CT CHRISTIANITY TODAY

Racism: How Should Christians Respond?

Our faith must inform the way we think and act about this ongoing issue.

Decades after the Civil Rights Movement, America is still dealing with racism. The topic of race fills our news headlines, our city streets, and even our pulpits. Recognizing the centuries-old mistreatment of minority groups, how should Christians respond to racism? Is it possible to respond in sensitive ways that actually make a difference? How should our faith inform and transform the way we think about race?

Scripture: John 4:1–30; Romans 12:3, 9–21; Galatians 2:11–14; Ephesians 2:11–16; Colossians 3:1–17

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Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

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How to use this resource for a group study

This Bible study can be used for an individual or a group. If you intend to lead a group study, follow these simple suggestions.

1. Make enough copies of the article for everyone in the group. If you would like your group to have more information, feel free to copy the Leader's Guide for them as well.

2. Don't feel that you have to use all the material in the study. Almost all of our studies have more information than you can get through in one session, so feel free to pick and choose the teaching information and questions that will meet the needs of your group. Use the teaching content of the study in any of these ways: for your own background and information; to read aloud (or summarize) to the group; for the group to read silently.

3. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting people to open up.

4. When working through the questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for your group to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.

5. Begin and end the session in prayer.

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Lessons from Martin Luther King Jr.

The truth of what he lived and preached

Over 50 years removed from President John F. Kennedy's assassination, it's difficult to imagine publically cheering his death. Yet this is what Philip Yancey describes happening in his Atlanta high school. To many in the South, Kennedy represented a threat to a treasured way of life, and his death was welcomed.

Yancey's view of Martin Luther King Jr., was also marked by his upbringing, and he dismissed King as someone who preached a social gospel and was a problem. Decades later, though, Yancey came to see King in a new way: as a Christian activist who, through his nonviolent approach, was willing to persevere in the face of jail time, beatings, and even defeat. We'll explore the deadly roots of racism and discover King's legacy that carries on today.

Scripture: Romans 12:3, 9–21; Colossians 3:1–17

Based on: "Confessions of a Racist," by Philip D. Yancey, *Christianity Today*, January 1990

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Part 1: IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

Note to leader: Prior to this session, provide for each person the article "Confessions of a Racist" from* Christianity Today *included at the end of this study.

Today, it's easy to view the Civil Rights Movement as something that was finished decades ago, but racism—in all its blatant and more subtle displays—continues to mark our lives.

Discussion Starters:

- What do you remember about the Civil Rights Movement, or what were you taught about it in school? What kinds of words or feelings come to you as you reflect on it?
- When, if ever, have you talked about racism in your church? What was the experience like? If you haven't talked about it at church, why do you think the topic has never come up?
- What recent events involving race make you think that racism is still impacting our country?

Part 2: DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

Yancey writes that King deliberately accepted "beatings, jailings, and other brutalities because he believed a complacent nation would rally around his cause only when they saw the evil of racism manifest in its ugliest extreme. By forcing evil out into the open, he was attempting to tap into a national reservoir of moral outrage."

King knew that in order for the nation to address systemic racism on a scale that had the potential to bring about lasting change, the public at large needed to see what was happening and feel convicted that things couldn't stay the way they were. The best way to get that message out was the news, and the news only covers those incidents that are especially brutal, events that affect the fates of many. While King would have recognized the wide effects of someone using a racial slur or a coworker laughing at a racist joke, he knew that to catch the attention of the media meant to lean into the most brutal, blatantly racist events.

As riots and brutal beatings were covered in the news, the American public could no longer sit idly. Even if they didn't feel they were directly contributing to racism, the public was forced, in many ways, to admit their complacency allowed it to continue to terrible results. As Yancey put it, "The real goal, King used to say, was not to defeat the white man, but 'to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor and challenge his false sense of superiority.' "

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- Yancey expresses feeling shame, remorse, and repentance in light of witnessing racism. How do you feel when you witness or hear about acts of racism?

- Yancey calls attention to both blatant racism and more subtle forms. What are some examples of each? Which do you think is more dangerous?

Read Romans 12:3, 9–21 and Colossians 3:1–17.

- These passages include descriptions of how Christ followers are to live in the world with kingdom values. According to these passages, what kinds of actions should mark a Christian's life?

Leader's Note: Several key things to pull out: identifying and hating what is evil in the world, clinging to God, devotion to community, zealous action, hospitable welcome, unity with people who are different, patient hope in affliction, and forgiving those who have wronged us and others.

- Why is it important to recognize racism as our struggle, too, even if we have never experienced it firsthand?

- What is the relationship between working for peace and working for justice? Can they go hand-in-hand, or are they opposing values?

Part 3: APPLY YOUR FINDINGS

Despite bleak conditions, and attack after attack, King stayed true to his mission of non-violent change. As Yancey wrote, "We now look back on the civil-rights movement as a steady tidal surge toward victory. But at the time, in the midst of daily confrontations with the power structure and under constant blackmail threats from the FBI, civil-rights leaders had no guarantee of victory. We forget how many nights those leaders spent in rank southern jails. Usually to them the present looked impossibly bleak, the future even bleaker."

In the midst of the battle, we need a long-term vision to remind us why we must stay the course. And King delivered this rallying vision on multiple occasions, including from the steps of the Capitol after the famous march from Selma when he said:

> I know that you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.
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> How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.
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> How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow.
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> How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.

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> How long? Not long, 'cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on.
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> He has sounded forth the trumpets that shall never call retreat. He is lifting up the hearts of man before His judgment seat. O, be swift, my soul, to answer him. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on.

Decades after the Civil Rights Movement, it's clear that the battle against racism continues. While this systemic issue can feel unbearably huge, perhaps impossibly large, we must take it up as our own and march on. Yancey writes, "For Martin Luther King Jr. the long view meant remembering that no matter how things appear at any given moment, God reigns. In the end, only God himself truly knows the long view of history. We are simply asked to trust him, and to act faithfully on what he has revealed to us in the short view."

Action Points:

- **Consider your own bias on historical events. How were you taught to view the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr., and racism? How have your upbringing, race or ethnicity, and geographical location informed your bias? Discuss this with a friend and see how your biases are different.**

- **Reflect on your experiences with people of other races and ethnicities. How much were you exposed to people different from you during your childhood? How often are you around people different from you now? What have your experiences been like—negative, positive, or somewhere in between?**

—Amy Jackson is managing editor of **ChristianBibleStudies.com**.

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Confessions of a Racist

It wasn't until after Martin Luther King Jr.'s death that I was struck by the truth of what he lived and preached.

Philip Yancey

When news came over the intercom system that President John F. Kennedy had been shot, students in my high school stood and cheered. They cheered because he was the president who had proposed civil-rights legislation and had then backed it up by forcing the University of Mississippi to integrate. To our comfortable enclave of racism in the suburbs outside Atlanta, Georgia, Kennedy represented an intolerable threat.

In 1966, when I graduated from that school, no black student had ever set foot on campus. Black families had moved into the neighborhood, and whites on all sides were fleeing to Stone Mountain and other suburban points east, but no black parents dared enroll their children in our school. We all believed then, and I have no reason to disbelieve now, that Gordon single-handedly kept them away. Gordon, a tenth-grader reputed to be the nephew of the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, had put out the word that the first black kid in our school would go home on a stretcher.

The Ku Klux Klan had an almost mystical hold on our imaginations. It was an invisible army, we were taught, a last line of defense to preserve the Christian purity of the South. I remember as a child watching a funeral procession for a wizard of the KKK. Caught trying to turn left across traffic, we had to wait until the entire motorcade passed.

Dozens, scores, hundreds of cars slid past us, each one driven by a figure wearing a silky white or crimson robe and a pointed hood with slits cut out for eyes. The day was hot, and the drivers' bare elbows jutted from open car windows at acute angles. Who were they, these druids reincarnate? They could be anyone—the corner gas station attendant, a church deacon, my uncle—no one knew for sure. The next day's Atlanta Journal reported that the funeral procession had been five miles long.

I remember also a Fourth of July rally held at the Southeastern Fairgrounds racetrack. Organizers had brought together such luminaries as George Wallace and a national officer of the John Birch Society, as well as Atlanta's own Lester Maddox, ardent segregationist and future governor of Georgia. A group of 20 black men, showing bravery such as I had never before seen, attended that rally, sitting in a conspicuous dark clump high in the bleachers, not participating, just observing.

I saw no one give a signal, but shortly after a rousing rendition of "Dixie," hooded Klansmen arose from the crowd and began an ominous climb up those bleachers. The black men had no escape. They stood and huddled together, looking around in desperation, but there was nowhere to go. At last, frantic, a few of them started climbing a 30-foot, chain-link fence built to protect spectators from the racecars, and the Klansmen scrambled to catch them.

The speaker's bullhorn fell silent, and we all turned to watch the Klansmen pry loose the clinging bodies, as though removing prey from a trap. They began beating them with fists and with Lester Maddox's souvenir ax handles. After a time, a few Georgia State Patrolmen lazily made their way up the stands and asked the Klansmen to stop.

More than two decades have passed, but I can still hear the crowd's throaty rebel yells, the victims' low moans and pleas for mercy, and the crunch of the Klansmen's bare fists against flesh. And with much shame, I still recall the adolescent thrill I felt—my first experience of the mob instinct—mixed with some horror, as I watched that scene transpire.

Today I feel shame, remorse, and also repentance. It took years for God to break the stranglehold of blatant racism in me—I wonder if any of us gets free of its more subtle forms—and I now see this sin as one of the most poisonous, with perhaps the greatest societal effects.

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Reassessing the Enemy

These memories of racism from my youth all came flooding back recently as I read a biography of Martin Luther King Jr. In successive years, two long and incisive biographies of King won Pulitzer Prizes: David Garrow's Bearing the Cross in 1987 and Taylor Branch's Parting the Waters in 1988. I read Garrow's book. The text runs for 722 pages, and reading it occupied most of my evenings for a week. The experience gave me an odd sense of something like, but not quite, déjà vu.

I was traveling familiar terrain—Selma, Montgomery, Albany, Saint Augustine, Jackson. Garrow presented these names—and I too now view them—as the battlefields of a courageous moral struggle. But when I grew up in the South in the '60s, they represented a geography of siege. The troublemakers from the North, with their federal marshals and carpetbagging ministers, were invading our territory. And the person leading the march in every one of those cities was our number-one public enemy, a native of my own Atlanta, Martin Luther King Jr.

What galled me most in those days was King's appropriation of the gospel. He was, after all, an ordained minister, and even my fundamentalist church had to acknowledge the goodness of his father, Daddy King. We had our ways of resolving that cognitive dissonance, of course. We said that King was a card-carrying Communist, a Marxist agent who merely posed as a minister. (Hadn't Khrushchev memorized the four Gospels as a youth?) When King came out against the war in Vietnam, that seemed to us to verify our theory.

We said that Daddy King had raised Martin right, but that the liberal Crozer Seminary had polluted his mind. He followed the "social gospel," if any gospel at all. (We never asked ourselves what conservative seminary might have accepted Martin's application back then.) And when the rumors about King's sexual immorality surfaced, the case against him was closed. Martin Luther King Jr. was a fraud, a poseur, not a true Christian.

I discovered that both of the recent biographies of King deal with these accusations in exhaustive detail. Most of the political and sexual rumors can be traced back to leaks from FBI agents, for J. Edgar Hoover had a personal vendetta against King. Yet no evidence exists that King ever had communist sympathies, although he sometimes tired of the injustices under democratic capitalism. True, two of his trusted advisers had belonged to the Communist party years before, but King had friends across the political spectrum.

Allegations of King's sexual immorality, however, are historical fact. The FBI taped numerous episodes in King's hotel rooms, and because of the Freedom of Information Act biographers could study the transcripts firsthand. After his recent revelations about King's sexual liaisons, Ralph Abernathy was denounced by King supporters for disloyalty, not for lying.

King's moral weaknesses provided a convenient excuse for anyone who wanted to avoid his message. Because of those weaknesses, some Christians may still be tempted to discount the genuineness of his faith. I certainly once dismissed him. (These Christians might want to review the list of outstanding people of faith in Hebrews 11, a list that includes such moral deviants as Noah, Abraham, Samson, and David.) But now I can hardly read a page from King's life, or a paragraph from his speeches, without sensing the centrality of his Christian conviction.

The Call

David Garrow builds his entire book around the scene of King's supernatural "call," which occurred early in his career. "It was the most important night of his life," writes Garrow, "the one he always would think back to in future years when the pressures again seemed to be too great."

King was thrust into civil-rights leadership in Montgomery, Alabama, after Rosa Parks had made her courageous decision not to move to the back of the bus. The community formed a new organization to lead a bus boycott and chose as a compromise candidate the new minister in town, King, who, at age 26, looked "more like a boy than a man." Growing up in comfortable surroundings, with a kind of inherited religion, he hardly felt qualified to lead a great

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moral crusade.

As soon as King's leadership of the movement was announced, the threats from the Klan began. And not only the Klan—within days King was arrested for driving 30 mph in a 25 mph zone and thrown in the Montgomery city jail. The following night King, shaken by his first jail experience, sat up in his kitchen wondering if he could take it anymore. Should he resign? It was around midnight. He felt agitated and full of fear. A few minutes before, the phone had rung. "Nigger, we are tired of you and your mess now. And if you aren't out of this town in three days, we're going to blow your brains out and blow up your house."

King sat staring at an untouched cup of coffee and tried to think of a way out.

In the next room lay his wife, Coretta, already asleep, along with their newborn daughter, Yolanda. Here is how King remembers it:

> And I sat at that table thinking about that little girl and thinking about the fact that she could be taken away from me any minute. And I started thinking about a dedicated, devoted and loyal wife, who was over there asleep. … And I got to the point that I couldn't take it anymore. I was weak. …
>
> And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee. I never will forget it. … I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. I think the cause that we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage."
>
> … And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world." … I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.

Three nights later a bomb exploded on the front porch of King's home, filling the house with smoke and broken glass but injuring no one. King took it calmly: "My religious experience a few nights before had given me the strength to face it."

Garrow weaves his narrative around that "visitation" at the kitchen table.

He comes back to it over and over again, for King came back to it at every critical moment in his life. For him it became the bedrock of personal faith, an anointing from God for a particular task.

As I read the account of King's life, and his many references to that night, I was struck by the simplicity of the message he received: "I am with you." The Jews in Haggai's day—weak, demoralized refugees who hadn't followed God's orders for years—heard that same message (Hag. 1:13). So did Isaac, in the midst of a famine (Gen. 26:3); and the apostle Paul, who got a vision of comfort after harrowing experiences in Athens and Corinth (Acts 18:10). Those words express an underlying theme of the Bible: the Immanuel ("God with us") presence of God. King reported no further visitations or visions over the next 13 years of his career. This one word was enough.

A Prophet's Perspective

During my high school years in the Deep South, I attended two different churches. The first, a Baptist church with more than 1,000 members, took pride in its identity as a "Bible-loving church where the folks are friendly," and in its support of 105 foreign missionaries, whose prayer cards were pinned to a wall-sized map of the world at the rear of the sanctuary. That church was one of the main watering holes for famous evangelical speakers. I learned the Bible there.

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In the ‘60s the deacon board mobilized lookout squads, and on Sundays these took turns patrolling the entrances to keep out all black “troublemakers.” Lester Maddox himself sometimes attended there, approvingly. And when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, that church founded a private school and kindergarten as a haven for whites, expressly barring all black students.

The next church I attended was smaller, more fundamentalist, and more overtly racist. There I learned the theological basis to racism. The pastor taught that the Hebrew word “Ham” meant “burnt black,” and that in his curse Noah consigned his son Ham to life as a lowly servant (Gen. 9). “That explains why black people make such good waiters and household servants,” my pastor would say from the pulpit. “Watch a black waiter move through a crowded restaurant, swiveling his hips, balancing a tray of food above his head. He’s good at that job because that’s the job God destined him for in the curse of Ham.” (No one bothered to point out that the curse was actually directed to Canaan, not Ham.)

That theology is still being taught today in pockets of the American South. But far fewer people accept it now, and one of the main reasons, for me especially, is the prophetic role of Martin Luther King Jr.

The word “prophet” is often applied to King, for, like those Old Testament figures, he endeavored to inspire change in an entire nation through moral appeal. The passion and intensity of the biblical prophets has long fascinated me. Most of them faced an audience every bit as stubborn, prejudiced, and cantankerous as I was during my teenage years. With what moral lever can one move a whole nation? I have concluded that virtually all the prophets followed a consistent two-pronged approach.

First, they gave a short-range view of what God requires immediately. This usually consisted of an exhortation to simple acts of faithfulness: Rebuild the temple. Purify your marriages. Destroy your idols.

But the prophets never stopped there. They also gave a long-range view to answer the people’s deepest questions: How can we believe that God loves us in the face of so much suffering? How can we believe in a just God when the world seems ruled by a sovereignty of evil? The prophets answered such questions by reminding their audience of who God is, and by painting a picture of a future kingdom of righteousness.

In good prophetic tradition, Martin Luther King Jr. used that same two-pronged approach. For him, the short-range view called for one thing above all else: nonviolence. Two decades later, we may lose sight of how hard it was for King to maintain his nonviolent stance. The biographies make that clear. After you’ve been hit on the head with a policeman’s nightstick for the dozenth time, and received yet another jolt from a jailer’s cattle prod, you begin to question the effectiveness of meek submission. Many blacks abandoned King over this issue. Students especially, the heroes of the Freedom Rides, drifted toward “black power” rhetoric after their colleagues were murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

As riots broke out in places like Los Angeles, Chicago, and Harlem, King traveled from city to city trying to cool tempers and reminding demonstrators that moral change is not accomplished through immoral means. He had learned that principle from the Sermon on the Mount and from Mahatma Gandhi, and almost all his speeches reiterated the message. “Christianity,” he said, “has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear. To be a Christian one must take up his cross, with all its difficulties and agonizing and tension-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its mark upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which comes only through suffering.”

> Garrow tells of a tense encounter with Chicago’s tough mayor, Richard J. Daley. As was his style, King sat silent through most of the boisterous meeting. The King supporters were feeling betrayed. They thought they had reached an understanding with Daley permitting them to march through Chicago with police protection in exchange for calling off a boycott. But Daley had double-crossed them, obtaining a court order that banned further marches. The air was hostile, and it looked as if the meeting

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would break apart in bitterness. King finally spoke up, with what one onlooker described as a "grand and quiet and careful and calming eloquence."

> Let me say that if you are tired of demonstrations, I am tired of demonstrating. I am tired of the threat of death. I want to live. I don't want to be a martyr. And there are moments when I doubt if I am going to make it through. I am tired of getting hit, tired of being beaten, tired of going to jail. But the important thing is not how tired I am; the important thing is to get rid of the conditions that lead us to march.

Now, gentlemen, you know we don't have much. We don't have much money. We don't really have much education, and we don't have political power. We have only our bodies and you are asking us to give up the one thing that we have when you say, "Don't march."

King's speech changed the mood of the meeting and ultimately led to a new agreement with Mayor Daley.

Only Our Bodies

We have only our bodies, King said, and in the end that was what brought the civil-rights movement the victory it had been seeking so long. When I was in high school, the same students who cheered the news of Kennedy's assassination also cheered King's televised encounters with southern sheriffs, police dogs, and water hoses. Little did we know that by doing so we were playing directly into King's strategy. He deliberately sought out individuals like Sheriff Bull Connor and stage-managed scenes of confrontation, accepting beatings, jailings, and other brutalities, because he believed a complacent nation would rally around his cause only when they saw the evil of racism manifest in its ugliest extreme.

By forcing evil out into the open, he was attempting to tap into a national reservoir of moral outrage—a concept my friends and I were not equipped to understand. Many historians point to one event as the single moment in which the movement attained at last a critical mass of support for the cause of civil rights. It occurred on a bridge outside Selma, Alabama, when Sheriff Jim Clark turned his policemen loose on unarmed black demonstrators.

The mounted troopers spurred their horses at a run into the crowd of marchers, flailing away with their nightsticks, cracking heads and driving bodies to the ground. As whites on the sidelines whooped and cheered, the troopers shot tear gas into the crowd. Most Americans got their first glimpse of the scene when ABC interrupted its Sunday movie, Judgment at Nuremberg, to show footage. What the viewers saw broadcast from Alabama bore a horrifying resemblance to what they were watching from Nazi Germany. Eight days later President Lyndon Johnson submitted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to the U.S. Congress.

We have only our bodies, King said. Not once in his career did a Selma or a Jackson or an Albany or a Cicero respond by saying, "You know, Dr. King, you're right. We are racists, and these discriminatory laws are unjust, unconstitutional, unbiblical, and just plain wrong. We're sorry. We'll repent and start over." Not once. It took more than King's prophetic words to break through the moral calluses of bigots like me. It took the bodies of the marchers in Selma and all the other places; it took King's own body in Memphis.

Martin Luther King Jr. did many things wrong, but one thing he did right. Against all odds, against all instincts of self-preservation, he stayed true to the short view. He did not strike back. Where others called for revenge, he called for love.

The civil-rights workers themselves, however, needed something more. They needed the long view. Already convinced of the justness of their cause, they wanted someone to interpret the long string of disheartening failures.

We now look back on the civil-rights movement as a steady tidal surge toward victory. But at the time, in the midst of daily confrontations with the power structure and under constant blackmail threats from the FBI, civil-rights leaders had no guarantee of victory. We forget how many nights those leaders spent in rank southern jails. Usually to them

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the present looked impossibly bleak, the future even bleaker.

To such demoralized troops, Martin Luther King Jr. offered a vision of the world held in the hands of a just God. In 1961 he was performing the same role as had Old Testament prophets in 500 B.C.: He was raising the sights of God's people to the permanent things. Already, at that early date, students were getting restless, and here is what King told those students:

> There is something in this student movement which says to us, that we shall overcome. Before the victory is won some may have to get scarred up, but we shall overcome. Before the victory of brotherhood is achieved, some will maybe face physical death, but we shall overcome. Before the victory is won, some will lose jobs, some will be called communists, and reds, merely because they believe in brotherhood, some will be dismissed as dangerous rabblerousers and agitators merely because they're standing up for what is right, but we shall overcome....We shall overcome because there is something in this universe that justifies James Russell Lowell in saying, "truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne." Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

And later, when the famous march from Selma finally made it to the state capitol, the building that once served as the capitol of the Confederacy and from which the Rebel flag still flew. King addressed those scarred and weary marchers from the steps:

> I know that you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.
>
> How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.
>
> How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow.
>
> How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.
>
> How long? Not long, 'cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on.
>
> He has sounded forth the trumpets that shall never call retreat. He is lifting up the hearts of man before His judgment seat. O, be swift, my soul, to answer him. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on.

For Martin Luther King Jr. the long view meant remembering that no matter how things appear at any given moment, God reigns. In the end, only God himself truly knows the long view of history. We are simply asked to trust him, and to act faithfully on what he has revealed to us in the short view.

That is the pattern not only of the prophets, but of all history. In the Garden of Eden, God with his long view could foresee the drastic consequences of human disobedience: the devastation of creation, the loss of paradise, the plague of human evil. Adam and Eve had only the short view: a simple command not to eat the fruit.

A true prophet reminds us of both. The prophet calls us to daily acts of obedience and faithfulness, regardless of personal cost, regardless of whether we feel successful or rewarded. Build the temple, resist evil, encourage good, love your enemy, tear down walls of division, keep pure. And the prophet also reminds us that no failure, no suffering, no discouragement is too great for the God who stands within the shadows, keeping watch above his own. A prophet who can get across both those messages just may change the world.

While Martin Luther King Jr. lived on earth, I, his neighbor to the east, did not listen to what he said. I was quick to

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pounce on his flaws, and slow to recognize my own blind sin. But because he stayed faithful, in the short view, by offering his body as a target but never as a weapon, and in the long view, by holding before us his dream, a dream of a new kingdom of peace and justice and love, he became a prophet for me, the most unlikely of followers.

The real goal, King used to say, was not to defeat the white man, but "to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor and challenge his false sense of superiority.... The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community." And that is what Martin Luther King Jr. finally set into motion, even in diehard racists like me.

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The Big Picture of Racism

The gospel must transform our understanding of race.

In this session we'll explore one of the Apostle Paul's primary—and perhaps most radical, in terms of social engagement—themes in his ministry summed up in this simple yet profound phrase: "in Christ." If we thought "justification by faith alone" was Paul's favorite phrase in explaining our upward relationship and standing with God, then the term "in Christ" would follow shortly after as Paul's explanation of how we view our new identity, God's purpose of creating a new people, and how we ought to live in that reality with one another. The gospel is bigger and better than we think, and it includes transforming our understanding of race, ethnicity, and belonging to the family of God.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11–16

Based on: Based on: "You Don't Have to Say 'Yo' Around Me," by Trillia Newbell, Her.meneutics, 2015

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Part 1: IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

Note to leader: Prior to this session, provide for each person the article "You Don't Have to Say 'Yo' Around Me" from Her.meneutics included at the end of this study.

The term "gospel" has been hijacked. It's slapped on books to differentiate one's brand, bias, and bent of the good news, and many are eager to tell us what the *true* gospel is. Some churches like to say that they're gospel-centered or that they focus purely on the gospel. They narrow the focus of the gospel to refer only to the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And while that is certainly part of the gospel, this hijacked definition takes our eyes off the full breadth of God's good news.

The term "racism" has also been hijacked. It has mysteriously moved from meaning both systemic injustices (e.g., control of stolen land from Natives, African-American slavery, immigrant exclusion practices, Jim/Jane Crow laws) and individual attitudes and practices, to simply referring to an outright taboo character trait.

In the process, we've lost sight of the bigger picture of racism—how it's systemically embedded in our society—to focus solely on individuals who are racist. Succinctly put, racism has moved from overt to covert racism. Blatant to not as blatant. This move allows us to become complacent under the guise, "As long as I'm not the one spilling the blood, I'm okay—I'm not a racist." An individualized view of racism blinds us to how much bigger the reality is.

Discussion Starters:

- Take some time to share how our culture and society have shaped our hyper-individualistic way of life.
- What are the challenges of living in a hyper-individualized culture?

Leader's note: To get you started: we're constantly comparing ourselves to others, aware of what others around us are doing/accomplishing/having through social media, and fed the idea of the American Dream and our right to a steady upward mobility.

- When have you experienced the topic of race as an elephant in the room? What makes it difficult to talk about?
- How often do you talk with others in your faith community about issues around race, identity, racial reconciliation, or justice? How do those conversations usually go? Are they done in spaces that feel safe, trusting, and challenging, or is the environment awkward and uncomfortable?

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Leader's note: Create a safe space to be honest here. It's okay, and actually preferred, for people to come to terms with acknowledging their discomfort with the topic, their fear of saying the wrong thing, and their worry about being judged or called a racist. This dialogue will go nowhere if folks aren't willing to move past their fear and engage. Gently draw out these fears, name them, and let people know they're not alone.

Part 2: DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

The statement "Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of my life" is more than a theological or spiritual claim. When the gospel is neatly packaged into an altar call moment wrapped up in the bow of the sinner's prayer, we miss out on a huge chunk of what it means to be people of the gospel. Consider just these two things.

The first issue is with understanding what it means for Jesus to be Lord. The statement "Jesus is Lord" is a deeply personal and spiritual affirmation. It's also, however, a theological statement that carries profound social and political implications. For the early Christians to claim Jesus as Lord was a direct offense to the Roman Empire that hailed Caesar as Lord. One can't get any more politically bold and controversial than that. At some point our conception of the lordship of Christ morphed into some spiritual, inner reality where Christ's reign was reserved for the throne in our hearts. This reduces Christ's lordship to the dilemma of whether to watch television shows like True Detective, laugh at Kevin Hart jokes, or see the problem of Black Friday shopping obsession.

Our Lead Pastor at Quest, Eugene Cho, poignantly preaches, "As Christians, we must be concerned about politics whether it addresses [issues of] race, immigration, refugee engagement, gender, children, or poverty. Why? Because politics inform policies that impact people. And as followers of Jesus, we are called to care about people."

The second issue is how we understand Jesus' work in the world. We're much more in love with the work and mission of Jesus of Nazareth than we are with the ongoing work and mission of Jesus the Christ. In other words, as insightfully noted by Scot McKnight in his work *King Jesus Gospel*, we are much more inclined toward a "salvation culture" than we are a "gospel culture." A "gospel culture" fully recognizes the cosmic saving work of Jesus, but is also moved by the resurrected Christ who is establishing through the church a kingdom that reflects racial righteousness, justice for all, and peace for everyone.

This is at the heart of Paul's message to the Ephesians. That being "in Christ" means we have been brought near by the blood of Christ and the dividing walls of racism, racial injustices, and separation have been broken through Christ. The finished work of Christ did not end with reconciling humanity back to God, but included reconciling a broken, sinful, and racialized

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humanity into one of peace. This is the ongoing work we are invited and called into as followers of Jesus.

Read Ephesians 2:11–16.

▶ How would you define the word "gospel"?

Leader's note: This is a bit of a bait and switch. Obviously, the above teaching will open people's perspective, but if you asked people this question at the beginning, most would not include racial reconciliation or the idea of being ambassadors of the kingdom of God. Help to lead and open people's perspectives to include a broader and deeper understanding of the gospel.

▶ What aspects of the work of Christ on the cross were accomplished?

Leader's note: Verse 16 is key here: "in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

In Paul's ministry in the first century, the constant dilemma and source of controversy was the inclusion of Gentiles (non-Jews) into a predominantly Jewish culture and rooted faith. At this time, Jewish-Christians held power and privilege over the newly welcomed Gentile believers.

▶ How do you see this paralleled in the church today?

Leader's note: How well do churches welcome people who don't carry power or privilege in our society? How should we welcome them? This applies both to racial divides, but also welcoming all kinds of "others."

Optional Activity:

Watch this video of #BlackLivesMatter stories: http://www.upworthy.com/if-youre-wondering-why-people-always-seem-to-be-talking-about-racism-lately-heres-an-explainer.

What spoke to you? What challenged you? What does #BlackLivesMatter mean to you?

Respond to this statement from the video: "If we can start from that place of recognizing my humanity, our humanity, the beauty of blackness, the embracing of blackness, that might be some radical change, as it will require a radical love. Once we're in that conversation instead of the one that ignores it we might be able to move forward."

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Part 3: APPLY YOUR FINDINGS

We live in a racialized society. We cannot escape that reality. We cannot hide from it. As Soong-Chan Rah pointedly notes, "Racism is America's original and most deeply rooted sin. . . .These types of statements ["I'm not a racist!"] reduce racism purely to individual actions and behaviors. If we use the language of individual sin to address [systemic] sin, then no individual is guilty." By individualizing racism, we are redefining it and setting up a straw-man slave owner to compare ourselves to, thus cleansing ourselves from the complicity of America's corporate sin.

As followers of Jesus we should not—and cannot—avoid the topic of race, as many do. As Trillia Newbell notes in her article, many people believe that "one of the most effective ways to improve race relations is to stop talking about race." Imagine if we used this method in our marriages: "I vow to never talk with you about our relationship so as to avoid discomfort, awkwardness, and rocking the boat." We wouldn't have much of a thriving relationship!

By ignoring the topic of race, we rob ourselves of allowing God to move and transform our churches and communities to reflect this new humanity in Christ. The gospel is bigger, better, and more powerful than the insidious disease of racism, and we must reclaim the full breadth of these words.

Action Points:

- **Be an intentional learner around this conversation. To be intentional means making the effort and time to read, listen, and watch things that help you grow and expand your perceptions and biases. Being a learner means you're choosing to carry a posture of humility, admitting you don't have all the answers, and opening yourself to growth and transformation.**

- **When was the last time you read a book from a non-white author's perspective around faith and race? Consider choosing one that speaks to the issues discussed today specifically from a non-white author.**

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You Don't Have to Say 'Yo' Around Me
How talking about racial bias helps us overcome our divisions.
Trillia Newbell

Even with the recent surge of attention given to issues of race and ethnicity, any attempt to enter a conversation on these issues comes with a degree of timidity: *Can I say this? Am I allowed to use that word? How will he respond if I ask about . . .?*

These kinds of questions can also come up around observations of Black History Month, as people consider ways to honor African Americans without resorting to stereotypes, clichés, or tokenism.

Our reluctance to address race and to resign to "safe" silence often comes from a desire to respect others, but also from our own fear of being called insensitive, hurtful, or worse, a racist.

That term comes with so much weight and penalty that people do not relate to it. There are few self-identified racists, though many in our country and our churches indeed struggle with racism. Our distance from this term hinders us from fully engaging with issues of race.

I've written previously to challenge fellow Christians to evaluate their hearts to see whether pride and self-exaltation have fueled the sin of racism within them. I know racism is alive and well because I have met people who tell me they struggle with it. Over the past year, I've engaged with brothers and sisters who are willing to face their sin, repent, and ask God for strength to change.

Many of these people, I believe, would continue to be complacent in their sin if some churches and organizations hadn't started to become more vocal over issues of race. When we are willing to have difficult, and sometimes uncomfortable, conversations—God works through them.

Researchers found that most evangelicals believe "one of the most effective ways to improve race relations is to stop talking about race." This sentiment reveals how many of us would rather ignore race as a societal force as well as our own racial bias.

Racial bias comes as a matter of instinct. What's your reaction when you see someone who appears to be of Middle Eastern descent boarding your plane? If you are walking in an urban area and a group of large black men approach, what do you think? When you see a white male with a beard, wearing skinny jeans in a coffee shop, how do you sum him up? Can all black people dance? Are all Asians smart? Are all Africans living in huts without electricity? Does every white person in America live in the suburbs and drive mini-vans?

I've experienced this kind of instinctual racial bias. Certain individuals meet me and feel the need to speak a certain vernacular ("Yo, what up?") or move in a way that was clearly something they picked up on from watching television. I wasn't offended; I'm confident that with enough interactions, that bias will be unproven in my case. In another instance, when I was accepted into law school, someone declared that I must have benefited from affirmative action. Why wasn't hard work the first assumption?

We are easily influenced by culture—what we've read, seen, or heard about but not experienced—and the attitudes and belief systems of generations past. To see reconciliation and progress in our nation, communities, and churches, we must recognize that racial bias is indeed a possibility for each and every one of us. We then want to fight our assumptions of others, learn, and ask good questions.

It is up to us to recognize our problematic assumptions and address our ignorance. Though the lack of

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understanding beneath much racial bias is not necessarily sinful, it can lead to an unbiblical mindset that favors your race over others'. Once bias causes unwarranted judgment, anxiety, or fear, it plagues us as sin.

The oft-used phrase "there's nothing new under the sun" relates to racial discrimination, too. Prejudice led a priest and a Levite to pass by a man on the side of the road after he suffered robbery and being beaten (Luke 10:31–32). And it was a love for neighbor that led the Samaritan to help the man regardless of the racial bias (Luke 11:25–37; John 4:9).

Additionally, we know that Jesus never held these biases; he was constantly bucking the system and cultural and societal definitions of race and ethnicity. He wasn't sinning—our Savior never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21)—he walked this earth in complete purity and righteousness. He related to, cared for, and served those who were not like him.

Scripture gives us a better way to view one another: We are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We are created uniquely different, to the glory of God, but we are one humanity (Genesis 1:26–28; Acts 17:26). We should embrace our differences, but not allow our assumptions and stereotypes to inform our actions.

We all must take steps to learn and educate ourselves. We must also repent where repentance is necessary and be honest about how we view our fellow man. This short article won't solve the problem, but I do pray it builds awareness, which is one step toward understanding, healing, and reconciliation. We are united by the gospel that makes us able to love and serve those who we don't know.

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How Should Christians Navigate White Privilege?

Understand the issue and discover biblical wisdom.

In this session we'll dive into an often uncomfortable and messy conversation around white privilege. It becomes a sensitive topic for many reasons. First, race is not everyone's favorite dinner conversation. Second, people have various levels of understanding when it comes to privilege. Some are completely unaware of privilege because it can be difficult to see. Others are filled with shame over the privilege they've received.

How did privilege play out in the early church? How did Jesus address and model power and privilege? We'll take a closer look at these questions and themes.

Scripture: John 4:1–30; Galatians 2:11–14

Based on: Based On: "Why I Celebrate Black History Month," by Peter Chin, *Christianity Today*, 2014

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Part 1: IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

Note to leader: Prior to this session, provide for each person the article "Why I Celebrate Black History Month" from* Christianity Today *included at the end of this study.

One of the hardest things about having a dialogue around white privilege is the reality that many white people don't see it. It's hard to have a fruitful conversation about something we don't know exists. Many have a hard time seeing how they've been privileged. Perhaps privilege is easier to understand when we focus on what we haven't received. If you're white, when was the last time (if ever) you were aware of the color of your skin because you were pulled over for no apparent reason, followed in a department store, denied a home loan despite solid credit history, or had an open seat next to you on the bus because no one would sit there?

Consider: Who are the faces that play central characters and heroes in film and TV? Who are the dominant faces in news media and broadcasting? What color are the primary characters in children's movies and shows? Who are the overwhelming decision makers and people in power in government and the marketplace?

White privilege is not only about the benefits you *get* for being white, but what you're *not getting* for being white.

Even for those who do understand their privilege, this can be a difficult topic. Many are filled with deep guilt and shame, and they're not sure how to handle it. Others may simply see this privilege as not a big deal, that it's something that doesn't have that much of an impact.

Discussion Starters:

- What were the conversations around race and ethnicity like in your family growing up?
- When were you first made aware of your racial and ethnic identity?
- When you became a Christian, how much did you think about the intersection of your faith and ethnic identity?

Part 2: DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

Read John 4:1–30 and Galatians 2:11–14.

In these passages we see two responses toward those we may consider as the "other." In the Gospel of John, we see a lengthy narrative of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, a powerful and scandalous encounter of Jesus pushing the boundaries and going against all societal norms of his day. First, she was a woman. Second, she was Samaritan. Third, as the text suggests, she quite possibly had a sketchy past with male relationships. For all intents and

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purposes, Jesus should never have interacted with this woman, yet he moves toward her not with fear or judgment, but with compassion and grace. It's powerful that Jesus takes a lot of time to ask her questions to get to know her story, where she's coming from, who she is. Instead of withdrawing from her to maintain those social barriers, he moves toward her to be in relationship.

On the other side, Galatians 2 is a brief story of how Peter withdrew from table fellowship and engaging with the new Gentile believers for fear of the growing faction of Jewish-believers who kept Gentiles at arm's length. Peter could have chosen to move as Jesus did and remain in fellowship with intentionality. Instead of being moved by the compassion and conviction he knew was right, however, he was swayed by fear of those in power and privilege and withdrew himself.

- ▶ When in your life have you been overwhelmed by fear of others? How did you handle that situation?
- ▶ What do you think Peter's greatest fear was engaging with the Gentiles?
- ▶ In what ways do you think fear plays a role in our engagement with our faith and the racial injustices we are witnessing today?
- ▶ How do you see power and privilege play itself out in these texts? How do you see white privilege play itself out in the context of the church?
- ▶ What privilege or lack of privilege have you experienced because of your race?

Optional Activity:

Watch the "Unequal Opportunity Race" Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBb5TgOXgNY.

After watching the video, consider: What thoughts and feelings came up for you as you watched?

Part 3: APPLY YOUR FINDINGS

In Peter Chin's article, he makes a strong case for why he celebrates Black History Month as one who is not black himself. On one level, there's an underlying privilege present: He doesn't have to. But in the way he sees his own racial and faith identity, his conviction leads him to that place. He enters into that rich story. In some way, he finds his own ethnic narrative intersect with that of African American history, the Civil Rights Movement, and the race issues of our day. It's about entering in and not walking away from the table that makes us one body. It's about becoming an ally, advocate, and voice as one who sees being a beneficiary and recipient of a sacrificial, justice-for-all demanding love movement led by African Americans.

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Years ago when I was in seminary there was foolish Facebook picture and post by some white colleagues making some racially insensitive comments towards Asians. Many within our Asian American community were upset, hurt, and angered by the ignorance and flat out racist remarks. However, it felt like our cries would more or less go unheard as the "angry Asians" on campus.

I was processing this with my roommate at the time who's black and he was just as angry—if not angrier—than I was. He posted a lengthy response calling out their hurtful choices in a way that built solidarity around a common thread. He chose to enter in as an ally when he didn't have to. It spoke louder coming from him, and I believe it had a greater impact because he chose to identify with our pain not trying to assume "I know how you feel" but instead validated us simply with a posture of "I don't know how you feel, but I can imagine your pain."

What does it mean to enjoin our stories with that of another? What does it look like to find the common threads that knit us together into the fabric of God's family called together as one body in Christ? How do we see one another's pain, suffering, and injustices as a threat against all humanity?

Action Points:

- **Visit a place where you are not the ethnic or racial majority. Do some research and go somewhere where you are not part of the dominant culture. Be a respectful and culturally honoring learner, observer, and participant. Share your experience with others. What was it like? How did you feel being the minority? How were you seen and treated? What did this experience teach you about times when you are the majority? If you're white, how did this shape your perspective of white privilege?**

- **Post something around racial justice on Facebook. You might be thinking, *I don't know what to say. I'm afraid of what I might post and how others might perceive or respond to me. I don't like conflict!* Be bold. Be courageous. You don't need to have all the right answers. Don't let fear and insecurity have a stronger hold over being a humble and growing learner and advocate in this area.**

- **Intentionally seek out conversation and relationships with people who are of a different ethnic or racial background than you. Carry a posture of humility to be a cross-cultural learner. Sit at the foot of another person's ethnic journey and story. The process of racial reconciliation begins with listening to others' stories and humbly choosing to be a learner. But it can't end there. It must move toward change and transformation beginning with self, and then moving toward your immediate community, and toward the wider community, city, and nation.**

- **Confess and lament. Please read this correctly: We *all* have things we are in need of constantly confessing, lamenting, and repenting from. This is not meant to be a guilt-driving or shaming exercise. It's a spiritual discipline for the people of God to embody as a regular practice. Our temptation may be to think we haven't personally done anything wrong, but we are part of a racialized system. The systemic injustice**

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against ethnic minorities continues today in the form of mass incarceration, gentrification, police brutality, immigration policies, refugee crisis, and more. We confess and lament not just what we have done personally, but in having the posture: "This doesn't affect me." Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 25, "For when I was hungry you fed me. When I was in prison you visited me. When I was a stranger you welcomed me. For what you did to the least of these you did unto me." How we think and act toward those whose situations seemingly aren't affecting ours is how we treat Christ.

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How Should Christians Navigate White Privilege?

Understand the issue and discover biblical wisdom.

In this session we'll dive into an often uncomfortable and messy conversation around white privilege. It becomes a sensitive topic for many reasons. First, race is not everyone's favorite dinner conversation. Second, people have various levels of understanding when it comes to privilege. Some are completely unaware of privilege because it can be difficult to see. Others are filled with shame over the privilege they've received.

How did privilege play out in the early church? How did Jesus address and model power and privilege? We'll take a closer look at these questions and themes.

Scripture: John 4:1–30; Galatians 2:11–14

Based on: Based On: "Why I Celebrate Black History Month," by Peter Chin, *Christianity Today*, 2014

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Part 1: IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

One of the hardest things about having a dialogue around white privilege is the reality that many white people don't see it. It's hard to have a fruitful conversation about something we don't know exists. Many have a hard time seeing how they've been privileged. Perhaps privilege is easier to understand when we focus on what we haven't received. If you're white, when was the last time (if ever) you were aware of the color of your skin because you were pulled over for no apparent reason, followed in a department store, denied a home loan despite solid credit history, or had an open seat next to you on the bus because no one would sit there?

Consider: Who are the faces that play central characters and heroes in film and TV? Who are the dominant faces in news media and broadcasting? What color are the primary characters in children's movies and shows? Who are the overwhelming decision makers and people in power in government and the marketplace?

White privilege is not only about the benefits you *get* for being white, but what you're *not getting* for being white.

Even for those who do understand their privilege, this can be a difficult topic. Many are filled with deep guilt and shame, and they're not sure how to handle it. Others may simply see this privilege as not a big deal, that it's something that doesn't have that much of an impact.

Discussion Starters:

- What were the conversations around race and ethnicity like in your family growing up?
- When were you first made aware of your racial and ethnic identity?
- When you became a Christian, how much did you think about the intersection of your faith and ethnic identity?

Part 2: DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

Read John 4:1–30 and Galatians 2:11–14.

In these passages we see two responses toward those we may consider as the "other." In the Gospel of John, we see a lengthy narrative of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, a powerful and scandalous encounter of Jesus pushing the boundaries and going against all societal norms of his day. First, she was a woman. Second, she was Samaritan. Third, as the text suggests, she quite possibly had a sketchy past with male relationships. For all intents and purposes, Jesus should never have interacted with this woman, yet he moves toward her not with fear or judgment, but with compassion and grace. It's powerful that Jesus takes a lot of time to ask her questions to get to know her story, where she's coming from, who she is. Instead

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- When in your life have you been overwhelmed by fear of others? How did you handle that situation?
- What do you think Peter's greatest fear was engaging with the Gentiles?
- In what ways do you think fear plays a role in our engagement with our faith and the racial injustices we are witnessing today?
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Why I Celebrate Black History Month

Black History Month is not just for black people. It's for all people.

Peter Chin

Author's Note: I use the term "Black History Month" rather than "African American History Month" because a friend informed me that there are individuals who would not be considered African American, but still very much are considered part of Black history, like Marcus Garvey and others. In general, I tend to use the terms "black" and "African American" interchangeably, and I apologize in advance if anyone finds this offensive.

Every February is Black History Month. I have to admit that before a few years ago, I didn't really celebrate it in any real way, besides some cursory acknowledgement. But now, I actively celebrate Black History Month, both in my personal life as well as in the life of the church. I don't do so because it's the right thing for an educated person to do, or in an attempt to pander to political correctness. Nor do I do this because I consider myself anything close to an expert on black history and culture. The reason I unapologetically celebrate Black History Month is because the past couple of years of my life have made me realize that, even as a Korean-American, it was only appropriate that I do so.

The first event that brought me to this realization was that whole "Make Me Asian" and "Make Me Indian" thing. Two years ago, there was an app on the Android market called "Make Me Asian," which took photos from your phone or mobile device and digitally altered them. This seems benign enough, but the manner in which they altered them was that they made your skin tone yellow, your eyes slanted, slapped a Fu Manchu mustache on your face, as well as a rice paddy hat on your head. Of if you wanted to pretend to be a Native American, it was war paint and red skin. Because racism. In truth, the app was not really "Make Me Asian," but more exactly, "Make Me a Horribly Offensive and Dated Asian Stereotype."

I made repeated requests to Google to take it down, but they refused. So I created a petition to ask Google to remove it, which garnered me a lot of flak of various sorts. I heard criticism from people who just could not understand what was offensive about the app. Others told me that the best way to address racism was to laugh it off, and argued that by bringing more attention to this app, I was only making the problem worse. In addition, there were others, the "digital freedom of information" types who believed that no digital content should be censored or restricted in any way. If it was offensive, then I shouldn't download it. Simple as that. I even received no small number of insults and threats along the way, from white supremacists, to supposed members of the Anonymous collective, although that is by its very nature difficult to verify.

It would have been difficult, if not outright impossible, to argue against these criticisms on a purely personal level, simply by saying, "Well, this hurts my feelings." As important as my feelings are, this would not be enough. I needed some kind of precedent to effectively argue that these kinds of portrayals were truly offensive and even harmful, not just to me, but to Asians as a whole. And fortunately, there was such a precedent: blackface.

Throughout much of the 19th and 20th century, white performers would often dress up as black people, including darkening their face, hence the term, "blackface." Blackface often took the form of a comedic portrayal of the happy-go-lucky negro on the plantation, but was also used to portray blacks in an even more negative and violent light, as the threatening dark-faced intruder, a bogeyman of sorts. At the time, no one saw any problem with black people being portrayed this way, and evidenced by the blackface's broad use in film, theater, print, and cartoons, even by such cultural icons as Shirley Temple and Bugs Bunny.

But by the mid-twentieth century, this started to change. There was a growing realization that blackface was not at all a benign and humorous portrayal of blacks, but nothing less than an insidious means of control. By portraying blacks in this way, whites could continue to dictate the way in which blacks were portrayed to the broader culture, perpetuating the abstraction that they were either servants who were perfectly content with their situation, or else

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intruders who were out to violate sanctity of home and person. Additionally, blackface subverted the creation of self-identity by denying blacks the ability to determine for themselves how they were presented, what they found offensive, and what they did not.

And so African Americans stood up and rejected such portrayals, often in the face of intense scorn. And their perseverance eventually won the day, as they were able to reverse the perception of blackface, to the point where most people today consider it offensive and inappropriate (although sadly, not everyone).

Because the Android app was in essence a form of digital "yellowface," this precedent became the bulwark of my defense. Sure, I was making a stand against the offensive characterization of Asians, but I was using the historical precedent that had been established by African Americans. Like them, I did not want to allow others to dictate the portrayal of my race and ethnicity, and I wanted the right to decide for myself what I found offensive, and that included this app. And because my argument was not simply personal in nature, but was formed from this storied precedent, other people could resonate with it, and understand its importance. In the end, nearly 15,000 people signed two petitions, including many blacks, whites, and other non-Asians.

When Google did eventually take down the app, I was under no misapprehension as to what was the cause. It wasn't because of my snarky tweets and outraged emails. It was because the ideological foundation and historical precedent against yellowface had been well established decades before in the fight against blackface. And without that, I would not have had a leg to stand on.

The second event that convinced me that I should celebrate the history and contributions of African Americans was when I moved into this community nearly five years ago. I know that most of the time on my blog, I talk about the harder aspects of living in the city. But I should also point out that the very reason that I am able to live here and blog about these events is because African Americans fought hard for that right.

It wasn't always the case that a person could live anywhere they wanted in the city. There used to be a policy in DC called Racially Restrictive Covenants. Basically, associations around the city would draft legal documents that restricted home ownership to people of specific races or religions, to make sure that their neighborhood remained the way that they wanted them to be.

But in the 1940s, African Americans began to challenge the legality of such covenants, and worked toward getting them overturned. They eventually succeeded, challenging the legal basis of these agreements. But even then, when blacks began to move into historically white neighborhoods like Mt. Pleasant and Bloomingdale, the local residents were openly hostile to African American families, shunning them, or worse. Despite this, blacks persevered in these neighborhoods, until it no longer became a strange sight to see a black family in every corner of the city.

Now fast forward over half a century later, to my own life and situation. I never had to worry about these kinds of issues. When I moved into this neighborhood, I didn't have to put any thought into whether I was legally allowed to. And my neighbors, Annette, Vanessa, Tyrone, William, they didn't shun me because of my race—they all warmly welcomed me and my (growing) horde of children. So clearly, I enjoy the right to live where I want, and not face legal nor cultural persecution as a result—but I did not fight for this right. That fight had been fought and won by African Americans, and I am just a beneficiary of their difficult struggle.

At this point, an especially pessimistic person might argue that blacks weren't exactly fighting this battle on my behalf. The fight against blackface and racially restrictive covenants was fought primarily on behalf of black people, and Asian Americans like myself were just unintentional beneficiaries of their efforts. But I don't think that's true. For instance, after the successful bus boycott of Montgomery, black leaders penned a letter with instructions that

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included this: “Remember that this is not a victory for Negroes alone, but for all Montgomery and the south. Do not boast. Do not brag.”

So no, they might not have specifically known that one day a Korean-American like me would benefit greatly from their efforts, but they always knew their fight went far beyond their own community, and was a fight for universal human dignity and equality.

These are scarcely the only examples in which the black Civil Rights movement lays a foundation for the rights of all minorities—these are only the examples that have affected me most recently. And so, even though I am a proud Korean-American who is by no means an authority on black history or culture, I actively celebrate Black History Month because I actively benefit from the efforts and sacrifice of black people. So have all minorities, and in truth, all Americans. Black history is something that we should all take time to learn about and celebrate, because some of the broadest shoulders that our nation stands upon trace their roots not to the continent of Europe, but Africa.

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