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Foreword

This Lenten devotional is a journey through America's history of slavery, segregation, and racism. At times, it may feel like a voyage into the shadow of death. But even in that deep darkness, God is with us, and his light is the hope that guides us.

The aim of this journey is that through the prayers, reflections, and responses, the Holy Spirit will transform us, individually and collectively, to look more like Christ. Our ultimate hope is that we would not only be grieved into repenting ([2 Corinthians 7:8-10](#)), but that we would all leave this experience bearing fruit in keeping with repentance ([Matthew 3:8](#)). *Because, repentance looks like something.* Tangible evidence of our transformation is broadcast in our words and actions, in our giving and service, in our lives and communities. True repentance *must* produce fruit.

As Paul [entreated](#) the Corinthians, I humbly ask that you make room in your hearts for us. For this journey. For these words. For the prayers. For the cultivation of new fruit. Over the next seven weeks, we open our hearts to our Father and allow him to prune and fertilize. May we not withhold any area of hearts, but freely allow him to change our beliefs and actions.

Each week we will encounter new perspectives as we journey from the slave trade through the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement to modern-day injustices. In the last week, Holy Week, we will navigate suffering, forgiveness, communion, and ultimately—resurrection. During the liturgical season of Lent, Sundays are feast days. We invite you to feast on the hope of the resurrection and the ways that God has been, and continues to be, reconciling us to himself and one another. Each day, in the responses and prayers, we will encourage you to participate afresh in the Great Commission to be Christ's hands and feet of reconciliation—starting in your own heart, and then in your family and community.

We pray that everyone who begins this journey will complete it, so we suggest that you set aside a specific time each day to read, pray, and reflect. *Make space for God to speak and move.* We have also included an abundance of links and resources for further exploration. Feel free to return to these after Lent. The goal is not to inundate you, but rather to supply a wealth of tools and resources for your continued learning. A helpful bibliography is also provided which includes all the in-text references and additional resources.

We also encourage you to find a diverse group of travelers for the journey. Join with others who are racially, ethnically, and socio-economically different from you. If those in your life are from a similar background, consider partnering with a church of a different racial composition or think about starting an online group. (You can check our [Facebook](#) page for others who are seeking a group.) To facilitate conversation, weekly discussion questions are provided and specifically tailored to stimulate dialogue.

Lastly, please know that we have prayed for you. *Even before you decided to take this journey, we have prayed for you.* We have prayed that Christ would gently take your hand and compassionately lead you through the dark valley of our nation's history into the hope of his redemption.

We give thanks to God that you are making room in your hearts this Lent.

BY JACALYN BARNES

DIRECTOR, REPENTANCE PROJECT

Preface

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:4).

In returning and rest is your salvation. In quietness and trust is your strength. But you would have none of it (Isaiah 30:15).

The first fruit of repentance is *returning to the vine*, which is Jesus.

In doing the work of repentance, we are reminded that repentance is first a gift of the Father. We receive the gift of repentance from the One who has already received us. We respond to the invitation to first return and to rest. Godly repentance will always produce the fruit of returning our hearts to Jesus.

As you engage with the daily reflections over the next few weeks, we have made space to pause along the way, and to position ourselves at the feet of Jesus. We are setting ourselves at the foot of the cross. In this posture, we too will pour out. It will be costly, but it will be worth it.

Together, we will prayerfully engage, inviting Jesus into the conversation as we offer our hearts to him. Each day will begin with a personal invitation to *return to the vine* through prayer and scriptures. We will end with a few questions or actions to consider, and a closing offering of prayer. Then, each Sunday, we will feast. We will remember the God of hope who is present in the midst of injustice and suffering.

We'll provide words of prayer and reflection for you as a guide, and as an invitation to allow the Holy Spirit to lead your heart. You may find that your invitation one day is to silence. On another day, perhaps there is a word, phrase, or prayer that you're prompted to offer. However you choose to come, *returning to the vine* is personal and not prescriptive, so feel free to use the prompts we've provided. The invitation is open to you.

We want to take the time to engage Jesus, to return to him, as we journey through this Lenten devotional.

The content you will encounter over these next 47 days is weighty and difficult, but it is also undergirded by hope. What we will read together will stir the deepest parts of us, that which bears the image of the God of justice. We will mourn, we will lament, we will wonder, and we will question.

But, we will not do it alone. We will do it *with* Jesus. We hope you will also experience these days together, in community. Consider forming a small group at church, or among a diverse group of friends or colleagues.

It will require endurance to complete this experience. It will require the work and strength of the Spirit of Christ within us. He will be with us. He will be faithful to lead us and to walk with us. He will be faithful to suffer with us and to raise us up with renewed hope and purpose.

Come, Holy Spirit, immerse us again in the waters of repentance. We receive your invitation to return, and to rest and to be saved. Return us to Christ, our first love, and teach us to abide in the vine. Produce within us the good fruit of repentance. Renew our minds with your truth, and unify your church. Amen.

BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

Introduction

The Repentance Project was born out of grief and desire.

The grief comes from knowing that the wounds inflicted both by centuries of slavery and a century of Jim Crow are not yet healed. Many systems of racial oppression are still in place and its diabolical legacy continues to affect millions of lives, both black and white.

The desire comes from knowing that those wounds can be healed and that there really is hope and possibility for the “beloved community” of which Martin Luther King, Jr. so often spoke.

This possibility, however, requires that we reckon with the long history of racial oppression in America and recognize the persistent legacy of slavery. When cities like Los Angeles, Ferguson, Baltimore, Dallas, Charleston, and Charlotte erupt in protest and flames because of racial tensions, it is not without context and a long history. While America was founded on some noble principles, it must also be said, grieved, and repented of that for centuries, America was founded on the attempted genocide of Native Americans and the oppression of African Americans.

We must recognize that if it took 400 years to bake racial oppression into our country’s DNA, it didn’t get resolved in the few decades since the civil rights movements. We’ve still got a lot of work to do, and the deepest work begins in the heart.

The Repentance Project wants to facilitate this work by helping Americans *recognize* this persistent legacy, *repent* with sorrow, and *respond* meaningfully, in the context of *relationships*. Our ultimate mission is to encourage racial healing by communicating the systemic legacies of slavery, building relationships, and creating opportunities—through formation, repentance, and repair—for a just future.

The Repentance Project is an attempt to help Americans recognize structural and racial injustice, as well as its impact. We hope this devotional will provide new eyes to see, new ears to hear, and a new heart that cares about how racial oppression is hurting those who bear the image of God. This text will also be helpful for those who are exhausted from having to “prove” that racial injustice actually exists. Our goal is to help create a safe space for those who face the reality of racial injustice to feel authentically seen and heard. We also hope to facilitate conversations in which African Americans can be a part of developing substantive solutions in repairing centuries-old fissures.

TOGETHER,

REV. BILL HALEY

REV. DARRYL FORD

REV. ERIN CLIFFORD

FOR THE REPENTANCE PROJECT LEADERSHIP TEAM

When God Said Yes

We gathered to seek God's will. We gathered to discern.

We were black and white Christians, about 15 of us, from Orlando, D.C., Richmond, Minneapolis, and Atlanta, from churches, non-profits, foundations, and the government. We met at a small farm in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, at Corhaven, a property set apart as a place to meet God. It is also hallowed as a place where at least 24 former slaves are buried.

Together we asked the questions: how can Christians concretely recognize the awful legacy of 400 years of racial oppression in the United States, and recognize the ongoing effects in the black community? How can Christians make statements and take actions that acknowledge and repent for this history? How can Christians recognize the ways that society and the church have benefitted from the long and still active history of racial injustice in our country? How can we express our grief and sorrow in a manner that leads to personal transformation and eventually acts of repair?

We gathered together to ask these questions. We gathered to hear from each other and to hear from God. We gathered to discern. We gathered to seek God's heart and will. Throughout the morning, the prayers were deep, the conversations honest and painful, the laughter easy, and the tone sober, humble, and full of trust.

After lunch, our group walked in the bright sun through the pasture and up to the slave cemetery at Corhaven, hidden in a far corner of the original plantation. A group of eighth graders and their teachers from a school in Baltimore joined us. They, too, a community of black and white Christians.

I shared the history of the slave cemetery with them, as well as our efforts to create a space that remembers and honors those who were not shown honor during their lifetime. I told the story of how a large group cleared the graveyard of overgrowth, underbrush, and fallen trees, and an unexpected and unexplained fire had burst forth from the ground. When it happened, there was a profound and shared sense of something deep and real being released.

Then Max Finberg, a Christian of Jewish heritage, led the 30 people gathered at the cemetery in a devotional. We recalled another time when God unexpectedly caused flames to burst forth. He recalled the exodus of God's people from Egypt 3,500 years ago, and their freedom from slavery. An event which has been remembered every year at Passover. In 3,500 years, they have never forgotten.

Max asked us to take off our shoes and socks, right there in the cemetery, in reverence. The place we were standing on was holy ground. It was awkward, uncomfortable, and dirty. And, it was absolutely right and powerful. Afterward, someone commented that, certainly, the last time a group of people had been barefoot in that place was for a burial.

We circled and joined hands for prayer. As soon as we did, the skies darkened and the wind began to blow. It was just breezes at first, but then powerful gusts of wind began bending the trees and sending leaves showering upon us.

Then a member of our group, David Bailey, led us in prayer. He requested a moment of silence, and as we complied, raindrops began to fall. When he started praying out loud, the rain came, and the wind

blew. There we all were, many of us already in tears, standing barefoot in a slave cemetery. Our feet just inches from the bodies of our brothers and sisters, with only the dirt between us. Then the rain came strong and David kept praying, lamenting, crying, and calling out for healing. The rain kept falling.

My 10-year- old daughter tugged at my hand and whispered what we were all feeling, “God’s crying.”

Yes.

Others reflected that it was like a baptism and that it was like healing water coming down, Living Water, and it felt like there was a washing away of something dark.

Yes.

David prayed for about 10 minutes in that pouring rain and no one moved a step. When we all said “Amen,” the rain instantly stopped. When he started praying, the first drops fell and the winds picked up. When we stopped, so did the rain and the wind. We walked back across the pasture in sunlight, soaking wet, barefoot and quiet.

It was like being in a Bible story. Throughout the whole Scriptures, there are stories of how God used nature to say something: on Mount Sinai ([Exodus 19](#)), Mount Caramel ([1 Kings 18](#)), the Sea of Galilee, ([Matthew 8](#), [Mark 4](#)), Golgotha ([Matthew 27](#), [Mark 15](#)), and Jerusalem ([Acts 2](#)). I have never experienced anything like it. It was like being in a real, live Bible story. Just as the characters in those stories questioned what had happened, our group also wondered, “What does this mean?”

We asked aloud, “Should we move forward on this ‘repentance project’?” There was not much silence before one brother said clearly and bluntly, “God already told us. He said ‘Yes.’”

We all agreed. Before we even verbalized the question, God had already answered it.

More than a clear “Yes,” there was a deeper message that God had given us. As we stood barefoot on holy ground in the rain and in tears, praying as the wind blew, we all agreed that God had said to us, “I am with you.”

Therefore, we keep moving forward with this “Repentance Project.”

BY REV. BILL HALEY

week one

LAMENT GRIEVED INTO REPENTING
THE IMAGE OF GOD &
THE THREE-FIFTHS
COMPROMISE

FORTY DAYS OF PREPARATION
WEEK ONE: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
SUNDAY FEAST: REPENTANCE & LOVE

Grieved into Repenting

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is here with you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit. I invite you to turn the attention of my heart toward you. Thank you for every good and perfect gift that comes from you. Today, I receive the gift of godly grief that produces repentance within me. I confess my need for you. Make me attentive to your Spirit and the work that you desire to do within me. I am yours, Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [2 Corinthians 7:8-10](#)

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

REFLECTION BY REV. DAVID HANKE

Quite simply, to repent is to change one's mind.

Repentance begins with the acceptance that my convictions and choices have been wrong. They have caused hurt to others and myself, division in my community, and disruption in my relationships. As I change my mind, I will change my behavior and make restitution for the damage my previous thinking caused.

The apostle Paul knew that the act of confronting individuals with their deliberate or unintentional error brings grief. Grief is appropriate, but not all grief is the same. There is grief that leads to despair, cynicism, and blame. This worldly grief produces death. However, there is grief that leads to a changed mind and different choices. Godly grief leads to salvation without regret.

We are inviting you to be grieved into repenting for the sake of changing your mind, going in a different direction, and amending your life.

As you pray through this Lenten Experience, you will be invited to consider the influence of chattel slavery and systemic racism on the choices you and your church have made. The intent is to expose specific things about which you need to change your mind.

RESPONSE

“The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them with a season of repentance” (*Book of Common Prayer* 2007, 264).

Today is Ash Wednesday. If you attend a Christian worship service, you may hear a reading from [Matthew 6](#). In that chapter, Jesus spoke about the way we practice our righteousness. He called his

disciples to examine the way they give (6:1-4), pray (6:5-8), and fast (6:16-18).

As you start this project of repentance, would you begin with a sober assessment of your giving, praying, and fasting? To whom are you generous? For whom do you pray? Which of your appetites lead you away from Jesus's leadership of your life? For what do you need to grieve? How will your grief lead you to repentance?

If we change our mind about the legacy of slavery in the United States, we will probably change the behavior associated with our giving, praying, and fasting. May your repentance lead you to a practice of righteousness that receives a "reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

"I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before the Lord, our maker and redeemer" (*Book of Common Prayer* 2007, 265).

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I confess that my convictions and choices have been wrong. (As you are led, name the convictions that come to mind.) They have caused hurt to others and myself, division in my community, and disruption in my relationships. Help me to change my behavior and show me how to make restitution for the damage my previous thinking caused. I receive your forgiveness. Lead me further, O Lord, in this work of repentance with you. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Platt, David. 2018. "[Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters: Racism and our Need for Repentance.](#)" Filmed April 2018 at Together for the Gospel, Louisville, KY. Video, 01:03:30.

Lament

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is here with you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit. I invite you to turn the attention of my heart toward you. Thank you for every good and perfect gift that comes from you. Today, I receive the gift of godly grief that produces repentance within me. I confess my need for you. Make me attentive to your Spirit and the work that you desire to do within me. I am yours, Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Psalm 60:1-5](#)

O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses;
You have been angry; oh, restore us.
You have made the land to quake; You have torn it open;
repair its breaches, for it totters.
You have made Your people see hard things;
You have given us wine to drink that made us stagger.
You have set up a banner for those who fear You,
that they may flee to it from the bow.
That Your beloved ones may be delivered,
give salvation by Your right hand and answer us!

REFLECTION BY REV. DR. AARON GRAHAM

Lament is an expression of sorrow. It is grief and recognition of death and loss. To lament together is to create the space—physically and emotionally—for wailing and praying and anger, for disbelief and all the other emotions that come with death.

We see the practice of lament in Scripture. Sixty of the 150 Psalms are laments that the world is not the way God intended. We see lament in the book of Lamentations and in Jeremiah. Jesus also laments in garden of Gethsemane.

We need to be reminded that our cries are not too much for God. He laments with us. In fact, he wants us to come to him in our anger, in our fear, in our loneliness, in our hurt, and in our confusion.

Each of the lamenting Psalms has a structure.

- They begin with a *complaint*. A sobriety about the brutality of the world and a complaint that things are not as they should be.
- They turn to a *request*. God, do something! Deliver me! Rescue me! Heal me! Restore me! Bring your peace! Display your justice! Show mercy! Do something!
- Laments end with an *expression of trust*. Sometimes these expressions are incredibly jarring. In the midst of the brokenness, there is an expression that the way things are now is not as God intended, designed, or desired. Laments end with the reminder that God is setting things right, even though it often seems so slow. It is right for our laments to turn towards a reminder that God is in control and about the business of righting all things made wrong.

We lament because we are being reminded this Lenten season that something has gone terribly wrong in our history as a nation. The sin of the enslavement of African Americans runs so deep that it still affects so much of our culture and country today. We are taking this time to learn and to pray through this devotional so that we can ask God to forgive, cleanse, and heal us.

We are calling out in prayer knowing that we have a Savior who is able to empathize with us in our weakness. We enter into our laments with confidence knowing Jesus is in the resurrection business and that death never has the last word when Jesus is on the throne.

RESPONSE

Before we move on, it's important to acknowledge at the start of this seven-week journey together that you may not yet *feel* sorrowful. You may not be ready to lament over the injustice of slavery and racism. That is ok. Through prayer, God grants us his sorrow over injustice. He gives us the gift of lamenting. Our responsibility is simply to ask God to give us his heart. The best place to begin our asking is to pray words of lament back to him.

Consider praying these words found in Psalm 22, or choose another Psalm of lament. Before you pray, ask God to speak to you. What might he be asking you to do? Perhaps you will find God prompting your heart this week to notice the injustices around you. Then, stop and pray as if it were you experiencing these injustices.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.
Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame ([Psalm 22:1-5](#)).

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are the most compassionate one. You are not unfamiliar with suffering. You mourn with those who mourn. Help me, Lord, to be attentive to the work of your Holy Spirit in me today. You grieve at every sight of injustice. Open my eyes to see and to receive your compassion today. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Katongole, Emmanuel and Chris Rice. 2008. "Lament." In [*Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*](#), 75-94. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Young, Mark. n.d. "[Racism: A Reflection and a Prayer](#)." Denver Seminary.

The Image of God and the Three-Fifths Compromise

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is here with you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit. I invite you to turn the attention of my heart toward you. Thank you for every good and perfect gift that comes from you. Today, I receive the gift of godly grief that produces repentance within me. I confess my need for you. Make me attentive to your Spirit and the work that you desire to do within me. I am yours, Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Mark 12:13-17](#)

And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” And they brought one. And he said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to him, “Caesar’s.” Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marveled at him.

REFLECTION BY ANDY CROUCH

Jesus asks for a coin and poses a seemingly innocent question, “Whose image [Greek, *eikōn*] is this? Whose title?” However, the question is not innocent. Caesar has made the coin, imprinting his image upon it, so it is fine to give it back to him. Who then bears the image of God and thus belongs to him? Human beings. Jesus’s answer not only evades his opponent’s trap, it raises the profound question of whether they and we are rendering all human beings to God with the dignity they deserve as his image bearers. Or, whether we are turning them into property and the currency of power and taxation.

“Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States . . . according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons” ([U.S. Const. art. I, § 2, cl. 3](#)).

The awful, arbitrary awkwardness of the so-called “Three-Fifths Compromise” at the Constitutional Congress is more complex and revealing than we often realize. It was not a simple conflict between those who wanted to treat enslaved individuals as whole persons (delegates from the Northern states) and those who wanted to treat them as non-persons (from the Southern states). Instead, it involved a conflict within the logic of slavery itself. For the purposes of elected representation, it would be to the advantage of the South that slaves be counted in the population of each state. But for the purposes of taxation, which was to be set based on the relative wealth of each state forming the new union, it would be better for slaves not to be counted at all.

So the Three-Fifths Compromise did not just resolve a conflict between pro- and anti-slavery states. It reflected a conflict within the South itself, and within the nation: whether “slaves” were persons or property. Given the interests of power and wealth at stake, even slaveholders could not make up their mind.

One silver lining in this dark cloud over our history is the final wording of the clause. It does not say, as we sometimes misremember, that slaves were “three-fifths of a person.” The phrase is “three-fifths of all other Persons”—meaning that in the end, every human being in the country was recognized in the Constitution as fully a “Person.” However, resolving the conflict inherent in that admission would take not just further compromise, but in the end, a civil war.

RESPONSE

It is easy from our historical distance to condemn the Three-Fifths Compromise. But, in what ways are we tempted to treat people as currencies of wealth or political power? How are you tempted to treat people, not as primarily image bearers of God, but as sources of wealth and support for your interests? Are there systems you participate in, even unwillingly, that treat people as mere numbers to advance others’ interest—or as “human resources” to create wealth for others? How do these systems end up compromising on the requirement to treat other people as fully, wholly, none other than representatives of their Creator?

These are not easy or comfortable questions to contemplate, let alone answer. Sit long enough to offer these questions to God. The same God who is jealous for every instance of his image in the world to be given full dignity and brought back into relationship with him. He is merciful beyond our understanding even when we render unto the world’s empires what we should render to him.

CLOSING PRAYER

Abba, Father, thank you for making me in your image. Open my eyes today to see those around me as image-bearers of God. Come, Holy Spirit, and do your work of transformation in my heart. Where I have been blind, give me sight. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Wilentz, Sean. 2018. *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation’s Founding*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Forty Days of Preparation

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is here with you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit. I invite you to turn the attention of my heart toward you. Thank you for every good and perfect gift that comes from you. Today, I receive the gift of godly grief that produces repentance within me. I confess my need for you. Make me attentive to your Spirit and the work that you desire to do within me. I am yours, Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Galatians 5:13-15](#)

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

REFLECTION BY REV. SYLVESTER “TEE” TURNER

We are engaged in a season of reflection during the forty days that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, fasted and endured temptation and suffering in the wilderness. Yet, it is also a period during which we commit ourselves to reflect on our own shortcomings and offer sacrifices and penance for our deeds. Those forty days were not just Jesus’s preparation for the journey ahead of him; it was also the foundation for a model that we were to carry forward. The model is summed up in Mark 12:30–31, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.”

As I view the state of affairs that we find ourselves in as Christians today, I feel that we have failed to live out that responsibility, leading me to think, what if...

What if...

We loved our neighbors as ourselves...we would not be as segregated in our communities as we are.

What if...

We did not have blue states and red states...we would have one United States.

What if...

We lived out God’s word and did not spend time trying to defend it...more people would be drawn to Christ.

What if...

We focused on building bridges and not barriers...the Angels in heaven would rejoice.

What if...

We were simply Christians and not right- or left-leaning Christians...we would be the light that sits upon the hill and others would see our good works and glorify our Father.

What if...

We really believed that all people are created with unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...we will not see some as aliens and threats, but as brothers and sisters in Christ.

What if...

My people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways...then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#)).

RESPONSE

At the close of this week, take a moment to pause and invite the Holy Spirit to highlight areas of emotion, curiosity, or even confusion that may have surfaced through these readings.

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, shine your light of conviction and truth upon my heart. I confess my need for your guidance. I offer these feelings that are weighty and burdensome, and those that are yet hopeful and eager with anticipation of your good work. I surrender all to you, trusting that you are producing the good fruit of repentance within me. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Kim, Heidi, Charles Wynder, Jr. and Stephanie Spellers. 2017. "[Becoming Beloved Community... Where You Are: A Resource for Individuals, Congregations & Communities Seeking Racial Healing, Reconciliation and Justice](#)." *The Episcopal Church*, August 16, 2017.

Sunday Feast: Repentance & Love

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is here with you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit. I invite you to turn the attention of my heart toward you. Thank you for every good and perfect gift that comes from you. Today, I receive the gift of godly grief that produces repentance within me. I confess my need for you. Make me attentive to your Spirit and the work that you desire to do within me. I am yours, Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Luke 6:27-28](#)

But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

REFLECTION BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

During a time of great violence and oppression in America, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks of love in his article, “Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience,” referring to the words of Jesus Christ:

“Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive, good will to all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return...it is the love of God operating in the human heart...rises to the point of loving the person who does an evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. I think this is what Jesus meant when he said ‘love your enemies.’ I’m very happy that he didn’t say like...it is pretty difficult to like someone bombing your home...threatening your children...But Jesus says love them, and love is greater than like. Love is understanding, redemptive, creative, good will for all men...” (1986, 47).

It is a tall order to “love one’s enemies.” Even more so, to lead an entire movement of people under the guiding principle of loving those who are brutalizing and degrading them in incomprehensible ways. It begs the question: what enabled King to accomplish this type of self-governance? The answer is perhaps found in the small but critical space of *knowing* the God who is *love*.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God...Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love...Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...If anyone says ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” ([1 John 4:7-21](#)).

How do we respond to the call to repentance in love—especially when another’s history of pain and suffering may be different than our own?

In repenting, we are being invited to change our thinking. A critical step is to think of others first—considering their needs with more faith, respect, care and attention than we might even give to ourselves. To consider others, we must first imagine them in our own minds. As we survey together the history of slavery and racism in America, we are endeavoring to *imagine it in our own minds*, to consider those among us who have endured a legacy of injustice and suffering. We are responding to Jesus’s command to love our neighbors as we would love ourselves.

“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” ([Hebrews 13:3](#)).

We are being beckoned to produce the fruit of repentance in our lives. We are being led to consider the suffering of others as if it were our own. And in doing so, we aspire to greater love.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank you for your great and unending love for me. Help me to be so assured of your love for me, that I freely love those around me. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ford, William and Matt Lockett. 2018. [*The Dream King: How the Dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. Is Being Fulfilled to Heal Racism in America*](#). Redding, CA: NEWTYPE Publishing.

Discussion Questions

1. At the start of this week, you were invited to prayerfully engage this devotional tool by beginning in prayer each day. How was that experience for you? Share with the group what you enjoyed and what felt challenging.
2. On day one, we were invited into an assessment of “godly grief that leads to repentance.” What did you discover in assessing your giving, praying, and fasting? To whom are you generous? For whom do you pray? For what do you need to grieve?
3. On day three, we discussed the Three-Fifths Compromise and the temptation to treat people as resources rather than as image bearers of God. How might you be tempted to treat people as sources of support for your interests? Are there systems you participate in, even unwillingly, that treat people as tools to advance others’ interest? Discuss any insights or questions that emerged from considering these things.
4. In what ways might your grief over these things produce the fruit of repentance, a change of mind and actions? Share your thoughts with the group.
5. How can the group best pray for you this week?

WOMEN & SLAVERY
SUNDAY FEAST: HOPE IN THE WILDERNESS
FOUNDED IN SLAVERY
SELF-DENIAL, CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE, AND THE
ROAD TO JUSTICE
THE UNITED STATES DOMESTIC SLAVE TRADE
WEEK TWO: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
THE INTERNATIONAL STORY OF SLAVERY
CHATTEL SLAVERY AND THE HUMAN ECONOMY

Founded in Slavery

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Matthew 7:24-27](#)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

REFLECTION BY MAX FINBERG

For all of the wisdom and foresight that our founding fathers had, part of the house that is the United States of America was built on the sandy foundation of slavery and exclusion. In the beginning, those who led our country refused to see enslaved Africans as brothers and sisters created in the image of God. Article 1, Section 2 of the [Constitution](#), providing for the election of Members of Congress, stated “the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other Persons.” Enslaved Africans were not fully human, only sixty percent, and just so they would boost the number of Representatives from slave-holding states. Thankfully, this was changed when the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) was ratified in 1868, three years after the Civil War ended. Those were during the few years of Reconstruction when African Americans were elected to Congress before federal troops were withdrawn from the former Confederate States in 1877. Then, the advent of state laws and practices effectively prevented the descendants of slaves from voting and winning votes as candidates—until the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Acts (1965). Even before the country was founded, enslaved Africans were an indisputable element of the fabric of this nation, from the [first instance of slavery](#) in Jamestown in 1619 through the establishment of the republic.

America’s legacy of slavery is also embedded in the U.S. Capitol, the building that houses our legislative branch, as it was built in part with slave labor. According to the government website, [Architect of the Capitol \(AOC\)](#), “enslaved laborers, who were rented from their owners, were involved in almost every stage of construction” of this “Temple of Liberty,” dedicated to the ideals of freedom, equality, and self-determination. The AOC found numerous documents referencing a “negro hire” for \$60-70 annual wages paid to the owner of the enslaved person. Enslaved laborers also helped build the [White House](#), just down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol. The very homes some of those founders lived in were built and maintained by enslaved persons, from Washington’s Mt. Vernon to Jefferson’s Monticello.

Many other institutions we now take for granted were founded and built by those who profited from [slavery](#) or those who were oppressed by it. [Churches](#), [colleges](#), and [corporations](#) all have roots in slavery. From the Baptist and Methodist churches to Harvard and Georgetown Universities, as well as companies like Aetna and Brooks Brothers, all have acknowledged their connection to America's original sin.

In recent years, we have experienced the crashing of our myths against the rocks of reality. We know that despite the goodness contained in our nation, part of our foundation is not the rock of ages; it is on the sands of slavery.

RESPONSE

What are the institutions you are a part of and to which you belong? What about your church, alma mater, or other affiliated organizations? Do a little digging and find out their connection to slavery. See if there has been an acknowledgment or an apology.

Pray and seek God's guidance as to whether acknowledging and apologizing to an African American friend for the role that slavery has played in your lives would open a deeper conversation that could lead to healing and reconciliation. Beverly Engel, the author of [The Power of Apology](#), states, "Almost like magic, apology has the power to repair harm, mend relationships, soothe wounds and heal broken hearts." The One who taught us to pray "forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" knew all about that.

It is difficult to know what next steps to take as an active participant in the work of repentance and reconciliation. You may fear doing the wrong thing, making matters worse or being misunderstood. But, as you earnestly seek God concerning how you might give expression to the work of repentance happening within you, expect that he will provide opportunities for you to move forward with grace. You may want to use the words of this closing prayer as a starting point, and then be courageous in your obedience to take another action. Your God is with you and he is faithfully leading you.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for leading me to your cross, where your justice and mercy were poured out for this moment of reconciliation. I'm grateful that I can boldly come before you in my neediness. Thank you for giving me access to your counsel, as a Father to his child. Instruct my steps, Lord. I need your direction. I want to bear the good fruit of repentance and I'm not sure what to do next. Open my eyes to be attentive to your leading in the ordinary steps of my day.

Search me, 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 your way everlasting ([Psalm 139:23-24](#)). Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DeWolf, Thomas Norman. 2008. [Inheriting the Trade](#). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Martin, Steven D. and Max Finberg. 2019. "[Repentance and Race](#)." Podcast. *National Council of Churches*. February 1, 2019.

The International Story of Slavery

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Exodus 2:23-25](#)

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

REFLECTION BY REV. BILL HALEY

When many of us think about slavery, we usually think specifically about slavery in America. This is understandable. We are Americans after all; it is part of our history. Relative to the entire transatlantic slave trade (which lasted from roughly 1545 to 1860, over 315 years), our American history is actually a rather small slice of the total horror of the story. “Of the more than 10 million enslaved Africans to eventually reach the Western Hemisphere, just 388,747—less than 4 percent of the total—came to North America. This was dwarfed by the 1.3 million brought to Spanish controlled Central America, the 4 million brought to British, French, Dutch, and Danish holdings in the Caribbean, and the 4.8 million brought to Brazil” (Kahn & Bouie 2015).

That quote is taken from the [article](#), “The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes: 315 years. 20,528 voyages.” Millions of lives. More powerful than the quote is the two-minute animation along with it that shows every one of those voyages from the West Coast of Africa, mostly to the Western Hemisphere, including America. Further, conservative estimates say that well over a [million](#) Africans died during the transatlantic journey; some estimates are much higher. These numbers do not include people who were taken to other parts of the world at that time.

The first African person to arrive in the former British colonies of America was on August 20, 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia. Over time, Richmond in the north, as well as Charleston and New Orleans in the South, became primary ports for slave ships which made the middle passage.

With the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves in 1808, America ceased participating in the transatlantic slave trade for a variety of political, moral, and economic reasons. One of the primary reasons was that breeding slaves and domestic sales had become so lucrative that importing individuals from the African continent was unnecessary. Despite the cessation of the transatlantic slave trade, slavery itself was still not banned.

Modern America would not be recognizable without the slave trade. It generated enormous commerce and wealth for some, enabled faster land development for agriculture and infrastructure, and created great prosperity for many—which is still being enjoyed today.

RESPONSE

Watch the two-minute [video](#) referenced above. Then take some time to imagine yourself as one of the people on one of those many ships. Imagine the moment you were kidnapped and taken from your home country, along the lengthy and arduous ocean voyage, to the moment you landed in America, to when you finally arrived at your final destination in a place you did not know. Think about the loss of family, community, culture, and language. Imagine the confusion and fear, compounded by brutality and dehumanization. What would you have felt?

Watch this five-minute [TED Talk](#) on the Atlantic Slave Trade. Who benefited, who did it destroy, and what is its ongoing impact on both the African and North America continents. How did slavery give rise to our modern notions of race?

Allow your heart to grieve in God's presence. Talk to God about what you're feeling.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, I'm overwhelmed by what I've seen, by what you've led my heart to imagine in considering one of these slaves could have been me. It is only by your grace that I have been born free. Let your gift of freedom produce good fruit in me. My heart breaks and wants to disengage from the pain of injustice that seems beyond resolving. But, "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint." ([Habakkuk 2:1](#)). Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Eltis, David. 2015. [Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade](#). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Haley, Alex, David Greene, Edward Asner, Lloyd Bridges, and LeVar Burton. 2002. [Roots](#). Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.

The United States Domestic Slave Trade

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Ezekiel 22:23-28](#) (italics added)

And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, say to her, You are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation. The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have *devoured human lives*; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Her princes in her midst are like wolves *tearing the prey*, shedding blood, *destroying lives* to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken.

REFLECTION BY DEMETRIUS SUMMERVILLE

In the early 1800s, cotton or “white gold” began to generate wealth for plantation families of the South. Like tobacco, cotton production required intensive labor. Virginia planters saw an opportunity to circumvent Congress’s ban on the importation of enslaved people through the inhumane act of breeding and selling humans “down river” into the deep South. For example, “In 1857 alone, sales [of the enslaved] at Richmond [auctions](#) totaled \$3.5 million” (Corcoran 2010, 58). Based on the Minneapolis Federal Reserve consumer price indices, that amount translates to \$89.9 million in 2016. Affirming the importance of slave breeding, Thomas Dew, President of the College of William and Mary, said, “It furnishes every inducement to the master to attend to his negroes, to encourage breeding, and to cause the greatest number of slaves to be raised. Virginia is, indeed, a negro-raising State for other States...The noblest blood of Virginia runs in the veins of slaves’ (Goodall 1853, 84).”

As cotton production expanded west, the promise of wealth escalated, and religious institutions wanted in.

“Money for the operation [of 1836 negro speculation] was in brisk demand...Capitalists demanded high rates of interest...Then it was the Trustees of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, lured by these high rates of interest...withdrew their amount of \$94,692.88, from a Northern institution where they were drawing the usual interest, and invested them in the Southwestern banks where they would be loaned to the speculators in the bodies and souls of men, women, and children.” (Goodell 1853, 61).

Today the prison industry helps businesses maximize profits by hiring prisoners to make products or perform services at extremely low wages. Like slavery, governmental policies are enacted that intentionally or unintentionally create a pipeline to prison, primarily filled with boys and men of color.

RESPONSE

There are some things that God is against. The above passage in Ezekiel reminds us that the oppression of the poor and the extortion of the needy is one of them. God is against injustice. As we consider these grievous statistics, take a moment to reflect upon the ways in which we, the church, have remained complicit in—and even benefited from—the extortion of the poor.

CLOSING PRAYER

After reflecting, join in the supplication below from the [*Book of Common Prayer*](#) (2007, 209).

*Almighty God, who hast created us in thine own image:
Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make
no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use
our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of
justice in our communities and among the nations, to the
glory of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who
liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God,
now and forever. Amen.*

Lord, have mercy. Jesus, have mercy! Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Baptist, Edward E. 2014. [*The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*](#). New York: Basic Books.

Johnson, Walter. 1999. [*Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Northup, Solomon. 2012. [*12 Years a Slave*](#). New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Chattel Slavery and the Human Economy

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Revelation 18:9-13](#)

And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, “Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

REFLECTION BY ANDY CROUCH

In Revelation, “Babylon” represents human idolatry and injustice taken to the extreme. Babylon is presented as a place of luxury, prosperity, commerce—and slavery. Babylon itself was a distant memory by the first century. The imperial city of that time was Rome. Rome’s empire, of course, is now a distant memory to us. Its wealth and beauty have in fact been laid waste, just as John foretold.

In another context, the list of luxury goods in Revelation 18:11-13 would be a celebration of international trade. Gold, silver, and jewels; cinnamon and spices; olive oil and fine flour—all these beautiful things are the fruit of human culture. Indeed, many of them are included elsewhere in prophetic and apocalyptic writings as part of the glories of the New Jerusalem.

However, this catalog of trade ends with a horrible final entry (first called to my attention by the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann), “Cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human lives” (Revelation 18:13). The wealth of “Babylon” comes from treating human beings as one more economic possession. People have been turned into things. Profitable things.

Few if any empires in history have avoided this awful transmutation. Certainly, not the economic powers that settled “the New World.” To extract the abundance of the Americas, Europeans not only brutally suppressed the indigenous occupants of the land, but from 1526 to 1867, “some 12.5 million slaves had been shipped from Africa, and 10.7 million had arrived in the Americas” ([Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History](#)). Only about 6 percent were shipped to North America, while the rest were shipped

to the plantations of the Caribbean and South America. Regardless of destination, these human beings were treated in law or practice as property—profitable things. (See [The Gilder Lehrman Institute](#) for a comparative perspective on slavery in the Americas.)

Like the people of Babylon, we behold the astonishing wealth and real beauty of our nation. Yet, that wealth is interwoven with a global economic system that has relentless incentives, centuries ago but also today, to dehumanize and exploit human lives. God will not overlook the destruction of his image, “For in a single hour all this wealth [will be] laid waste” ([Revelation 18:17](#)).

RESPONSE

Not far from where you live there is a city; or you may live at its very heart. Its most coveted addresses are places of luxury, which Babylon or Rome could only dream. However, that city also carries a legacy of violence—a history of treating people as profitable things. What is the residue of that legacy? Who bears its scars today? If that legacy were fully and truly judged, would you be one of the kings, merchants, and sailors who mourns the loss of wealth? Or would you say with the scorned of the earth, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever” ([Revelation 19:3](#))?

For most of us, the best we can hope is that we would be in both groups. We have profited from exploitative economies past and present, but by grace we can also heed the call of Revelation 18:4, “Come out of her, my people.” Spend a few moments in prayer:

1. Lamenting all the things that would be lost, and will be lost, in God’s judgment of our own nation and world.
2. Lamenting, even more, the loss that has come as our economies have turned people into things.
3. Praying for the courage to resist evil and the lure of the Babylonians of our day.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you will not overlook the destruction of Your image. “For in a single hour all this wealth [will be] laid waste” ([Revelation 18:17](#)). Give me the grace to lament, and to mourn, and to weep over these things, that I may be set free. I desire to resist evil and cling to what is good.

In your judgment, O Lord, we will lament the loss of our things—our creature comforts and conveniences that have come at the expense of human lives. We will lament the loss of our reputation and our self-adulation. We will lament the loss of our social status, our position among the wealthy and powerful. But we will find ourselves in the esteemed place where you dwell, among the meek and the lowly. Among the cast down and the broken. You dwell with the poor and oppressed, and make a place for all to dine at your table. So we repent, Lord Jesus. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Johnson, Walter. 2005. [The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas](#). New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.

Women and Slavery

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Mark 5:25-34](#)

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.” And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

REFLECTION BY REV. ERIN CLIFFORD

For male and female, slavery was equally devastating. Both were torn from families, beaten mercilessly, and seen as property in the eyes of the law. Despite these common factors, the circumstances of enslavement differed for men and women. (See [PBS feature](#) on the “Slave Experience: Men, Women, and Gender”).

In the pre-abolition era, the enslaved woman’s role as mother was exploited and commercialized. Because it was economically advantageous for them to bear more children, they were intentionally [bred](#) to increase the owner’s capital and workforce. And, pregnancy often provided little respite for female slaves who regularly worked up until the time they gave birth and resumed their duties shortly thereafter. Although constantly at risk of separation from their own children through sale, female slaves were often required to care for and [nurse](#) their master’s children, putting the needs of white children above those of their own.

For female slaves, [sexual violence](#) was commonplace. First-hand accounts of this brutality are found throughout slave narratives such as that of [Harriet Ann Jacobs](#), [Solomon Northup](#) and [Olaudah Equiano](#). In Equiano’s memoir, he describes the regular violations that female slaves faced:

“[I]t was almost a constant practice with our clerks, and other whites, to commit violent depredations on the chastity of the female slaves...I have known our mates to commit these acts most shamefully, to the disgrace, not of Christians only, but of men. I have even known them to gratify their brutal passion with females not ten years old” (1794, 133).

This early domestication and sexualization of black female bodies have resulted in an enduring triptych of [stereotypes](#): the [mammy](#), [jezebel](#), and [sapphire](#). The mammy caricature has been employed over the decades in the marketing of domestic products such as coffee, soap, and cleaners. One of the most recognizable examples of this is the [Aunt Jemima](#) food brand. The character of Aunt Jemima is directly linked to a minstrel song written in 1875, developed as a derisive satire. The [jezebel](#) and [sapphire](#) stereotypes are far more insidious and have been used to simultaneously sexualize and vilify. The jezebel is reflected in the continuing [hypersexualization](#) of black women in the [media](#), while the sapphire caricature is portrayed in the “sassy” and “angry black woman” tropes. And, unfortunately, these stereotypes are imposed at a young age. A recent study by [Georgetown Law](#) found that black girls as young as five years old are often “adultified,” being perceived as less innocent and more sexually aware. Consequently, they are perceived as less in need of nurturing and protection than their white counterparts.

The perceptions of African American women and girls that began in slavery are still evident today in the perpetuation of destructive stereotypes, in unconscious bias, and racialized notions of black women’s roles. This is contrary to their value as image bearers of God and directly undermines their full flourishing in society, resulting in centuries of generational suffering and trauma that continue to impact their [emotional](#), [physical](#), and [financial](#) well-being.

RESPONSE

In Mark’s account of the woman suffering from bleeding, we see Jesus acknowledging a woman who is not only physically suffering but is being marginalized by the community around her. He tenderly addresses her as “daughter” (the only woman in the gospels to receive this honor), reminding her and us that she is loved and seen even through the years of suffering that she has endured. As male and female, we are all given our gender as a gift and as a reflection of the Divine. As we acknowledge the isolation and prejudice that so many black women still experience today, let us take a moment to confess our own conscious or unconscious assumptions about gender. Where have we sought to dehumanize or objectify another because of their gender or race? Where have we contributed to the theft of another’s dignity or respect by our thoughts, words, or actions? Let us invite God to give us his eyes for one another that we might see one another as the glorious creations he has made.

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Spirit come, search me, and know me. I invite you to shine your light on any areas of bias or wrong assumptions I’ve made because of another’s race or gender. Bring those instances to mind so that I may confess them before you. Come and reveal. [Pause and allow the Holy Spirit to bring up those instances, then confess them.] Heal me of this disease that has crept into my veins. Let your love for humanity flow freely through me. Let me see with new eyes those who were once distorted to me. Out of the abundance of a renewed heart, let my mouth speak words of love and reconciliation. In Jesus’s name, amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Calautti, Katie. 2014. “[‘What’ll Become of Me?’ Finding the Real Patsey of 12 Years a Slave.](#)” *Vanity Fair*, March 2, 2014.

Lewis, Catherine M. 2011. [Women and Slavery in America: A Documentary History](#). Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.

Self-Denial, Civil Disobedience, and the Road to Justice

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Daniel 1:8](#)

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

REFLECTION BY REV. DR. DENNIS EDWARDS

Self-denial and civil disobedience can be weapons of social change. At various points in human history, principled people refused to take the easy road. They rejected paths that would lead them into complicity with society's evil systems. These heroes resisted the temptation to jettison their beliefs and values in favor of what could have been an easier life, or at least a life that minimized conflict. They understood the words by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (1963c).

The civil rights movement in the United States is an example of a time when faithful people, trusting the words of Jesus that peacemakers are blessed ([Matthew 5:8](#)), refused to accept the injustice of a racially segregated society. These heroes civilly disobeyed laws that segregated Americans, putting themselves in danger of bodily harm as well as criminal prosecution. When the police brutalized them, most did not retaliate because they practiced self-denial in the form of non-retaliation. They could have spared themselves verbal abuse and physical pain, but through self-denial and civil disobedience they believed a more just society could emerge.

These 20th-century heroes had good biblical precedent for their attitude and action. Readers of the Bible are familiar with the story of Daniel and his three compatriots, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 1:1-21). These young men were taken as slaves to serve Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century BC. Jerusalem had been defeated, the beloved temple of Solomon had been destroyed, and God's people had been taken into exile. According to the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar intended to create model Babylonian citizens by indoctrinating young Judeans. Stripping the young men of their Hebrew names and giving them names associated with Babylonian deities was just one way of demoralizing the newly conquered men. Another way to assert Babylonian dominance was to feed these young men at the king's table.

Committed to their faith in God, Daniel and his friends refused to eat the king's food. It was a simple act

of defiance. It was an act of self-denial as well as of civil disobedience. It might even seem to have been illogical. Yet, despite the young men eating only vegetables and refraining from the king's rich food, they were in better condition than all those who ate at the king's table. God had done this. God blessed the young men through their sacrifice.

RESPONSE

Let God speak to you in the story of Daniel. Then, celebrate God's faithfulness to Daniel and his friends. We must resist evil structures that demoralize and dehumanize others. Dare to be a Daniel.

Similarly, consider the history of African Americans in the United States. Take a moment now to thank God for the faith and fortitude of those heroes who resisted evil laws and practiced a form of self-denial which leads to sweeping social change. Consider also how God might want to use you. Fasting can be an act of self-denial that leads to justice and societal transformation.

Now, take a moment and meditate on [Isaiah 58](#).

CLOSING PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, you are faithful to work all things together for good. Thank you for preserving and protecting African Americans in this nation. Thank you for your faithfulness to call forth men and women of courage to lead in the way of love for their fellow man, and justice for all. Thank you for imparting a godly heritage and a legacy of faithfulness to our African American brothers and sisters. Lord Jesus, continue to reward your people for their sacrifice. Restore to them the years of harvest that the locusts have eaten. And Lord, use me. Make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Marsh, Charles. 2006. [*The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*](#). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Sunday Feast: Hope in the Wilderness

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that you belong to your maker. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord Jesus, I draw near to you today. Through the noise of the crowd, through the tyranny of my task lists, I press in to touch the hem of your garment. By the power of your Holy Spirit, transform me. Renew my mind with your truth. Open my eyes to see where I am still bound in my thinking and actions, and come set me free. I want to walk in alignment with you. Make me attentive to the leading of your Spirit in my every step today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Zechariah 4:7](#)

Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’

REFLECTION BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

There is always hope in the wilderness.

For African Americans, theirs has been a history of wilderness experiences. Displaced. In hiding. Yet the wilderness yielded great fruit, even in its hardship. There is a unique closeness with God and dependency upon him found in the African American experience.

We have been invited to learn from a people who found God in the midst of struggle, and have not abandoned him. We learn from our African American brothers and sisters how to cling to God, and how he clings to us. We see how he embeds himself within our very flesh and bones and comes to suffer with us.

And there, we learn his voice. He speaks to us. What a tender privilege it is to be carried by the Father. To know what it is to be held in his arms, and to be upheld by his voice. Abolitionist Harriet Tubman rescued hundreds of slaves through the Underground Railroad in response to a calling she believed was from God. “The Lord told me to do this. I said ‘Oh Lord, I can’t—don’t ask me—take somebody else.’ But God said ‘It’s you I want, Harriet Tubman’” (Clinton 2005, 136).

[Harriet Tubman](#) relied entirely on the voice of God for direction. In his [article](#), “Harriet Tubman Followed the Voice of God,” Mark Ellis recounts, “She would listen carefully to the voice of God as she led slaves north, and she would only go where she felt God was leading her” (Ellis 2016). Abolitionist Quaker, [Thomas Garrett](#), who worked with Tubman similarly stated, “I never met with any person, of any color, who had more confidence in the voice of God, as spoken direct to her soul” (Bradford 1869).

How would she have known the God who rescues, the one whose voice directs us in the darkness, except that she walked the way of the Underground Railroad with him. No, we would never suggest that slavery was God’s perfect plan. Throughout the Scriptures, God opposes the destruction of his image bearers, and he promises to judge those who participate in such abuse. But, he is also the God who is able to reveal his goodness in the midst of the most horrific circumstances. He is everywhere, and so his goodness can be found there too.

God has called a people thrown into the dark pit of slavery's despair to be a light of hope to those who are suffering. They can show you the way to the master healer. They can lead you to the deliverer. They can bring you before the God of justice who acts justly on your behalf.

They will carry you into the presence of the one who has sat with us in the dirt and dined with us in the presence of our enemies. Together, we will go to the one who was beaten and bruised, tortured and killed. And together, we will together stand before the one who conquered the grave and raised us up with him again.

Together, we will rise. Christ was dead. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

CLOSING PRAYER

Hallelujah, Christ has overcome. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Asay, Paul. 2018. "[Harriet Tubman: Saving hundreds of lives would not have been possible without God.](#)" *Aleteia*, March 17, 2018.

Discussion Questions

1. Watch the two minute, animated slave trade [video](#) referenced on day two of this week. Discuss together what it might have been like to be on those ships. From the moment you were kidnapped and taken from your home country, along the lengthy and arduous ocean voyage, to the moment you landed in America, to when you finally arrived at your final destination in a place you did not know. Think about the loss of family, community, culture, and language. Imagine the confusion and fear, compounded by brutality and dehumanization. What would you have felt?
2. On the first day of this week, we were invited to consider the power of apology by researching our affiliated institutions and their connection to slavery. Share with the group what you discovered. If there were connections to slavery, how do you feel about their response or lack of response? How can you actively participate in making amends?
3. We also explored personalizing acts of repentance within personal relationship. This can feel awkward. Were you able to spend some time praying about acknowledging and apologizing to an African American friend for the role slavery has played in your life and theirs? Take some time to discuss with the group any apprehensions or fears that arise in considering this action. Resist the temptation to try to solve one another's challenges. Listen, and then take a few minutes to pray about these things together.
4. How can the group continue to pray for you this week?

DECONSTRUCTING RACE
**VOTING
RIGHTS**
JIM CROW AND THE GOD WHO HATES

CHRISTIAN OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY
A SUBVERSIVE COMMUNITY OF HOPE
VOICES OF PROTEST AND
VOICES OF REASON
SUNDAY FEAST: REVIVAL & THE BLACK CHURCH
WEEK THREE: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

week three

Christian Opposition to Slavery

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Exodus 3:7-8, 21:16](#); [Isaiah 1:15-17](#); [James 5:4-6](#)

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Exodus 3:7-8).

Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death (Exodus 21:16).

When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause (Isaiah 1:15-17).

Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you (James 5:4-6).

REFLECTION BY DR. ROBERT J. MACKAY

By the mid-eighteenth century, a Christian abolitionist movement began to take shape in America. In 1754, the Quakers renounced the practice of slaveholding, refusing to allow its members and ministers to own slaves. In the [Epistle of Caution and Advice](#), the Quakers stated:

"Yet, as we have with Sorrow to observe, that their Number is of late increased amongst us, we ... earnestly exhort all to avoid, in any manner encouraging that Practice of making Slaves of our Fellow Creatures. Now dear Friends, if we continually bear in Mind the royal Law, or doing to others, as we would be done by, we shall never think of bereaving our Fellow Creatures of that valuable Blessing Liberty; nor endure to grow rich by their Bondage. To live in Ease and Plenty by the Toil of those whom Violence and Cruelty have put in our power is neither consistent with Christianity nor common Justice" (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends 1754).

Other leaders also spoke out [against slavery](#). Notably, [John Wesley](#), one of the founders of the [Methodist](#) religion, was an ardent opponent of slavery and supporter of the abolition movement, as were many

involved in early American Methodism. In [*Thoughts on Slavery*](#), published in 1774, he provided a detailed description of the actual workings and horrors of slavery. Wesley continued to campaign against slavery throughout his life. His views are powerfully expressed at the conclusion of the book, “Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you but by his own act and deed, by his own voluntary action. Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion. Be gentle toward all men; and see that you invariably do with everyone as you would he should do unto you” (Wesley (1774) 1999, 56).

The Methodist Episcopal church in the United States confirmed its opposition to slavery in 1784 and the United Brethren in Christ ruled in 1837 that slave owners could not continue as members. The Methodist church, and other denominations such as the [Baptists](#), later [split](#) between the North and the South over slavery.

RESPONSE

It [has been said](#) that the history of American Christianity is “both tainted with significant and shameful failures and also really beautiful successes” (Editors, 2017). Reflect on these failures and successes in light of the divisions in the church over slavery.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has recently released a [report](#) on their involvement in slavery. This is a possible model for the process of recognizing and repenting from our history. Consider reading the report. Does this change the way you think about repentance?

The Christian [abolition movement](#) rooted its criticism of slavery in Christian values and ideas, such as brotherhood, liberty, benevolence, and judgment of individuals and nations. Are there grave, modern injustices that we, as Christians, are ignoring today?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, make us one as you are One. For your name's sake, we pray. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lundy, Stevie Jr. 2017. “[Southern Baptist Convention, History & Past](#).” Published May 14, 2017. Video, 02:34.

Noll, Mark A. 2006. [The Civil War as a Theological Crisis](#). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

A Subversive Community of Hope

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Exodus 19:3-6](#), [Matthew 5:14-16](#)

The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel” (Exodus 19:3-6).

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).

REFLECTION BY REV. BEN HOYER

Having rescued his people from slavery, God had in mind to set them apart as his own treasured possession. Israel would be a kingdom of priests and the rest of humanity would be their parish. This calling continues in the New Age. Jesus told the folks who were gathered around him in Galilee that they were the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The plan of God is consistent: people, forgiven by him, represent him to the world.

The reading yesterday discussed how some denominations actively opposed slavery. However, this was not the majority. The people of God, assembled in churches across the United States, mostly dropped the ball. On the whole, Christians did not develop the reputation as representatives of a God who loves with abandon and restores what has been broken. More often than not, Scripture was quoted to preserve the status quo, even to dehumanize humans. Systematic and organized thought went into constructing arguments to prove that the Christian Scriptures supported slavery. Texts quoted out of context were used to excuse brutality and intense violence. There was even a “[slave Bible](#)” created with the express purpose of maintaining obedient slaves rather than proclaiming the truth of the Gospel.

The goal of retaining ownership of baptized Africans presented legal complications. According to Mark Galli’s piece “[Defeating the Conspiracy](#)” in *Christianity Today*:

“Many masters in colonial America believed if a slave was baptized, ‘according to the laws of the British nation, and the canons of the church,’ he must be freed. Colonial legislatures sought to preserve their ability to own Christians, and by 1706 at least six had passed acts denying that baptism altered the condition of

a slave ‘as to his bondage or freedom.’ It wasn’t just economic but a twinge of Christian conscience that prompted the legislation. As Virginia’s law put it, it was passed so that masters, ‘freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavor the propagation of Christianity’” (1999).

As enslaved Africans began to enter the faith, church buildings remained segregated and denominations split to keep the races apart. The very best construction suggests that white people of God went along grudgingly with the work of God. In reality, white Christians often stood in the way of conversion. Yet, God is determined for his Kingdom to endure. People thrown out of church mid-prayer simply started their own church rather than let hatred turn them from faith. Through the miraculous work of God, faith became a cornerstone of the African American community. Churches became rallying points for community, culture, and eventually civil rights. This move of God among enslaved, segregated, and subjugated people happened in spite of most church-goers, not because of them.

RESPONSE

Respectable [church people](#) don’t have a great track record of being on the right side of God’s work in the world. Israel couldn’t settle into a good rhythm with God in Old Testament days, and Jesus fought regularly with the Pharisees. It’s disheartening to see the people of God play games of power and prestige when there is an opportunity for love in the face of evil and for restoration in the face of subjugation.

You are not exempt from these games. As a child of God, you can repent for the failings of our people in the past. But also, take the time today to ask God where you’re blind to his working in the world around you.

CLOSING PRAYER

Join together in praying what is known as the “Jesus Prayer.” As you pray, give space to the work of the Holy Spirit within you. We’ve inserted reminders to *pause* and *confess* those things that come to mind as you pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. [Pause]

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. [Pause]

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. [Pause]

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. [Pause]

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. [Pause]

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of repentance and the assurance of your forgiveness. Thank you for unveiling my eyes to see where I have been blind. I trust you to complete the good work you’ve begun within me. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tisby, Jemar. 2019. [*The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Browne, Katrina, Jude Ray, and Alla Kovgan. 2015. “[Traces of the Trade: Faith and Reconciliation](#).” Filmed 2008, Published October, 28, 2015, *PBS POV*. Video, 04:46.

Deconstructing Race

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Ephesians 2:14](#)

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...

REFLECTION BY DEMETRIUS SUMMERVILLE

[Black](#)—adj. dirty, sinister, evil, wicked, indicative of condemnation, sad, gloomy, hostile, angry, discontent, depressed, sullen, and grim (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2016, Oxford Living Dictionary 2016).

[White](#)—adj. upright, fairness, unblemished, innocent, favorable, fortunate, purity (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2016).

The dictionaries' descriptions for "[white](#)" and "[black](#)" served as building blocks in the "dividing wall of hostility" that continues to influence how we see, name and, consequently, treat one another. Additional building blocks for this dividing wall were added by [Christian theologians](#). They provided biblical justification for the institution of slavery and subsequent systems of discrimination (apartheid and Jim Crow) by referencing the curse on Noah's son, Ham. In his 1898 [Lectures on Calvinism](#), Dr. Abraham Kuyper, a theologian and former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, stated, "From the high-lands of Asia our human race came down in groups, and these in turn have been divided into races and nations; and in entire conformity to the prophetic blessing of Noah the children of Shem and of Japheth have been the sole bearers of the development of the race. No impulse for any higher life has ever gone forth from the third group [the descendants of Ham]" (Kuyper (1898) 1999, 35).

Scientists and philosophers also inserted scientific blocks in the wall by asserting that Africans were less intelligent and therefore unequal with people of European descent. Thomas Jefferson supported these theories in his 1784 [Notes on The State of Virginia](#), "I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks...are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind...This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people" ((1743) 2006, 153-154).

Transatlantic slavery was unique in that it was based primarily on skin color; the one thing a person could not change. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a historical legacy of discrimination based on race, which continues today. One of my friends from college recently mentioned, "I told my son he better be friends with those white boys on his team because he may be working for them one day." At the crux of

his imperative are internalized racial assumptions about the superiority and inferiority of people groups. The actual race of a person is not what creates the “dividing wall of hostility,” but rather the *worthiness* or *unworthiness* attributed to a person’s race. Jesus broke down the dividing wall of hostility not to make us “color-blind,” as some would encourage, but “color-brave.”

RESPONSE

Take a moment to consider your own experiences. Have there been instances when you made assumptions about a person’s status as “worker” or “boss” based on their skin color? Recount the story of that experience. What happened? What were you thinking or feeling in that moment? Are people of color in your workplace, school or church equitably represented in positions of leadership?

Watch this brief [TED Talk](#) by Melody Hobson, President of Ariel Investments, on what it takes to be “color-brave.” In your positions of influence or decision-making power, how might God be inviting you to be “color-brave”?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank you for empowering me to be strong and courageous. Open my eyes to see where you are inviting me to use my voice and influence. Forgive me for the times that I have turned a blind eye or judged wrongly my brothers and sisters of color. Give me your mind to act with wisdom and boldness, in Jesus’s name. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Biewen, John. 2017. “[Scene on Radio: Seeing White Series](#).” Podcast. Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, February - August 2017.

Haynes, Stephen R. 2007. [Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jim Crow and the God Who Hates

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Proverbs 6:16-19, 20:23](#)

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good (Proverbs 20:23).

REFLECTION BY REV. DARRYL FORD

While we all are familiar with the biblical truth “God is love,” we are prone to forget that God also hates. To be more specific, we are keen on remembering the things God calls abominations as long as they coincide with our own agendas and predilections. We conveniently “misremember” certain things God hates when it means we may have to give up power, privilege, and status. Sadly, this has largely been the case in majority culture churches throughout American history.

At the close of the Civil War, the U.S. Congress endeavored to even the scales in the South among ex-slaves and whites. Passing the [Fourteenth Amendment](#) granted full citizenship to slaves. Passing the [Fifteenth Amendment](#) banned racial discrimination in voting. This led to further Reconstruction policies like the [Enforcement Acts](#) passed between 1870 and 1875. These acts protected African Americans’ right to vote in elections, hold office, and serve on juries, as well as receive equal protection under the law. This also meant that federal troops would be sent into the South to enforce these laws and protect African Americans from being harassed at the voting booths by white supremacist groups, like the Ku Klux Klan.

The early results were encouraging, especially in Southern states like South Carolina. Because African Americans in South Carolina vastly outnumbered whites, the newly enfranchised voters were able to elect a majority of African American representatives to the state assembly. Many of these legislators worked to rewrite the state constitution and pass laws ensuring aid for public education, as well as greater equality for all.

This success was short-lived, however. After the Presidential election in 1876 and the Hayes Compromise of 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes (who had lost the popular vote to Samuel Tilden) agreed to remove federal troops from Southern states in exchange for the electoral votes necessary to win the presidency. This effectively ended Reconstruction and ushered in the Jim Crow Era. Ex-slaves were

now at the mercy of their former masters. Laws making brown and black people the equals of whites were seen as absurd, and even *un-Christian*. In 1883, the Supreme Court agreed with these sentiments and deemed the [Civil Rights Act of 1875](#) unconstitutional. That would be the last civil rights legislation signed until 1957.

Jim Crow laws quickly supplanted the acts passed during Reconstruction. These policies, rooted in white supremacy, appealed to whites afraid of losing employment opportunities and economic power to blacks. Politicians exploited this fear to win the votes of poor white workers. Newspapers fed into the biases of white readers by embellishing or even inventing black crimes.

These discriminatory laws touched every aspect of life. In South Carolina, black and white textile workers were prohibited from working in the same room, entering through the same door, or gazing out of the same window. Blacks increasingly became un-hirable with several unions passing rules to exclude them. In parts of Richmond, Virginia, one could not live on certain streets unless the majority of residents were people that the individual could marry. This worked to keep blacks out of white communities because it was illegal to marry outside of one's race.

In 1914, Texas had six towns in which blacks could not live. Mobile, Alabama passed a Jim Crow curfew stating that Blacks could not leave their homes after 10:00 p.m. Soon, signs marked “whites only” or “colored” hung over doors, ticket windows, and drinking fountains. Georgia designated black and white parks. Oklahoma designated black and white phone booths.

Segregation became the *modus operandi* for prisons, hospitals, and orphanages, as well as schools. Black and white students had to use separate textbooks in North Carolina. In Florida, the books couldn't even be stored together. Atlanta courts kept two Bibles—one for black witnesses and one for whites.

This begs the question: “*where was the church?*” The church in America was largely silent and complicit. Many of these policies were written and consented to by avid church-goers. Pastors of congregations preached sermons on the Christian argument for segregation. They warned that integration was against God's will and against the laws of Scripture.

Today, we need to pose a similar question: “*where is the church?*” As believers, our mission is to convey the heart and mission of God to restore both broken people and broken systems. This means we love what God loves and hate what God hates. In Jesus's condemnation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23, it is evident that he cares about both individuals as well as systems of oppression. If Jesus cares about both, then we are to care about both also.

Sadly, it often seems when addressing the issue of racial injustice, many white Americans truncate the Gospel into one [focused on individuals](#), and ignore its structural elements. For many, racism is attributed to those who burn crosses or participate in lynchings. For many white Americans, these types of occurrences become the rubric by which they evaluate racial injustice for themselves as well as the country. If they aren't practicing similar types of overt and violent acts against African Americans, the belief is that they can't be racist or racially insensitive. For them, racism can be relegated to an unfortunate relic from a dark past that occasionally makes intermittent cameo appearances. Ironically, these beliefs serve as the bedrock of structural racism—which is more insidious than the blatant racism of Jim Crow America—because it's shrouded in ignorance. These beliefs are held by

grandmothers and grandfathers, moms and dads, brothers and sisters, friendly neighbors, pastors, and congregants. By all conventional standards, these are “good” people. Yet, by embracing the idea of individual racism at the expense of structural racism, these people ignore the cumulative and disparate effects these policies have had on African American communities.

The heart of God is against unjust measures. God hates unequal scales. He calls it an abomination. To have the heart of God is to say that image bearers are not just worthy of freedom, but worthy of friendship—and even better, worthy of being family. May God give us a hatred for the things that he hates, and a deep and abiding love for those that he loves.

RESPONSE

Take some time to consider the difference between individual and structural racism. How does your heart align with God’s heart concerning unjust measures? Where have you sensed discomfort or conviction as you read today’s reflection? Write down your thoughts, questions, and feelings. Ask God to align your heart with His.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, I repent. I confess to You the areas of my blindness and lack of concern about unjust systems that You hate. I have loved what You do not love, and I have not hated what You hate. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Noll, Mark A. 2008. [*God and Race in American Politics: A Short History*](#). Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Voting Rights

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Matthew 5:43-48](#)

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

REFLECTION BY MAX FINBERG

African Americans have done an amazing job of following Christ's command to love their enemies. In his timeless sermon on [loving your enemies](#), the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached, "The darkness of racial injustice will be dispelled only by the light of forgiving love" (King 1963d, 50). Similarly, the voting rights activist and church lady extraordinaire, [Fannie Lou Hamer](#), said of loving ones enemies, "I feel sorry for anybody that could let hate wrap them up. Ain't no such thing as I can hate anybody and hope to see God's face" (Walser 1973).

Nineteenth-century German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck once dismissed the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount to politics (Moran 2011, 145). However, black people have been proving him wrong since arriving on these shores. Through strategically embracing non-violence, the civil rights movement (and its predecessors and successors) have been able to put loving one's enemy into practice in very political ways, including in the service of voting rights.

White people have denied Black people complete or easy access to the ballot since the founding of the nation. The [Fourteenth Amendment](#), ratified following the Civil War, made formerly enslaved people (that is, men over age 21) full citizens and bestowed on them the right to vote. A few years later, the [Fifteenth Amendment](#) made it even clearer, "The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." But it was almost a century later, in 1964, that the [Twenty-Fourth Amendment](#) was ratified, ensuring the right of citizens to vote without having to pay a poll tax. That was one of the many obstacles that was erected to prevent African Americans from exercising their hard-won right to vote. Others included having to accurately guess the number of beans in a jar or bubbles in a bar of soap, recite passages from state constitutions, or pass literacy tests (usually only required of those who couldn't vote before 1866). The passage of the [1965 Voting Rights Act](#)—following Bloody Sunday and the famous march from Selma to Montgomery—is a familiar chapter in the civil rights movement. (See

interactive voting rights [timeline](#).)

While direct disenfranchisement is not legal, indirect disenfranchisement has been on the rise. In 2013, the [Supreme Court](#) revoked part of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, providing greater freedom for states to enact discriminatory policies. This has resulted in increased photo ID laws that disproportionately affect minorities, senior citizens, and low-income individuals; purges of voter rolls; and state laws that prevent felons from voting, after already having served their sentence. According to the non-partisan [Brennan Center for Justice](#), 25 states have enacted measures to restrict access to voting since 2010. And, many of these measures disproportionately [target](#) African Americans.

In light of recent events and allegations around voting suppression and fraud, we need to pray for this fundamental aspect of our democracy. As the Lord instructed Peter in Acts 10, the Good News is available to everyone. Let us pray and act to make that the case for voting in our democracy, especially to those who have been historically denied this right.

RESPONSE

Read [James 2:1-9](#) (below) in light of racism and voting discrimination. Then, consider how God might be calling you to advocate for those who are being disenfranchised.

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man... 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 2:1-9).

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I confess my desperate need for you. I esteem others for their status and wealth, while you esteem those who are poor in spirit. You uphold the cause of the oppressed and afflicted. Teach me to love as you love. Teach me to love without partiality. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Thurman, Howard. 1996. [Jesus and the Disinherited](#). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Voices of Protest and Voices of Reason

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Isaiah 1:18](#)

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

REFLECTION BY REV. SYLVESTER “TEE” TURNER

Coming off the Martin Luther King, Jr. day celebration, I began to reflect on his “[I Have a Dream](#)” speech, given in Washington, DC, on August 28, 1963, at the Poor People March on Washington. In his speech, he states that:

“In a sense we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes black men, as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned” (King 1963a).

Since he was speaking of the under-served and under-protected citizens, I would change “her citizens of color” to her under-served citizens. The thing that most amazed me by this quote and speech is that it was a voice of protest as well as a voice of reason. He was speaking to the promise of this great country and about the neglect shown to others in this great country. However, he knew that we could rise to the occasion as a nation, as he stated in his speech, “again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force” (King 1963). He was reminding us that our spiritual voices should be as active as our body and mind in addressing the issues of today.

Both voices are relevant and important. However, it seems that there is little balance between them in our communities, in our nation, and, sadly, in the body of Christ. We are called not only to be reconciled with one another and to stand for righteousness, but also to reason. As Isaiah 1:18 petitions us: “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” Reasoning has become a lost art in this day and age. You are either an ally or a foe, which leaves many to ask the question: *whose side is God on?* I am sure his answer would be: *the one who loves their neighbor as they love themselves.*

The good news is that at this time of social, political, and religious unrest it is the perfect time for the people of God to be a voice that speaks truth to power. Not my truth—not a truth that supports a position that I favor—but a truth of God’s word that breaks the bonds of oppression and injustice. We are in a

time where we cannot sit on the sidelines and allow inequality to go uncontested. The prophets of old spoke against any and all injustices that were aimed at the people of God and the principles of God's word, regardless of who was in power. Just as Moses spoke to Pharaoh, Nathan also spoke to David. As men and women of God, we have to be willing to be voices crying in the wilderness, unifying our voices until righteousness rolls down like a mighty rushing wind.

Let us become God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led. By doing so, we will be able to live out our pledge of being "one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

RESPONSE

Ask God to show you how he might be inviting you to be both a voice of reason and of protest in the battle against racial injustice. Perhaps your invitation is to first "reason" with those who share a different perspective or life experience—pursue a family member, friend, colleague, or neighbor who does not share your views on race. Engage in difficult conversations, seeking first to understand, then to be understood. Practice the art of "reasoning together."

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, teach me to reason well. Give me your heart, your perspective, and your voice. Help me to speak when you are speaking, and to be silent when you are silent. Let my life be a living testimony of reconciliation. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

King, Martin Luther Jr. and James Melvin Washington. 1986. [*A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*](#) New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Sunday Feast: Revival & The Black Church

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Here I am, Lord. With this breath that you've given me, I lift my voice to you. As the deer pants for water so my soul longs for you. My whole being thirsts for you. You are my shelter and sustenance. You are the word made flesh that dwells among us. I want to feast on your truth today. Come, fill me afresh. Let the wellspring of my heart pour out more of your goodness, your compassion, and your justice. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Psalm 85:6](#)

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

REFLECTION BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

Revival came out of slavery.

One of the hallmarks of the black church is “revival meetings.” Historically, they’d last for seven days or more depending on how the Spirit was leading. In modern times, they are more commonly held for two to three days over a weekend. No matter the length or the venue, the cry of revival is found in these few but powerful words: *Lord, revive us, again!*

This is the cry of a people for whom those words were desperate. Slavery and racism threatened to vanquish black people. It was in many ways successful in crushing the God-given sense of *worthiness* in the souls of black folks. But the revival cry—to be revived, in soul, before the God who made them—was ultimately a cry to worship.

Worship is about reflecting the image of God. If you are made in the image of God, then you are found worthy to offer your worship. You can cry out with great hope and power: *Lord, revive us, again!*

In this sense, it is worth considering why the children of Israel departed Egypt. Why were they set free? Yes, slavery is wrong—and God detested it. Yes, they were suffering—and God was grieved by it. Yes, they were being destroyed—and God was moved to rescue them because of it. But God rescued his people for one primary reason: to set them free to worship him.

I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered My covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians ([Exodus 6:5-7](#)).

Why does God emancipate his people? Why has he come to set us free literally and spiritually? Why did God send his Son to die on a cross for us? The answer is: so that we might know him in this most intimate encounter of worship. We were made for this communion—to behold with faces unveiled

the glory of God, and to be transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another ([2 Corinthians 3:17](#)).

He has restored our worthiness as human beings—black and white—to look into the face of the Most Holy One. And so, we cry out: revive us, again! This prayer of the black church for centuries of revival is also the prayer of Jesus over us today. It is the reason for this Lenten season. Christ came, and died, and gave us his Spirit so that we would be found worthy to worship a holy and just God.

So, let the church say amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Smith, Yolanda Y. 2008. "[The Bible in Song: Reclaiming African American Spirituals](#)." *Reflections*, (Spring). New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Discussion Questions

1. Watch this brief TED Talk by Melody Hobson on what it takes to be “color-brave.” What thoughts or new insights surfaced for you? Are there any experiences she mentioned to which you can relate? Discuss your feedback and impressions.
2. In your positions of influence or decision-making, how might God be inviting you to be “color-brave” in your environment?
3. On day four, we learned about individual and structural racism? Were there any new insights that you found personally challenging or convicting? Split into pairs and take five minutes to share with each other. Then, share with the group.
4. How can the group pray for you this week?

MASS INCARCERATION
FOSTERING
FAMILY FROM SLAVERY TO CONVICT LEASING
LEGALIZED LYNCHING AND THE DEATH PENALTY
THE REDEMPTION OF
CULTURAL IDENTITY
SUNDAY FEAST: REBUILDING WITH DUST
WEEK FOUR: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
THE HUMAN FACE OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

week four

From Slavery to Convict Leasing

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Leviticus 19:36](#), [Proverbs 20:23](#), [Micah 6:11](#)

You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (Leviticus 19:36).

Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good (Proverbs 20:23).

Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights? (Micah 6:11)

REFLECTION BY TED HADDOCK

After the Civil War, Southern states adopted “[black codes](#),” based on former slave codes. These laws aimed to severely restrict the lives of the newly freed slaves and maintain them as a cheap labor source. The codes effectively restricted access to employment for African Americans, while also criminalizing unemployment under vagrancy laws. If arrested for vagrancy and unable to pay the fine, freed blacks were [leased](#) to pay the debt. (See [illustration](#)). This system became known as [convict leasing](#). (To learn more, explore the [interactive map](#).)

Although racialized in the post-Reconstruction South, convict leasing was not a Southern invention. It was an exploited version of the “[contract](#)” system that already existed throughout the U.S. prior to the Civil War. Within this context, prisoners were forced into compulsory labor and hired out to generate income for the state. The main difference was that “contract” prisoners were under the auspices of the warden, rather than a private employer (who often proved more brutal) as with the convict lease system.

Southern states, now devoid of free slave labor, soon embraced prisoners as an alternative, cheap workforce. Given that both state government and private business stood to benefit, vagrancy arrests escalated (primarily of African Americans, including [children](#))—especially during harvest season. This system was so profitable that Alabama’s revenue from convict leasing soared from 10 percent in 1883 (pre-abolition) to roughly 73 percent in 1898 (post-abolition) (University of Houston 2016). Furthermore, 90 percent of state and over 95 percent of county prisoners in Alabama were black (Curtin 2007).

This practice also thrived in Georgia. Historian, Douglas Blackman, explains, “The state had more forced labor slaves than ever by 1930. In excess of eight thousand men—nearly all of them black—worked in chain gangs in 116 counties. Of the 1.1 million African Americans in the state that year, approximately half lived under the direct control and force of whites—unable to move or seek employment elsewhere under threat that doing so would lead to the dreaded chain gang” (2008, 371).

Historical narratives further detail the impact of vagrancy laws and convict leasing. Bluesman, David “Honeyboy” Edwards, recalls his personal experience in Mississippi during the 1940s:

“In the South they had that vagrancy law, that hog law. I got pulled for that a number of times. That means better have a job or don’t be seen on the streets. The police pick you up in the street during the day when everybody’s working. ‘What you doing walkin’ around here? Get in the car!’ They carry you in to jail and they give you four to five days, and that time was spent out in the fields, working the cotton” (Edwards 1997, 47).

In a more violent narrative, Marc Goodnow details the brutality of convict leasing in his 1912 article, “Turpentine: Impressions of the Convicts’ Camps of Florida.” Scholar Jeffery Drobney relates Goodnow’s account, “...he [Goodnow] stood in horror and watched as a black convict was forced to be a ‘runner’ in a deadly game of hide and seek. In this weekly occurrence, which trained camp dogs to track down escaped convicts, the man was given a five-minute head start and then required to lead the dogs on a chase through the swamps and saw-palmetto thickets of the forest” (Drobney 1994, 411). Additional testimonies of individuals swept up in the convict leasing system can be found in Douglas Blackmon’s book, [Slavery by Another Name](#). In it, he describes the rampant brutality of the system and how a number of these convicts died during their times of servitude. (See [recent discovery](#) of convict leasing graveyard.)

Unlike most U.S. legislation, [vagrancy laws](#) did not require that a person do something criminal before they were arrested. Equipped with this license to arrest at will for roughly ninety years, local and state governments handpicked an unlimited source of free labor to work Southern fields, just as we had done before emancipation and the [Thirteenth Amendment](#). Eventually, during a series of court cases in the 1960s and 1970s, vagrancy and related laws were declared unconstitutional. However, the underlying convict leasing system found new ways to exploit black labor, eventually resulting in the industrial prison complex that we have today.

RESPONSE

Make time to learn more about the legacy of the convict leasing system and how it still impacts African Americans today. Consider watching the PBS documentary [Slavery by Another Name](#).

Now, take a few minutes to be silent. Allow what you have read to settle in these moments of quiet. When you are ready, join in the closing prayer below. You may want to add your own words that may have surfaced during these moments of stillness.

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you are holy and just. You love honesty and fairness. You embedded your image in all people. Yet, my culture and economy (myself including) have benefited at the expense of the poor and marginalized—both historically and presently. I don’t know what to do with this except to ask for your mercy and that your kingdom come. May your will be done; your ways established; and your honesty, generosity, and freedom openly exchanged among us—here in my hometown, in my state, and in our nation. Have mercy on me. Have mercy on us.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blackmon, Douglas. 2008. [Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II](#). New York: Doubleday.

Legalized Lynching and the Death Penalty

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 4:8-10](#)

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.”

REFLECTION BY REV. BILL HALEY

Slavery was an institution built on the premise that some lives were less valuable than others, based solely on the color of skin. Those whose lives were considered less valuable could then be treated with less concern for fairness, rights, dignity, and decency. Considered as another person’s property, slaves could be treated largely at the whim of their owner, with the owner having little fear of legal reprisal. While laws for the protection of slaves existed, they focused on safeguarding commercial interests rather than human rights, and were rarely or weakly enforced. Therefore, whipping, raping, branding, cutting, mutilating, or burning a slave were all legal. Other forms of punishment or forced compliance were also common, as well as executions for “problematic” slaves or those who tried to flee. Of course, the enslaved person had little or no legal recourse.

In the Jim Crow era, black people were killed with impunity from the late 1800s through the 1960s, frequently by lynching. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) has [documented](#) more than 4,000 [lynchings](#) of African Americans in the South between 1870 and 1950, although many more went unrecorded. (See CSDE [lynching database](#)). While there were laws in these states against murder, including such atrocities as lynching, perpetrators often went unpunished or were given light sentences. These legal practices further reinforced the idea that some lives mattered less.

Bryan Stevenson, the founder of EJI, makes the connection between lynchings and the modern-day death penalty. In [Just Mercy](#), he writes, “The racial terrorism of lynching in many ways created the modern death penalty. America’s embrace of speedy executions was, in part, an attempt to redirect the violent energies of lynching while assuring white Southerners that black men could still pay the ultimate price” (Stevenson, 299).

Statistics bear out Stevenson’s claim of racial bias in the judicial system. Although blacks comprise 13.4 percent of Americans (U.S. Census 2010), they consistently make up more than 40 percent of inmates on death row (Snell 2011; Davis & Snell 2016). Contrastingly, 95 percent of all elected prosecutors are white (Women Donors Network 2015). (View related infographics [here](#) and [here](#).)

In addition to the disproportionate number of blacks on death row, African Americans are also over-represented among those serving life in prison without parole (LWOP). A 2014 [report](#) found that 65.4 percent of prisoners serving LWOP for nonviolent offenses were black. The report showed even greater

racial disparities in some regions, revealing that “In 13 states and the federal system, the percentage of blacks serving life sentences is over 60 percent. In Georgia and Louisiana, the proportion of blacks serving LWOP sentences is as high as 73.9 and 73.3 percent, respectively. In the federal system, 71.3 percent of the 1,230 LWOP prisoners are black” (Turner and Dakwar 2014).

From slavery, through Jim Crow, to the modern system of mass incarceration, the American political and judicial system seem to demonstrate that *some lives matter less*.

RESPOND

Pray, “Lord help me to see.” Then make time to watch one of these two video of Brian Stevenson: [TEDTalk](#) (23 min) or [presentation](#) (6 min).

Talk to God about what you’ve learned and what you’ve felt, honestly expressing your feelings. You may want to learn more about the work of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) or commit to reading Bryan’s book, [Just Mercy](#).

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help me to see. Open the eyes of my understanding to see as you see. Give me new sight today. Let me come nearer to you and learn your ways that I may see, and perceive, with godliness. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Biziou, Peter, Aude Bronson-Howard, Willem Dafoe, Brad Dourif, Chris Gerolmo, Gene Hackman, Trevor Jones, Frances McDormand, and Alan Parker. 1988. [Mississippi Burning](#). Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment.

Mass Incarceration

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Leviticus 19:9-18](#)

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God. You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

REFLECTION BY REV. MIKE AITCHESON

The name “Jim Crow” incites some of the darkest moments in our country’s history. The term [originated](#) with a [caricature](#) of black people which involved a cameo of a white male in blackface. It later became a pejorative term synonymous with African Americans. As it evolved, it became the [name](#) for laws enacted in response to Reconstruction efforts, which briefly protected black freedmen’s rights. Simply put, it was legalized discrimination.

In modern times, mass incarceration of people of color is thought to be the “New Jim Crow” (albeit with clear distinctions). Currently, the United States has the largest total prison population in the world and an occupancy rate of 103.9 percent (World Prison Brief a, b). This phenomenon can be traced back to the convict leasing system, but was accelerated during the “war on drugs.”

The drug wars began in earnest in the 1980s with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. This law imposed harsh [minimum mandatory sentences](#) for non-violent, drug-related offenses—at a time when drug use was already on the decline (Tonry 1994, 25). The legislation had racial and socio-economic biases built in, such as setting disparate sentences for possession of the same drug in different forms. For example, ten-year minimums were imposed for possession of 5,000 grams of cocaine versus only 50 grams of crack, which was more prominent in poor, urban areas. Additionally, trafficking 5000 grams of cocaine carried the same sentence as only 100 grams of crack. (See crack vs. cocaine [infographic](#) and [charts](#).) This policy had racial implications because, as the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports, 88 percent of crack offenders are black (Taxy 2015). As a 2006 report explains:

“Thus, the sentencing disparities punishing crack cocaine offenses more harshly than powder cocaine offenses unjustly and disproportionately penalize African American defendants for drug trafficking comparable to that of white defendants. Compounding the problem is the fact that whites are disproportionately less likely to be prosecuted for drug offenses in the first place; when prosecuted, are more likely to be acquitted; and even if convicted, are much less likely to be sent to prison” (Vagins & McCurdy 2006, i).

Those who were among the most impacted by the drug wars and resulting legislation were overwhelmingly people of color. In the 80s, one study found that *whites composed 87 percent of drug dealers* compared to only 10 percent of blacks and 2 percent of Hispanics (Fairlie 2002). Yet, blacks were 3.6 times more likely to be arrested for selling drugs and 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug possession (Brookings, 2014). (See Washington Post article for more.) As recently as 2016, white adults (18+) [reported](#) higher rates of drug use (56 percent) compared to blacks (48 percent) and Latinos (39 percent), which is contrary to the public stereotype (CBHSQ 2017). While the [Fair Sentencing Act](#) of 2010 attempted to address the biases implicit in drug prosecution and sentencing, unfortunately, people of color are still being arrested at higher rates.

Because of the laws and policies enacted during the “war on drugs,” homes have been torn apart. Privatization of correctional institutions has further created environments where prisoner labor is exploited for commercial gain. One can hardly disagree that the need to evaluate the impact of race on our justice system remains.

RESPONSE

The God we serve loves justice and instructs us to deal with all people justly. Are we being loving neighbors if we stand idly by or promote laws that discriminate based on color or status? Consider the statistics that one in three blacks can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime. Think of these numbers in light of your black friends, relatives, or acquaintances. (Resist the temptation to think “it would never be them”). Then, consider having a conversation with this individual about the fear of unjust incarceration that he/she and his/her loved one’s experience. Make space for God to stir empathy and understanding, and to turn that compassion into meaningful action.

To learn more about these issues, consider watching the documentary [13th](#) by Ava Duvernay.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, search me and see if there be any grievous way in me. Let the light of your presence shine on me, examine, and transform me. Compassionate King, give me your heart that does not turn away in the face of suffering, nor yield to apathy, but is always moved to righteous action. Let your light so shine through me, that men and women would see my good works and give glory to you, my Father in heaven. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Alexander, Michelle. 2012. [The New Jim Crow](#). New York, NY: New Press.

Nellis, Ashley. 2016. “[The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons.](#)” *The Sentencing Project*, June 14, 2016.

The Human Face of the War on Drugs

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Luke 17:1-3](#)

And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves!...”

REFLECTION BY TED HADDOCK

Today’s reflection will continue the conversation on drug policy and mass incarceration. As mentioned yesterday, a disproportionate number of African Americans are incarcerated in federal prison on drug charges compared to white Americans.

From the 1930s through 1970, the total U.S. federal and state prisons maintained a steady population of about 200,000 inmates (The Sentencing Project 2018). In 1971, president Nixon promoted the idea that drug abuse was “public enemy number one.” Immediately, incarceration rates began to rise. In the 1980s, presidents Reagan and Bush redoubled the “war on drugs,” and in the 1990s, mandatory sentencing and “three strikes” laws took hold under President Clinton. By 2006, the [US prison population](#) exceeded 1.5 million. By 2011, forty years after the war on drugs began, more than 7.2 million Americans were either in prison, on probation, or on parole, as highlighted by [President Carter](#) (Carter 2011). (See short [video](#) on mass incarceration.)

By nearly all measures the “war on drugs” has proven a massive failure, with the explosion of the opioid epidemic, escalating budget [appropriations](#), massive incarceration of non-violent offenders on the rise, and millions of African American families absorbing the brunt of the damage. Mandatory sentencing has resulted in millions of young, non-violent African American men and women behind bars for excessive periods of time. As such, these men and women are unable to provide for their families, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and criminalization. With felony charges, these individuals are highly [unemployable](#) when they try to re-enter the labor market. Incarceration also has long-term [health consequences](#), including increased risk of anxiety, asthma, depression, diabetes, Hepatitis C, HIV, hypertension, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Similarly, the [children](#) of inmates suffer [emotional](#) distress, [economic](#) instability, and [educational](#) setbacks.

The growing opioid epidemic predominant in white communities has recently prompted policies offering rehab and medical treatment, while African Americans remain caught in the decades-long “war on drugs” and continue to bear the brand of “public enemy.” Addressing drug abuse in all its forms is a necessary public responsibility. However, those of us who have supported heavy-handed and failing drug-prevention policies (which leave African Americans and the poor at a greater disadvantage) share responsibility for the present-day chaos within our nation’s distressed [communities](#).

RESPONSE

Read the article “[When Addiction Has a White Face](#)” by Professor Ekow N. Yankah. Take five minutes of quiet time to journal what thoughts come to mind.

Catherine Hoke, founder and CEO of [Defy Ventures](#), points out that “We’re all ex-somethings. I wish we’d ask ourselves, ‘What would it be like if I was only known for the worst thing I’ve done?’ Moved by empathy, we’d recognize people for who they are today and not for the mistakes they made yesterday. Millions with criminal histories would unlock their potential” (Winter 2017). Reflect on what it would be like if you were only known for the worst thing you’ve done or left undone. How would potential employers, co-workers, or acquaintances relate to you if that’s all they knew about you?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help me to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn. Give me your heart to pray for those in prison as if I were in prison with them. Lead me to a true repentance that considers others as better than myself. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Abrams, Eve. 2017. “[The Human Stories Behind Mass Incarceration](#).” Filmed November 2017 at TEDWomen. Video, 13:15.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2015. “[The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration](#).” *The Atlantic*, October 2015.

Fostering Family

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Psalm 68:5-6](#)

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.

REFLECTION BY REV. DR. AARON GRAHAM

In Psalm 68:5-6, we are reminded that God is the one who welcomes the orphans, widows, and strangers, and ensures they are cared for as if they were Israelites themselves. The Israelites are exclusively called by God to an inclusive mission. Their spiritual health is measured by their commitment to care for the most powerless in society—the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. In verse 6, we see God is committed to not just serving prisoners, but freeing prisoners who are specifically enslaved to debt.

In the United States, there are over 100,000 children in foster care who are waiting to be adopted. These children have been removed from their biological homes for a variety of reasons and are currently in the custody of the state. They are the ones the Bible calls orphans.

Some of the challenges we face in child welfare and foster care today are rooted in the history of the enslavement of African Americans. Even today, [studies](#) show that there is a disproportionate number of African American children in foster care. In fact, they are 44 percent more likely to be placed in foster care than Caucasian children (Knott & Donovan 2010).

When we do not care for children and youth when they are young, we pay the price as a society later. Multiple studies, including some from the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), show that youth who age out of foster care are much more likely to drop out of high school, be unemployed, experience homelessness, be trafficked sexually, become pregnant at a young age, and be dependent on public assistance.

Taking up the cause of the fatherless has been the cause of the local church since the beginning. In ancient Rome, infants were often abandoned on the outskirts of the cities. The practice was called “exposing.” The child was usually unwanted because they were the wrong gender or had a disability. They were literally taken outside the city walls and left to the elements—the sun, rain, and wild animals. Christians, who were often a persecuted minority at the time, made a practice of finding these children and bringing them home, sometimes even raising them as their own.

RESPONSE

Meditate on the words from [Psalm 68:5-6](#), “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing.” You might do this by reading them slowly aloud, and pausing on a word or phrase that catches your attention. Linger

there for a moment, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through these words of life. Write down any thoughts or impressions that come to mind. When you are ready, move on to the closing prayer below.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for adopting me as your child. As you have freely and extravagantly poured out your love on me, may you empower me to do the same. Expand the capacity of my heart, oh God! Impart your love and passion for the parentless child. Open my eyes to see the children and families in crisis in my own community, and all around me. Speak to my heart, even now, and show me what you would have me to do. And then give me a willing Spirit to obey. Lord Jesus, I pray for the day when there are more families waiting to foster and adopt children than there are children waiting to be adopted. Help your church to lead the way, for your glory. In Jesus's name. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Medefind, Jedd. 2013. [*Becoming Home: Adoption, Foster Care, and Mentoring--Living Out God's Heart for Orphans*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Redemption of Cultural Identity

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Revelation 7:9-12](#)

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

REFLECTION BY ANDY CROUCH

In the midst of scenes of judgment, John sees a preview of glory, and family and nation are at the heart of it. Not only are the twelve tribes of Israel sealed with the sign of God’s redemption, but he sees people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” praising God. They have “come out of the great tribulation” ([Revelations 7:13-14](#)), and while they all wear robes of white, they represent the full diversity of humanity, rescued by the Lamb.

The story of white America is a story of assimilation—immigrants from many parts of Europe and beyond being stirred into a “melting pot” that subsumed their particular cultural heritages into a new American identity. Many white Americans have only a dim sense of their own ancestry; their forebears arrived in a “New World” that promised them a new identity cut off from the past.

Meanwhile, the violence that accompanied that arrival—the displacement and decimation of the existing peoples of the Americas and the enslavement of Africans—severed links to heritage and history, as well. Both those who could identify as “white” and those who were excluded from that kind of privilege have been cut off from their history.

This is very far from Revelation’s vision of redemption. Significantly, John sees people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Each of these categories matters. It is possible to be part of the same nation and speak a different language (for example, Spanish- and English-speaking citizens of the United States). It is possible to speak the same language but be part of different nations (citizens of Portugal and Brazil). At the final celebration of victory, none of these fine distinctions between nation, tribe, people, and language has been lost. They are all present—in a great multitude no one can count.

Is it possible that after the “great tribulation” of violence, which threatens to erase identity and memory, God will rescue all the forgotten stories of our American lives?

RESPONSE

Who are the most distant members of your family whose names you know? What was their story? Did they undergo a “great tribulation”? What is your nation, tribe, people, and language? In a journal, do your best to identify these elements of your heritage.

Then consider offering each of the following three kinds of prayers to God:

1. Thanksgiving for the ways your particular family, nation, tribe, people, and language have represented the image of God.
2. Lamentation for the suffering and loss that is part of their story.
3. Prayer for God to rescue and remember the parts of that story that have been lost, forgotten, or erased.

Give God thanks for the day when everyone—sealed in Christ, in all the fullness of their cultural inheritance—will be gathered around the throne of the Lamb.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for the promise of that glorious day when your unified church—in every tribe, nation, tongue, and people—will be gathered around the throne of the Lamb. Flood my heart with expectation. And today, give me the humility and courage to be an ambassador of reconciliation and transformation—first in my own heart and then in my family, church, and community. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Greear, J.D. 2018. “[Racial Reconciliation and Cultural Diversity in the Church](#).” *ChurchLeaders*, March 26, 2018.

Newbell, Trillia J. 2014. [United: Captured by God’s Vision for Diversity](#). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

Sunday Feast: Rebuilding With Dust

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, remember that God is nearer than the breath you breathe. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

O Lord, my God, come with the breath of Your Spirit and revive me again. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Zechariah 4:10](#)

Do not despise the day of small beginnings. The Lord rejoices to see the work begin.

REFLECTION BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

Perhaps as you've engaged this Lenten devotional over the past few weeks, your strength is waning. Perhaps you are feeling defeated or discouraged, or that the hope of redemption for such suffering is beyond reach. In these moments, we must pause to remember that redemption comes from the Spirit. *It is God who does the work of repentance. He does the work of [reconciliation](#).* It is always his work, and we are willing participants. It is not by our might, but by our willingness to allow the Spirit of Christ to be at work within us. He will break down our walls. And, he will build them up again.

Do you remember the story of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem? It was a hopeless situation. He used a crew of ragged, tired, broken people who had been living in exile. They didn't have the best material to work with. In fact, the rubble of the wall was limestone, which crumbled to the touch. They were rebuilding a wall with dust.

That's where God likes to work. Out of the dust he creates new things. They were building in the midst of naysayers and antagonists who hurled insults and threats against them:

"Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?'" ([Nehemiah 4:1-3](#)).

And they were building despite all the odds. They were not the first to attempt to rebuild the wall, but they were the first to succeed. God did a miraculous work and they restored the wall in record time, just fifty-two days ([Nehemiah 6:15](#)). *And it all began in the heart of one man who was willing to fall on his knees in repentance for a nation.* Nehemiah cried out to God with a repentant heart, and the Lord responded with great fruit from his repentance.

We are in the midst of dust and rubble in our nation. It feels like the structural walls of justice and righteousness have crumbled beneath our feet. *God is calling his church to pray.* He is beckoning us to humble ourselves, to pray, to repent and to turn from our ways that He might heal our land ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#)). And he will respond as he did with Nehemiah. He will be faithful to come and to breathe upon the works of our hands. He will strengthen our feeble knees, and build a wall of reconciliation out of our brokenness.

Come, let us rebuild from the dust together.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, come and steady our hands and hearts in your work of rebuilding. Unify us by your Spirit. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Caliri, Heather. 2017. "[Repenting of Systemic Racism: What Josiah can teach us about changing the future and repenting of the past.](#)" *Relevant Magazine*, August 17, 2017.

Discussion Questions

1. This week we explored inequalities in our justice system based on race. You were invited to watch Bryan Stevenson's Ted Talk about race and the death penalty, and to read Professor's Yankah's article "When Addiction Has a White Face." If possible, watch the TED Talk together (watch the last 5-7 minutes if time is limited). Discuss what you learned, what stood out to you, and what feelings emerged?
2. Take some time to pray together about these issues. Talk to God honestly about what you learned and how it made you feel. Ask him to help your group consider a way forward. What next step could you take in community service individually or together? What service opportunities are available in your area to support people of color in the justice system? How might you commit to praying about these issues regularly? Perhaps you'll want to write a common prayer for your group to pray together.
3. If time allows, end your time by sharing a bit about your family legacy. Who are the most distant members of your family whose names you know? What are your nation, tribe, people, and language? Thank God together for your family legacy—offer gratitude and repentance for those who have gone before you. Pray about the legacy that you want to perpetuate by your acts of repentance.
4. How would you like the group to pray for you this week?

BLESSING TO THE NATIONS
DOCTRINE OF
DISCOVERY (NON)ACCUMULATION OF WEALTH & THE RACIAL GAP
RED-LINING AND NEIGHBORHOODS BUILT BY BIAS
GENTRIFICATION:
A CALL FOR RESPONSIBLE NEIGHBORING
SUNDAY FEAST: ARISE & SHINE
WEEK FIVE: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO RACE & DEEDS ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Blessing to the Nations

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding, and compelling me to walk in the good works that you prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Galatians 3:15-18](#)

To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

REFLECTION BY REV. MIKE AITCHESON

Abram (who was renamed Abraham by God) was called to leave his father’s house and his country to follow the true and living God. His calling was accompanied by covenantal promises and a commissioning to be a blessing to the nations ([Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-9](#)). These promises find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, Abraham’s “offspring,” who opens the way of salvation to the nations. Christ, thereby, increases the number of Abraham’s promised descendants and grants entrance into the heavenly promised land to which he, Abraham, looked (Hebrews 11:8).

A Christian nation or nation with many Christian people is and will probably always be a subject of discussion regarding America’s religious fabric. Whatever your position, it’s hard to deny that God has blessed America in myriad of ways, despite its controversial beginning and development. Notwithstanding, the promise made to Abraham was for the ethnic Israelites until the true Israel, Jesus Christ, arrived. Now God’s promises and commissioning to be a blessing are directed to his church, the new Israel, anywhere in the world.

America, with all its faults, has had a strong Christian presence. Though parts of the church were involved in the proliferation of slavery, many prominent congregations and theologians spoke out against it. Even now, many denominations are recognizing and speaking out against racial injustice. (See the Presbyterian church of America’s overtures [one](#), [four](#), and [eleven](#) on racism, repentance, and reconciliation). For decades, Christians have also championed wellness for the whole person through important nonprofit organizations, like [Goodwill](#), [Salvation Army](#), and the [YMCA](#) to name a few.

This Christian ethic resounded through the civil rights movement under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This was during a time when many Christians brought reproach on the name of Jesus by refusing to be a blessing and by instead being silent about injustices against blacks, or by proactively denying justice. [King challenged America](#) to live out the true meaning of its creed, found in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal”

(Jefferson et al., 1776).

The Christian world view, which holds that every human was created in the Imago Dei—the “Image of God”—cascades through such a creed and the courageous call to observe it. Under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians are blessed to be a blessing. Commands like love your neighbor, do good to all especially those in the household of God, and even to seek the welfare of our enemy, reinforce this high calling. (For more, see Howard Thurmond’s [*Jesus and the Disinherited*](#), particularly the chapter on love.)

As Christians, our life starts with the true and living God who called us into a covenant relationship with himself. We must recognize that God lovingly gave the greatest blessing of salvation in his son, Jesus Christ, and has generously lavished us with any other material or talent that we possess. With this in mind, Christians see their lives not as instruments that are directed downward and inward, but upward and outward, following the pattern of our Savior. This means that we who have been blessed by God seek to mediate his blessing to others in any righteous way possible so that others might come to know the greatest blessing of salvation in Jesus Christ and in turn be a blessing to others.

RESPONSE

As you continue your fast, consider how you might “mediate God’s blessing to others” today. In a large or small way, how might you give of your time, prayers, or resources to support the work of racial reconciliation and justice? Ask God to lead you in researching where he might be specifically calling you to be a blessing. Be courageous in extending the blessing that God has given you to a hurting world around you.

(For an example of how one denomination has recognized and repented of racism, see PCA overtures [one](#), [four](#), and [eleven](#) with recommendations for moving forward.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Oh Lord, help me to realize that all I own is on lease from you. As you have so richly blessed me, make me a blessing also. Make my life a living testimony of your love. Let me extend the blessing of your salvation to those around me today. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

King, Martin Luther. 1958. [*Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*](#). Victor Gollancz: London.

Doctrine of Discovery

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding, and compelling me to walk in the good works that you prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 1:26-28](#)

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

REFLECTION BY REV. DAVID BAILEY

In Genesis, God gives a mandate to humanity to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth. It’s a mandate to seek the flourishing of the world. This command reflects the creative nature of God. The next instruction that God gives Adam is to cultivate and maintain the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 1-2](#)). Creating, planting, and cultivating are actions to which God has called all of humanity—and not just a few.

The [Doctrine of Discovery](#) interpreted the mandate to “subdue the earth” as applying to Europeans exclusively. Only they could exercise the God-given authority to exercise dominion over the earth. First articulated in a [Papal Bull](#), issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, the Doctrine of Discovery stated that any land not inhabited by Christians was available to be “discovered,” claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers. This doctrine also became the basis of all European claims in the Americas including the United States’ western expansion. In the U.S., the Supreme Court held in the 1823 case *Johnson v. McIntosh* “that the principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to New World lands.” Most significantly, under this doctrine, Europeans had rights over the land they “discovered” even when other people were [occupying](#) the land, who “lost their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations.”

The practice of this doctrine is the primary reason for wealth accumulation by European descendants in America and other Western nations. Sir Walter Raleigh said in 1615, “Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself” (Raleigh 1829, 325.) He was right!

Slavery ended in the United States in 1865; but shortly after slavery, Jim Crow laws became the mechanism to limit African American freedom. These laws severely restricted their ability to engage fully in the flourishing of their own community.

Home and land ownership is one of the primary ways that wealth is accumulated in the United States,

and it wasn't until the 1969 Fair Housing Laws were passed that African Americans were technically able to purchase a home wherever they desired. However, during the 1970s, the practice of "[redlining](#)" was common in the house appraisal and mortgaging industry. Redlining was the practice of rating the house values according to a racial hierarchy that gave higher house values to white neighborhoods over black or immigrant neighborhoods. These practices did not become illegal until the passing of the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977.

Although black people have been in the United States since 1619, it wasn't until almost the 1980s that black people could legally purchase home or land and have the potential of fully reaping the economic benefits of ownership like their white brothers and sisters.

RESPONSE

In [Leviticus 19:9-10](#), the people of God are instructed that when they harvest the land they own, they shouldn't consume all of it, but leave a portion of the harvest of their land for the poor and foreigner. This Levitical law is called gleaning. Spend some time journaling, asking God what it would look like if you were to practice "gleaning." And ask yourself the question, "How can I live in a way that the poor and foreigner can benefit from the fruit of my labor?"

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank you for calling us to repentance. Forgive us for wrongfully standing in the way of your promise for the fruitfulness of all be people made in your image. Thank you for the changes that have been made to right this wrong. We ask you to breathe on our right actions and multiply the fruit of repentance toward good works in your church, and in our nation. Show me how to practice "gleaning" and generous stewardship for the benefit of the poor and oppressed. I yield to your guidance. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gordon, Wayne and John Perkins. 2013. [*Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development*](#). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Natelli, Michael. 2018. "[What You Need to Know about Redlining and Gentrification](#)." *The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission*, September 5, 2018.

(Non)Accumulation of Wealth & The Racial Wealth Gap

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding, and compelling me to walk in the good works that you prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Deuteronomy 15:12-15](#)

If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.

REFLECTION BY REV. BILL HALEY

“Economists estimate that up to 80 percent of lifetime wealth accumulation depends on intergenerational transfers” (Adelman 2003).

When your ancestors were denied the possibility of any sort of ownership whatsoever because they were owned under slavery, it makes it impossible to transfer wealth to your next generation. When slavery ended, the possibility of ownership became more plausible, but still next to impossible because of many restrictions of the law. For instance, in 1870, if you were black, the business licensing fee just to start a business was \$100 (a lot of money in those days). If you were white, there were no fees at all.

Most wealth is accumulated and passed on through the transfer of housing and land. If for centuries, you were denied access to property ownership, you have nothing to transfer. And then if for a century, it was difficult to own a house because of mortgage restrictions based on your race. Additionally, if most of the housing that was available to you was of a lesser value because of location or quality, you will have very little money to pass on to your children. ([Watch](#) video on housing and the racial wealth gap.)

This has been the experience of black Americans. White Americans have had centuries of a head start to accumulate wealth and pass it on to the next generation. As an example, the producers of *Race: The Power of Illusion* compare their own [backgrounds](#):

[Our stories] show the way in which those policies in the past helped create conditions for the future...I [white] have three to four times the net worth of Cornelius [black], even though for 20 years we have been working literally next to each other, making the same amount of money. It's certainly not because I am a more savvy stock investor, I assure you. It's because of the way in which I was able to inherit from my parents opportunities to get a down payment for my own home, for example, [and] the money to go to college. All of this was possible...because of the appreciation in their home” (Oliver 2003, 18-19).

It was only the Fair Housing Act of 1969 that finally and legally made it the case that any property was available to any American. Black Americans have had very little time to take advantage of compound interest, rising property values, or retirement funds that grow over decades.

This leads to a “racial wealth gap.” According to a recent [report](#) in 2015, the median household income for a black household was \$35,400, whereas for a white household it was \$60,250 (Luhby 2015). This may not seem like much, but the median wealth of those same households was \$11,030 for a black family, compared to \$134,230 for a white family. These [statistics](#) show that about 73 percent of white families own homes compared to 45 percent of black families (Shin 2015). Furthermore, the white homes have median values of \$85,800 compared to \$50,000 for a black family in 2011. In January 2016, [the gap](#) was even higher.

There are many reasons for these disparities today, but in significant part, they go all the way back to slavery, on which our country was founded.

RESPONSE

To understand how this dynamic operated, particularly related to housing, commit to reading Ta-Nehesi Coates’ landmark article in [The Atlantic](#), “The Case for Reparations.” To learn what can be done to address this gross inequality, see “10 Proposals for Eliminating the Racial Wealth Gap” in [Forbes](#) magazine.

Then, think about the difference that generational wealth has made in your life and how you’ve been blessed by that freedom. Think about those whose lives are affected now because their ancestors didn’t enjoy that freedom. Is there any way you can take some of the benefits you enjoy and try to make that right, even if it’s a token? Figure out what it should be, pray about how you might offer it, and then offer it with great prayer that God would remove the racial wealth gap in our country.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the blessings you have given me. Those that I have worked to acquire, and those I have received as an inheritance. Show me how I might offer what I’ve been given as an act of repentance. Use me and my small offering to remove the racial wealth gap in this nation. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Traub, Amy, Catherine Ruetschlin, Laura Sullivan, Tatjana Meschede, Lars Dietrich, and Thomas Shapiro. 2016. “[The Racial Wealth Gap: Why Policy Matters](#).” *Demos and Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP)*, June 21, 2016.

Redlining and Neighborhoods Built By Bias

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding, and compelling me to walk in the good works that you prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Proverbs 22:7](#), [Ezekiel 22:29](#)

The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender (Proverbs 22:7).

The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice (Ezekiel 22:29).

REFLECTION BY REV. BEN HOYER

Power is not neutral. It tends toward corruption. Throughout the story of Scripture, God's people aren't exempt from that corruption. Yet, Scripture is consistent in its condemnation of the abuse of power. When Ezekiel speaks on God's behalf to Israel, he condemns their disregard and abuse of the marginalized. The people of God, regardless of cultural norms, are always called to affirm human dignity and live generously.

It may not be surprising that a country of people capable of brutal slavery would also carry enough racism to prevent equitable [access](#) to home ownership, but it is alarming to see how systematically and universally African Americans have been [excluded](#) from homeownership. Ta-Nehisi Coates explains:

“From the 1930s through the 1960s, black people across the country were largely cut out of the legitimate home-mortgage market through means both legal and extralegal... Their efforts were buttressed by the federal government. In 1934, Congress created the Federal Housing Administration. The FHA insured private mortgages, causing a drop in interest rates and a decline in the size of the down payment required to buy a house. But... the FHA had adopted a system of maps that rated neighborhoods according to their perceived stability. On the maps, [green areas](#), rated ‘A,’ indicated ‘in demand’ neighborhoods that, as one appraiser put it, lacked ‘a single foreigner or Negro.’ These neighborhoods were considered excellent prospects for insurance. Neighborhoods where black people lived were rated ‘D’ and were usually considered ineligible for FHA backing. They were colored in red. Neither the percentage of black people living there nor their social class mattered. Black people were viewed as a contagion. Redlining went beyond FHA-backed loans and spread to the entire mortgage industry, which was already rife with racism, excluding black people from most legitimate means of obtaining a mortgage” (Coates 2014).

Without hyperbole, we can say that large, racially monolithic communities were strategically engineered. Furthermore, discriminatory hiring practices colluded with discriminatory mortgage practices to produce high concentrations of poor in distinct city neighborhoods. We are still living with the consequences of that [collusion](#) today.

RESPONSE

Spend a few minutes in silence. As you've engaged with this time of fasting, consider the Holy Spirit's work to faithfully produce the fruit of repentance within you. When you are ready, consider praying the [collect](#) for social justice below.

CLOSING PRAYER

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, especially mine, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatred cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gross, Terry. 2017. "[A 'Forgotten History' Of How the U.S. Government Segregated America.](#)" *National Public Radio (NPR)*, May 3, 2017.

Rothstein, Richard. 2018. [*The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*](#). New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Gentrification: A Call for Responsible Neighboring

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding, and compelling me to walk in the good works that you prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Jeremiah 29:7](#)

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

REFLECTION BY REV. DARRYL FORD

In 2014, the United Nations [reported](#) that for the first time in history more people live in urban areas than in rural areas. Fifty-four percent of the world's population live in cities. This is increasingly the case in the United States. With desegregation, as well as the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Fair Housing Act (1968), urban sprawl and white flight from the city led to an exodus into newly created suburbs (also referred to as 'exurbs'). During those times, living in the city was viewed as the bottom rung of the economic ladder. The inner cities were where the rings of industry (downtown) existed. The cities were where immigrants and the working class resided. To progress upward, people were expected to move out to wealthier suburbia.

Today, in a [reversal](#) of those sensibilities, more people are finding cities desirable as they undergo what journalist Alan Ehrenhalt calls a "[demographic inversion](#)" (2013). More people who can afford to live where they want are choosing cities. Minorities, who have primarily resided in city neighborhoods, are now being supplanted by those who differ from them both racially and socioeconomically.

The general term for the influx of wealthier people into an existing urban neighborhood is gentrification. This also brings with it related increases in rent and property values, as well as changes in the district's character and culture. On the surface, this appears to be a [good thing](#). Many studies show a drastic reduction in crime as well as increases in property values. If the rubric by which we evaluate a community's development is contingent upon these factors, then one would surmise that gentrification is a success. The issue isn't whether or not gentrification is good or evil. The question should be: *for whom is gentrification a success?*

As redeemed image bearers of our creator, we are called to uphold the mission of our creator— to seek the peace and prosperity of the city. But what does that actually mean? This call isn't to care for the land mass of the city and not the inhabitants therein. We are called to seek the welfare of its citizens. This means that responsible neighboring should be characterized by the following.

1. *Humility*

In order for those from a majority culture (who are moving into a predominantly minority urban community) to be seen as helpful and not hurtful, a posture of superiority must be identified and

rooted out. Newcomers can't reflect that of a colonizing adventurer who has arrived to civilize and save the community. This isn't the heart of a good neighbor. A responsible neighbor exchanges the pronouns "those" and "them" for "we" and "us." It is in this spirit of humility that we can lament together with our neighbors about how peace and prosperity have been precluded for them.

2. Collaboration

Gentrification doesn't have to be a net loss for those who didn't leave if newcomers move with a sense of obligation to learn and build relationships with existing residents. This means when moving into a neighborhood, identify stakeholders. Ask the question "what are these neighbors doing?" or "what do they need?" If you move into a gentrifying neighborhood, and your first desire is to see a Pilates studio and a coffee shop built, it may be time to subordinate your agenda to your neighbors' more pressing concerns—possibly reducing police brutality and improving housing and education. This means that both the gentrifiers and the gentrified coalesce in communities where trust is engendered and alternatives can be created.

RESPONSE

While the inevitability of gentrification is readily apparent, the responsibility of Christian neighbors is to mitigate its effects on the community's ability to flourish. We strive for this imperfectly, but as believers we cling to a hope of the complete restoration of all things. In a world riddled with brokenness and inequity, the call to seek peace and prosperity is a signpost of a perfectly whole and just kingdom to come.

In the words of E.M. Forster in [*A Room with a View*](#), "We cast a shadow on something wherever we stand, and it is no good moving from place to place to save things; because the shadow always follows. Choose a place where you won't do harm—yes, choose a place where you won't do very much harm, and stand in it for all you are worth, facing the sunshine" (1908).

You might live in or near a city that is experiencing gentrification. Your place of residence is not a mistake; rather it is *an invitation to partner with God* in the work He's doing in your neighborhood. Spend some time meditating on the words from [Jeremiah 29:7](#), pray and ask God how you might seek the welfare of your city.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for my home. Thank you for the neighborhood to which you've sent me. Give me your insight to know how you want me to serve here. Teach me to pray and to seek the welfare of my city. Stir compassion and clarity in my heart for the people negatively impacted by gentrification. And give us divinely inspired wisdom to cause the inhabitants of these places to prosper in every way. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Fayyad, Abdallah. 2017. "[The Criminalization of Gentrifying Neighborhoods](#)." *The Atlantic*, December 20, 2017.

Ogbu, Liz. "[What if Gentrification was about Healing Communities instead of Displacing Them?](#)" Published April 12, 2018. Video, 15:01.

A Christian Response to Race & Deeds Across Difference

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding, and compelling me to walk in the good works that you prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [1 John 4:7-8](#)

Let us love one another, for love is of God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

REFLECTION BY REV. DR. KENDRICK CURRY

Before Baltimore, Charleston, Minneapolis, and DC. Before Freddie Gray's death, nine casualties at Mother Emmanuel AME church, the Castile murder, and Terrance Sterling's slaying. Before all of the recent marches and cries for justice in the nation. Before it all, in 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. raised the question, "Where do we go from here: chaos or community?" (King 1967). Today, we have seemingly chosen chaos over the beloved community.

In 1967, Dr. King raised questions and gave answers, which are still on target today:

"Why is equality so assiduously avoided? Why does white America delude itself, and how does it rationalize the evil it retains? The majority of white Americans consider themselves sincerely committed to justice for the Negro. They believe that American society is essentially hospitable to fair play and to steady growth toward a middle-class Utopia embodying racial harmony. But unfortunately, this is a fantasy of self-deception and comfortable vanity. Overwhelmingly America is still struggling with irresolution and contradictions... Laws are passed in a crisis mood after a Birmingham or a Selma, but no substantial fervor survives the formal signing of legislation. As the nation passes from opposing extremist behavior to the deeper and more pervasive elements of equality, white America reaffirms its bonds to the status quo" (1967).

These questions of King's still loom. How can black America and white America become neighbors? How can we move intentionally toward the "deeper and more pervasive elements of equality" that must exist between neighbors? What does it take to get over the "fantasy of self-deception" to deal with the inner conflict which is wedded to the status quo, so that we can embody racial harmony and be the beloved community?

The familiar parable of the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:29-37](#)) is one Scriptural passage which aids white and black Christians in becoming the beloved community. An upstart lawyer asked Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" In my imagination, Jesus tells a parable: A certain [Black] man was beaten and left for dead traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. The priest and the Levite—symbols of authority and power—pass on the other side. (We realize that he is unclean according to the Levitical law, but he has been beaten and left for dead. He can't breathe!) An immigrant of mixed heritage from Samaria is the one who cares for the beaten, half-dead brother. An immigrant even puts the beaten, almost-dead one on his animal,

pays for the hospital stay at the inn, and tells the innkeeper to bill him for the rest when he returns. So, who is the neighbor? Clearly, the immigrant Samaritan.

How do whites and blacks become neighbors? First, the Samaritan teaches us that we must develop a “double-consciousness” hermeneutic, or interpretation. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois defined double-consciousness saying:

“The Negro is a sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois [1903] 2008).

So we—as the Samaritan did for his beaten, half-dead brother—must first view life through the lens of the other and then respond to promote healing. We must intentionally move from powerlessness to power, from the underside to the topside, from poor to the rich, rather than the traditional top-down approach.

Second, we must develop a language to communicate with the other. While we don’t know how the Samaritan communicated with the wounded brother, what is clear is that he switched code —verbally and perhaps nonverbally—across race, culture, and maybe even power so that a need could be met. Can we develop a common language that enables us to communicate as brothers and sisters for the common good? Is there a way for the black and white beloved in Christ to appreciate our cultural distinctions—language, music, etc.—and be truly multicultural rather than being multicolored and forced to cater to the dominant culture?

RESPONSE

To have a Christian response to race, we must embrace the call to see the other and then respond and change our speech so that we are culturally sensitive to the other. Then, we shall see the glory of the coming of the Lord because we have embodied [1 John 4:7-8,12](#): “Let us love one another, for love is of God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” So beloved, we have an urgent choice today: shall we choose love of other and deeds across difference or shall we choose hate and violent co-annihilation? What if...we choose love?

Consider your church or work environment. Is it multicultural or multicolored? Take time to observe, journal, and pray about your observations. How might God be encouraging the fruit of repentance—a change of thinking—in that context?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, open my eyes to see what you see, and teach me to love as you love. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Perkins, John and Karen Waddles. 2018. *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

Sunday Feast: Arise & Shine

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, breathe in the promise that God is ever-present. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your abiding presence. Increase my awareness of your presence leading, guiding and compelling me to walk in the good works that You prepared for me ahead of time. You are faithful. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Isaiah 60:1-2](#)

Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

REFLECTION BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

In the face of great adversity, the church arose. Though the enormity of the task to right the wrongs of systemic racial and wealth inequalities seems hopeless, it is not. We are not without hope. God has called his church to arise and do the work of reconciliation, and God is equipping us to do it.

The days that you've committed to this Lenten devotion are evidence of the fact that God is reminding his church of its allegiance to him, above all else. He is reminding us of the first-fruit of repentance, returning to him and aligning our hearts with what concerns his heart.

In [Stride Toward Freedom](#) by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he reminds us of our mandate in the midst of societal crises of justice.

"The church too must face its historic obligation in this crisis. In the final analysis, the problem of race is not a political but a moral issue...It has always been the responsibility of the church to broaden horizons, challenge the status quo, and break the mores when necessary...The church must remind its worshipers that man finds greater security in devoting his life to the eternal demands of the Almighty God than in giving his ultimate allegiance to the transitory demands of man. The church must continually say to Christians, 'Ye are a colony of heaven.' True, man has a dual citizenry. He lives both in time and in eternity; both in heaven and on earth. But he owes his ultimate allegiance to God" (1958).

In midst of the brutality of racism and oppression endured by [black Christians](#) in America, the church largely remains silent. Until, we are not anymore. God begins to shine his light on individual hearts, and they respond. And we begin to see change—the church arises to its calling as champions of justice and righteousness.

It's interesting that the Scripture says to arise and shine for *your* light has come. It is both an individual and a communal call to arise. They are not independent of one another. They are in fact interdependent. One must be personally ignited to arise. The greatest movements in church history were most often ignited because individual hearts responded. It only takes a "faintly burning wick" ([Isaiah 42:3](#)) to ignite the fire of repentance in the heart of the church. God is fanning the flames and they will not be quenched.

A bruised reed he will not break, a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice ([Isaiah 42:3](#)).

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank you for stirring your church to arise and shine. Thank you for stirring us in our innermost being. Let strength arise from deep within the belly of your church. Breathe into us. Breath of God, breath into us with the might of your power in our inner man. Revive us, again.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Perkins, John. 2018. [*Dream with Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books.

Discussion Questions

1. This week we explored the impact of racially segregated neighborhoods, gentrification and wealth disparities. Discuss your observations of changes taking place in your local neighborhoods. Are you seeing or experiencing the effects of gentrification? Share your thoughts and ideas about how to “add value” to your environments by being good neighbors. You may want to review day five’s reflections or any notes from your journal.
2. On day six, we engaged the question: “Is my church or work environment multicultural or multicolored?” Share your observations in those environments. How might God be encouraging the fruit of repentance—a change of thinking—in that context? What can you personally do to facilitate that change? Share your ideas together.
3. As you continue your fast, consider how you might “mediate God’s blessing to others” this week. Consider together the Levitical practice of “gleaning” discussed in day two. In large or small ways, how might you give of your time, prayers, or resources to support the work of racial reconciliation and closing the wealth inequality gaps?
4. How can the group pray for you this week?

HISTORICALLY
BLACK COLLEGES &
UNIVERSITIES (HBCUS)
SUNDAY FEAST: JUST MERCY
KEEPING EDUCATION OUT OF REACH
WEALTH FROM SLAVERY BUILDS AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES
**NUTRITION AND
THE FOOD WE EAT**
FAREWELL TO THE CHRONIC ILLNESS
WEEK SIX: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
SEPARATE BUT EQUAL: PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ZIP CODES

Keeping Education Out of Reach

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Isaiah 58:6](#)

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

REFLECTION BY REV. BILL HALEY

At the [Corhaven Graveyard](#) in rural Virginia lie the remains of 24 enslaved people from before the days of the Civil War. There are only field stones, stuck straight into the ground, to mark where some of them lay. There are no inscriptions on them, no names, no dates of birth, no dates of death, no Bible verses, and no kind words. If these enslaved people had put any inscriptions on a gravestone, they would have betrayed the fact that they knew how to read and write, which could have led to severe punishment by their owner. Even their owner could have been fined and flogged for allowing those he enslaved to learn how to read and write since this became illegal in Virginia as early as [1819](#), and in many other slave-holding states.

What generated these laws was simply fear, “Fearing that black literacy would prove a threat to the slave system—which relied on slaves’ dependence on masters—whites in many colonies instituted laws forbidding slaves to learn to read or write and making it a crime for others to teach them” (Thirteen 2004). This 1830 [statute](#) from North Carolina was somewhat typical:

AN ACT TO PREVENT ALL PERSONS FROM TEACHING SLAVES TO READ OR WRITE, THE USE OF FIGURES EXCEPTED: Whereas the teaching of slaves to read and write, has a tendency to excite dissatisfaction in their minds, and to produce insurrection and rebellion, to the manifest injury of the citizens of this State: Therefore, Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, That any free person, who shall hereafter teach, or attempt to teach, any slave within the State to read or write, the use of figures excepted, or shall give or sell to such slave or slaves any books or pamphlets, shall be liable to indictment in any court of record in this State having jurisdiction thereof, and upon conviction, shall, at the discretion of the court, if a white man or woman, be fined not less than one hundred dollars, nor more than two hundred dollars, or imprisoned; and if a free person of color, shall be fined, imprisoned, or whipped, at the discretion of the court, not exceeding thirty nine lashes, nor less than twenty lashes. II. Be it further enacted, That if any slave shall hereafter teach, or attempt to teach, any other slave to read or write, the use of figures excepted, he or she may be carried before any justice of the peace, and on conviction thereof, shall be sentenced to receive thirty nine lashes on his or her bare back (General Assembly of North Carolina 1831, 11).

These anti-literacy laws were made even stricter after the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831.

During the Civil War, black soldiers and runaway slaves living in camps protected by the Union army were educated in schools created by the army. During the Reconstruction era, after the Civil War, there

was a surge in the education of blacks in the schools created by both the Freedmen's Bureau and by blacks themselves. After Reconstruction, however, the education of black Americans was once again undermined in several ways. During Jim Crow, many black children were forced to work alongside their parents as sharecroppers. Even when they were allowed to attend school, poorer and rural towns frequently only had enough resources to build one school, which was dedicated to white children. The schools for blacks that did exist were often severely underfunded and overcrowded, with few resources for instruction. As Peter Irons of the American Federation of Teachers describes:

"Jim Crow schools—which taught their students only those skills needed for agricultural work and domestic service—fit the needs of the white economy and society...The only value to a white landowner in educating black children lay in their ability to pick cotton or wash laundry. Any education beyond the rudiments of literacy and figuring would not only be wasted on them, but it might encourage them to seek higher education, which would make them unfit for working on white-owned farms and in white homes" (Irons 2004).

Jonathan Kozol also discusses these issues in his [book](#), *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* as does Nathan Glazer in his [article](#), "'The Shame of the Nation': Separate and Unequal." Our country's history demonstrates that the education of some children simply matters less than others—a belief that still persists.

The landmark case of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954 was an important step forward, though it did not solve everything. In speaking of the [unfinished promise](#) of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Erwin Chemerinsky, university dean and law professor, resolutely contends that "over the last 40 years, the Supreme Court has failed to advance equal education and unfortunately has frustrated it."

RESPONSE

Educational systems can be hard and slow to change. Many are called to speak up about this; some are called to work on this. All of us, though, can be attentive and proactive to enhance the education of those who have not been the beneficiaries of the best education that can be provided for them. We can do this through tutoring or making ourselves available to students who are struggling. How would you seek to address the injustice of inequitable education opportunities, even in the life of just one boy or girl?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do. As your people, we have failed to seek justice, to rescue the oppressed, to plead for the foreigner and to defend the widow and the orphan. We have turned our backs, rather than sought your face in the image of your beloved ones. You dwell with the poor and the lowly; you make your place amongst the downtrodden. Find us also there, with you. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Robinson, Lacy. 2018. "[The Legacy of Anti-Literacy Laws](#)." *UnboundEdu*, November 21, 2018. Video, 04:38.

Williams, Heather Andrea. 2009. [Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom](#). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Wealth from Slavery Builds American Universities

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Luke 19:2-8](#)

And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

REFLECTION BY DEMETRIUS SUMMERVILLE

The slave trade made wealthy many who became benefactors and trustees for America’s earliest [educational institutions](#), like [Harvard](#), [Yale](#), and [Princeton](#).

Orphaned teenager, Alexander Hamilton, managed Nicholas Cruger’s shipping business, which sold enslaved human beings and supplies to plantations. Cruger’s father and uncles were among the founding trustees of [King’s College](#) (now Columbia University) in 1754, and they also funded Hamilton’s education at King’s.

The Rev. Dr. Richard Furman was a slave owner and pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina. He went on to found [Furman University](#) in 1828. Furman was a leader in the Charleston Baptist Association when in 1853 it stated that, “The Divine Author of our holy religion adopted this institution [slavery] as one of the allowed relations of society [the relation of slave to master] ... We would resist to the utmost every invasion of this ‘right’ come from what quarter and under what penitence it may” (Goodell 1853, 38).”

Craig Steven Wilder, an author and professor of American history at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, states in the prologue to his [book](#), *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities*:

“The founding, financing, and development of higher education in the colonies were thoroughly intertwined with the economic and social forces that transformed West and Central Africa through the slave trade and devastated indigenous nations in the Americas. The academy was a beneficiary and defender of these processes...The American academy never stood apart from American slavery—it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage” (Wilder 2013; 2, 11).

Georgetown University, under the leadership of its president, John DeGoia, commissioned a study of the institution's [link to slavery](#). The report documented, in part, that Georgetown University's leaders sold 272 enslaved individuals to landowners in Louisiana in 1838 to pay off its debts. [Watch](#) video clip from DeGoia's speech on the findings. For a deeper understanding as to the importance of this acknowledgment and subsequent actions, [watch](#) the presidents of Harvard and Georgetown address this topic.

RESPONSE

How does this account of Georgetown's response coincide with the response of Zacchaeus? Consider what you would want your collegiate or high school alma mater to do if it were discovered that the names of buildings, scholarships, or programs were named after those who passionately supported and/or profited from the enslavement of men, women, and children.

CLOSING PRAYER

The following prayer is based on [Psalm 51:10-12](#).

Lord, purify our hands and our hearts. Renew a right spirit within us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation, uphold us with a willing spirit and deliver us. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Schmidt, Ashley. n.d. "[Universities Studying Slavery](#)." *University of Virginia*.

Smith, Stephen and Kate Ellis. 2017. [Shackled Legacy: Universities and the Slave Trade](#). *APM Reports*, September 4, 2017.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Proverbs 2:6, 9-10](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17-20](#)

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding...Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul (Proverbs 2:6, 9-10).

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 5:17-20).

REFLECTION BY MAX FINBERG AND PAUL MONTEIRO

Believers recognize the importance God places on gaining wisdom and the transformative power of education. We (Max and Paul) are proud alumni of Howard University (the Divinity and Law Schools, respectively), one of more than 100 Historically (but not exclusively) Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Fellow believers in a previous era acted on this understanding to help establish many of our nation's HBCUs. Our alma mater was named after a white man—Civil War General, Oliver Otis Howard—who was known as the Christian General because of his religious faith. He joined the First Congregational Society of Washington in establishing an educational institution to teach and train those freed from slavery. Since its [founding](#) in 1867, our alma mater has awarded more than 100,000 degrees and is known for its role in educating black professionals.

Augusta Institute was founded in the same year, in the basement of Springfield Baptist Church, the oldest independent African American church in the United States. The institute went on to become Morehouse. In the same Atlanta neighborhood, Spelman was started in a church basement as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary by two White women from the North. Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles overcame many obstacles. They were motivated by their faith and, as recounted by Michelle Obama, “determined to lift up ‘these women and girls who have never had a chance’” (Obama 2011).

This same motivation of faith—that all people are created in the image of God and that wisdom and knowledge will lead to justice and equity—inspired the creation of other institutions of higher education. Premised on the equality of all, these schools were founded to train those freed from slavery to provide for themselves, their families, and their descendants. In living out their faith, many were led to create liberating environments to counter the enforced ignorance of slavery.

From the very beginning, HBCUs were infused with the desire of white people to serve freedmen and freedwomen who were coming out of slavery. Founders, both black and white, were often motivated by their faith. According to the [president](#) of the United Negro College Fund:

“Many HBCUs are affiliated with denominations widely recognized for their support in the African American community—the various Baptist conventions, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodists, and the United Church of Christ. But Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, the nation’s leading educator of future Black physicians and pharmacists, is a Catholic institution. And Oakwood University in Alabama is closely affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (Lomax 2010).

A few years prior in 1890, Vermont Senator Justin Morrill succeeded in passing the second [Morrill Act](#) to create public, land-grant institutions that would admit Black students. Despite his initial effort in 1862 to create “one college in every State upon a sure and perpetual foundation, accessible to all, but especially to the sons of toil,” the former Confederate states prevented admission of blacks to their federally-funded state universities (Parker 1971, 273).

Despite the spirit of reform following the Civil War, the intervening decades saw opportunities diminish as white institutions closed their doors to black students. In 1896, the Supreme Court’s decision in [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) established the doctrine of “separate but equal”—but they were never equal. In fact, it wasn’t until decades later when James Meredith was admitted under the force of law to Ole Miss that things finally began to change in Southern, higher education.

Even now, funding for the 1890s HBCU public land-grant institutions still pales in comparison to that of the 1862 land-grant institutions (which, fortunately, now admit students of all races and backgrounds.) Funding for predominantly black schools is and has been “very poor and not equitable compared to white institutions” (Fudge, Lee & Keys 2015). According to a 2013 [report](#), HBCUs received \$100 million in research and extension funding compared to \$544 million for the 1862 institutions. Yet these [institutions](#) are not relics of history. Despite the changing landscape of the post-Civil Rights era, they continue to serve as critical ladders of opportunity. Nearly three in five HBCU students are from low-income backgrounds and the first in their family to attend college. Education is still a necessary step to freedom.

We should learn from the history and modern relevance of HBCUs as places of reconciliation in action. We see this today through increased enrollments of white, international, and Latino-American [students](#), resulting in one in five HBCU students being non-black. Consequently, HBCUs remain a force for good, a model for reconciliation, and a light on the hilltop, especially for those who have been marginalized.

RESPONSE

There are many opportunities to support HBCUs. Ask God how he may be calling you to get involved and consider one of the following:

- Donate
- Teach a course
- Mentor a student
- Attend a chapel service
- Support a student ministry
- Encourage your loved ones to apply and attend (following in the footsteps of the Honorable Harris Wofford, who was the first white student to graduate from Howard Law School).

Be an ambassador for Christ with the ministry of reconciliation.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the miracle of historically black colleges and universities. Thank you for the many men and women who risked—and lost—their lives so that these institutions can exist. And, thank you for the opportunity to join you in your work of reconciliation. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lomax, Michael. 2010. “[Churches Played Vital Role in Historically Black Colleges’ Success](#).” *CNN*, September 20, 2010.

Lomax, Michael. 2015. “[6 Reasons HBCUs Are More Important Than Ever](#).” *UNCF*, December 14, 2015.

Separate but Equal: Public Education and Zip Codes

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Luke 10:25-37](#)

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

REFLECTION BY REV. DAVID BAILEY

Loving God and loving your neighbor is the essence of what God calls us to do. When the expert on the law asked “who’s my neighbor?” Jesus tells the story of a man who was on a road that was known to be dangerous. The road to Jericho was a winding path where people who engage in criminal activity could lay in wait for someone to rob or mug. Jesus’s audience was familiar with that part of town, and when he said a man was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by the road, his listeners were not surprised and probably expected that kind of behavior. The priest and the Levite saw the man and chose to pass by. It was the Samaritan who stopped and invested his time and money to bring healing to the man who had fallen upon unfortunate circumstances. Jesus told this story so that we would have a clear picture of who we should focus on when we think about our neighbors and being faithful to God.

One of the primary questions that home buyers ask in deciding where their family should live is whether there is a great school zone or not. In most situations, the more expensive the house, the better the local school. The poorer the house, the poorer the school. The fact that we can determine the quality of education from a zip code is an injustice.

In 1954, the US Supreme Court determined in [*Brown vs. Board of Education*](#) that creating segregated schools that were “separate, but equal” was unconstitutional. Integration of public schools then became mandatory and led many wealthy whites to start private schools so they would not have to integrate. Many of these private schools were Christian schools.

During the 1950s and 1960s, there were strides made to bring racial and economic integration within public schools to create a better school system for all students. But, in 1974, the Supreme Court determined in [*Milliken vs. Bradley*](#) that the school systems were not responsible for desegregation across district lines unless it could be shown that they had each deliberately engaged in a policy of segregation. In essence, this upheld segregation of students of color in inner-city districts from white students in wealthier, suburban districts.

Add this law to the fact that schools are funded by personal property taxes and housing values have been crippled in black neighborhoods by the legacy of redlining. This creates a perpetual cycle of underfunded schools around the country. This further reinforces why we can determine high performing and underperforming schools simply by zip codes.

When the expert in the law asks the question “who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells about a man that fell under unfortunate circumstances. If you are a child born in a poor zip code, in essence, you are at risk to be beaten and left for dead by the perils of this unjust housing and educational system. Yes, some students make it out of that educational system without being metaphorically beaten up and left for dead. But it is telling that, just like the priest and Levite, that the majority of Christians who have the wealth to make choices about where we live choose to walk by these children when we settle in a better zip code.

RESPONSE

Educate yourself on the injustice of our housing and educational system. Spend some time praying, journaling, and asking God: how can I love my neighbor as myself in the areas of educating our children?

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, come and flood my heart, soul and mind with Your love for God, for myself and for my neighbor. I cannot do this of my own strength, so I ask for your help.

Teach me your ways that I may walk in your truth. Unite my divided heart so that I will fear Your great name (Psalm 86:11). Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ansari, Zakiyah. 2018. “[Kerner at 50: Who Will Be Bold and Courageous? Confronting Racism and School Funding Equity](#).” Learning Policy Institute, August 09, 2018.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. n.d. “[Racial Equity](#).”

Nutrition and the Food We Eat

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Proverbs 20:17](#), [Leviticus 19:9-10](#)

Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel (Proverbs 20:17).

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19:9-10).

REFLECTION BY MAX FINBERG

This Proverb from King Solomon was written inside my journal for high school English class and is one I still remember. I could almost feel the small stones crushing against my teeth, and I never wanted to ingest the bread of deceit.

I grew up in a small town in upstate New York that only had two black families. It wasn't until I moved to Washington, DC after college and started living with three African American friends that I really started learning about food and its cultural and historical connections to slavery. One day a housemate brought home some chitterlings, or *chitlins*, to cook. Even my other roommates objected to the foul smell. These pork intestines and other offal were unwanted parts of the pig given to enslaved people. They were able to take the discards and make delicacies that live on in soul food and Southern cuisine, even today. All of us inherit many of our food preferences from our ancestors, and now I understand a bit of how slavery affected what we eat. Those viewed as being at the bottom of the food chain are provided food that is not desirable to those at the top.

Part of this legacy lives on in the disparities we still see between African Americans and whites related to access to food and resulting nutrition. In one of the richest countries in the world, one out of every four African American children is threatened by hunger. According to the [USDA](#), one out of five African American households (21.5 percent) does not always have enough food, compared to one in ten white households (10 percent).

We also see these disparities in the area of health and nutrition-related diseases. We see it reflected in the very lives of black people today. In fact, Thomas McGuire, a Harvard Medical School professor of health economics, explains "In terms of health, there's a five-year penalty for being African American compared to being a white male," (Powell 2016). In addition to the lower life expectancy, African Americans were one and a half times as likely to be obese as whites and twice as likely to have [diabetes](#),

according to the Department of Health and Human Services (Office of Minority Health 2016).

Also, a great deal of research has concluded that neighborhoods consisting primarily of minorities with low incomes—in particular, African Americans—have [fewer supermarkets](#) than wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods. Urban [food deserts](#) contain twice as many blacks than other urban areas. This phenomenon is also known as “food apartheid” or “environmental racism.” Calories are cheap; nutrients are expensive. Unfortunately, fresh fruits and vegetables are more expensive than junk food and less accessible in many predominantly black communities.

The stones of slavery linger in our mouths as a legacy through our cuisine, agriculture, food distribution, and health care systems.

RESPONSE

In God’s economy, all would be fed and well-nourished. Given that we no longer live in an agrarian society and we can’t give away food from our fields to those who hunger, what should we do?

The next time we sit down for a meal and say grace and give thanks for our food, remember all those who do not have enough—or enough *nutritious* foods. What can we do in our worlds to make this a more just system?

The next time we pray the familiar words “give us this day our daily bread,” reflect on how Jesus provided physical and spiritual food to all who were hungry.

The next time we are approached by a food bank or anti-hunger ministry, remember how we have been able to reap the harvest of slavery. Spit out the bread of deceit and savor the bread of life instead.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give us this day our daily bread. We remember those who are without a meal today. Send your people—send me—to be your hands and feet to a hungry world. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Brones, Anna. 2018. “[Food Apartheid: The Root of the Problem with America’s Groceries.](#)” *The Guardian*, May 15, 2018.

New York Law School Racial Justice Project. “[Unshared Bounty: How Structural Racism Contributes to the Creation and Persistence of Food Deserts.](#)” *American Civil Liberties Union*, June 2012.

Farewell to Chronic Illness

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Matthew 5:3-10](#)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be sons of God.

REFLECTION BY TED HADDOCK

Imagine a rift in a relationship with someone you care about, someone who should know you, respect you, and appreciate who you are. What happens when you're treated unfairly? If things go sideways between my wife and me, I can hardly get through the day. We need to acknowledge the rift to survive and to resolve the hurt in order to thrive. As hard as it can be to address "it," the "it" is more painful, toxic, and devastating to ignore.

Now imagine that unresolved wound, and take that daily brick of pain and stack it up over months, years, and then generations. Keep stacking until it seems normal, systemic, "just the way it is." That's where we are as a nation when it comes to race and social justice. We've made good strides; however, there are innumerable structures piled up all around us with generations of unacknowledged pain.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. taught about the reciprocal damages of racism, saying, "Segregation scars the soul of both the segregator and the segregated. The segregator looks upon the segregated as a thing to be used, not a person to be respected" (King 1958, 205). The illness of racism simultaneously reinforces a false sense of inferiority for the one and a false sense of superiority for the other, dehumanizing both.

Maybe we're not divided like our parents or grandparents in the 1950s, but just as they inherited dysfunctional systems and assumptions from previous generations, so have we. It's easier to see in hindsight, but the legacies of segregation linger around us—and in us—whether visible to us or not. Just as an untended wound becomes infected and won't heal on its own (and might actually kill us), neither will the social wounds we've inherited repair without honest, humble, and assertive attention. There's good medicine for these deformities, but the patient can't get to it unless he first understands that he needs help.

What if we, white brothers and sisters, were able to better see and understand the subtle yet potent ailments we've contracted, and the characteristic blind spots that we've lived with for so long?

What if we were free from that chronic ache of entitlement that's lived among us longer than we can remember—so long that we're simply numb to it? Our path to freedom lies in humility, repentance, and forgiveness—a full supply of medication forever at our disposal. But it's been boxed up in the cabinet, for as long as I can remember. It's time to open the box.

Do we care about the things that God cares about? What lens do we use when we read the latest headlines or newsfeed? When was the last time we gave up our right to be right and used our time, energy, and creativity to try to truly understand the other?

Clouds of anxiety form in the stagnant air of fear rising from the unknown, fear of the future, fear of the past, fear of political instability, fear of the other, fear that I or my children or grandchildren might not be okay. But what if we really believed that we were so well-loved and cared for that we were able to give to others from the “more than enough” ([2 Corinthians 9:8](#)) of this provision?

As followers of Jesus, we are no longer slaves to fear because perfect love drives out fear. For all God's children, there is no lukewarm maintenance of the status quo, but rather full devotion to the things of God, loving him who loves the vulnerable and loving our neighbors, who are often different than ourselves. Is this not what Jesus is talking about in [John 10:10](#) when he describes the fullness of the way things were made to be? “I came that they [you] may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). That motivation to live for something bigger than ourselves is part of remaking the entire world—unmaking violence, establishing love and respect, and living into the promise of “making all things new” ([Revelation 21:5](#)).

The wounds of the false-inferior and the false-superior will be made whole. Together, we will no longer miss out because we've constructed chaotic divisions and workarounds between “us” and “them.” Together, there is no distinction of nationality, social status, gender, or race, but instead we are brothers and sisters, parents and children. All of us together, we are well-loved, sharing a common future of goodness, respect, and opportunity.

RESPONSE

Consider these questions that were raised in today's reading. Personalize them and spend a few minutes journaling your responses. Do I care about the things that God cares about? What lens do I use when I read the latest headlines or newsfeed? When was the last time I gave up my right to be right and used my time, energy, and creativity to try to truly understand the other?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, open my eyes to see what I cannot see. Pour the oil of your anointing on my will, and give me renewed sight and the ability to perceive with godliness. Open my heart to see the ways in which fear, pride, and privilege have reinforced a false sense of superiority, and kept me from seeing another's pain. Open my heart to acknowledge the generational consequences of slavery, and give me a spirit that is willing to repent and repair this wound—for the healing of your body. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Marsh, Charles and John Perkins. 2018. [*Welcoming Justice: God's Movement Toward Beloved Community*](#). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Sunday Feast: Just Mercy

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, rest in the pleasure of God at his every thought concerning you. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Lord, you are the only one who is holy. You are the set apart one. Thank you for shining the light of your presence on me today. I yield to the work of your Spirit in me today. Thank you for your promise to transform me, conforming me to the image and likeness of your Son. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Hebrews 13:20-21](#)

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

REFLECTION BY CONSTANCE PADMORE

There is only one holy and righteous judge. He is the one to whom we plead our case. In these weeks together, we have come with repentant hearts to the throne of the Just One. We have come as the broken, abused, accused, and accuser to Jesus, the Chief Intercessor. The stains and burdens we carry as his Bride our great. Yet, he has promised to come for a Bride without spot or wrinkle.

Repentance is about the blood of Jesus. There is no repentance apart from the blood of the Lamb who has made atonement for our sins and allows us to stand before his throne without accusation. We are innocent—not guilty—because of the blood of Jesus.

Of course, as Christians, we understand this gift of atonement and we're celebrating it in this season of Lent. But in the face of such injustice and the brutality of racism, we can easily forget that there is a Judge who sits above every earthly judge. There is a Kingdom that is above every earthly kingdom. And there is a King whose justice and mercy is the foundation of his throne.

In our efforts to see the fruit of repentance in our land, to see the church reconciled in Spirit-led, blood-bought, authentic unity as black and white brothers and sisters, we will surely be met with discouragement along the way.

We will find ourselves trying desperately to right the wrongs within our nation's justice, educational, and social systems. *We will be voices of reconciliation in the face of opposition and lack of understanding.* And we might find our hope fleeting with the pace of progress.

But that is when we must remember that we appeal to the Judge of all the earth. We are presenting our case to a higher authority. With prayer, with petition, and with our God-instructed action, we will certainly take a victory lap in the work of repentance.

There's a story in [Just Mercy](#) by Bryan Stevenson that is all too familiar. For black people, it may evoke feelings of anger, frustration, and fatigue at the long-suffering. For white people, it may also evoke a

myriad of emotions from condemnation to apathy. But for us as Christians, we're left to search for Hope in these stories. Where is Jesus? Stevenson writes:

"Once I was preparing to do a hearing in a trial court in the Midwest and was sitting at counsel table in an empty courtroom before the hearing. I was wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and tie. The judge and the prosecutor entered through a door in the back of the courtroom laughing about something.

When the judge saw me sitting at the defense table, he said to me harshly, 'Hey, you shouldn't be in here without counsel. Go back outside and wait in the hallway until your lawyer arrives.'

I stood up and smiled broadly. I said, 'Oh, I'm sorry, Your Honor, we haven't met yet. My name is Bryan Stevenson; I am the lawyer on the case set for hearing this morning.'

The judge laughed at his mistake, and the prosecutor joined in. I forced myself to laugh because I didn't want my young client, a white child who had been prosecuted as an adult, to be disadvantaged by a conflict I had created with the judge before the hearing. But I was disheartened by the experience. Of course, innocent mistakes occur, but the accumulated insults and indignations caused by racial presumptions are destructive in ways that are hard to measure. Constantly being suspected, accused, watched, doubted, distrusted, presumed guilty, and even feared is a burden borne by people of color that can't be understood or confronted without a deeper conversation about our history of racial injustice" (Stevenson 2014).

We can imagine Jesus in that courtroom. He has also experienced being invisible, his true identity unseen in a courtroom where despite false accusations; he stood as the Advocate for all of humanity. "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him" ([John 1:10](#)).

We find Jesus here, even as we find him at the cross, where his justice and mercy prevailed. At the foot of the cross we are praying, "Lord, heal our land." We are lamenting, "Lord, heal our wounds." We are surrendering with these words, "Lord, I repent." Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, heal our land. Lord, heal our wounds. Lord, we repent. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Stevenson, Bryan. 2014. [*Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*](#). New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Discussion Questions

1. This week we explored the history of racism in our educational systems and the current inequalities in education based on color and socio-economic status. Share about your personal educational experiences. How are they similar or different? Were you in a “wealthy” school district? How did your experience compare to those who were educated in less affluent environments? How does God call the church to respond to these matters?
2. Consider what you would want your collegiate or high school alma mater to do if the names of buildings, scholarships, or programs were named after those who passionately supported and/or profited from the enslavement of men, women, and children.
3. How would you seek to address the injustice of inequitable education opportunities, even in the life of just one boy or girl? Share your ideas together, and make an action plan for next steps. Commit to praying for one another and holding each other accountable.
4. How can the group pray for you this week?

PREPARING FOR WEEK SEVEN

As next week will be your final group discussion for this Lenten experience, plan to take some time to reflect on how you’ve experienced God. How have you seen the fruit of repentance in your life? How has your mind been changed concerning racism and reconciliation? Recall the devotional entries that most deeply resonated with you. Where is God nudging you to further engage in acts of repentance? Spend time in prayer and in the Word about your next steps, and pray about those who could engage this process of discernment with you.

YOU ARE A
PART OF THIS
SUFFERING
PILATE AND POWER
COMMUNION & UNITY
FORGIVENESS IS NOT PASSIVITY
STATEMENT OF REPENTANCE
WEEK SEVEN: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
SUNDAY FEAST: SO I AM SENDING YOU

Suffering

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God's hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Matthew 26:36-46](#)

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

REFLECTION BY REV. ERIN CLIFFORD

Today begins our journey into Holy Week, a time of reflecting on the suffering, death, and ultimate victory of Christ for each one of us. We've spent the last five weeks focused on the particular and significant suffering of the African American community from the history of slavery through today. I'm sure many of us are weary from meditating on these tragedies and today is another opportunity to offer those burdens to Christ. As we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, we find a companion in our suffering. Our Messiah was "*despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not*" ([Isaiah 53:3](#)).

In the garden, Jesus urges his disciples to watch and pray with him amidst his pain. But, staying awake to suffering is difficult. In [Matthew 26:36-46](#), we are given two ways of reacting to the suffering in the world, both in our own lives and in those around us. We can fall asleep as the disciples did, or we can pray for God to keep us awake and show us his will in it, as Jesus did. Jesus chose "*obedience through what he suffered; and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him*" ([Hebrews 5:8-9](#)).

The Rev. Dr. King, when [preaching](#) on this passage, says that life's central test is making the transition from "let this cup pass from me" to "nevertheless." Choosing not our will but God's will in the midst of suffering:

“I can hear even Jesus himself...standing amid the darkness of the cross. And out of the pain and the agony and the darkness of that cross we hear him saying, ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken.’ But then, in the midst of that he turns to God and he keeps his eyes on God...that isn’t the last word that we hear from the cross for out of the midst of the darkness... we hear something else, we hear a voice saying, ‘Not my will, but thy will be done.’ Now you got to learn that, my friends, and when you learn that you can stand up amid any condition because you know that God’s with you no matter what happens. You can stand up amid despair. You can stand up amid persecution. You can stand up amid disappointment. You can stand up even amid death. But you don’t worry because you know God is with you. You have made the transition. You have faced life’s central test... ‘Not my will, but Thy will be done.’ And when you can cry that, you stand up amid life with an exuberant joy...Even though you stand amid the giant shadow of disappointment, you don’t despair because you know God is with you” (King 1957).

RESPONSE

Take a few moments of silent reflection. Note any thoughts or questions that have surfaced from this reading. When you are ready, move on to the closing prayer below.

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us join in the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s [prayer](#) about the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Let us pray. Oh, God our gracious Heavenly Father...help us to realize the darkness of the week ahead, with its Gethsemane, yes, with its Calvary, with its dark cross. Oh, God, help us to realize though that in the midst of this, there is a way out as we face life’s central test, the test of making the transition from ‘Let this cup pass from me’ to ‘nevertheless.’ God grant that we will discover that it can only be faced by giving our ultimate allegiance to Thee... Help us to realize that God is the answer. In the midst of all of our trials and tribulations, God is the answer. In the midst of all of our disappointments, God is the answer. Help us to live with that philosophy. And by that, we will be able to live until we meet Thee in all of Thy eternities. In the name and Spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen” (King 1957).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

King, Martin Luther, Jr. 2003. “Suffering and Faith.” In James M. Washington (Ed.) [A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), 41-2. New York: Harper Collins.

King, Martin Luther, Lewis V. Baldwin, and Julius Richard Scruggs. 2011. [“Thou, Dear God”: Prayers That Open Hearts and Spirits](#). Boston: Beacon Press.

Forgiveness is Not Passivity

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God's hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Romans 12:19](#)

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

REFLECTION BY REV. DARRYL FORD

After Dylann Roof murdered nine black Americans in a historic church in Charleston, South Carolina, family members of the victims were asked to forgive him. The forgiveness offered by some of these family members was applauded by many white Christians and yet was met with much dissonance within black communities.

Immediate black forgiveness for historical and contemporary suffering perpetrated by whites has become a ritual in this country. There are a few things that may be at the center of this ritual. In addition to righteous anger and a desire for justice, blacks have demonstrated swift public forgiveness because it has served as a necessary coping strategy in a historically, white supremacist society. Blacks are patently aware of a past where expressing anger or a lack of forgiveness for centuries of white transgressions led to beatings, shootings, stabbings, hangings, and burnings; being raped, imprisoned, and herded into insane asylums; job terminations, stolen land, and dismissals from schools. Blacks are also aware of the current pressure to resist the "angry" black [man](#) or [woman stereotype](#).

Many believe that Christianity has been misappropriated to teach blacks passivity and weakness in response to white terrorism—in hopes that this "turning of the cheek" will merit a grand reward for suffering silently. This is due to an incomplete understanding of forgiveness as nothing more than a mere ritual. When black people say "we forgive" it must be more than just a healing ointment for white anxiety, fear, and [fragility](#).

As a Christian, an African American, and a pastor, I cannot ignore the biblical call to forgiveness. I cannot ignore the radical ways in which I have been forgiven. A holistic understanding of forgiveness means we lay aside our right to revenge. This means that we fully accept that the death of Jesus on the cross paid the price for our sins as well as the sins perpetrated against us. It means that we trust God to be the good and just God that he has declared himself to be.

Forgiveness is not absolution of the consequences of sin, however. This is why forgiveness and repentance are substantively different. *Both are required for reconciliation*. Far too often, blacks have been made to feel like forgiveness is synonymous with reconciliation. This leads to the ritual of

forgiveness which is merely an assuaging of white guilt without restitution. This is contrived forgiveness and not the heart of God.

True forgiveness frees the offended from the bondage of bitterness and revenge. *True repentance* frees the offender from the bondage of pride, lack of empathy, and apathy. If white Christians truly felt the pain of black Americans, when times of cruelty, injustice, and violence occur, immediate and contrived forgiveness rituals would never suffice.

There are two things that forgiveness does not mean.

1. *Forgiveness never means we stop seeking justice.*

Forgiveness of sin does not absolve the offending party of the consequences for sin. Forgiving a criminal does not mean that the crime goes unreported. Nor does it mean that we shouldn't press charges or refuse to testify in court. Seeking justice must be rooted in the desire to protect others and advocate for their flourishing, not because we want to enact revenge and retribution.

2. *Forgiveness never means we put ourselves in harmful situations.*

The great migration of blacks from the Jim Crow South in the early 1900s, to Northern and Midwestern industrial cities, was not indicative of a lack of forgiveness. It was instead for their protection and flourishing.

Black Christians biblically forgive by viewing legitimate hurts, frustrations, and anger through a redemptive lens that proclaims, "I will renounce my right to get revenge for all the ways that this present kingdom has broken my heart. I will also believe Jesus's words that the kingdom of God is indeed at hand. This means that I will pray with my heart and work tirelessly with my hands and feet to see signposts of how the perfectly restored coming kingdom invades the broken, exploitative, and racist kingdom of this world."

RESPONSE

As you engage these topics of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, how is the Holy Spirit defining or redefining these terms for you? How is the Bible calling you to forgive or repent? The Gospel narrative of Christ's death and resurrection is a great place to deepen your study, especially in this Lenten season. The cross of Jesus Christ is the place where justice, forgiveness, and mercy meet. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth as you study the Gospels. Take notes and journal new insights—expect God to speak to you. He will be faithful to do so.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your word is Spirit and it is life. Forgive us, as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DiAngelo, Robin. 2018. [*White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*](#). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Tillman, Brian. 2017. "[Repentance, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation](#)." *United Methodist Communciations*, December 5, 2017.

Communion & Unity

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God's hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#)

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

REFLECTION BY REV. MIKE AITCHESON

If racism is America's original sin, then division is one of the most palpable byproducts. With the arrival of enslaved black Africans to Jamestown, early colonists set in motion a rift that expanded the length of our country's development. Some of the arguments for enslaving Africans included: God's ordained purpose for them as cursed descendants of Ham, their equivalence to animals, and as a way to civilize them.

The country would eventually find itself in a war over whether or not slavery would be permitted in

the western territories of the nation. The [Civil War](#) claimed more American lives than WWI and WWII combined. The dispute over slavery metastasized beyond government and economics, into every facet of American life. It even caused a split among prominent Christian denominations. The Presbyterian church, already hampered by the old school and new school rift, further split into the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches. Some of the latter's most notable leaders were known for their vehement defense of the "peculiar institution."

During both the period leading up to and following the war, enslaved blacks were positioned at the back of Sunday worship services, if permitted with whites at all. This laid the groundwork for Sunday morning still being considered the most segregated day of the week. In fact, during the Reconstruction period, certain churches gathered ceremonially for public lynching services following worship. Racial strife of this sort would persist through much of the 20th century (To learn more, read Charles Marsh's, [God's Long Summer](#)). Howard Thurman, in [Jesus and the Disinherited](#), maintained that throughout segregation, American Christianity had betrayed the religion of Jesus almost beyond redemption.

The apostle Paul confronted the Corinthians for their abuses of the Lord's Supper, among the many issues over which they were divided. The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the grace of Christ in connection with his death for us, but it also signifies our bonds to one another. Just as the Passover meal celebrated Israel's protection from death and deliverance from Egyptian captivity, communion proclaims the death of our savior Jesus Christ who delivered us from bondage to sin. Regardless of our backgrounds, we all need to feast on the same Christ. We are all united in the same mystical body of Christ, and as such, we are to strive to grow in the bonds of unity, which we acknowledge every time we commune together.

RESPONSE

One of the best ways to overcome division is through communion with the "other." Presbyterian pastor, [Lingon Duncan](#), explained that racism was not even on his radar until he befriended black pastor and church planter, Thabiti Anyabwile. Relationship changed his heart. Allow relationships to continue to transform yours. Invite a black colleague or neighbor to break bread over a meal. Then consider being intentional about developing this friendship. There is power in the breaking of bread, in the sharing of lives, and in the building of relationships.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord may we see how we've isolated ourselves from our neighbors who are different than us. Open our eyes to the experience of others and open our hearts to repent of our blindness. Remove the log of bias from our eyes so that we may see the image of God in all people. And remind us, every time we take communion, that our lives are inextricably bound together in the flesh and blood of Christ. Unify your body! For your namesake. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Emerson, Michael O., and Christian Smith. 2001. [Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thurman, Howard. 1996. [Jesus and the Disinherited](#). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

You Are A Part of This

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God's hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Luke 22:54-62](#)

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

REFLECTION BY REV. DAVID HANKE

Peter follows at a distance.

We are almost to the end. At this point, Peter is certain of what will happen to Jesus. He follows because he has to see. His eyes are unable to turn away from the way things are playing out. Perhaps he can't believe it. Just days before... Yet it is so clear how it will end.

Peter's words over the last few days have been marked with bravado and pretentious self-promotion. He says to Jesus, "*I will lay down my life for you*" ([John 13:37](#)). You can imagine Jesus's compassionate sadness as he tells Peter what will really happen, "*Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times*" ([John 13:38](#)). Then later that same evening, when Jesus is arrested, it is Peter who jumps forward and cuts off Malchus's ear.

So much bravado and posturing.

Boasting can work its way into the project of repentance. As you have engaged in this Lenten experience, perhaps you have had moments of self-promotion, self-righteousness, and other self-centered contempt. These are familiar highs and lows that accompany the emotions of change.

But here, at the end, when it is clear what will truly transpire, bravado is gone. Peter follows at a distance. He stays in the shadows. He disconnects.

Ironically, this is actually his opportunity to run forward, to stand at Jesus’s side, and to follow-through on that brave, but hollow, declaration: “I will lay down my life for you.” Instead, he hides and denies. He weeps, but he doesn’t act. In his forward to [*Zealous Love: A Practical Guide to Social Justice*](#), Eugene Peterson calls this “sentiment” and he contrasts it with compassion, “Feeling sorry for the victims of injustice is not a prophetic act. We live in a culture that has replaced compassion with sentiment. Sentiment is mere feeling, disconnected from relationship. Sentiment is spilled compassion. It looks like concern; it could develop into compassion, but it seldom does” (Peterson 2010). Peter’s boasting has miscarried into sentimentality.

Jesus knows Peter.

Although this story of denial shows up in all four of the Gospel accounts, it is only Luke who tells us that Jesus turns and looks at Peter. It is such a poignant moment—Peter denies knowing Jesus, but with kind eyes, Jesus acknowledges knowing Peter. Without words, Jesus reminds Peter who is hiding in the shadows: *you are a part of this*.

We all have those moments when we had the opportunity to say or to do something, and we didn’t. Jesus sees us in our silence and denial. Jesus sees us in our sentimentality. And Jesus sees our desire to follow-through even if the fruit is not there, yet.

RESPONSE

We are almost to the end. You are a part of this. You are a part of this.
Where has your repentance brought you? What will you do next?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for turning and looking at me. Thank You for peering into my eyes with the reminder that I am a part of your great work of reconciliation. You have brought me out of the shadows and into the light of Your presence. Complete the good work of repentance that you have begun in me. What would you have me to do next? [Take time to listen and journal what comes to mind]. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Yankoski, Michael and Danae Yankoski. 2009. [*Zealous Love: A Practical Guide to Social Justice*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Pilate and Power

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God's hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Mark 15:1-15](#)

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

REFLECTION BY ANDY CROUCH

The Jewish authorities have already put Jesus on trial—in the form of an irregular, overnight tribunal with conflicting testimony ([Mark 14:53-65](#)), ending only when Jesus declares that he is the Lord's anointed. Now it is the Roman prefect Pilate who is pressed into a highly irregular role—applying the most heinous punishment Rome ever devised to what he perceives as largely a matter of jealousy and rivalry with the local leaders. To Pilate's amazement, Jesus, who spoke so clearly to the Jewish tribunal, refuses to declare or defend himself. Pilate is left to "satisfy the crowd" as best as he can, by ordering Jesus's crucifixion.

We would never have heard of the Roman official Pontius Pilate if he had not been confronted, early one morning, by the dubious and troublesome case of someone called "King of the Jews." To be a prefect of Judea was to hold a decidedly mid-level position in the vast Roman administrative state—a sign that Pilate's career had not gone well up to that point, lacking either talent or the right patrons, or both.

And yet Pilate, as described by Mark, is a canny politician. He is amazed that Jesus offers no defense against a flimsy prosecution. Pilate is well aware of rivalries among local factions and is able to quickly

assess what will placate the crowd. He knows how to be a master manipulator. How can the prisoner before him, the “King of the Jews,” not play the political game as well?

No less than three times in this short account, Pilate uses that phrase “King of the Jews.” Pilate’s worldly, calculating, self-interested power has encountered someone who wields an entirely different kind of power. (Indeed, as Jesus says to Pilate in the conversation recorded by John, Pilate would have no power at all if it had not been “given [him] from above.”) Jesus has a power that Pilate cannot imagine, the power to sacrifice, to give up all power. And Jesus is driven by an utterly different mission than Pilate seems ever to have known: to reveal and embody truth.

In a world full of calculating politicians, what would it look like for followers of Jesus to offer an alternative, but still politically powerful, witness?

RESPONSE

In this passage, Pilate, the consummate political leader, meets someone called “the King of the Jews.” And we, too, are invited to meet Jesus this Holy Week, allowing him to overturn our assumptions about what true kingship, leadership, and power entail. Spend some time reflecting on and praying about each of these questions:

- How can I embody Christ’s sacrificial power in my life?
- What areas is God inviting me to give up privilege and pick up servanthood?
- How might I tangibly enter into the experience of the powerless and oppressed in my area?

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, all power and authority belong to you. Teach me, Lord, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have called me as a minister of reconciliation. Search me and root out my selfish-ambition and self-seeking agendas to attain the wealth and power of this world. Forgive me for where I have fallen short, and mark me with your courage to surrender. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DeWolf, Thomas Norman and Jodie Geddes. 2019. [*The Little Book of Racial Healing: Coming to the Table for Truth-Telling, Liberation, and Transformation*](#). New York, NY: Good Books.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1963. “[Draft of Chapter IV, ‘Love in Action.’](#)” Stanford University: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute.

Statement of Repentance

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God’s hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [Revelation 3:3](#)

Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.

REFLECTION BY JACALYN BARNES

As you come to the end of this Lenten season, I rejoice for the fruit of repentance that God has, is, and will continue to produce in you. Do not allow this to be the end of your journey. In the coming weeks and months, go back through this guide and click through the links you missed. Select one or two of the additional resources to read. Commit to following through on a few of the response activities. Make a plan to share what you have learned. Be intentional about developing friendships and community with those who are different from you. Most importantly, *do not cease praying*. Regularly contemplate what acts of repentance God may be inviting you to perform. Even now, take a moment and ask him. Then write out what you discern and commit to following through.

Now, go forth and “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” ([Matthew 3:8](#)).

RESPONSE

Read the statement of repentance below. Consider posting it in your home or office as a reminder.

I AM SORRY that our nation has prospered at the expense of African Americans for 375 years through slavery, slave codes, Jim Crow, segregation, and lingering inequality in many systems in America.

I RECOGNIZE that many of the most devastating social problems in our country and local communities are direct results of these deeply-rooted injustices.

I KNOW that there is nothing I can do to change what has happened or to fix everything, but I can say that I am truly sorry. I acknowledge this legacy and its effects, and I grieve.

BECAUSE OF WHAT I RECOGNIZE, I repent and I will respond by seeking to build genuine relationships with those who bear the brunt of this legacy.

I WANT TO listen, learn, and better understand how the perpetuation of systems that leverage benefit for some, and pain and disadvantage on others, continues today. I will also do what I can to promote communities of equality, justice, reconciliation, and love for one another.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, Father, for honoring this righteous intention and confession of my heart. Help me to walk it out as you have called me. Any work that you begin will be lasting and eternal. Thank you for relentlessly pursuing me on this journey of repentance. Let me be found faithful and fruitful. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Anyabwile, Thabiti. 2018. "[The One Sin That Must Not Be Confessed](#)." *The Gospel Coalition*, April 7, 2018.

Wilson, Jared C. 2014. "[Genuine Repentance](#)." *The Gospel Coalition*, March 18, 2014.

Sunday Feast: So I Am Sending You

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment or two to be still. In the silence, receive God's hope that never disappoints. Exhale. When you are ready, offer these words (or your own) in prayer.

Father, we turn our hearts to you. We rest in you. We find our strength in you alone. Any work we do apart from you will be fruitless. It will amount to nothing. But we come to you and ask, by the power of your Holy Spirit, produce the fruit of repentance within us. In the perfect and redeeming name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: [John 20:19-23](#)

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

REFLECTION BY REV. BILL HALEY

"Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfillment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished...the finding, the saving, the giving of new life—in Jesus. He has done it. With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all. A great door has been swung open in the cosmos which can never be shut... In particular, we are all invited—summoned, actually—to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship, and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work at bringing it to birth on earth as in heaven" (Wright 2010, 92).

God loves the world. God loves the people of the world, each one. When God created the world in the first place, God made it so that it would be a place of shalom and flourishing for all creation, and for each and every person. The design was not for division and oppression among peoples or between each other, but rather for the people of the world to be one family, God's family, a community of diversity marked by and living in love.

But that's not the way the world turned out. When sin entered the world and the fall happened, everything broke, and we've been suffering the ravages ever since.

God could have left us to our own devices, but he didn't. In the words of one of the old prayers, the [Great Thanksgiving](#), "When our disobedience took us far from you, you did not abandon us to the power of death. In your mercy, you came to our help" (*Book of Common Prayer* 2007, 373).

In love, God the Father sent Jesus the Son so that sin, and greed, and death would no longer have the last word, but rather so that God's great design and hope could once again be realized. It was the cross that enabled our forgiveness. And it is the resurrection that makes "thy Kingdom come" now possible. Thanks be to God!

It was Pope John Paul II who said, “We are an Easter people, and Hallelujah is our song!” (Paul, 1986). So today we say...

Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Yes, it offers us the hope of eternal life and is a pledge and portent of our resurrection too. And yes, it means that the powers of darkness, brokenness, division, oppression, and death have in fact been defeated. It may be that it will take much time for that victory to be made final, but that it can be and will be is now assured.

The resurrection also means that we, frail and weak and human as we are, are invited—called actually—into Jesus’s great work of “thy kingdom come.”

It’s a stunning statement he says to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

Really? Now we share in the vocation and the mission of the resurrected Christ? There’s no other way to read his words. What the Father sent Jesus to do, now we are called to, as well.

Jesus came into the world to intentionally confront the effects of the Fall, to take on the suffering of the world upon himself, and by the power of God redeem it, with his body being a conduit of God’s grace and the revelation of his glory.

And that’s what we are to do.

As followers of Jesus, and his very body on earth, we are to intentionally confront the effects of the fall, take the suffering of the world upon ourselves, and by the power of God redeem it, with our very bodies being a conduit of God’s grace and the revelation of his glory.

He breathed on them and said to them “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

This task is too much for us. We cannot do this in our own strength. This is why Jesus breathes on his disciples: to empower them with the Holy Spirit, his spirit. At Pentecost, that same Spirit is given to all the disciples, and he’s now given it to us, as well.

We have a mission. We have a calling. We have a task. We have work to do.

And we’ve been given the power of Jesus himself to do it.

“The more we find out about Jesus, and particularly about his death and resurrection, the more we are energized by the Spirit to reveal God’s love to the world. In John 20, Jesus breathes on the disciples and says to them, ‘*As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit.*’ And suddenly we see the whole vista of what God did in Jesus, through his healing and his suffering, through his parables, his celebrations, and ultimately his agony. And, with that, we discover that the story of Jesus’s ministry is not only the story of what he did in history, but encompasses also the vocation that comes to us in the present: that we should be, in the power of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus for the whole world. This discovery brings the most remarkable joy and the most remarkable sorrow. This is our vocation: to take

up our cross, and be Jesus for the whole world, living with the joy and the sorrow woven into the pattern of our days” (Wright, 1998, 9-10).

RESPONSE

Take some time to ask God this question directly: Lord, in light of this journey I’ve taken these last 47 days, what are you calling me to do? Take some time to listen to God. Write down what you hear. Commit to doing it. Ask for God’s help and then pray the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Wright, N. T. 1998. [*Reflecting the Glory: Meditations for Living Christ’s Life in the World*](#). Minneapolis: Augsburg.

W right, N.T. 2010. [*Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*](#). New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Discussion Questions

1. Which devotional entries most resonated with you? Share with the group those favorite reflections and why they impacted you.
2. What feels difficult or challenging as a result of this Lenten experience? Share with each other those areas of hardship, and then pray for one another.
3. In light of these 47 days, where do you sense God leading you? What might he be asking you to do next? Are there steps of courage or faith you're being invited to take? Share with your group. Ask for help and prayer if you feel unclear or unsettled. Give yourself grace to receive the slow and intentional work of repentance.
4. As you walk out the fruit of repentance in your life, consider using the Statement of Repentance from day six as a common prayer for your group to continue to pray together.
5. How can those in your group continue to pray for you?

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