

Racial Healing Through Spiritual Formation

Adult Bible Class Curriculum

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	p. 5
Curriculum Outline	p. 7
Lesson 1	p. 9
Lesson 2	p. 15
Resources	p. 21
Appendix	
Prayers for Racial Healing	p. 23
Creative Applications	p. 25
Spiritual Practice: “One Anothers”	p. 27
Spiritual Practice: Confession and Self-Examination	p. 31

INTRODUCTION

As Christ-followers, we see the image of God in all people and recognize our responsibility to address underlying forces that deeply impact the body of Christ. Because we are all part of the same body of Christ—regardless of our skin color—we are called to care for the entire body of Christ.

To begin to look at racial healing, we must first acknowledge that racism exists. Then individually and as a church body, we seek to find our part in bringing healing and peace. More important than arguing what we do or don't agree with, our primary goal with this material is to learn how to listen. Set aside any judgments you might have and choose to **listen well** as your first response.

We seek to step into this space with courage to address hard things and with compassionate hearts as we come alongside people—those who see the need for change, those who aren't quite there yet, and those who are ready but unsure where to start. May we listen well to one another and to God speaking through his Word and his Spirit to address how we interact with humankind.

WHAT THIS STUDY IS: Recognizing that we (individually and collectively) must do the work of spiritual formation through deconstruction/reconstruction and self-examination to focus on seeing the image of God in all people and moving toward racial healing.

The material in this study is intended to look at the effects of race in our society and a faithful, Christ-like response from us as a body of believers. But also keep in mind that this approach, these concepts, and each spiritual discipline can apply to any way that culture divides us into “groups” or focuses on our differences.

This curriculum will provide a baseline for shared language—a framework for you to work within. These words and ideas may be a stretch for some people. For others, we may not be stretching far enough. But this is the first step toward racial healing as a church body. This is not an exhaustive study on racism, but it's a preliminary look at race to begin the conversation here within our church.

We may have to hear some hard truths to be able to fully move into this space of racial healing. If you or your class feel overwhelmed by what you're taking in, bring that to God and allow his Spirit to keep your ears open while your heart wrestles with what you're hearing.

A few things to keep in mind as you lead your class:

Our prayer is that as we learn together we provide a safe place to discuss relevant topics. Be mindful of the people in your class and whether or not it is a safe place for conversation.

Consider starting each class with a covenant to offer one another grace as we discuss a topic that can be difficult. Or choose a prayer from the appendix to open each class as a way to center everyone before opening up discussion.

If class discussion widens and encompasses more topics outside of race (i.e., politics, gender identity, etc.), gently steer the class back toward the topic we are focusing on together in God's presence: how we can bring about racial healing between all types of people who were created in the image of God. We are not seeking to solve everything that troubles us in the world right now. For these two weeks, we are taking an honest look at race and how it affects human beings today.

Keep in mind how we use language. Be mindful that different sources (i.e., authors, social media influencers, news stations, etc.) speak of racial topics and terms differently. **Let us not allow the way we discuss these topics to remove the humanity from flesh-and-blood people who experience pain from our country's history and the ongoing implications of racism.**

We ask you to allow what we learn together to move from your head to your heart, from understanding to relationship, from recognizing to doing. This is a purposeful way of walking in the world that will bring Christ into each of our daily contexts with whatever divisive issues present themselves there.

Do you have further questions? Would you like additional resources?

Do you want to go deeper on this topic?

Reach out to Hannah McNeill, Greg Dowell, or Mic Biesboer.

CURRICULUM OUTLINE

RACIAL HEALING THROUGH SPIRITUAL FORMATION

WEEK 1: WHY TALK ABOUT RACE “Created in the Image of God”

SCRIPTURE: **Genesis 1:1, 26-27** – God Creates Humankind

LESSON FOCUS

1. Where we find our identity
2. Basics on race and racial reconciliation
3. Spiritual deconstruction related to race

TERMS & DEFINITIONS RELATED TO THE TOPIC OF RACE

STORY/ILLUSTRATION

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR RACIAL HEALING

- Practice the One Anothers
- Dwell on Micah 6:8. Apply the passage through the lens of racial healing.

WEEK 2: A CHRIST-LIKE RESPONSE TO RACE “Who is my neighbor?”

SCRIPTURE: **Luke 10:25-37** – The Good Samaritan

LESSON FOCUS

1. Going deeper on the topic of race
2. Personal examination
3. Listening posture

STEPS FORWARD FROM “THE DEEPLY FORMED LIFE”

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR RACIAL HEALING

- Confession and Self-Examination
- Practice of Listening – James 1 “Quick to listen, slow to speak”
- Dwell on the Fruits of the Spirit. Apply to social media.

WEEK 1: WHY TALK ABOUT RACE

“Created in the Image of God”

SCRIPTURE: **Genesis 1:1, 26-27** – God Creates Humankind

Genesis 1:1, 26-27 NIV – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 MSG – God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.” God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God’s nature. He created them male and female.

INTRO QUESTION

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

LESSON FOCUS

1. Where we find our identity
2. Basics on race and racial reconciliation
3. Spiritual deconstruction & reconstruction related to race

Our story begins here—with creation. The multitudes of people on the earth of all skin tones, the thousands of languages spoken worldwide—it all began with God speaking humankind into existence. We know where we came from, yet the creation story feels so far from the world we experience today. The world is wide and vast, numerous in cultures and ideas. When we begin to talk about a topic that is sensitive for many people, we must first remember how we are created. We are created in the image of God—we bear the *imago dei*.

As you hear the word “we,” who do you think of? Take a moment and consider who comes to mind. Is it people you know? Are they familiar? Do they look like you? **The goal with this first week is to examine how we think of others, keeping in mind that first and foremost we are created in the image of God.** All of us. We know this because of scripture that is God-breathed and that we believe is true. **So how can we speak words that are unloving to someone whose skin is a different color than ours? What allows us to protect one group and fiercely fight against another?** This is what we are seeking to understand. We are all people created in the image of God. There are no rankings, no preferences, in God’s kingdom. And

as children of God, we bear his likeness and carry it into the world. As Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

“Race is a social construct. There is no biological basis for the superiority or inferiority of any human being based on the amount of melanin in her or his skin.”¹ Perhaps we need some redefining. This structure of race is the basis of racism, and this is what we are seeking to reconcile. Reconciliation is a biblical idea, and we’ve been given the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:11-21). [How can we apply this to racial unity?](#)

We must seek to separate the agenda from the concept. What we mean by this is that rather than taking a political stance on this topic we utilize an approach that recognizes and values humanity. What this may require is “spiritual deconstruction.”

In our first Faith Forum, we introduced the topic of deconstruction, not as a tearing down of beliefs but as a healthy process from learning (construction), to questioning (deconstruction), to a new way forward (reconstruction). Perhaps that is the approach we can take as it comes to discussing racial healing.

Why are we even talking about race? You may feel that race is no longer an issue in the United States—slavery was abolished by 1865 and segregation was eradicated with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If this is your feeling, ask yourself if you’ve tried to see this from another person’s perspective. Have you heard directly from a person with black skin that racism no longer affects their life? Consider that your skin color may affect your awareness of what others experience.

TERMS & DEFINITIONS RELATED TO THE TOPIC OF RACE

To start from a unified place, there are some terms that we want to define—both how these words are used in culture and what we mean by each term. Lisa Sharon Harper effectively breaks down some of this language for us as follows.

Distinguishing **race**, **ethnicity**, **culture**, and **nationality** from the biblical perspective:

- *Race*, *ethnicity*, *culture*, and *nationality* often are used as interchangeable words, but each one has a different shade of meaning.
 - *Ethnicity* is biblical (Hebrew: *goy* or *am*; Greek: *ethnos*). Ethnicity is created by God as people groups move together through space and time.
 - *Culture* is implicit in Scripture, but the word is never used. Culture is a sociological and anthropological term that refers to the beliefs, norms, rituals, arts, and worldviews of particular people groups in a particular place at a particular time. Culture is fluid.
 - *Nationality* indicates the sovereign nation/state where an individual is a legal citizen. It is a geopolitical category determined by the legal structures of the state.
- *Race* is about power—in political terms, dominion. As a political construct, race was created by humans to determine who can exercise power within a governing structure and to guide decisions regarding how to allocate resources.²

¹ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, p 27.

² Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*, p 54.

- Race is defined as “association with a group of people based on shared physical traits.”³
- “Race is a social construct. There is no biological basis for the superiority or inferiority of any human being based on the amount of melanin in her or his skin.”⁴

Here are some additional terms you may hear related to race.

Racism: a system of oppression based on race.⁵

Echo chamber: Dictionary.com lists the definition as “an environment in which the same opinions are repeatedly voiced and promoted, so that people are not exposed to opposing views.” When we exist inside an echo chamber, we are not listening to anything outside of the ways we already think.

Unconscious bias: Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines this as “an unfair belief about a group of people that you are not aware of and that affects your behavior and decisions.” It can also be referred to as implicit bias.

- Are these new terms to you? What are your reactions as you hear these terms? Remember to listen with an open mind even if you’re unsure about what you’re hearing.

The practice of racism removes people’s humanity. And this is in direct opposition to how God calls us to interact with others. [Are there ways in which your thinking about people different than yourself could use some examination, perhaps even deconstruction?](#) But we don’t end there. After deconstruction comes reconstruction.

To reconstruct our ideas about racism, let’s look back to the beginning. What we know about God is that he created us in his image. How can we keep this in mind as we interact with others? [Can we learn to allow someone else’s experience without feeling threatened by its implications toward a group you identify with?](#) Simply listen without trying to fix or defend. Practice listening and empathy for what is felt by the other person. And ask God for the grace to minister to the person across from you in that moment rather than protect or defend how you feel. **To bring this kind of non-anxious presence to our interactions we must be firmly rooted in our identity in God as his image bearers.**

We are called to be in the world but not of the world. We exist in this time and space, but our primary identity is not Republican or Democrat, black or white, male or female. We are ALL children of God, image bearers of God. Let us not forget where we came from.

- [How can remembering that we are made in the image of God change our attitudes toward others?](#)

³ Race + Justice Essentials, <https://raceandjusticeessentials.com/glossary/>

⁴ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, p 27.

⁵ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, p 16.

STORY/ILLUSTRATION

Acts 10 – 11:1-18 – Cornelius and Peter

Key Scriptures in the Passage:

- 10:1-2 – At Caesarea there was a man named **Cornelius, a centurion...He and all his family were devout and God-fearing**; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.
- 10:15 – The voice spoke to Peter, **“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”**
- 10:27-28 – Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: **“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.”**
- 10:34-36 – Then Peter began to speak: **“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.** You know the message of God...”
- 10:44-45 – While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit came on all** who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.
- 11:1-3 – The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, **the circumcised believers criticized him** and said, **“You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”**
- 11:15-17 – **“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”**
 - How were different ethnicities at work in this story? How did they interact?
 - What can we learn from this story?
 - Did anyone shift their stance/beliefs throughout the story?
 - What are some examples of unconscious bias in this passage?
 - What does this teach us about *imago dei* and our response to others who appear different?

ADDITIONAL TEACHING OPTION: *An illustration of unconscious bias from author David W. Swanson.*

A few years ago I was quietly reading in the living room of our first-floor Chicago apartment. Earlier that day I'd patched a hole in the sidewalk in front of our building and then placed a barricade of yellow tape across it to protect the wet cement. It was a pleasant autumn afternoon, and I'd opened the window, so when someone began loudly tearing down the tape, I could hear it clearly.

In the three seconds it took to run from the couch to the window, an image of the person destroying my work jumped into my mind: a student from the local public high school. If I'm completely honest here, the person who appeared in my imagination was a young black man. Instead, when I reached the window, I saw someone else, a young white guy, likely a student at the prestigious university in our neighborhood. A sense of frustrated entitlement exuded from his stomping, ripping, and angry cursing.

You might think that I yelled at him to stop, but instead I was caught short by what had just taken place—not on the sidewalk but in my own imagination. I walked back to the couch feeling ashamed. For no rational reason I had made an assumption about who was ruining my hard work. Even more troubling, if my own two eyes hadn't seen otherwise, I'd still be assigning blame to an innocent black man—a figment of my imagination—to this day.

Social scientists describe moments like these as evidence of unconscious bias—assumptions existing beyond our awareness that we hold about groups of people.

We don't leave these biases behind at the entrances of our churches. White Christianity is deeply susceptible to and complicit in the racial biases that inflict damage on people of color. As my own story shows, it's not that most of us are consciously choosing these racial biases; they've simply attached themselves to our imaginations and assumptions.⁶

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If we believe that all people are created in the image of God, how can we tolerate the mistreatment of entire people groups?
- Do I have a knee-jerk reaction related to the topic of race? What can I learn about myself in that quick reaction?
- Who is in my echo chamber? How can I open myself to a voice or perspective that is not in my echo chamber? Challenge yourself to listen to the voices of people of color and what they have to say.
- In what ways do the words I use about others reflect the love of Christ as exemplified in Scripture?
- Do I feel the need to defend myself rather than listen to a different point of view? If so, why is that the case? Bring your honest answer to God and allow him to teach you.
- “Your knowledge will remain abstract and theoretical until you care about the people who face the negative consequences of racism.”⁷ What do you think about this statement? Agree or disagree?

⁶ David Swanson, *Rediscipling the White Church*, p 11-12.

⁷ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, p 195.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR RACIAL HEALING

- Practice the One Anothers. When scripture references “one another” the phrase refers to ALL people: younger, older, the same age, the same color skin, a different color skin. See appendix for explanation and application.
- Dwell on Micah 6:8. “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”
 - What does it mean to act justly? How does this apply to racial healing?
 - What does it mean to love mercy? How does this apply to racial healing?
 - What does it mean to walk humbly with your God? How does this apply to racial healing?
 - As you look at your life through the lens of Micah 6:8, is there a place or places where you are aware of injustice, a need for mercy or kindness that is yours to bring, a place where you are not walking humbly with your God but are relying on your own strengths, gifts, and competencies to bring what is needed in the world? Speak to God about this and listen for what he has to say.

WEEK 2: A CHRIST-LIKE RESPONSE TO RACE

“Who is my neighbor?”

INTRO QUESTION

What does the word “neighbor” mean to you?

SCRIPTURE: **Luke 10:25-37** – The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37 – On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

- How can we expand how we define “neighbor?” Acknowledge who your neighbors are.
- Here’s where scripture and culture meet. If you believe what scripture says, then it should affect how you live in a tangible way. How does this scripture teach us to treat one another? How can I be a better neighbor?

LESSON FOCUS

1. Going deeper on the topic of race
2. Personal examination
3. Listening posture

The goal of the first week was to examine how we think of others, keeping in mind that first and foremost we are created in the image of God.

The goal of the second week is to move toward racial healing by learning to be a neighbor to others.

As we begin week two, please remember a few things:

- Faith Forum is intended to be a safe place to discuss relevant topics. Be mindful of the people in your class and whether or not it is a safe place for conversation.
- We notice that our ideas about race may need to be first deconstructed and then reconstructed.
- All people bear the image of God.

As we go deeper into the topic of racial healing, be mindful that many sources speak of racial topics and terms differently. Regardless of our personal opinions, may we not allow the way we talk about these topics to remove the humanity from flesh-and-blood people who experience pain from our country's history and the ongoing implications of racism. All flesh-and-blood people belong to the same humanity because we all are created in the image of God. By remembering this fact about all people we can move closer to racial healing.

We are familiar with the story of the good Samaritan. The story is prompted by a conversation between Jesus and a man referred to as an expert in the law. Through the conversation with Jesus, the man asks, "Who is my neighbor?" Such a seemingly simple question with a seemingly simple answer. The question seeks to define "neighbor," and Jesus responds with a story that answers in the clearest way who one's neighbor is as well as how one's neighbor is to be treated. But it is not the ability to identify who is and who is not a neighbor that is the compelling thing about this story. What's compelling is that Jesus turns the focus from merely identifying the neighbor to *being a neighbor to others*, a specific compassionate way of walking in this world and caring for those around us.

If we are to be like the good Samaritan, we should ask ourselves how we can be a neighbor to those around us. As seen in this story, being a neighbor isn't conditional—it isn't based on education level, zip code, profession, or skin color. It's a way of embodying the love of Jesus and sharing it with the world. It is a way of seeing what is needed and taking action. [How does being a neighbor connect to the topic of racial healing?](#)

The practice of racism removes people's humanity. The solution to racism is not to "become colorblind" to people's differences, heritage, and skin color. The goal is to see, acknowledge, and accept all people based on the fact that they are created in the image of God. Racism is a complex issue with layers of history and experiences that we may not fully understand. Rather than deny the reality of our neighbor's experience, we can try another way.

In telling the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Jesus addresses a hearing problem. He says, "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear."

How can we seek to understand anyone if we don't first listen to him or her? Have we been hearing and not understanding? It would be wise not to assume that we know all the answers regarding a life we've never lived or experienced. Instead, we can bring a posture of listening to one another and learning from one another.

Listening to someone from another race doesn't mean you are denying your own background or culture. Listening to a person from a different political party does not mean you are required to switch your vote. Listening to someone who believes differently than you do doesn't mean you are denying your faith. But what listening does is connects us to our neighbor in a loving, open, and accepting way that allows us to then *be a neighbor*. It is this posture of looking outside ourselves and caring for the needs of others that can bring racial healing. It also sounds a lot like how Christ chose to live. His neighbors included Pharisees, children, Samaritans, tax collectors, and lepers, and his way of *being a neighbor* brought healing to those around him.

As we remain centered on Christ, we can open our eyes to diversity. We can acknowledge and honor those who aren't exactly like us. Our purpose on this earth is not to agree on everything, but to live out lives of love and compassion that glorify our God. It's common to have different viewpoints, but that must never stand in the way of loving others with the love of Christ.

That is really what we're after when it comes to racial healing.

May we learn to look outside ourselves. This in itself is a spiritual discipline. We can take a prayerful approach, asking God to open our eyes, to help us see the world how other people see the world, to show us the loving way that can bring healing to our world.

Knowing what we now know, where do we go from here? Racial healing is ongoing, and as followers who proclaim Christ, we are committed to bringing justice and healing to the world as agents of God's good works. So we go on this journey together—committing to love and uplift one another, to listen to and learn from one another, to examine ourselves, to make room for God's work in us.

A NEW WAY FORWARD: RECONSTRUCTING OUR APPROACH TO RACE

This is the work of reconciliation—not that we despise ourselves or others but that we listen and live humbly and incarnationally and through that process see the image of God in one another.

Reconciliation is hard and protracted work, yet by the grace of God and the courageous steps we take, we can begin to taste today what is waiting for us when the new creation is fully consummated.⁸

“Practices for Racial Reconciliation” from *The Deeply Formed Life* by Rich Villodas:

1. **Remembering** – The divisiveness and racial injustice we are experiencing today is the fruit of centuries of racial oppression and hostility. The residue of racial inequality and hostility remains. We can't understand our present reality without an honest recognition of our past.
2. **Listening** – We must commit to listening to others even when it's hard. To some degree, most of us can admit that we can do better at listening, yet this remains virtually impossible for many reasons. For example, we equate listening to agreement, we would rather be right than open our

⁸ Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*, p 74.

minds to different perspectives, we might carry deep anxiety about negotiating differences, we reduce people to their worst belief, or we are simply afraid of change.

3. **Lament** – The act of lament is the spiritually mature response to sadness and sorrow. By lamenting we pour out our souls to God and in turn receive grace and power to respond.
4. **Prayer** – When engaging the powers of racial hostility, we can be prone to using tactics that conform to the destructive ways of this world. A person working for racial justice and reconciliation without a deep spirituality of prayer is missing an important part of the healing process. In our work of reconciliation, prayer is a steadfast refusal to give ourselves over to either resignation or self-reliance.
5. **Self-examination** – One of the ways we dishonor the image of God in others is by not doing the hard work of examining the assumptions and biases we have against them.
6. **Confession/Repentance/Forgiveness** – We come together as deeply broken and frail people. We sin against God, and we sin against each other. We are all complicit. We must begin by looking at how we are in many ways no different from the people we dislike and allow that understanding to move us to confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES

Mark 9:38 – “Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”

- What issue did the disciples have with the man driving out demons?
- What was Jesus’ response?
- If we apply this to someone today who is “not one of us,” what might our response be?
- Which is more important: being right or loving your neighbor? Which is more important to God?

Romans 14:10-13 – You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another.

- What are the ways in which we pass judgment on one another?
- How does it make you feel to know that each of us will give an account of himself to God?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do I need to repent of? Is there someone who I need ask for forgiveness based on my harmful words or unloving actions?
- Do I feel the need to defend myself rather than listen to a different point of view? Why or why not? Bring your honest answer to God and allow him to teach you.
- “Indifference to oppression perpetuates oppression.”⁹ How do you feel about this statement?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR RACIAL HEALING

- Confession and Self-Examination: see appendix for explanation and application
- Practice of Listening – James 1 “Quick to listen, slow to speak”
 - Often in our communication with others, we seek to solve a problem, or we are focused on getting efficient and expedient results. This listening exercise is the opposite of these things. We are going to practice the passage from James 1:19 which says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak.”
 - This exercise may feel awkward, but to experience the full benefit, please follow the instructions as written. Divide into groups of 2 - 3 people. Within each group, please remember to 1) listen fully to the person speaking, 2) refrain from speaking, and 3) thank the person for sharing.
 - Provide the groups with a reflection question or two from the lesson. Within each group, select the first person to share. Set a timer for 2 minutes and give the speaker the full time to respond to the question. While they share, the other group members listen fully to the person speaking and refrain from speaking themselves. When the first person has finished sharing, the other two individuals thank them for sharing. Then repeat the process in the groups until each person has spoken.
 - Reflect on the process as a class.
 - Did you learn something about those speaking as you listened?
 - What was going on inside of you as you remained silent?
 - Was it hard not to give feedback or advice to the one speaking?
 - How often do we listen with the sole intent of hearing the other person without planning what to say next?
- Dwell on the Fruits of the Spirit. For an application, follow the exercise related to social media.
 - We can use the fruit of the Spirit as our guide. Read a news article or post on social media. Take a **patient** and **self-controlled** stance, breathing a moment and putting thought into *if* you will respond and *how* to respond. If you want to respond with a comment, use **love** and **gentleness** to filter your words as you remember the inherent image of God created in all people. Consider how your words could either offend/injure others versus bringing **peace** and **joy** into those spaces.

⁹ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, p 15.

- A Note About Media: Interacting with News Outlets and Social Media
 - Consider that the nature of media is often not to tell 1) the full story, 2) both sides of the story, or 3) an unbiased story when it comes to news and current events. Knowing this, we can pray for a discerning spirit as we interact with the information we receive. **May we consider the source while not forgetting the humanity of people affected by the reported news.**
 - Consider the voices that you hear on social media. Is your social media experience an echo chamber, representing only stances and voices that you already agree with and identify with?

RESOURCES

If you want to dig deeper, contact us for more resources.

BOOKS

- *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman – THEOLOGY
 - The writer demonstrates how the gospel may be read as a manual of resistance for the poor and disenfranchised. Jesus is a partner in the pain of the oppressed and the example of His life offers a solution to ending the descent into moral nihilism. Hatred does not empower—it decays. Only through love can God’s justice prevail.
- *The Deeply Formed Life* by Rich Villodas – SPIRITUAL FORMATION
 - This book is a roadmap to live in the richly rooted place we all yearn for: a place of communion with God, a place where we find our purpose. New York pastor Rich Villodas lays out a fresh vision for spiritual breakthrough following five key values.
- *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen – SPIRITUAL FORMATION
 - This spiritual bestseller lays out an insightful plan for living a spiritual life and achieving the ultimate goal of that life—union with God. The author emphasizes that the more we understand (and not simply deny) our inner struggles, the more fully we will be able to embrace a prayerful and genuine life that is also open to others' needs.
- *The Gospel of Peace in a Violent World* edited by Shawn Graves and Marlena Graves – THEOLOGY
 - It can be difficult to see the peace of Christ in our broken, violent world. This book not only responds to the realities of war and conflict but also offers a broader, deeper understanding of peace that addresses topics such as race, gender, disability, immigration, the environment, food scarcity, and more holistic shalom that is evidence of God's presence.
- *A Fever in the Heartland* by Timothy Egan – HISTORY
 - A historical book by the Pulitzer and National Book Award-winning author that tells the story of the Klan's rise to power in the 1920s, the cunning con man who drove that rise, and the woman who stopped them. The book presents a page-turning reckoning with one of the darkest threads in American history.
- *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson – BIOGRAPHY/HISTORY
 - Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of a young man who was sentenced to die for a murder he insisted he didn’t commit.
- *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby – HISTORY
 - This narrative takes you on a historical, sociological, and religious journey: from America's early colonial days through slavery up to present day. It charts a path forward to replace established patterns and systems of complicity with bold, courageous action.

It is a call from a place of love and desire to fight for a more racially unified church that no longer compromises what the Bible teaches about human dignity and equality.

- *Rediscipling the White Church* by David Swanson – THEOLOGY
 - Pastor David Swanson contends that discipleship, not diversity, lies at the heart of our white churches' racial brokenness. Before white churches can pursue diversity, we must first take steps to address the faulty discipleship that has led to our segregation in the first place by rethinking our churches' habits, or liturgies, and imagine together holistic, communal discipleship practices that can reform us as members of Christ's diverse body.
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee – FICTION
 - A tale of coming-of-age in a South poisoned by virulent prejudice, it views a world of great beauty and savage inequities through the eyes of a young girl, as her father—a crusading local lawyer—risks everything to defend a black man unjustly accused of a terrible crime.

WEBSITES

- “Why There Are No White People in the Bible” by Dan Bouchelle, <https://www.mrnet.org/blog-db-1/2021/01/26cbh-s5y6g>
- “Racial Reconciliation May Not Be What You Think It Is,” https://www.missioalliance.org/racial-reconciliation-may-not-think/?fbclid=IwAR21GCqRHtlv4auWQvlidTBiC790DtcyjZ8U_ZoMS-z6yfo1Khc0qg7mtQw
- Carl Spain Center on Race Studies and Spiritual Action: <https://carlspaincenter.org/resources/>

SERMONS

- “The Gospel, Race, and Justice” with Dr. Jerry Taylor and Don McLaughlin.
Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mjkI3TrJIs>.
Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToKQay6hz90&list=PLVxkzcZqkc-ek38EBAYF5eHW7SajB01gd&index=19>.
- Rick Atchley series: “Why Talk About Race?”
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnjejt767F5KtQ76ZKGvaEejMx_swQ35r
- Carl Spain sermon from 1960
 - Spain, Carl, “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals” (1960). *Lectureship and Summit Audio Collection*. 5199. https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/sumlec_audio/5199

VIDEOS/MOVIES

- Privilege Explained in a Race - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4K5fbQ1-zps>
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- *Hidden Figures*
- *Remember the Titans*
- *Just Mercy*

APPENDIX

PRAYERS TO PRAY INDIVIDUALLY OR IN CLASS

O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. —Book of Common Prayer

Almighty God, Creator of the living and the non-living, you marvelously made us in your image; but we have corrupted ourselves and damaged your likeness, by rejecting your love and hurting our neighbor. We are desperately sorry and heartily repent of our sins. Cleanse us and forgive us by the sacrifice of your Son; remake us and lead us by your Spirit, the Comforter. We only dare to ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. —Kenyan Revised Liturgy for Holy Communion

My God, thank you for the physical sight to see both light and darkness around me. Thank you too for insight that comes with the vision to tell the difference. I know that my perception of reality, my vision, determines my ability to respond to life, and that the greater my vision, the more fully alive and fully human I can be.

Still I confess that sometimes the smallness of my vision limits my perception of myself, my neighbors, and the world, so that I treat others as less than human and not fully alive—personally, politically, economically, and socially.

I need the vision that Jesus gives, that sees no difference between sacred and secular, sexual identity and personhood, ethnic group and worth, economic position and dignity, education and value.

I need the vision to ask the hard questions and to change my attitude and the structures of society where I can. Because of the sensitivity of sight you give, enable me to stand in awe and wonder at life and its possibilities. Help me kneel in humility to worship you and not myself. Lord hear me as I say, “Let my eyes be opened.” —From *Visions of a World Hungry* by Thomas G. Pettepiece

Almighty God, as you have sent Jesus to be for us light and truth, send now your spirit upon us to grant us grace and strength to follow in his footsteps. Amen. — A Guide to Prayer for Ministers

Lord of the captive and Lord of the free, fill our voices with songs that proclaim hope, joy, and justice for all creation. Guide us this day to walk alongside the oppressed as fellow sojourners. Amen. — Common Prayer

O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me. Keep me in touch with myself, with my needs, my anxieties, my angers, my pains, my corruptions, that I may claim them as my own rather than blame them on someone else. O Lord, deepen my wounds into wisdom; shape my weaknesses into compassion; gently my envy into enjoyment, my fear into trust, my guilt into honesty. O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me. —Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace*

Lord, we long to be your people in this world where other powers claim our allegiance. You have stamped your image on us. Guide us by your light that we might see clearly who we are and what it means to give ourselves to you. Amen. — Common Prayer

Transform our desires to mirror yours, Lord. Bind us to you and to one another in vows of peace, in obedience to your word, and in the love of the Holy Spirit, which binds you to the Father, one God both now and forever. Amen. — Common Prayer

Lord God, King of the Universe, we lift up our hands to you and ask you to help us bear the burden of injustice. Grant us a discerning spirit to follow your path to justice. Equip us with your patience and your grace so that as we walk with those who suffer, we might strengthen and uphold one another. — Common Prayer

O Father in Heaven, perhaps you've already heard what I wanted to tell you. What I wanted to ask is forgive me, heal me, increase my courage, please. Renew in me a little of love and faith, and a sense of confidence, and a vision of what it might mean to live as though You were real, and I mattered, and everyone was sister and brother. —Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace*

CREATIVE APPLICATIONS

1. Look at the artwork on the cover of “Standing in the Need of Prayer.” See what you notice in the painting. Consider what Dr. Taylor said about carrying our history inside of us. In the picture, what do you see about the girl’s history? Name what those things are.
What are parts of your own story that could be drawn? Draw out experiences in your life that have shaped you. (Examples: grew up on a farm with siblings, have a grandparent that took you to church, death of someone close to you, being raised in a certain environment, talents that you have, things you’ve participated in. Think big!) Name something that’s part of your story. Now, what if I told you that’s not really part of your story? Or what if I said, “let’s just erase that part?” How does this illustrate the experiences people of color have with racism?
2. Comparison of two pics of children: black boy picking cotton and white girl in KKK outfit. “Train up a child in the way he should go...when he grows older he will not abandon it.” (Proverbs 22:6). What did these children learn about their place in life? How does racial inequity affect all of society—from children to the oldest generations?
3. Privilege Explained in a Race: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4K5fbQ1-zps>. Watch the video. What were your feelings as you watched? How can we recognize the privilege we have?
4. Examples in scripture of people using their voice—in good or bad ways. Jezebel, Elijah, Saul/Paul, etc. What will you stand for? How will you use your voice? If we don’t use our voices at the right time and equip ourselves well, do our voices matter?
5. Discussion: Why do I get angry when we talk about racism? Why don’t I get angry when we talk about love?
6. Think about something you believe about people with a different skin color. Why do you think this? Who taught you this? Can it be reexamined?
7. *Your Legacy* storybook. How do the pictures and messages in “Your Legacy” differ from what you were told as a child about your history?
8. “We are more alike than we are unlike.” Maya Angelou poem: <https://youtu.be/9adflFfYaCM>. If God created all humans in his image, what can we understand about the diversity we see in the world?
9. “I don’t preach a social gospel. I preach the gospel. Period. The gospel of our Lord is concerned for the whole person - when people were hungry, Jesus didn’t say, ‘now, is that political or social?’ He said, ‘I feed you.’” Because the good news to a hungry person is bread.” —Desmond Tutu
10. Blue Eyes vs Brown Eyes Illustration (see next page)
11. Historical Example of Racism: Narrative about Emmett Till
12. Recent Historical Example of Racism: Narrative about shooting in Mother Emanuel AME

With any of the applications above, classes could discuss together, answer reflection questions in smaller groups, or write reflective response.

Blue Eyes vs. Brown Eyes

When Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in 1968, a third-grade teacher in Riceville, Iowa, named Jane Elliot knew she needed to help kids understand the significance of King's death. Mrs. Elliot split her class into two groups by the color of their eyes. She told her students that those who had brown eyes were smarter, better behaved, and in every way superior to the blue-eyed kids in the class. Because they were unarguably better, brown-eyed kids were given the best seats in the class. They got extra recess time and second helpings of hot lunch. They were allowed to use the drinking fountain in the classroom. Blue-eyed students were forced to wear collars identifying which group they were in more easily, and they were repeatedly told how the brown-eyed students were superior to them. In addition to having less time at recess, blue-eyed kids weren't allowed to use any of the playground equipment. They were always placed last in line, and instead of the drinking fountain, they were forced to drink tap water from disposable cups (but they weren't allowed to throw them away because everyone knows that blue-eyed children are wasteful).

Mrs. Elliot wanted to help kids experience what it felt like to be discriminated against, but she was actually horrified by what happened. Students in each group started acting like the brown-eyed/blue-eyed lie was true. Brown-eyed kids looked down on blue-eyed kids and called them names. Blue-eyed kids took longer to do their schoolwork than they had the day before. On the following day, Mrs. Elliot admitted she lied when she said brown-eyed children are smarter, better behaved, and superior. Everyone knows, she said, that blue-eyed kids are smarter, better behaved, and superior in every way. The results were the same in reverse.

"I watched what had been marvelous, cooperative, wonderful, thoughtful children turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating little third-graders in a space of fifteen minutes," said Mrs. Elliott. She says she realized then that she had created a classroom-sized model of the whole society. At the end of the two-day exercise, Mrs. Elliot talked through the experience with her students. She asked how it felt to be told they were better than other kids, how it felt to be treated differently. She then asked how the kids would treat someone with a different skin color.

- What does it mean to say that race exists only because people think it does?
- In what ways do you take your own race for granted?
- How would it feel to be treated differently because of the color of your eyes?¹⁰

¹⁰ Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism*, p. 32-34.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: ONE ANOTHERS

Borrowed from "Spiritual Disciplines Handbook" by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

****The following information is taken in its entirety from *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.**

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."
– 1 CORINTHIANS 10:17

Just as the Trinity is one, so followers of Jesus are one. No matter how many schisms divide us, the supreme reality we are to incarnate is oneness. We belong to one another. We cannot apprentice ourselves to Jesus and live without regard for others.

What does Christian oneness and community look like? Scripture is replete with examples and directives that can shape healthy relationships and engender safe, thriving body life.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

- "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)
- "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)
- "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." (1 Peter 1:22)
- "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." (1 John 3:11)
- "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." (1 John 3:23)
- "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." (1 John 4:7)
- "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4:11-12)
- "And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another." (2 John 1:5)

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

- "Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:13)

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

- "Each helps the other / and says to his brother, 'Be strong!' " (Isaiah 41:6)

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER

- "God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:24-25 NRSV)

ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

- "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7)
- "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:14)

BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER

- "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
- (Ephesians 4:31-32)
- "The fruit of the spirit is . . . kindness." (Galatians 5:22)

LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER

- "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." (1 Peter 3:8)

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

- "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

BE HOSPITABLE TO ONE ANOTHER

- "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:9)
- "Be hospitable to one another without complaining." (1 Peter 4:9 NRSV)

HONOR ONE ANOTHER

- "Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:10)

BELONG TO ONE ANOTHER

- "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:5)
- "We are members of one another." (Ephesians 4:25 NRSV)
- "Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." (2 Corinthians 13:11)
- "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." (Hebrews 10:25)

- "God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:24-25 NRSV)

BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER

- "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (mutual affection]." (Romans 12:10)

SPEAK TRUTHFULLY TO ONE ANOTHER

- "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices." (Colossians 3:9 NRSV)
- "So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another." (Ephesians 4:25 NRSV)

TEACH ONE ANOTHER

- "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

AGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER

- "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10)

LOOK OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER

- "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:4)

WORSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

- "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:19-20)

LAY DOWN YOUR LIVES FOR ONE ANOTHER

- "We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." (1 John 3:16 NRSV)

DO NOT PROVOKE ONE ANOTHER

- "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5:25-26 RSV)

DO NOT GRUMBLE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER

- "Do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!" (James 5:9 NRSV)

DO NOT ENVY ONE ANOTHER

- "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5:25-26 NRSV)

SUGGESTIONS FOR PUTTING THE SCRIPTURAL "ONE ANOTHERS" INTO PRACTICE

Any of the suggestions found below can be done with a prayer partner, accountability partner, mentor or spiritual director. They are also suitable for small group interaction and follow-up.

1. Choose a "one another" that you want to become a hallmark of your life. Consider why this "one another" is important to you. Picture what practicing the "one another" will cost you. It could cost you time, money and a variety of self-indulgent moods and behaviors. Commit yourself to practicing the "one another" every day for two weeks. At the end of each day, notice where you lived your "one another." Where did you not live your "one another"? Seek grace to continue to incarnate Christ's self-donating love. At the end of two weeks, consider whether or not you should dedicate two more weeks to intentionally living your "one another." Do you feel called to move on to a different one?
2. When and how have you received the "one another" love and encouragement found in Scripture? Which "one anothers" did or didn't you receive growing up? How have these affected your attitude to "one another" directives? Talk to Jesus about your experiences. Offer him your desire around "one another" living.
3. On a monthly basis focus on a particular "one another." If you are in a small group, you might call a month "Encourage One Another Month." During that month, each participant opens his or her heart to encourage others in the group. At the end of the month meet to discuss what this was like for all of you. What touched you most deeply? What was most difficult? **How did you find God in the "one anothers?"**
4. Consider the people in your world that have little experience of the biblical "one anothers." How could you intentionally bring a "one another" experience to these people? Plan a time to do so.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CONFESSION AND SELF-EXAMINATION

Borrowed from "Spiritual Disciplines Handbook" by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

****The following information is taken in its entirety from *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*.**

DESIRE: to surrender my weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire and embrace practices that lead to transformation

DEFINITION: Self-examination is a process whereby the Holy Spirit opens my heart to what is true about me. This is not the same thing as a neurotic shame-inducing inventory. Instead, it is a way of opening myself to God within the safety of his love so I can authentically seek transformation. Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change.

SCRIPTURE: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." (Psalm 32:1-2)

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5:16)

PRACTICE INCLUDES

- admitting to God the natural propensity to rationalize, deny, blame and self-obsess
- examining the "sin network" in your life as evidenced in presumptuous sins, besetting weaknesses, self-centered habits and broken relationships
- replacing sinful habits with healthy ones
- seeking God's grace to change
- confessing sins by examining your life in light of (1) the seven deadly sins, (2) the Ten Commandments, (3) prayers of confession found in prayer books or Scripture (Psalm 51), (4) a life confession, journaling confessions and confessions made to others

CONFESSION AND SELF-EXAMINATION

Confession may be good for the soul, but it can be very hard to do. We are invested in looking like good moral people. After all, appearing good is one way of dealing with the notion that something is wrong with us. We haven't murdered anyone or robbed a bank.

Furthermore, when we do wrong we try to fix it and make it better. We can put a great deal of energy into maintaining the image that we are good moral people. But this very appearance of goodness can be a way we defend ourselves against our sin. For when we can't see our sin we have nothing to confess.

The truth is that we all sin. Sin is anything that breaks relationships. Jesus is totally realistic about broken relationships. He experienced them. He was put to death by them. Yet Jesus taught that the damage done through sin was not the last word on life. Sin could be confessed. Sin could be forgiven. And sinful people could be set free.

Much of Jesus' teachings and at least a third of his parables are about forgiveness. Over and over again he modeled what it looked like to bless when you are cursed and to forgive when people don't deserve to be forgiven. Furthermore, one of the central pleas of the Lord's Prayer focuses on confession and forgiveness: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

True repentance means we open the bad in our lives to God. We invite him to come right in and look at our sin with us. We don't hide by being good, moral people or in neurotic self-recriminations. We don't pretend to be other than we are. We don't disguise the truth by carting out all the disciplines we practice. We tell it like it is without rationalization, denial or blame—to the only person in the universe who will unconditionally love us when we are bad. We hand over the pretense, image management, manipulation, control and self-obsession. In the presence of the holy One we give up on appearing good and fixing our sin. We lay down our ability to change by the power of the self. We turn to Jesus and seek forgiveness.

Jesus, the only Son of God, died a violent, unspeakable death so we could know what freedom from sin tastes like. Jesus laid his power down, suffered and became sin so that we would not be condemned. Every time we confess how we have missed the mark of God's love and truth, we open ourselves up to the mending work of the cross. Jesus' wounds hold true life-changing power. This is the shocking reality that confession can open up to us. Through confession and forgiveness we live into the truth of being God's new creation! The old is gone. The new has come.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Does your confession tend to be along the lines of "Forgive my sins, dear Lord" rather than specifically naming your sins one by one before the face of God? What does the lack of specific confession do to self-awareness?
2. What experiences have affected your ability to give and receive forgiveness? Talk to God about what this means.
3. When have you tasted the joy of forgiveness? What was that like for you?
4. What is it like for you to confess your sins before a friend or confessor?
5. Which of your sins hurts those closest to you?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Imagine you are in a safe place, surrounded by the love of God. • Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you. Remember he sees you absolutely and with love. • Using the Ten Commandments as a guide, journal your sins. When you have finished, go through each

commandment one at a time, asking God to forgive you and help you to change. • Then burn your list in a symbolic act of what it means to have God remove your sins from you.

2. Set aside some time for confession and self-examination. In the presence of God ask for light to pierce your defenses. • Then ask yourself, Who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger and so on? • As the Holy Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be to give you grace to forgive them. • Write an apology, make a phone call or confess out loud in an attempt to put the relationship back on track.
3. Make a life confession—alone or to a trusted friend or confessor. • Dividing your life into seven-year segments, reflect on the sins particular to each segment. • Confess your sins aloud. Receive the freedom that comes in knowing you stand completely in the clear before a holy God.
4. Ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, What do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you? What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself? Let their answers guide you in a time of confession.
5. Enter into a covenant group or an accountability relationship where you cannot hide. Tell the truth about who you are and ask your partners to pray for you and help you change.
6. Imagine the kind of person you would like to become in your old age. Then look at your life and assess whether or not the way you live now is preparing you to become this person. • Confess where you need to change. Ask God and the community of faith for help.
7. Turn to Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Use the psalm as a way of bringing your own sins before God. • How does God meet you in these confessions of David?
8. How in touch do you feel with your own sin? • If you feel out of touch with your sin, honestly consider where some of the following sins show up in your life: envy, lust, greed, gluttony, deceit, lying, exaggerating, envy, anger, pretense, avoidance of responsibility. • What do you see about yourself? How do you want to talk to God about these things? • Confess where you have fallen short of God's expectations, and receive his forgiveness.
9. **Begin to notice your strong emotions. When do you feel yourself getting hot, defensive, angry, withdrawn? What is motivating your emotion? What behavior stems from your emotion? • As you attend to this internal world, ask God to make you alert to what triggers strong emotional reactions. Confess any sin relating to these reactions. • Practice noticing your internal world, and begin to develop a habit of immediate confession.**
10. If you are interested in identifying your besetting sin or compulsion, read a book on the Enneagram such as *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* by Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert