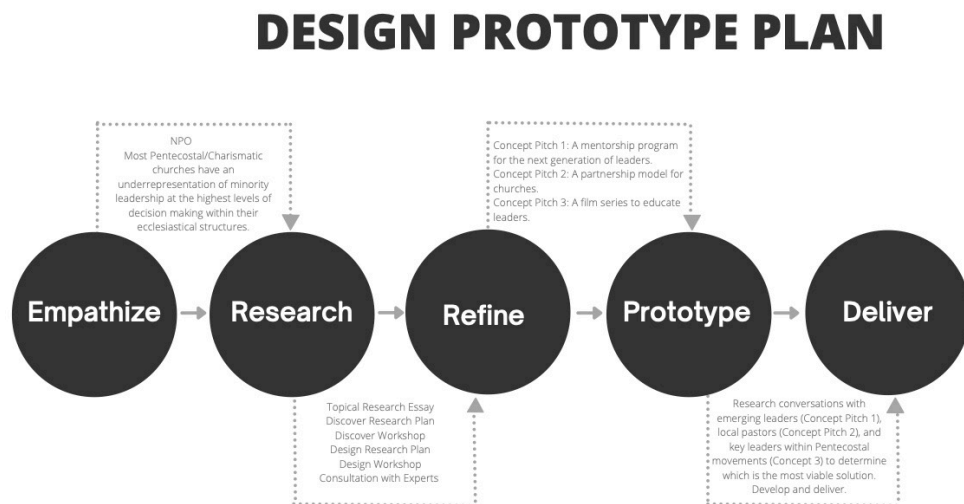
<sup>124</sup> R. Khari Brown, "The Connection between Worship Attendance and Racial Segregation Attitudes among White and Black Americans," *Religions* (2011): 277; <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/2/3/277/htm>.

<sup>125</sup> Iseminger, "Converting White Christian Congregations to Sites of Anti-Racism," 5.

racial diversity, inclusion, equity, and the unique history of Pentecostal movements in racial reconciliation efforts. This series will be used for mentoring young adults, coaching staff and leadership teams, and for broadcast purposes.

## APPENDICES

**FIGURE 1: DESIGN PROTOTYPE PLAN**



## Appendix 1

### Lesson 1: Creation: Race, Ethnicity, Culture, and the *imago Dei*

- This session would lay a foundation for human identity, cover the *imago Dei*, and introduce basic terms related to racial reconciliation and racial justice.

### Lesson 2: Fall, Flood, Nations, and the Tower of Babel

- This session would lay an understanding of a more robust hamartiology. It would describe how the Fall has had both vertical and horizontal impacts on our relationships. I would also survey some of the destructive teachings on race that have been used to promote white supremacy such as the Sons of God and daughters of Eve, Ham, and the mark of Cain.

### Lesson 3: The Exodus, Conquest, and the Gibeonites

- This session would address the genocidal infanticide in Egypt and also deal with the tough issues of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. This could also study Israel's sins against the Gibeonites.

#### Lesson 4: Racial Injustice and the Exile

- This session would show the interwoven relationship between idolatry, immorality, and injustice and how these were the grounds for the Exile.

#### Lesson 5: Ethnic Makeup of the New Testament World

- This session would identify the ethnic makeup of the first century and would focus on the relationship between Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, Romans, and "Barbarians."

#### Lesson 6: Jesus and the "Outsider"

- This session would highlight Jesus' interactions with those who were not Jewish, such as the Samaritan woman, the centurion, and many others.

#### Lesson 7: Race in the New Testament World

- This session would focus on the ethnic diversity which existed in the New Testament Church as a model for our relationships today.

#### Lesson 8: Race and "the Gospel"

- This session would combine Jesus' Kingdom teachings of the gospel reaching every ethnic group with how Ephesians 2 combines individual reconciliation with God and reconciliation between people.

#### Lesson 9: Race and The Church

- This session would focus on the ethnic tensions in the early Church and the mission to the Gentiles.

#### Lesson 10: Race and Modern Pentecostalism Part 1

- This session would tell the story of the modern Pentecostal movement beginning at Azusa Street and would highlight the efforts to combat racism in the early days of the twentieth century.

#### Lesson 11: Race and Modern Pentecostalism Part 2

- This session would focus on the development of modern Pentecostal denominations and how they fractured along racial lines soon after the birth of the movement.

#### Lesson 12: Racial Reconciliation and the New Creation

- This session would highlight prophecies of every tongue, tribe, and nation worshipping God and focus on Revelation and the future fulfillment of these prophecies.

#### Lesson 13: Racial Reconciliation until the New Creation

- This session would discuss contemporary issues and engage how we live in the already/not-yet as ambassadors of reconciliation for the already/still-coming Kingdom.

## Appendix 2

### GENERATION Z SURVEY

Respondent 1:

#### Section 1

1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *Yes! What I would add is modern day examples and depending on if this program is built for next generational leaders in the US, I think there should be more US cultural history or examples on how the church today has been built on white supremacy cultural. This is a great outline, learning the theology and bible history is important to racial reconciliation but having modern, every day examples will also help. I feel like its missing the "how do I apply this today"*

2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *Yes. The course is great but people need to see how it applies to their daily lives.*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *You don't know unless you try! There are so many factors that play into that. So I think multiple people should facilitate of all different races. While learning about the history of the bible and theologically point of view there also needs to be a cultural history part. Nothing we change unless we understand how it was built. If its being facilitated by a white man (who holds the most privilege in the world) pastor then I do think that the efforts or work need to be shown almost has evidence that they are on the journey as well. This is also meant for all races but if talking about predominantly white churches it would be beneficial for a white person to be teaching white people if they have done the work and research and rely on others to help fill in gaps.*

#### Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.

2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.

3) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *Those are GREAT results! Just make sure the outline reflects that 1<sup>st</sup> result.*

### Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? If not, what would be the ideal length of a mentoring program? *I have so many follow up questions to consider....How many people are in the group? Will there be homework? I honestly think twice a month would work better. Because this is a journey and there needs to be time for unpacking, unlearning and processing. 2 hours a month I don't think allows for questions and learning.*

### Section 4

Each participant will make a written "racial reconciliation covenant" committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one's life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *Lifelong journey and commitment. Lead with love. Understanding. Willing to try*

*Willingness to be wrong. Not knowing all the answers*

Respondent 2:

### Section 1

1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *Yes, it looks great. I love how each lesson will dive into different aspects biblically.*

2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *Yes, I think it would be great to add. Otherwise, people may apply it differently based on their culture.*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *No*

### Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

- 1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.
- 2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.
- 3) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *Looks good. Not sure of what more to add.*

### Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? *Yes, I believe so.*

### Section 4

Each participant will make a written "racial reconciliation covenant" committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one's life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *Standing up for Minorities (Brothers & Sisters. Treating Minorities/everyone equally as Jesus did. Reach out to the minorities around you & know their story (Show them you care) Correcting/ calling out those who do not treat Minority's fairly. (In a Professional manner).*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *I think it would vary. Because I do think any race could teach it, but will each trainer/facilitator have personal experiences with racial issues etc. & would they be able to answer certain questions centered on minority's/racial issues? (I hope that makes sense.)*

*I'm sure there's more but this is what I thought of :)*

Respondent 3:

### Section 1

1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *Yes*
2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *I believe so, it would be helpful in my opinion.*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *No*

## Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

- 1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.
- 2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.
- 3) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *I think the participants for this mentoring program should be diverse.*

## Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? *Yes I think committing once a month for a year in a mentorship program is a sufficient amount of time. That is something I would apply to my schedule and very manageable.*

## Section 4

Each participant will make a written "racial reconciliation covenant" committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one's life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *It could be a value and/or commitment from each lesson.*

Respondent 4:

## Section 1

1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *I believe this course is comprehensive. The lessons appear to be dense and complex enough for those looking to go into a deeper study, but simple enough for those with no background at all related to this content.*
2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *Yes, I believe this could benefit the course.*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *Unfortunately, I do feel the race/ethnicity will have some bearing on how the content is received. I would even argue that it could be unwise not to have 'some' minorities represented in teaching and facilitating this course. Now, this does NOT mean all those facilitating need to be of a specific race or ethnicity, but it is important to be aware of how an all-white or even all-black facilitator could be perceived. There should be some balance among those represented.*

## Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

- 1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.
- 2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.
- 2) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *I can't think of anything else that would need to be considered. This is great.*

## Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual toward racial reconciliation efforts? *Yes, I believe this is both a realistic time frame and manageable.*

## Section 4

Each participant will make a written "racial reconciliation covenant" committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one's life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *Biblically Accurate, Culturally Relevant & Applicable, Integrity, Honest, Authentic, Teachable, Holy-Spirit Led.*

Respondent 5:

## Section 1



1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *Yes. I think this course is very comprehensive, the only thing that could make it more relatable is maybe adding some examples from more recent times is correlation with the bible examples.*

2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *Yes*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *Yes. I believe by someone of white race facilitate this training it will help to influence others who are not of color help to interact and advocate.*

## Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.

2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.

2) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *A safe space to express your thoughts and feelings on racial injustices and racial reconciliation in the church*

## Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? *I think this is good because it gives enough time for the message to reflect in daily actions and then a refresher with more content.*

## Section 4

Each participant will make a written "racial reconciliation covenant" committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one's life and pastoral leadership. What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *These are good covenants to keep.*

Respondent 6:

## Section 1

1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *I feel like yes. I like that it starts from creation and the way God made us and explores straight through to what's happening in the world today.*

2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *Yes! Especially in the last subject. We can't be focusing on the past all the time.*

3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *I think it does. Racial reconciliation is about race and as humans, we can be prejudice. I think it would be helpful to have a variety of ethnicities to teach these sessions to give their insight/perspective, essentially adding a more Kingdom culture.*

## Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.

2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.

2) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *I would hope that people who do this program would not be afraid to talk about it with others. I can't think of anything else at this time.*

## Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? *No. First, if it's only once a month, at least a 3 ½ hour block would give you a better chance to truly explore the topic and dig deeper into meaningful discussion. (Also allowing for a 15-minute bathroom break.) Secondly, if it's a lifelong journey, where's the built-in accountability? There should be some sort of follow-up after the 12-month program ends. If you want TRUE retention, people need accountability and a reminder from time to time to help guide them and keep them focused on THIS subject versus any other initiative in the world. (For example, vowing to surrender your life to Christ is/isn't a one-time choice... and things like weekly church, weekly connect groups, daily bible studies/devotions, apps are all good resources to aid in facilitating growth to the original vow.)*

## Section 4

Each participant will make a written “racial reconciliation covenant” committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one’s life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *“I vow to view others as God views them and... [incorporate results of Section 2: be emotionally resilient to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice, know and understand the biblical position and help communicate to others, and committing to a lifelong journey to learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective]. Then asking the candidate to add something personal/specific to their heart/calling/passion in surrounding racial reconciliation in the church.*

Respondent 7:

#### Section 1

1. Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *Yes*
2. Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *Yes*
3. Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? *No*

#### Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

- 1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.
- 2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.
- 2) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *Better understand of generational trauma caused by racial injustice*

#### Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? *Yes.*

#### Section 4

Each participant will make a written “racial reconciliation covenant” committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one’s life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment? *I think incorporating generational trauma that has come from racial unrest and how through biblical principle we can overcome the trauma and bring more resolution and understanding of how Jesus cared for people.*

Respondent 8:

### Section 1

Is this biblical training course comprehensive? *Yes, I believe with the current modules, this can convey the topic of racial reconciliation.*

Does this biblical training course need to be supplemented with sociological content to aid in its contextual application? *I do believe that having sociological content would aid to this program. It can help show why this is so important in our current society.*

Will the race/ethnicity of the one facilitating this biblical training course have any bearing on the outcome? Yes/No If so, why: *This is a hard one to answer, mainly because we don’t know what someone has gone through. I believe to articulate this correctly you would need to have multiple race/ethnicities teaching this. I believe having multiple ethnicities represented would help create a sense of understanding and perspective to the audience.*

### Section 2

The results that will be achieved through this mentoring program are:

- 1) Each participant will develop emotional resilience related to listening and discussing matters associated with race and injustice.
- 2) Each participant will know and understand the biblical position on the proposed subjects and be able to communicate them to others.
- 2) Each participant will commit to a lifelong journey of learning and growing in racial reconciliation efforts from a biblical perspective.

What other results might need to be considered through this mentoring program? *I believe empathy for someone else’s walk in this space would be a result of this mentoring program.*

### Section 3

The proposed schedule for this one-year program is one mentoring session per month, in a group setting, for two hours. This would involve teaching and dialogue. Is that sufficient time to mentor an individual towards racial reconciliation efforts? Yes

#### Section 4

Each participant will make a written “racial reconciliation covenant” committing them to apply what is learned in this program in their future pastoral leadership. This covenant is to serve as a reminder of the importance of this work over the course of one’s life and pastoral leadership.

What are some of the values and commitments that should be incorporated into this commitment?  
*Listening to someone’s story on the topic of racial reconciliation before speaking into the person’s current situation. Have an empathetic but biblical approach to racial reconciliation. Be people-focused, but gospel-centered (non-compromising on what the gospel of Jesus says on the racial reconciliation).*

## Appendix 2

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?
2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?
3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?
4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?
5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?
6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community?
7. How would you rate your leadership team’s urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?
8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?
9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?
10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?
11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?
13. Besides preaching and teaching, can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?
14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?
15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?
16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?
17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?
18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?
19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?
20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

#### PASTORS SURVEY

Respondent 1:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

*White (Non-Hispanic) (53.5%), Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) (21.1%), White (Hispanic) (14.2%), Asian (Non-Hispanic) (3.36%), and Two+ (Non-Hispanic) (3.34%)*

2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

*Yes, our church would be considered*

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

*Roughly 15%*

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*A congregation that has multiple different ethnicities represented at all ages*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*We are doing really well. We have become more diverse over the past five years or so. Within the church our relationships are strong and growing.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community?

*Yes, and they have made strides to bring reconciliation to the community.*

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?

*8 - it is something that is very important to our church especially within the community we live in.*

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*We have made a few attempts, most of them have gone really well because we chose to meet tangible needs with every endeavor.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*There are not specific teaching materials we have used. We will typically lean on several friends of this house that are POC as we navigate through the current cultural issues.*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*Recently it has been the challenge of getting into different facilities due to the restrictions with Covid. Another challenge is finding reputable companies to facilitate opportunities. Another area is that the need in our area is so great, narrowing down the best projects, people and organizations can be tough.*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*Really teaching through scripture and the life that Christ exemplified in the gospels. We are very strategic with our verbiage to make sure everyone knows they are welcome and we need to be a friendly church to whoever walks through the doors of our facility. We also challenge people to do life with one another and that encourages them to honor that uniqueness we all have.*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*We address the issues head on and teach that everyone is created in the image of God. We encourage people to engage with those that are not like them and we promote everything we do to every demographic represented within our city. Practically we are strategic with verbiage, presentation and promotion to make sure we are including people of color in those items.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*Our best approach has been through meeting practical needs in some the most impoverished and racially diverse areas of our church through food distributions, investing in the schools by supplying equipment and resources, and then connecting with the families of those students to provide for their needs when available. We also take a long-term approach with helping single mothers get back on their feet.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

*This is a challenging question, but I believe diversity and excellence are not mutually exclusive but need to be closely tied to one another. In order to be excellent there must be diversity especially in the sense of understanding and meeting the needs of people. There must be a standard of excellence that allows people from all walks of life an equal opportunity to succeed. We cannot sacrifice one for the other.*

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*One of the biggest areas I would undertake first would be education and awareness of what diversity is and what it looks like within our context. Listening to people that are not like use can give us an understanding of cultures we may not understand. Merging worlds in every possible facet with our organization and making sure our leaders are learning about the culture of the people we work with. Training our leaders to think and plan with others in mind.*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

*Within our church we have a few different processes for training leaders. Our primary one is through a leadership college, where we identify our younger leaders and put them through a training process that helps them identify and develop their gifts, trains them for leadership and potentially promotes them to a position of authority. We have a similar approach when it comes to the adults in our church, we work with them to discover their gifts, then connect them whit a team leader to develop those gifts and then move them to places of leadership as they develop and mature.*

17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*Our process looks filters through the need or open position then looks for a candidate that fits that criterion or sometimes they are flip flopped. We typically find our staff within our leadership college*



*or our church family, so we have a pretty strong understanding of who they are. I cannot think of any discrepancies due to our process being internal. The only thing that we could adapt to is looking at outside applicants and creating a process of interview different individuals for the sake of diversity and inclusion.*

18. How would you help to create and sustain an organizational environment that acknowledges and celebrates diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout its daily operations?

*I think one of the best ways to do that would be to hire people that represent different people groups. Creating a space where diversity is encouraged through conversation, connection, and capability. Celebrating people of different cultures through our events and activity.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*One: create equal opportunity through events and employment opportunities*

*Second: create space for conversation and education*

*Third: promote or champion causes that are important or driven by diverse people groups*

*One way to do this would be to create benchmarks for each category that ensures that we are providing equal opportunity to a diverse people group*

*We would measure the engagement of the types of people that are engaged in those efforts.*

*Allow space for individuals to provide input and feedback to our efforts*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*I spend a good amount of time talking to different demographics of people on a frequent basis due to the nature of my job and the city that I live in. I have pretty meaningful conversations about varied perspectives almost daily because I work with youth and young adults. I would encourage our teams to spend time with people different from them consistently and to ask questions of those individuals to learn more about diversity. We could bring in communicators regularly that can speak to these issues and then create opportunities for our staff to ask questions.*

Respondent 2:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

*40% Black. 40% Latino. 30% White/Other.*

2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

Yes.

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

*Approx. 1%.*

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*Different backgrounds, colors, and families serving and sitting in each row at church.*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*The church is Great. It's the outside world that is trying to turn us against each other.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community?

*Yes, but the Jesus way, not the BLM way.*

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?

*3ish. We are very diverse in terms of our congregation.*

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*Depending on the definition, yes. I have spent much time in the past few years listening with care to the stories of hardships and struggles that my minority friends have gone through. Being heard is being healed.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*Tony Evans' content is stellar. MLK's book - Strength to Love. NT Wright - Surprised By Hope.*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*Making sure we are not hiring for the sake of color i.e. out of tokenism.*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*We celebrate diversity via celebrating different people and their stories.*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*By having fun spending time with people who aren't like me as well as being mindful of phrases that could be offensive.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*Hosting a life group at my place with a group of very different people. Showing love to everyone who comes through our doors.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

*I understand how the meaning or standards of excellence may vary based on culture; however, I believe Godly excellence involves diversity.*

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*Push and living all things according Acts and the people who took care of each other, adding to their numbers daily, and were united as one.*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

*As of late it has been based on relationships. Training is offered to everyone from the sermon to the serve team.*

17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*The playbook. Does the potential hire match the mission, vision, and values of our organization that entails follows the mission and vision of Jesus' teachings and commands?*

*Improvement would be met by providing leadership pathways such as actually promoting job offers, leadership opportunities, etc.*

18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?

*Live it out. I celebrate the person for their content not their color. Celebration of others who implement the values of excellence and diversity cannot be done enough.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*I would host an all-staff session where we talk about the benefits and cohesions that can come from work conflict and disagreement when handled correctly. Measurement would be in the quality of staff relations.*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*Seek first to understand. And sometimes then be understood. Any story is possible in our staff. That's why we are called Grace.*

Respondent 3:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

*White (54.9%) Hispanic (31.2%) Black (5.3%)*

2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

*If having different Latin-American countries represented within a Hispanic Church counts as multiethnic, we would say that we are at least 20% ethnicity, for sure!*

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

*Español Key Team is 50% composed of people of other races/ethnicities (Dominican, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Salvadorian, Peruvian, American (White/African American), Colombian, Honduran). This is including Connect Group leaders.*

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*A racially diverse congregation is composed of 50% or more Hispanics, African Americans, Asians within a white conglomerate.*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*The congregation relates to each other well.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community?

*Yes.*

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?

7

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*We've attempted to build bridges between Hispanics of different nations and with Caucasians. Still a working progress but we have seen changes of comfortableness when interacting with each other. We've seen it not work when one side is completely indifferent or unwilling to interact.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*Bible and modification of some books like, "Resolving Conflicts."*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*The biggest challenge for churches in general, is taking the risk of doing things differently because of perspectives that could challenge the common practices.*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*Repeating the concept of extending to others what you would like for them to extend towards you from the most visible and influential spaces. Also, plan interactions that will create people to ask and understand each other.*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*First, clearing stereotypes personally so I can live by example and then being vocal about these issues. Best way to promote diversity is not waiting for someone different to arrive but search intentionally to include what's missing.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*Mediating private conversations between people with the goal of bringing perspective. Events that highlight the uniqueness of different races.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

*Acknowledgement that diversity is celebrated individually, and it can contribute to the excellence we are aspiring to achieve together*

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*Direct group or individual trainings about the topics.*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

*Voluntarily people sign up for courses to be trained and progress towards leadership. Also, current leaders recommending the same courses. Both cases, promotion will come from pastoral team.*

17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*Lead and executive pastors review applications and hire. No.*

18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?

*would you help to create and sustain an organizational environment that acknowledges and celebrates diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout its daily operations?*

*Creating spaces relationally and even visibly of the desired atmosphere. Intentional moments of connecting these goals.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*Plan, invest, train and communicate the expectations. By the way they do life outside of the workplace or church.*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*Weekly! Mediating conversations and bringing perspective to the different views.*

Respondent 4:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

*Primarily White, Black, Hispanic and Asian*

2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

*Yes*

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

45%

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*That our congregation has an equal representation of same ethnicities as that are living in the community it serves. For us, that would mean our congregation looks like our community, with White, Black, Hispanic and Asian members feeling seen, valued and connected equally.*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*We work hard to make sure that everyone feels valued in our church. We have developed conversations around race that are safe spaces for those that attend to share not only in their pain but to build bridges across cultural divides.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community? Yes

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?

8

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*After the George Floyd incident, we created The Honor Movement which was built around reconciliation by creating safe spaces for conversations on an ongoing basis. It was very successful for the first year and a half. We are now in the process of reworking it to follow up in areas where it wasn't sustainable.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*We've used a number of different materials but the most successful was The Third Way by Miles McPherson.*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*Over the past decade, we have worked diligently at creating a multiethnic leadership team, as well as making sure our board represented the diversity of our congregation. Our leadership team a decade ago was primarily white conservatives males who didn't always recognize the existence of racism, nor the need to build bridges, although our Senior Pastors did. Surprisingly the congregation has always been diverse and represented the community it served even though the executive-level leadership did not. The Senior Pastors became intentional in identifying and mentoring Black and Hispanic leaders with the intent of creating space for them in strategic places of influence and*

*leadership. Over the course of the last decade, we have had more diversity in our leadership team, with white leaders now being the minority and not the majority.*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*It is repeated regularly from the pulpit in sermons, in leadership meetings and in small groups. It has become part of our culture.*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*This is an ongoing conversation within leadership. We are regularly asking for feedback to make sure our language doesn't carry any implicit bias towards any group.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*The Honor Movement is an ongoing conversation group. We also have used our small group leader training to make sure the leaders understand how to identify areas that need reconciliation. Although we are still looking for ways to grow in this area.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

*Both of these values are important in everything we do to serve our community. Excellence is defined in our church, as "we go above and beyond, it's about excellence" and so our goal is that this would also be in the area of diversity.*

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*To make sure we are training our leaders to not only value everyone regardless of race, but we would also make sure all of our leaders are trained in healthy conflict resolution and are great question askers rather than status defenders.*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

*The majority of our leaders are those that are first identified in our small groups or volunteering on a team. Once the person has been identified as having potential for leadership, they are then mentored/trained by the leader of the team they currently serve. We also have an eight month online comprehensive leadership course that not only teaches the culture and values of the church, and basic leadership tools but also spiritual disciplines. We found in previous years we had amazing leaders who were not spiritually strong. This course was created to make sure our leaders were growing holistically in every area of their lives, spiritually, emotionally, relationally and biblically, identifying their gifts and strengths in the process. This is taught cohort style and each cohort has staff mentors that walk with them through the course.*



17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*When we hire we look for competence, character and chemistry. With that said we are also intentional in wanting our staff to be diverse culturally and as much as possible equal representation of gender as well.*

18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?

*We'd love to hire someone who is an expert in inclusion to assess how we are doing in every area of the church. We are sure as much as we have worked to celebrate the diversity that we still have blind spots. Building for the future of the church must include a strong foundation that is leading in our community in this area.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*A few ideas moving forward is to make sure the stories being told from the platform represent and celebrate this. Creating spaces in small groups and on teams that celebrate this so that it becomes a normal part of the culture. In the future, sending a survey to the congregation asking questions to see if they feel the church is supportive and respectful of differing perspectives would be helpful to hear the heartbeat of the church.*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*The limited experience I have had with this has been in developing relationships with the people in our church and taking the time to hear their stories. I am not sure how to incorporate this in my management practices except to continually become a better listener and ask better questions to hear someone else's perspective and collaborate on solutions.*

Respondent 5:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

*Scottsdale, AZ: 86.6% White, 10.2% Hispanic, 5.2% Asian, 2.1% Black (2020 Census Data)*

2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

*The Scottsdale Campus is not Multiethnic.*

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

0%

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*A congregation with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race than the majority*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*Relations are good, there are no barriers or exclusive groups.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community?

Yes

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?

4

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*We have had staff training, heard sermons and panels on racial relations. As far as I can tell, it has not impacted the diversity of our campus.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*The bible and a guest training.*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*The primary challenge is availability and moving people through the layers of leadership, there aren't many people of diverse races on any level of leadership at our church.*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*I wouldn't say this has been a primary focus of my leadership, aside from letting people make their own decisions and take ownership of their serving areas.*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*I make a point to have conversations with people of all races and make them feel welcome when they attend our church.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*I have not.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

*I think our church is better when there are a diversity of opinions, backgrounds and viewpoints.*

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*I think we could create some KPIs and strategies to help us become more diverse in leadership. We could make a plan of inclusion with practical steps.*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

*1 on 1 meetings, Pathways, Alpha, and Group Trainings.*

17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*I make recommendations for new hires and give background and references. There could be a more clear path on the pathway towards becoming a staff member.*

18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?

*I could be more intentional about spending time with people of all backgrounds and seeking out those who might not normally feel as included.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*I could give people an opportunity to share their stories of diversity and their perspective in our group meetings. If people are willing to share, it would tell me the process is successful.*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*We attended a diversity training at one point where people shared their views on inequalities. I could create space in the meetings I run to give people an opportunity to share their perspective.*

Respondent 6:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

White (54.9%) Hispanic (31.2%) Black (5.3%)

2. Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

No

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

0%

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*A racially diverse congregation would include more whites into our black congregation.*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*They relate well but its difficult to get whites to attend a church led by a black pastor.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community? Yes

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest?

3

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*Not formally.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*The Bible.*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*Having relationships with people of other races and overcoming their ideas of what the black church is.*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*By teaching our congregation that all people are created in God's image.*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*It's hard to challenge racial stereotypes when they continue to be perpetuated by people.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*I have tried to demonstrate unity with our community by engaging in community wide efforts.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

*Diversity can contribute to the excellence we are trying to achieve together.*

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*I would be willing to share Christian diversity and training materials with our congregation.*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

Pastoral team.

17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*It begins with a member being faithful. Based on their involvement and their agreement with our church's values, leaders, and mission, we invite them to become deacons who over time become elders. If they are called to full time ministry, we will train them accordingly.*

18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?

*I would be willing to embrace this idea, but it would take significant effort to change internal biases within our leadership.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*It would take a few white leaders who are willing to show support and faithfulness over time. There is no greater catalyst for changing perspectives than a living example.*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*I have done this on an individual level as the need arises. If I had the right material and support, I would formally introduce to our members as a class.*

Respondent 7:

1. What is the racial demographic of the zip code in which your church is situated?

*White (54.9%) Hispanic (31.2%) Black (5.3%) American Indian (4.2%) Asian (1.1%)*

Is your church considered multiethnic with at least 20% of the attendees of a different race/ethnicity?

*I would say we are over 20%*

3. What percentage of your senior leadership team is composed of people of other races/ethnicities?

*50%*

4. What does a racially diverse congregation look like in your definition?

*It should reflect at minimum the racial makeup of your community. That means that leadership you should cultivate and raise up leaders of all races.*

5. How would you describe the state of relations between people of different races/ethnicities within your congregation?

*There is a warm and accepting relationship between people of race and gender. They mix seamlessly.*

6. Does your senior leadership have a desire to model racial reconciliation to the community?

*Yes, and they are.*

7. How would you rate your leadership team's urgency in building a racially diverse church on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest

*10*

8. Have you attempted racial reconciliation efforts in the past? Have they succeeded? Have they failed? Why?

*Yes. Yes. No.*

9. What teaching materials have you used to promote racial reconciliation in your church?

*The Bible*

10. What has been the primary challenge to promoting and working with other races/ethnicities at the highest level of decision-making in your church?

*None that we are aware of*

11. How do you encourage people to honor diversity?

*By looking at each individual as made in the design of God and by creating unique events that celebrate those valuable cultures*

12. What steps can be taken to counteract racial stereotypes and foster diversity and inclusiveness?

*By having a multitude of conversations with individuals.*

13. Besides preaching and teaching can you provide an example(s) of how you have created a context for racial reconciliation with your congregation?

*Yes we go out to eat with people of all races and model it for those around us. By seeking out a diverse set of friendships. And by inviting those of different races to have conversation to tell their story so we can gain understanding of their journey.*

14. How do you conceptualize the relationship between diversity and excellence?

15. What kinds of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?

*To continue to model it, seek out called and gifted leaders of diversity and to become inclusive in leading*

16. What is the process for identifying, training, and promoting leadership within your church?

*We have several pathways - finding everyone a place to serve, to encourage everyone to invest in themselves through on going learning in classes and courses, to start leading a Connect Group where they can develop their leadership skills. We have several trainings (Pathways, Evening Bible College, Courses)*

17. How do you determine who is hired to serve on staff within your church? Is there any discrepancy that could be improved upon in how you hire and promote staff within your church?

*Executive Team does the hiring.*

18. What strategies would you implement to establish and maintain an organizational culture that recognizes and values diversity and incorporates inclusiveness into all aspects of daily operations?

*By continuing to develop gifted leaders of all races.*

19. Can you describe the measures you would take to establish a positive and respectful workplace environment that appreciates diverse perspectives and backgrounds? How would you assess the effectiveness of these efforts?

*Inclusivity, diversity, opportunity. By keeping my finger on the pulse and knowing the people*

20. Can you share an example of your past involvement in facilitating productive conversations among groups with diverse perspectives and addressing social and economic inequalities? How would you integrate this experience into your leadership style?

*Being involved previously in government discussions and formations of certain things like day of prayer, our community shelter for battered women and children, and others*

## Appendix 4

### Proposed Film Series

These episodes would be filmed in a coffee shop with a live studio audience. Each episode would include a 30-minute teaching followed by a 30-minute conversation with someone of another race/ethnicity adding their perspective on the biblical content and its corresponding sociological application.

- Episode 1: Creation: Race, Ethnicity, Culture, and the imago Dei
  - This episode would lay a foundation for human identity, cover the imago Dei, and introduce basic terms related to racial reconciliation and racial justice.
- Episode 2: Fall, Flood, Nations, and the Tower of Babel
  - This episode would lay an understanding of a more robust hamartiology. It would describe how the Fall has had both vertical and horizontal impacts on our relationships.
- Episode 3: Race and "the Gospel"
  - This episode would combine Jesus' Kingdom teachings of the gospel reaching every ethnic group with how Ephesians 2 combines individual reconciliation with God and reconciliation between people.
- Episode 4: Race and The Church
  - This episode would focus on the ethnic tensions in the early church and the mission to the Gentiles.
- Episode 5: Race and Modern Pentecostalism
  - This episode would tell the story of the modern Pentecostal movement beginning at Azusa Street and would highlight the efforts to combat racism in the early days of the twentieth



century. This episode would also focus on the development of modern Pentecostal denominations and how they fractured along racial lines soon after the birth of the movement.

- Episode 6: Racial Reconciliation and Contemporary Issues
  - This episode would focus on contemporary issues in race relations like political divisions, reparations, critical race theory, and the challenges in developing multiethnic churches and leadership teams.

## Appendix 5

### EXPERT INTERVIEWS

#### Researcher

I really appreciate your time and want to take a few minutes to continue the conversation that we've had over the past year or so, as I've continued the process related to my NPO and why there's a lack of minority representation at the highest levels of decision-making in Pentecostal churches and movements. You have been a real help to me! I feel that I have *more* to learn *now* than when we first began these conversations. I wonder if you feel that way with your lived experience and role in the United Nations: Do you feel you have had clarity on these issues and the corresponding solutions, or due to changing conditions in society, that you're trying to find clarity?

#### Participant 1:

I certainly think that sometimes I'm struggling to regain clarity. I'll give you an example from church: We had, and were gaining, a lot of momentum around the racial equity space. Yet, what's been happening since last year-- when we had the situation in New York-- racial equity has since been pushed aside. So much so that the people of color who I was speaking to said, "Yes, there we go again. It's another white man who's taking the spotlight." In other words, for them [the people of color], it wasn't like, 'Okay, this is a catastrophic issue, this is something...' To them, it was like, 'Well, this is what always happens. Race is never a priority. There's always going to be something else.' And so, I feel that the more that I get into it, the more that I am seeing those kinds of things.

In fact, if I think about my workplace in the UN, with what we saw in terms of racism against the refugees in Ukraine, or even the way the whole world responded to that situation and some of the commentary around civilized people, 'They're just like us.' My senses have been heightened to the extent to which I'm dealing with the problem. Whereas before I felt like it wasn't like that. Maybe because I wasn't having the conversations I am now. Therefore, the clarity comes in the sense that this is such a big problem, and I didn't realize how big it was, but I am very clear about what and where I'm meant to be.

## Researcher

I have moral clarity. I have clarity from a gospel-centered perspective, but then it gets unclear when suddenly people accuse your gospel-centered perspective as being connected to things like critical race theory. It feels like the conversation keeps shifting from one front to another. I'm not sure if that's a product of a culture with a short attention span, or the product of people trying to protect the status quo by changing the conversation.

I'm at the point in my research where I am prototyping three different possible solutions. The first involves a mentorship program for the next generation of pastoral leaders, equipping them to engage in the work of racial reconciliation and advancing equity within the churches they will serve. The second involves designing a partnership model for churches that desire to collaborate toward racial reconciliation and the empowerment of minority leadership in their congregations. The third is developing and producing an educational film series to inform churches on the biblical and sociological basis for diversity, inclusion, and equity, along with the unique history of Pentecostal movements and their reconciliation efforts.

The new line of thinking that has developed for me throughout this process relates to the role that education plays or has the potential to play in shifting mindsets. So, as an expert in this field, do you believe that biblical education can make a difference? Do you believe that it has the potential to change mindsets or is it an ineffective effort?

## Participant 1:

The biblical education can make a difference by transforming mindsets. Not only because of what we see in scripture in terms of how our faith grows but because biblical principles help us transform how we see things. The bigger question is, 'Who are the ones doing the educating?' That matters!

If you look at many Pentecostal churches, people of color aren't engaged there at the highest levels. So, people are only being taught a single narrative of how scripture is being translated regarding racial reconciliation, and it doesn't reflect some of the nuances or the cultural things that people of color are exposed to. Hence, it makes it more of a challenge to see the perspective or alignment. This is the biggest challenge that we have with biblical education: The people who are bringing the biblical education look a certain way and have similar experiences that the rest of us don't have, and we're left with the resounding reflection, "Okay, that's great. But how does it apply to me in my situation?"

It becomes especially difficult to relate because some of the examples that they give are not examples that I personally would give.

I've also seen this when I worked at a university with the students, particularly around this whole theme of diversity and inclusion-- including students with disabilities. What was often brought to my attention was, "When the teachers are giving us examples and they're teaching us, we can't relate to it because the examples that they're giving are from a dominant narrative or from able-

bodied people. And the fact that they're not considering that there are students who might have a disability or otherwise, we can't relate to it."

If you think about America and white or Black churches, there are some Black churchgoers and Black pastors that really know how to transform the lives of the people who sit under them. So, I don't think there's anything wrong in biblical education. I think it's about who's bringing it.

Participant 2:

I agree. The question of what role education should take in addressing discrimination and injustice is very important. The Bible says, "people perish for a lack of knowledge," and that relates to this area as much as any area. Education begins with understanding the problem, not informing people of the solution. When you truly understand and empathize with the Black experience you can then use that as the basis for educating others.

Participant 3:

Education is the foundation of civilization and has led to the changes we enjoy every day. Without education, we would be in the dark ages (no pun intended!). So, we need to educate people with truth not just passing fads. Most people accept a form of education that is based on one racial experience. The victors write history.

Researcher:

If I had to do this over, I would probably do doctoral research into this topic because I haven't been able to find much research on this. I've only been able to find one dissertation which measures through qualitative and quantitative research, the impact of biblical education on shifting mindsets related to race. And there's just nothing out there in terms of academia. And what I'm hearing you say reminds me of, Esau McCaulley's *Reading While Black*. The illustrations that are chosen to reinforce the facts may just seem natural to me because I'm white. But not thinking that someone next to me, as you've described, would not connect to those illustrations or even metaphors which reinforce the biblical narrative as I see it because they've been raised to see things differently-- their experience is dissimilar to my own. So, it seems so unnatural, and yet so perfectly true, to hear what you're saying: That our own lived experience-- which includes our identity, our ethnicity, and all those things-- really sets the context for how we hear and how we perceive truth. Which in turn would lead to how we apply truth.

Participant 1:

Yes! I've been to African churches and the Word does not land the same. [In Africa], they're preaching from the gospel, yet the application is different! They provide examples distinct to things Africans/people who have lived in that region would know and understand. For example, there is a lot of witchcraft. So, when pastors are preaching and they're giving the type of identifiable and parallel examples, people can relate to it because they've encountered it.

However, in a European context, you might not be talking about witchcraft. You might be talking about something like 'Don't make your work an idol,' or 'Why are you forfeiting coming to church on a Sunday and taking your kids to a soccer game?' It's very different. All this to say, the same example provided to the congregation in Africa would not serve the people in Europe. If you are not exposed to a certain culture's lifestyle, it would prove very hard to relate.

In fact, I have even had some people who have said, "Well, we can't go to these white churches because they're not as strong in the Lord." Only because of the examples that are being given. And if we even look back to one of the things that I always talk about when it's racist, let's look at some of the origins. Even if we look at Thomas Jefferson and that era where you had what was perceived to be all these godly men who were using the gospel to justify slavery. There are too many people interpreting what the Bible means. I don't want to know what your interpretation is, I just want you to teach me the word.

Researcher:

So, what is the answer? Is the answer that the white church needs to be re-disciplined? Is the answer for there to be a higher degree of collaboration between people of various races and ethnicities to engage in corporate teaching, team teaching, cooperative discipleship, and spiritual formation and transformation? Is that an answer or is there another answer that I'm not aware of?

Participant 1:

I think it's all of that. In the context of work, one of the things that we're very clear about is that we always talk about the importance of engaging with the community that you're trying to understand - especially if you're developing policies or programs for them. For example, in Australia, there were all these people coming up with, "Aboriginal people need this." And from a government perspective, we created all these policies, but the surprising thing is we never actually consulted with the community to ask them, "What do *you* need?" And I think it's the same in the church context. We come up with all kinds of stuff about, this is what's needed, but *are we consulting with the people who would most benefit from it?*

So I feel it's all of that you've said. I feel there's a re-disciplining that needs to happen. But it's also about growing the perspectives of people. Because for me, one of the things that just shocks me when we talk about racism and the biblical aspect of it is, this whole notion of the fact that we are one body with many parts. And so I'm always like, "Why is it so hard for people to understand that as a Black woman who is Christian, I have experiences that you don't, and me stating that doesn't mean that I'm not Christian. I'm just actually stating perspective and experience that you might never go through, but we are one body. And just like the function of the eye is very different to what the leg does, and we're all created in the likeness of him."

Internally our spirit is the same, but our bodies are different. So, why can't we just accept that, and rather than trying to distance people's experiences, just have an understanding of, "Oh my God, maybe I need to sit with the hand because when I understand what the hand does as a leg, it means

that I can grow." And I think that's the thing that's missing: We need to stop being selfish in our approach, because I don't believe Jesus was selfish in that. He was all things to all people. That's why one of the things that I hate is when people say, "Well we shouldn't focus on diversity too much because there are more things that are similar than that are different between us. Let's focus on our similarities and stuff."

Why have we made diversity a bad word? Being different is not a negative. There's nothing wrong with being different. It's a positive as well. And so I feel that's what we need to come back to in the church. I think the answer is getting people to understand there are different perspectives and making people engage with the people that they want to help. So as a pastor, you need to know your congregation and have a sense of what they need. But you personally have also done the work to say, "There are people that are missing." Or, "Within my congregation, I have a group of people and how do I engage with them? What can I do to understand that?" I feel we need to do more of that, in the sense that why can't we create opportunities for those kind of voices to happen because everybody learns. And so I do think that there's the re-discipling. I think there needs to be a call out to say, "Let's engage with all the voices. Let's really push ourselves to make sure that when we are sharing biblical truth, that it is truth that everybody can relate to and understand. Let's give examples that are beyond what I might know."

But I think it requires work. You have to go out of yourself in that way. And I think we've just been too comfortable because there's been no challenge. You're even talking about the difficulty in finding this dissertation and stuff like that. Maybe it's because there hasn't been anything done because there's never been a requirement to know. Because up until now, it's been okay to keep things the way they are.

Participant 2:

There is a lot of work that needs to be done, and I think we must begin with an open and honest conversation about how divided we are before we can make any progress. America keeps punting this issue down the path of history. We get close to honest conversations, and then we back away because they get uncomfortable or because they threaten the powers that be. If we can't be honest, we can't make progress.

Participant 3:

I want to speak to how the idea of diverse leadership is accepted at every level in society (except maybe country clubs) but not in the church. Why is the church still divided over the issue of race? Why aren't we the most racially inclusive institution on the planet? If the gospel unites us and if the early church was united, why haven't we maintained that posture? The basis for our unity is the gospel not critical race theory nor any other social engineering. We need to teach people the gospel and hold them accountable to it.

Researcher:

I'm sure this is going to show my lack of cultural EQ, but I want you to speak to it very, very clearly. It seems to me, when I hear you talk about the importance of there being a collaborative effort, using my words, in discipleship so they are discipling people from this broader base truth and cultural perspective. One of the things I notice is that I've got a lot of Black friends, all of whom I dearly love, and there are some, and this is where I'm going to get clunky, who own their Blackness and M---- would be one of them. M---- is really comfortable being Black, not just racially/ethnically, but culturally. And I know that means something different in different parts of the world, and again this is clunky but, he owns that Blackness. And as a result of that, he brings a richness to our church that I love, as opposed to some of my other friends who were raised differently. And they're being authentically true to who they are. But they're just a little more like me with dark skin. Culturally, I'm not saying ethnically.

So they [my Black friends] all have a very important role to play, but I think my Black friends who are culturally more like me, don't expand the conversation as much. Because to the people in our congregation that are more like M----, who have a cultural Blackness besides a racial or ethnic Blackness, my Black friends who are culturally white, don't disciple them in the way that M----can. And it takes all of us, so I get that. Can you just unpack that for me? I need to know this personally as  
I  
continue.

Participant 1:

What you're talking about is the internalized whiteness. So, yes, we talk about whiteness as a culture. Whiteness is both a consciousness and it's a color. So, when we talk about whiteness, as in, Terry is white, F---- is Black, whiteness in that context would be color.

Whiteness as a consciousness is when you think white. And I think that's what you're alluding to your Black friends who are culturally white. This is when we've internalized whiteness, meaning that the ideals and the standard of what is good and what is right is determined through a white lens. [In context], as a Black person, the way that I act might show itself in the accent or where I'm sent to school. My parents sent me to private schools when I moved back to Zimbabwe. But the way that they decided whether the school was good was by how many white people were in the school. In other words, if the school was known to have a lot of white kids, then apparently it was a good school. This is my parents who spent so many years in the States. But for them, that was the standard and all of us at that time bought into it and so you'd go to these schools. For me, that's internalized whiteness. It means you believe a school to be good, not based on its academics but by about how many white people are at the school. People have grown up in this internalized whiteness because that is the standard that has been told. And as a result, I remember straightening my hair and never wanting to go to work with an Afro, because it was like I was too Black to be in the environment.

When you internalize whiteness, you buy into the ideal that it is the standard that you should apply. And then there are other people who reject that and are like, "You know what? Black is beautiful. I'm not changing anything. And I need to challenge this narrative." And it's not even just the Black community. We see this with other communities, like Asia. For example, internalized whiteness

touches on colorism as well in terms of the whitening of skin. Why? Because of the accepted 'good' internalized whiteness ideals. Or why are Chinese students sent to international universities or these Western worlds? Although the country itself will talk about how much they hate the West, when it comes to certain things, it's like we won it. So, I think that we've conditioned ourselves into thinking like that. And there are instances where some people, I've heard people saying, "Oh, she's too Black." And you talk about M---, in some places, he's too Black. He's too much. He needs to tone down his Blackness. I can only do a little bit, and unfortunately, that has crept into the church. And if you think about it within an American context, it's so eerie because isn't that the slavery of a house slave and a field slave. Think about it. The people that were the house slaves looked a certain way and they were more presentable. And then the people that weren't [presentable] were sent out to the field.

If you really think about it, I feel a lot of that stuff stems from internalized whiteness because what is the acceptable Black and what is the unacceptable Black? And although we don't want to see the connection, I think that's crept into the church. So, we like her because she speaks a certain way, and she must be intelligent. That other person with that strong accent, they're not as refined or not as cultured or, my favorite, not as well-traveled. That kind of thing. We don't do that for white folks though. There are some who've only grown up in the state that they were born in, who've never seen Europe or whatever. Funny enough, we never say that about, "Oh, they're not cultured or well-traveled." So, there's definitely a difference. And in our community, sometimes there's a struggle between, is this acceptable? I think it's becoming more acceptable because historically, for Black universities, there was a time that you [a white man] wouldn't be caught dead going there. But, now, it's become fashionable... And this is the confidence I feel that we are starting to see in terms of being Black. Because 30 years ago, these Black universities were created out of a need that there probably wasn't anywhere else for people of color to go. Yet, now it's become fashionable.

Participant 2:

This is a very important issue and I want to respond with a few ideas. If we don't ask you to check your whiteness at the door, we shouldn't check out color at the door. This internalized whiteness shows up in a lot of ways in white churches. First, the music of the church must broaden stylistically to relate to people of color. When all the popular worship music sounds like it was written by white surfer dudes, it doesn't connect at a deep soul level with Black and Brown people. I'm sure that's true for Asians as well. Even in Pentecostal churches which have been historically more integrated, there are different types of worship, and some doesn't lend itself to the Black experience. Second, there must be an intentional approach towards including people of color in highly visible roles beyond the worship ministry. It's easy for white people to accept Black people as entertainers, but not as decision-makers. This requires a humility to learn and be under the authority of someone of another race. We need to see more racial humility. Third, we don't see ourselves in the branding efforts of large churches, and, if we do, it feels contrived not genuine. Fourth, we need to make room for young Black leaders to grow without feeling the pressure to be perfect and to represent the entire Black community. That pressure is too much for anyone to bear.

Participant 3:

I agree. There has been a social conditioning within the broader society and within churches as to what constitutes appropriate behavior. When people of color are expected to give up their innate responsiveness, their humor, and their ways of interacting with each other just to feel accepted, that isn't real acceptance, that's racial adaptation. And racial adaptation leads to a weak and one-sided church. The church of all places should be where people are allowed to be themselves and should receive one another. The church should be a rich stew where all the pieces are distinct, not a soup where everyone has been blended together.

Researcher:

My final question has to do with the most effective medium for educating people on racial diversity, equality, and equity. What is the most effective way to educate people, through a film series, or small groups, or seminars?

Participant 1:

I think it depends on your objectives because people learn differently. Some learn better in classrooms, others in small groups, and others when they are alone and can contemplate at their own pace. Most people, however, learn best when they feel emotionally safe. When it comes to discussing race, emotional safety is important. The racial conversation can trigger people emotionally and that causes them to relive previous trauma which results in them becoming argumentative, shutting down, or withdrawing to a safe space internally. The benefit of filming is that people can watch it in the comfort of their own space physically and emotionally.

Participant 2:

I wonder if you could do both? I agree that a film series is the safest emotionally and allows you to reach the biggest audience, which may be the most important thing. But if you also mentor smaller groups you could take them deeper into the material through conversations and also measure their progress as they become equipped in the work of racial reconciliation.

Participant 3:

The question of the delivery system is the easiest one for me to answer. Emerging generations live on social media. If you want to reach them, you must go to where they live. I think you should educate through a podcast or a video-based delivery system that is used as a YouTube series and also as smaller pieces for Instagram, Tik-Tok, and other social media platforms.



# Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

## Appendix 1

The film set was thematically designed with the course content in mind. I envisioned a modern, minimalistic aesthetic that would feel more like a therapist's office than a classroom. The idea was to create a psychologically comforting space for what some might consider a stressful topic while also presenting a subtle reference to interracial relationships with warm, rich tones.

**Figure 2: Film Storyboard 1**



**Figure 3: Film Storyboard 2**



**Figure 4: Film Storyboard 3****Figure 5: Film Storyboard 4**

## Appendix 2

The manuscript was written in an informal, conversational tone and is formatted for a teleprompter; therefore, the footnotes were verbalized.

### Session 1: Introduction to the Course

Hello, my name is Terry Crist. I'm a fifth-generation pastor with roots deep in the soil of classical Pentecostalism. My wife and I have spent the past 35 years planting and pastoring churches, training and developing leaders, and traveling into over 60 nations in ministry. Most recently, I spent a decade serving as a lead pastor of Hillsong Phoenix and giving oversight to the North American

Hillsong Leadership Network. Judith and I currently pastor a multi-site church called “City of Grace” with campuses in Phoenix, Mesa, and Tucson, Arizona and in Las Vegas Nevada.

Most importantly, I have a deep passion to see churches and leadership teams become multiethnic and I’m working to coach churches, ministries, and faith-based organizations in the biblical frame of racial reconciliation. I am completing a Doctor of Ministry degree from George Fox University in “Semiotics, Church, and Culture” with a focus on “Racially Integrated Leadership in Pentecostal Movements.” So, as you can see, this topic is one that comes out of my personal connection with people like you who are also on the journey towards embodying the idea of the gospel, racial reconciliation and the church.

And I’m guessing that’s why you’ve accessed this course. You want to get this right as much as I do. And you’re not willing to sit on the sidelines, just hoping the world becomes a more righteous, equitable, and just place. Further, you’re not looking to the culture to teach you how to establish those things. You’re committed to diving deep into the scriptures to gain God’s perspective on this and you are willing to engage in the hard and holy work of fleshing this out in your small group, on your leadership team, and in your church community.

From my earliest memories, I’ve held a deep-seated passion for racial reconciliation— for opportunity and equality and even equity extended to those who are disadvantaged— and I’ll share some of my own story as we look at the biblical reasons for that because that’s what matters most. As important as our own personal experiences are, we look to the objective reality of God’s Word. And even though I’ve spent most of my adult life in this conversation about the dynamics of racial injustice, when it comes to my own experience, I still have so much to learn.

In fact, my hope in filming this course is that it might become the sort of living work that we can continue to dialogue around in the years to come. I would love to hear from you after you finish his course. I would love to hear your thoughts, your learnings, and even your ongoing questions, because there is so much to issue— so much pain, so much hurt, so much disappointment, so much longing, and so much hope as it relates to diversity, inclusion, and equity. And our willingness to sit at the table together and to have this conversation with one another based on the gospel, is the basis for true and lasting change.

My sense is that we cannot learn what we refuse to discuss. And we cannot change what we’re afraid to discuss. Those are two of the reasons why we are stuck in this moment when it comes to race-relations. It’s because many of us don’t even know how to have this conversation without it blowing up in our faces and adding more trauma to those who have already been hurt.

Have you ever felt that way?

Have you ever felt unequipped to have a healthy conversation about racial dynamics, across racial lines?

Have you ever felt like you just needed to know conclusively what the Bible says about this—and not just the big picture— but some of the finer points? Finer points like: what does the bible say about

the construct of race? Are race and ethnicity the same thing? Is it right/wrong to acknowledge racial/ethnic differences? How much attention should we pay to them? What does the Bible teach about interethnic marriage? Why has the Bible been used to justify racial oppression? How do we build the kind of churches that model diversity and equality in the midst of a racially divided world?

In the absence of humble and healthy conversations, we are either avoiding the subject altogether or we are talking at each other and past each other instead of *with* each other. And that's what makes this course so important. This course is a conversation starter, a topic guide, and an invitation into a conversation. I'm going to offer some thought provoking, and maybe even challenging ideas along the way from a biblical and pastoral perspective, to equip you to do the hard and holy work in your own community.

Now, I want to be very clear about that as we get started. I am not a sociologist. I am not an anthropologist. I am not a psychologist or trauma informed therapist. I am not a proponent of any modern social theory— or of any other academic discipline that informs the issue of race relations. I am a pastor, a Bible student, and a practitioner of building healthy relationships across racial and ethnic lines.

Throughout this course, I will offer you an opportunity to engage with biblical principles and real-life examples in a way that will lead to a better perspective on why this matters, what we've gotten wrong about it, what we've gotten right, and how we can join together to find some sense of connection and hopefully even resolution as it relates to racial reconciliation.

I really believe we, as the people of God, must have this conversation at this moment in history. We can't ignore this critical issue in our generation. We can't defer it to the next generation. We can't look the other way thinking that it will resolve itself. History has proven otherwise. We must face racial division and injustice and the hope of equality and unity in diversity for the sake of the gospel. We have to confront it for the sake of our Kingdom witness. And for the future of our children and our children's children. We need to have this conversation for the hope of our nation. And ultimately for the common good of humanity.

As the people of God, every generation should make a fresh new commitment to look to the gospel for direction on how to address the pain points found in the world around them. And when it comes to racial inequality, inequity, oppression, and injustice—these are some of the greatest pain points in our world today. We are all but one degree away from someone who is consistently discriminated against on the basis of the color of their skin.

Now, I want to establish one thing right here at the outset. There is an ongoing debate over which single term adequately encompasses the work of diversity, equality, inclusion, reconciliation, equity and justice. I have chosen to use the word "reconciliation," with complete awareness of the inadequacy of the word.

As some have suggested, it's impossible to "reconcile" what was never "*conciled*." Makes sense, right? If you are looking at this through the lens of culture and history, it's hard to find a time when

racess were “conciled.” But if you are looking at this through the lens of scripture, there is a clear picture of when we were unified and when we became divided, and how we make the journey back to a reconciled world.

Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil offers a comprehensive definition of “reconciliation” in her book *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*. She writes, “Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”<sup>1</sup>

I love that definition because it encompasses everything in the biblical concept of *shalom*. God’s plan is for the flourishing of humanity. He longs for us to dwell at peace, along with the rest of creation, in a world in which nothing is missing, and nothing is broken.

Ultimately, racial reconciliation is not just another issue, it’s a gospel issue.

And it’s not just a gospel issue, it’s a moral issue.

And it’s not just a moral issue, it’s a cultural issue.

And it’s not just a cultural issue, it’s a church issue.

And it’s not just a church issue, it’s a Kingdom issue.

And it’s not just a Kingdom issue, it’s a heaven issue.

So, when you look at it through that framework, it is one of the most important issues of the day.

And with that, let’s dig in.

Grab your Bible and something to take notes on. Invite your friends and family, or your small group, or even your church staff, to gather around the screen and let’s begin a journey through the scriptures in search of what God has to say about “The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation & the Church.”

## **Session 2: Creation and the *Imago Dei***

The past couple of years have proven that we all have a long way to go when it comes healing the racial wounds of the past 400 years. The summer of 2020 was a grim reminder of our painful past and of our unresolved present. Following the public murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd in the spring of that year, the nation summer erupted in a tsunami of pain, confusion, outrage, and even despair, that summer. And for most of us, it was a huge reminder of how much work we have ahead of us when it comes to building a fair and just society.

Whether you believe the blame is to be laid at the feet of police, politicians, or protesters, I think most of us—Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic—would agree that we aren’t as far along as we had hoped as it relates to equality and opportunity for all people.

And if things are bad in the nation (generally speaking), we must be honest about the fact that they're not much better in the church. I know many Christians are faithfully laboring behind the scenes to love their neighbors and to give people of differing races/ethnicities the benefit of the doubt, but overall, the way we have approached this issue leaves a lot to be desired. Our witness to the world does not testify of unity and solidarity and generosity.

Now, the very moment I open this session with this idea, I'm immediately aware that there are two deeply entrenched sides of this conversation. On one side, there are those who are deeply passionate about fighting the issue of racial injustice in our world. They believe it is systemic, pervasive, entrenched and that those who hold power are bent on intentionally perpetuating it. They believe that every white person is equally guilty of continued supremacy.

On the other side, there are those who believe (either sincerely or conveniently) that racial injustice no longer exists in society. They believe the Civil Rights movement resolved the last vestiges of it, therefore, any experience with personal or structural racism is a figment of one's imagination. They believe this is a political matter and not a gospel matter.

I think most of us who love Jesus, and His gospel and His church— those of us who want to live faithful to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission— are somewhere between those two extremes. Most of us are somewhere in the middle seeking a third way— the Kingdom way— instead of the way proposed by the far left or the far right. We're just trying to figure it out in a way that is honest and consistent and charitable, and faithful to the scriptures.

Now, to be clear, we all have unconscious biases and we all have adopted predispositions and we need to make room for the gospel to do a deep work in our hearts. So, I'm not suggesting that even those of us to sit in the middle have fully resolved this. For most of us, it requires the ongoing work of repentance and renewing our minds and choosing the Kingdom way. But fundamentally, for those of you watching this course, you just want to get this right.

Have you ever looked around you at this big, beautiful, diverse, multiethnic world that we live in and wondered, "how in the world did we get here?" How did we go from Adam and Eve to Raphael and Maria, and Kwame and Zahara and Sven and Helga and Saaid and Farah and Dai and Ling?

I'm glad you asked that question.

When I ask how "did we get here," I'm asking three things: How did we arrive here on the planet? How did we end up here in a divided world? And did we land in the story of a church united by God's grace? We are going to trace the lines of that throughout this entire course.

The story of creation, division and reconciliation is one of the primary themes in scripture so there is no shortage of material to work with. We don't need a humanities class to get this right, and we certainly don't need to look to social theories. We have everything we need right here in the Bible to see God's grace for every race.

Now, in this first session, we're going to start at the beginning, because the gospel originates in the very beginning. The gospel is not the reaction to a problem, it has been God's plan for humanity from the outset.

In the beginning, a "good" God created a "good" world, and as a crowning act of creation, He formed humanity in His image and after His likeness He called us "very good."

"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.'" Genesis 1:26

Vs 27 recaps this act: "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27

It is so important for us to realize that diversity was part of God's plan from the very beginning. Just think about creation for a moment. Instead of creating one type of bird, God created about ten thousand different bird species. Instead of creating just one kind of animal, scientists have since discovered almost nine million different animal species. And, instead of one type of geography or topography, our generous God created everything from mountains to valleys to deserts to rain forests. He lavished His affection on the planet, and He filled it with abundance and diversity. And when it came to humanity, He also created people in every skin color and pigment. Every shade and hue. Every facial feature and hair texture. Every nose and face shape. He wanted humanity to reflect the vastness of His divine personhood.

Now to be clear, the garden was not a mass production plant with every ethnicity coming off the assembly line. The genetic potential for every ethnicity was invested into one single person.

Now, these two verses, Genesis 1:26-27, lay the foundation for the theological concept of the *imago Dei*—the image of God as seen in humankind.

Being created in the image of God is no small matter.

Our origin story is then recapped in the second chapter of the Bible, and it expands in this retelling.

"Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person." Genesis 2:7

Now, because we were formed from the earth, the word "Adam" is best translated as "earth man," and some scholars have interpreted it to literally mean "red earth man."<sup>2</sup> They take that from the idea that Adam means "ruddy ground." If you have ever worked in a garden, you have encountered the back, brown, or red substance called humus. The word comes straight from the Latin without changes in spelling and means "earth." Humans come from humus. Black, brown, yellow, red, or white, we all come from the same substance, and we are all connected to each other at the most fundamental biological level.

This is a good reminder that our first parents weren't white, western, suburbanites. Our original parents were black, brown, or red hued people.



Following the introduction of the *imago Dei* in chapter 1, it becomes clear that we have been formed for *missio Dei*—the mission of God in the world. We were embodied to emulate God—to reflect His character and His rule in the world.

“Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it..’” Genesis 1:28

This is one of the seminal lines when it comes to the development and establishment of peoples groups, ethnicities, and our association with geographies. From the beginning God intended for humanity to be diverse, equal, and unified. Eden wasn’t the destination; it was the place of our origination.

Now, just think about what that means practically.

To accomplish this, human beings would need to do two things: procreate and migrate. So, as humans began to procreate and migrate, we encountered different environmental conditions, and as we adapted to them, cultural distinctive began to emerge. Colder conditions required more clothing and less exposure to the sun. Warmer conditions meant more exposure to the sun, therefore more melanin. Over time skin tones changed. So, different climates and nutrients influenced our diversity even more.

So, the cultural mandate meant God was positioning us for increasing diversity. And eventually, different languages developed. Different stories were told. Different songs were sung. Different ideas and customs and cultures were formed.

And none of this caught God by surprise.

Now, when the Apostle Paul looks back at Creation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in...

“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.” Acts 17:24-26

Now, there is some dispute in the scientific community as to how this all developed, but to the surprise of the scientific community a recent study by geneticists suggests all modern humans trace our ancestry to a single spot in southern Africa 200,000 years ago.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of whether this discovery holds up or a new one takes its place, what we do know according to the Bible is that every person on the planet came from our original parents—Adam and Eve. Within their genetic pool, they had the potential for a variety of different skin colors and eye shapes and other physical features. Even though the environment shaped some things, God embedded this potential within our original parents.

We all know how this even works in our own families to a much lesser degree, right? Judith and I have three sons and they look like they were born to three different biological families. We have a ginger son, another with medium brown hair, and one with dark brown hair. And when they were young, they were even more distinct. Terry was red headed and fair skinned, and he would sun burn walking to the car—and that was from the kitchen to the garage! Joshua was blond and could get a little tan. Tyler had coal black hair, and in the summer, he looked like he was East Indian. That's in one family.

As remarkable as it seems, one ancestor holds the biology for every person on the planet. Now, environment has a secondary role to play as it relates to the development of melanin levels, the formation of different languages, and cultures and appetites, and behaviors. But God is the architect of it all. We are all made in His image. We are the imago Dei.

And with that, we will pick up on this idea in the next session as we unpack the difference between race and ethnicity. Have you ever thought about the origins of those two words and the impact they have on our everyday lives?

Have you ever wondered if we should bear any responsibility for our race or ethnicity? If I'm white, should I feel guilty for being white? If I'm Black, should I feel as if I must ignore the historic oppression of African Americans or even excuse my own experiences with prejudice and racism?

And, what if I'm neither Black nor white? Why are other non-whites often left out this conversation? What about people historically defined as brown or "people of color?" What about Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans, and others? What does the Bible have to say about the gospel and God's plan as it relates to all people?

### **Session 3: Race, Ethnicity and Colorblindness**

In our previous session, we laid the groundwork for the beauty and diversity of the imago Dei, and that leads us to the distinction between "race" and "ethnicity." This distinction is important for us to understand in any discussion on "creation, division, reconciliation, and the gospel."

So, let's unpack these two highly charged words:

First, ethnicity. Ethnicity refers to belonging to a people group defined by language, culture, and ancestry. It refers to the ways "people identify with each other based on commonalities such as language, history, ancestry, nationality, customs, cuisine, and art. Within the larger framework of 'white', we can easily identify dozens of ethnicities."<sup>4</sup> Sometimes this is connected to a specific "ethno-linguistic" people group. Presently, there are 650 ethnic groups spread over 190 countries. The Bible uses the word *ethnic* or *ethnicity* as the preferred descriptor for the uniqueness of our skin colors and geographical origins. The original words are *goi/goiim*, *mishpahoth*, *phule*, *ethnos/ethne*. All these are descriptors of people, tribes, nations, ethnicities.

Second, race. Race is a social construct, often based on physical features and often constructed in contexts of hierarchy and power. It's something humans made up as a way to separate people into

groups. It's based on appearance, not genetics. This is evidenced by which groups count as "white." There was a time in US when Italian and Irish people were not considered "white," yet now they are. The idea of race has evolved to classify people for different reasons. Usually, to exercise power over them.

According to Sarah Shin, the terms Black, Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Native are used to describe specific ethnic groups. She defines Black as individuals of African descent, including African Americans, African Canadians, and more recent migrants from the Caribbean and Africa. Asian refers to individuals of Asian descent, including Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and many other ethnic groups. Latino encompasses a broad group of people from various Central and South American and Caribbean countries, such as Mexico, Chile, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Middle Eastern refers to individuals descended from the transcontinental region centered on Western Asia and Egypt, including countries such as Iraq, Turkey, and Iran.<sup>5 6 7 8</sup>

Finally, Shin says *White* refers to those "of the European diaspora, from the earliest Western European colonialists to past and present-day immigrants from Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe as well."<sup>9</sup> That's another subject for another session. But it's important for us to remember that we all belong to one single race—the human race. And categorizing people on the basis of arbitrary "racial" categories has led to tragic injustices down through history.

Now, let's give each other some latitude in using the word "race." We all use it. I've spent three years doing doctoral work on this and I still use it. It's in my sermon title today. What's most important is that we're clear on the fact that we are all made in the image of God.

Now, when we talk about race, there are people who idealistically wonder, "Shouldn't we all just be colorblind? Since everyone is the imago Dei, and since we are all equal in God's eyes, is it even helpful to acknowledge our differences? Maybe we would be better off by not even acknowledging racial and ethnic distinctions."

I felt the same way for many years. In my attempt to show love and value and respect for other people, I thought the best thing I could do was to overlook their racial/ethnic distinctions. As much as I thought I was helping, unfortunately, I wasn't. I was minimizing the beauty and the uniqueness of those I was attempting to stand as an ally with.

While the idea of being colorblind may seem logical in theory, when you stop and think about it, there are a couple of fundamental problems with seeing colorblindness as a helpful practice.

First, colorblindness is a departure from what God intended. The conception is not found anywhere in the Bible. In fact, we find the exact opposite. God loves ethnic diversity, and He includes ethnic distinctions as a reminder of His original intent and design. If God wanted to, He could have made us all one single color. But He didn't. He's not a vanilla only God; he's a 31,000 flavors God. He is glorified through the diverse tapestry of nations, tribes, and tongues.

Therefore, colorblindness is saying to God, we are uncomfortable with the way you designed things and we refuse to acknowledge it. (Strangely, some of the very people who rightly want us to acknowledge gender distinctions, don't want to acknowledge ethnic distinctions.)

Secondly, colorblindness is dishonoring and dehumanizing. The idea of being colorblind often becomes the basis that people use to whitewash (pun intended) the atrocities that have happened in history and are still happening around us because of racism. Closing our eyes to color is closing our eyes to the inequalities that exist in our world.

Rather than ignoring color we should see, honor, and celebrate it. Not in a way that's weird, like wanting to touch someone's hair or skin, but in a way that's natural. We don't have to make too much of it, but neither can we make too little of it.

More importantly, as Christians, we are called to live with eyes wide open, to see injustice, so we can proclaim liberty to the captive. Being blind to differences means being blind to the painful realities that some people experience. And quite frankly, denying differences won't make injustice go away, but it will desensitize us to the lived realities of many people who are discriminated against because of the color of their skin. And discrimination is all around us.

Not only does God delight in diversity as our Creator, but He is also a Father who is heartbroken by division and injustices. Every parent knows the joy of seeing their children love one another and some know the sorrow of seeing them at odds with one another. God is no different. Not only does He want humanity dwelling in diversity, He wants us to live in harmony, which means equality and unity. This matters so much that He laid the groundwork for it in the beginning.

As I mentioned previously, scientists have been studying the origin and development of races for centuries. According to historical perspectives, society has traditionally categorized the human population into five races: African, European, Asian, Oceania and Native American, with each race believed to possess distinct physical and genetic traits. However, recent advancements in the field of genetics have challenged these long-standing beliefs and shed new light on the complexity of the concept of race. It is important to note that the notion of race is a social construct and the genetic differences between individuals are much more nuanced than a simple categorization into five distinct races.

Recent research indicate that human populations exhibit regional differences, yet the genetic variation between regions is relatively minor, leading to the blurring of racial boundaries.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, there is a higher degree of variation within each geographic region than previously understood, thereby casting doubt on the existence of a uniform identity for each race.

What's exciting about all of this is that this new view, based on genetic research, is a lot more consistent with the Bible. This idea of us being the imago Dei has significant implications on how we are to view race and ethnicity.

First: If our ontological reality is to be the image of God, that contains major implications for all of life. If we are created in the image of God, and commissioned to image Him to the world, then we

have certain responsibilities to care for creation and for each other. We are representing God here. And that's no small matter. Above color, nationality, political identity, or cultural philosophy, we represent God to the world.

Second: The imago Dei confronts any effort to dehumanize others. No race is superior to another, and no people's group is more important than another. Every nation, tribe, and tongue is equally made in the image of God and equally reflects Him. The imago Dei confronts any form of supremacy or discrimination.

Third: The imago Dei offers a beautiful portrayal of who we were created to be. It gives us a beautiful image of the magnificent tapestry that is the human race – diverse in all of its cultures and colors, woven together in its common humanity.

Understanding the imago Dei shows how our theology informs our anthropology, which in turn informs our sociology.

What do I mean by that? Let me break it down for you:

Theology is the study of God – what we believe about God.

Anthropology is the study of what makes us human – what we understand about people.

Sociology is the study of relationships, societies, and institutions – how human beings interact with each other.

And our theology – what we believe about God – informs and influences what we believe about people – our anthropology. If we believe God is an unengaged deity who is unconcerned and uninvolved in our daily lives, it informs the way we should engage with others. If we believe God is an angry and spiteful deity, it influences how we treat others.

Conversely, if we believe God is loving, kind, compassionate, and merciful, that says something about the worth and value of humanity and it serves as a model for how we treat others. How we see God frames what we believe about other people and ultimately, what we believe about them, determines how we behave towards them.

So, our theology informs our anthropology, and both influence our sociology – what kinds of communities and societies we should strive to create as a result of us having been made in the image of God.

All around us the world struggles to define what it means to be human, and the implications are staggering. Previous generations wrestled with the question and its relationship to things like abortion and euthanasia, but it now informs our view on everything from gender to sexuality to technology to genetic engineering to artificial intelligence as well as the challenges of racism, sexism, and classism.

In a culture where designer babies and human cloning are now a part of our ongoing conversation, and activists and policy makers seek to conjure new ways to define humanity, Christians need to think biblically about what it means to be human. And not for the sake of legislating morality more effectively, but rather to demonstrate a better way of being human in an effort to show the world a better way to live.

There is so much riding on our understanding of what it means to be human at this moment in history. And even more, there is so much riding on what it means to be the people of God.

So, let's do what it takes to get it right for the sake of our world, our witness, our sons and daughters, and for generations yet to come.

Now that we've looked at how we arrived here on the planet, let's shift our attention to the question of how we arrived here in a divided world.

Have you ever looked around that bias, prejudice, inequality, and injustice and wondered why is there so much pain in the world as it relates to us getting along with each other as a species? Racial trauma is persistent and many of you have suffered from it. In the words of Rodney King, "why can't we all just get along?"

There is a simple answer to this complex situation.

Following Creation, humanity existed in that ideal state of diversity, equality, and unity for about two chapters, and we've been working from a deficit ever since. The impact of sin was felt on everything in the world, including our interpersonal relationships. If you take sin out of the world, you have a very small Bible. Just two chapters, in fact, because everything following Genesis 3 is God's response to sin.

Racism, discrimination, and prejudice is the problem of sin, not skin. And, it may be the world's most common sin. The enemy has used it effectively, universally, down through history. More people have suffered, died, or at least have lived diminished lives because of racism than any other malady. As far as the devil is concerned, racism works, so he is not giving up that weapon easily.

And, let me be clear, not everyone is a racist, but there is enough racism in the world to keep it alive and active. But the good news is that through the gospel, there is a better way, and we are going to spend a lot of quality time talking about those solutions in upcoming sessions.

#### **Session 4: Deconstructing Misconceptions in Genesis (part 1)**

In our first three sessions, we discussed how a theology of Creation—specifically that every person is made in the image of God— is vital to how we engage conversations on race. We briefly defined terms, such as "ethnicity" and "race." And we saw that colorblindness is not the virtue that we once thought it was.

We wrapped up our last session with the idea that the divisions we see around us in the world are a result of one thing—the presence of sin. Now in reducing it down to that, I realize some people

may automatically equate simple repentance as the sole solution to racism. Because we all know that repentance IS the biblical response to sin, right?

“But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” 1 John 1:9

Thank God for the gift of repentance and the corresponding release from sin. And yet, repentance also means following up our admission of guilt with a new behavior. When we repent for our individual sins, the biblical expectation is that we will behave differently on the other side of our absolution. In the same way, when societies repent of their sin—when nations humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways—the biblical expectation is that they will behave differently on the other side of their absolution.

Let’s look at what that means for us individually and communally. This session is so important because many people have twisted the scriptures to support racism, sexism, classism—all the ‘isms of the world. So, let’s look at some obscure Old Testament passages that have been distorted to support oppression.

Following the creation of humanity, many biblical scholars call the first 11 chapters of Genesis the “pre-history” of the Bible. It’s the story of God’s work in the world before He made His covenant with Abraham... before He chose one particular nation to be His people. Starting with Genesis 12, the Bible follows the story of Israel and God’s covenant with them, with the intention to bless the whole world through them. But in these first 11 chapters, God’s covenants and His punishments are focused on all of humankind, because until Genesis 11, all of humankind was one people group, with one common language.

This is how this “pre-history,” played out in the first 12 chapters of Genesis

- In Genesis 1-2 God created the world and called it good. Everything existed in a state of untried perfection. It was beautiful, peaceful, harmonious, and fruitful.
- In Genesis 3 everything changed. Adam and Eve rejected God’s good plan. Sin entered the world and violated Shalom. Shalom is the biblical picture of what God intends for the flourishing of humanity. Shalom is a world in which nothing is missing, and nothing is broken.
- In Genesis 4-5 the world begins spiraling downward. Sin is compounded upon sin. Before long, we see the first murder- as Cain kills his brother, Abel. And from Cain descends a man that is even more evil that he was. His name is Lamech, and he is so violent that he boasts about his murders.
- Genesis 6 begins by telling us that “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). This is intentionally repetitive to emphasize the point: EVERY inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was ONLY evil ALL the time.

- Except Noah for Noah in Genesis 6:8. Only Noah was righteous in God's eyes. This is why God sent the flood. He needed to start over, with a new humanity.
- Genesis 6-9 then describes the Flood along with God's promise to Noah to never renovate the world by water again. This is a covenant with Noah, and also with the rest of creation.
- Genesis 10 contains the genealogical record of the descendants of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. It is sometimes referred to as "the Table of Nations." This record confirms that "all mankind known to Israel is descended from a single stock. All men are sons of Noah as well as sons of Adam." Genesis 10 affirms the oneness of humanity amidst the diversity of races and ethnicities and refutes any concept of racial, ethnic, or cultural superiority.

Genesis 10-11 then shows us that Noah's descendants didn't turn out much better than Adam's. Sin was already in the human heart—the human condition—the human community. And everything that Noah took onto the ark, he brought off of the ark.

The study of these chapters provides valuable insights into the origins of race and ethnicity. The central theological concept related to race/ethnicity is that sin corrupted humanity and led to division among people groups, deviating from God's intended plan for unity in diversity. However, a misapplication of these stories has been used throughout history to justify racist attitudes and behaviors. To address this issue, it is necessary to critically examine and dispel these misconceptions.

The first misconception relates to The Fall.

The Fall helps us to understand how a sin like racism can become structural, not just individual; sin can be personal and systemic. Now many people struggle to comprehend systemic sin, especially when it comes to racism. They argue that sin is something that only exists on a personal level. This is how so many people can close their eyes to the racist systems and structures in place in our world.

The story of the Fall shows us that sin operated on a systemic level from the very first moment it infiltrated humanity. It caused a power struggle in the very first family system—which was marriage. Then the story of Cain and Abel showed that the same power struggle filtered down to the next human family system—to sibling relationships. Then with Lamech and other descendants, we see the power struggle affecting the entire community, all of society – every human system.

The sin of racism, as with any sin, is personal and individual, but over time it has also become structural and institutional. How does that happen? Very simply, what begins in the heart is eventually expressed in the community, right? The condition of our hearts is outworked in our relationships. And since our world, socially speaking, is made up of relationships, any sin we fail to address within ourselves is going to be expressed in the systems of society.



Now, many Christians start to panic right here because they are afraid this is going to lead to some social theory— but it doesn't have to. What I'm talking about predates social theories. It has nothing to do with recent ideologies and everything to do with original sin.

All through the OT, we see the expression of sin at an individual level and at structural levels. Fallen people organize societies and perpetuate cycles and systems of brokenness. Just read the minor prophets. It gets intense as God speaks to things like injustice, oppression, usury, and not caring for the poor and He calls them to corporate and national repentance.

Listen, if sin can only be personal as some people believe, why would God call an entire nation to sackcloth and ashes? Why not just call the guilty parties to repentance? Why on call on a nation to humble themselves and pray if the sin of one doesn't have some effect on us all?

Theologians call the doctrine of sin "hamartiology."

It's an entire field of study.

Sin is personal but it can be national/systemic/structural. National sin is when we institutionalize sins like slavery, usury, discrimination, partiality.

Racism is the sin of partiality.

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." James 2:8-9

Racism is the expression of our sinful desire to "rule over" one another instead of co-ruling creation together.

And fallen humans develop fallen systems.

In our next session we will go deeper on how the Fall has impacted all our relationships. We are all working from a deficit. And we all have a lot of work to do to reclaim the ground that was lost because of sin. But the good news is that Jesus has reclaimed that ground, in and through the gospel, and He has given us a toolbox to repair the broken places in our world.

When I look at myriad of issues in our world ranging from power struggles to systemic inequities to racial profiling to white privilege and power, and on and on I could go, I am so aware that the worlds solutions are hollow and temporal. The real and lasting answers are found in the gospel.

Stay with me. We're just getting started and we have a lot of ground to cover right here in this course. This is one of those rare instances when a teaching actually begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation and in between those books ends we find a lot of pain and suffering. But even more, we find the fingerprints of God all over this subject as He shapes humanity along the lines of His Kingdom purpose.

## Session 5: Deconstructing Misconceptions in Genesis (part 2)

Have you ever wondered: why is it so hard to talk about race without it becoming divisive? Why does every attempt to have this conversation blow up on me? Or maybe you've wondered: what are my own blind spots when discussing the topic of race, ethnicity and cultural differences? We all have personal preferences when it comes to certain things but how do I know if it is something more than that? How do I know if it's a preference, a bias, a prejudice, or something worse? How do I know when I am assuming a stereotype? What do I say to someone who has been profiled for their race or has experienced racial trauma?

In this session we are continuing to look at biblical misconceptions and flat-out deceptions that have been used to support racist mindsets and behaviors. You would have thought we have moved beyond these misconceptions, but they surfaced on twitter again just this past week.

The first was misconception related to the Fall of humanity. A misconception of the Fall positions sin as *only* personal and not as communal and structural.

The second misconception is related to the story of Cain.

One of the oldest examples of a racist misinterpretation of these first few chapters of Genesis is based on the idea of a "pre-Adamic" race of people. The first record I have seen is in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it gained traction after that with Christians who were trying to reconcile science and scripture. Originally, the "pre-Adamic race" theory was a response to the question of where did Cain find a wife? If Adam and Eve were the first couple, who did their son Cain marry?

Now, the logical answer is that he married his sister. This early in human history, marriage of siblings was a simple necessity and likely not yet a genetic problem. But there were some who believed that another race of beings must have existed on the planet, and this may explain the early fossil records. It may explain neanderthal man.

Stephen Haynes says one of the oldest examples of racist Bible reading has to do with the story of creation, and it "explicates the existence of various human races by postulating separate acts of creation. Pre-Adamism, as this tradition has come to be called, was introduced as early as the tenth century," but it received major attention in the seventeenth century. Haynes explains: "in 1655, French scholar Isaac de la Peyrère purveyed his pre-Adamite theory as an answer to the age-old question regarding the identity of Cain's wife."<sup>11</sup>

Later, explains Haynes, European Enlightenment thinkers adopted pre-Adamism "as a challenge to the biblical account of human origins, and in the nineteenth century it was welcomed by advocates of white superiority." Racists have used the story of Cain in a number of inventive ways: "one involves the idea that Cain left his family to master an inferior tribe described alternately by pre-Adamite theorists as 'non-white Mongols', 'Black Races', or 'beasts of the field'." Interestingly, "the suggestion that Cain's mark was blackness was advanced in eighteenth-century Europe and was popularized a century later in America by Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism."<sup>12</sup>

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the belief in pre-Adamism emerged and gained traction. This theory held that since white and non-white people appeared to look different, non-whites must have descended from a pre-Adamic race, leading to the notion of polygenism or multiple creations of different races. This perspective was often used to argue that non-whites were of a lower status, thereby justifying slavery and perpetuating racism. Some so-called scholars used pre-Adamism as a scientific justification for slavery and racist beliefs.

Some forms of the pre-Adamic theory even posit that there were separate acts of creation for each race. In this bizarre theory, there was a white Adam and Eve, a black Adam and Eve, an Asian Adam and Eve, and so on. They argue each were created separately, and each had their own line of descendants, according to their race.<sup>13</sup>

I'm not going to name any names, but some of this ridiculousness still exists in various forms today. Not only is it unbiblical, but it's also the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches.

The pre-Adamic theory distorts the scripture to justify a divisive, racist point of view and many proponents have even suggested that the "mark" that God gave Cain made him a Black. Again, that is nowhere in the Bible. This is completely invented and untrue. (Side point: he was probably already a Black/Brown man!)

If that isn't enough, there is another movement called the "Christian Identity" movement, which teaches that Jews and other "non-white" people are descendants of Satan – actual descendants of the serpent from the Garden.<sup>14</sup> This is absolute nonsense. It's heresy. And it's dangerous. The Jews are God's chosen people in the Old Testament – the people through whom He would bless all of the nations of the world. Full stop. Argument settled.

The Bible literally gives us genealogies of the whole world descending from Adam and Eve to Noah. Following the flood, we see the record of Noah and his sons and their wives and humanity multiplying from there. And only later, in Genesis 11, does humankind separate into people groups with different languages.

The development of different people groups is much better explained (both biblically and scientifically) by the story of the Tower of Babel spreading different groups to different geographical areas than the idea that God created each of the different races separately. We'll get to that in a moment.

The third misconception relates to the Flood.

There are two ways the flood story has been misinterpreted to perpetuate racism:

One, their explanation of the story of the "sons of God" intermarrying with women before the Flood. And two, their explanation of the "curse of Ham" in the story of Noah and his sons after the Flood.

Before the Flood, Genesis 6:1-4 describes that the “sons of God” saw that the “daughters of men” were beautiful, and they took whoever they wanted from among them and had children with them. This “taking” was violent language, not typically a consensual, mutual relationship.

A traditional reading of this passage would say that the “sons of God” were angels, since that is what the term usually referred to in the Bible. These angels took women for themselves and had children with them. But some theologians believe that these “sons of God” were not angels, but kings or noblemen. It was also customary in the ancient world to call kings “sons of God” because they were believed to have a special divine connection, sometimes descended from gods or even believed to be gods themselves.

This would also be consistent with the idea of “taking” whoever they wanted as wives. Kings and noblemen were often allowed to do that in the ancient world.

But those who want to justify racism interpret this in a totally different way. They believe that this story was really about interracial marriage, which God found an abomination, and is why He sent the Flood. Again, there is zero biblical evidence for this belief.

This may sound crazy to us, but this misinterpretation was common enough that it was part of the teaching of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1980s – not that long ago. In 1986, the national director of the KKK used this to warn Americans that the apocalypse was coming soon. He quoted Jesus saying, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it shall become in the days of the Son of Man” – meaning when Christ returns. What Jesus meant was that the world will be like it was in the days of Noah – “EVERY inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was ONLY evil ALL the time.” But this guy said that the “days of Noah” referred to interracial marriage. So he pointed to the growth in interracial marriage in the United States at the time and declared that the end must be near. I wish I was making this up. People really do believe and teach this. People who claim they are Christians. This is why we have to be vigilant to study our Bibles for ourselves and learn what it really says.

The fourth misconception relates to the curse of Ham.

Perhaps the most prominent racist teaching from Genesis comes from the “Curse of Ham.”<sup>15</sup> This occurred after the Flood, after Noah had planted a vineyard and made wine from its grapes. One night, he drank too much and fell asleep naked in his tent. His son Ham saw his nakedness, which was a shameful thing in the ancient world, and told his brothers. The other two took a blanket and walked backwards into the tent to cover up their father without seeing his nakedness. When Noah awoke the next morning, he cursed Ham’s son Canaan, promising that he and his descendants would be servants to his brothers’ descendants.

Those who want to justify racism say that Canaan’s descendants became the Black people of Africa. This passage was misused repeatedly to justify slavery in the United States, that it was the fulfillment of God’s punishment on the descendants of Ham. Again, this interpretation has absolutely no basis in Scripture whatsoever. (Side point, Ham was probably already a Black/Brown man!)

Unfortunately, this thinking is what is underneath the actions and policies that have caused racial trauma to many. Uncovering these misconceptions is a good first step toward healing for those who have experienced racial trauma.

The descendants of Canaan were the Canaanites, the people group living in the Promised Land when the Israelites (who were the descendants of Shem) conquered them in the book of Joshua and beyond. This is what God is referring to, not anything to do with what we call “race” in the modern world at all. All throughout Scripture, we see Israel’s mission to be a blessing to all nations. A God-fearing Canaanite even appears in the lineage of Jesus. But we’ll get to that later.

The fifth and final misconception relates to The Tower of Babel.

Genesis 10 gives us the account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and all of their descendants, and where they each ended up settling geographically. Chapter 11 then gives us the story of how and why they were scattered to different places.

When we get to this story, in Genesis 11, humanity was living in one place and shared one common language. They had stopped obeying the cultural commission to procreate AND migrate. Instead of obeying God’s instruction, they decided to plan and order their own society. So, they stopped expanding across the earth and they huddled up together and focused on building a tower in an attempt “to reach the heavens” and to make a name for themselves.

The story specifically points out that they are doing this so they wouldn’t be “dispersed over the whole earth” in order to point us back to this original command from God to “fill the earth.”

Those who want to justify racism see the development of different people groups as a punishment for the Tower of Babel, as if diversity is the result of sin. But what they miss is that it was God’s intention from the beginning for them to multiply and migrate. Their sin was actually their refusal to procreate and migrate and instead to concentrate humanity in a place of unity and pride.

In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to become the Father of many nations in response to the disastrous human situation described in Genesis 3-11. Abraham’s location is important to note. God calls Abraham out of Babel. And He called Abraham to do what Adam had failed to do—to procreate and migrate—to multiply and fill the earth—He said your descendants would be as numerous as the stars and the sand. They will inhabit every place your foot walks.

It’s the same thing God has commissioned us to do through every covenant. Even the Great Commission is procreating spiritually and migrating globally. Diversity has always been and will always be God’s plan. He rejoices in the diversity of the different races, nations, and people groups of the world, and He hates the division we have created between them. The power struggles and domination – the desire to rule over one another – is a direct result of sin entering our world. It’s the same sin we see when one race tries to dominate another. Instead of ruling over God’s creation together, we are trying to rule over each other.

These first chapters of Genesis give us this background of the origins of race and humanity: who we are and how we got here. It also tells us what needs to be fixed.

Now, I'd like to close with two challenges that are simple but vital: read Scripture well and open your eyes to the extent of the fall.

First, read Scripture well. Tragically, the Bible has been abused and misused to create horrific hierarchies and to perpetuate terrible tragedies. Where might you be adding words to the Word? Where do you fill in gaps with your own assumptions or prejudices? This can happen when we read the Bible alone. One of the greatest accomplishments during the time of the Reformation was giving more people access to Scripture in their own language. But we weren't meant to read it in isolation. When we interpret in community -with people of different genders, races, or life experiences, we may find we have blind spots in reading Scripture. Let's read God's incredible Word faithfully, in community.

Second, we must recognize the extent of the Fall. I'm not talking Calvinist or Arminian debates. I just mean recognizing that we who follow Jesus should be quick to recognize that our societal structures are fallen, that our relationships are broken. We have an incredible Gospel -Good News that all of our relationships can be restored. But we can't work toward racial reconciliation if we don't see the depth of our need for it.

In the next session, we are going to look at what the Bible has to say about how we as Christians are to treat the foreigner, the stranger, and the immigrant. Because we cannot separate these issues out from the subject of creation, division, racial reconciliation, and biblical justice. If we are going to gain a comprehensive understanding of what is broken in our world and how the gospel addresses it, we have to dig a little deeper than some of the topics trending on social media or surfacing in our coffee shop conversations.

On some level, it all ties together.

### **Session 6: Racial Reconciliation and the Foreigner (part 1)**

It seems that everyone has a different opinion on how to treat immigrants today. In fact, we're not even in agreement on what to call them! It's one of the most hotly contested issues in our nation, with people arguing back and forth about whether we should open our borders or close them, whether we should provide social services or not, and whether we should deport those who are undocumented or grant them mass amnesty.

Immigration is a serious and complicated issue, both for humanitarian reasons and national security reasons. And there are logical arguments and strong emotions, and deep compassion on both sides of the conversation. But immigration is also an issue through which some people's racism can be revealed. For some, their views on immigration are founded on their view of the "other," or on their deeply held beliefs about different races mixing with their own.

Our question as Christians is, what does the Bible say about how to treat the immigrant? Which is really the question of how do we treat the "other"? Let the politicians argue about laws and the economists argue about sustaining a growing or dying population. Our role as followers of Jesus first and foremost is to embody and express God's heart for humanity.

Now, in our last two sessions we talked about the origins of mankind and our earliest civilizations—the story of how we developed different nations, languages, cultures, and people groups. All of that is included in the first 11 chapters of Genesis – what scholars call the "pre-history."

This week, we'll move into the second part of Genesis, then Exodus, and finally Joshua, to hear the story of how God chose one of those people groups to be His people.

The fact that God chose one nation to be His people does not mean He doesn't care about the rest of the nations. In fact, it means just the opposite. His purpose in choosing one nation was to bless the whole world through them. Someone had to be chosen for that role.

Throughout the Bible, from the very beginning, from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David to Christ, we see God choosing one person and forming a special relationship with them, called a covenant, in order to bless the whole world through them.

- When God formed a covenant with Adam and Eve, it was never just about them. They were to rule the earth in His stead and bear His image to the world.
- When God formed a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:3, He said, "All of the families [people groups] on earth will be blessed through you."
- When He formed His covenant with Moses and the people of Israel, He said that when they lived by His law, they would be a light to all the other nations, to lead them to God.

This is the pattern. God chooses one person/group that He uses to bless the rest of the world. His heart and His mission are for the whole world. God's plan wasn't about making Israel more racially/ethnically significant than any people's group. God's intention was to bless the world through them.

When Abraham was first called by God, in Genesis 12, God told him twice that His intention in blessing Abraham was so that he would be a blessing to others. Genesis 12:2b, "I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." And 3b: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God then positioned Abraham, and eventually all of Israel to know what it felt like to be the foreigner in someone else's land. God promised Abraham a land of his own, but Abraham himself never actually owned that land. It would be his descendants who would finally inherit that land over 500 years later. After God called him, Abraham spent his entire life as what the Bible calls a "sojourner." What today we might call a nomad or a migrant.

This was a significant part of Abraham's story theologically. The great "faith chapter" of the New Testament:

"And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise." Hebrews 11:9

This sojourning was a significant part of Abraham's faith. Theologically, this was a foreshadowing of what it's like for believers to be citizens of heaven living on this earth - Kingdom people in a foreign land. From the very beginning, the people of God have been a people on the move. All through Genesis we see them sojourning.

After chronicling the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and his sons, Genesis ends with the twelve sons of Jacob moving to Egypt to escape a famine. Once again, they were sojourners living in a foreign land. Although they were initially received well thanks to Joseph -the book of Exodus opens by telling us that the welcome did not last forever.

Exodus 1:8 says "there arose a new Pharaoh over Egypt who did not know Joseph" and held no obligations to protect his family. And he felt threatened by how large their family had grown and how strong they were. So, he decided to enslave them. "

This is significant to notice when it comes to thinking about race relations. We don't want to gloss over this, because this is a story that has been replaying itself in many, many nations all over the world throughout all of human history.

Even though the Israelites had been living in Egypt for generations, this Pharaoh did not consider them Egyptians. Though they lived in his land, he didn't see them as part of his people. He still considered them foreigners living in his land. They were "other" from him. Think about people in the United States today whose family have lived here for generations. Yet if they don't look white, people continually ask them "where are you from?" Even if they say "Phoenix," someone might reply, "No, where are you really from..." We are conditioned as humans to categorize. Most of us see those different from us as the "other." Whom might you be tempted to see as "other?"

Pharaoh dehumanized the descendants of Jacob enough to enslave them. Enough to order all of their male babies killed. When we categorize people of other people groups, nations, or races as "other" from us, this is how we become capable of horrendous atrocities against them.

"But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became." Exodus 1:12

We need to stop and take notice. As simple as it seems, this is one of the primary reasons people commit horrendous atrocities towards others - fear.

They were afraid of the Israelites. Afraid they would become stronger than them and rise up against them. The Egyptians wanted to maintain their power as the superior people group in that land.



Does any of this sound familiar? Do we see this happening anywhere today? Or anywhere in history? There are countries all over the world, all throughout history, where one group oppresses another out of fear of losing power.

Pharaoh was so afraid of the Israelites growing more powerful that he committed ethnically driven infanticide. In verse 15, he told their midwives that as they were delivering babies, to let the females live but to kill the males. The midwives feared the Lord and didn't do it, saying the babies came too quickly for them to be able to do what he asked. So Pharaoh doubled down. In verse 22, he commanded all of his people that they should throw every son born to the Israelites into the Nile. This was a public announcement to the whole Kingdom. He wasn't hiding his desire to destroy them.

Note this contrast of fear here: Pharaoh feared losing his power, but the midwives feared the Lord.

And notice what happens to each of them.

Verse 20 says, "So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. "

But God did not deal well with Pharaoh. In his effort to preserve his power at horrific costs, Pharaoh lost everything. In the end, he lost his own life in the Red Sea.

In our day-to-day lives, slavery and genocide may feel far away. Yet they are deeply woven into the history of many societies, including our own in the United States -from the genocide of Native Americans to African chattel slavery to Jim Crow Laws, Japanese internment camps, and even the way we treat Hispanic migrants today.

It's easy to distance all of that from things like the horrors of the Holocaust or the genocide in Darfur or Rwanda or Bosnia-Herzegovina or Cambodia and to think they are not the same. It's to pretend we would never participate in evil. And yet, we have.

Racial or ethnic-driven injustice often begins with "othering." When we see other races, other people groups, and other nations as anything less than our brothers and sisters in one human family, made in the image of God just as we are, we can justify treating them as "less than."

"Othering" is at the root of racism. Othering paves the way for dehumanizing people. Which paves the way for committing all kinds of evil against them. Slavery and genocide may be the most horrific examples of it, but we have all committed sins of "othering." And God wanted His people to never forget when they were "others."

The topic of immigration has been politicized throughout many countries over the years, however as Christians we can rise above the polarization and model what it means to welcome the foreigner into our church family. Yes, there are legal and responsible ways to do this, but fundamentally we are called to engage the world with generosity and hospitality.

Our love and appreciation for diversity does not force everyone into an ethnic "melting pot" but rather is enriched by the various distinct flavors found in the beautiful stew of humanity.

You may not live in a multiethnic community nor worship in a multiethnic church, but we all live in a multiethnic society, therefore we should all actively be involved in showing biblical hospitality to the other.

### **Session 7: Racial Reconciliation and the Foreigner (part 2)**

One of the big issues we are wrestling with as Christians in our times, is what does the Bible say about how we treat the "other?" Let the politicians argue about laws and the economists argue about sustaining a growing or dying population and lawyers argue about pathways to citizenship. All those things should matter to us, but above all, our role as the church is to embody and exemplify God's heart for humanity. We are called to be allies and advocates.

Let's continue with the biblical timeline.

When the Israelites finally escaped Egypt, God met with them to give them His law. This was a part of their covenant relationship, the way they were to live as His people, reflecting His character. Among hundreds of laws about every imaginable concern, God gave them specific laws about how they were to treat the foreigners among them.

Now, before we go any further, please note that these laws regard Israel's treatment of the foreigners living among them. This is not my attempt to indirectly address some of the policy issues of our days. When it comes to border security and a fair and just and humane policy for immigration, those are separate issues. But they should be informed by this picture of what God intended for ancient Israel.

The laws regarding the treatment of foreigners in the Old Testament are rooted in two central themes: 1) the vulnerability of the sojourner and 2) God's compassion for the sojourner. Leviticus and Deuteronomy, among other books, emphasize the inclusion of foreigners in the category of vulnerable individuals, along with widows, orphans, and the poor, referred to as the "quartet of the vulnerable." Despite their adherence to the covenant, foreigners were susceptible to exploitation and mistreatment. God's concern for these vulnerable groups, including foreigners, is evident in the laws He established for His people at Mount Sinai, which defined their ethical responsibilities towards these groups.

"You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you mistreat them and they cry out to me, I will hear them cry." Exodus 22:21-23

These laws are expanded upon throughout Leviticus/Deuteronomy. The Sabbath laws were to apply to foreigners to protect them from being exploited in work. The laws not only protected the foreigner but also provided for the sojourner. For example, in Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy

24:19-20, God commanded his people to not reap their whole harvest, in order to leave provision for the foreigner. Ruth the Moabitess benefited from this provision.

God's people are to be marked by protecting and providing for the vulnerable. But this is more than charitable acts. We see God wants His people to have a heart for the sojourner, to remember they were once sojourners.

This is summarized in Deuteronomy 10: "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." Deuteronomy 10:18-19

We not only love the sojourner because we are all spiritual sojourners. We love the sojourner because God loves the sojourners.

Foreigners were permitted to live among the Israelites, but they only received certain rights if they chose to enter into the covenant. God promised all foreigners that if they committed to His covenant, they would receive His blessing. Even Israel's greatest enemies. We see in the Book of Jonah that God even extends mercy to the enemies of Israel in Nineveh when they repent.

Jonah was furious; he didn't think they deserved God's mercy and grace. They were Assyrians -the people who eventually captured the Northern Kingdom. But God's plan and purposes, from beginning to end, were always for every nation, tribe, and tongue.

Now we run into some complexity in all of this with the stories of the Conquest, particularly when the Israelites move into the Promised Land and begin to attack foreign nations in war. If God loves the foreigner, why did He command them to attack these foreign nations and utterly destroy them? Is this God being racist against the Canaanites? Is this God committing genocide?

There is no doubt the book of Joshua is a difficult one to read. It's a struggle to reconcile this God who appears to be wrathful and vindictive with the God of love we see elsewhere in Scripture. We can't gloss over these passages or ignore them.

In Deuteronomy 20:16-18 God told the Israelites "not to let any living thing survive" in the cities they were going to inherit, but to "completely destroy them." But what matters is the reason He told them to do it. So that none of these nations' "detestable acts" would influence Israel.

Leviticus 18 tells us that these "detestable acts" included adultery, child sacrifice, incest, and bestiality. In verses 24-32, God said that these practices had caused the land itself to become polluted. The Conquest wasn't genocide of a people group, nation, or race that God didn't like. It was a purification of the land.

But that doesn't address the question of what happened to the God of mercy, forgiveness and steadfast love? The God who forgave the Ninevites, a people who had committed acts just as detestable as the Canaanites?

In order to understand what's really going on in these stories of the Conquest, we have to look at the very first "attack" on a city in Canaan – the battle of Jericho. Scholars like John Walton point out that we should view these "cities" more as military bases rather than like our contemporary cities. But the passage isn't focused on Israel's victory.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the whole story surrounding this is completely focused on God. The Israelites prepared for battle by consecrating themselves, not physical training for military strategies. And it wasn't the strongest warriors who lead the march, but the priests. This was a religious ritual more than a battle.

And perhaps most telling, after the walls came down, God told them in Joshua 6:17 – "the city and everything in it are set apart to the Lord for destruction."

Set apart to the Lord is religious language. "Set apart" means holy.

It's also the language of sacrifice – set apart for destruction. Just like an animal sacrifice would be completely burned up on the altar, these cities would be completely destroyed. Scholar David M. Howard tells us in his commentary that in the ancient world, "things could be offered to God by being utterly destroyed. This could happen with respect to material wealth, people, or even entire cities." The destruction of these military bases wasn't about God destroying a race or a people group; it was to purify the land.

For many of us, that still doesn't make us feel any better. Why should these Canaan be offered as a sacrifice? That doesn't seem fair or right or loving. Even if they did some bad things, even a lot of bad things... isn't God the God of forgiveness?

This is where the rest of the story of Jericho comes in. It wasn't all of Jericho that was utterly destroyed. One woman and her family were saved. Just like one family was saved from the Flood. Rahab and her family were spared because of the kindness she showed the twelve spies when they came to scout out the land.

But it wasn't just her act of kindness. Just like Noah, it was her faith that saved her. In Joshua 2:9, she told them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land." She said she had heard of all that God did for them bringing them out of Egypt and then in verse 11, she says, "the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

Rahab was a believer. Rahab chose to commit to the Lord and enter the covenant family. An option that was open to everyone living in the land of Canaan. Rahab was spared because of her faith, as any other Canaanite who had faith in God would have been.

God didn't destroy the Canaanites because they were Canaanites and save the Jews because they were Jews. In the very next battle, the battle of Ai, God would destroy any Israelites who sinned against the covenant. It wasn't about which group they belong to. He spared those who had faith, no matter what nation, tribe, or people group they were from. Just as Peter would say centuries

later, "God shows no partiality between (Jews and Gentiles), but in every nation, He accepts anyone who fears him and does what is right."

The story of the Conquest was a story of God creating a people who would be faithful to His covenant. No matter what nation, race, or people group they were originally from. The foundation of that people were the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt. But any Israelites who were unfaithful to God were destroyed along the way. And any foreigner who wanted to join God's people, like Rahab, were welcomed in. So that only the faithful survived.

God was creating a holy nation, set apart for Him. A nation of people of faith, regardless of ethnicity or culture or language.

Throughout the rest of Scripture, we see the motif of sojourners. The people of God from Abraham to today are a people on the move. Abraham was a migrant due to his faith. Jacob and his sons were economic migrants -fleeing the famine of Canaan. The Israelites were sojourners fleeing their oppression in Egypt. I know this might sound strong, but our attitude toward migrants in our world today reveals how we would view Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and the Israelites back then.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Jesus Himself was a temporary immigrant in Egypt, having fled His homeland due to safety concerns. The Messiah, Lord, and Savior, was once a refugee, living as a displaced individual within the Roman Empire. Therefore, one's perspective towards refugees and immigrants today reflects their view of Jesus if they were in Egypt during the first century.

So, how are we treating the foreigners among us?

In the "Parable of the Sheep and the Goats" in Matthew 25, Jesus includes "the stranger" among the people the righteous helped and the wicked did not. Verse 35 says,

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Matthew 25:35

We can ignore, excuse, and even reject this scripture as being naïve. Overly simplistic. Unrealistic. Or we can hear what Jesus is saying to us about the condition of our hearts. The political policies of a nation always reflect the condition of our hearts. I believe we need fair, compassionate, humane, just, laws, but we will never have them without having hearts that express the heart of Jesus and His Kingdom. Do we have a heart of fear or a heart of welcome?

Most of us fear at least some group of people. Which people are you most threatened by? Who don't you want moving into your neighborhood? How might even people you respect -whether politicians or family members -be shaping your fears? Whom do you see as "other"?

Then let's go beyond that to action. Whom might God be calling you to welcome? Is there anyone God is calling you to invite into your home for dinner or go out to lunch to show His love and heart of welcome? Would your small group consider partnering with a relief resettlement organization to help welcome a refugee family?

Jesus asks, "Are you welcoming the stranger?" Because, He said, "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me."

In our next session we are going to do a deep dive into one of the hot button issues of our times. What does the Bible say, if anything, about the issue of justice? Is it biblical? Is it socialist? And what part does justice have to play in the story of the gospel, racial reconciliation, and the church?

### **Session 8: The Prophets and Social Justice**

At the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., there is a beautiful space called the "Contemplative Court." As its name suggests, it was designed to be a place to contemplate. A space for deep thought and mediation. There are caramel-bronze walls of Bendheim glass. In the center of the room, a fountain rains into a pool from the skylight above. On the walls are several inscriptions, quotes from notable abolitionists, revolutionaries, and artists. One of the walls features these words:

Let justice roll down like a mighty water and righteousness like an overflowing stream. Amos 5:24

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used these words in his "I Have a Dream" speech in which he refused to settle for superficial progress. He said, "No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.'"

The water running down from the cylindrical fountain in the middle of the room echoes this battle cry for the people of God. The sound of the water falling down brings the words to life.

These words have been an anthem of the Civil Rights movement in America and for believers who have fought for justice across the world. Racial and ethnic injustices have been perpetuated throughout history when we overlook God's heart for justice. The call for justice is a rallying cry for the people of God. A mission for those who know and follow Jesus.

In this session we are going to look at the prophets and biblical justice. This may be one of the most important sessions in this series, so I want to take a moment to offer a couple of quick qualifiers.

First, the idea of biblical/social justice is not new. To those who think the idea of social justice is a new construct of political ideologies, or progressive societies, or even millennial generations, I want to remind you that the church has engaged around the issue of justice from the earliest of days. As you'll see in this session, this has been the expression of God's heart from the earliest record. His passion for justice runs like a river through the pages of Scripture. Both Covenants. Old and New Testaments. And it has continued to flow through the arc of history. Some of the more notable examples of the Christians engaging around the issue of justice in recent history include John Newton, William/Catherine Booth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sojourner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and many others.

Even though the term “social justice” is not found as such in the Bible, the idea/concept/principle is clearly grounded in the narrative of Scripture. In fact, I will argue that any form of “social justice” that isn’t grounded in God and Scripture is a something less than what God intends for humanity.

Second, the term “social justice” is not a euphemism for socialism. What we are going to talk about is a “Kingdom of God” issue. It’s a Jesus issue. It’s a gospel issue. It’s not a political issue. Even though politics can facilitate or restrict the flow of Kingdom values in a society, the roots of “social justice” originate deep in the soil of Scripture, deep in the heart of God.

Third, we can make this subject as complicated or as simple as we want. There are layers and levels that make for interesting conversations but when everything is said and done we are called to “do something” about this issue. Don’t get stuck in social justice theories and neglect the world around you. A healthy church is the best answer to a hurting world. There are hurting people all around you every single day. Many of them are nameless, faceless, voiceless, and powerless and you can minister to them, advocate for them, come alongside them and see their lives transformed—along with the systems that contribute to their well-being.

With that in place, let me get started with a story:

As far back as I can remember, I’ve had a concern for justice. When I was five, my dad graduated from Bible College, and we moved to the Black Hills of South Dakota to plant a church. The Black Hills are best known for Mount Rushmore, the massive sculpture carved out of a granite mountain of the heads of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln. It’s breathtaking. The heads of the Presidents are 60 feet tall. It took 14 years for Gutzon Borglum to skillfully blast them into existence. And over 3 million tourists visit the site each year. It was a regular destination for our family as we camped and fished and brought friends and family to the area more times than I can even count. It’s one of my favorite places on the planet.

The property that Mt Rushmore occupies was originally owned by the Lakota Tribe of The Great Sioux Nation. The Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868) granted the Black Hills to the Lakota in perpetuity, but the US seized the area from them after The Great Sioux War of 1876. It was never given back.

My family arrived in South Dakota in 1971 just after members of the American Indian Movement led an occupation of Mt. Rushmore. In order to make a statement about the injustice of losing their lands, a Native American “holy man”, John Fire Lame Deer, led young activists, grandparents, and children to the top of the mountain where he planted a Lakota prayer staff. He said the staff formed a symbolic shroud over the presidents’ faces and that they would “remain dirty until the treaties concerning the Black Hills are fulfilled.”

I remember visiting Mt Rushmore for the first time and hearing the story of the activists who were removed a few months earlier. And, even though I was only 6, I felt really strange about it. I was sad. I wondered why the Indians couldn’t have their land. I wondered why we couldn’t find a way to share it. I wondered why we had taken it from them in the first place.

And what added to the conflict in my soul was the fact that just 17 miles away there was another granite mountain being sculpted. It was of a Lakota riding on a horse. His name was "Crazy Horse." His sculpture was taking forever to complete. In fact, it took just 14 years to sculpt four presidents on Mt Rushmore. It's taken over 70 years to sculpt just the face of Crazy Horse— with no end to the project in sight.

The contrast between those two mountains set the context in my young soul for the disparities I would see in my childhood in South Dakota between the Sioux Nation and the white community— and later on in the deep South between the Black and white community.

And, just as that experience framed my outlook on the disparities in society, there is one verse that has framed my outlook on how God wants us to respond to them. It's found in Micah 6:8.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8

I love that passage because it is a world of ambiguity—in a world of religious confusion—in a world divided by every imaginable philosophy, God simply tells what will make the world a better place: justice, kindness, humility. How amazing is our God, that He will distill all of His expectations for humanity down to three simple ideas? Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

The saying, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God," appears simple, but upon closer examination, it holds much deeper significance. This phrase is rooted in the covenant God made with Israel, starting with Moses' liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and God's promise to be their God and for them to be His people. The covenant established a two-way relationship, similar to a marriage covenant, where both parties have responsibilities that sustain and maintain the relationship. It is a revolutionary statement that highlights the transformative power of God's love and the importance of fulfilling one's obligations in a covenant relationship.

God established a covenant with the Hebrew people, declaring "I will be your God and you will be my people." The expectations set forth by God were anchored by two primary commandments. Deuteronomy 6:5 instructs, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your strength." While Leviticus 19:18 states, "Love your neighbor as yourself." In order to clarify these mandates, God provided additional guidelines, including prohibitions against murder, lying, stealing, and infidelity, as well as a command to not covet what belongs to one's neighbors.

Seems pretty straightforward, doesn't it?

Seems easy to remember, right?

Well, apparently, we human beings tend to forget what matters when things are going well.

Micah's preaching took place during a time of prosperity for the Israelites. However, they had forgotten their covenant with God and as a result, they had lost compassion for those who were



suffering from poverty and other forms of slavery. The rich and powerful were exploiting the weak and the poor, who were also financing the nation's military buildup.

Micah confronted the leaders about the injustices in their society, but their response was to change the subject. They pointed to their religious practices, asking what else God could expect from them. Micah then answered their question by stating that God requires them "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

The biblical concept of justice, embodied in the Hebrew word "mishpat," requires treating individuals with fairness and equity, administering punishment or acquittal based on truth and impartiality, regardless of their racial or social background. This extends to providing the entitled rights and necessities to all, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged such as widows, orphans, immigrants, and the economically deprived. The Bible holds that a just society is one that cares for and protects these vulnerable groups, viewing neglect as not only a lack of empathy but also a transgression of justice. The divine love and protection extended to the vulnerable should serve as a model for society to follow in ensuring that "mishpat" is upheld in the treatment of all individuals, especially those with limited economic and social power.

"For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." Deuteronomy 10:17-19

Justice, then, is decidedly social in nature.

I think Professor Cornel West has said it best: "Justice is what love looks like in public." Justice in the way of the Hebrew prophets, the tradition Jesus follows, is an act of profound love. It is the public dimension of the commandment to love God and neighbor. Love must inform the interpersonal and institutional realities we find relate to.

Justice, in its essence, is about rectifying imbalances within society where certain individuals are denied their fundamental needs, rights, and necessities for thriving as members of the community. The concept of justice lies at the core of the Exodus story and defines the nature of God as a just deity. The covenant made between God and the Hebrews, who were rescued from slavery, entailed that they must not treat others in the same manner as they were treated in Egypt. Doing so would break the promise made to them by God.

Why should we be concerned about those who are vulnerable? It is because God is concerned about them.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one indirectly affects all indirectly."<sup>19</sup> We see this idea throughout the prophets -that God is a just God and expects His people to act justly.

Now, in our next session we are going to enter the world of the New Testament as we begin bringing this series closer and closer to where we are living today!

### **Session 9: The Ethnic Composition of the New Testament World (part 1)**

In the last few years, more and more people have become more and more interested in tracing their genealogy. And that can make for some surprising moments. I did it myself, a couple of years ago. After realizing that there is so much of my own family history that I'm not familiar with, I logged on to [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and signed up for their program.

Ancestry's website tells many people are interested in their family history because it provides them a sense of identity and belonging. It helps them to find and navigate own unique place in history. And for those reasons, that can be a positive thing. Unfortunately, down through the ages, many people have used genealogies in unhealthy ways. They've used genealogical research to define, label, and exclude people rather than to include them.

What if I told you that Jesus's lineage shows us the power of inclusion and not exclusion? That even though His is a royal lineage, His genealogy isn't at all exclusive, but radically inclusive? It sweeps into the lineage of family of God to those who approach God on the basis of faith, regardless of ethnicity.

Today, we're moving into the New Testament, which begins with Jesus' lineage. But we're not just going to look at Jesus's ethnic heritage, we're also going to explore all of the different people groups that existed in the biblical world at that time, to get an idea of how He fit into that cultural world. Most people just assume that since the Jews were God's chosen people, and since Jesus was a Jew, then He must have existed within an ethnically monolithic culture. But He didn't. He lived in an extremely diverse culture. Not unlike our own

The Greco-Roman world at the time of Jesus' birth was an interesting mix of many different cultures all living together under the same government. It was a fairly unique time in history and like many other nations, Israel was occupied by Rome. So, they had to negotiate their own Jewish culture within the greater Greco-Roman culture of the day.

J. Daniel Hays, a biblical scholar, has done extensive work on this subject. And he reminds us that while there was a Greco-Roman culture, there wasn't a Greco-Roman ethnic group.<sup>20</sup> The Roman empire was vast, ruling over many nations. So, the writers of the New Testament use a generalized descriptor of "Greeks, Jews, and Barbarians," to include every ethnic group. And when the New Testament talks about "Jews and Greeks" it literally means Jews and "everyone else," not just people from the nation of Greece.

You see, most cities in the Roman Empire were extremely diverse. They would have had their own local culture and language, but they would also have spoken Greek as their second language, and they would have adopted much of Greek culture as well. Especially those who wanted to be powerful or influential in the Roman world.

Also, intermarriage was common. Greeks and Romans who immigrated to other lands would often intermarry with local people, so their cultures would naturally be mixed that way and would become more so over time.

Because of this diversity in the Roman Empire, some terms in the New Testament can be difficult for us to understand if we don't know this historical context. So, I want to briefly unpack a few of the different ethnic/cultural terms we see in New Testament times to better understand the context of Jesus and His followers.

We'll start with "Greek." "Greek" can refer to anyone who had been "Hellenized" - conformed to Greek culture. Before the Roman Empire, when Alexander the Great and the Greeks took over other countries, they forced the people to learn Greek and adopt Greek culture. But when The Roman Empire took over The Greek Empire, the Romans didn't come and change everything again. Because the Greeks already had the most sophisticated architecture, philosophy, theater, and everything else, the Romans just integrated Greek culture into their own. This is how they ended up with a "Greco-Roman culture" that could also be referred to as "Greek" culture. So, the Romans did things like take the Greek gods and connect each one to one of their own gods and then blend them together into one pantheon that had both Greek and Roman names. Roman and Greek culture intermingled into a mixed culture.

Being "Greek" didn't refer to your race or ethnicity, but the fact that you had adopted a Greco-Roman culture. Which actually had more to do with your education than anything else. Uneducated people tended to not have learned Greek and therefore kept more of their own cultures, while more educated people learned Greek and adopted Greek culture.

A similar thing happens today when the children of immigrants go to school in their new country. The kids may speak English much more quickly than their parents because of going to public school. They also tend to adopt broader elements of American culture more than their parents do.

This shows an important element of class and education as influencing how "people groups" were viewed, in ways that weren't directly limited to ethnicity. This is key for understanding "Barbarians." The term "barbarians" in the first century Roman world referred to anyone who did not have a Greek education, whether they were from Asia Minor, Africa, or Europe. This term went beyond race to education and cultural integration.

The word "Barbarians" is used in Romans 1:14 and in Colossians 3:11. We'll discuss this verse more in an upcoming session but in essence, it refers to those who were not educated in Greek culture.

So, within the broader Greco-Roman context of the New Testament, the gospels are set in the land of Israel, which is occupied by Rome. And outside of the Roman occupiers and migrant groups, we see two main people groups in the land of Israel: the Jews and the Samaritans.

Now how these two Jews diverged from one another is a little confusing. You have to track it closely. Throughout the Old Testament, we read about God's people, the Israelites inhabiting the Promised Land, then being exiled from it, and then returning. We know that the "Jews" in the New

Testament are the descendants of the Israelites, but suddenly the "Samaritans" seem to appear. Where did they come from? Why are they living in the Promised Land? Who are they?

Following King Solomon's death, when the Kingdom of Israel divided around 930 BC, the Northern Kingdom with its 10 tribes continued to be called "Israel," and the southern part of the kingdom with its 2 tribes was then called "Judah."

The Southern Kingdom, or Judah, considered itself to be the pure line of God's people. They had David in their lineage, and they possessed the Temple in Jerusalem. It was Judah who continued the story of Israel and the worship of Yahweh under the covenant. They were taken into exile in 586 BC to Babylon, but then returned seventy years later and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple. They were called "Judahites," and over time, that eventually changed to Judeans, and then Jews. There were lots of different religious sects within the Jews, but they all considered themselves to be God's people ethnically.

The Northern Kingdom, on the other hand, had intermarried with several other people groups over the generations. They not considered to be pure Jews. In fact, in 722 BC, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria. About twenty thousand Israelites were taken captive and strategically replaced with inhabitants from five nations. Those foreigners from Babylon, Cuthah, Avah, Emath, and Sepharvaim intermarried with the Jews who remained in the land, introduced them to idol worship, and mixed their religion with the Jewish faith. Over time, these interethnic inhabitants of the land became known as the Samaritans. This happened gradually over centuries; therefore, the origin of their name is shrouded in mystery. As one Bible nerd to another (you're in the club now), you should know the name Samaritan doesn't appear in the Hebrew Bible (it is a Greek word with a Latin ending), it seems to be derived from Shomron, the name of the Northern Kingdom's capital.

The Samaritans are first mentioned in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah. At that point, the Jews were in exile in Persia. Nehemiah was allowed by the Persian king to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the Temple. He reached Jerusalem with grand plans of renewal, but instead was met with harsh opposition by the Samaritans living there. They taunted him and even threatened to fight against the rebuilding efforts. This was the start of long-lasting animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans, and we will explore that tension in following sessions.

The Bible doesn't follow what happened to the Northern Kingdom after the Assyrian invasion. In fact, rabbis in Jesus's day still debated whether the "lost ten tribes" would ever return. Most modern Jews believe they assimilated into Assyrian culture.

The New Testament "Samaritans" claimed to be descended from those ten northern tribes. These Samaritans believed in the Torah – the first five books of the Old Testament and worshiped the same God as the Jews, but they worshiped on Mt. Gerizim instead of in the Temple in Jerusalem. Mt. Gerizim was the mountain on which the people – all 12 tribes – had pronounced the blessings of the covenant in Deuteronomy before they crossed over into the Promised Land.

When the Southern Judahites returned from the exile in Babylon, they did not see the Samaritans as part of God's people for two main reasons:

- They were descended from the northern tribes who had broken away from the true Israel, the tribe of Judah, the tribe of David. 1 Kings 20:18 even says that the Lord removed those ten tribes from His presence and "only the tribe of Judah was left."
- They had intermarried with foreigners and let their pagan religions get mixed in with theirs, so that the religion that the Samaritans practiced wasn't what God had given to the original 12 tribes in the law at all.

Jesus didn't allow cultural barriers or ethnic distinctions to dictate who was allowed into a relationship with God. Every person, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality has equal access to God by faith on the basis of grace. Knowing, this, followers of Jesus should be the most racially inclusive people on the planet. We were created as a diverse people. Our Savior championed people of diversity. The church was born in Acts 2 as a diverse community. And ultimately, heaven is going to be the most diverse place in the Universe.

### **Session 10: The Ethnic Composition of the New Testament World (part 2)**

In this session, we're going to talk about what the Bible has to say about interracial marriage, among many other things.

Fifteen years ago, my sister-in-law fell in love with an African American man in our congregation, and it created some tension in our extended family and even in our church community. The same young lady who researched my family's genealogy experienced a lot of rejection for falling in love with someone who didn't share the same skin color. I'm ashamed to say that some of our family even boycotted their wedding. That's just how charged this issue is in some communities.

But what does that Bible have to say about it?

In our last session we saw how the Samaritan were a mixture of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom Israel and at least five other nations. But it's incredibly important for us to understand when we're talking about the issue of race, that intermarriage wasn't a bad thing in God's eyes from a racial or ethnic perspective. The scripture prohibits marriage between the people of God and those of the pagan nations on religious basis. That has nothing to do with ethnicity or nationality.

Remember, Rahab and Ruth were assimilated into God's people on the basis of faith and were welcomed into the lineage of Jesus. In fact, the Jews made room for people of other religions to convert, but they had to assimilate into Israel on the basis of His covenant. But God forbid His people marrying those of other nations who brought their pagan gods into marriage, therefore leading His people astray from following Him alone.

The ban on intermarriage in Ezra and Nehemiah was not due to any racial prejudice, but rather was a response to the mixing of different religions. The intent behind these verses has been

misinterpreted by some with discriminatory motives who use them to oppose interracial marriage. In actuality, the scripture supports and sanctions interracial marriage and does not discriminate against the mixing of different races or ethnicities.

In Nehemiah 13, God explains that this marrying pagan women was forbidden. He points to Solomon as His example:

“Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin.” Nehemiah 13:26

In Ezra 9:1, Ezra makes it clear that “intermingling” with these foreigners when they returned from exile was about their “detestable practices,” not because of their race or ethnicity. It was about joining themselves together with those who were not following God. In the same way that 2 Corinthians 6:14 talks about not being “unequally yoked with unbelievers.” That’s not a prohibition against connecting yourself with people who are different from you in race or culture. But with those who differ in faith.

A few verses later, Paul quotes from the covenant, where God commands His people to “come out from [the pagan nations] and be separate.” God’s people were called to be separate from the world. “Holy” means set apart from Him. They were called to welcome anyone who wanted to come into the fold of God’s people and conform to His practices. But they were not to assimilate into the world and conform to its practices. This is what it meant for them to be a “holy people.”

Some people with racial biases have tried to use the term “holy race” in the next verse in Ezra – Ezra 9:2 – to justify their idea that there is a holy “race” of people that God loves more than others and to argue against interracial marriage.

Ezra 9:2 says that when God’s people married foreigners, “the holy race mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.” But the use of the word “race” here isn’t about ethnicity. It’s about being the people of God. Later, in the New Testament, Peter would use that exact phrase about the New Testament church, which was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Israel’s identity as a “holy race” or “holy people” wasn’t about their ethnicity, it was about their identity as God’s people, which we’ve seen throughout all of these sessions, included people from any race, tribe, and tongue who had faith in God.

All of this gives us the backstory of why the Samaritans were different from the Jews in the first century and why the Jews despised the Samaritans so much. Not only had they broken off from the tribe of Judah originally to go worship false gods, then they had intermarried with pagan nations who worshipped foreign Gods. The original kingdom had split in 930 BC, so by the New Testament, it had been a thousand years since they had turned away from God. The Jews did not consider them a part of God’s holy people in any way.

Now, in addition to the Jews in Israel, we also see many Jews in the New Testament, living in other nations all over the Roman Empire. After the Exile, when the Persians dominated them, they

continued to disperse the Jews all over their empire. Then when Alexander the Great and the Greeks dominated them, they kept moving the Jewish people too. Scholars call this period of time “the Diaspora” – when Jews were dispersed all over the world.

By the time of the New Testament, after 500 years of dispersion, there were Jews scattered all throughout the Roman Empire. This is why so many Jews who spoke different languages were in Jerusalem at Pentecost in Acts 2. When Peter stood up to preach he was looking into the faces of men from 16 different nations who had gathered for the Feast of Shavuot (Weeks). This great dispersion is also how the institution of the synagogue began. All those Jewish people living in foreign lands couldn’t get back to the Temple for Sabbath. They needed a local place they could meet and worship and learn.

It’s amazing that they continued to worship God in those foreign lands, that they found a way to be faithful in exile – exactly what the exilic prophets had called them to. Instead of letting these foreign nations lead them away from God, as the Samaritans had, they built little outposts for the worship of God in the midst of foreign lands. This is what it meant for them to be a holy people, set apart for Him.

Now, all these dynamics worked together to create the perfect conditions for the birth of the Church. Why?

First, that there were Jews living in every nation meant that there were synagogues in every city where the apostles could preach the gospel.

Second, the fact that all nations were joined by a common Greco-Roman culture and language made it easy for Roman citizens like Paul to travel between all of these cities and to preach to all of the people there, no matter what tribe or nation they were originally from.

Third, Rome had built roads connecting communities and nations and travel was easier than it had ever been in the history of the world.

And the fact that Jews and Gentiles were already living peaceably together in Pax Romana throughout the Empire would make it easier for them to live together in community as the church. The global multiethnic nature of the Roman Empire would help set up the image of a Christian Church that was made up of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

I know this was a lot of background. But I want to show you how this is so important to understand even the first two chapters of the New Testament.

And this was the world Jesus was born into. It’s a lot like the world we live in.

In Matthew 1, we see the genealogy of Jesus. A Jew would have expected the Messiah’s lineage to be composed of only noble men from the line of David. But Jesus’s parents were both relatively obscure, not of high social status or honor. And although Jesus’s genealogy did show Him being directly descended from David, there were some major surprises in it.

- First, Jesus's genealogy included four women. This was very rare for a patriarchal culture like first-century Judaism.
- Even more surprising, those four women were Gentiles: Tamar was likely a Canaanite, Rahab was a Canaanite, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba may have been a Hittite (she was married to Uriah the Hittite).
- And all four of these women had untraditional, even scandalous, stories of how they got into the bloodline of Jesus.

Yet none of these women were the type of foreigners who led God's people astray; they all joined into God's people. Every one of these women showed great faith. Each of these names disrupts the genealogy of Jesus to make an important theological point – being God's people is not about bloodline or race or ethnicity, it's about faith. All people of all races and cultures are welcome to belong to God's family.

The second chapter of Matthew also gives us a surprising account of Gentiles who were involved in the coming of Jesus – the Magi. The magi were a traditional class of Persian or Babylonian priests, renowned as astrologers. Note these two nations: the Babylonians, who had taken the Judahites into exile and the Persians, who took over the Babylonians. The story of Esther happened during the rule of the Persians –where the Persian king almost wiped out the entire Jewish people. And in the story of Daniel, the Magi of Babylon were selfish, incompetent and brutal pagans who almost got Daniel killed.

It would have been shocking to have these two former captors of the Jews be part of the birth of Jesus. But in Scripture, we see God's love for all nations –even the enemies of His people.

In Jonah, God forgave the Assyrians in Nineveh.

In Daniel 4, God converted King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

In Ezra, God moved the heart of King Cyrus of Persia. God reached out to each of these enemy kingdoms and included them in His covenant and His plan. And He didn't just use them to accomplish things for the Jews; He cared for them too.

In Jonah 4:11, the Lord said to Jonah, "Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh [the capital of Assyria] in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

God loves the nations.

The inclusion of the magi in the story of Jesus's birth teaches us the same thing that the inclusion of the Gentile women in His genealogy does. God welcomes all people of any nation tribe or tongue who have faith in Him. The Magi were foreigners, but they came to worship Jesus.



They didn't come to attack Israel or to pull people away from God. They came to worship. They saw His star in the sky and they recognized, like Rahab did, like Ruth did, like Nebuchadnezzar did, like Cyrus did, that the God of Judah is THE God of every nation, tribe, and tongue. The God of gods and the Lord of lords.

A survey of the Greco-Roman world helps us see the New Testament more vividly –its world was complex, just like our globalized world today. If we don't understand someone's cultural context, we don't understand their life experiences. What ethnic groups in your community do you need to learn more about? Maybe you could learn more about the culture of someone in your workplace to better understand their own life experiences.

And the more I learn about the complexity of the New Testament world, the more I marvel at how God orchestrated people from enemy groups into the lineage of Jesus. The story of Jesus's ancestry and birth compels us to adopt God's heart for all people and confronts us with our own prejudices. It helps us to see the ways that we have excluded others based on their history or background. And I'm amazed at how God orchestrated the rise of the church at just the right time to live out His mission to bless every nation.

As we continue through the New Testament, we'll see more of how Jesus included all people of every nation in the message of the gospel. We'll continue to be challenged to love and include others the way God does and, we will look at what this means for the cultural issues of our day.

### **Session 11: Jesus and the Marginalized (part 1)**

One hundred years ago, Charles Sheldon wrote a book depicting the role of Christians in the world. It was entitled, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* Through a chain of tragic events, the minister of a prosperous church realized how unChristlike his life had become. So, he made a commitment to lead his congregation in a vow not to do anything without first asking the question, "What would Jesus do in this situation?"

The book makes clear that asking "What would Jesus do?" in every situation is the key to truly walking In His Steps. Since then, the initials WWJD, have been seen on everything from t-shirts to tattoos and from red carpets to major sporting events.

Sheldon's premise is through provoking. No one can deny the dramatic changes that would occur in the world if we would all ask ourselves that question, and then behave correspondingly, in every situation. But maybe there is another question, a more fundamental question that we should ask ourselves and each other: whom would Jesus love?

Have you ever wondered how Jesus would respond to certain things if He were living in our world today? What would Jesus have done if He were standing there in the moment when Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others, drew their last breaths?

How would He have acted if He were standing on that street corner in Minneapolis when Derek Chauvin had his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes 46 seconds?

What would Jesus have done in your middle school gym class when that kid made a racial slur about your classmate? Or on your job when someone wasn't included or promoted on the basis of their skin color? Or in the grocery store when a person of color was treated poorly? Would He have done more than just stand there, frozen in fear?

What would Jesus do in this divisive season in our communities and even our world?

In this session, we are talking about how Jesus related to people of other races.

In our blond hair, blue-eyed rendition of Jesus, we easily miss the fact that Jesus was a first-century Jew, living in occupied Rome. Jesus was born into an ethnic culture, and He interacted with people outside of His culture.

Now, in both Jewish and Greco-Roman culture at the time, there were very strict rules about who you were "allowed" to eat with or do business with or marry or touch or even talk to. Jews didn't talk to Samaritans at all. Those of high honor didn't associate with those of low honor. But Jesus blew all of that out of the water. New Testament scholar Jerome Neyrey, an expert on first century honor/shame culture, wrote that in so many of Jesus' recorded interactions in the New Testament, He was "calling off the honor game."

Ancient culture, like many Eastern cultures today, was based on an intense system of honor and shame. You were born with a certain level of honor based on your family's socio-economic standing – this was your "ascribed honor." But then you could also gain or lose honor depending on what you did in your life, or even things that happened to you. If you committed a grievous sin like adultery, you would lose honor. But you would also lose honor if you got a serious disease like leprosy through no fault of your own. You could even lose honor if someone in your family did something shameful.

Meanwhile, being invited to dinner by someone of higher status than you or winning a debate or doing well in your business all increased your honor. And if someone in your family gained honor, the whole family gained honor with them.

Everything in their culture was regulated by how much honor you had. Honor, even more than money, was the most valuable commodity. The higher level of honor, the greater your ability to associate with anyone you wanted, so people were constantly trying to gain honor and minimize shame in everything they did in life.

But Jesus flipped the script, eating with everyone regardless of status – sinners and saints. The lowly and the honorable. In back-to-back chapters in John, chapters 3 and 4, Jesus had a deep theological conversation with the highest of the high and the lowest of the low. From Nicodemus to a Samaritan woman. He healed lepers, Gentiles, and sinners, but also people from the most honorable families as well as those who would have been seen as oppressors. He didn't discriminate based on honor or status or any demographic. Jesus was telling us with His actions that all people are equally valuable in God's eyes. While He was not overthrowing honor and shame

culture, He was subverting an earthly system of honor and shame that made distinctions between so-called “insiders” and “outsiders.”

There are so many stories of Jesus interacting with outsiders that anyone reading the gospels in the first century would have noticed this immediately. It defined His ministry so much so that people called Him “Friend of Sinners.” To be clear, that was not an affectionate nickname. It was a slur against His character.

Jesus was an honorable man. His demographics ticked the boxes of honor. He was a Jew, not a Samaritan or Gentile. He was a man, not a woman. And He was a rabbi, which was a great honor career-wise. He had been born into an average carpenter’s family, that was His ascribed status. But He had moved up in the world dramatically to be respected as a Rabbi. If Jesus were playing the honor game, He definitely would have been winning.

Yet He repeatedly reached out to the lowly.

We could look at lots of different stories – Jesus reaching out to the lepers, who would have been considered unclean because of their sickness. Or Jesus connecting with the tax collectors who were despised because of their greed. Or Jesus showing respect to the cripple or blind or lame, who were considered “less than” because of their disabilities. Or Jesus loving the “sinful woman” who was an outcast because of her sin.

But in this session, we’re going to specifically look at a few stories of Jesus reaching out to those who were outcasts for ethnic reasons – because of their race or ethnicity.

First, we’ll look at one of my favorite stories: Jesus’ encounter with the Woman at the Well.

We see in John 4:1 that Jesus intentionally went through Samaria. *“Now he had to go through Samaria.”*

*“So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.”* John 4:4-6

Like most Jews, Jesus could have avoided Samaria. In the last session, we discussed how Samaritans were not viewed as real Jews. They were seen as heretics and as half-breeds. Yet, Jesus has a tender love for the Samaritans.

He went out of His way to stop at Jacob’s well. There, he encountered a Samaritan woman. BTW: I think we’ve gotten her all wrong. Too often, just like the adversaries of Jesus, we let our own prejudices fill in the gaps. Nowhere in the story is this woman directly called “sinful.” We often assume that she was getting water at noon to avoid other women who came in the cool of the day because she was sinful. But that may not have been the case. I’ve just written a book on Jesus’ Love Affair with the Samaritans that takes another look at this beloved story and it turns some of the assumption upside down.

We don't know her name, but we know Jesus wasn't afraid to be seen in public in conversation with a woman. He set aside the Jewish rules of ritual purity to ask her for a drink. The Samaritan woman knew her place in the culture, and it wasn't in giving a Jewish man a drink. But He initiated this encounter.

Jesus then offered her living water. This begins a theological conversation, where the woman at the well shows she knows her beliefs. Is this Jewish stranger greater than their ancestor Jacob? What is this "living water" that he offers? Why is their worship still divided.

John 4:16, Jesus tells her to get her husband. When she says she has no husband, Jesus replies *"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."*

We don't know exactly why she had had five husbands; too often, we are quick to fill in the gaps and sexualize her, assuming she was a perpetual seductress. While she may have had an affair, there could be a number of other reasons for five husbands. She very likely could have married young and had one or more husbands die. She could have been barren and had husbands leave her (though, it's unlikely that four or five men would marry a woman known to be barren). She could have been like Tamar, a victim of a series of unfortunate events. We simply don't know. But regardless of the why she had five husbands, it's not too much to assume that she could have experienced shame. Just as barren women were seen as cursed by God, her community could have made all sorts of assumptions about her.

This woman recognizes that Jesus is a prophet -he knows her story. So, she enters a theological debate, the crux of the debate between Jews and Gentiles -where should YAHWEH be worshipped? Although her theology is incorrect, she clearly is inquisitive. She knows the theology of her community and how it was distinct from the Jews. Jesus establishes orthodoxy, but He goes deeper. While salvation is from the Jews, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth."

The woman responds with confidence that the Messiah will explain everything when He comes. Then Jesus tells her "I, the one speaking to you -I am he." She was the first person in the book of John to whom Jesus revealed that He was the Messiah, and she becomes the first evangelist to non-Jews in the book of John. She runs into town and tells everyone about Him. In verse 39, we see that her testimony was enough for many of the Samaritans to believe, even in a culture where a woman's testimony was not legally valid in court. Many Samaritans believe because of her testimony, but their belief is solidified when Jesus stays for two more days to teach them.

There are so many reasons why I love this story. I love seeing Jesus' heart for a woman who would not only have been marginalized but also a woman who was on a quest for the truth. He doesn't let cultural expectations become barriers to ministering to her. In her excitement, she leaves her water jar to serve as the first missionary to the Samaritans! And Jesus stays for two days in her town to point her whole community toward the living water that is deeper than Jacob's well. He spent two whole days in a village filled with "the others."

Jesus did not remain silent to the challenges from the Samaritan woman about the historic tension between Jews and Samaritans. In fact, He owns His own ethnicity as a Jew and still addresses this woman's deepest need. He models the importance of Christian leaders speaking up for those whose voices have been silenced.

## **Session 12: Jesus and the Marginalized (part 2)**

I want to take this session to touch on a few interactions that Jesus had with marginalized people in the gospels, because they show us a lot about His nature and how we have misunderstood some of these examples related to race.

In Matthew 8:5-13, a Roman centurion comes to Jesus, asking Him to heal his servant who is paralyzed and in terrible suffering. Jesus offers to go, but the centurion says that he knows Jesus is so powerful that he doesn't have to physically come. He can just say the word and the servant will be healed. Jesus is amazed by this centurion's faith. He hasn't found anyone in all of Israel with such great faith.

"When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 'Lord,' he said, 'my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering. Jesus said to him, 'I will go and heal him.' The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.'" Matthew 8:5-13

The Jews would have seen this centurion as unclean because of his ethnicity. And many would have hated him because of his position in society. Israel was a Roman territory and Rome had stationed soldiers there to keep the people under control. They were on the streets in uniform every day to intimidate the Jews. Their very presence was a reminder of Roman rule over Israel. He represented oppression.

Yet this centurion humbled himself before Jesus. He called Jesus "Lord," and said that he did not deserve for Jesus to come under his roof! He trusted in the absolute power of Jesus. This was no ordinary centurion.

Notice also whom he was asking Jesus to heal - his servant. Someone whom most men in power like himself would consider completely expendable, completely replaceable. If a servant died, so what? Get another one. But not this man. This man was different. This man went out of his way to find Jesus, humble himself, and ask Him to heal his servant.

Not only did this man have great faith in Jesus, but he also had a great love for the "least of these." The two greatest commandments - love God, love others.

Jesus used this Roman centurion as an example to tell His disciples what was happening to the Kingdom of God. How it was shifting. The "Kingdom" was no longer the physical country of Israel,

but the Kingdom of heaven. The true Kingdom of God was made up of all of those of any nation who followed Jesus with this kind of faith.

In Matthew 8:11, Jesus says, *"Many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the table of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."* Not only the biological children of Abraham, those who are ethnically Jews. But those from all over the world who trust in Jesus - the spiritual "children" of Abraham from every race, nation, tribe, and tongue.

The disciples would have considered the centurion an outsider because of his ethnicity. But Jesus praised him above any person He had ever met in Israel, which would have included them! Jesus didn't care what his ethnicity was. His faith gave him a seat at the table.

Now, we'll move to a more complicated story. In Matthew 15, Jesus meets another woman who has several "strikes" against her: she was a woman and a Canaanite. On top of that, her daughter was demon possessed. The Canaanites were descendants of the people that the Israelites were supposed to have driven out from the Promised Land when they took over, but they didn't. Throughout the Old Testament, the Canaanites were often bitter enemies and cyclically led the Israelites into idolatry. On top of all of that, this woman's daughter was possessed by a demon.

But this was a woman on a mission. She had a persistent faith. In Matthew 15:22, she cries out to Jesus, and he does not answer her right away. From the start, this passage can make us feel uncomfortable. Was he ignoring this woman because she was a Canaanite? Some scholars argue that Jesus didn't answer, not because he was being rude or ignoring her, but to test His disciples, to see what they would do. The disciples begged him to send her away, in the same way they had shooed the children away from Him. In their eyes, children were not worth Jesus's time, and neither was this woman. Jesus was an honorable rabbi, the future king of Israel.

Jesus tells her in verse 24 *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."* Yet, she persists, kneeling before him, asking him to help her. Jesus then says in verse 26 *"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."*

This verse troubles us today. Is Jesus insulting her for being a Gentile, calling her a dog?

Craig S. Keener, a renowned Pentecostal scholar, explains that Jesus was not cursing the woman but rather testing her to see if she would persist in her faith.

In this test, Jesus has yet another theological conversation with a woman -this time with the extent of God's compassion. Can it extend beyond the "children?" The woman recognizes her humbled status. This contrasts with the disciples who tried to fight for their seats in the Kingdom. Yet she knows and trusts that the kindness of God can even reach her.

Like the Roman centurion, Jesus praises this woman for her great faith. He not only has compassion on her, but He also commends her faith in front of His disciples.

Jesus broke down racial, religious, cultural, social, and gender barriers in this encounter. Though the disciples may have thought of her as a dog, she proved to have more faith than His closest disciples. She would eat at the table with them in the Kingdom of heaven, not beg for scraps under it.

The Canaanite woman came to Jesus in utter helplessness over her daughter's demon-possession. But this was not the only time Jesus ministered to Gentiles with demon possession. Jesus was willing to minister to the most unclean and the most helpless.

Finally, in Mark 5, we see one of the most powerful encounters between Jesus and the forces of evil. Jesus and His disciples travel to the region of the Gerasenes. While there is some debate about wherever this was, scholars agree it was in a Gentile area, particularly with the presence of pigs. Verses 2-5 show how utterly helpless this man was. He was possessed by an evil spirit, living in tombs. No one could restrain him, even to save him from himself. His super strength could break the chains that were meant to protect him from himself. Verse 5 reads "Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones."

He sees Jesus from afar off, and the demon speaks to him. Jesus isn't deterred, even when he finds out the man is inhabited by a whole legion of demons. Long story short, Jesus casts the demons out into a herd of two thousand pigs who run off a cliff.

It sounds absurd to us, but it was anything but funny to the witnesses. Those who were tending the pigs reported what had happened. So, the people come to see for themselves. But they find more than drowned pigs.

I love verse 15 "When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid." This verse shows the man in a completely transformed condition. The man who was so tormented he could not be subdued was sitting. The passage implies he once was naked and now was fully clothed. And for the first time in ages, he was in his right mind again. The people are spooked and ask Jesus to leave.

He obliges them. But on His way out, the man whose life had been transformed begs to join Jesus. But Jesus turns him down. He says in verse 19 *"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."* Rather than rejecting this man, Jesus commissions this new disciple. In Mark's Gospel, this man is the first evangelist to the Gentiles throughout the "Decapolis." People were stunned at God's mercy and power.

This story is so moving. It begins by showing Jesus's intention to go beyond the "lost sheep of Israel." Then we see him not repulsed by a Gentile who was unclean in every way -literally living among the dead. Jesus not only has mercy and demonstrates His power over demonic forces, but He commissions this man. He entrusts him with the good news of the mercy of God. In a world where we can be image-conscious, where we may want only the best and brightest, the popular

and the put-together to represent our church communities, Jesus instead sends out the outsider as His chosen messenger.

These are but a few of the stories of Jesus' interactions with the "outsiders." In everything Jesus said and did, He taught us that entrance into the Kingdom isn't based on social class, honor, heritage, or any of these categories we have created. Only by grace through faith.

But He actually did more than that. Jesus didn't just say, "Race doesn't matter, let's all just be color blind." He didn't pretend that these very real categories and barriers didn't exist. He just subverted them.

This is a lesson for those of us who come from a position of privilege in our world. It is our responsibility to actively tear down barriers for those in our world who are marginalized. Proverbs 31:8 encourages us to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." With great power comes great responsibility. When you are in a position of privilege, you have a responsibility to use your privilege to defend the rights of those who don't have it.

Too often, we overlook or neglect our own agency.

We live in the bliss of ignorance.

We talk disparagingly about *that* part of town.

We'll talk about communal or systemic issues in future sessions, but I want to pause here and focus on our hearts. Because everything in the community comes out of the condition of our hearts. A healthy church is the answer to a hurting world. A unified church is the answer to a divided world.

Where might you be like the disciples? What people make you feel uncomfortable? Whom do you want to dismiss? And where do your own racial prejudices keep you from loving people? We asked in an earlier session -whom might you consider as other? I want to ask that again, but slightly differently. What racial or cultural prejudices might keep you from loving those whom Jesus loves? Who makes you feel uncomfortable? What part of town do you avoid?

Who don't you want moving into your neighborhood? I don't mean just one nice token neighbor. I mean who might you not want to move into your neighborhood in a large group? What part of town do you avoid? Where are you willing to go to love people? You may not feel called to go to another country on a mission trip, but are you willing to get out of your community of people who look like you to volunteer with an organization meeting real needs?

I hope that today we see the deep heart of Jesus. Relationships are the key to bringing justice to all the injustices in our society. But it's hard to know how to love people if we don't have a relationship with them. I hope today we grasp the heart of Jesus -and may we live out this heart of Jesus for those who are marginalized in our communities today.

### **Session 13: Diversity and the Church in Acts (part 1)**



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "It is one of the great tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies that 11:00 on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours- if not the most segregated hour in Christian America." Many don't realize that at the time he said this, in much of the Jim Crow South, it was expected for Churches to follow the Jim Crow rules of segregation.

Researchers tell us that that hasn't really changed much since the 60s. Yes, there are some churches who are pursuing diversity, equality, and even equity, but statistics tell us that most churches do not reflect the diversity of their communities. That is key -the diversity of their communities. It makes sense for a church in an ethnically homogenous small town to reflect the demographics of its community. But too many multiethnic communities do not have multiethnic churches.

For a church to be considered multiethnic according to Michael Emerson, a church must have at least 20% of its community as belonging to a different ethnicity than the majority.<sup>21</sup> That's not a high standard. Put differently, a diverse church, says Jacob Dunlow, is one "where no single ethnicity makes up more than 80% of the congregation."<sup>22</sup> Louis Porter II says this is because "a group of 20 percent or more creates a critical mass that can influence an entire organization and move beyond tokenism."<sup>23</sup> Oneya Okuwobi points out how, when this percentage is reached, "there is a 99% chance of contact with other racial groups and the proportion of minority members is large enough to have an impact on the organization's operations."<sup>24</sup>

Yet, researchers find about 15% of churches in the US are multicultural. The highest estimates are 20%.<sup>25</sup> Now, there's a lot to examine here -where is the place for immigrant churches that are united by a common language? How many churches are multiethnic but choose not to be multicultural? What does this look like around the world? These are conversations leaders are having all over the world.

But before we look at tactics, I want to look at biblical principles. Specifically, is this what the church was meant to be? How did the early church navigate the blessings and challenges of diversity?

In many ways, the book of Acts is a starting template for what the church should look like. Now, to be clear, the first-century church did do lot of things right, but they weren't perfect either. They struggled with many of the same things we that we struggle with when it comes to racial and ethnic diversity. The church in Acts reveals our origination but not our final destination. It's filled with principles and patterns and if we only make it as far as they did, that's probably better than where we currently are, but there is so much more to be realized.

I had someone recently why I care so much about racial-reconciliation, and my answer was pretty simple. Because it's biblical. It's the fruit of the gospel at work in a church and a community. And... because I'm a Pentecostal. Now, you don't have to be a Pentecostal to care about this—in fact some of the people I know who care the deepest about this aren't—but for me, Pentecost is an added layer and an additional motivator.

I love what one of the legendary bishops of the Church of God in Christ once said, *"The responsibility for promoting racial healing rests with all Americans, but especially with the Christian Church; and especially with that segment of the Christian Church in which Pentecost is the essential metaphor that defines its vision."* Ithiel Clemmons

And the reason for that, is because the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was fundamentally about three things: (1) the birth of the church (2) the supernatural empowerment of believers, (3) the full inclusion of nations and generations, with men and women both fully empowered to prophesy.

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?" Acts 2:1-8

Now, when the Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, God is reversing the effects of the division that occurred at the Tower of Babel, among other things. The backstory takes place in the early chapters Genesis. Do you remember it?

In Genesis 1:26 God created humanity in His image and His likeness. In Genesis 3:6, Adam and Eve sinned and in vs 23 they were banished from the Garden—sent east of Eden. Humanity begins to spiral downward into increasing evil. So, God decides to restart the world with a man named Noah and his descendants.

Genesis 6:9 says that Noah was a righteous man, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. So, God saved him and his family from the flood. But after the flood— after God went to great lengths to restart the world—Noah's descendants began spiraling down into evil as well. History repeats itself. Because sin was embedded in human nature—not creation and nature.

Now, the next rebellion against God is repeated in the story of the Tower of Babel. And Genesis 11 introduces the story in what appears to be positive language: Vs. 1 "Now the whole earth had one language and the same words." Did you catch that? Everyone spoke the same language and lived in the same place. What's the problem? Now, on the surface that may seem like a beautiful thing, but it was contrary to God's plan.

God had commanded Noah and his family to do the same thing that He originally commanded Adam and Eve to do. In Genesis 1:28 God commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." In Genesis 9:1, God said to Noah "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." God

wanted the entire earth to be filled with His story and His glory. He didn't want humanity settling down into one place and building a gated community. He wanted the planet filled with diversity.

But, following the flood, instead of spreading out across the earth, the people decided to reach upwards into the heavens. Instead of filling the earth with God's glory, they determined to amass glory for themselves. They wanted to access heaven on their own terms. And that is the history of humanity and idolatry. So God stopped their efforts by confounding their language and dispersing them across the face of the earth (Genesis 11:8-9). In one sense, He actually pushed them back to His original plan to fill the earth. From this point on, mankind was divided into different nations with different languages.

In Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, God was reversing the effects of their rebellion at The Tower Babel. He has gathered men from every nation, and He is once again unifying their language. But this time their common language is the language of the Spirit. And this time God will use their unity for good—to bless the nations and to carry the Good News of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus to every nation!

Continuing on in Acts 2:14, 16-18, "But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. [16] But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. "

This is the birth of the church in power. This is the bringing together of nations and generations and men and women as equal partners in the gospel. This was a game-changer for humanity.

One of the many miracles of Pentecost is the demonstration of unity within diversity. The crowds at Pentecost were not a homogenous mix at all. Yes, they were all Jews, but they were from all over. Their language and their culture represented every nation in the Roman Empire.

God was making a huge theological statement in the supernatural event of Pentecost.

They were still diverse, ethnically and culturally, but they were brought together into one body. God didn't force them all to speak Hebrew to hear the gospel - He spoke to them in their own native tongues. Our God is a God who comes to us and meets us where we are.

And though God changes us when He brings us into the body of Christ, He didn't make them change who they were ethnically to fit in with the Church. God changes our hearts when we become believers, but He doesn't change our race, our ethnicity, our cultures, or our backgrounds. Instead, He weaves all of us together into a beautiful tapestry of colors, cultures, and styles.

This was how the church began. This was God's design for the church from the beginning.

In Acts 2-4, these diverse believers all lived together in community and shared everything in common. They ate together, prayed together, worshiped together... they did life together. Acts says they were "one in heart and mind" - all FIVE THOUSAND of them, from all different nations and backgrounds." This was the very definition of unity in diversity. Sadly, time revealed that their unity wasn't as nearly as deep as it initially appeared.

### **Session 14: Diversity and the Church in Acts (part 2)**

Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, the meteoric rise of the church in Acts 3 and the remarkable unity of the church in Acts 4, we start to see the first signs of disunity in the church in Acts 6—and sadly, it falls along ethnic/cultural lines.

In this situation, their rapid growth had led to the neglect of the certain widows in their community. Not all widows, just certain widows.

"But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food." Acts 6:1

We often read Acts 2 and 4, assuming the early church was idyllic and harmonious, but as early as Acts 6, the church was perpetuating injustice. And injustice against the most vulnerable among them. This is exactly what the prophets had preached against. Exactly what the New Covenant was not supposed to be like. Weren't they supposed to be able to keep God's law and reflect His character because He would change their hearts? Yet, here they are, already making divisions and playing favorites.

Now, there were two types of Jews involved in this conflict and both made up the Jerusalem church: the Hebrews and the Hellenists. The Hebrews were the Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians. The Hellenists were the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. Another way to look at it is the Hebrews were the locals and the Hellenists were the Californians who had moved into their community!

Even though they were all Jews, the Hebrews and the Hellenists had their own separate synagogues in Jerusalem. But when they became Christians, they came together in one community.

Now, on the surface, this conflict appears to be a small matter, but it wasn't. It was a big deal! Why? Why was this a big deal?

First, the church was expected to feed widows and orphans. This was a legitimate need within their community. The widows needed financial aid to survive. This was not performative. This was not virtue signaling. Widows and orphans were two of "the quartet of the vulnerable." The other two were immigrants and the poor.

Second, the credibility of the church was on the line. before the unbelieving world. Caring for widows was the evidence of their continued faithfulness to God in the midst of a lot of changes taking place in the shift from Judaism to the Way of following Jesus.

Third, this was the first cross-cultural conflict in the church. This division was right along ethnic/racial lines. It was as serious as ethnic/racial division is today. And it was in the church. There was an economic, and social, inequality as the Hebrews had access to resources and influence and decision-making and the Hellenists didn't.

Fourth, this was the first generational divide in the church. Some scholars believe that many of the Hellenists had immigrated to Jerusalem to be buried in their old age. And, the local Hebrew community would have been naturally younger. Just imagine a holy war between Sun City and Gilbert!

So, this situation had all the notes for a symphony of conflict. It is fraught with poverty, neglect, immigration, discrimination, and generational division. I can imagine the rumor mill: "They say they care about people, but they don't. If they really cared, this wouldn't have happened on their watch! If they were true pastors, everything would run perfectly."

The only thing they had going for them is that there was no social media! Remember back when it took effort to gossip?! And, because you had to gossip to a real person who could lovingly check you on your motives, you had a real chance to overcome an offense. Today, we can just post gossip with no accountability and the fallout is devastating for everyone involved.

Now, here's what I love about this story. It's a beautiful picture of resilience in the lives of the widows, the apostles and the church.

The Hellenist widows raised the issue, the leaders of the church faced the issue, together they all took responsibility for the issue, they collectively resolved the issue, and the church moved beyond the issue.

Here's what they didn't do:

First, the apostles didn't ignore the issue, or silence the ones who raised the issue, or shun the ones who were impacted by the issue. No one was canceled.

Second, the widows didn't make more of it or less of it than what it was. And they didn't use it as a wedge to push other issues through. We have to be very careful with that, right? Let's just solve the immediate issues before us today, and then we can solve the issues before us tomorrow.

Third, the church didn't form a committee or vote or split. The ones who raised the issue didn't leave and plant their own church as is the custom in our world today. They didn't retreat back to monolithic single, ethnicity churches. They remain committed to building a multiethnic Church to the glory of God!

These widows, apostles and the church handled this conflict in a way that honored Jesus, maintained integrity, and demonstrated credibility in the eyes of the world. They realized that how the church handles conflict will determine our impact in the community. How we handle divisions will undergird our witness or undermine our witness. And this should matter to us.

Now, what are some of the lessons we learn right here to navigating relational conflict—whether it’s in a family, or in a community, in a company, or in a church? This story shows us a beautiful example of the pursuit of unity in the midst of diversity.

“So, the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We’ll turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’” Acts 6:2-4

Now, when it comes to the issue of diversity and inclusion, leadership is always our greatest resource or our greatest deficit. In this case, they needed a specific kind of leader to address this issue. They needed high-capacity, minority leaders. If you look at the names of the people, they chose in verse 5, every single one of them is Greek. “Stephen, Phillip, Procuras, Nicanor, Timon, Parmernas, and Nicolas.”

This was equity being extended to the minority community because of the need. We can argue about things like equality vs equity and whether affirmative action has any legitimacy, but what we see right here is a clear example of one group of people being cared for.

Wait for it.

This is like saying “Grecian Widows Lives Matter.” GWLM

That’s not to say, “Jewish Widows Lives Don’t Matter.” Because they did. But their provision wasn’t being undercut.

I think a lot of pastors like myself have been misunderstood when we’ve said things like “Black Lives Matter.” For most of us, that ISN’T a statement of allegiance to an organization, it was a value proposition related to a peoples group who have historically suffered the injustice of 400 years of oppression, dehumanization, marginalization, and injustice. We weren’t supporting BLM as an organization and we weren’t supporting Black people to the exclusion of other people... we were just doing what the Apostles did here in Acts 6. We were intentionally focusing on a point of injustice.

Of course, blue lives matter. Of course, white lives matter, Of course, pre-born lives matter. Of course, all lives matter. And we should speak up and extend protection and equity when any one of those is under attack. It isn’t wrong to focus on just one of those when they have suffered so greatly, historically. For years I marched in antiabortion protests and not once did I need to balance that issue by standing with immigrants or Blacks. Likewise, you can stand for BLM as a value proposition and not feel the need to assure everyone that you haven’t forgotten all other image-bearers.

Now, in our next session, if you want to build what MLK called the “Beloved Community” and if you want to see diversity expand in your church, you have to follow this pattern of intentionally adding diversity to your leadership team and that’s exactly what we’re going to talk about.

This course is heating up! I can't wait for us to get into our next session as we continue in the book of Acts.

### **Session 15: Diversity and the Church in Acts (part 3)**

Going back to the first century, the church was looking for ways to address marginalization with new strategies for increasing diversity among our communities of faith. In our last session we learned about how the Apostles created an additional level of leadership and selected leaders who had not previously been represented. Many strategies have been tried from integration to assimilation. In this session we will see examples of how diversity of the church reaches outside its cultural and geographic location.

In Acts 8, the geographical outline moves to the Samaritans, and the disciple Philip takes center stage. We hadn't heard too much about Philip in the gospels, only a few times in John. And in those stories, he seems to not really understand what's going on or what Jesus is doing or saying. But in Acts 8, Philip is a man on a mission. He is empowered by the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus said they would be the case when He ascended into Heaven in Acts 1:8.

Like Jesus, Philip breaks all kinds of racial, ethnic, and religious barriers when he takes the gospel to Samaria. Remember that the Jews hated the Samaritans. They considered them even more worthless than Gentiles, because they had been Israelites, but had turned their backs on God and intermarried with the Gentiles.

Acts 8 has three main stories:

First, Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, and many Samaritans were healed of diseases and many demons were cast out in verses 4-7: "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed."

And verse 8 says "So there was great joy in that city."

Second, there was the story of the Samaritan sorcerer Simeon in verses 19-25. Simeon became a believer and accepted the gospel, but he was chided by the apostles for trying to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, as if it were a parlor trick or a money-making scheme. This story shows Philip breaking not only ethnic barriers in preaching to the Samaritans, but also breaking religious barriers. Simeon into the family of God openly but he had to give up his old ways.

"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive

you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin. Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." Acts 8:19-25

Third, then there was the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in verses 26-28. The Spirit supernaturally guided Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the book of Isaiah in the chariot of his master, the Queen of Ethiopia.

Philip explained to him that the very passage he was reading pointed ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus and the eunuch believed and was baptized in a stream nearby (38). When they came up out of the water, Philip disappeared. The Holy Spirit had transported him away (39).

The story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch touches on two issues:

First, the inclusion of all people, races, and ethnicities in the gospel. In the Greek world, the term "Ethiopia" referred to anything in Africa south of Egypt, not just the country of Ethiopia we know of today. Racially speaking, he would have been dark skinned. He was a Gentile and ethnically about as different as you could get from Philip. In the Roman Empire, Ethiopia could have been considered "the ends of the earth." Therefore, even though Philip was still only geographically in Samaria, he was already fulfilling the whole promise of Acts 1:8 to be Jesus's witness to the ends of the earth.

Second, this story shows powerful redemption of the marginalized. The fact that he was a eunuch would have been very religiously significant for a Jew. In other countries in the ancient world, it was common for a servant of a king or queen to be castrated so they would not be tempted to engage sexual activity with the royal harem. And in the Jewish law, a eunuch would have been one of the types of people who were not allowed to enter the presence of God. Leviticus tells us that any priest with damaged sexual organs were not allowed to serve in the holy place.

Eunuchs were ostracized for being less than men. They were outsiders. And they had no hope of descendants in a culture where honor and success were often defined by descendants. But God is showing us that grace now covers our deficiencies.

Church tradition says this eunuch brought the gospel to Ethiopia, home to one of the most ancient churches. In an era where Christianity is mistakenly viewed as "white man's religion," we cannot gloss over the story of the early African Church. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch shows us that the gospel is for even the most marginalized and for all people of every tribe and nation.

Then Acts 10 records the famous story of Peter's vision and the conversion of Cornelius.

At this point about 10 years had passed since the Day of Pentecost. Think about it. Despite the fact that Pentecost was a foreshadowing of God's desire to reach all nations. Nothing had been done to take the gospels to the nations.



Just think of the American church before the Civil Rights Movement or the South African church during Apartheid or any other expression of racial division and hostility down through the ages. The early church was segregated and the Judaizers were proud of it.

Gentiles were still considered unclean, and the Jews would only accept them on ONE condition—they had to convert to Judaism—which meant the men had to be circumcised. So, you can imagine how hard it was to convince your non-Jewish friends to follow Jesus the Messiah, right?

Now that brings us to Acts 10:1-2, "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God."

Despite the fact that Cornelius was a military officer in an oppressive system, He loved God and wanted to please Him. And when God saw his desire to know Him, God set a plan in motion that involved two angels and a supernatural vision. The angels were involved in coordinating the meeting together between Peter and Cornelius, and the vision was sent by God to get Peter's attention.

Now, Peter was on a rooftop praying and he was hungry and wanted something to eat. While his hosts were preparing it, he fell into a trance and had a vision. The vision was of a great sheet being lowered from heaven. Think of it as a picnic blanket. On it was every food item prohibited by Jewish law. And God said, "Dig in Peter!" Peter took one look at the table and said "No way! I'm not exactly sure what this means, but nothing good could come of this."

Two more times God sent back the picnic blanket. While Peter was trying to figure out what all this meant... an angel appeared to him and said, go answer your door. And when he did, he found some Gentile soldiers there who told him, "We want to invite you to Cornelius's house to share the gospel with his household."

...and then Peter puts it all together ten years after Pentecost...

Verses 34-35 says, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

You see, all along the prohibition on eating unclean animals had just been a picture of humanity's sinfulness but the sacrificial death of Jesus removed the uncleanness for everyone who believes—not just for one race of people.

"While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles." Acts 10:44-45

Look at how the next chapter opens in verses 2-4, "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But

Peter began and explained it to them in order: [In following verses he tells them about the picnic blanket; and preaching to Cornelius, and then he says...] Acts 11:2-4

Verses 15-17, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Acts 11:15-17

I am not the first in recent history to ask this question, but it bears repeating. It's the question I want us to consider: "Are you, or am I, standing in the way of God integrating His church?" What are we doing to dismantle systems of oppression that keep people from sharing in power and privilege? Are we cooperating with His plan to unite nations/generations, and genders with full and equal authority in His Kingdom?

These questions may feel like they just emerged over the past few years, but these questions were at the heart of this struggle in the New Testament. As ambassadors of reconciliation, God has always expected His family to cooperate with Him in the diversification of the planet. This is embedded in the sending of Jesus and in Jesus sending the church into the world.

Now, apart from the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus AND the sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, this is THE most significant event in the NT because this is how WE made it into the church. And it is a picture of the heart of God to see His entire family—the entire human race—seated around the table feasting on His goodness and enjoying His salvation.

From this point forward, there was no going back. The church had become one new humanity through salvation in Jesus and we have been placed in one new society called the church. The church was going to be racially diverse. It was going to be multiethnic. And it was going to be multicultural (in the best sense of the word).

Acts 11:26, "...And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Now, I think it goes without saying, but they didn't cease to be their ethnicity, they were just defined more by their identity in Christ. Their new identity in the new humanity carried more weight than their ethnic identity.

Listen to Acts 13:1, "Now there were in the CHURCH at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

Now, most people read right over that. Luke wants us to know they are one in Christ, first, and second, they were ethnically distinct. Saul and Barnabas were Hellenistic Jews, which means ethnic Jews who have adopted Greek culture. Simeon was nicknamed "Niger," because he was from a region in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lucius was from Cyrene, modern-day Libya. And Manaen was from Herod's household, which means that he was Jewish aristocracy. That means of the five leaders mentioned, one is from the Middle East, one from Asia, one from the Mediterranean, and two from Africa.

The early church's leadership in Antioch was ethnically diverse. They were living together in MLK: "the beloved community" and it was working!

And all of this led to the first council of the church in Acts 15. After much deliberation the Apostles decided that God was expanding His church to include all nations and that this was a picture of David's tabernacle which opened to the priesthood of all believers. The verdict, if God didn't require anything more than faith on the basis of grace, neither would they. The requirement for circumcision was set aside and membership in the church was extended to everyone. Acts 15 opened the door wide by sanctioning the integration of Jews and Gentiles. The church is no for everyone regardless of race, economic status, cultural preference, geographical home. We are one new humanity—one new ethnic—and our identity was birthed by God and acknowledged by His first generation of leaders. Every ethnic is to be given a seat at this table!

Now, why does this matter so much to God and to us? I've spent my entire ministry in pursuit of a church where God is glorified, and the gospel is magnified through racial diversity, equality, unity, and reconciliation. This is not a trendy thing for me. It's not the result of us trying to be relevant. It's certainly not the infiltration of Critical Race Theory as our detractors would have you to believe.

The church is supposed to be a family who loves each other wholeheartedly, loves each other unconditionally, and celebrates each other in our diversity. We are called to offer the world a foretaste of heaven on earth.

### **Session 16: Race and the Modern Pentecostal Movement (part 1)**

Before we move into the Epistles, I want to leap forward 2000 years and to spend a little time talking about the birth of the modern Pentecostal movement and its relationship to racial reconciliation. While many historians have documented the rise of Pentecostalism, few have examined the racial dynamics within the movement and their ongoing influence on churches and denominations.

As you trace the work of the Spirit following Acts 2, you can see that there has been an unbroken line of people down through the centuries who have experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in much the same way as the disciples did on the day of Pentecost. There are reports of these supernatural outpourings of the Spirit in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most of them involved individuals but a few even included prayer groups and small revival meetings, until we arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit among the Methodists and Holiness churches in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was quite notable leading to significant revivals in Kansas, Kentucky, Indiana, New York and Ohio. The most notable of those revivals took place at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles. All the founders of the modern Pentecostal denominations were directly or indirectly impacted by the Azusa Street Revival.

Context in the city: Los Angeles was abuzz in 1906. The city was exploding with growth. It was incredibly diverse. New religious movements were springing up, churches were being planted, and, as people were hearing reports of the Welsh Revival, there was an increasing hunger for God

to do something in LA. To compound that, just nine days after the initial outpouring, there was a great earthquake in San Francisco which added to the eschatological fervor in LA. The tremors were felt in LA and the people thought the end of the world was at hand.

Context in the country: The United States had started to recover from the Civil War, but the divisions were deep. Slavery had ended, but men and women of color, weren't recognized as equal persons. Many States, particularly in the South still had segregation laws (Jim Crow laws). African Americans had to eat at separate counters, use separate bathrooms, and swim in different public pools. These laws governed every part of life. Chinese immigrants suffered horrible discrimination and deplorable conditions as they worked on the railroads. Immigrants from Europe were seen as a threat -as an economic burden on society.

Women were also struggling to receive similar rights to men. It wasn't until the 1920s that women even had the right to vote! They were trying to gain other rights in society too -rights to inheritance, rights to work in various sectors of society.

Then there were issues within the Church. "Modernism" reached its height in America, and the church was trying to figure out what to do with it. Christians were trying to figure out how to be taken seriously by a society obsessed with science and reason. So, fundamentalists resisted and withdrew from culture. Liberal Christians accepted higher criticism and began to assimilate with the culture.

And, right in the middle of all this, the Holy Spirit chose His timing to do something incredible. He chose to visit us again in a fresh new way, just as He had on the day of Pentecost. I think the timing of this new global outpouring of the Holy Spirit was just as strategic for the church in our age as the day of Pentecost was to the first century church.

Now, it's hard to say exactly when and where the modern Pentecostal movement began because the Holy Spirit was working in incredible ways around the world! But there were two settings where we can trace the story of "us" to: Kansas and Los Angeles (think Wizard of Oz and Hollywood).

Let me describe the situation in Kansas, first. Charles Fox Parham is credited with being the first person in modern Pentecostalism to associate speaking in other tongues with the "initial physical evidence" of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Parham was a Methodist minister living in Kansas, who went on a preaching trip to the Northeast where he saw the Holy Spirit moving in a couple of Holiness churches and he believed God wanted to do the same thing in Topeka. So, he challenged his 31 Bible School students to study the scriptures with an open heart to see what God would do. In a "watch night service" on January 1, 1901, one of his students, a woman, Agnes Ozman, spoke in tongues. This started a revival where 12 other students were filled with the spirit and Parham spoke in tongues on the third day.

Although others had been filled with the Holy Spirit, this was the beginning of something new as Parham attached it to the idea that this was the evidence of being filled with the Spirit.

After a few years of trying to get momentum with this revival in Topeka, and not succeeding, Parham moved to Houston Texas in 1905 and started another Bible College. It was there that a Black Holiness evangelist by the name of William Seymour became familiar with Parham's doctrine of tongues and showed up at Parham's school requesting to be admitted. Parham reluctantly allowed Seymour into his Bible school on the condition that he remain segregated from the white students, as was required by Jim Crow laws in the state of Texas. Seymour sat in the hallway and listened to Parham's teaching through an open door.

At the same time, churches in the Holiness tradition throughout California had been praying for revival. Seymour was invited to come to Los Angeles by like-minded pastors who believed in a second work of the Holy Spirit. It began as a small meeting with people praying fervently and Seymour preaching passionately. And from the beginning, the crowd was racially integrated.

Now, what happened on April 09, 1906, at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles has fascinated church historians for over a century. On that day, the Holy Spirit was poured out and several people were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and they spoke in tongues. God poured out His Spirit upon them on one of the busiest days of the year in one of the largest cities in the world—just as he did in Jerusalem at Pentecost. And three days later, William Seymour was baptized in the Spirit.

Over the following year people came from all over the world to be a part of the revival and most took the revival fires back to their own communities. Frank Bartleman called Los Angeles the "New Jerusalem" and because of the racial integration featured in the Revival, went on to proclaim, "The color line has been washed away in the blood."<sup>26</sup>

The revival was not just characterized by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was characterized by racial unity, and by men and women leading together with full and equal authority. Defying the racial segregation of the times, the Azusa Street Revival demonstrated unity between white and Black Christians as they worshipped together, fellowshiped with each other, and ministered alongside one another.

The first edition of "The Apostolic Faith," a newspaper chronicling the Azusa Street Revival, was published in September 1906, five months after the revival's inception. This publication highlighted the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the revival participants, noting that it began among African Americans and eventually spread to include "Ethiopians, Indians, Mexicans, and other nationalities." Seymour and other early Pentecostals recognized the racial and cultural melting pot of their movement as a sign of God's plan for the mission, viewing the interracial character of the meetings and the equality of races accompanying the gift of speaking in tongues as a positive outcome.

This inter-ethnic character made the Azusa Street Mission different from the other Black mainline congregations in Los Angeles. Robeck says the best way to view this difference is "through the lenses of class and culture. The other Black congregations catered to middle- and upper-middle-class members."<sup>29</sup> The Azusa Street Mission, on the other hand, "made more space in their midst for the recent influx of less educated, poorer African Americans."<sup>30</sup>

Now, there was an unfortunate side to the Azusa Street Revival. Charles Parham's theological views were radically inconsistent. He believed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, but he also held racist ideologies. He believed he should "preach to people of color, but he remained doubtful about their ability to perceive the truth and act accordingly." And "although Parham maintained a paternalistic attitude towards African Americans in his early ministry, this attitude did not negate his belief in white superiority and... segregation." He was a product of his times. He was a racist. He admired the Ku Klux Klan and he published antisemitic writings.

Parham was eventually invited to Azusa by Seymour and when he arrived, he was horrified by the mingling of the races. He rebuked the church publicly. Seymour denounced him and they never reconciled.

And the debate over who is the true "father" of Pentecostalism - Charles Fox Parham or William Seymour- points to the racial issues involved in the movement.

Despite the challenges posed by racism and division, the Azusa Street Revival set the stage for the exponential growth of Pentecostalism throughout the twentieth century. The revival was attended by many influential figures, including Charles Harrison Mason (Church of God in Christ), Frank Bartleman (Assemblies of God), G.B. Cashwell (Pentecostal Holiness Church), G.T. Haywood (Pentecostal Assemblies of the World), who took the Pentecostal experience back to their own regions, leading to the growth of denominational movements. However, the influence of Parham's racist ideologies led to division within the movement, resulting in racial and doctrinal splits within two decades of the revival's inception.<sup>31</sup> Although the "Oneness" movement continued for many years as the most racially integrated of all Pentecostal groups, by 1931 it had divided along racial lines as well.

The Azusa Street Mission officially closed its doors in 1938, but its legacy continues. Pentecostal historian James Tinney, acknowledges the legacy of the Azusa Revival when he writes, "without the important role of blacks there might be no Pentecostal movement of any magnitude today in the United States or the world."<sup>32</sup>

Bishop Ithiel Clemmons is even more direct when he says: "Pentecostalism is the only denomination of the Christian faith in the United States founded by African-American people."<sup>33</sup>

### **Session 17: Race and the Modern Pentecostal Movement (part 2)**

In *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*, Iain MacRobert, a Pentecostal historian, suggests there are strong ties between traditional West African folk religion and the Pentecostalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Religion in Africa was essentially musical - it was "danced and sung, beaten out in the rhythms and tones of 'talking' drums, the swaying of bodies and the stamping of feet..."<sup>34</sup> The vibrancy of this expression of worship carried over into Pentecostalism and became a feature of the movement.

While this background is important for understanding why Black Pentecostalism has grown exponentially, it should be noted that Blacks were present in many denominations throughout the

nineteenth century before Pentecostal movements took hold. Cecil Robeck, one of the foremost Azusa Street Revival scholars, says Black Christians comprise two different worship traditions, "often following lines drawn by their respective social classes."<sup>35</sup>

First, the historic African American churches, which included the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1787), the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion (1820), the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (1870), and the National Baptist Convention (1880) represent one tradition. While most of their constituents were Black, in many ways they had chosen to lean toward the dominant white culture in which they lived.

The second tradition, according to Robeck, "tended to embrace the 'folk church' tradition, without the formal expressions and trappings of their more affluent African American neighbors in the historic Black churches."<sup>36</sup> This group "could frequently be found worshipping in Wesleyan Holiness churches, in tents, in cottage prayer meetings, or in storefront facilities." It was this tradition that strongly echoed the experiences of Black Christians in Africa.

The modern Pentecostal movement was just beginning in the first few decades of the twentieth century, but the wounds of division would continue despite repeated attempts to reconcile by the Assemblies of God in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the "The Memphis Miracle" in the 1990s, and continued efforts in 2013 and 2014.

The most notable movements to directly emerge from Azusa Street were the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and the Assemblies of God (AG). The Assemblies of God organized in 1924 as a white denomination independent from the Church of God in Christ, which was predominantly African American.

The Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ will always be connected, particularly in the sense that COGIC birthed the AG. However, it is not a connection marked unity and equality. Hamilton says, "whether or not the founding of the Assemblies of God marked a formal separation between the two churches, it is clear that a de facto segregation was instituted which has yet to be overcome" despite some efforts.<sup>37</sup>

This "de-facto segregation" related to "leadership and the allocation of resources" continues to limit the promotion of minorities who seek to serve at the highest levels of authority and decision-making within the structure of predominantly white churches.

Some suggest the racial cooperation at the Azusa Street Revival has been idealized and overstated. We may never know whether this is true, but one thing is certain: Pentecostals are often as racially segregated today as every other religious group. In *Black Fire*, Estrela Alexander notes that in the twenty-first century, white Pentecostal churches have implemented various measures aimed at promoting racial cooperation. However, she notes that despite these measures, "African American enfranchisement still lags behind mainline churches, and blacks are still locked out of full participation and marginalized to varying degrees."<sup>38</sup> To regain the interracial cooperation of the

movement, Pentecostals must reconcile the theological and cultural dynamics of the Azusa Street Revival.

Without an honest evaluation of the roots of Pentecostalism there might be no path forward for modern Pentecostals. In ignoring the past, the same broken cycles of division, oppression, and injustice are perpetuated. The history of modern Pentecostalism contains many chapters worthy of celebration, but there are other moments which require reflection, repentance, and a commitment to the ideals that originally characterized God's plan for diversity and unity among humanity, and which were a feature of the Azusa Street Revival.

The Holy Spirit brought about a transformation in the lives of individuals during the Azusa Street Revival and other early Pentecostal revivals connected to the movement. People who were considered inferior and faced discrimination from white society were empowered by the Holy Spirit and gained a new sense of self-worth.

Despite being dehumanized by many in white society, they saw themselves as the *imago Dei*, and according to MacRoberts "their pneumatic experience affirmed black dignity and lifted the believer out of the mundane into 'ecstatic' consciousness of God's presence, power, and love."<sup>39</sup> However, the racial disparities that seemed to be overcome in the early years of the Azusa Street Revival returned towards the end, setting the stage for a difference in focus among white and Black Pentecostals moving forward.

Reflecting on the history of early Pentecostalism, Iain MacRobert writes in *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*:

"Black Pentecostals - in practice if not always in theory - perceive the Spirit as working through them in the gifts of story and song, testimony and prayer, vision and dream, dance and motor behavior, shouting and the drama of the sermon - all manifestations of the power and love of God. For white Pentecostals, the charismata were soon restricted to the nine referred to in 1 Corinthians 12, and even they were understood in the narrowest and most limited sense. Tongues and physical healing were exalted, but they rejected the power and love which transcended race and color, could create the interracial community of God's people and could bring healing for the hurts caused by the social diseases of slavery and racism."<sup>40</sup>

This claim that white Pentecostals rejected "the power and love which transcended race and color" may seem exaggerated, but the current divided state of white and Black churches gives it credence. Sunday morning is still one of the most segregated hours in American life, with over 80% of all congregations being composed of one predominant racial group.

Further, according to a 2015 study by Lifeway research, most worshipers prefer it that way: "Two-thirds of American churchgoers (67 percent) say their church has done enough to become racially diverse. And less than half think their church should become more diverse."<sup>41</sup>

Many churches, including but not limited to Pentecostal and Charismatic ones, have no desire to be multiethnic or multicultural. Soong-Chan Rah, Professor of Church Growth at North Park



University, explains how American Protestants in the latter half of the twentieth century were heavily influenced “by a ministry philosophy called the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP).”<sup>42</sup> This view held that “churches grow faster when they are homogeneous.” Early pioneers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century “church-growth movement” encouraged a de facto segregation based on their desire to see churches experience numerical growth. The idolization of church growth has become a barrier to living out the biblical vision of a fully integrated church that does not discriminate based on gender, race or socio-economic class.

Noted sociologists, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, believe the inadequacy of most racial reconciliation efforts today is rooted in the fact that they are exceedingly “individualistic and interpersonal.” They amount to “become a Christian, love your individual neighbors, establish a cross-race friendship, give individuals the right to pursue jobs and individual justice without discrimination by other individuals, and ask forgiveness of individuals one has wronged.”<sup>43</sup> They note that even though “evangelicals discuss the personal sacrifice necessary to form friendships across race, their solutions do not require financial or cultural sacrifice.” In other words, “they do not advocate or support changes that might cause extensive discomfort or change their economic and cultural lives. In short, they maintain what is for them the non-costly status quo.” This fear of disrupting the familiar behavior norms in homogeneous churches is the driving force that keeps them from racially diversifying. New people from different racial and ethnic identities bring new ways of doing things which disrupt the way things have always been done, thereby creating discomfort.

Most evangelicals are waiting for a miracle to heal the racial divide, according to Emerson and Smith. They call this a “miracle motif”—a “theologically rooted idea that as more individuals become Christians, social and personal problems will be solved automatically.” Here is how it works: “what is the solution to violent crime? Convert people to Christianity, because Christians do not commit violent crimes. What is the solution to divorce? Convert people to Christianity, because Christians are less likely to get divorced.” This approach is insufficient as statistics reveal that Christians struggle with the same social issues as unbelievers. While the first work of the gospel is focused on reconciling God with humanity, its secondary work is of no less a matter of obedience to Christ. This secondary work is the intentional act of reconciling humanity to one another on the basis of Christ’s love. Thus, racial reconciliation is the continuation of the gospel at work. Until an intentional and consistent move towards racial reconciliation and equality and brotherhood that transcends all human divisions is normative in churches and society, the gospel has not completed its work.

Further, a merely individual approach to racial reconciliation is wholly inadequate, as it fails to address the structural and institutional aspects which have allowed racial inequity to flourish for centuries. The work of the gospel as it relates to racial reconciliation involves speaking truth to power (Eph. 4:15) and confronting principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12) that seek to enslave humanity.

It is not enough to hope things will be different in the future. The emerging generation is insistent on seeing change, and Edward Gilbreath is right to say, “if we expect to see God move us toward

a place of true and lasting unity, we cannot do business as usual. Nor can we wait for an older generation to pass away."<sup>44</sup> This is because racial reconciliation requires "creating a climate where people deal honestly with racial and cultural issues. It should put an emphasis on action, so that leaders make changes based on feedback learned through dialogue (both formal and informal)."

Gilbreath makes it clear that many evangelicals sincerely desire a form of racial reconciliation even if they expect it to miraculously transpire apart from any effort on a societal or structural level. This longing for reconciliation, however, does not guarantee it. For one, this can even lead some Christians to "come on too strong. In their desire to have a cross-cultural friendship, they unknowingly perpetuate the classic dynamic that gives the white person the upper hand."<sup>45</sup> White Christians can re-traumatize Black Christians in how they seek their voice. By putting the burden on Black Christians to educate them on matters related to racial injustice, white Christians are demonstrating an unwillingness to learn and grow. On the other hand, many do not understand what the process of reconciliation actually entails. Thus, they may give up when the process becomes uncomfortable or comes at a cost to those who have previously had power. If we want to see genuine and lasting change at both the individual and structural levels of society, we must be willing to demonstrate humility and embrace discomfort.

### **Session 18: Racial Reconciliation and the New Creation**

We started in Genesis, and we are almost to the book of Revelation. I can see the end of the book in sight! I want to do a quick deep dive on "Racial Reconciliation and the New Creation." This subject is so important that we could do an entire season on it alone. Let's consider your homework once you finish with this course.

Now the basis for this idea is found in the book of where we see the story of breaking down racial disharmony as the first century church bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The church, having been born primarily among Jews, expanded rapidly among non-Jews and in the early days wrestled with a radical vision of "one new humanity" that transcended ethnic boundaries (Eph. 2:13). Eventually, these first-century Christians came to embrace it, wholeheartedly. They opened their arms to Jews and Gentiles, men and women, and slaves and Roman citizens alike (Acts 8:4-8, 26-40; 10:1-48; 16:6-15), acknowledging that all who believed had become "fellow citizens and saints with the members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

When Saul of Tarsus collides with the grace of God on the road to Damascus and from that point on is known as Paul, the Apostle, He begins to give us language to describe what God has done for us through the work of the cross and the power of the resurrection. Paul's letters offer a helpful biblical foundation for understanding race and ethnicity.

By believing in Jesus we have been liberated from the domain of darkness, spiritually translated into the Kingdom of God and made brand new in every imaginable way. Through Jesus we have been restored back to Eden.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. " 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

The work of the cross reconciles us to God and the consequence of that is that we are reconciled to one another. The implications of this are profound. This means that Christians of other races are essentially joined to us as one body.

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26-28

Verse 26 affirms our identity as sons and daughters in the family of God. Further, it is faith in Jesus Christ that makes us "children of God," not any ethnic distinction.

Alan Cole observes, "the phrase implies a closeness of communion which is neither absorption nor complete identification; for while human personality may be changed by the new relationship, it is not obliterated."<sup>46</sup> In verse 28, we discover a profound and life-changing proclamation: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This radical language harkens back to God's original design in Genesis 1:26-27. It is a radical declaration of Christian identity and unity.

Now, that brings me back to two reference points. Racial harmony is made possible on the basis of: (1) our common humanity as the imago Dei, and (2) the new humanity which is formed in Christ. We all bear responsibility toward racial division, hostility, and injustice because of our common humanity, but the church bears greater responsibility because of our new humanity. No one gets a pass from working on this, but the greater weight should be on us, the church.

According to the NT there is only one church. There wasn't a white Gentile church, or a Jewish church, or Palestinian church, or a Hispanic church or an Asian church or a Black church. God's plan is for one church, a multiethnic, intergenerational church. Now, the moment I say that I can feel the pain of a lot of Black pastors and church members who would say, "The Black church has been the only safe place for us. In a world that has oppressed us, we've found love and care, and comfort, and solidarity, and a sense of dignity and worth and value. The Black church accepted us when we were nonhumans and 3/5 humans. The Black church disciplined us and gave us agency and taught us how to improve our lives in every way. We wouldn't have gotten that in a white church and probably not in a multiethnic church."

I hear you. I validate the rich, theological, social, spiritual contribution the Black church has made to the church at large. I have benefitted from the Black church. I'm not suggesting we dismantle

churches of color; I'm suggesting we *expand* them in the spirit of Acts 15 and allow others in, just as we should with white and Hispanic churches.

From its inception, God designed the church to be the earthly expression of His heavenly Kingdom and as such we are called to model reconciliation, equality and unity, and promote human flourishing in every way.

Now, in Ephesians 2, Paul goes further than he does in Galatians 3, grounding reconciliation in the work of Christ Himself. Paul explains that God, entirely out of His grace, has saved humanity by the death and resurrection of Jesus. In verse 11, He shows how Christ's work on the Cross has accomplished reconciliation vertically, between humans and God, and horizontally, between people groups.

Verse 11 uses explicitly ethnic language, showing the previous exclusion of the Gentiles from the covenant, "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)." Ephesians 2:11

Verses 13-14 reveal that the atonement of Christ has broken down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility..." Ephesians 2:13-14

Verses 15-16 continue to explicitly link the Cross to reconciliation "making one new man in place of the two, so making peace." "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups [Jews and Gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace...and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." Ephesians 2:15-16

To further expand on who makes up this "one new man," the term "saints" refers to believers without ethnic distinctions. As Andrew Lincoln writes, "The readers [the Ephesians] are to see themselves as fellow citizens with the rest of believers."<sup>47</sup> That is, they form one citizenry with all other believers, set apart from the world (Eph. 1:4; 5:3, 27) as appropriate inhabitants of God's "holy temple" or "dwelling place." They are, as Frank Thielman puts it, "'members of [the] household' (Greek: οἶκος) over which God presides as Father, a thought that forms a skillful contrast with the former plight of Paul's readers as 'resident aliens,' people who stood outside the 'household' that forms God's society."<sup>48</sup>

Paul rejects the notion that the church must choose between the values of diversity and unity. He is clear that in Christ, all are not only possible, but expected of believers.

Craig Keener summarizes the implications of Ephesians 2 for evangelicals when he writes,

"... Racial reconciliation and justice are gospel issues and thus close to the heart of what must be evangelical commitments. Racial and ethnic prejudices, mistreatment, and neglect are thus not topics to be addressed merely optionally in evangelical teaching and preaching; unity in Christ is a foundational principle with moral demands."<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the work of reconciliation must be at the core of the Church's concerns and commitments because of what Jesus has done for us. We have been reconciled to Christ, formed into a new humanity, and our mission to reach others so Christ may do the same thing in them.

## **Session 19: Race and Slavery**

I'd like to share some thoughts on the topic of "Why some Christians supported slavery in the past." J. Warner Wallace, writing for "Cold Case Christianity" has explored this issue and I want to rely heavily on his thoughts. He writes of how the world marked the abolition of the Slave Trade Act March 25th, 1807, which had allowed for the buying and selling of slaves in the United Kingdom for many years. In 1863, the United States followed suit when President Abraham Lincoln initiated the process of ending slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery in the states that seceded from the Union and it was officially ended in the US with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Although the end of slavery did not eliminate racism, it marked a significant step forward.

The 2006 film "Amazing Grace" sheds light on the movement to abolish slavery and raises questions about the role of Christianity in both promoting and ending slavery. Some Christians are uneasy about the history of slavery involvement by members of their faith. Regrettably, many practicing Christians were slave owners, just like non-believers. In fact, they even used religious scripture to justify their actions. Prior to the Civil War, many slave owners in the South used passages from the Bible to defend their practices. One example is Jefferson Davis's Inaugural Address, where he cited such passages.

The President of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis, wrote, "(Slavery) was established by decree of Almighty God...it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation... it has existed in all ages, as has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts."<sup>50</sup>

Jefferson Davis was not the only one holding such views. He may have adopted these beliefs from his religious leader. During that time, many pastors shared the same perspective as Jefferson and even spoke about slavery from the pulpit.

It was once commonly believed among some sects in the 19th century, including South Carolina Baptists, that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible. Reverend R. Furman, a South Carolina Baptist minister, stated, "The right to hold slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example." This notion was rooted in certain biblical passages that acknowledge and regulate the practice of slavery and the ownership of slaves by several biblical patriarchs. The argument was bolstered by Paul's failure to address the issue in his letter to Philemon concerning

Philemon's slave, Onesimus. Finally, the silence of Jesus on the matter in his teachings and sermons further perpetuated this belief. These factors have led some to conclude that God endorses the institution of slavery, a notion that has been heavily criticized.

This leads to the very difficult question: Is the Bible Pro-Slavery?

This is a widely debated issue in present times and with good reason. The concern has some valid grounds, as it can be seen in both Old Testament law regulations and New Testament letters written by the apostles of Jesus Christ.

"Bondservants, obey your earthly masters." Ephesians 6:5

"Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters." Colossians 3:22

"Servants, be subject to your masters." 1 Peter 2:18

On one level, it's easy to read that and conclude that slavery was endorsed, but there are some theologians who nuance this by saying, slavery wasn't authorized, it was regulated. In other words, since slavery was the byproduct of sin (partiality, pride, power, domination, idolatry of personal identity) and it was common, the apostles couldn't remove it from the culture, but they could teach believer how to better the conditions of slaves.

That may be the case, but it feels a little hollow, right? Because we see them taking a strong stand against other sins in the New Testament without acquiescing to cultural norms. I want to be honest, that even the best answer to this issue is whole unsatisfying in light of what now know slavery to be.

To provide context before delving into potential answers, it's important to note that slavery in any form goes against God's intended purpose for human beings. Although there are some severe condemnations of slavery in the Bible, there are also some passages that seem to accept it. Christians follow the principle of progressive revelation, meaning that God's will and character were revealed to humanity gradually over time and not all at once. To fully understand the Bible, one must consider the entire narrative of revelation, not just isolated verses.

Christians hold the belief that God's revelations were adapted to specific historical contexts, which included imperfect social structures present in those times. The notion of God withholding any instructions or laws until all societal evils were eradicated is deemed as unrealistic. Consequently, ethical directives in the Bible offer an insight into daily life as a Christian in a particular historical context, but do not present a comprehensive understanding of God's will and character regarding institutional and structural evil.

A clear example of this is a soldier being willing to follow the orders of his superior officers does not guarantee his endorsement of the armed services or the war. Further information is required to gain a broader perspective. Likewise, practices such as polygamy or slavery, which may have been prevalent in ancient times, do not equate to God's endorsement of these practices, even if the Bible

provides instructions for them in specific contexts. Such instructions must be interpreted in the context of the entire biblical canon.

When considering these issues, there are two fundamental reference points in biblical revelation that must be considered. The first is special creation, which asserts that all human beings are created equally in God's image. The second is the gospel, in which God transcends racial divides through the victory of the cross, and will eventually gather a community of people of every nation who will dwell with Him in eternity (Revelation 7:19).

The created order holds special importance as it displays God's initial revelation for humanity. The gospel, on the other hand, gives us insight into the final outcome of God's process of redemption.

With that, here are some possible explanations:

First, slavery in the ancient Greco-Roman world was mostly different than slavery in the premodern and modern world. In the ancient world there were a few nuances: (1) slavery was primarily an economic indenture for only as long as a debt was owed. It wasn't forever.; (2) Slavery was rarely racialized. People were not forced into slavery because of the color of their skin. (3) There was a system to treat slaves and often they were considered as members of a household.

Second, just as when it comes to the patriarchal hierarchy between men and women, the Paul subverts slavery in a much more subtle way. He doesn't want the gospel to be subverted by cultural or political issues, so he conceals his teaching into a subversion of the Roman household code of the day. He tells husbands how to treat wives, which is not something someone did. He told masters how to care for slaves, which went above the cultural expectations, and He does take one powerful moment to speak to the issue of slavery head on. It's in the book of Philemon.

The letter of Philemon, written by Paul, is addressed to a slave owner regarding his runaway slave, Onesimus. This letter provides an interesting insight into Paul's views on slavery.

If the Bible were indeed supportive of slavery, Paul's reaction would have been quite different. Instead, Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus "not as a slave, but as a dear brother." He even goes as far as asking Philemon to treat Onesimus in the same way he would treat Paul himself.

This instruction from Paul effectively dissolves the master-slave relationship and replaces it with a bond between brothers. It recognizes the dignity and worth of Onesimus as a fellow believer, and challenges the prejudices that make slavery possible.

While this letter may not provide a full-fledged abolitionist manifesto, it does demonstrate the incompatibility of slavery with the principles of the gospel. This may be one reason why many prominent abolitionists have been Christians.

One might ask, "Even if we accept that slavery in ancient times was less severe and that God accommodated His revelations within historical contexts, why doesn't the Bible say more against slavery?" If the Bible is against oppression and God brought an end to 400 years of slavery in Egypt,

why doesn't it matter as much now? Why isn't slavery explicitly and uniformly condemned everywhere, at all times?

The answer to those questions is not clear. However, it is imperative to recognize the differences between slavery in ancient times and slavery in more recent periods and to acknowledge that God works gradually throughout history, even in imperfect circumstances. It is also important to view the issue of slavery within the larger framework of God's plan for creation and salvation. Above all, we must consider the teachings and actions of Jesus. Upon reflecting on Jesus and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross, I have confidence that the heart of God is good and that all forms of oppression and injustice are evil.

I still have many questions, but this understanding provides me with the hope and perspective I need to continue exploring this topic. And I hope it does the same for you.

## **Session 20: Racial Reconciliation and the Eschaton**

In our closing session I want to bring this series on *"The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation and the Church"* full circle. We have already covered 20 sessions and since we started in Genesis, I want to close in Revelation. Just as first beginnings are so important, final impressions are too. God's plan for humanity which began in Genesis is realized in the church and fully actualized in Heaven. And we catch a glimpse of it in Revelation. The book of Revelation is the climax of prophecy and history. The vision of John the Revelator gives us a glimpse of humanity at the consummation of human history and in this final scene we see a throng of people from every nation, tribe, family, and language gathered around the throne in worship to Jesus.

The beauty of every culture is represented around God's throne! The Lamb has won! The Cultural mandate has been accomplished; the Great Commandment has been fulfilled. The people of God, through trial and error, through sin and repentance, through many starts and stops, have finally gotten it right: they have migrated and procreated—they have multiplied and replenished the earth. Heaven is filled with nations, tribes and tongues. Part of the picture that John presents in the Apocalypse is the portrayal of the true people of God as multiethnic and multicultural, coming from all of the nations of the earth.

Genesis and Revelation are "book ends by design." John connects his theology with the book of Genesis. As I mentioned at the beginning of this course, Genesis 10 and 11 show the sin and rebellion of humankind, and the resulting scattering across the earth and separation from God. In Genesis 10 the population of the world was defined and described by a fourfold formula: according to families, languages, lands, and nations.

Genesis 12:1-3 then presents the answer, redemption through the Abrahamic promise which would bless all the people of the earth.

John is playing off the Genesis motif and he wants us to know the King in the Garden has now conquered the earth. The four-fold formula of Genesis 10 (tribe, language, people and nation) all stress the ethnic diversity of the people of God. Blacks and whites and Asians, and Hispanics, and



First Nations Peoples and every other ethnic group are united, intermingled, and actively engaged in worship across color lines.

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation." Revelation 5:9

These are the same four-fold peoples of early Genesis. They have survived through it all and out into eternity. They are gathered around the throne and we know them as they were known.

We don't lose our color when we receive our glorified body. We don't lose our language when we receive our glorified body. We don't lose our ethnic distinctions in our glorified body. Because these are not things that need to be fixed. These are not the result of sin or the Fall. They are not the outcome of the Flood or the Tower of Babel— they are not deficiencies God is dissatisfied with, they are differences that He is glorified in! We are different by design!

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Revelation 7:9-10

If this is what heaven is going to be like, then when Jesus taught us to pray "on earth as it is in heaven," we should be working to be the reality of heaven to the challenges of life.

The work of racial reconciliation is gospel work. It involves imaging God, making things right through intentional actions, and working for the flourishing of every person in our communities. Accordingly, each one of us should we pursue racial diversity, reconciliation, unity, and justice unreservedly, because of the gospel.

## **Session 21: Conclusion**

Well, we've made it to the very end, and I've enjoyed every single moment of our theological journey together! Well done! I'm proud of you! I hope you have grown spiritually, and I hope you've grown in your understanding as we've examined the "The Gospel, Racial Reconciliation and the Church" from Genesis to Revelation.

Now that we have reached the end of this course, this is where your work begins. It's going to take all of us, using all of our gifts, talents, and strengths to bring about change.

Martin Luther King, Jr., paraphrasing the words of Theodore Parker, a Harvard theologian, pastor and abolitionist popularized the notion "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."<sup>52</sup> In other words, change takes a long time, but it does happen. I'll leave it to others to debate whether that arc bends slowly by the incremental changes of a critical mass or is more forcefully bent through the will of reformers intent on social change, but one thing is clear to me. We will not change what we do not acknowledge and prioritize.

I've often wondered if the moral arc of the universe looks more like a bell curve?

The intensity rises every time we see another demonstration of racial injustice on the news or on social media. Before long a critical mass forms as enough people respond against the injustice, together the early adopters and late adopters begin to demand change as intensity builds. Finally, the crescendo is reached, and whether justice is received or denied, it isn't long until the attention of the public turns to something else and the curve drops off.

There is an ebb and flow to the conversation about racial inequities in society and flows along the lines of public awareness about acts of violence towards people of color.

What if we started a different sort of bell curve—one based on a revelation of the gospel and committed to doing the hard and holy work of reconciling people to one another on the basis of what Jesus has done for us? What if we chose to extend the top median of the bell curve long beyond future injustices, and 24-hour new cycles, and public outrage for as long as it takes until we begin to see the fruit of the gospel at work in our communities?

Now, that we have finished this course, I would love to hear your thoughts, your learnings, and even your ongoing questions, because there is so much to issue—so much pain, so much hurt, so much disappointment, so much longing, and so much hope as it relates to diversity, inclusion, and equity. And our willingness to sit together and to stay engaged in this conversation, based on the gospel, is the basis for true and lasting change.

I have a couple of bonus sessions ahead that I'm offering. One is highly practical as I talk about racially diversifying your staff, leadership team, and your church. This is so important because churches that proclaim a gospel of reconciliation don't always put it into practice.

And then I am offering two interviews on the subject of "extending equity to minority leaders at the highest levels of decision-making in churches."

These last three sessions are worth your time and investment because they put the theology we've studied into practice in personal and tangible ways.

## **Session 22: Racial Reconciliation and Church Leadership**

In this session, I want to share some practical thoughts on how to build a multiethnic staff, team, and church. I find it heartbreaking to look around at the global church and see how some who proclaim a gospel that encompasses racial reconciliation often fail to reflect that in their churches. Even more, they lack minority representation at the highest levels of authority, direction, and decision-making in their churches.

We've talked about some of the reasons for that in this course. The issue of race relations is complex and layered and can only be understood against the backdrop of scripture, the history of race relations, the origin of church movements, white hegemony, and the dynamics of power-sharing in leadership.

The movement towards pluralism and multiculturalism in the late twentieth century has heightened international awareness of unresolved racial tensions. These ongoing tensions are set in the context of persistent racial inequity, the resurgence of white supremacy, and the rise of the “Black Lives Matter” movement.

The church is also experiencing a significant transformation as global Christianity is becoming increasingly diverse. Church leaders are generally divided over the reality and severity of racial division, and when it is acknowledged, the solutions are elusive. But I remain hopeful. After all, this is the work of the gospel, and the gospel is going to prevail. We can do something practically about the situation. So, what can we do?

First, do your homework. You need to resolve what you believe because your values are going to be tested by everything from the people in the pews to principalities and powers. Know what you believe theologically. Sociologically. Historically. You don’t need to be an expert, but you need to do some homework. The good news is that you have this course to refer back to. And there are more quality resources than ever to help you on your journey towards racial equity and unity.

Second, do your heart work. How deeply you believe in this mission and how strong is your resolve? Are you willing to be tested? Misunderstood? Mischaracterized? Are you willing to be called “woke,” “or a Marxist?” Do you care deep enough about this issue to have people walk away from you without compromising the gospel? This is hard and holy work. Assess your motives. Interrogate your biases. Evaluate your language. Spend some time leading your church in prayer for your community.

Third, make your commitments. You will give your life to this. This is a long journey. To borrow Eugene Peterson’s phrase: “this is going to take a long obedience in the same direction.” You can do all the right things and still not see a quick harvest. You can reverse engineer multiethnic churches in much the same way we would a multisite church or a mega church, but ultimately the results are in God’s hands. You can plant and water, but God has to give the increase. This is about aligning your life with the gospel and that doesn’t happen overnight. We can make the decision without any testing. The question is, can we stay the course over decades, if necessary?

Fourth, lay the groundwork. Lay the groundwork in your church or organization before you try to build something on it. Have a hundred conversations from the parking lot to the pulpit. And listen. Listen to white people. Listen to Black people. Ask some questions. Learn some new skill sets.

Fifth, enlarge your personal relational circle. The gospel is “go and tell” and it is “show and tell.” Change moves at the speed of our relationships.

Sixth, expand your playlist. Someone once said, “It’s not about the music, but it’s always about the music.” There is something about music that speaks to the deepest part of our being and nowhere is that more evident than when it comes to people of color. Music is the language of heart and soul—of language and culture.

Seventh, diversify your leadership. Model diversity in every way at every age and stage at every level of church life. Model diversity in your graphics, volunteers, sermons illustrations. And you will have to intentionally promote people of color.

Eights, keep this issue anchored in the gospel. The gospel (both testaments) is your moral authority to lead people into diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice. You don't need a better textbook. You don't need another textbook. You can use other supportive textbooks to illuminate but check them carefully against the authority of scripture.

Ninth, keep this issue confined to this issue. There are many other agendas that seek to crowd into the conversation on racial reconciliation, and not all of those issues have any connection. There are a few, but not many. The problem is that when we allow every other issue to crowd into this space, it weakens our focus on it. And when we allow issues that contradict the Bible to crowd it, it discredits this issue which is biblical and as we've seen consistently present from genesis to revelation.

Tenth, celebrate your progress. Don't let it get weird. Don't major on the minors. Don't make your allies feel uncomfortable but celebrate the progress. Use MLK Day, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and others to provide opportunities to celebrate your progress in diversity.

God is with you. You are doing great work. Don't waste your time debating your detractors. Build with those who share the same vision as you and God's good hand of favor with rest upon you and your work.

BONUS Session 23: Interview with Ps Tim Ross, Embassy Christian Center, Dallas, TX

BONUS Session 24: Interview with Ps Tim Ross, Embassy Christian Center, Dallas, TX

## Appendix 3

The study guide is designed to be a companion resource for the online course. It follows a pattern of an opening prayer, group discussion topics, scriptural readings, a closing prayer, and a call to action. The link to the full study guide is provided here:

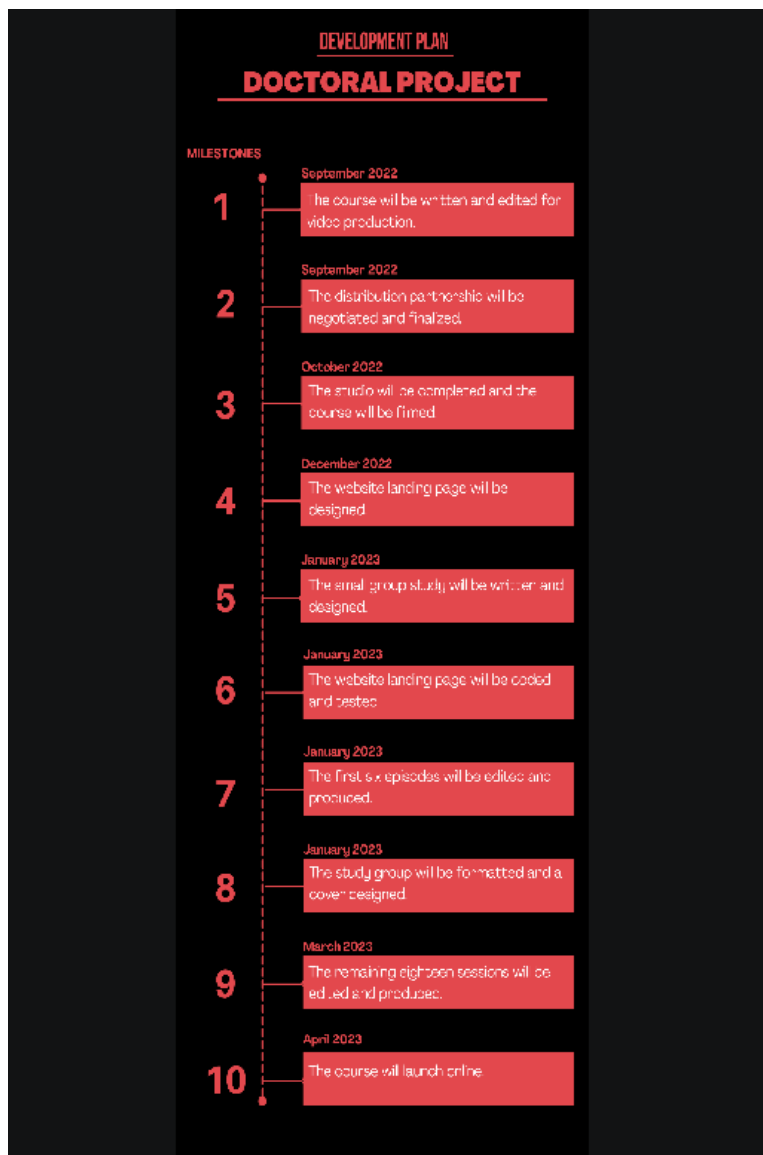
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# Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

## Appendix 1

This graphic represents the timeline for the milestones and key deliverables.

**FIGURE 6: DOCTORAL PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PLAN**



## Appendix 2

The table of contents for the complete course is featured in this section.

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## Appendix 3

The study guide is designed to be a companion resource for the online course. It follows a pattern of an opening prayer, group discussion topics, scriptural readings, a closing prayer, and a call to action. The content for the first three lessons is included as a sample.

### Session 1: Course Introduction

#### Opening Prayer

*"O God,  
you created all people in your image.  
We thank you for the astonishing variety  
of races and cultures in this world.  
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,  
and show us your presence  
in those who differ most from us,  
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect  
in our love for all your children;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

- *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition*<sup>126</sup>

#### Discuss:

In this introduction session, Terry Crist, pastor, author, and course presenter, shared his heart on why he developed this course on racial reconciliation. In concert with him, we want to open our first discussion by sharing our own personal reasons for taking it. These opening questions may feel more vulnerable than those in a typical small group, but this is not a typical small group. Racial reconciliation is a highly charged subject, both in our culture at large and in the church. We have all had deeply personal experiences with racial tension and have deeply personal feelings about it. It's not a light topic, so our discussions may feel heavy from the very beginning. But as Terry said, we cannot learn, grow, and change the world if we cannot discuss openly, honestly, and vulnerably. We have avoided the matter and tiptoed around it for far too long. It's time to have the hard conversations.

- Why have you chosen to take this course? What are you hoping to gain from it?
- What things would you like to discover or resolve in our small group?
- What has been your personal experience with racism? Which of your experiences has been most impactful in making you think differently or opening your eyes?

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<sup>126</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).



- How have you seen racism at work in our culture? Which instances of racism in our culture have made you think differently about it or opened your eyes?
- Describe relationships you have had with people from other racial backgrounds and how they have influenced you to think differently about the racial tension in our culture.
- What questions do you have about what the Bible says about race and ethnicity?

There are a million ways we could discuss racial injustice, racial tension, and racial reconciliation. We could talk about it from a political, moral, or economic standpoint. We could talk about studies and statistics or personal experience, which we will. But as Christians, what matters most is what the Bible has to say. As believers, the Bible is our standard, our canon, the standard by which we measure all other things.

**Read:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:3

- In what ways is the Bible useful for our lives? How does the Bible equip us?
- How has God given us everything we need to live a godly life?
- What does this tell us about why we should study what Scripture has to say about race?

One of the essential tenets of our faith is the doctrine of the *sufficiency* of Scripture—that the Bible tells us everything we need to know to live a godly life, to love God and love others. This doesn't mean the Bible tells us everything we need to know about every topic. It doesn't include instructions for changing the oil in your car or filling out your tax returns. But it does tell us all we need about living a life that pleases God, including relating to those of other races.

**Read:** Galatians 3:28

- What does Galatians tell us about how people of different races are valued in God's kingdom?
- What basic principle for relating to other races does this verse give us?

The Bible has a lot more to say about race than we might imagine. It doesn't just answer the big-picture questions, like "Does God value all races equally?" but also the finer points, like "Is race a social construct?" and "Are race and ethnicity the same thing?" or even "How did we get different races?" As we study what the Bible has to say about race from Genesis to Revelation, we'll find it has more to tell us about race than just basic principles and practices. When we look at the whole biblical story from beginning to end, we find a clear picture of how we started out unified, when we became divided, and how we can make the journey back to a reconciled world.

- When you think about the term "racial reconciliation" what comes to mind?
- What baggage does our culture have surrounding the term?
- How have you heard people respond to it on both sides of the aisle?

“Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.” –Brenda Salter McNeil<sup>127</sup>

We will unpack that definition more as we go through this course, but for now it’s enough to focus on the phrase “God’s original intention.” Reconciliation is a politically charged word that has been twisted and distorted in our world, but all it really means is getting us back to what God originally intended. God’s original intent was for all of creation to flourish. For every person to flourish. Every nation, tribe, and tongue. Every race.

**Read:** Isaiah 2:2-4 and Revelation 7:9-10

- What do these passages tell us about the racial makeup of the kingdom of God?
- What does it tell us about how these different people groups will relate to each other?
- What does this tell us about God’s heart when it comes to racism, inequality, and injustice?

Ultimately, racial reconciliation is not just a political or moral issue, it’s a gospel issue. And it isn’t a side bar or one of the finer points of theology where we can agree to disagree. The fact that the imagery in these passages about the eschatological Kingdom of God includes people of every nation, tribe, and tongue means racial reconciliation is central to the very heart of the gospel.

Which means we can’t ignore it, we can’t defer it to the next generation, and we can’t look the other way thinking it will resolve itself. You’ve chosen to take this class because you know this. Terry’s sessions will offer thought-provoking questions and challenging ideas, but the really hard work will be done in your small group discussion time. The more you are willing to let go of preconceived notions and hold back from being defensive or jumping to conclusions and really listen to one another and to what God’s Word is teaching us, the more you will get out of your discussions. And the more you will be equipped to join God in making our world look more like His reconciled Kingdom with every nation, tribe, and tongue together as one.

- What are your concerns about the way the church has handled issues of race in the past?  
What are your concerns about how the church is handling issues of race right now?
- What positive things have you seen the church doing related to racial reconciliation?
- How could the church be a light to the world when it comes to racial reconciliation?
- How would it impact our culture for the gospel if the church were to lead the way in racial reconciliation?
- What are some ideas of ways we as individuals and as a small group can make a difference in our community toward racial reconciliation? We will discover more ideas as we move through the course, but it’s good to start thinking now.

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<sup>127</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 21.

## Closing Prayer

*"When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial justice,  
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.*

*When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,  
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.*

*When we try our best but say the wrong things,  
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.*

*When the chaos of this dies down,  
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.*

*When it becomes easier to point fingers outwards,  
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.*

*God of truth, in your wisdom, Enlighten Us.  
God of hope in your kindness, Heal Us.  
Creator of All People, in your generosity, Guide Us.*

*Racism breaks your heart,  
break our hearts for what breaks yours, O Lord.*

*Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures. Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith."*

*—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>128</sup>*

## Respond with Action:

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for our church, our nation, and world regarding issues of racial injustice and racial reconciliation. You can pray for individuals too if you feel led, but specifically, at the beginning of our study, we want to think big picture about what is going on in our culture. As important as our discussion is, we don't just need to discuss. We need to pray. Every great spiritual movement in church history started with prayer. Unified, focused, heartfelt, passionate prayer asking the Holy Spirit to move in our world. Prayer is the most powerful thing we can do to change our culture. This week our

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<sup>128</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Shake us from Our Slumber," *Prayers for Racial Justice and Reconciliation* (The Center for Mission and Identity at Xavier University) - <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/prayers-for-racial-justice-and-reconciliation>, accessed online Dec 2, 2022.

prayers will be more general, asking the Holy Spirit to move and work in our hearts, our small group, our churches, and our world. In future weeks, our prayers will become more specific.

- **Act:** This week, at the start of our study, take some time to simply listen to someone from another racial background. Take a friend out for coffee or a meal or invite them to your home and tell them you intentionally want to hear about their personal experience with race in our world. Do not turn the conversation back to your own experience, just listen to theirs. You can ask open-ended questions that help draw out their experience more deeply. Otherwise, don't talk, just listen.

## **Session 2: Creation and the *Imago Dei***

### **Opening Prayer**

*Leader: Dear heavenly Father, Creator of every nation, tribe, and tongue, we come before you in humility asking you to penetrate our hearts with your Word. We want to know your truth, not the half-truths of our culture or the lies of the evil one, but your truth. We are willing to do the hard work of letting your Word rebuke us, correct us, and transform us. We invite you to cut open our hearts with your double-edged sword and ask you to strip away any lies, half-truths, preconceived notions, and presuppositions as we pray together the words of Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV):*

*All: Search me, God, and know my heart.  
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.*

### **Discuss:**

Terry opened this session by talking about the summer of 2020 and how the murder of George Floyd rocked our nation and much of the world. We told you this course would jump right into the hard stuff, didn't we? Think back to the summer of 2020 ...

- How did you first hear about the murder of George Floyd?
- If you watched the session, how did it make you feel? If you didn't watch it, why not?
- How did the people around you react, both in person and online? What reactions did you see from different groups of people?
- How did the Christians in your circle react? What about church leaders and Christian organizations?
- How did people react to the events *after* the murder—the protests, riots, boycotts, etc.?

The murder of George Floyd was a catalyst that led to the greatest period of civil unrest in the United State in generations. The world was already in upheaval because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was a presidential election year involving some very volatile personalities. All

these stress factors revealed deep cracks looming beneath the surface of our society and contributed to the two sides of the political aisle becoming more deeply entrenched in extremist views.

This course seeks to find an alternative “third way” of thinking about, talking about, and acting on the issues of racial injustice and racial reconciliation in our world. Not a “middle way” between the two extremes, not a compromise, but an alternative way. The way of the Kingdom, the way of Jesus. Instead of trying to strike a balance between the two extremes, we seek to start with Scripture as the foundation for what we believe and how we should respond, independent of what either side says. Our goal is not to appease any person or group but to please God. To do so, we must do the hard work of stripping away our presuppositions—some of which we don’t even know we have—and make room for the gospel to do deep work in our hearts.

**Read:** Philippians 2:12-13 and Hebrews 4:12-13

- We read in our last lesson that the Word of God is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). How do these passages add to that?
- How does God’s Word have the power to judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart?
- How have you personally experienced God’s Word penetrating deep into your heart and revealing things that you didn’t realize before?
- Why might the process of working out our salvation involve “fear and trembling”? What does this tell us about the process of letting God’s Word penetrate our hearts like a sword?
- How might using the voice of Scripture as our guide rather than the world affect our views of race?

We all have deeply entrenched presuppositions about race, whether we realize it or not. This doesn’t mean we’ve done anything wrong, it’s simply a result of growing up in a highly racially charged culture. We seek to let God’s Word cut open our hearts and divide between the things that come from the culture, our own personal experiences, or even the lies of Satan and the truth of God’s Word. In this way, God’s Word is less like a battle sword and more like a surgeon’s scalpel operating on our hearts. The process may hurt, just like surgery does. But it is the only way to bring healing.

This is what this course is about. Cutting open our hearts with the sharp blades of Scripture and revealing what needs to be healed there. We do that by trying our best to let go of our presuppositions, preconceptions, and attitudes and come to His Word humbly and openly and look at what God has to say about race from Genesis to Revelation, beginning to end.

**Discuss:**

The issue of racial reconciliation is parallel to the big-picture story of the whole Bible, the reconciliation of all things to the way God intended them to be. Racial reconciliation is one part of that. This is the overarching story of the Bible:

- Creation: God created the world good (Genesis 1-2).
- Fall: Sin marred God's good creation, both mankind and creation itself (Genesis 3).
- Redemption: Jesus came to redeem the world, not just human beings but all of creation (Romans 8:22-25; Galatians 3:13).
- Consummation: In God's future Kingdom, all will be made new and perfect (Revelation 21).

In the session, Terry asked, "How did we get here?" in three different ways, parallel to the four phases of God's redemptive story above:

1. How did we arrive here on this planet? (Creation)
2. How did we end up here in a divided world? (Division)
3. How did we land in the story of a church united by God's grace? (Reconciliation)

When we look at the story of the Bible, we can see the creation, division, and reconciliation of the races right along with the story of the creation, fall, and redemption of all of creation.

1. Creation

**Read:** Genesis 1:26-27, 31

- In the context of this passage, what does it mean to be created in God's image?
- What does the passage say about creation at this point?

Terry reminded us that when God created the world, He didn't make just one kind of bird, one kind of fish, and one kind of land animal. He made about nine million different animal species. Instead of a single topography, He created mountains and valleys, lakes and oceans, and deserts and rain forests. All of creation reveals the diversity of the brushstrokes of God, including humanity. When God created mankind, He placed within that first couple the genetic potential for every ethnicity—every facial feature, hair texture, every nose, face, and eye shape. Every skin color and pigmentation, every shade and hue. Every ethnicity of humanity reflects the image of God. And every ethnicity is good. We are all the *imago Dei*.

**Read:** Genesis 1:28

- What did God tell humanity to do? What was their relationship with creation to be?
- How does this reflect the image of God?

As creatures made in God's image, humanity was charged to rule the earth as God's representatives and care for creation the way God would. And to this first couple, God told them to multiply and fill the earth, to procreate and migrate. Both of those things led to greater diversity. As they procreated, more and more genetic combinations developed. And as they migrated, different environmental conditions led to varying adaptations. Warmer conditions meant more exposure to the sun, therefore darker skin. Colder and dryer conditions led to narrower noses.

But none of this caught God by surprise. He planned it from the very beginning. He built the genetic potential for every possibility into that first human couple, and He commanded them to procreate and migrate. He commanded them to diversify. God delights in a diverse tapestry of every skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and body type. The God who made every single person's fingerprint unique certainly delights in the diversity of humanity.

## 2. Division

**Read:** Genesis 11:1-9

- How does this story show the division of the different races? Why did God divide the people?

The story of the Tower of Babel explains that the whole world was once unified as one people. They all spoke the same language and lived in one common place. They weren't migrating over the earth as God had commanded. And then, like Adam and Eve in the garden, they tried to become their own gods. They decided to build a city and a tower to make a name *for themselves*, rather than ruling the world as God's representatives as they were called to do as the *imago Dei*. So, God confused their languages and separated them as a punishment for their sin. Just as the fall brought brokenness into the world, so this division brought brokenness between nations, tribes, and tongues. Division wasn't God's desire; it was the result of their sin.

## 3. Reconciliation

**Read:** Acts 2:1-12

- How does this story show the reversal of what happened at Babel?
- What brought about this reconciliation?

The story of Pentecost shows us that in Christ, all nations, tribes, and tongues are reconciled as one. There is no Jew and Gentile or Roman and Egyptian in Christ; we are all one body (Galatians 3:28). God divided them by language at Babel, but He enabled the disciples to speak in every language at Pentecost so the people could understand them. He didn't take away the diversity of the languages, but He took away the division between them. This is the picture of the reconciled Kingdom of God—unity in our diversity—so that in the final consummation of the Kingdom, we see every nation, tribe, and tongue, worshipping God together at Mt. Zion (Isaiah 2:2-4; Revelation 7:9-10).

This reconciliation step is where the church is called to be. The story of Pentecost is the very beginning of the church age. The first thing God did was take away the division between the languages, between the nations, between the races. Creation—Division—Reconciliation, right here in the pages of Scripture.

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

As ambassadors of Christ's Kingdom, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Not just reconciliation of individual people to God, but reconciliation of all creation to the way God intended it. This includes racial reconciliation. And it is a significant part. Significant enough to be specifically mentioned at all the critical points in God's story of reconciling the world to Himself, not only each of us individually but all of humanity. Racial reconciliation not just a political or social issue; it's a gospel issue, central to the very heart of the gospel.

Every one of us is made in God's image. We are the *imago Dei*. We all have the responsibility to be His representatives in ruling over and caring for this planet. To rule over it and care for it the way He would and reconcile it to the way He intended it to be. All of us, together. As one body, every different body part together making up the body of Christ. Unity in diversity. The *imago Dei*.

- In your thinking, conversations, and actions about race, what difference does it make to believe that every human being is made in the image of God?
- What difference does it make to believe that we all descended from one pair of human parents?
- What difference might it have made if Derek Chauvin had believed these things about George Floyd?
- In what ways have you seen the church reflect God's design of "unity in diversity"?
- Where have you seen divisions in the church along racial lines? Or divisions in the way we think about racial injustice and reconciliation?
- What result do these divisions have in our churches? In our witness to the world?
- Think about the imagery of the diversity of the body of Christ. How do we need each other to bear God's image to the world? How is there unity in that diversity?
- In a world that is so divided when it comes to these kinds of issues, what kind of witness would it be to the world if our churches were to truly reflect unity in diversity when it comes to race?
- What practical steps can we take to get the American church to that point?

"There is no institution more equipped and capable of bringing transformation to the cause of reconciliation than the church. But we have some hard work to do." —John Perkins<sup>129</sup>

## Closing Prayer

A Prayer of Lament

"O Lord, how long will your church be divided along racial lines? How long will the lingering effects of animosity, injustice, and pride mark your blessed bride? How long, O Lord, will my white brothers and sisters not understand the pain in those whose experience is different than ours? How long, O Lord, will my minority brothers and sisters struggle with distrust and feel ostracized?

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<sup>129</sup> John Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018).



God, grant us the heart to weep with those who weep. Give us empathy and understanding. Create trust where there is pain. Make your church the united bride you want her to be.

These divisions of mistrust and historical bias run deep, O God. Without you, nothing will ever change. In our pain and our weariness, we express our hope that Jesus can change our hearts and unite the church. We believe the gospel is greater than our divisions. And we long for the day when the world will take note of how we love each other. So help us to meet each other in this prayerful journey. We come to learn to lament. Hear us as we weep together, that we might walk together.

In the name of Jesus, our King. Amen."<sup>130</sup>

### **Respond with Action:**

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to pray for your church as a body to reflect the *imago Dei* to the world. Pray for your church to seek unity in diversity. If your church is not already ethnically diverse, pray for God to grow and stretch your church in ways that will bring more diversity. Pray for the church leadership to have wisdom and guidance from the Lord about how to grow in diversity. Pray for them to be open to partnering with other churches or starting outreach ministries or other out-of-the-box but Spirit-inspired ideas to “diversify” their community. Also, pray for your own life to reflect the *imago Dei*, to love and care for the world as God’s representative and work toward the reconciliation of all creation to how God intended it to be, including racial reconciliation.

**Act:** This week make a list of different ways your church can increase in diversity and work more toward unity in that diversity. How can you bring more diversity into your church body and/or reach out to ethnically diverse groups in your ministries? How can your church partner with other churches to reflect unity in diversity? Share your lists at the beginning of your next small group meeting time and pray over them for the Spirit’s leading.

## **Session 3: Race, Ethnicity, and Colorblindness**

### **Opening Prayer**

“O God,  
you created all people in your image.  
We thank you for the astonishing variety  
of races and cultures in this world.  
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,

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<sup>130</sup> Mark Vroegop, *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation* (Crossway, 2020).

and show us your presence  
 in those who differ most from us,  
 until our knowledge of your love is made perfect  
 in our love for all your children;  
 through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

*Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition*<sup>131</sup>

### **Discuss:**

- What has been your experience with people talking about the desire to be “colorblind” regarding race?
- How did the concept of being colorblind make you feel before you watched this session?
- How do you think it would make you feel if you were a different race?
- What questions do you still have about race, ethnicity, and colorblindness, even after watching this session? Did any new questions arise for you?

Terry opened this session by talking about the distinction between two highly charged words in our conversations about racial reconciliation—“ethnicity” and “race”—and what they really mean:

- Ethnicity - belonging to a people group defined by language, culture, history, customs, cuisine, and art. Within what we call “white” or “black” there are dozens of ethnicities.
- Race - a social construct, based on physical features and often constructed in contexts of hierarchy and power. It’s something humans made up to separate people into groups based on appearance, not on genetics, which is how a light-skinned person from a black ethnic group can “pass” as white.<sup>132</sup>

Genetically, scientifically, there are no “races” at all. The variation between what we call “races” is very small, and there is no uniform identity for each race. Science tells us the same thing the Bible teaches—we all descend from one first couple; we are all one human race.

And yet, it’s not so easy to say, “Hey, we’re all just one big human race, why can’t we all just be colorblind?” It seems logical in theory, but there are a couple of problems with “colorblindness” as our goal:

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<sup>131</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>132</sup> Vivian Chou, “How Science and Genetics are Reshaping the Race Debate of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” Science in the News (Harvard University, Apr 17, 2017) <https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2017/science-genetics-reshaping-race-debate-21st-century/> - accessed Dec 6, 2022.

1. It's a departure from what God intended. We find the exact opposite in Scripture. God celebrates ethnic diversity! He values every different type of person equally, no matter what kind of hierarchies the world has.

**Read:** 1 Corinthians 12:18-25

God doesn't pretend that every part is the same; He honors our differences. But He *values* every part the same. Even the parts that humankind may not think are valuable. And He says the body doesn't work without every part working together. The imagery of the body of Christ shows us God's desire for diversity, equality, and unity among His people.

2. It's dishonoring and dehumanizing to those who experience suffering based on their race. Closing our eyes to color is closing our eyes to the inequalities that exist in our world.

Race is "just" a social construct, but that doesn't mean it's not a real problem. Race isn't a "real thing" genetically and scientifically, but it's a real thing in our culture. It's a social construct that causes real injustice, pain, and suffering in real people's lives. And as Christians, we are called to live with eyes wide open to the injustices and suffering in our world so we can do something about it.

**Read:** Romans 12:15

- Why is seeking to be "colorblind" not "mourning with those who mourn"?
- How does it make people feel when we minimize or dismiss their suffering?
- Why is it important to empathize with those who are suffering and seek to understand their pain?
- What difference can it make to someone to sit with them in their pain?

As believers, we are called to mourn with those who mourn, to first recognize that they are suffering and that their pain is real. Then we are to seek to understand their suffering. We are called to empathize with their suffering, which sometimes can mean to just sit with them in their pain. But Christians are not only called to mourn with those who mourn; they are also called to actively fight injustice.

**Read:** Isaiah 58:1-12

- Why did God say He wasn't listening to His people's prayers or accepting their sacrifices?
- What would He rather they do than offer sacrifices, fast, and worship?

Throughout the Prophets, God called His people to open their eyes to the injustice going on around them. He told them their worship and prayers and sacrifices were meaningless if they were not actively fighting injustice in the world.

**Read:** Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Psalm 10:14, 17-18; and Proverbs 31:8-9

- How does God react to the pain of the afflicted?

- What does it tell us about God that He defends the oppressed?
- Why does God command His people to also defend the oppressed and love the foreigner?
- Why do we need to speak up for the rights of the needy and destitute?

As the *imago Dei*, we should reflect who God is. As the people of God, we are supposed to act like Him, to love people the way that He loves them. God has a heart for the oppressed, the marginalized, and the afflicted. He sees their pain, hears their cries, and defends their cause. And He calls us to do the same.

If we seek to be colorblind, we are whitewashing the atrocities of racism in our culture. We are closing our eyes to the reality of some of our fellow brothers and sisters in our human family, pretending those inequalities don't exist, telling them their pain isn't real. This is the exact opposite of what God does.

Though the *imago Dei* teaches us that we are all equally valuable in God's eyes, we can't simply declare that we're all unified and equal, hold hands, and pretend everything's all right. When a married couple has experienced brokenness and hurt but want to reconcile, they don't just "forget the past" and ride off into the sunset. They go to counseling and do the hard work of evaluating what happened and why and how they are going to fix the brokenness to move forward in a healthy way.

The only way to true reconciliation is to *work through the mess*. We must deal with the past and work through it. And we must be honest about the present injustices, broken systems, and inequalities in our communities, nations, and world. Like reconciliation in a marriage, it takes a long time and a lot of hard work.

"In order for reconciliation to occur, there must be repentance, justice, and forgiveness." –Brenda Salter McNeil

- What mistakes and missteps have you made when talking and thinking about race, ethnicity, and colorblindness? What changes would you like to make going forward?
- If you have been on the receiving end of hurt by someone trying to be "colorblind," describe how that made you feel and how you responded.
- As the church, how can we change the conversation surrounding race, ethnicity, and colorblindness in our culture? How would a focus on the *imago Dei* change the way we talk about it?
- How can you celebrate and honor the unique beauty of the ethnicities of your friends, family, and others in your community?
- In what ways is God leading you to celebrate the diversity in His body and our world?
- What would it look like practically for you to sit in the pain with a friend of another race? What might you learn from it? How might it affect your relationship?
- What would it look like practically for you to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves?
- What would it look like practically for you to defend the cause of the afflicted and oppressed?

- In what ways is God leading you to actively fight for justice in the world?

### **Closing Prayer**

*"Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.*

*Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.*

*Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.*

*Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.*

*Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child ... someone's beloved son.*

*Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.*

*Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.*

*Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.*

*Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.*

*Instead ...*

*Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.*

*Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.*

*Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.*

*Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.*

*Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.*

*Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.*

*Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.*

*Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground.*

*Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard."*

*"God, in your mercy ...*

*Show me my own complicity in injustice.*

*Convict me for my indifference.*

*Forgive me when I have remained silent.*

*Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.*

*Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness."<sup>133</sup>*

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<sup>133</sup> Dr. Yolanda Pierce, "A Litany for Those Not Ready for Healing," *Prayers for Racial Justice and Reconciliation* (The Center for Mission and Identity at Xavier University) - <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/prayers-for-racial-justice-and-reconciliation>, accessed online Dec 6, 2022.

–Dr Yolanda Pierce

**Respond with Action:**

- **Pray:** Take some intentional time this week to ask God to open your eyes to the racism in the world around you, both individual acts of racism as well as racism built into our systems and institutions. Ask God to search your own heart and reveal any biases and prejudices surrounding race that you may not even realize. Ask Him to help you see if there is any way you need to change your language surrounding race, ethnicity, and colorblindness. Pray for the strength, wisdom, and love to sit with others in their pain. Pray for the courage and love to defend the afflicted and oppressed and actively fight for justice.
- **Act:** This week take some time to celebrate the diversity of our world. Find out about someone else's culture and then experience some part of it—music, food, art, customs, etc. If you know someone from another culture, ask them to help you—take you to their favorite restaurant or show you art they love or play traditional music for you. For this week simply enjoy and celebrate the diversity of humanity.

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