

Addressing Racism

A COMMUNITY
GROUP
DISCUSSION
GUIDE

A LETTER FROM THE ELDERS

Since sin emerged in the garden, the world has experienced unnecessary and tragic conflict and injustice. We mourn sin and its long-term effects, but we do so with confidence, obedience, and hope as Christians. We know the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church, and that is as true today as it was in the Book of Acts.

One of the sins that has constantly plagued our world, and our nation specifically, is racism. Racism can be defined as injustice rooted in bias, partiality, and prejudice toward a specific people group related either by ethnicity or family of origin. Due to recent events, the topic is once again a major focal point in our society. Given that racism is one of the myriad expressions of sin in our fallen world, Christians should not be surprised to see the world's reaction to sin's destruction. Unfortunately, the way the issue is being addressed today is often informed by unscriptural philosophies, characterized by a lack of civility, and governed by fear—none of which meet the standard of wisdom and love that our Creator and Lord expects the Church to lead with. This guide for personal (Psalm 139:23-24) and group (Hebrews 3:13) reflection has been created to serve believers who want to either begin to or continue to pursue God's will for us, as His people, to be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation. Our prayer is that the Church, as God's ministers of grace and healing, can increasingly be the "city set on a hill" that "cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14), and which draws all who are weary and heavy laden to God's peace (Matthew 11:28).

If we are going to be God's means of grace in this area, we should follow David's example in Psalm 139. We should let God's work first **increase** in us, and then invite others into our pursuit of God's best for His people and world. We know that "racism," like all sin, will not be completely eradicated until His Kingdom comes, but we also know that He calls us to live as "aliens and strangers" and "citizens of another Kingdom" who show a better way.

The purpose of this personal reflection and group discussion guide is to enable each of us to "**excel still more**" (1 Thessalonians 4:10) as we live to **honor** Christ and pursue the Great Commandment and Great Commission in all circumstances, including circumstances negatively impacted by racism, past and/or present.

Borrowing from the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we hope this guide helps each of you with many aspects of the Christian's call to be **increasingly sanctified**. God's Word encourages us to lead relationally as humble people who delight in understanding and who want to grow in every way as ministers of reconciliation and a source of hope in a broken world. We know from the parable that there were robbers who stripped, beat, and left an innocent man half-dead. The Elders are not aware of Members of our body who are or who have ever engaged in racial injustices akin to the robber in the parable; obviously, if that were the case, those individuals would have long ago been immediately admonished and called to repent. However, in situations like the one described in Luke 10, it is not hard to imagine that there might have been eyewitnesses—people who, though they did not commit the crime, chose to say and do nothing while the injustice was taking place and chose self-preservation instead of caring for the defenseless. There could very well be friends among us

who have witnessed an expression of prejudice or racism and found themselves guilty of the sin of silence. We pray this guide will serve these friends as they consider afresh how they can “open their mouths for the mute, for the rights of the unfortunate...and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Then there were the priest and the Levite who did not witness the injustice being done, but did see the man hurting and in need. They each chose not to stop and care for the hurting, and the passage is clear that they missed an opportunity to love their neighbor. We hope this guide helps many of our Members discover ways they can proactively run towards the hurting in any area where they are in need—be it as victims of racism, or due to other issues related to their family situation or life circumstances. The church has historically cared for those in need, and we hope we excel still more as Christ’s people in being aware of and acting on those opportunities today.

If we imagined how the story might have continued after the end of the parable, we can envision the beaten man healing from his external wounds, leaving the inn, and then beginning life anew. But, he would undoubtedly now live with unseen wounds, fearful of when the next robbery, stripping, and beating will come. God’s Word calls us to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15) and to live with one another in an understanding way. We pray this guide will serve you as you seek to be God’s agent of healing and understanding who will “weep with those who weep” and find ways to make the world better by loving the hurting and sharing with them the eternal hope that is in Christ alone.

Finally, we rejoice that we have many Members who have been leading and are Good Samaritans. We are grateful for you and pray that you do not grow weary in doing good, and as a result of us all prayerfully working together, we pray more join you in your faithfulness.

We hope this guide helps each of us become more attuned to our surroundings, which leads to change wherever there is opportunity for more good and less bad. As we have in the past with other areas crucial to our witness as God’s people (such as the wise use of finances, living together in community, and resolving conflict), we ask each of you to prayerfully prioritize working through this material with your community as you shepherd one another.

As we often say, we are an imperfect people on a perfect mission for a perfect God. We are being sanctified, and we hope this guide helps you and your community group in that sanctification process related to the past and present injustices of our nation and the lasting negative effects that come with them.

Praying each of us do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

The Elders of Watermark Community Church

Introduction to the Discussion Guide

The issue of racism affects everyone differently. Many of us have keenly felt the impacts of prejudice and unfair systems throughout the course of our lives. For others, events that make it into the news serve as a wake-up call, bringing new awareness to an issue that has long been there.

Everyone responds differently. Some of us are exhausted by the number of conversations we have had about race and feel the pain of being ignored or not cared for. Others have avoided the topic altogether, perhaps intimidated and fearful.

This guide is for all of us. We pray it specifically allows you to individually reflect on God's Word and what it says about our own heart's response to sin's constant desire to deceive and rule over us and our world.

This guide is for your community group, to come together and discuss a biblical view of race, ethnicity, prejudice, and injustice.

All of us have a responsibility. Christ has entrusted His kingdom work to the Church (1 Corinthians 4:1). We are ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18); peacemakers in the world (Romans 12:18) who seek the welfare of the cities we live in (Jeremiah 29:7) and raise our voices for the oppressed (Proverbs 31:8-9). As Members of one body (Romans 12:5), unity must be fought for. There is a very real and ever-present enemy that wants nothing more than to facilitate chaos, confusion, paralysis, and division (John 10:10; Ephesians 6:12).

We must listen to each other, we must talk about the problem, and we must act. God's Word calls us to humbly listen; encourages us to share our hearts, our pain, and our concerns; commands us to confess our part; and ultimately informs our actions.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Spend time working through the Individual Reflection section. Take your time; read the verses; and thoughtfully answer the questions.

After everyone in your community group has completed the first part individually, use the next section to facilitate discussion and pray together.

Individual Reflection

WHERE AM I?

*"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."
(Proverbs 20:5)*

Based on our own experiences, levels of understanding, and the conditions of our hearts, we've each had different responses to recent events. Before any of us can understand each other, we need to understand ourselves. Read the below examples and, as you do, note which of these reactions resonate with you.

- Have you been traumatized by racism you've personally experienced in your own life?
- Are you intimidated by this conversation, either uneducated or unprepared to engage with others about it?
- Do you feel anxious about speaking up, fearful that you're going to say the wrong thing and be labeled a racist?
- Do you feel disconnected, like racial injustices you hear about on the news are almost hypothetical because of the degree to which they are seemingly absent from your day-to-day experiences?
- Are you overwhelmed by the endless flow of information and opinions on news and social media outlets, unsure what to believe or who to listen to?
- Do you feel frustrated, like this is an overblown issue that gets talked about way too much, and that we should just move on already?
- Do you feel exhausted or discouraged, like this is a hamster wheel of history constantly being repeated and readdressed?
- Have you felt unseen, ignored, misunderstood, or invalidated because of your personal experiences or recommended actions?
- Do you desire to take action, but don't know where to start?
- Do you believe the problem is real, but the proposed solutions are unrealistic or inappropriate?
- Do you feel guilty about something you've done (or failed to do) in the past, or ashamed that you have never done anything to understand and address the issue?

Be encouraged, church! You are not alone in your feelings and experiences (1 Corinthians 12:26; Hebrews 12:3). It is understandable that we start at different places, but it is necessary that we strive together toward Christlikeness (Colossians 1:28-29).

Individual Reflection Questions:

- What has been your response to the tragedies surrounding the killing of some black Americans? Have you mourned with those who mourn? Have you been more eager to understand, to defend, or to suggest solutions?
- How has your reaction changed over time? In what way? How do you feel now?
- What has informed your reactions? (Personal experiences, news, social media, movies, books, conversations, biases, etc.)
- Have recent events brought to light memories of times where you have experienced, witnessed, or participated in racial hurts or bias? What were those experiences? Have you allowed yourself to process through and grieve over such events?
- How have you seen racial prejudice, injustice, or indifference manifest itself in the world at large? Do you have personal experience with it, or personal relationships with anyone who has been impacted by these sins?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

*“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”
(James 2:9)*

Racism isn't a social or political issue; it's a sin issue with social and political implications. The problem is sin. **Racism, in any form, is a sin.**

Regardless of how society or individual people might define racism, biblically the sin of racism is a rejection of God's good design and a slandering of His workmanship. It is the sin of partiality. All people are created by God in His image (Genesis 1:27). We are all God's image-bearers, and we are all wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). God makes no distinction between people based on any kind of man-made category (Colossians 3:11; Romans 10:12), and neither should we.

The specific examples of racism we hope to acknowledge and address in our world go beyond what many might initially think of as examples of racism.

- Prejudice or favoritism based on any distinction is a sin (James 2:1-4).
- Selective listening that only hears what you want to hear is a sin (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
- Silence in the midst of sin is a sin (Ezekiel 3:18-21; Ephesians 5:11).
- Failing to take action when you know there is something you could do is a sin (James 4:17).
- Apathy toward brothers and sisters who are hurting is a sin (Romans 12:9-13; 1 John 3:16-18).

We miss an opportunity any time we fail to care for each other as a body. Members who have experienced racial prejudice or who are grieving over tragedies (Nehemiah 1:4) should not grieve alone (Romans 12:15). We need to take the time to listen to and understand (Proverbs 18:13), humbly seeking to serve the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4). We should seek forgiveness where appropriate (James 5:16) and forgive people who have sinned against us (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17:3-4).

Individual Reflection Questions:

- In light of the above verses, what different ways have you seen the sin of racism or its impact manifest itself? Have you seen any of these sins within our church? Within yourself?
- Do you see yourself as an image-bearer of God? Now think of someone who is the complete opposite of you—someone with a different background, ethnicity, socio-economic status, intellectual or physical ability, political ideology, etc. Do you see that person as an image-bearer of God?
- Think of the last time you witnessed partiality or mistreatment of any kind. What did you do? Were you silent? Did you mourn with the victim? Did you engage with the one who seemed to initiate the action?

WHAT IS MY ROLE?

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:3-18)

God’s Word says that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). We all have a sinful nature that desires division (Galatians 5:16-26). Therefore, we should all prayerfully seek to understand our own hearts and consider how we may be straying from God’s heart toward all people.

Sanctification is a process, and we are not yet perfect (Philippians 3:12). We may have “hidden faults” that are difficult to discern (Psalm 19:12). Asking God to identify where we have blind spots or personal failings is a humbling prayer (Psalm 139:23-24), but it is a key first step towards healing. Acknowledge that there is a problem, and ask the Lord to show you if you might have been part of the problem in word, deed, or inaction. This kind of humility is the key to a healthy heart. We should all do the work to “test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord” (Lamentations 3:40). When the Holy Spirit makes us aware of sin, we are to confess and forsake those transgressions (Proverbs 28:13). Forsaking sin should include repentance (Romans 2:4; 2 Chronicles 7:14), making amends (Luke 19:8), and committing to bear good fruit in the days ahead (Matthew 3:8).

Individual Reflection Questions:

- Read and pray through 1 John 1:7-10 and Psalm 139:23-24. Are there areas of personal sin the Holy Spirit is revealing to you?
- Read Proverbs 18:2. How are you seeking to understand others? Do you too quickly express your opinion?
- If you feel like you cannot share the pain you feel with your community group, why is that? What is holding you back?
- Are there areas where you might show partiality or favoritism, even if unintentionally?
- Have you ever had a conversation with someone about how the sin of racism impacts their life? If so, what did you learn? If not, why have you not?

- Have you studied aspects of world history and American history that have contributed to the racial divides we currently see in culture today? Can you articulate the perspective of others and why they have come to their conclusions?
- After examining your heart according to Psalm 139:23-24, is there anything you need to confess and repent of today as it relates to partiality, favoritism, or indifference? If not, thank God for His grace and Spirit who is at work making you like Christ.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13-14)

Read all of Ephesians 2. Note the progression of the chapter: from being dead in sin, to being saved by grace through faith, resulting in reconciliation and unity.

As with any sin problem, the solution to the sins of racism or indifference is the gospel. While racism and indifference, like all sin, will always be with us until Christ returns, these should be increasingly eradicated from the hearts of those who know Christ. Christ can bring freedom from sin (John 8:34-36; Romans 6:6-7). And although we don't (and can't) earn salvation through good works, once saved, we still have good works to do (Ephesians 2:8-10). In living out our faith, there is still an action step; we are to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). That includes working on our own hearts, internally, and externally working to love and serve each other.

Since every person starts from a different place, your action steps might look different from someone else's. Consider Nehemiah 1. After grieving, confessing, and seeking the Lord over the brokenness in his society, Nehemiah was able to see his practical response. Once we have done the heart work towards repentance, we can start to see more clearly the Lord's direction for our lives. Initial next steps could include continuing education to better understand the problem, varying media consumption to hear other perspectives, or intentionally seeking to build relationships with people who have different backgrounds, cultures, or experiences from you.

Ultimately, every Christ follower has an action step: to love others as He has loved us (1 John 4:19). Love is the defining trait of Jesus' disciples to a watching world (John 13:34-35). We should be the examples to follow when it comes to reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) and loving our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37).

Individually, we can be conformed to Christ (Romans 8:29); together, we can love and serve everyone as Christ intended (Colossians 3:12-17).

Individual Reflection Questions:

- How are you doing at loving and serving the people in your community group in regard to this issue? Can you articulate what they are feeling? Are you asking them for help in pointing out what you might be missing?

- If you have been personally affected by racism and racial injustice, what can you share to help members of your group move toward you?
- Is there anyone you have unresolved conflict with around this topic? Someone you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from? How can you reconcile with that person?
- Do you feel that we as a church are unified in Christ? How have you personally been taking part in unifying the body?
- Are you being intentional to build friendships with people that have different backgrounds or cultures than you?

Community Group Discussion & Prayer Guide

If you are asking yourself these questions for the first time, we encourage you to lean in with humility and honesty. If you feel this is a daily reality, we encourage you to extend grace, be patient, and fight to maintain the unity of the spirit and bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3). This is a starting point, a way to begin a conversation that should be ongoing. Inevitably, incidents of racial injustice will fall out of news and conversation cycles. Our prayer is that our church would be marked by ongoing “love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). If you need to ask someone’s forgiveness, go to them first (Matthew 5:23-24), and if someone has sinned against you, begin the conversation by reconciling (Matthew 18:15-16; see also our Conflict Field Guide).

Group Discussion Questions:

Start by reading Galatians 5:14-6:2 together and pray for God’s Spirit to mark your time and conversations together. Then together answer these questions:

- Has your group discussed reconciliation issues between people of different colors and ethnicities? If you haven’t talked about this as a group, why do you think that is?

- What has been each person's initial response to the topic? Has that response changed? If so, why and how?
- Are there any hurts within the group that need to be addressed? Any sins that need to be confessed?
- What has each person learned from their individual reflection? Are there any questions you feel like you couldn't answer?
- How can you move toward a deeper understanding of each other and pursue unity together?
- Do you have any next steps, individually and as a group? Any move toward further action?

PRAYER GUIDE:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23-24)

Pray that each person would know where they need to change in order to grow in Christlikeness.

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

Pray that we would in no way show partiality to anyone, based on any difference, but would instead truly "love your neighbor as yourself."

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:16-20)

Pray that we would be effective “ambassadors for Christ” as we fulfill “the ministry of reconciliation.” Pray that we would be faithful to proclaim the gospel so that all people would know how to be reconciled to God and ultimately reconciled to each other.

“But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26)

Pray that there would be no divisions between us, and that we would properly care for all members of the body, suffering and rejoicing together.

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:13-18)

Pray that we would all be “wise and understanding,” displaying “wisdom from above” as we seek to “make peace.”

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Pray for our city and our country, including those in leadership or “high positions.” Pray for “all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-11)

Pray that the Lord would give comfort and strength to those who are weary. Pray that we would not rely on ourselves, but that we would trust God and find our hope in Him.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Pray that God's Church would rise up and be the example it should be, showing truth and love by our actions and our words.

A Continuing Conversation

This is not intended to be the end of the conversation in your group; it is just a beginning.

We should each examine ourselves regularly (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5), confessing and reconciling promptly. Trust that God does not want you to carry burdens of guilt or shame because Jesus already took on those burdens on the cross. However, this does not remove the responsibility the Church has to combat injustice of any kind (Micah 6:8). This is true for every area of the Christian's life.

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:3-6)

In the weeks and months ahead, may each of us continue to ask ourselves: are my words good for building up, giving grace to all those who hear? (Ephesians 4:25-32) And may we continually look to God who is both the founder and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).

As always, our community team is here for you. If your group gets stuck or needs help with figuring out next steps, widen the circle by reaching out to your community shepherd or director.

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:9-10)

Let's go, church!