



**UNITY
COMMISSION**

B I B L E S T U D Y

**ROAD TO
RACIAL
RECONCILIATION**



OPEN BIBLE[®]
CHURCHES

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First Edition

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to acknowledge and thank the Unity Commission of Open Bible Churches for their tireless efforts to build unity in the body of Christ by lovingly encouraging and assisting our Open Bible family in being sensitized to the continued reality of racial bias and discrimination. *Road to Racial Reconciliation* is a byproduct of their efforts.

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The Unity Commission dedicates *Road to Racial Reconciliation* to the pursuit of relationships, respect, and interaction – all of which transcend both cultural and racial barriers and reflect the love of Jesus.

We salute our team of passionate writers, all members of the Unity Commission, who, with the gifted assistance of Hannah Bemis, copy editor, developed the lessons for this Bible study, which can be used for personal or group study.

They are:

Rev. Kwabea Francis

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We also appreciate the skilled graphic design assistance of Greg Roberts, Open Bible's print media manager.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this resource. We trust it will help you become aware of any assumptions you might unknowingly hold in your own heart that could hinder harmony in Christ's body and encourage you to be on the lookout for opportunities to do your part in building unity in the body of Christ.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1, NASB).

Randall A. Bach and Hannah Bemis

CONTENTS

WEEK 1: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY 7

Day 1: Learning to be Aware	9
Day 2: Recognizing Our Influences	11
Day 3: Sharing Our Lives	12
Day 4: Truly Loving One Another	14
Day 5: Personal Application & Prayer	16

WEEK 2: JESUS, THE APOSTLES & RACE 19

Day 1: Jesus is Rejected	21
Day 2: Jesus' First Response	23
Day 3: Jesus' Second Response	24
Day 4: Peter's Approach to Race	26
Day 5: Personal Application & Prayer	28

CONTENTS

WEEK 3: STRANGERS, NEIGHBORS, BROTHERS & SISTERS 31

Day 1: Stranger Danger or Kindness – God’s Plan for the Stranger	33
Day 2: Stranger to Neighbor	35
Day 3: Brothers and Sisters (Sometimes the Hardest Ones to Love)	37
Day 4: The Bottom Line of Love	39
Day 5: Personal Application & Prayer	40

WEEK 4: STEPPING INTO LOVE & RECONCILIATION 43

Day 1: Building Healthy Relationships	45
Day 2: The Value of Learning to Listen	46
Day 3: Walking In & Pursuing Peace	48
Day 4: Bearing One Another’s Burdens	50
Day 5: Personal Application & Prayer	52

CONTENTS

WEEK 5: EQUALITY & UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST 55

Day 1: God's Word on Equality	57
Day 2: God's Word on Equality (continued)	60
Day 3: God's Word on Unity	62
Day 4: God's Word on Unity (continued)	63
Day 5: Personal Application & Prayer	65

WEEK 6: JUSTICE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST 68

Day 1: God's Word on Justice	70
Day 2: God's Word on Justice (continued)	72
Day 3: Moses, Pharaoh & the Children of Israel (A Biblical Case Study)	74
Day 4: Moses, Pharaoh & the Children of Israel (A Biblical Case Study)	76
Day 5: Personal Application & Prayer	77



WEEK

1

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

WELCOME!

You have just begun what will hopefully be a challenging and eye-opening journey toward racial unity and reconciliation. Our goal is for this journey to be centered on Scripture and led by the Holy Spirit. Before you begin, we invite you to do two things. First, pray. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you do each week's lessons. We can trust Him to lead us into all truth with kindness and gentleness. Some of the topics may not be easy; some may even bring up painful or tense feelings. Trust that Jesus will be with you all the way, giving you the courage to enter the tension.

Second, give some thought to your own feelings regarding race in America. Do you believe racial reconciliation is needed? When you look around, do you see peace or do you see conflict? Whatever your feelings and beliefs may be, Jesus is more than able to mold them to match the Truth that is His nature. Our prayer is that by the end of this study, our hearts will more closely match that of our Father, allowing us to see, love, and build relationships with people of all races as He does.

DAY 1: LEARNING TO BE AWARE

On our road to reconciliation regarding race in America, the first step is awareness. We need to become aware of the fact that how we see life is only one degree of a 360-degree view. That means there are 359 angles of a situation that we don't see. That is a lot of room for growth if we're willing and surrendered to God.

1. Let's start off our week with some personal self-evaluation and see if we can learn some new angles about race and reconciliation. For each question, simply check "Yes" or "No."

Do you ever think about the color of your skin?

Yes _____

No _____

Do you ever feel defensive or worried about people who have your skin color?

Yes _____

No _____

Is your race or culture a defining attribute to you?

Yes _____

No _____

Have you ever experienced being treated differently based on the color of your skin?

Yes _____

No _____

When you look around a room, do most of the people look like you?

Yes _____

No _____

Did you grow up in a multicultural community?

Yes _____

No _____

WEEK 1

If most of your answers are “No,” then that places you in the majority of the population. If most of your answers are “Yes,” then most likely you know what it is like to live in the minority of the population. Let’s imagine for a moment that neither one of those terms defines you nor puts you on a “good” or “bad” side. We are called to love one another despite our earthly bodies.

2. Read *Philippians 2:1-4*. Summarize what Paul is saying in your own words.

3. Based on this Scripture, is there any sort of person we are not called to love?

4. Look up the following Scriptures. Identify who Jesus is ministering to and whether they would have represented a “majority” or a “minority” in Jewish culture.

Mark 2:13-17
Luke 7:1-10
Luke 7:36-50
John 4:1-26

5. What group/s might have represented the majority (the ones with the most influence and representation) in New Testament Jewish culture? (There are several potential answers to this question.)

6. Based on these Scriptures, what people did Jesus allow to decide for Him who had value and who did not?

WEEK 1

7. Explain whether Jesus ministered to those who were most like Him or least like Him. Give specific examples.

DAY 2: RECOGNIZING OUR INFLUENCES

The examples from Jesus that we read yesterday show us that there is value in seeing life from someone else's perspective and that every life has value because it was created in the image of God. Jesus' main influence was His relationship with the Father.

We have all been influenced throughout our lives by our family, experiences, and faith. We are influenced by what we listen to, what we watch, and what we read. Becoming aware of the other 359 degrees of a situation requires that we set aside what we have always believed to be the full picture and realize that maybe there is another way of looking at a situation.

1. What are some of the major influences in your life? (Examples: family, friends, movies, books, podcasts, music)

2. Read *1 John 4*. In verse 6, John challenges us to be able to recognize the Spirit of Truth from the spirit of error. Share an example of each regarding the racial divisions we face today.

Spirit of Truth:

Spirit of Error:

WEEK 1

3. What influences in life can make it difficult to accept perspectives different than our own? How does *1 John 4* address those influences?

4. What is one of the biggest challenges you personally face regarding the topic of race and culture? Are there experiences or other influences from your life history that contribute to those challenges?

DAY 3:

SHARING OUR LIVES

In order to become more understanding of people who are different from us we have to be willing to give of ourselves. The path to reconciliation between races is relationship.

1. Read *1 Thessalonians 2:8*. What is it that compelled Paul to share his life with those from Thessalonica?

2. What are some obstacles people might face in sharing life with someone from a different race or culture?

DAY 4:

TRULY LOVING ONE ANOTHER

The world defines so much for us; if we are not careful it can shape who we are and control how we act. God has called us to a much higher standard. We explored that standard on Day 3, learning what it means to share our lives with each other. Today we are going to spend time in 1 John 4, taking a good look at what it means to love one another and examining the challenges we may face when trying to do that. We need to start with a strong foundation that is filled with the Word of God.

1. Read *1 John 4:7-12*.
Where does John say love comes from?

How does God show us love?

Why does God call us to love everyone?

WEEK 1

2. Now read *1 John 4:15-21*.
What does it mean that we abide in God and He abides in us?

How do we come to know and believe in (or trust in) God's love?

How does God perfect our love?

Is there room for fear in our love? Please explain.

WEEK 1

What does God command of us when it comes to loving everyone?

DAY 5: PERSONAL APPLICATION & PRAYER

Loving the Lord and believing in Jesus comes at a high price and often requires us to stand up and speak truth, even if no one else is willing to do that. Now more than ever is a time to speak up and share the Gospel of Jesus and the love that He gives. Racism has no place in the Gospel and is a direct and blatant attack on the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.

1. Read *John 3:10-21* and summarize it in your own words.

WEEK 1

2. What implication does the belief that Jesus died on a cross for our sins, went to hell, and conquered death only to rise from the grave three days later all to give us the promise of eternal life have on how we care about, treat, and advocate for others (even those who are different from us)?

3. Read *John 1:6-23*. What was John's mission or purpose?

4. What would it look like today to be someone who is "crying out in the wilderness" to prepare or make straight the way of the Lord (vs 23, ESV)? How might this "crying out" apply to taking a stand against racial injustice?

5. Do you think God would want you to take a stand against racism and the mistreatment of those He loves and those He has called us to love? Why or why not?

WEEK 1

6. What are some biblically-aligned ways you could stand for and with those from other races and cultures who are being mistreated?

PRAYER

FOCUS

If we have made a commitment to the Lord and call Jesus our Savior, then the gospel compels us to hate evil and to LIVE IN THE LIGHT. As we come to a close in the introduction of our study and prepare to journey over the next five weeks, let's invite the Lord to soften our hearts and expand our perspectives.

Lord, we thank you for Your Son, Jesus, and we rejoice in the grace and freedom that we find at the foot of the cross. As we continue our journey toward racial reconciliation and unity, may we have the same heart that Paul did when he wrote these words to the church of Ephesus.

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift (Ephesians 4:1-7, ESV).

Lord, give us strength to rely on you and lean into the uncomfortable places. May we trust in you with all of our hearts! Give us a heart and mind that longs to find unity amongst your people.



WEEK

2

JESUS, THE APOSTLES & RACE

INTRODUCTION

When most of our relatives and the people in our circle of friends look like us, it is easy to not think about race as a personal challenge. Although other people may have a problem with race, we might assume all is well since we have not personally experienced racial prejudice or conflict. When our sense of norm is interrupted, when assertions from a differing perspective invade our comfort level, we're surprised by what comes to our mind, or perhaps even out of our mouth. Our responses to these types of disruption can be an indicator of who we are and what we truly believe inside. The Bible shares that Jesus and others were also tested regarding their heart toward other races and cultures. This week we'll look at how Jesus and some of His apostles viewed, felt about, and responded to other races. This will better help us in our own navigation of racial matters.

For the purposes of this chapter, it will be helpful to know some background information about the complex relationship between the Israelites (Jews) and the Samaritans. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken over by the Assyrians in 721 BC. Some of the Israelites were taken as prisoners and others remained in the land and married the people of the land who were Gentiles, people who were not Jewish. The children of those marriages were the Samaritans, half-Jewish and half-Gentile, whom the Israelites viewed as "half breeds." They were disliked and shunned by the Israelites, not only because they were the offspring of intermarriage but also because they worshiped pagan idols (2 Kings 17:29). During Nehemiah's time, 530 BC, a remnant of Israel was allowed to return to the North and reclaim their land. The Samaritans who lived in that land greatly opposed Nehemiah's quest to rebuild the Jewish temple and they tried to sabotage his efforts. Bitterness between the Jews and Samaritans continued to grow on both sides until about five centuries later, when Jesus arrived on the scene.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING:

Brief History of The Samaritans (Bible History Online) (bible-history.com)
Who Were the Samaritans? Their Meaning in the Bible (biblestudytools.com)

DAY 1: JESUS IS REJECTED

1. Read *Luke 9:51-56*. What seems to be happening in these verses, especially verse 53?
2. What was the disciples' response to all that was taking place in Samaria? What emotions do you recognize in their responses?
3. How did Jesus respond to the disciples and to the Samaritans?
4. Which response do you relate with the most, Jesus' or the disciples'? What are the reasons for your choice?

WEEK 2

5. Culturally the Samaritans and Jews did not get along. Bias ran deep, both ways. Using what you've learned about their history, describe how this might have influenced the disciples' behavior in this story.

6. Consider whether you have ever had a bias or challenge when it comes to another person's race or culture. Jot down any experiences that come to mind.

7. What do you hear Jesus saying to the disciples in this passage? Scripture says nothing about how they responded to His rebuke; what thoughts do you think they had? What do you hear Him speaking to your heart?

WEEK 2

DAY 2: JESUS' FIRST RESPONSE

1. Read *Luke 10:30-37*. Of the three men in the story, which one demonstrated what it means to be a neighbor and why?
2. From your reading of this text and from what you read yesterday regarding Jesus' rejection (*Luke 9:51-56*), how do you think Jesus felt about the Samaritan people? Please explain your answer.
3. What is the kindest thing someone from a different race or culture than yours has said or done for you? Did their kindness affect your view of people who are like them? If so, how?
4. If you had to retell this story in a current context, what type of person might fit the role of the beaten man? Who would you cast as the Samaritan? Why did you assign the roles in this way?

WEEK 2

5. How do you think the significance of Jesus using a Samaritan man to demonstrate being a neighbor could be relevant in today's racial divide?
6. What is God speaking to you in this story about being a neighbor? Take a moment to thank Him for what He is saying and ask Him to show you what your next steps should be.

DAY 3: JESUS' SECOND RESPONSE

1. Read *John 4:4-9*. How did Jesus and the Samaritan woman respond to each other?
2. Look back at *Luke 9:51-56* and *John 4:10-15*. Jesus was rejected by the Samaritans in Luke 9. Why do you think He responded to this Samaritan woman in the way He did? If you had been in Jesus' place, would that have been difficult to say and do?

WEEK 2

3. Re-read *John 4:10-26* Did Jesus or the Samaritan woman mention their differences? Who brought up their racial differences, and what are the differences that were mentioned?

What was the focus of the conversation?

Why do you think their conversation took this direction?

4. According to the stories in the Bible read so far this week, what was Jesus' approach to racism?
5. Think of Jesus' race. Was He in a position of power or of vulnerability? Use the text reviewed this week and any other Scripture to explain your answer.

WEEK 2

6. Have you ever had a desire to share Jesus with a person from another culture, race, language group, or religion? If you have done so, how was the interaction and what was the outcome?

DAY 4: PETER'S APPROACH TO RACE

1. Read *Acts 10:1-8*. Where was Cornelius from and what country did he serve as captain?
2. Look at *Acts 10:2*. What type of man was Cornelius and why do you think this fact was mentioned about him?
3. Read *Acts 10:9-16*. What did God show Peter in the vision? How many times did He show this vision and why do you think God showed the same vision multiple times?

WEEK 2

4. Read *Leviticus 11:3-19*. In this list of forbidden foods, did you notice any of the animals that Paul saw in his vision and was told to eat? What might be the significance of this?

5. Re-read *Acts 10:15*. Why do you think God told Peter to eat something that was once forbidden?

Regarding race, has God ever made it clear to you or to someone you know that it was okay to interact with someone you once thought was forbidden? Did you do it, and why or why not?

6. Read *Acts 10:17-23*. What were the Holy Spirit's next set of instructions as stated in this portion of Scripture?

WEEK 2

In what way does Peter receive confirmation from God that these men are part of the vision he saw?

7. In verse 28 of *Acts 10*, what does Peter reveal to Cornelius? Why is it significant? Do you believe this was difficult for Peter? Why, or why not?
8. In verses 34 and 35 of *Acts 10*, Peter makes another statement. What do you hear God saying through Peter in these two verses?

DAY 5: PERSONAL APPLICATION & PRAYER

1. What kind of view were you raised with toward people who were different from you in race, language, or culture? Did you see examples of views among people you knew that you recognized were wrong?

WEEK 2

2. Review the personal influences you reflected on last week. What influences in your life, positive and negative, have contributed to the way you see and interact with people from different races or cultures?

3. As you reflect upon your life, were there negative experiences or influences to overcome that negatively affected your attitude toward other races? Describe a person whom you saw best model Jesus-like love for people who did not look like that person.

4. Re-read *Acts 10:28, 34-35*. What is God speaking to you today about what to believe and how you should interact with people who are different from you?

PRAYER

FOCUS

Take some time to pray about what God has spoken to you this week. While praying for yourself, pray also for any others you may know who are struggling with this topic of race. If you choose to, you can use the following as your guide:

Father, thank You for creating us all in your image. You are great and truly to be praised. Thank You for speaking through your Word this week. If I have a bias or dislike of others who are not like me, Father, I humbly repent and ask for your help to do and think differently. Help me to forgive others who may have bias toward me. Use me as your light to love others and help others see You. Lord, help me to use Jesus as my model when I interact with those who are different from me and those who have rejected me in the past. May I love others no matter what they may look like. May You be glorified in all I do and say, especially when I interact with others unlike me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



WEEK

3

STRANGERS, NEIGHBORS, BROTHERS & SISTERS

INTRODUCTION

As we saw last week, Jesus' lifestyle gives us the ultimate example of how we are called to interact with others, especially those referred to in the Bible as "strangers," "neighbors," and our "brothers." When someone is our stranger or neighbor, they may not look or sound like us. This difference can often be a point of discomfort. Unfortunately, when we are uncomfortable, we sometimes say and do things that feel unkind or even dismissive of others who are different from us. We must recognize and rise above that! It is important that we learn not to send incorrect messages just because we are uncomfortable. We need to realize that, even if unintended, insensitive comments or actions toward people who seem different from us can cause offense and hurt. We must assume responsibility for the ways that our words and actions affect people. While it may be human nature to gravitate toward people who seem familiar to us, the Bible shows us another way. This week's lesson focuses on God's desired response to our stranger, neighbor, and brother or sister.

DAY 1: STRANGER DANGER OR KINDNESS

1. Try to recall a time as a child or an adult when you felt like the “stranger” or outsider of a group. What or who helped you feel better or more comfortable?
2. Read *Leviticus 19:33-34*. Who does this verse categorize as an “outsider,” “foreigner” or “stranger”? Use a concordance or a Bible dictionary (there are many available online) to get help with the biblical definition of “stranger.”
3. Using the biblical definition as a guide, who might we categorize as a stranger today?
4. What does the *Leviticus 19:33-34* Scripture above say about the treatment of strangers in our lives?

WEEK 3

How does this Scripture apply in our culture today?

How might this Scripture personally apply in your life today?

5. An “in group” is the group of people we most identify with and feel comfortable with. Considering your own life, who would you consider your most natural “in group,” and what groups of people might you see as more foreign or unfamiliar?

6. Read *Galatians 3:26-29*. A new idea of being one in Jesus Christ is mentioned in these verses. What does it mean to be one in Christ as mentioned in verse 28?

7. Reflecting on the same passage, what, if anything, might cause us to question whether another person is truly one in Jesus with us?

WEEK 3

8. In the New Living Translation verse 27 mentions that once we “put on Christ, like putting on new clothes,” our new identity in Christ trumps our previous identifiers (Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female). What do you think this could or should look like in the Church?

DAY 2: STRANGER TO NEIGHBOR

1. Read the following Scriptures: *Matthew 22:34-39, Matthew 19:16-19, and Mark 12: 28-33*. Based on these lines from Jesus, and reviewing the story of the “Good Samaritan,” who would Jesus have meant when He referred to our “neighbor”? Feel free to use a concordance or Bible dictionary to get help with the biblical definition.
2. The above Scriptures are taken from different conversations, but there seems to be a common theme with them all. Why might this similarity be present?

WEEK 3

3. In your own life, who would you most struggle to call your neighbor? Is there anyone you would exclude from this category? Is there anyone the Bible excludes from its definition of “neighbor”? Please explain your thoughts.

4. Read and reflect on *Romans 13:8-10*, *Leviticus 19:16-18*, and *James 2:8-9*. Name some specific ways these Scriptures say we should treat our neighbor.

5. What is one small “next step” you could take with a specific person in your life to treat them more like a neighbor? (Bonus points if it is the person or people from #4 that you tend to struggle with!)

DAY 3: BROTHERS AND SISTERS

(Sometimes the Hardest Ones to Love)

1. Using a biblical concordance or dictionary, paraphrase the biblical definition of "brother."
2. Review *1 John 4:13-21* and highlight or write below any verses that mention our brother.
3. According to this Scripture, who is our "brother" (or sister)? Are there any distinctions in race, gender, political party, or church affiliation?
4. According to this passage, what lives in us if we live in God?
5. What are some of the benefits of living in God? What grows in us when we do? (see verse 17)
6. What is cast out of us when we have God's love?

WEEK 3

7. Take a look at verse 20. What factors might cause us to fear one of our brothers or sisters in Christ? List anything that comes to mind.

8. It is common for people to voice fear of others who are different from them. Some express fear of those with a different socio-economic status or belief system joining their community or moving into their neighborhood. Some might express fear that someone of a different race or language might take their job. Based on verse 20, are these fears biblical (do they show love)? Please explain.

9. Do you consider other Christ followers who believe differently from you (for example, economically, politically, theologically, etc.) or look/sound different than you to be your brother or sister? Please explain.

10. Based on verse 21 and our directive of loving our brothers and sisters, how do we get to a place of loving other believers whom we fear or do not agree with?

11. Take a look at *Galatians 5:13*. How does this Scripture instruct us to show love to our brother/sister?

WEEK 3

What would demonstrating love look like toward other believers who we strongly disagree with or who we consider to be very different from us?

DAY 4: THE BOTTOM LINE OF LOVE

1. There are many kinds of love. What comes to your mind when you think of “love”? Write your own definition:
2. Review *1 John 4:7-8*. Compare the description of love in this Scripture to your definition from #1.
3. Think about whether there is a person or group of people in your life that you find it difficult to love. What are some ways of overcoming challenges in loving them?
4. Read *John 13:33-34*. What do you hear Jesus calling us to do as His children?

WEEK 3

5. Take a look at *1 Corinthians 13:4-7*. Love is further described in this passage. Share some of the descriptions for love.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

6. What most speaks to your heart regarding love in *1 Corinthians 13:4-7*?

DAY 5: PERSONAL APPLICATION & PRAYER

1. In your contact with people who are different from you (racially, socioeconomically, politically, culturally, etc.), do you think you treat them more like a stranger, a neighbor, or a brother? Why do you think that is?

WEEK 3

2. Circle the word that best describes your relationships with “neighbors” of a different race (*vibrant, comfortable, uncertain/awkward, fearful, curious, non-existent, other*). What experiences or influences in your life have contributed to these feelings?

3. Reflecting on this week’s study, list actions God might be calling you to take toward people who are different from you. Second, list actions God might be calling you to take with people who are like you, to help them adjust their thoughts and actions toward people who are different from them.

4. When looking back over this week’s Scriptures, what command seems to unite the three categories of stranger, neighbor, and brother?

5. Looking at the life of Jesus, do you think He made a distinction between these three categories? Please explain.

PRAYER

FOCUS

Pause for a moment to consider what the Holy Spirit has been speaking to your heart. After some time of silence, pray about any changes God is calling you to make. You may also pray this aloud.

Father thank you for a week of exploration in the love of my neighbor, brother, sister, and stranger. Thank you for revealing truth to my heart in a fresh way. The changes you desire to see in my heart I submit to you, and I ask for help in moving forward, in living out your command. Help me to love in a manner that pleases you, in faithfulness to your Word. Help me to be a bridge-builder between races. May I live out love in a manner that glorifies and demonstrates the truth of who you are. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



WEEK

4

STEPPING INTO LOVE & RECONCILIATION

INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation can be defined as the restoration of friendly relations. This is not just a nice idea; we are actually called by God to the ministry of reconciliation. Our relationship with God is directly connected to our relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters, our neighbors, and even strangers. If we choose to be unreconciled with those around us, then we truly cannot be united with Christ in the freedom He has given us.

Sadly, racism has created a tremendous amount of division. Through this week's study we hope to create pathways that are filled with God's grace and instructions, leading to a better understanding of what it truly means to be reconciled with one another.

"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 ESV).

DAY 1: BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

1. Read *Romans 12:9-13*. Reflecting on your life, list any people or groups of people who you may have only “pretended” to love.

2. When you think about people to whom you typically “show hospitality” or invite into your home, do these people tend to be and look mostly like you or different from you? What are some of the reasons this might be?

3. Do you have any relationships with someone who either has a different color of skin than you or is from a different culture?

If yes, please share something you have learned from that relationship that you didn't know until you became friends.

If no, why do you think that is?

WEEK 4

4. Read *Ephesians 2:11-22*. What are some barriers we might find in our lives that make it hard to build and maintain healthy relationships?
5. What are ways that the Holy Spirit helps us to look beyond our barriers and enjoy the unity that is found in Jesus? (Verses 14-22 will be helpful in answering this question.)
6. Read *1 John 3:18-19*. What are some actions you can take to build relationships with the people of a different race or culture God has placed (or may place) in your life? (Examples: meet over a cup of coffee, invite a family over for dinner, volunteer together, etc.)

DAY 2: THE VALUE OF LEARNING TO LISTEN

1. On a scale from one to ten, one being the worst and ten being the best, how good of a listener are you?
2. Learning to be an active listener in a friendship starts with giving up our thoughts and our right to speak. In the following Scripture passage,

WEEK 4

circle the qualities mentioned that could help us become better listeners. (Feel free to compare different versions of the passage when doing this activity).

"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 receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:3-12 ESV)

3. Read *Romans 12:2*. Is listening a common custom or behavior of this world? Please explain why or why not.

4. How might God transform us to be better listeners?

WEEK 4

5. Read *James 1:19*. Try to recall and share about a time that the Lord brought you into a situation that required you to simply listen.
6. What did you learn from that time?
7. How might the skill of listening help aid us in our goal of racial reconciliation?

DAY 3: WALKING IN & PURSUING PEACE

1. Read *1 Peter 3:8-12*. What is your first reaction when someone insults or “reviles” you? What are your instinctive emotions and behaviors when you’ve been slighted or offended?

WEEK 4

2. Does our culture celebrate a person who is tenderhearted and humble in attitude? Give specific examples of why or why not, perhaps providing examples of people who have demonstrated these attitudes in history or current times.

3. In your relationships, do you more often find yourself seeking peace or seeking confirmation that you are right? Reflect on why that might be.

4. Read *Proverbs 14:29*. When issues of race or other controversial issues are discussed, or when someone argues with you over something you are passionate about, where do you tend to land in the conversation? What are some ways you can be a person of “great understanding” in these situations?

5. Read *Romans 12:17-21* below. Highlight any of the verses that speak to you. Try to name one specific way you can conquer an evil in your life with good.

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (ESV).

WEEK 4

6. How might being tender-hearted, humble and free of vengeance help aid us in our goal of racial reconciliation?

DAY 4: BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

We will camp out in Galatians 6 today and learn how our behavior and investments with our earthly relationships have a direct effect on our eternal relationship with the Father.

1. Read *Galatians 6:1-3*. How would you define or describe the word "burden"?
2. What does it mean to carry someone else's burden? Try to give specific examples of when you have done this or someone has done this for you.
3. Based on the Scripture we just read, what is the main obstacle we face in helping someone carry their burden?

WEEK 4

4. Read *Galatians 6:7-10*. How does the idea of reaping what we sow apply to the relationships in our lives? What are some specific ways you have reaped what you've sown in your personal relationships?

5. What does God say about those who are concerned only with their own life ("sow to [their] own flesh")? What are some ways we can step outside of ourselves and be more concerned about those who are racially different from us?

6. Read *1 Peter 5:7* and *Psalms 55:22*. Who is our ultimate example in bearing the burdens of others?

7. Is it possible to effectively carry another's burdens before we first let God carry ours? Please explain your thoughts.

8. List some things or "burdens" you may need to surrender to God so you are better able to bear the burdens of others.

DAY 5: PERSONAL APPLICATION & PRAYER

1. Read *Hebrews 12:15*. According to this Scripture, what is it that has the potential to defile us? How does this cause us to fall short of God's grace?

2. Take a few minutes and reflect on a time when you struggled with bitterness. How did you handle it? In what ways was God's grace present with you through the experience?

3. Read *Luke 17:4*, *Ephesians 4:32*, and *Colossians 3:13*. What repeated theme seems to be at the heart of reconciliation? Reflect on whether there are any people with whom you need to seek forgiveness or give forgiveness.

WEEK 4

4. Read the passage below. Highlight any parts that speak to the ideas of reconciliation and peace-making.

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

5. Who are some people in your life with whom you can begin the process of reconciliation? List some practical steps you can take to begin this process.

6. Now give some thought to whether there is any person, or any people groups, in your life with whom racial reconciliation is needed. If there are, what are some steps you can take to begin restoring right relationship with these people?

7. Read *Proverbs 10:12*. What is it that covers all offenses and, according to *1 Corinthians 13:8*, “never ends”? Who in the Bible embodies this quality perfectly?

PRAYER

FOCUS

Read *1 Peter 2:23*. Spend some time reflecting on how Jesus modeled humble love, and ask Him to help you embody love to others, especially those who have hurt you, who challenge you, or who are different from you.

Lord, give me your eyes to see and your ears to hear. If there is any offense in my heart, I submit it to you. Show me how I can be your hands and feet as I live out my life and help me to offer forgiveness first. Teach me how to walk alongside my brothers and sisters in Christ and learn the true meaning of bearing another's burdens. Lord, I love you and I thank you for the grace you give me each and every day. Today I choose to lean into that grace, trusting that it will make me more like you. Amen.



WEEK

5

EQUALITY & UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Last week we learned what the Bible has to say about reconciliation and how we can actually walk out the love that God's Word describes. It seems a given that if we are walking in love and pursuing reconciliation, that equal treatment and unity should be present as well. God's Church should be the most equal and unified place on the planet! Sadly, this isn't always the case.

For various reasons, known and unknown, the body of Christ has sometimes fallen short of God's expectation for us to demonstrate equality and unity towards all and with all. Since the body of Christ has a higher responsibility to reflect God's glorious Kingdom expectations on the earth, now is an opportune time for us to align or realign ourselves to God's divine directive. The current racial divide in our world should disturb and drive God's people to search, study, and settle on what the Word says on these persistent matters and willingly embrace God's written commands to reconcile racial division. In doing this, hopefully we can establish even more credibility in the body of Christ and reap a harvest of souls from all nations.

DAY 1: GOD'S WORD ON EQUALITY

1. In the space below, write your own personal definition of "equality."

2. Review *Galatians 3:26-28*. What do you think it means to be "one" in Christ Jesus? Describe what you think that would look like.

3. How does the idea of being "one" apply to the idea of "equality"? Is it possible to have one without the other?

4. We know that God does not create individuals with equal or identical abilities and characteristics. However, in what ways should Christians view and treat others as equal? What should that look like?

WEEK 5

5. Why do you think Paul thought this teaching on being “one” was necessary for believers within his cultural context? In what ways is this teaching necessary for our current cultural context?
6. Reviewing previous weeks of this study, think about the way Jesus interacted with people. Give some examples of how Jesus modeled the equality among genders and races that Paul describes in Galatians.
7. What are some things that all believers can do, or do better, to demonstrate the unity Christ had and still has in mind (unity that transcends racial barriers)?

WEEK 5

8. Read *Matthew 7:12*. How does this Scripture apply to the topic of equality? Based on what Jesus said here, how important do you think this topic was to Him?

9. In the space below, reflect on a time when you did not feel treated as an equal, for reasons other than race.

10. Now consider whether there was ever a time in your life when you were not treated as an equal by a person of another race. If you have an example, how was that racial experience different than what you wrote about in response to the previous question?

WEEK 5

- 11 Based on *Matthew 7:12*, explain whether you believe inequality is ever part of God's design. Try to cite another Bible story or passage to support your answer.

DAY 2: GOD'S WORD ON EQUALITY (CONTINUED)

1. Read *Philippians 2:2*. What should "having the same love" toward one another look like when the other person is in the body of Christ, but of another race? What should it look like if the other person is not in the body of Christ?

2. What does it mean to be "in full accord"? What are some things we can do in the body of Christ to be in full accord and of one mind?

WEEK 5

3. Now continue and read *Philippians 2:3*. Give an example of how selfish ambition might cause inequality.

4. What role does humility play in going beyond considering people our equal and actually valuing others above ourselves? Explain which you believe is the higher calling. Which of these did Jesus model?

5. Read *James 2:1-4*. What does James mean when he writes that as brothers, sisters, and believers in Jesus Christ, we should show no partiality (also known as favoritism or discrimination)? What would be some examples of partiality?

6. According to verse 4, what is described as the underlying cause/reason for discrimination? Do you think you or most people in your life treat discrimination as seriously as Scripture does? Why or why not?

DAY 3: GOD'S WORD ON UNITY

1. Read *Psalm 133:1-3*. Read closely the description of the anointing oil that was poured on top of Aaron's head. What does that description or picture teach us about how we should dwell together in unity?

2. Re-read verse 3: What is the wonderful benefit of unity described in this verse?

3. Read *1 Corinthians 12:18-21*. Have you seen a situation in which there was resentment toward a person from another race because of the leadership role to which God had called them? If so, what made you recognize that?

WEEK 5

4. Reflect upon your own life and interactions with people. Have there ever been times when you thought that people who looked different than you were of less value to the body of Christ? If yes, what caused you to think that way, and how have you changed?

5. If you witnessed a physical body with parts that were disconnected or dismembered, would you consider that body disabled or at a physical disadvantage? How might this apply to the spiritual body of Christ?

DAY 4: GOD'S WORD ON UNITY (CONTINUED)

1. Read *John 17:20-23* (ESV). When Jesus said, *"just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,"* do you think He meant
 - (A) Always agreeing with one another?
 - (B) Assembling and flowing in harmony together?
 - (C) Worshiping together under one roof?
 - (D) None of the above?
 - (E) All of the above?

Why did you select that answer?

WEEK 5

2. What does Jesus say the world will recognize if we as believers become one with each other and with Him?

3. This prayer contains some of the last words Jesus spoke to His Father before He was crucified. What does this tell us about unity and its priority to Jesus? How should this shape the way we prioritize and value unity?

4. Read *Proverbs 6:16-19*. In light of this Scripture, what examples do you see in our culture of both peace and discord in the Church body at large today?

5. What are some ways people might sow discord in the body of Christ today?

WEEK 5

6. What are some ways people could (and should) sow peace? What are some ways you personally can be a sower of peace in your areas of influence?

DAY 5: PERSONAL APPLICATION & PRAYER

1. What are some ways the Holy Spirit has been speaking to your heart this week? It might be through encouragement, conviction, ideas for action, etc. Take a few minutes to listen and write down anything the Holy Spirit is speaking to you.

2. In what ways has this study helped you see through the lenses of people in your life who are of a different race?

PRAYER

FOCUS

Take some time to pray about what God's Spirit has spoken to you this week. If you'd like to, use the following as your guide.

Heavenly Father, You impressed upon my heart this week through your Word how You are against inequality, disunity, and anything that fuels these fires of evil. Thank You for showing me through your Word areas that I personally can and need to address. Thank You for your grace and for granting me strength to be transformed by conforming into the image of your loving Son, Jesus, who is just to all, who equally loves all, and who wants unity among all. I repent where I have fallen short, and I ask for your forgiveness. I want my life to model a redeemed lifestyle of love and obedience. Please help me to be a vehicle for racial reconciliation in the body of Christ in my community and in my places of influence. I trust you to use me in the ministry of reconciliation from this day forward. In the name of Jesus I pray and believe. AMEN!



WEEK

6

JUSTICE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

We've covered a lot since we began this journey together. We've become more aware of our own perspective and influences, and how those might differ from opinions of others in our lives. We've studied the life of Jesus, and how He and His disciples responded when they encountered racial tension in their day. We've defined what it means to be a "stranger," a "neighbor," and a "brother," and have seen how God's command to love applies to each one of these. We've studied how the Bible defines love and what it looks like to walk in love on the path of reconciliation. We've confronted the truth that the biblical values of equality and unity aren't always demonstrated in the Church, but how God can use us to usher these values back into His kingdom.

This week, our final week, we will examine another biblical value, justice. "Justice" is a hot-button issue in current American culture, but it is a Kingdom issue first. Whatever groups or people are with whom you associate the term "justice," whatever memories or feelings it brings up, know that there is a heavenly version of this concept that is superior to even the best forms of it in our world. Justice was God's idea, and it's part of His heart. Because of that, it should be part of ours. This week we'll study the Scriptures to learn how God has advocated for justice on behalf of those who are marginalized and how we can join Him moving forward.

DAY 1: GOD'S WORD ON JUSTICE

1. What is your personal definition of justice?
2. Read *Amos 5:24*. How should *"justice roll[ing] down like waters"* and *"righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"* apply racially to the body of Christ?
3. Why might the prophet Amos have compared the qualities of justice and righteousness to water?

WEEK 6

4. Read *Isaiah 1:17*. What might this verse look like when applied correctly in the body of Christ? List specific examples and possibilities.

5. Do you feel personal responsibility to seek justice and correct oppression? If so, what would that look like for you? If you do not feel responsibility, please explain why.

6. Read *Micah 6:8*. Briefly paraphrase this Scripture. In what ways does it speak to your heart?

7. Why do you think God requires justice from His people, and how does humility play a role in fulfilling this requirement?

DAY 2: GOD'S WORD ON JUSTICE (CONTINUED)

1. Read *Isaiah 61:8*. This verse captures God's strong emotions towards justice and injustice. Why do you think God is so passionate about these things?

2. This Scripture also mentions God will "faithfully give...recompense," which means He will reward or punish appropriately for an action. What are some possible ways God might still reward or punish just or unjust actions today?

3. Read *Proverbs 28:5*. In light of this Scripture verse, how do you explain people of God who appear to not understand justice?

WEEK 6

4. What does *Proverbs 28:5* indicate is needed if we do not understand justice completely?

5. How would seeking the Lord help us to understand justice completely?

6. Read *Leviticus 19:15-18*. According to this Scripture, by what standard does God command us to apply justice? What are the specific ways we are commanded to behave toward our neighbor, and how are these behaviors a demonstration of justice?

7. In the space below, list some of the people groups whom you see as most vulnerable to injustice in our society and world. What kinds of injustice might they experience? As a person of faith, what are some biblical ways you can encourage, support, and assist those people?

WEEK 6

8. What are some specific ways the body of Christ can support and stand with people who share experiences of injustice in society, in court, or with law enforcement?

DAY 3: MOSES, PHARAOH & THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

(A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY).

1. Read *Exodus 1:8-15*. If the old Pharaoh and Joseph had a great partnership, why wasn't a new partnership formed between Israel and the new Pharaoh? (See *Genesis 41:41-46* for background information.)
2. What threat did the children of Israel pose to the new Pharaoh, and why?

WEEK 6

3. Is it possible that even though some people groups feel threatened by each other that those threats are more perceived than real? Please explain your thoughts and share any examples that come to mind.
4. What system did the new king of Egypt set up to protect his people from his fears of the Israelites? Explain whether you believe this is an example of racism.
5. Do you see resemblances between how the Egyptians treated the Israelites and how people of color or other minorities today have been treated? If so, share some examples of the similarities you see.

WEEK 6

6. Have you ever experienced or witnessed conduct or systems of control that were racist in nature? If so, how did you respond?

DAY 4:

MOSES, PHARAOH & THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

(A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY - continued).

1. Read *Exodus 3:7-10*. What was God's response to the culture-wide racism the children of Israel experienced in Egypt? What does your heart say in response to the oppressive manner in which the Egyptians treated the Israelites?
2. Meditate for a moment on God's response to Israel in the above passage. If there is injustice, inequality, and structural racism in the body of Christ today, how should God's people address and respond to these issues?

WEEK 6

3. As God's servant, can you hear the cry of any people experiencing injustice and inequality today, and if so, what will be your course of action? If not, what may be causing you not to hear their cry?

DAY 5: PERSONAL APPLICATION & PRAYER

1. In the Scriptures we've studied this week, is there anything that has shed light on adjustments you should make to help bear the burdens of people in your life (whether they are strangers, neighbors, or brothers and sisters) when they experience injustice? If so, please share what the Holy Spirit has spoken to you.

WEEK 6

2. How has the case study in Exodus helped you identify parallels with structures of racism and injustice that exist in our world today?

3. What are some things that you can do in your sphere of influence to help address and eradicate racial bias, inequality, or injustice?

4. Reread *Micah 6:8*. In what ways can you work to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God? Are there any resources (books, media, people) that might help you in this good work?

5. If you could do one thing in the next month to pursue justice, what would that one thing be?

WEEK 6

6. Reflect on the main takeaways you have from this Bible study. Write them below and share them this week with someone in your study group or in your life.

PRAYER

FOCUS

Take some time to ask the Holy Spirit what His “next steps” are for you following this study. Pray about what He speaks to you, and feel free to use the prayer below to guide you. (This week’s prayer, “A Prayer for True Justice,” was taken from the YouVersion Bible App.)

Oh Heavenly Father, our hearts are heavy. Broken. Please give us eyes to see and ears to hear where your Spirit is working. Help us to see every person the way that You see them. Break our hearts for what breaks yours, God. Let us not merely say that we love each other. Give us strength to mourn with those who mourn, to weep with those who weep. Let Your justice roll like waters. Let your righteousness and love flow from us like rivers of living water. Purify our hearts, Lord, and fill us with genuine hunger for justice, for mercy, and for true peace. Heavenly Father, let justice and mercy start with me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Thank you so much for your time and dedication to this Bible Study. Our hope is that it served as a way for you to connect with the Father's heart on an issue that He cares about. The bottom line is His love runs deep for people of every nation, ethnicity and color, and His desire for all of us to have equal access to Him was so overwhelming that He gave His life for that to be made possible. Themes of equality, justice, and racial reconciliation run all throughout the Bible, and hopefully this study provided a means for you to connect with Scripture in a new way, and maybe even awakened within you a new awareness or compassion for others who look different from you.

As you wrap up this study, we have a few suggestions for ways you can extend the study and make it even more meaningful.

1. **Connect with others in a focused time of prayer and worship.** This study was heavy, and even controversial in nature. We realize it may have dredged up painful or uncomfortable memories and feelings. We believe a time of corporate prayer with those in your Bible study group would be the perfect way to conclude the study, and a way to take these heavy burdens to the feet of Jesus. Make the time your own and pray how the Spirit leads, but we suggest praying for peace and reconciliation, and perhaps even repenting on behalf of our nation for past and present sins regarding racism.
2. **Meaningfully connect with someone outside your own race and discuss what you learned from this study.** We realize this could be awkward if you don't currently have a relationship with someone who doesn't share your race. If that is your situation, then start by praying for God to enlarge your friendship base, bringing people into your life who aren't just like you. If you do have people in your life who are of a different race from you, we suggest taking them to coffee or out to lunch, and simply sharing some of the things God stirred in your heart over the past six weeks. While these conversations aren't always comfortable or easy, they can often be the seeds for the reconciliation and unity that are so desperately needed today.

3. **Consider reading further on the topic.** There are a million resources on the market right now on the topic of race, and some are better (and more biblical) than others. Here are just a few that we can personally recommend:

The Third Option, by Miles McPherson. Miles is the senior pastor of The Rock Church in San Diego, CA. His church is one of the largest but also one of the most racially diverse in the nation. In his book he challenges us to “fully embrace God’s creativity and beauty as expressed in the diversity of His people.”

The Dream King, by Will Ford and Matt Lockett. This book tells the miraculous true story of two men, one Black and one White, who became friends only to later discover that one man’s family had previously owned the other’s family in slavery. It’s a story of true reconciliation, forgiveness, and the kind of love that is only sourced in God.

Our prayer is that God will continue to draw each of us nearer to Him, and consequently nearer to one another in love as we continue to grow and learn together.