

UNITED

A CONVERSATION ABOUT
RACE, FAITH & OUR RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

Thanks for choosing to journey as a group through the conversations in this study. We created it in response to the racial unrest we've all seen expressed in numerous ways over the last several years.

Ferguson, Baton Rouge, and Charlottesville are all evidence of racial division within our nation. That's why we think it's important to have an open discussion about race. While the principles you'll discuss are applicable across any racial group, the content is focused primarily on the dynamic between white and black people. That doesn't mean the experience of other people of color aren't important. It's just a reflection of the central role that relations between white and black people play in race in America.

If you're a non-minority entering into this conversation, you may feel we're asking more of you. We are. Because you are part of the majority population, you have power and influence. That's true even if you don't feel like it is. Having power and influence means you also have responsibility. *United* will challenge you to think in new ways about that power, influence, and responsibility. That may stir some emotion. It may be uncomfortable. We ask that you allow yourself to sit in that tension. Discomfort isn't always a bad thing. In fact, we can't really grow and be comfortable at the same time.

During the study, you'll hear different people's stories. One person can't speak for the experiences of an entire group of people, but we want to present you with different perspectives. Keep in mind that we're not trying to solve a problem. We want to start a conversation that points in the direction of unity within the body of Christ . . . and beyond. As we engage and have conversations with others, our understanding grows and the space between us shrinks.

We want to challenge you open your hearts and minds, and continually ask the question, "What does love require of me?"

UNITED

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SESSION 1: ANDREW YOUNG

INTRODUCTION

Andrew Young has had a long and illustrious career as an activist, politician, and diplomat. He was a close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and has served as a congressman, Mayor of Atlanta, and a United States Ambassador to the United Nations. The following video is from an interview at Gwinnett Church with Jeff Henderson.

[WATCH ANDREW YOUNG VIDEO]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Andrew Young makes the point that racism is a sickness and you don't get mad at sick people; instead, you help them. If this is true, how do you help them?
2. Have you ever seen someone change a strongly held belief? If so, what do you think it takes for someone to make such a big change?
3. "Don't get mad, get smart," can be hard advice to follow. Do you think it's ever appropriate to get mad? What are some ways one could be angry and still be heard? [Ephesians 4:26; Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 17:2]
4. Think of a time when you have been wronged and were powerless to do anything about it. How did you react?
5. What are some ways you can de-escalate a conversation when someone is angry? What are some things that fuel anger?

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ON RIOTING:

"But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity." —"The Other America" 1968

6. Andrew Young took the low place in order to build the relationship with the jailer. Share a time when you took the low place in a relationship. What can we learn from his posture?

GETTING REAL

“Racism” can be a complex and emotionally charged word. How would you describe what it means? Here are some helpful definitions from Merriam-Webster.com:

Racism - a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of particular race

Bigotry - obstinate or intolerant devotion to one’s own opinions and prejudices

Prejudice - 1: injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one’s rights; *especially* : detriment to one’s legal rights or claims

2a (1) : preconceived judgment or opinion (2) : an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge **b** : an instance of such judgment or opinion **c** : an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics

RACISM DEFINED

Discussion Questions:

1. What strikes you about these definitions?
2. What are some examples of racism today?

FILTERS EXERCISE [WATCH VIDEO]

After watching the video, use the PDF to identify some of your filters. Once you have filled in your filters, try to identify some that may be affecting the conversation from the other side.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can understanding filters affect the race discussion?
2. What are some common filters we may be blind to? Why is that so?

THIS WEEK:

We must know where we have been in order to move forward. Investigate U.S. history and racism (see Resources below for suggestions).

1. What did you learn?
2. How can you leverage what you’ve learned?

REFLECT

And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6.8

RESOURCES

(The Resources Section provides further opportunities to explore Black history/perspectives in America and other topics relevant to these conversations. They do not represent all perspectives but should help to provide a glimpse of some of the undercurrents that are affecting current events.)

10 Must-Watch Black Documentaries

<http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/explore/10-black-history-documentaries-to-watch/#.WKiGPrHMxPM>

History of Racism and Immigration Timeline

<http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415892940/data/8%20history%20and%20immigration%20timeline.pdf>

Dr. Condoleezza Rice reflects on Civil Rights (5 min.)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=jqEPRSJkCo>

UNITED

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SESSION 2: BENJAMIN WATSON

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Watson is an NFL tight end for the New Orleans Saints, as well as an author. He was named one of CNN's extraordinary people in 2014 because of his "thoughtful, balanced Facebook post" in response to the grand jury's decision to not indict a white officer in the shooting of an unarmed black teen in Ferguson, Missouri. Jeff Henderson interviewed Benjamin Watson at Buckhead Church as part of the Wish You Were Here series. **[For more information about the events leading up to the decision and ramifications, consult the Leader Guide.]**

[WATCH BENJAMIN WATSON VIDEO: SESSION 2, VIDEO 2]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read through Benjamin Watson's Facebook post found on page 5.

1. Which parts of Benjamin's FB post resonated with you? Why? Which parts didn't? Why?
2. If one is not familiar with or doesn't have personal ties to the events, it may be difficult to understand the weight of the Ferguson decision and its aftermath. We may even disagree. What is the value in seeking to understand someone with whom you disagree? What are some ways to seek that understanding?
3. Benjamin makes the point that we don't have a skin problem; we have a sin problem. How might treating racism as a sin problem address its root cause? How might this perspective fall short?
4. Benjamin mentions that his daughter was watching and listening and picking up cues from her parents. What cues are you passing along to those who are watching and listening to you? How can you be intentional about what you communicate?
5. What role should prayer play in racial reconciliation? What should we be praying for collectively and individually?
6. Jeff references Dr. King's idea of "The Beloved Community," which Paul wrote about in Galatians as a model of oneness and unity. How can we, as the church, model The Beloved Community today?

THIS WEEK:

Ask God to expose situations where you didn't do for someone what love required of you, where you need to repent.

Make a list of some practical things we can do to be distributors of peace, brokers of hope, and bridge builders. Pick one and do it this week.

REFLECT:

Search me, 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

RESOURCES:

(The Resources Section provides further opportunities to explore Black history/perspectives in America and other topics relevant to these conversations. They do not represent all perspectives but should help to provide a glimpse of some of the undercurrents that are affecting current events.)

Sam Collier with Sho Baraka on Rioting — <https://vimeo.com/212487411/60c58f0370>

Beloved Community — <http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sub4>

Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life — <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life>

Ferguson Report — https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf

BENJAMIN WATSON'S PRAYER

Lord, man looks at the outward appearance, but you look at the heart. Lord, convict our hearts when it comes to race Lord, lead us to repentance because of your blood Lord. Let us be honest. Let us be honest with our feelings that aren't from you. Lord remove guilt from us God, but give us grace. Let us be motivated by love and not hate. Lord, may we purposely do things to spread your gospel demonstrating it through love. And Lord, I pray for forgiveness. I pray for those who have been offended when it comes to this issue God, that they will be able to forgive because you have forgiven us seven times over. Lord, you have forgiven us and loved us so much sent Jesus Christ to die for us when we didn't deserve it. While we were yet sinners you died for us because you loved us so much. Lord may we please, extend that same grace to others.

And I pray for this country while still reeling from so many different issues. I pray the Body of Christ strengthened. I pray the Body of Christ shoot out from here like arrows affecting positive change. Lord, let us go out to work places, to our schools, to our teams and most importantly to families. And lead our families by teaching our children what it means to be Christians and what it means to be followers of you. Lord, not affected by the outside but by doing things that are for you. Leading people in the right direction, being an example always confessing Lord, where we fall short in this area of racism.

We thank you for this church, I pray for the leadership of this church to continue to give the Word of God unadulterated to the people. I pray that they will never say things Lord to appease ears, but simply say things that are from your Word speaking truth in love. And I pray for those who hear, that they would be doers of the word and not just hearers, that they would take it to heart and allow positive change in their hearts Lord, because, again, it is a heart issue. We thank you for the Gospel In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

BENJAMIN WATSON'S FACEBOOK POST

I'M ANGRY because the stories of injustice that have been passed down for generations seem to be continuing before our very eyes.

I'M FRUSTRATED, because pop culture, music and movies glorify these types of police citizen altercations and promote an invincible attitude that continues to get young men killed in real life, away from safety movie sets and music studios.

I'M FEARFUL because in the back of my mind I know that although I'm a law abiding citizen I could still be looked upon as a "threat" to those who don't know me. So I will continue to have to go the extra mile to earn the benefit of the doubt.

I'M EMBARRASSED because the looting, violent protests, and law breaking only confirm, and in the minds of many, validate, the stereotypes and thus the inferior treatment.

I'M SAD, because another young life was lost from his family, the racial divide has widened, a community is in shambles, accusations, insensitivity hurt and hatred are boiling over, and we may never know the truth about what happened that day.

I'M SYMPATHETIC, because I wasn't there so I don't know exactly what happened. Maybe Darren Wilson acted within his rights and duty as an officer of the law and killed Michael Brown in self defense like any of us would in the circumstance. Now he has to fear the backlash against himself and his loved ones when he was only doing his job. What a horrible thing to endure. OR maybe he provoked Michael and ignited the series of events that led to him eventually murdering the young man to prove a point.

I'M OFFENDED, because of the insulting comments I've seen that are not only insensitive but dismissive to the painful experiences of others.

I'M CONFUSED, because I don't know why it's so hard to obey a policeman. You will not win!!! And I don't know why some policeman abuse their power. Power is a responsibility, not a weapon to brandish and lord over the populace.

I'M INTROSPECTIVE, because sometimes I want to take "our" side without looking at the facts in situations like these. Sometimes I feel like it's us against them. Sometimes I'm just as prejudiced as people I point fingers at. And that's not right. How can I look at white skin and make assumptions but not want assumptions made about me? That's not right

I'M HOPELESS, because I've lived long enough to expect things like this to continue to happen. I'm not surprised and at some point my little children are going to inherit the weight of being a minority and all that it entails.

I'M HOPEFUL, because I know that while we still have race issues in America, we enjoy a much different normal than those of our parents and grandparents. I see it in my personal relationships with teammates, friends and mentors. And it's a beautiful thing.

I'M ENCOURAGED, because ultimately the problem is not a SKIN problem, it is a SIN problem. SIN is the

UNITED

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SESSION 3: SKIN IN THE GAME - PART 1

INTRODUCTION

In the summer months of 2016, racial tensions came to a head resulting in an armed sniper gunning down police officers in Dallas, Texas. The shootings were during a peaceful demonstration against violence committed by officers in Louisiana and Minnesota. In order to help navigate the pain, tension, and emotions, Andy Stanley invited Sam Collier and Joseph Sojourner to a discussion at North Point Community Church.

[WATCH SKIN IN THE GAME PART 1 VIDEO: SESSION 3, VIDEO 1]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When have you experienced a disconnect between your experience of a situation and someone else's experience? How did you handle it?
2. When you were learning to drive, what instructions or advice were you given about what to do if you were pulled over by a police officer?
3. Andy suggested, "The further we are from a problem, the simpler it looks," and, "The closer you get to a problem, the more complex it becomes." How can non-minorities move closer to the problem? How can minorities help to expose the complexities of the issues while inviting further discussion?
4. Genesis 1:26 says that people are made in God's image. That gives every person inherent dignity and worth. What are some things in our culture that can diminish the dignity and worth of a person?
5. Dr. King said, "In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." What might keep people silent? How can you communicate value and worth and love?

GETTING REAL

In the next four short videos you will hear personal stories of racism from people in our church. As you watch the videos, put yourself in their shoes. Remember your filters and lay them down as much as you can.

[WATCH RACISM UP CLOSE VIDEOS: SESSION 3, VIDEOS 2-5]

After watching the videos, discuss the following questions.

1. Which of these stories stands out to you? Why?
2. How do you think their stories impact their views?
3. If you were speaking with them, what would you want to ask/say?
4. When someone shares a story like these, how should we respond?

The next video offers a perspective on the Black Lives Matter movement. Before watching it, take a minute to identify some of your emotions about this topic. When you hear Black Lives Matter, what are your thoughts? Remember the goal of this study is to identify and consider other perspectives. Lay down your filters as much as you can and try to understand the heart of the message—even if you don't agree with it. One more thing to note, there are fringe people on all sides that that don't represent the majority even if their voices are loud. These radical extremes are not helpful when trying to understand most perspectives.

[WATCH BLACK LIVES MATTER VIDEO: SESSION 3, VIDEO 6]

Please note: We wholeheartedly affirm the statement that Black Lives Matter, because every human being bears the image of God with inherent dignity. However we have chosen not to align with the blacklivesmatter.com political platform.

After watching the videos, discuss the following questions:

1. What is the heart of this perspective?
2. Why might the black community think their lives do not matter?
3. From this perspective, does “black lives matter” negate the idea that “all lives matter”?

THIS WEEK:

Harvard created an assessment to help us identify things we may not be able to see in ourselves when it comes to racism. We encourage you to take the test and prayerfully consider the results and your reactions to them. Spend some time identifying your emotions. Consider the following:

Do you agree with the assessment? Why or Why not?

How would you know if you had racist thoughts or tendencies?

Is there anything you can take away from the assessment to help you understand things affecting your perspective?

HARVARD IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION OVERVIEW:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

REFLECT:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. – Proverbs 31:8-9

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. – Isaiah 1:17

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SESSION 4: SKIN IN THE GAME - PART 2

[WATCH SKIN IN THE GAME PART 2 VIDEO: SESSION 4, VIDEO 1]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Andy makes the point that both groups made theological, religious, and cultural concessions in order for there to be unity in the church. What changes do we need to make to build unity?
2. Sam references Dr. King's quote, "Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they cannot communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated." What keeps us from being in relationship with one another? As the church, what do we need to do to overcome these barriers? As individuals, what can we do?
3. Read Acts 10:27-28. What can we learn from the first-century church with regard to racism?
4. Andy states, "Prejudice and racism are almost impossible to see in the mirror because it is hidden in our hearts." What keeps us from seeing ourselves accurately? What can we do to change this? As the church, what hangs in the balance of us getting this right?
5. Read Ephesians 4:1-6. What are we called to as believers? What does this look like practically? How does this involve our "invest and invite" strategy, especially if we have a tendency to live in neighborhoods and areas of town with people who are similar to us? (See racial dot map under references.)
6. Andy makes the statement: "We have the message; we have the leverage. And if you're a Christian, what you don't have is an excuse." How does racial division affect the church and our message? How can we move beyond excuses and leverage this call to be united?
7. The more we understand each other, the more our compassion grows for each other. What is one thing you can do over the next couple of weeks to take a step towards unity?

THIS WEEK

In our trainings, we encourage our leaders to be humble, curious, teachable, and intentional. These are some postures that help create a safe and growing environment. What if we took these postures and applied them to racial division?

What could this look like if we were intentional about reflecting the church Jesus describes? What is your part?

IDEAS TO BUILD UNDERSTANDING

- Be intentional about making friends who are different than you.
- Invite people from a different race to coffee in order to get to know them.
- Expose yourself to materials from other perspectives (books, podcasts, movies, magazines, Tedtalks, etc.)
- Brush up on the history of other races and people groups.

REFLECT

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. – John 17:20-21

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and all. Ephesians 4:4-6

RESOURCES

(The Resources Section provides further opportunities to explore Black history/perspectives in America and other topics relevant to these conversations. They do not represent all perspectives but should help to provide a glimpse of some of the undercurrents that are affecting current events.)

Under Our Skin: Getting Real about Race. Getting Free from the Fears and Frustrations that Divide Us.
https://www.amazon.com/Under-Our-Skin-Getting-Frustrations/dp/149641330X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1488483233&sr=8-1&keywords=ben+watson

13th Netflix Original Documentary

Racial Dot Map: <http://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map/>

This resource provides a map of the United States. It uses census data to put a dot on the map for each person in the U.S. Each dot is color coded for their race. It is a stunning example of just how segregated the U.S. continues to be.