

Race and the Bible:

A Small Group Study for The District Church



Session #1 ~ Race overview in the Bible

Objective: Expose small groups to a sampling of the Biblical material on race and to see the God's intentionality regarding diversity of ethnic groups.

Discussion Starter:

- As it relates to race, describe the kind of Washington, D.C. you would like to see? Describe the kind of church would you like to see?
- Share with the group your hopes for this study.

Introduction

Which statement(s) below would closest fit your understanding of the Bible's view towards race? Explain.

- The Bible is silent / neutral on the issue of race and ethnicity.
- Racial / Ethnic distinctions are a result of sin.
- Racial / Ethnic distinctions were God's design.
- The Bible exhorts believers to be color blind.
- The Bible exhorts believers to notice and celebrate race and ethnic distinctions.
- Other position?: _____

Race and the Bible

Genesis 10-12

Genesis 10 includes a passage commonly called "The Table of Nations". It outlines the various descendants of Noah listed by their "languages, in their territories and nations" (see Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 and 32). Genesis 11 includes the story of the Tower of Babel. Genesis 12 includes the calling of Abraham.

Read Genesis 11:1-9.

- What were the sins of people building in Babylon?

- Do you think God's judgment of confusing the languages is mostly punishment in the form of a curse or mostly a disciplinary act for correction?
- If punishment, for what? If viewed as a form of correction, what is being 'corrected'?

Acts 2

Acts 2 describes the 'birth' of the Christian Church during the Jewish festival of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit fills the disciples and enables them to proclaim the Gospel to a diverse audience.

Read Acts 2:1-12.

- What are the similarities and differences between Acts 2 and Genesis 11?
- In what ways is the narrative of Acts 2 a response to or fulfillment of Genesis 11?
- List the 'nationalities' or ethnicities listed in Acts 2:9-11.
- Verse 12 concludes with the people asking, "What does this mean"? As it relates to the Bible's view of race and ethnicity, what does it mean that the people heard, "in their own language"?

Revelation

The book of Revelation, though often clouded in imagery, paints beautiful pictures of Heaven and the acts of worship that take place there.

Read Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-10.

- What is being described?
- Who is participating?
- John (the author of Revelation) says he sees people from every tribe, language and nation around the throne of God (Rev. 7:9-10). Why might this be important?

- What might be the implications of John's revelation of seeing ethnicity in Heaven?

Wrap Up and Follow Up

- In the appendix is a sample list of biblical passages that deal with race and ethnicity. Briefly review that sheet.
- In light of the passages studied, and the passages listed in the appendix, how does this challenge or affirm your understanding of what the Bible says about race and ethnicity?
- From the appendix, select one of the passages listed on the "Bible and Race" handout and have a quiet time of devotion this week using that passage.

Prayer

Share with the group some of your prayers for the remaining sessions. Share what 'action steps' you would like to take this week as a result of this session. Ask the group to pray for you as you take those steps. Next week, share with the group any results or ways you saw God answer those prayers.

Session #2 ~ Race as Personal and Corporate Sin

Objective: Understand the dual ways (personal and corporate) sin corrupts ethnic distinctions resulting in racism.

Discussion Starter

- How do you think black Americans feel about the state of race relations in America?
- How do you think white Americans feel about the state of race relations in America? What about Americans of other racial or ethnic backgrounds?
- Do you think there is a difference between the ways Christians and non-Christians of the different races feel about the state of race relations? Why or Why not? Should faith matter on this topic?

Introduction

Acts of racism (and any sin for that matter) can often be broken into two areas of impact: personal and corporate. Sins of race that are personal are those that an individual engages in either by way of commission or omission. Often the most dramatic images of this, in our context, are older images of KKK rallies and lynchings.

But the sin of racism can also affect the systemic functions of a community as well, the areas that are more corporate. Historic examples of the overt systemic forms of racism include Jim Crow laws and discriminatory lending practices.

In this session, biblical examples of both personal and corporate racism will be highlighted.

Galatians and Acts

Read Galatians 2:11-14.

- What does Peter do? Why do you think he does that? What is the impact on others?
- In what ways could Peter's behavior be classified as 'racism'?
- What threat to the Gospel do Peter's actions represent?
- In the appendix, see and complete the Racial Reconciliation Inventory. Share the results with the group.
- What 'tables' do you find yourself 'drawing back' from like Peter drew back from the table of Gentiles? In what ways might these undermine the proclamation of the Gospel?

Read the Dr. John Perkins quote below:

Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. Jesus said that the essence of Christianity could be summed up in two inseparable commandments: love God and love thy neighbor. ... But can a gospel that reconciles people to God without reconciling people to people be the true gospel of Jesus Christ?

The gospel has the power to reconcile people to God and to each other. Man's reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ is clearly the heart of the gospel. But we must also be reconciled to each other. Reconciliation across racial, cultural and economic barriers is not an optional aspect of the gospel.

- What strikes you most about Perkin's connection between the gospel and racial reconciliation?

Read Acts 6:1-7.

- What is the problem that arises in the early church? In what ways can this be seen as an example of prejudice?
- How was the problem in Acts 6 resolved?
- The background of the men chosen to solve the problem all had Greek names (they were likely all Hellenists). Do you think that is important? Why or Why not?

- What might be the significance of Hellenistic Jewish converts to Christianity serving both Hellenist widows and Hebraic widows?
- How might this solution foster reconciliation?
- How does this resolution affect the spread of the gospel?

Christian author Carl Ellis speaks of the variations of racism in four ways: Hot, Cold, Relational and Systemic. Hot designates those forms that are overt—racism by commission. Cold designates those forms that are passive, often committed by omission. Relational are the personal dimensions while, systemic are the more corporate results or outcomes of racism and may not be intentional. See the chart below.

- Where on Ellis’ ‘window pane of racism’ would you place Peter’s actions as described in Galatians 2?
- Where would you put the actions of the disciples in Acts 6?
- List other, contemporary examples for each of the categories in the matrix.

	HOT	COLD
RELATIONAL	i.e. Racial Slurs - - -	i.e. Unexpressed racial fears - - -
SYSTEMIC	i.e. Red Lining - - -	i.e. racial disparities in income, education, health care. - -

- How does the gospel address systemic forms of racism in society?

Reconciliation Two-Step

Dr. Randy White says, “There is more to reconciliation than multi-ethnicity. A strategy at both the relational and structural (or systemic) levels are needed. They are two essential feet of a complex dance.”

See the Reconciliation Two-Step handout in the appendix. As a group, read the Left Foot (Personal) and Right Foot (Systemic) columns, and discuss as many of the questions as desired.

Wrap Up and Follow Up

- Share with the group ways you have seen God answering the prayers you shared last week.
- Which of the ‘steps’ from the Reconciliation Two-Step handout do you want to reflect on or begin acting on this week? Share your response with the group and have the group pray this week for your own personal ‘two step’ towards reconciliation. Next week share with the group how you see God answering the prayers.

Prayer

- Pray that God would reveal to you ways that you are intentionally or unintentionally ‘pulling away from the table’ of reconciliation.
- Pray that God would encourage you to take the first ‘step’ that you sense Him requiring of you.

Session #3 ~ Reconciliation and the Church

Objective: Increase understanding of the racial reconciliation implications of the Gospel.

Discussion starter:

Share with the group a time when you've experienced the sting of racism.

- If you could go back to that time and say something to the person(s) that wronged you, what would you say to them?
- What do you think Jesus would say to them?
- What do you think Jesus would say to you?

Introduction

The first step in reconciliation to God is through a relationship – namely, a relationship with Christ. Likewise, the first step in racial reconciliation is through relationships with those that are different than ourselves.

Read and discuss the following quotes:

“The gulf between black and white can be crossed only on a bridge built by the hands of God. ... Without God at the center, there is no basis for reconciliation”.

– Chris Rice, *More than Equals*.

- What do you think it means to put God at the center of reconciliation?
- What differences can you see between the world's message of tolerance, diversity and inclusion and the Gospel's message of reconciliation?
- What evidence do you see that God is actively building that bridge?
- How might God want you to participate in the bridge building?

“The people who will be most committed to racial reconciliation are the people for whom it has become a personal issue”.

– Spencer Perkins, *More than Equals*

- How could you make racial reconciliation more of a personal issue for you?
How could The District Church?

Acts 10 ~ Conversion of Cornelius

Acts 10 describes the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion. This passage drips with cross-cultural nuance and provides insight into God’s desire that the gospel transform lives and relationships.

Read Acts 10:1-48.

- Why do you think God chose Cornelius? What is Cornelius doing when he hears from God?
- What was Peter doing and thinking about when he had the vision?

In the chart below, list the cultural and social differences between Cornelius and Peter. Consider their differences in ethnicity, social class, economic bracket, education, political affiliation, religious background, employment history, etc.

Cornelius	Peter
- Roman Centurion	- Hebrew Zealot
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-

- In what ways might Peter’s vision and his interaction with Cornelius have expanded Peter’s understanding of God? Of God’s work in the world?

- What did that new insight require of Peter?
- What might such an insight require of you?
- Who are the 'Cornelius' in your life that you might need to approach?
- How might engaging in relationship with those different than yourself expand your understanding of God and his work in the world?

Personal Application

- Who is someone from a different ethnicity that has impacted your life and why they mean so much to you.
- Who is someone from a different ethnicity or background that you could take to lunch or coffee and get to know better?
- What is a practical next step you could take towards understanding your own cultural background?
- What is a practical step you could take towards becoming an agent of reconciliation?

The Church of Antioch

Read Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3, 14:26-28.

- How did the church at Antioch get started? Who started the church, and why might that be significant? (See: Acts 11:19-30)
- Why do you think it might be significant that the disciples were first called "Christians" at Antioch? What characterizes these people?
- Read Acts 13:1-3 and 14:26-28. How does the leadership here reflect the church and why might that be important?
- Why do you think God uses this church to launch Barnabas and Paul in mission to the Gentiles?

- How is Barnabas' involvement with the multiethnic church in Antioch and the mission to the Gentiles a form of reconciliation (see Barnabas' role in Gal. 2:11-13)?
- What impact does this multiracial church have on the spread of the gospel?
- How would you like to grow or see your church grow in becoming more like the Antioch church? How might that affect relationships in your life?

Love One Another

See the "One Another" sheet in the appendix. As a group, go around and read, out loud, the one another's. As you read, think about the implications of these for racial reconciliation.

Wrap Up and Follow Up

- Share with the group ways you are seeing God answer the prayers you've shared from the previous two weeks.
- What are some specific God has opened your eyes to as a result of this study? What are new insights, revelations or prayers that you have as a result of the study?
- What are some specific next steps you sense God requiring of you?

Prayer

Spend time praying for one another in the group and seeking God's wisdom for the role you are to play in being a reconciler.

Appendix

1. Race and Ethnicity in the Bible
2. Racial Reconciliation Inventory
3. Reconciliation Two-Step
4. One Anothers of the Bible

Race and Ethnicity in the Bible¹

A very brief sample

The Bible takes note of Ethnic Differences

- Pentecost (Acts 2)
- Noah and Nations (Genesis 9:1)
- Many Nations (Genesis 10)
- Skin Color (Song of Sol. 5:10)
- Final Worship (Rev. 5:8-14)
- Naomi's sons (Ruth 1:9)
- God Rules (Ps. 47:7-9)
- Interracial Marriages
 - Moses and Zippora (Num. 12:1)
 - Naomi's sons (Ruth 1:4)

The Bible Emphasizes Crossing Ethnic Barriers

- Good Samaritan (Luke 10)
- Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)
- Jesus and the Woman at the Well (John 4)
- Jonah to the Ninevites (Jonah)
- Jesus and the Centurion (Mark 10)
- Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8)

The Bible Wants Justice for all People Groups

- Justice for the Gentiles (Matthew 12:14)
- Paul's rebuke of Peter (Gal. 2:1-16)

The Bible is Honest about Ethnic Tensions

- Hellenists vs. Hebrews (Acts 6:2-6)
- Gentile Christians and the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-21)
- Dividing Wall of Hostility (Eph. 2:14-18)

The Bible Supports the Dignity of all ethnicities

- Made in God's image (Genesis 1)
- All related to God (Eph. 3:15)
- Co-heirs with Christ (Eph. 3:6)

The Bible Models Multi-Ethnic Ministry

- Multi-ethnic Ministry Partners (Acts 10:4)
- Multi-ethnic Church Plant in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3)

¹Dr. Randy White. Pink House Curriculum, Intersarsity's Fresno Institute for Urban Leadership.

Reconciliation Inventory²

The purpose of these questions is not to provoke guilt, but to help you examine your everyday life and determine what level of contact you actually do have with people from another race. While the questions are addressed to whites, readers from any background can ask themselves the questions in terms of their contact with members of a different racial group.

Neighborhood

- If you had to borrow a tool, is there someone of a different ethnicity or background on your street you would ask for it?

Children

- If you needed a baby sitter for your children, is there someone from a different background as you, you would trust to do it?
- Do your children have friends of a different background than you they might invite to spend the night?
- Look at your children's bookshelf. Do they have any books about or by people of a different background than you?
- If you wanted a Christian from a different background or a nonwhite Christian to have an impact on your children, is there someone you would invite to participate in their lives?

Work

- If you were to choose one coworker to do a vitally important project with, is there a black person or a person of a different ethnic background you could choose?

Church / Spiritual

- If you were to choose a prayer partner, is there a person of a different ethnic or racial background you know well enough to ask?
- Is there a living black Christian who has had an influence on your spiritual development?

Social

- If you decided to ask someone from a different racial or ethnic background out to dinner, is there someone you could invite?
- If you're married, is there a black couple or a couple from a different racial or ethnic background you and your spouse would invite to dinner?
- If you were to invite someone to join you in your favorite recreational activity, is there a black person or a person from a different racial or ethnic background you would invite?

² Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, *More than Equals* (Downer's Grove, Ill. Intervarsity Press, 2000), pg. 78 and 79.

Mentors

- Is there a living black person or someone from a different ethnic or cultural background than you who has made a significant impact on your life?
- Look through your bookshelves. Do you have any books by nonwhite authors or authors from a different ethnic, racial or cultural background? What about Christian authors?

Reconciliation Two-Step³

There is more to reconciliation than multi-ethnicity. A strategy at both the relational and systemic levels are necessary. They are two essential feet of a complex dance.

Left Foot (Personal)	Right Foot (Systemic)
<p>1. Acknowledge and repent of personal prejudice and unexamined privilege, asking and extending forgiveness.</p> <p><i>Questions to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What attitudes or actions have I inherited or adopted that I know are hindering the development of true relationships across ethnic lines? - What disincentives exist in my life to pursuing racial reconciliation? - What prevents me from asking for or extending forgiveness when race has been a factor in the hurt I or someone else is feeling? 	<p>1. Address / confront corporate or systemic forms of racism (i.e. housing, health, education, employment, governmental, church leadership, etc.)</p> <p><i>Questions to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Am I aware of what different racial groups in my community regard as justice issues that are based in ethnicity or race? Can I name those issues? Would I know who to ask? - Do I regularly speak out in social forums to address issues of race? - Have I ever met with a police, government, business or church official to express concern over racial issues or to address an incident?
<p>2. Commit to growing in personal knowledge of race issues from a Biblical, historical and cultural perspectives.</p> <p><i>Questions to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How confident would I be at this moment if I had to demonstrate the specific ways the Bible deals with race, ethnicity, racial tensions or reconciliation? - If I had to describe to someone else one major current issue facing the Latino, African American, Asian American and Native American communities respectively, and the roots of these issues in history, could I do it? - Where in my life am I actively seeking to learn about other cultures? 	<p>2. Support the dissemination and access to information about race and reconciliation issues in the institutions where you have influence.</p> <p><i>Questions to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have I ever met with someone in my profession or major or denomination to discuss racial justice and reconciliation issues from an insider perspective? - Do I have books, articles, Bible study guides, etc. at the ready to use as the opportunity arises? How current are my materials? - Do I know what institutions or agencies or churches in my community are being proactive on race and reconciliation issues?

³ Dr. Randy White. Pink House Curriculum, Intersarsity's Fresno Institute for Urban Leadership.

Reconciliation Two-Step Con't.

Left Foot (Personal)	Right Foot (Systemic)
<p>3. Develop multi-ethnic friendships and increase your level of cultural sensitivity.</p> <p><i>Questions to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In my circle of 5 closest friends, is there ethnic diversity? - Have I asked my closest friend who is different than me ethnically how I am doing in my relationship with them, where my blinders are, and how I can honor them more? - Where in my life am I actively leaving my ethnic comfort zone to develop relationships? 	<p>3. Develop diverse partnerships focused on a collaborative task where all parties are essential.</p> <p><i>Questions to ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Am I in any kind of mutually dependent, collaborative relationship with nonwhite individuals or organizations where we are attempting to accomplish something together? - What agencies in my community are doing the best job at creating opportunities to work side by side at something across ethnic lines? - If I am in diverse partnerships, who holds the power, who brings the resources, who dictates the style, who gets to be leader, what are the pathways to leadership and what is success?

The 'One Others' of the Bible

What the Bible has to say about how Christians are to relate to each other.

Be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50)

Wash one another's feet (John 13:14)

You are members of one another (Rom. 12:5)

Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)

Be devoted to one another in love (Rom. 12:10)

Honor one another above yourselves (Rom 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16)

Love one another (Rom. 13:8)

Stop passing judgment on one another (Rom. 14:13)

Edify one another (Rom. 14:19)

Be like-minded toward one another (Rom 15:5)

Admonish one another (Rom. 15:4)

Greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16)

Greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Cor. 16:20)

Greet one another with a holy kiss (2 Cor. 13:12)

Greet one another with a kiss of love (1 Peter 5:14)

Wait for one another (1 Cor. 11:33)

Have the same care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)

Serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13)

Bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2)

Speak truth for we are members of one another (Eph. 4:25)

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32)

Love one another (1 John 3:11)

Love one another (1 John 4:7)

Love one another (1 John 4:12)

Do not lie to one another (Col. 3:9)

Bear with one another (Col. 3:13)

Love one another (1 Thess. 4:9)

Love one another deeply (1 Peter 1:22)

Forgive one another (Col. 3:13)

Comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18)

Incite one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24)

Encourage one another (Heb. 10:25)

Do not speak evil of one another (James 4:11)

Do not make complaints against one another (James 5:9)

Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)

Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)

Clothe yourself with humility towards one another (1 Peter 5:5)

Have fellowship with one another (1 John 3:23)

Love one another (1 John 3:23)

Love one another (1 John 4: 11)

Love one another (2 John 5)

Bibliography

This small group guide was drawn extensively from the following resources.

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