

# Dismantling Racism:

building beloved community



## Walking the Path of Gospel Truth: A POJ Study on Building Beloved Community

In Paul's letter to the Galatians he recounts a story from his time in Antioch. Peter came to visit and enjoyed wonderful fellowship with the church.

When a group of Jewish believers from Jerusalem came, Peter separated from the Gentile community and would not eat with them. Paul characterizes Peter's decision as not "walking straight down the line of gospel truth (The Kingdom New Testament)." For Paul our separation from others, our unwillingness to see others as equal in the eyes of God, makes crooked the truth that Jesus died for all. These are convicting words for the church considering Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous line about how eleven o'clock is the most segregated hour in America. Even more, the divides we see along racial lines in terms of wealth and water, housing and health care, education and environmental wellbeing call us to find ways to participate in God's vision of shalom for all creation. This study helps individuals and communities to discern where they have veered off the straight path of the gospel truth and invites everyone to participate in the building of a beloved community.

*The Dismantling Racism: Building Beloved Community* ministry team set about preparing this curriculum after the POJ called for a vocal and sustained response to the events of August 2017 in Charlottesville. The overture passed by the POJ in the wake of the shocking displays of divisiveness and hate serve as a kickstart to conversation in this study. Each session has a focus text from the Bible from which a theme is developed with historical and contemporary examples. *Walking* is set up as a six-week study that would work well for Lent or as a Summer series.

### Scope and Sequence:

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#### *Lesson One: Beginning to Walk the Path of Gospel Truth*

Looking at the Presbyterian Church USA's and Presbytery of the James' response to events in Charlottesville in 2017, participants are asked to begin to think about the ways we define terms like racism and white supremacy. How can we begin to reconsider the deep divisions that still haunt our state and nation? What does the Bible have to say about these issues and how can we find strength to confess our shortcomings? How can we take hold of God's vision for humanity and live it out more fully in our churches and communities?

Scripture: Galatians 2:11-21

Resources:

- Letter of August 14, 2017 by PCUSA Stated Clerk, the Mission Agency Executive, and the Co Moderators
- Overture Concerning the Rise of White Supremacy and Racism affirmed at the POJ meeting in February 2018
- Barmen Declaration
- Belhar Confession
- Text from *Book of Order 2017/2019 F-1.0302*
- Scripture Readings for Week 1

***Lesson 2: What Does Salvation Have to Do with Racism?***

Using Jesus' mission statement in Luke 4:16-21, participants are encouraged to consider the meaning of salvation. How is Jesus' very earthly understanding of his mission different than some traditional understandings of what salvation looks like? Who are the oppressed and the captives of today and how are we called to continue Jesus' mission? What does this continued mission have to do with race?

Scripture: Luke 4:16-21

Resources:

- Wealth, poverty, health numbers in black and white
- Scripture Readings for Week 2
- Definition of Terms: Oppression, Captivity, Poor
- Video Clip

***Lesson 3: Breaking Down the Dividing Wall***

What are some of the divisions and differences among people in the Bible? Can you think of any stories in the Bible that have something to say about overcoming differences in tribes, tongues and nations? How the Jew/Gentile divide is the early church's version of our divisions along race and ethnicity. Understanding Jesus work on the cross as breaking down the dividing walls between us. If we recognize that in Jesus our socially constructed barriers have already been torn down, what do we need to do to be the united body of Christ in the world. Participants can investigate how the divisions that remain in our communities and our ability to understand and empathize with others is adversely impacted by implicit bias. A more systemic view of the issue can be explored through examining divisions we see in our communities along race stemming from local and national policies and planning that results in segregation and disadvantage.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Resources:

- Excerpts from *Overcoming Bias*
- Excerpts from *The Color of Law*
- Video clip
- Scripture Readings for Week 3

#### ***Lesson 4: Dwelling Place of God***

What is the Biblical vision for our life together as children of God? How can we begin to imagine the churches, communities and world that God seeks to bring to life through Jesus Christ? Inspired by the vision of the church as the dwelling place for God through the Holy Spirit, this lesson offers hopeful pictures of Christians building community across racial, ethnic, etc. barriers.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-21 (emphasis on 19-22); Revelation 21:1-5, 22:22-24

Resources:

- Video Clip with examples of inspirational communities
- Scripture Readings for Week 4

#### ***Lesson 5: Where the Spirit Leads You***

Participants are encouraged to be open to the risky and uncomfortable call of the Holy Spirit to cross over cultural, ethnic, racial boundaries to develop new relationships in the body of Christ. Theologian Willie Jennings says this about the focus text of this lesson, "This is the condition of risk in which Christianity comes to exist and without which authentic Christianity does not exist. This the risk of faith that comes to each of us, but none of us carries it alone. This risk here is found not in believing in the new revelations but in new relationships. The new word that God continues to speak to us is to accept new people, different people that we had not imagined that God would send across our paths and into our lives." [1]

Scripture: Acts 10:9-16, 34-43

Resources:

- Scripture Readings for Week 5
- Suggestions for building new relationships

- Video Clip

### ***Lesson 6: Invitation to the Lord's Table***

This final lesson returns to the title story of this study to reconsider our understanding of the Lord's supper and our life together in Christ. How is the Lord's table an invitation to think about not only Jesus death for us, but also the life of the new covenant that we are asked to participate in when we share the bread and cup? Participants in the study are asked to see the Lord's table as a symbol of our life together in our churches and in our communities.

Scripture: Galatians 2:11-21; 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

#### Resources:

- Selected Readings on the Lord's Supper
- Scripture Readings for Week 6
- Video Clip

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[1]Jennings, Willie James. *Acts*. 2017. (108)