

"This book is spot-on for the kinds of conversations we need to be having."

– Walter Brueggemann, author of *Sabbath as Resistance*

What if I say the wrong thing? Is race really something that I need to talk about (I'm white)? Shouldn't I let people of color be the ones to bring it up? I don't want to offend anyone. I don't think I'm racist, but what if I say something that sounds racist? It's on the news all the time, but I don't know how to talk about what's going on. I'm worried someone will call me a racist. I don't see color. Why do we have to keep talking about this? I feel stupid when we talk about race. I realize there's a lot I don't know. But it's not my fault! I am not a racist. I work with people of color and I'm respectful and friendly to them like I treat anybody else. I have friends who are people of color and who don't want to talk about race, so why should we? I get angry thinking you're trying to make me more politically correct. Leave me alone already. What does this have to do with faith? The Bible doesn't say anything about race. Let's leave it alone. But what I saw happening on the news... some people are crazy and racist. But that's not me. But how do I stop something like that happening in my town? I don't know. It makes me anxious.

Helping White Christians Talk Faithfully about Racism

CAROLYN B. HELSEL

STUDY GUIDE

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to facilitate small groups' engagement with *Anxious to Talk about It*. The first page of each week's section is a Journaling page you can photocopy for the members of your small group. Hand the page out before the week in which the chapter on the journaling page will be discussed.

The journaling pages have the text from the Questions for Reflection section at the end of each chapter in the book followed by space to write.

We all have strong opinions and emotions about race, and many people find writing to be a powerful tool in processing emotions. Encourage group members to write about their feelings, whether they use the journaling pages or not.

This guide offers suggestions for structuring each week's meeting, with an opening, discussion questions, activities, closing. Tailor the material to your group's needs and personalities.

Book study groups invariably face the challenge of readers not reading the material before it is being discussed. Some people will rise to the task if the group leader sets and maintains the expectation that the reading be done. Others will decide they don't need the stress of trying to fit the reading in or of being shamed if they don't, and will just quit coming. And with this book, many will be eager to drop out of these difficult conversations anyway. What's a group leader to do? Use the approach that fits you and your group, keeping in mind that there is value in the gathering itself, in addition to the value of reading the book.

Leading a small group engaging with the realities of race is no easy task, but it is a sacred one. To echo a phrase from the book's Introduction, strive to "meet [group members] where [they] are, encouraging [them] to embrace hard conversations."

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Introduction, Chapter 1, “Race, Emotion, and Interpretation”

WEEK 1

Personal Journaling

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

(text from the end of chapter 1)

Hopefully you are reading this book with someone else. Take time now to talk about some of the ideas from this chapter. What feelings emerge when you hear the topic of race raised? Do you feel nervous or frustrated? Perhaps irritated or angry? Maybe you feel sadness or guilt? Where do those feelings come from, and where do you experience them in your body?

Sometimes I experience feelings in my gut, like they are sitting right on my stomach. Other times, I'm not even aware of my feelings. When that happens, I can be stuck in my head, not aware of what my body is going through, whether getting sweaty palms or a faster heart rate.

As you begin these conversations about race and racism, think about the stories that come to mind for you and name the feelings that they bring up. Pay attention to your own body in this moment. Take deep breaths.

Share with someone else some of your past experiences of talking about race and racism, and name one thing you hope you will gain from this experience.

Pray for one another, and also pray for all of those who experience racial discrimination. Lift up in prayer the families of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, and the police officers shot in Dallas and Iowa. Pray for all of the people whose stories we haven't heard. Pray for God to bring the healing and reconciliation that only God can bring.

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WEEK 1

Introduction, Chapter 1, “Race, Emotion, and Interpretation”

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Suggested Opening

If you are leading a small group, begin your meeting with prayer. If people already know each other, give a moment for people to tell about an experience from the past week that made them feel grateful. Ask, “What made you feel grateful this past week?” Follow up by asking, “When you feel grateful, where do you feel it in your body?”

If participants don’t know one another well, invite them to share their names. To involve the body, ask persons to pretend to throw a ball toward another person in the group, and they can pretend that the ball is any kind of ball they wish. Each person says his or her name, then throws a “ball” to another person in the group, who then shares his or her own name, throws the ball, etc.

Connecting persons to their bodies is an early reminder about the goal of this process: connecting us to our bodies, recognizing that our emotions live in our bodies and impact how we interact with one another. Anxiety can make us feel tight in our bodies, and noticing that tightness and trying to sit with it can open us to new experiences with one another.

Engaging the Content

Based on the reading in the Introduction and chapter 1, have participants consider first how particular stories impact our interpretation. Ask: “What examples can you think of to show how stories are related to how we interpret events? [For instance, if you consider the fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” from the perspective of the wolf, the story would be very different from the one we’ve always heard, from the perspective of Little Red Riding Hood herself.] Are there other examples of telling stories in different ways that impact how you view a particular issue?”

A follow-up question: “How are emotions related to stories and interpretations? What are the emotions that accompany the stories in the examples just given?”

Ask someone to read Luke 10:25–37. Ask: “What feelings come up for you when listening to this story? What other stories does this parable bring to mind for you? How would it feel to take the point of view of a different character in the story, for instance, from the lawyer’s perspective? Or the man in the parable who was beaten and left for dead?”

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Ask: “What are the emotions and stories that come to mind when you talk about racism? The author described several phrases that people use to talk about racism, like ‘colorblind’ or ‘reverse-racism.’ Do any of these phrases come to mind when you think about racism? What are the stories behind these phrases? What emotions do they bring up for you?” Invite persons to share these stories with one other person or with the whole group.

Activity

In your small group, give each person an index card and a marker. Tell the group: “Draw a symbol or stick figure to depict a story that comes to your mind about race. Take a minute to think about it and make a quick sketch.”

Then have each member share the drawing with another person or the whole group, letting each person talk briefly about the story that the drawing represents.

Once everyone has shared, tell members to hold the index card and imagine what emotions this story brings up for them. Then tell them to write those feelings down on the back of the card.

At the end of the meeting, put all the index cards together in a basket, representing an offering to God. Say: “As you put your index card into the basket, imagine giving your feelings and stories to God, trusting that God is with you through this period of listening to difficult stories about race.”

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WEEK 2

Chapter 2, “Feeling White”

Personal Journaling

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

(text from the end of chapter 2)

Has anyone ever made accommodations for you that made you feel cared for? Has anyone ever asked you how you wanted to be addressed, or treated you with respect? If so, then you know how it feels when another person is sensitive and thoughtful toward you. On the other hand, do you know what it feels like when someone calls you a name that hurts your feelings or makes you feel disrespected? Was the person intentionally trying to hurt you? Whether or not they hurt you on purpose, words and names can still give us pain. What is the nicest thing someone has ever said to you? Why did you appreciate it?

If you are journaling, take a moment to write about your thoughts and feelings after reading this chapter. What have been some of your experiences of “feeling white”? What feelings are brought up for you when you hear these stories? Share with someone your story of coming to notice race and its impact on your life. How do parts of our identity (our gender, for example) impact how we understand ourselves as racialized in society? Have you felt “othered” in some way because of who you are? How does this connect with your racial identity? If you are meeting in a group, close with prayer, asking God for an increased capacity for loving others where they are, including yourself.

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Chapter 2, “Feeling White”

WEEK 2

Small Group Study Guide

Suggested Opening

Open with prayer, asking for God to be with you and your group as you continue to engage in challenging conversations. Pray for each of the participants. Pray for the Spirit of God to be present with you.

Invite participants to go around in a circle, sharing their names again (if this group is new to one another), and a major event from their past week. After they mention their event, have them give a color to the way that event from the past week made them feel. (i.e., “I had a stressful meeting that went better than I thought it would, and that made me feel yellowish-orange.”) It can be any color, just whatever seems to connect in their mind to that story.

Engage the Content

Hopefully, participants will have read chapter 2 before meeting in the small group. If not, take a minute to highlight some of the stories. Ask participants to share which story stood out to them the most. How did they respond to the stories in this chapter?

Ask the group: “Could you identify with the woman who grew up in segregation where things ‘just were the way they were’? If you did not grow up during that time, what do you remember from your own experiences growing up? Did you talk about race with your family or at school? Has there been an experience that made you ‘feel *white*’?”

Sometimes, there are moments in our lives where we “get it”—something clicks for us that we didn’t understand before. The author writes about feeling called to ministry and having that call questioned by Christians who believed women should not be ordained. Ask the group: “How do you think that experience helped her begin to understand that racism was still a reality people of color experienced?”

Ask: “Have you ever had an experience where someone doubted you could do a job because of some aspect of your identity? What was that experience like? What can those experiences tell us about what it might feel like to be a person of color in predominantly white spaces?”

Ask someone to read 1 John 4:18–21. The author includes this passage when talking about the subject of political correctness, suggesting that we should care about the words we use, not out of fear for saying the wrong thing but out of

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love. Invite participants to share: “Has there been a time when you learned a way to speak that helped others feel more respected? Is there an experience you have had of being called one thing, when preferring to be called something else? Can you describe a time when someone made you feel honored or loved?”

Closing Activity

Give participants an index card and something to write with. Invite them to write down a situation when they have been unsure of the right word to use or name for someone. Perhaps it’s an experience of having said the wrong thing and feeling guilty about it later. Have them write a few words that describe that incident. On the back, invite them to write down the emotion that accompanied that action. Ask: “Did you feel embarrassed? Stressed? Sad? Write a word or two on the back that describes the emotion.”

Like last week, have group members put their cards in a basket in the center of the room as an offering. As you close, pray over those experiences that have taught you something. Ask that God continue to teach the group how to care for one another so that you can help others feel loved and respected.

Chapter 3, “Mapping Racial Identity Development”

WEEK 3

Personal Journaling

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

(text from the end of chapter 3)

Before moving on to the next chapter, take a moment here to check in with yourself. Take a deep breath. What thoughts and feelings did these stories of racial identity development bring up for you? Write them down. Circle the feelings that are the strongest for you. Maybe you are experiencing anxiety or resentment, sadness or irritation. Perhaps reading this chapter made you nervous and stressed out or left you feeling guilty at times. I have noticed myself feeling skeptical at times, wondering whether this theory is accurate or helpful. If you have any of these feelings, even doubt or suspicion or any other emotion, write it down. Spend a moment looking at your list, then cover the words you have written, and see if you can name all those feelings and where they come from. Say a prayer over those words and feelings. Ask God to help you honor what you are experiencing and help you experience peace. Thank God for already knowing your heart before you knew yourself.

Afterward, look back over the stages of racial identity development. Turn to the elements you found most helpful. Are there any you felt a strong connection to? Did you find yourself nodding at a particular place? Where do you find you’ve grown within these stages? What kind of experiences have brought you to where you are now? Have you ever been angry with someone, only to eventually realize that your feelings toward them were outward signs of what was going on inside of you? When are you most likely to feel negatively about someone? What can you do to remind yourself next time to first sit with your emotions and investigate why you may be feeling the way you do? Share with another person your discoveries and decisions, naming the stages of racial identity development that best describe your own life experiences.

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Suggested Opening

Begin with asking participants to take a moment to do a “body scan.” Invite them to close their eyes and sit for a few moments in silence, asking them to listen to different parts of their body to see where they may be feeling stressed or anxious. Encourage them to take deep breaths and to notice the parts of their body that bring them any discomfort. After a few moments of silence, open with prayer. You can use your own words or the prayer offered here:

“Embodied God, you who came and took on flesh as one of us, you continue to meet us in our bodies, holding us through every cell of skin and bone that holds us together. We give you thanks that you have brought us to this place to be together. Prepare our hearts to receive the conversation ahead of us as a gift, and provide us the wisdom to know how to live differently as a result. We lift up all those who cannot choose when and where to discuss issues of race, who are reminded by others that the color of their skin sets them apart. Help us to become aware of the experiences of others, and of how the appearance of our own bodies may give us unfair advantages and disadvantages. We thank you for loving us in our bodies, and we pray that you will help us use them for your glory. Amen.”

Engaging the Content

Invite someone to read Exodus 17:1–7. Afterward, say: “The text describes the movement of the Hebrew people through the wilderness. The text says the Israelites ‘journeyed through stages.’ This particular text shows them complaining about their thirst. The people ask Moses why he even brought them out of Egypt. What is remarkable is that God meets them where they are and attends to their needs. Even with their attitudes, they receive what they need in that moment: water. God tells Moses to strike the rock to create a stream, and he does, and the people receive water.”

Ask: “Has there been a time in your life when you went through various stages, some of which brought out the worst in you? Did you experience in those times God meeting you where you were?”

Say: “This chapter described the stages of racial identity development as a way of helping us understand the stages individuals might go through in understanding themselves as racialized in our society.”

Ask: “Did any of the stages described resonate with you? If so, which ones? If not, is there another way you would describe your process of coming to think about race in different ways?”

Invite participants to share any thoughts that came to mind from the process of journaling if they have been writing along with the book.

Closing Activity

Hand out index cards and something to write with. Say: “Write down one thing that you think could help you learn more about how to work against racism. Is there a particular book you want to read? Or a place you want to visit? Is there something you can do in your community? Is there a group you can join? Take a minute to write down one thing, however small.”

Invite the group to share with one another what they wrote on their cards. Invite them to consider that each of these ideas is a movement of growth, a way we can continue to challenge ourselves, to join the work others have already been doing. Conclude by praying over these activities, asking God to lead us and guide us. Allow participants to take home their index cards as a reminder.

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WEEK 4

Chapter 4, "Hearing Different Stories about Race"

Personal Journaling

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

(text from the end of chapter 4)

Have you ever broken the law? If you were invited by someone else to share your earliest memory of breaking the law, what feelings would emerge for you? Would you feel rebellious and share a story that made people laugh? Or would you feel upset, remembering when others wrongly accused you of breaking the law, feeling that others saw you as a criminal when you were innocent? What do these kinds of stories have to do with your experience of race?

What are your thoughts and feelings after reading about Mr. Johnson's story?

Have you ever been pulled over by the police for speeding? What was your experience like? Were you worried about your physical safety? Did an officer ever point a gun at you? Have you ever been handcuffed and put in the back of a police car? What would you be feeling if you were in Mr. Johnson's shoes in that moment? What if you were pulled over many times and had an experience like this? Take a moment to journal about your reactions.

What about Guwayne? Have you ever known anyone like Guwayne, who has made some mistakes in life and has had to pay for those mistakes? Does it seem fair to you that Guwayne should spend that much time in jail for drug charges, and be labeled a felon for the rest of his life? What are some ways you think we could do better as a country to help the poor and to rehabilitate those who have been imprisoned? Who benefits from mass incarceration?

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Chapter 4, “Hearing Different Stories about Race”

WEEK 4

Small Group Study Guide

Suggested Opening

Begin by asking if anyone recognizes the following lyrics: “Police men are the people in your neighborhood, in your neighborhood, in your neighborhood...They’re the people that you meet, when you’re walking down the street, they’re the people that you meet each day.”

Say: “The author (Carolyn Helsel) grew up hearing this song sung on the television show *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, when Mr. Rogers would go out and introduce children to the people they may meet outside their homes. With this friendly image of police officers, and without any other interactions, Helsel grew up feeling positively toward law enforcement.”

Invite participants to share what they remember about their attitudes toward the police when they were growing up.

Ask: “Did you interact with the police at all growing up? What were the messages you learned about the police in your house? Did your parents have any friends who were police officers?”

Engaging the Content

Say: “This chapter begins with some funny stories about white ministers’ run-ins with the law. Some of their stories involved the police, others did not.”

Ask: “What do you think the ministers in these stories were taught about the police growing up?”

Say: The story that follows in this chapter is one in which a black woman minister experiences being accused of breaking the law. While it was her first time she remembers, there were many times that followed.

Ask: “What might these experiences have taught her? If you were in her position, how would you feel about law enforcement?”

Say: “The police have a difficult job, and in many instances they are risking their lives. At the same time, they have a great responsibility to use their weapons only when necessary. In the story Mr. Johnson shared, the officer who pulled him over put a gun to his head.”

Say: “In the story Guwayne shared, he was given a 15-year prison sentence for drugs. Growing up he saw selling drugs as the only lucrative job in his poverty-stricken town. What if instead he had been given more job opportunities? Statistics show that white people engage in illegal drug use at the same rate as

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people of color, but they are much less likely to be arrested and imprisoned for drug charges. While Guwayne did not argue about being guilty for having sold drugs, it still seems as though the punishment he received was not comparable to what a white person may have received for the same offense.”

Ask: “Do you know someone whom you feel was given different treatment by law enforcement, either by police officers or the justice system? How would you feel about the justice system if you were Mr. Johnson, or if Guwayne was your son?”

Ask someone to read John 9:1–2: “As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’”

Say: “The two verses begin a story in John where Jesus heals a man born blind. In these first two verses, the disciples are questioning Jesus, asking who is to blame for the man’s blindness. They want to make someone responsible. Who sinned? Was it the man, or his parents? The assumption behind their question is that this man deserves his blindness, that his blindness is a punishment for either his sin or the sin of his parents. When people are down-and-out, sometimes it can be easy to judge them. Have you ever assumed that someone’s misfortunes came as a result of their own failings? Sometimes that may be the case. But in many cases, people are born into larger issues and problems—like poverty—and it can be hard to ever escape. It is not fair to blame poverty on individuals or their parents.

“In listening to the stories of persons who have been imprisoned, such as like Guwayne, or pulled over by the police, such as Mr. Johnson, sometimes we want to point to something they did to justify what they experienced. But many people are falsely imprisoned, and persons of color are far more likely to be pulled over by the police than white people are. It is unfair to blame these painful experiences on these individuals alone. Larger issues and problems are at work here.”

Ask: “Where have you seen the police making a positive impact on the community? Where have you seen the need for law enforcement to make changes? How can we support the officers who protect our communities? How can we also encourage them to address these inequalities?”

Closing Activity

This session covers some really controversial topics. Take a moment at the end of the session to check in with everyone and how they are feeling. Ask participants to close their eyes and to think about the emotions they are feeling and where they are feeling them in their body. Direct everyone to take a few deep breaths. Close in prayer, asking God to give each of you wisdom as you consider the challenging stories you discussed in this chapter.

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Chapter 5, “Expressing Gratitude”

WEEK 5

Personal Journaling

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

(text from the end of chapter 5)

What makes you grateful? Do you think of gratitude as an appropriate response to discussions about race and racism? Why or why not? What benefits or disadvantages do you think could come from having a framework of gratitude when talking about these topics? Can you see where you have experienced gratitude through discussions like this in the past? This chapter addresses a lot of sensitive subjects, such as white people’s relationship with their caregivers who are people of color, and how our class background influences how we think and talk about race. What feelings did these topics bring for you?

One of the sections mentioned the history of housing discrimination and its impact on wealth inequality. Thinking about your own housing situation, what kind of living situation did you experience growing up? What was the neighborhood like? Did your parents own their home or rent? If they owned their own home, did you see their home appreciate in value over the years? Did your parents’ prosperity impact your own ability to own a home?

In thinking about patterns of discrimination that have resulted in segregated neighborhoods and schools, what are your thoughts about what might be a better solution? What kinds of efforts are you seeing in the area where you live to address these inequalities? Take time to write about these questions and then share them with another person. Remember to check in with your body to see where you are processing the emotions that come up in these discussions.

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Allow each person a chance to begin the session bringing to mind someone they are grateful for. Invite the group to sit in silence for a moment, thinking of the person. Then ask participants to describe in one word what makes them feel grateful for that person—what quality do they possess? Ask: “Why does that particular quality about that person make you feel grateful?” Open with prayer, giving thanks to God for these people and the ways they have blessed your lives.

Engaging the Content

Say: “This chapter looked at gratitude as a grounding motivation for talking about racism. Rather than entering these challenging conversations with the expectation of conflict or guilt, opening our hearts to the experience of gratitude may better prepare us to receive the gifts that these conversations may bring. It can take courage to enter into dialogue that you know may be challenging and that can bring up difficult emotions in you and perhaps in others. Does it even make sense for us to talk about looking forward to these conversations with an attitude of gratitude? What are your thoughts?”

Ask someone to read Ephesians 2:4–10. Ask the group:

- * What does this text tell us about God? What reasons does this text give us for being grateful to God?
- * How do verses 8–9 speak to you about the role of our works in saving us?
- * How does this relate to our conversations about racism?

Say: “The author believes this verse tells us, as white people, that we cannot save ourselves. That even working against racism, we cannot do it on our own. We cannot become ‘saved’ from our racism by ourselves. Only God redeems. Only God saves us, through faith, and not by works.

“God also unites us with all people as the body of Christ, even when we may be on opposite sides of a centuries-long racial divide. Relationships we have with people of color are a gift, in light of the long history of racial oppression.”

Ask: “Who are the people in your life you consider to be a gift to you? How might you express your gratitude?”

Say: “This chapter also included specific opportunities for us to reflect on issues of relationships with caregivers who may have been people of color, our housing situation, how inheritance may have functioned along racial lines, and the segregation of neighborhoods and schools.”

If group members responded to these journal prompts ahead of time, invite them to share their reflections. If not, allow them to spend a few moments responding to the prompts above under “personal journaling,” and then allow them to share with the group their thoughts.

Closing Activity

Invite someone to read again Ephesians 2:4–10. Invite another member to read Ephesians 2:11–22. End your time together in prayer, giving thanks to God for the many people mentioned in this session who have made us feel grateful, thanking God for the salvation we receive not through works but through faith in the grace of God, and giving thanks for the work of God in Christ that unites us with others across our differences.

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WEEK 6

Chapter 6, “Spiritual Practices for Race Talk” and Conclusion

Personal Journaling

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

(text from the end of chapter 6)

After reading, listening to the stories of others, and attending to your own emotions, what feelings do you have? My hope is that you feel a deep sense of gratitude for the people in your life who have shared their own stories with you. I hope you are feeling grateful for what they have contributed to your own understanding. I hope you feel gratitude toward the God who loves you even though your mistakes and sins are completely known. I hope you feel grateful for the love that calls you to new acts of love.

I also hope you feel an urgency that this is a subject we need to continue to talk about, because the repercussions of centuries of slavery and later forms of discrimination do not simply evaporate or age out. The legacy of racism is born anew and comes in new forms. I hope you are left feeling a sense of urgency to stay alert for the ways it re-emerges in your own context.

My hope is that when you feel difficult feelings surrounding this topic, you will be able to notice what is going on inside of you and allow yourself those feelings without denying them or pushing them away.

I also hope you will share this book with people you know. Invite them to read it with you as you reread it. Suggest that your small group at church or leadership team read it together. Or find other books that talk about this subject in other ways. The goal is to stay aware and to continue to look for ways to engage with long-term efforts at racial justice.

I invite you to write down things you hope to do in the next year that keep you in this conversation. Is there a conference or an event you can attend? Is there an organization in your area you can join that's working on issues of justice with and for persons of color? Can you meet with the white people in your networks to talk about race? Can you put into practice some of the spiritual exercises talked about in this chapter? Can you work with people in your church to incorporate some of these ideas in worship? Take time to notice any experiences of gratitude you find along the way, and give thanks to God for the opportunities for new relationships.

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Chapter 6, “Spiritual Practices for Race Talk” and Conclusion

WEEK 6

Small Group Study Guide

Suggested Opening

Invite someone to read aloud the passages read at the end of last week’s sessions: Ephesians 2:4–10 and 2:11–22. Invite participants to reflect on what this passage brings to mind from the past several weeks of being together. Pass out index cards, and invite participants to write down one thing they are grateful for about the past weeks of meeting together. Have persons share what they are grateful for and then put their index cards in the center of the table or room where you are meeting. Say: “Let these cards be a reminder to us during our last meeting together of all the things we have already experienced in this time.”

Engaging the Context

Begin a discussion with participants about the practices described in this chapter: self-compassion, bearing witness, hospitality, and preaching and worship. Take time to ask a series of discussion questions for the group to consider the different practices, allowing time after each cluster of questions for members to respond.

Ask: “Which of these practices connected with you? Where do you see yourself already engaging in these practices in your life?”

Ask: “Where in your life are you bearing witness? Where might we go to continue to bear witness? How might this change our attention?”

Ask: “How is just listening to these stories a form of hospitality? Where might you continue to listen to the stories of others who have been impacted by racism? How might we engage in new acts of hospitality, perhaps forming groups around tables to continue these conversations? Where in your city or neighborhood might you go to practice hospitality? How might you engage in hospitality in your home?”

Ask: “Where have you seen preaching and worship that engage this subject? How do you see it integrated into the church you currently attend? What would you like to see done differently at your church?”

Invite participants to share any insights that came to them through their personal journaling. Ask: “Were there particular commitments you made through the act of journaling? Things you want to do this coming year? Do

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you already know of groups working in communities of color or addressing racism in your area? Is there a way you could support or participate in the events hosted by these groups?"

Ask: "What kinds of questions do you want to be asked by others of us within this group as you leave this study and we see each other again outside this group? Is there something you want to be reminded of? If so, take a moment to write it down on another index card and take it with you as you leave."

Closing Activity

Let participants experience the guided prayer of self-compassion as they prepare to leave. Say: "This has been a full six weeks together, and the work is only just beginning. There will be many opportunities to continue to have these conversations in the days and years ahead. This is not something that is 'done' or we are 'over,' so we must be diligent in continuing to heal from the racism of our past and present. As we move into our future, let us continue to care for ourselves in the midst of this challenging journey, acknowledging that caring for ourselves can best help us care for others and stay engaged in this long effort. We will end with the guided prayer offered in chapter 6 of the book as a way of sending us out with gratitude into the world where God has called us to act for justice."

Say: "Let's begin by sitting comfortably and closing our eyes, taking in deep breaths."

Make your own body comfortable, putting both feet on the floor, relaxing your shoulders. After several moments of deep breaths, begin the guided prayer, speaking in a slower pace.

Say: "Imagine the healing balm of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, being poured down upon your head, dripping down from the top of your scalp to your shoulders, down your arms, to your hips, and down both legs. This healing balm of Christ, the Holy Spirit, is a word of grace being poured over you. In this moment, allow yourself to acknowledge that what you are going through right now is hard. This is difficult. What you are experiencing right now is a kind of suffering. Name to yourself the feelings that you are carrying in this moment. Learning about racism and the ugliness of our past and the ongoing struggle people of color experience is painful."

Say: "At the same time, others are also going through this same thing. Others, perhaps in this room, are also suffering in the same way that you are. Others around the world share in this suffering to varying degrees. Feel yourself connected to them. And as you continue to take deep breaths, feeling yourself connected to all others who are suffering, imagine now the loving arms of your Savior Jesus Christ being opened to you, with the scars in his hands still visible. Imagine these loving arms wrapping around you, being embraced by

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the love of a Savior who continues to be with you as you suffer, who sees what you are going through right now. Imagine those arms extending to surround persons suffering across your community, nation, and world. See Jesus' arms covering all who experience the kinds of suffering we have been discussing."

Say: "As you imagine these loving arms wrapped around you and the whole world, let yourself exhale with gratitude for the love God has shown to you. With every breath, let out an audible or inaudible, 'Thank you.' [deep breath] 'Thank you.' [deep breath] 'Thank you.'"

Say: "Express your gratitude to God, to your loving Savior Jesus Christ, saying, 'Thank you.' You give thanks for the healing balm of the Holy Spirit, flowing down over you: 'Thank you.' You give thanks for the stories that have been shared with you, the individuals who have opened their hearts by sharing their experiences with you: 'Thank you.' You give thanks for the challenge of these kinds of conversations, the way they push us to think in new ways and to expand our network of concern, and call us to love our neighbor anew: 'Thank you.'"

Say: "We are thankful for the ways that our emotions respond to these stories and conversations, thankful that we can feel deeply: 'Thank you.' We give thanks for all of those who are working for racial justice, working to rebuild communities that remain divided; for these workers we say, 'Thank you.' We thank you, O God, for the ways that you work through us and in us, continuing to redeem us and calling us to share good news with the world. For all of this, we say, 'Thank you. Thank you.' [deep breath] 'Thank you.'"

Say: "As we end our time together from these past six weeks, I invite you to remain in silence as you depart, carrying with you the thoughts and gratitude that you expressed through the guided prayer."

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