

Session 1

INTRODUCTION /

“I THINK IT IS ONE OF THE TRAGEDIES OF OUR NATION, ONE OF THE SHAMEFUL TRAGEDIES THAT 11 O’CLOCK ON SUNDAY MORNING IS ONE OF THE MOST SEGREGATED HOURS—IF NOT THE MOST SEGREGATED HOURS— IN CHRISTIAN AMERICA.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

UNFORTUNATELY, LITTLE HAS CHANGED IN THE MORE THAN FIVE DECADES SINCE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MADE THIS STATEMENT. OUR HOMES AND OUR PLACES OF WORSHIP ARE STILL LARGELY SEGREGATED. IS THIS MERELY A REFLECTION OF OUR CONTEXT, OR IS IT A REFLECTION OF OUR FAITH?

Race and reconciliation is a conversation that can be hostile and extremely polarizing. Emotions range from fear and frustration to fatigue and indifference—or even anger. But we are the Church, and God’s people are called to be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation.

We should want to see God’s image bearers redeemed and God’s family united.

As we get started, we must all confess we come to the conversation with our prejudices and personal experiences with race, and God’s Word may not currently be the primary source shaping our view on race and reconciliation, but it should be, and it can be.

The gospel message has never ignored racial issues. The greatest commandments compel us to love God and our neighbors, and the Great Commission compels us to share the gospel and build lasting relationships with other ethnicities. So this is bigger than a race issue—it's a discipleship obstacle.

John Piper said that “missions exists because worship doesn't.” We can also say racial dysfunction exists where discipleship doesn't.

Our vertical reconciliation to God should directly impact our horizontal relationship with one another.

The Church possesses the ability to demonstrate this unity, but we can only live this out by the power of the Holy Spirit and through discipleship.

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“The reason we haven't solved the race problem in America after hundreds of years is that people apart from God are trying to create unity, while people under God who already have unity are not living out the unity we possess.”

– Dr. Tony Evans

Discipleship only happens in relationships. If concerts, conferences and even church services don't produce meaningful, discipling relationships, they're just short-term experiences. The beauty of the gospel is not sameness, but oneness. God has called us to unity, not uniformity, and mutual discipleship produces this type of oneness.

“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!”

– Revelation 7:9-10

Every nation, tribe, people and language exists in heaven. Even in heaven, we see a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural people united. This means we'll eternally exist the way God created us ethnically and culturally. Just as on earth, we will not look the same in heaven; but, together, we will worship the same Savior and proclaim the same message. Ethnicity is valuable to Jesus on earth and in heaven, so it should be valuable to us on earth and in heaven. We should worship God now across various cultures, languages and ethnicities as a beautiful way of picturing and practicing how we will worship Him later with believers for eternity.

A community of people centered in the gospel enables the multiethnic body of Christ to weep, mourn, rejoice, laugh, play, eat, love, confess and repent together.

THE GOSPEL COMMUNITY SPECTRUM is a tool to examine both our personal lives and our church community through the lens of a theologically and practically biblical worldview. This spectrum is designed to:

- ▶ **Allow for personal introspection, acknowledgment, understanding and confession regarding how we engage race.**
- ▶ **Spark candid, open dialogue.**
- ▶ **Encourage practical action steps to pursue oneness in our local churches and communities. These steps are not new, and they are not unique to our modern American context.**

THERE ARE FOUR STEPS IN THE GOSPEL COMMUNITY SPECTRUM:

1. Ignorance / 2. Awareness / 3. Intentionality / 4. Gospel Community

In this guide, we will unpack each phase of the spectrum through the life of the Apostle Peter in Acts 10. Although God used Peter powerfully to impact the early church, Peter himself struggled to build relationships with other ethnicities. The Holy Spirit deepened his understanding of the reconciliatory nature of the gospel message to unite him with people who didn't look like him. Peter eventually learned that the church is stronger together—especially across ethnic lines. Let's pray that our God will also give us a deeper revelation of the gospel through studying Peter's journey of reconciliation.

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ **Do you have conversations about race with other ethnicities? Why or why not?**
- ▶ **How has Scripture shaped your view on race and reconciliation?**
- ▶ **Since there will be ethnic identity in heaven, how should that impact our relationships across racial lines now?**
- ▶ **Look at the four phases in the Gospel Community Spectrum. Where do you fall on the spectrum? Why?**

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- ▶ **Read Acts 10 before our next discussion, and consider Peter's relationship with other ethnic groups.**
- ▶ **Watch "Beyond Racial Gridlock: A Forum Featuring Dr. George Yancey" on undivided.net. Sociologist George Yancey establishes a common definition for racism and shows how the Church often copies the solutions offered by the rest of the world instead of implementing a biblical model.**