

UNDIVIDED

MORE THAN A HASHTAG

Discussion Guide
UNDIVIDED.NET

 North American
Mission Board

WELCOME /

Whether this is your first step or one of many steps already taken along the journey to heal racial division in the church and the culture, we are encouraged and excited you're here.

Undivided: More Than a Hashtag was primarily developed for pastors and other church leaders to help guide and equip you as you have truthful conversations about racial tensions in the Church and culture. After completing the curriculum yourself, you may choose to use some or all of it as a tool to lead your congregation, too.

While we know that race is not a binary issue, and there are people of color who are impacted by injustices every day, we have limited much of our discussion to the current conversation around division between black and white, but we believe these same principles can be applied to a variety of situations.

Each of the five sessions in this curriculum includes written material and a videoed panel discussion. As you watch the videos, you will notice a combination of diverse and single-race panel discussions. Just like when there is division in a marriage or any family relationship, sometimes the men need to take the husband aside, and the women need to take the wife aside for productive discussion that leads to reconciliation. The same is true of this family relationship. We encourage you, no matter your race, to listen and learn from your brothers and sisters on all of the video panels.

As you walk through this curriculum, you may be asked to answer questions that are difficult. You may have to confront issues, both current and historical, in ways you didn't expect. Your long-held assumptions may be questioned. Anytime we confront the enemy, it can be hard and emotionally exhausting work, but keep going. Because when we confront the enemy, we are not alone in the fight, and the unity of Jesus' Church is worth it.

How to use the curriculum

- 1. Pray:** Pray for yourself as you take an honest look at yourself and your community. Pray that God would open your eyes, ears and heart through this exercise.
- 2. Invite a group:** We recommend you use this curriculum with a group. That could be a group of leaders in your church, or it could be a group of other local pastors.
- 3. Establish ground rules:** Review the discussion guidelines on page 5 individually and as a group. Agree with your fellow group members to follow these guidelines in your discussion.
- 4. Do your homework:** Before your group meets to discuss each session, read the Scripture and two essays related to the session.
- 5. Meet with your group:** You may choose to meet weekly or monthly depending on your group's schedules. At each group meeting, start by watching the video panel discussion. After the video panel, pray with your group, read the Scripture passage and review the written lesson. Use the discussion questions to guide your conversation and help keep you on track.
- 6. Dig deeper:** At the end of each lesson are dig-deeper resources. Use these to help deepen your understanding of this division and how to address it.

PANELIST INTRODUCTION /

During each video panel session and throughout the written material, you will hear from black and white church leaders from across the United States.

Donna Gaines is a pastor's wife, Bible teacher, author of four books and editor of *A Daily Women's Devotional*. She is a disciple maker who fervently desires to see the lives of women transformed as they encounter God through His Word and prayer. Embracing God's missional calling on her life, Donna mobilizes women to practically live out their faith through both inner city and international efforts. She is the founder and president of the board for ARISE2Read, a nonprofit that focuses on literacy in the inner city. She is the wife of Steve, the mother of four and "Nonna" to 11 grandchildren. Donna enjoys Memphis barbecue, Alabama football and anything you can douse with salsa.

Derwin Gray is a former NFL player and the founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church (TC), one of the fastest growing churches in America. TC is a multiethnic, multigenerational, mission-shaped community near Charlotte, North Carolina. Pastor Derwin and his wife, Vicki, have been married since 1992 and have two children: daughter, Presley, and son, Jeremiah. In 2015, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Southern Evangelical Seminary. In 2018, he received his Doctor of Ministry in the New Testament in Context at Northern Seminary under Scot McNight. In addition to his role at Transformation Church, Derwin teaches at conferences nationwide and is an author.

J.D. Greear is the pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. The Summit is characterized by its gospel focus and sending culture. Under Pastor J.D.'s leadership, the Summit has grown from a plateaued church of 300 to one of over 10,000, making it one of *Outreach* magazine's "top 25 fastest-growing churches in America" for many years running. He has led the Summit in a bold vision to plant 1,000 new churches by the year 2050. He has also authored several books, completed his Ph.D. in Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and is the 62nd president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He and his wife, Veronica, live in Raleigh. Together, they are raising four ridiculously cute kids: Kharis, Alethia, Ryah and Adon.

Dhati Lewis is the lead pastor of Blueprint Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and the vice president of the North American Mission Board's Send Network. He earned his Master of Arts in Cross Cultural Ministry from Dallas Theological Seminary and most recently received his Doctorate of Ministry in Great Commission Mobilization from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dhati has seven beautiful children and is married to Angie, a discerning woman who empowers and encourages him to live fully in his identity in Christ. He is also an author of several books.

Bryan Loritts is the privileged husband of Korie and the graced father of three sons—Quentin, Myles and Jaden. He serves as a teaching pastor at The Summit Church in North Carolina. He is the president and founder of The Kainos Movement, an organization committed to seeing the multiethnic church become the new normal in our world. He is also an award-winning author of several books. In addition to his responsibilities as a pastor, Bryan travels extensively throughout the world preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ at conferences and events, as well as serving on the Board of Trustees for Biola University and Pine Cove Christian Camps. He has also received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Outstanding Achievement in Leadership from the Thriving Organization.

PANELIST INTRODUCTION /

Karen Loritts has served alongside her pastor husband, Crawford, in ministry since 1972 as a teacher, mentor, author and international speaker. She is a mom to four and a grandmother who continues to host Grandparent Camp each summer in her home. She is a founding member of a community outreach program that gives away thousands of dollars each year to those in need who are working toward a better future.

Vance Pitman responded to God's call to Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2000 as a church planter from First Baptist Church in Woodstock, Georgia. From a small group of 18 adults in a living room, Hope's fellowship has grown to 4,000 people in small groups desiring to connect people to live the life of a Jesus follower. Hope Church has sent hundreds out of its fellowship on mission, invested millions of dollars in God's global activity and has commissioned 60 churches in the western United States. As a seasoned church planter in the West, he speaks across the country and all over the world. He holds a Bachelor's Degree with a major in History and a minor in Business Management from the University of North Alabama and a Master of Divinity degree from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Kristie, are the proud parents of four children and grandparents to two.

Jimmy Scroggins is first, husband to Kristin; next father to James, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaac, Stephen, Anna Kate, Mary Claire and Caleb; and then lead pastor of Family Church, in West Palm Beach, Florida. He is dedicated to building families in South Florida through a network of neighborhood churches. His vision is to see each of their campuses on mission to help people in their community discover and pursue God's design and reach South Florida with the gospel.

Ken Whitten has been privileged to serve in various local, state and national capacities. What marks and motivates him the most is the high honor of being senior pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Florida, these past 25+ years and being on mission with God in West Africa, China, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Romania, England, Paraguay, Panama and Guatemala. From 1982–1989, he was privileged to serve at Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, under the leadership of Adrian Rogers, whom he considers his spiritual father. Ken Whitten is married to his bride Ginny. They've been blessed with four children and 10 grandchildren.

Important!

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES /

Before you go any further, prayerfully read and ponder these guidelines for your conversation and journey through the curriculum. Revisit them occasionally, both individually or as a group.

- ▶ **Approach the curriculum and conversation with humility (Colossians 3:12).**
- ▶ **Remember the Holy Spirit is in us. If your words or attitude do not line up with the fruit of the Spirit, you are walking and speaking in your flesh (Galatians 5:22-23).**
- ▶ **The conversational goal is to run to the tension of systemic injustice with the goal of reconciliation—not just get things off of your chest (James 1:19).**
- ▶ **Don't let fear of people keep you from taking a stand (2 Timothy 1:7).**
- ▶ **Fight to stand on the Lord's side (Joshua 5:13).**
- ▶ **Be an advocate instead of an aggravator (Galatians 6:2).**
- ▶ **Remember that some in your group or church may not be as far along as you when it comes to this matter. Show them grace as you speak the truth. If you shame them, they may not continue to move forward in their journey (Ephesians 4:29).**

Session 1

INTRODUCTION /

OPENING LETTER

Dhati Lewis

I'm really excited that you are jumping into this series with us. As you begin, consider these three things. First, give prayerful thought to the way you engage this material—the posture of your heart. Second, review the practical tips and guidelines on how to use the study to get the most out of this series. And, finally, review the brief overview of the text we will be using as the foundation of our conversations.

THE POSTURE OF YOUR HEART

What do you feel when you see the words racial reconciliation?

Racism? Privilege? Social justice? If you're anything like me, those words trigger emotions and can even take you down memory lane to some traumatic places. Because of the society we live in, it is *very* difficult to enter into a conversation about racism and unity in the church without our personal wounds and defensiveness coming with us to the table. But my encouragement to you is to bring it with you—bring all of you, all of your story, all of your authentic feelings and thoughts—bring it all. It's not possible for you to leave your story behind. And we don't want you to. Bring all of you to the table of this conversation. And at the same time, don't let feelings become your guide. Remember that even when you feel anger, hurt, grief and fear that you can choose to walk with the Spirit and respond in a way that is authentic to your heart *and* in line with the Spirit's desire for unity.

If I could choose one word to describe the best way to approach this content, it would be humility. If we want to move toward being undivided in our churches, we have to be humble. We must be humble. And humility comes at a cost. It is not done by accident. It is intentional and persistent work to lay yourself down for the sake of others, to constantly consider another's viewpoint above your own, to make room for new ideas and voices and to be willing to admit fault.

You won't do it perfectly. No one will. And that is why we ultimately rest in the work Christ has done for us. In 1 John 2:1, the Apostle John reminds us, "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one."

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

1. Read, watch, discuss.

The content was developed with the idea that you—and all those in your group with you—would read the materials first, watch the video and then discuss it together. It's important that everyone do the reading before watching the video because it helps each person begin to process the information and be able to contribute to the group discussion.

2. Understand the goal.

Our goal in providing you this content is not to give you all the answers. We want to model healthy conversations with healthy conflict and diverse opinions with the hope this will be a launching pad for further work and an encouragement to continue the work you are already doing. We want you to engage in these types of conversations in your own church. For those of you leading churches whose members may be struggling with engaging these issues, I pray this series gives you courage and clarity on the best next steps for leading your church toward authentic unity. For those of you experiencing fatigue from years of engaging the work of reconciliation, my heart aches with you. I hope that, through this series, the Holy Spirit will encourage you to press on. My prayer for you is that God will renew your strength.

AN OVERVIEW OF GALATIANS 2

In each of the panel discussions, we focus on a different part of Galatians 2. We focus on some key aspects of each part of the text and seek to apply them to our context today. So, before you jump into the video discussions, I want to make sure you understand the big picture of what's going on in this chapter.

In Galatians 2, we see Paul, yet again, having to fight for clarity around the issue of circumcision. It's been 14 years since the Jerusalem Council made it very clear that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. And, yet, here Paul is again, still having to fight for the truth of the gospel to be applied to Titus. So often in our day, the work we do is determined by the trending hashtags of the moment. As believers, we must engage this work with long-term perseverance that outlasts the trends and leads to lasting change.

The way Paul engages is also important for us to notice. Paul was a circumcised Jew. He would have been considered "one of us" by those who were demanding Titus' circumcision. But Paul didn't ask Titus to defend himself or advocate for himself. Paul went to his own tribe to advocate for Titus. **Paul took on the scrutiny and work of an advocate.** He didn't stop at niceties and token gestures, but he truly became an advocate for Titus, bearing the weight of the conflict in order to love his brother well.

In verse 11, we see a powerful confrontation. Peter knew and proclaimed equality of the Gentiles in the faith. And, yet, whenever certain Jews came to town, Peter stopped associating with the Gentiles. This behavior was so prominent that Barnabas and many other believers began to do the same. Paul confronts Peter for his hypocrisy, reminding him that agreeing with the statement about Gentile equality isn't the point. The point is for our lives to reflect the truth of the gospel. In verse 14, Paul calls this division a "deviation from the truth of the gospel." The division of racism is a deviation from the truth of the gospel.

If we are going to be an undivided church, we need more than a hashtag, more than token gestures, more than formal statements. We must recognize this is more than a social issue. **This is a gospel issue.**

As you begin, take a minute to read and reflect on Jesus' prayer for you in John 17.

"I PRAY NOT ONLY FOR THESE, BUT ALSO FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN ME THROUGH THEIR WORD. MAY THEY ALL BE ONE, AS YOU, FATHER, ARE IN ME AND I AM IN YOU. MAY THEY ALSO BE IN US, SO THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE YOU SENT ME. I HAVE GIVEN THEM THE GLORY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME, SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE AS WE ARE ONE. I AM IN THEM AND YOU ARE IN ME, SO THAT THEY MAY BE MADE COMPLETELY ONE, THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW YOU HAVE SENT ME AND HAVE LOVED THEM AS YOU HAVE LOVED ME"

– John 17:20-23 (CSB)

Session 1

PRE READING /

The Church as One*J.D. Greear*

Reading Romans 16 reminds me of a tradition my family had on New Year's Day as I was growing up. My mom would cook corned beef and cabbage, which is a meal we didn't eat any other time of the year (because it is gross). But on New Year's, it was my favorite meal of the year because my mom put little coins in the cabbage for us to find. Maybe the money symbolized prosperity for the year. Maybe it was a culinary parable about the value of an agrarian lifestyle. Maybe my mom made up the whole thing.

But I digress. Like I said, Romans 16 reminds me of that cabbage and coins.

The long list of names in Romans 16 may seem like a random and strange way to close one of the most powerful books of the Bible. It's "cabbage" for most people, essentially like the credits at the end of a movie. You don't watch the credits unless someone has told you they're followed by a secret scene or some bloopers.

But tucked among all the "cabbage" of those names are some awesome gospel-coins.

We don't know much about most of the 26 individuals Paul lists, but what these names do reveal is that the early church was remarkably diverse. They may sound strange to us, but they reveal unity-in-diversity in several areas. These names reveal a diversity of ethnicity, a diversity of class and a diversity of gender.

This also makes me think of the overarching message in Galatians 2, because Galatians 2 shows us that diversity in the body of Christ doesn't occur in a vacuum. It doesn't happen without intentionality. **And sometimes**

it takes a person willing to be bold enough to actively confront obstacles that could potentially create disunity.

In society—now more than ever—we seem incapable of uniting around anything other than affinity groups. Where in our society is there a group that transcends differences of gender, class or race?

The only place that happened in the ancient world was in the church. And I'm convinced the local church is still the only place that kind of unity-in-diversity can happen. It's a unity I pray for daily, a unity God desires and a unity God has promised to bring to those who are humble enough to let Him do His work.

But God often chooses to do His work of unity through men and women bold enough to move away from their comfort to create change—men such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

On April 12, 1963, Dr. King sat in a small, solitary jail cell in Birmingham, reading a newspaper article written by several white clergymen. These men urged Dr. King (and others) to abandon their nonviolent protests in the fight for racial reconciliation. They wrote, "We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely."

Dr. King immediately began composing a response in the margins of the newspaper itself. And four days later, having gotten some paper from his lawyer, he finished and sent the now famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Dr. King's letter confronted inaction and passivity with the authority of a biblical

worldview, particularly one shaped by the gospel. We often talk about Dr. King's vision of racial equality. But "Letter from Birmingham Jail" reminds us that this wasn't Dr. King's vision. It was God's vision.

Dr. King called for an end to racial injustice, not by appealing to current laws, to what's popular or even to the will of the majority (all of those things, at the time, were against him!), but to a Higher Law. He said that God had created all races of one blood and, thus, all men of all races were brothers.

For Dr. King, what was ultimate—what he appealed to in the face of political opposition, and even a majority that opposed him—was the justice of God.

"Letter from Birmingham Jail" was a thunderbolt in the battle for racial justice, and it remains a powerful wake-up call to this day. A lot has changed in the past 57 years, but the need for the church to lead in the fight for racial reconciliation is as pressing as ever.

Dr. King's letter expounded a vision of the world rooted in a Christian worldview, which is why it feels so powerful.

God has declared that multiracial unity is His intention for the church, and He has given His Spirit with the promise that He will make it happen (Ephesians 3:1-13; 4:4-5). Local churches should reflect the unity of the coming kingdom of God by being places where people of different ethnicities, backgrounds, political affiliations, income levels and even languages come together in unity. This kind of multiracial unity was one of the distinguishing marks of gospel proclamation in the ancient world, and today's world needs to see it more than ever.

Prayer

Father, as sinners we are all capable of walking out of step with the gospel. Help us to see where we might be living in a way that's inconsistent with Your Word. Give us the power by Your Holy Spirit to walk in humility, patience and truth amidst a hard topic, and help me to humbly lead others to do the same. In Jesus' name, Amen.

✦ SCRIPTURE READING: GALATIANS 2:1-14 (CSB)

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. ² I went up according to a revelation and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those recognized as leaders. I wanted to be sure I was not running, and had not been running, in vain. ³ But not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. ⁴ This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus in order to enslave us. ⁵ But we did not give up and submit to these people for even a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you.

⁶ Now from those recognized as important (what they once were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism)—they added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised, ⁸ since the one at work in Peter for an apostleship to the circumcised was also at work in me for the Gentiles. ⁹ When James, Cephas, and John—those recognized as pillars—acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ They asked only that we would remember the poor, which I had made every effort to do.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he

stood condemned. ¹² For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. ¹³ Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?”

¹⁵ We are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners,” ¹⁶ and yet because we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus. This was so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified. ¹⁷ But if we ourselves are also found to be “sinners” while seeking to be justified by Christ, is Christ then a promoter of sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild those things that I tore down, I show myself to be a lawbreaker. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

OLD ISSUE—NEW DAY

Since Genesis 3, mankind has faced the consequences of sin within ourselves and those around us. **We contend daily with hypocrisy, inconsistency, fear, division and much more.**

For centuries, we have divided along lines of religion, class, ethnicity and—in our case in North America—race. Unfortunately, this ever-growing temptation to build dividing walls has also happened in the Church.

In the early Church, the strife between Jew and Gentile was normative. And in Peter's (Cephas) case, the Lord had to give him a vision *three times* to emphasize the good news of the kingdom was not just for the Jew and that God does not show favoritism (Acts 10, 11).

But like Peter (in Galatians 2), and as leaders, we're prone to forget that as the Church, we are to fight division of all kinds. We need similar reminders (and sometimes rebukes) when we live out of step with the gospel.

Our context may be different from that of the early church, but the principle is still the same—the Church is one body. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the Christ. And as Christians, we are invited to live in the kingdom of God where God Himself is ruling, and He's reconciling all tribes, tongues and nations to Himself. Not only is He reconciling men and women from the corners of the world to Himself, but He's also reconciling us to one another. The gospel has vertical (between us and God) and horizontal (between ourselves and our fellow humans) implications.

For those of us in the United States, we've inherited centuries of racial strife between blacks and whites. And in other contexts, like Canada, the tensions are broader between whites, blacks, Indigenous people and more. In either case, the tension and division surrounding race and ethnicity is not merely a social issue, it's a biblical one.

So it's time to ask ourselves some hard questions. How have we, implicitly or explicitly, contributed to racist ideologies, systems¹ and actions that ascribe greater or lesser value to a human based on skin color?

As Christians, the gospel is calling us to something that's so "other" to the world—*true* unity in Christ that doesn't disregard our differences or force another to conform. It takes supernatural humility and patience to search our own hearts and ask ourselves hard questions before we lead our people to do the same. The journey will be hard, but it's worth it.

Related Verses: *Acts 10-11; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 1:7*

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ **What prevents us running to this tension of racial systemic injustice with the goal of reconciliation?**
- ▶ **What fears do you or your leaders have when addressing the issue of race and the church?**
- ▶ **Where else in God's Word have you seen examples of ethnic tensions? How was it handled?**

↓ DIG DEEPER

Beyond Racial Gridlock by George Yancey (Book and Video) / **"The Bible and Race"** by Tim Keller (Blog Post) / **"Multi-directional Leadership and Racial Injustice"** by Trevin Wax (Blog Post) / **"Racism and Corporate Evil: A White Guy's Perspective"** by Tim Keller (Video) / **United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity** by Trillia Newbell (Book)

¹Tim Keller addresses this topic of systemic evil when he says, "If you're part of a community, there are systems that the whole community participates in. Things get done by the system, and you, by participating in the community, are to some degree getting that done, even if there's levels of responsibility ..."

Session 2

PRE READING /

Long-haul Ministry*Bryan Loritts*

Social media has done a lot for our society—some things have been good and others, debatably, not so much.

One phenomenon social media has created that may not always be so helpful is the penchant for us to try to simplify complex situations or discussions into hashtags. Originally, hashtags were designed to help identify social media messages on a specific topic.

You put a hash sign (#) immediately before a word, and it makes that word something a person can use to see what others are saying about a particular topic.

In today's polarizing racial and political climate, we often use hashtags as a way to get our points across via digital media. **It has a way of popularizing a particular issue or discussion, and often that social media popularity lulls us into this false sense of accomplishment that we've contributed more to a cause or a situation through joining the digital conversation than we actually have.**

In Galatians 2:1-5, we're reminded again of the difficulty some Jews had in accepting the fact that they weren't the only ones fit to receive salvation through Jesus Christ. Verse 1 tells us that after 14 years, Paul was still trying to correct erroneous doctrine that threatened the freedom people had in Christ, regardless of the tribe or nationality into which they were born.

Perhaps the apostle would've hoped that after more than a decade, more progress would've been made. Perhaps he felt that by now, society should've moved beyond trying to compel people like Titus into circumcision for salvation, despite the fact that he was a Greek man (verse 3) and despite the fact that the inclusiveness of non-Jews into the

gospel wasn't a new phenomenon anymore.

But through this account, we learn there is no silver-bullet sermon, letter or book that can magically whisk away the obstacles that Satan has been using since the beginning of time to try to keep division in the ranks of the church. Hopefully, this scriptural picture of Paul's persistence shows us the importance of persisting and enduring in the sometimes frustratingly repetitive battle of manifesting racial unity among Christ's body.

So often, we try to reduce the complex matter of racial reconciliation to quick one-liners such as, "It's not a skin problem; it's a sin problem." Or we add whatever en vogue buzz words or social media hashtags into our discussion as proof that we're pushing for progress.

We say things like, "Just preach Jesus," which is certainly necessary, but also needlessly simplistic. Paul, indeed, preached Jesus, but he also got into the fray and actively worked to deconstruct harmful ideologies attached to the gospel that, though perhaps well-intentioned, shortchanged the efforts to make true progress.

Just as Paul discovered regarding the work of detaching Jewish legalism from the pure gospel, the work of reconciliation as minorities in majority spaces can be lonely and exhausting. In fact, if we only see this as "work," chances are we won't make it to the finish line but instead will flame out in a fit of (understandable) bitterness like the prophet Jonah.

Over the years, I've often referred to this as the call for minorities to serve as missionaries, seeing the mission field

as our white brothers and sisters. My decades-long exchanges with people of color trying to live incarnationally among our white siblings has led me to conclude the missionary metaphor is inadequate. Sure, there are aspects to the imagery which fit: cross ethnic/cultural exchanges, having to learn a new language, modifying one's customs and always having to dial back who you are.

But what are we to do when the mission field is supposed to be our home? It's a place which, historically can be hostile to people of color, a place where we may continue to feel the subtle drips of long-ago firehoses. As the Asian scholar, Amos Yong, frames it: To be a person of color called to the work of reconciliation can induce a prevailing sense of being the "perpetual foreigner," thus requiring those of us who engage this journey to be properly suited for the long haul.

I guess I could pull you into my own journey and inundate you with a litany of sleepless nights and obscene moments where I have been the recipient of overt racism in churches I've served and experienced long walks in the valley of loneliness. But in some ways I've already done this in my book, *Insider/Outsider*.

Instead, I want to close this with hope. Effective leadership demands a positive attitude that prepares us for long-haul ministry. And our attitudes are merely the thermometers of our emotional health. Minority brother or sister—and their advocates—hear me: The effectiveness and longevity of your ministry will depend not on your ability to maintain relevance in the hashtag culture of pithy soundbites and clever one-liners, but on your fighting for your emotional well-being so that you can endure a long-haul journey in racial reconciliation.

As the writer of Proverbs says, we must guard our hearts.

The Conversation is Not Done

Karen Loritts

One of the interesting things about America's current racial climate is how it seems a fresh awareness and interest in the plight of black and brown people has arisen, seemingly just overnight.

Of course we know it wasn't just overnight. The racial unrest we see that exploded after the murders of Ahmad Arbery at the hands of two white men and Breonna Taylor and George Floyd who were killed by police officers has been simmering just beneath the surface for a long time. The most recent high-profile incidents have only exacerbated what's already present.

On one hand, it's a good thing, because it seems now, more than ever, more of our white brothers and sisters who perhaps didn't always see what people of color see when it comes to race relations in America are now asking questions and taking more interest in listening to and learning about their black and brown brothers and sisters. But on the other hand, such a sharp and sudden rise in the fervor of American race issues can actually lead to a sensationalizing of the matters at hand—the kind that brings attention, but only on a surface level.

Social media culture has proven itself effective at giving everybody a platform to say virtually anything they want. **And if enough people stick a hashtag to some topic and it begins to trend, it's easy to fall into this misleading sense of "mission accomplished."** Because we use social media for so much of our discourse, whether good or bad, if we're not careful, we may begin to think that our hashtags are accomplishing more in the matter of advancing the discussion of racial unity, especially around the gospel, than what they truly are.

Let me be clear: When it comes to truly promoting a biblical sense of unity around the gospel and when it comes to promoting the idea of gospel-

centered racial reconciliation, the hashtags and social media fervor alone are not enough.

The striking thing about reading Galatians 2, especially in the first five verses, is how long Paul contended with this matter of tearing down division around the gospel. Sometimes when we read Scripture and we move seamlessly from chapter to chapter, it's easy to forget the expanse of time that often passes from one story to another. Right away in Galatians 2:1, we learn that Paul had been battling with the same issues of circumcision vs. uncircumcision and legalistic approaches to the gospel for 14 years.

What that should tell us is that the movement toward bringing true racial reconciliation to the body of Christ around the gospel is going to take more than a few cute sayings and a couple of trending social media posts. It's going to take persistence, prayer, uncomfortable conversations and the power of the Holy Spirit working through yielded men and women to accomplish the unity we seek.

The reason why Paul was able to contend with it for so long is because for him, it wasn't a matter of getting caught up in the moment. It was a calling from God for his life.

And I believe, in order to be effective, you have to embrace racial reconciliation as a call from God in your life. For me, I was born in what we call the concrete jungle of Philadelphia in the ghetto of all ghettos. But in the providence of God, God moved me from that area. I grew up attending a black church for a while, but ultimately I ended up finding my way to a place that was completely different.

It was a predominantly white church, and the pastor's name was Peter Kowalchuk. He was from the Ukraine, and he came to that community after it had seen shifts and changes due to

white flight. But to this community's credit, a group of white families remained, and they patiently loved that community.

As a teen, I came to that church and gave my life to Christ there, and those people loved me. I was one of just five black people in that congregation, but what it taught me was how to allow people to love me for who I was. That experience has translated into how I navigate this matter of gospel-based racial reconciliation, because whenever I start getting weary with some of the same questions being asked of me by my white brothers and sisters, I remember that pastor and those loving folks from that church in which I grew up. **It reminds me that what we're after in terms of gospel unity and racial reconciliation in our churches won't happen outside of patient love being exhibited on both sides.**

Session 2

MORE THAN A HASHTAG /

Prayer

Father, it's so easy to give up when things get hard. Endurance and perseverance do not come easily—especially in the area of race relations. Christ persevered in going to the Cross and staying on the Cross, even when He could have called down a legion of angels to save Himself. He was willing to endure the pain for something greater than the pain. God, give us (give me) this Christlike fortitude to not pursue my own comforts but to pursue the good of my neighbor and to preserve the truth of the gospel no matter the cost. In Jesus' name, Amen.

✚ SCRIPTURE READING: GALATIANS 2:1-5 (CSB)

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. ² I went up according to a revelation and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those recognized as leaders. I wanted to be sure I was not running, and had not been running, in vain. ³ But not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. ⁴ This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus in order to enslave us. ⁵ But we did not give up and submit to these people for even a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you.

ENDURING FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

Is the gospel really free?

Some Jews in the early church struggled to accept salvation in Christ's finished work alone. They had been adhering to the Law of Moses for centuries, and to be told Christ fulfilled the law (making it so that they don't have to anymore) was hard to grasp. This idea of salvation in Christ alone *plus* certain Jewish customs was appealing to Jewish Christians but unnerving and confusing for Gentile believers.

Even after 14 years, Paul went back to Jerusalem to correct this false gospel that was spreading among the churches in Galatia.

Fourteen years later, Paul was still fighting to correct this erroneous thinking. That's a long time to go back and forth with other Christians.

While it's not a direct one-to-one correlation, in the United States, people—especially Christian men and women of color—have been working to undo false ideologies that have seeped into the church in America about the value (or devaluing) of black men and women in America. The American experience has been profoundly different for people of different races since the



The American experience has been profoundly different for people of different races since the nation's conception, and negative perceptions of black men and women have not gone away easily.

nation’s conception, and negative perceptions of black men and women have not gone away easily.

With the technological advancement of the internet and social media, it’s hard to escape the ever-growing mound of names of black people killed by law enforcement who become trending hashtags. But there is more to the racial tensions in North America than these trending hashtags. Men and women killed today are more than a hashtag.

They are people made in God’s image.

And they are not the first. From the slave ships to the social media videos, it has been a centuries-long journey of hardship and persecution for the black community in the United States. Perhaps we could learn a lesson from the Black community and the black church. She has endured insurmountable hardship, yet she has kept going. She hasn’t given up hope in Christ and the potential of a better future—even if it’s only a heavenly one.

The second verse of the song, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*², captures this endurance well:

*God of our weary years,
 God of our silent tears,
 Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
 Thou who has by Thy might led us into the light,
 Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
 Lest our feet stray from the places, Our God,
 where we met Thee;
 Lest, our hearts drunk
 With the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
 Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
 May we forever stand.
 True to our GOD,
 True to our native land.*

Although race has been one of many dividing lines in the Church in America, it doesn’t have to be. God’s will can be done on earth as it is in heaven. And in the kingdom of God, “there is no ethnic home team when it comes to the Church³.”

There’s a long road ahead of us as God continues to refine and prune His Church in race relations. May we walk this road with peace, humility and unity in Jesus’ name. May we strive for lifelong obedience in the same direction.

Related Verses: *Acts 15; Galatians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18*

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ **How does the modern division of racism⁴ threaten the message of the gospel?**
- ▶ **How has division hurt the church today?**
- ▶ **For black and brown congregations: How do we shepherd our congregations to endure even in the midst of “minority fatigue”?**
- ▶ **What could we accomplish if we were undivided?**

↓ DIG DEEPER

“3 Things I Learned Growing up in the Black Church” by Shardavia Walker (Blog Post) / **“An Interview with Crawford Loritts”** (Blog Post) / **“Justice by the Bible Project”** (Video) / **“Why Hope Will Sustain Us Through the Pain”** by Missie Branch (Blog Post)

² *Lift Every Voice and Sing*—also known as The Negro National Anthem—was written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson and was set to music by his brother, John Roseamond Johnson, in 1899.

³ Brian Loritts, session two of *Undivided: More than a Hashtag*.

⁴ “[racialization] understands that racism is not mere individual, overt prejudice or the free-floating irrational driver of race problems, but the collective misuse of power that results in diminished life opportunities for some racial groups. Racism is a changing ideology with the constant and rational purpose of perpetuating and justifying a social system that is racialized” (*Divided by Faith*, Emerson, 9).

Session 3

PRE READING /

It's Time to Act*Jimmy Scroggins*

I grew up in the Bible Belt in the most Southern Baptist of SBC churches. I grew up in churches where all the people were like my family.

So, my mother and father were godly people. They loved each other, loved Jesus, loved me and loved my brothers. And most of the people at our churches were just like us.

Our church was almost all white. They were Republican-leaning and very patriotic. Many of the men had served in the military. I grew up in the kind of churches where we sang hymns all the time and had the Southern gospel music singing services in the evening. When I became an adult, I moved to Louisville, Kentucky, with my wife, Kristin, and went to Highview Baptist Church which was just like the churches where I'd been raised.

That changed in 2008 when the First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Florida, called me to come be their pastor. Now this church was different from the churches I'd known, because it was in South Florida. And if you've never been to South Florida, it's a super diverse place and highly integrated.

I'd never been part of a church like that before, so I entered a whole new world, and what a blessing it is to be a part of a church that really looks like heaven. We have people from all over the world, people speaking different languages and coming from all sorts of diverse backgrounds.

We have millionaires and billionaires sitting next to people on public assistance and everything else in between. And that's what makes us different. What that means is in order for me and other leaders to serve our

church well, we cannot afford to play favorites. **We can't allow a person's financial status, social stature or even their position in the church tip the scales of fairness in how we interact with them, treat them or hear and empathize with their concerns.**

Too many times in our churches, however, that's exactly what we do—especially when it comes to combating controversial issues in our land such as racism and matters of injustice. In Galatians 2:6-10, Paul provides us with a tremendous example of how to avoid the temptation of tokenism and favoritism in Christ's body.

When he went to address the way Jewish leaders were trying to unjustly force Titus into circumcision as a requirement of being in Christ, Paul went straight to the leaders of the church with his unfiltered concerns.

Verse 6 seems to suggest that it may not have been surprising if Paul had chosen to succumb to the pressure of influential church leadership—church members whose reputations likely held major weight in church decision making. Paul didn't cower to that. Instead, he addressed these matters with the kind of boldness that made the church leaders take notice.

Paul didn't give a token speech or allow church leaders to pick one or two people out of the crowd to use as token representatives for their cause. Paul realized that the injustices that presented opposition to the gospel and an obstacle to Titus weren't just isolated situations. Rather, they were indicative of a deeper, systemic problem. Paul's actions sought to address the matter at its root.

In July 2016, after Philando Castile, a 32-year-old African-American man, was fatally shot by a police officer during a traffic stop, we set aside our scheduled sermon series for the following Sunday and called an audible service. It would've been a travesty for us as pastors of our ethnically diverse church to make a little statement, say a little prayer and move on with business as usual. That may work for some churches, but we are a multicultural church in a multicultural city, so that wouldn't have worked for us.

To do that would've been nothing more than our making an empty, token gesture designed to appease the kinds of people in the church that you don't want to offend or upset, but it's also destined to discourage the brothers and sisters in our congregation with black and brown skin. **It would've looked good on the surface, but it would've accomplished nothing.**

Scripture is clear, particularly in James 2, that God shows no partiality with His children. And because God doesn't do it, neither should the church. Being united doesn't mean that we are all supposed to look, act and talk the same, expecting those with differences to assimilate into our cultural preferences.

Paul risked ridicule and mockery from those who were supposed to be his brothers in Christ because of his stance for Titus. But he didn't care. He knew that glad-handing the church leaders for the sake of keeping peace would only further push back the gospel progress that had already been made.

Today, we have been called by God to take a similar approach.

When the parents of African-American, Caribbean and biracial children in our church have to respond to Facebook videos with even sterner versions of "the talk" (special instructions about how to over-respond to police officers so you don't get shot—a talk that white

parents don't even have to think about), then we have a problem.

When our brown-skinned brothers and sisters are uncomfortable and even resentful coming to our church because they are afraid that they'll be regarded with suspicion, pity or apathy by their own fellow believers, then we have a problem.

In times of injustice, our black- and brown-skinned brothers and sisters don't want pity. They don't want sympathy. They want solidarity, they want justice and they want the injustices and the racism to stop. They want a future where their children can experience and expect justice before the law in our country.

Moreover, they want to know that their church has their back. Even when it's unpopular, and even when it doesn't earn us brownie points with the perceived elite among us, it is always our job to stand against tokenism and make sure we show firm and decisive stances against the sins of racism and injustice, especially within the church.

Coming Together Around the Gospel

Donna Gaines

The world's narratives are polarizing. And increasingly so. But as believers, our values and goals are different. We have been captured by a love greater than any this world has ever known. This great love compels us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. **That means we must not allow the worldly divisions of race, socioeconomic status, education level and even language to hinder our desire for unity around the gospel.**

In Galatians 2:6-10, Paul addressed religious division as he stood beside Titus, a Gentile, and defended his acceptance and belonging in Christ. As a Gentile, Titus was not circumcised. But he had heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ. He was a Christian. Paul argued that he should be welcomed into the company of other believers – Jewish believers – despite his not being circumcised. And although at other times circumcised believers, such as the Apostle Peter, had made statements that indicated agreement about a legalism-free salvation that trusts in Jesus alone, the way Titus was being treated because of his differences invalidated those words.

Paul's defense of Titus is an example of what it means to go beyond merely professing unity to promoting true gospel-based inclusion of others. The Jewish believers loved the idea of Gentiles being partakers of their Christ, so long as they also took extra (unnecessary) steps, like circumcision, to prove they truly belonged. What they were saying, in essence, was, "Sure, give us those who are different than us, but let's find ways to make them more like us before we truly accept them as being one of us."

It's striking to me how similar this mindset is to what some in American church culture ascribe. It is time for the Church to "be the Church" and embrace all people, tribes and tongues for the glory of our Savior! I realize these changes will not take place over night. But incremental change can lead to

massive shifts in church culture over time. We must be intentional about obeying the Great Commission as we "make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). We must choose to make Christ's last words our life's mission. As we do, He will build His Church.

A few years ago, the Lord challenged me in this area. An education major in college, I had told my husband, Steve, that I wanted to reach kids through education and the gospel. Twenty-five years later, when God led us to Memphis, He threw the door wide open for me to do just that. Our church has Bellevue Loves Memphis Projects (quarterly days of service where our members are given pathways to serve and build bridges to share the gospel). Through a connection with one of those projects in the inner city, I began going weekly to tutor children after school. I was brought face to face with the great need across our city. Memphis has one of the highest child-poverty rates in the nation.

As I was praying over the city one morning, my heart was moved by this fact and I sensed an overwhelming awareness of the Presence of God and these words were imprinted upon my heart and mind, **"This is your city. These are your children. What are you doing about it?"**

As a grandmother, I was moved by the awareness that I would not be able to sleep if any of my grandchildren were receiving a subpar education or were going to bed hungry. If I truly loved my neighbor as myself, how could I ignore the profound need in my city? God was calling me to challenge the people in the churches in our city to see the need and respond. And so, ARISE2Read was born.

ARISE2Read is a nonprofit organization that seeks to end the generational poverty cycle through the gospel and education. We purposefully connect with churches in the communities of

the schools we adopt. We also recruit volunteers from adopter churches and local churches to lead after school Bible clubs. Through these relationships, the families in these schools have a connection with a local church when a need arises. In addition to churches throughout the city, a number of businesses have also come alongside us, adopting schools and helping to provide volunteers to coach second grade students to read. We are seven years in, and the results have been remarkable!

But I also began to notice that something else was happening. As we intentionally walked into schools to reach those who were very different ethnically and socially, I discovered that we weren't just helping them. They were helping us. They were teaching us just as much as we were teaching them. Our volunteers were as impacted as the students.

Loving my neighbor is proof that I am loving God with all of my being. His greatest command is for our greatest good. It is when I am loving the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind and strength that sin loses its grip. I no longer prejudge people for the color of their skin or their socioeconomic status, but I'm coming alongside them, loving them as I would love my own children, my own grandchildren. What I want my grandchildren to have, I want these children to have.

As a result of Bellevue Loves Memphis, our church is becoming more multicolored, while slowly becoming more multicultural. We are beginning to look a little more like heaven where one day, "a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" will worship before the throne (Revelation 7:9). As this is happening, we are fulfilling one of our church's values: intentional hospitality. We want to greet every person who enters our buildings with the love of Christ. We recognize that we can't truly learn through a homogenous group of people doing the same things the same way we've always done them. That's

not what God has called us to do. That is not a picture of the New Testament church.

To truly reflect what I believe Scripture calls us to be as churches, we must join together on all levels. **Our greatest desire should be to love the Lord and bring Him glory. In order to do that, we can't afford to be complacent or apathetic about the make-up of our church.** We should desire to accurately represent our community. We must open our hearts and our arms and embrace our communities for the sake of the gospel and the advancement of the kingdom!

Session 3

MORE THAN A TOKEN GESTURE /

Prayer

Father, it can be hard to speak up when I see people I know and love who are walking out of step with the gospel. But You've called us to use Your Word to reprove, rebuke and correct—in truth and love—when there are inconsistencies in the lives of my brothers and sisters. May I see the plank in my own eye before seeking to remove the speck in my brother and sister's eyes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

† SCRIPTURE READING: GALATIANS 2:6-10 (CSB)

⁶ Now from those recognized as important (what they once were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism)—they added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised, ⁸ since the one at work in Peter for an apostleship to the circumcised was also at work in me for the Gentiles. ⁹ When James, Cephas, and John—those recognized as pillars—acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ They asked only that we would remember the poor, which I had made every effort to do.

RUNNING TO TENSION WITH A HEART OF RECONCILIATION

Do we fear what others in our “camp” may think of us if we speak out against racist or prejudiced ideologies, comments and dispositions?

The fear of the opinions of others is strong. It can lead even the most strong-willed leaders astray by moving them to stand up for the wrong thing, failing to stand up for the right thing or acting hypocritically to please others⁵.

In Galatians 2, Peter finds himself struggling when—to please the circumcision party—he refuses to eat with Gentile believers. He forgot communion with God was not contingent on heritage as a Jew, and in doing so, he added qualifications to the gospel.

What cultural qualifications are we tempted to add to the gospel? Do we expect people to think a certain way about secondary or tertiary theological doctrines, dress a certain way or speak a certain way?

As a leader, Peter's influence was so strong, he led others astray (Galatians 2:13). Likewise, pastors and church leaders have the influence to change the culture of a local assembly of Christians—for better or for worse.

⁵ See also Galatians 1:9; 2:12.

We're not told in the text, but from what we know of Peter, we can infer he repented upon Paul's rebuke and returned to the good news he cherished so much. If Peter—the rock—can be moved, we must take heed lest we fall.

Have we failed to speak up in moments where God may be calling us to reprove, rebuke, correct or restore brothers and sisters who are out of step with the gospel in this area?

In contrast, Paul wasn't afraid to speak to his own "tribe" (the Jews) on behalf of the scrutiny Titus—a Greek—was facing (Galatians 2:3). He advocated for Titus. He saw inconsistencies and change that needed to happen, so he addressed the culprits of the problem.

Whatever changes pastors and leaders want to see in their congregations and ministries must be led out at the highest levels of the leadership.

If we want to see the dividing wall of hostility broken down and a multicultural movement among the Church, we need to model it as leaders by drawing near and befriending those ethnically different, engaging and loving our neighbors and not showing partiality.

As Ken Whitten says, "A multicultural lifestyle has to be modeled from the top. You have to walk it. You can't preach it and not demonstrate it. Preach the gospel. Demonstrate the gospel, and let it do the work."⁶

Related Verses: *Proverbs 31:8, 9; James 2; Galatians 6:2*

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ **Are we tempted to believe that any cultural things will make us godlier? What are those things? (e.g., certain attire, the way a person speaks, style of music, political party, personality types, etc.)**
- ▶ **An advocate is someone who runs to the tension with a heart of reconciliation. What does it look like to be an advocate in your context?**
- ▶ **As a church leader, you are the overseer of a system. How can we change the culture of our churches to be a culture of reconciliation and advocacy?**
- ▶ **What is the cost when we are unwilling to stand up to those within our race or "tribe" and advocate for others? (e.g., impact on our walk with Christ, impact on unity in the body, impact on friendships, impact on society, etc.)**

↓ DIG DEEPER

"6 Biblical Principles for Shepherding through Racial Reconciliation" (Blog Post) / **Divided by Faith** by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith (Book) / **"Loving our Brothers and Sisters in This Moment"** by Justin Bouldin (Blog Post) / **"A Prayer of Lament for This Moment"** (Blog Post) / **Free at Last?** by Carl Ellis (Book) / **Oneness Embraced** by Tony Evans (Book) / **One Blood** by John M. Perkins (Book)

⁶ Session three in *Undivided: More than a Hashtag*.

Session 4

PRE READING /

Diversity United in Christ*Vance Pitman*

Statements are important. They can be a tone-setter toward meaningful and lasting paradigm shifts and necessary change. They can provide structure to a movement and become a reminder to stay on course.

But without congruent and consistent action, statements can also become empty, hollow stumbling blocks toward true progress—particularly in racial reconciliation.

The Jerusalem Council made a formal statement about the equality of Jews and Gentiles. And the Apostle Peter made his own personal statement echoing similar sentiments of the Council, recorded back in Acts chapters 10 and 11. But in Galatians 2:11-13, we see Peter's actions contradicting his words as he showed not only his unwillingness to eat with Gentiles, but his ability to sway "other Jewish believers [to follow] Peter's hypocrisy" (Galatians 2:13, NLT).

Scripture tells us that Peter's rebellion wasn't due to lack of information or lack of knowledge of what is right. It was simply due to fear of criticism from people who shared his heritage and still clung to the necessity of circumcision.

In 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention released a statement condemning racism. Since then, other statements have been made by state conventions and SBC leaders, and those statements are good and necessary. Yet, we still see many of the same issues plaguing our denomination.

How do we combat it? We must begin by taking the bold approach that Paul did. Paul was not afraid to call out Peter publicly for his sin of rebellion against the spirit of the gospel. Why such a hard and direct stance? Because

when we sin by treating others with disdain because of their differences, like Paul, Barnabas and other Jewish believers did in Galatians 2, we're not just passively disobeying. We're actively and conscientiously making a choice to deem ourselves better than others, even if they've been purchased and cleansed with the same blood of Jesus that has purchased and cleansed us.

At Hope Church in Las Vegas, the church I'm privileged to serve as pastor, we have more than 4,000 people who attend when we're regularly meeting. God has brought together a family of believers that represents 54 languages. Some ask us how we do it or even why we strive to be this way, and the answer really is quite simple.

God created culture. God created color. God loves diversity. But it's diversity that's united in our identity in Christ.

As we get to share and express that diversity together, we get to see the full picture of the Imago Dei, the image of God represented in humanity.

I think one of the reasons we're seeing some of the issues in society today is because for too long, the church has sat on the sidelines. We've organized our churches around our cultural preferences rather than the centrality of the gospel. Studies show that in the average community in America, the average local school is 20 times more integrated than the average local church. Something is wrong when legislation through the government has produced more integration than the reconciling power of the gospel and the church.

How do we effectively promote biblical unity and racial reconciliation in our churches? To answer that, I look at our

philosophy for planting churches. We start with the city instead of starting with a service. When you do that, you're starting with people versus a program. When you start with a city, you go into that city with the gospel. The gospel is no respecter of persons, and so as the gospel engages a city, guess what's going to happen? The church is going to become a reflection of the community.

Unfortunately, we talk about the multicultural church like it's a new thing. But biblically, it's not a new thing. It's a New Testament thing. According to Acts 2:5-11, when the first church was launched in Jerusalem, there were 15 language groups in the first church on the first day. **The early church was born with an expression of multicultural community, and that's what the church should be in every community.**

In order to do that, you can't just rest on a statement. We have to make the statements we make about racial reconciliation and biblical unity in our churches come alive with the way we structure our ministries, with the way we choose leadership and ultimately with the way we treat each other and hold each other accountable, just as Paul did with Peter, Barnabas and the Jewish believers in Galatians 2.

Accountability in Unity

Ken Whitten

When we encounter Galatians 2, particularly verses 11 through 13, it should beg a question.

Are we serving people out of legalism, or are we serving out of love?

On Sunday, July 6, 2020, two days after celebrating America's Independence Day, I stood in the pulpit of Idlewild Church, just feeling the need to truly pour out my heart to God in prayer during our time of worship.

In that prayer, I said to God, "We are ripe for Your hand of judgment. And if it has not already come, we seem like we're already experiencing some of it. We can't repent for everyone else, but each of us can repent for our own pride, our own apathy and our own cold heart."

I asked Him for revival. I asked Him to stir our affections again toward Himself. I asked Him to help us tear down all the idols in our lives that compete with the one, true allegiance and love that we should have for Him.

Given everything that's been happening in our world lately, from a global pandemic to renewed racial and political unrest, it felt like an appropriate prayer. And the message I preached that day, "The Spirit of America," felt like an equally appropriate challenge to help us defeat the spirit of entitlement that has seemingly grown among us like a stubborn weed.

Here's how I define this spirit of entitlement: **It's a demand for a grace or a privilege given without the personal responsibility of gratitude in receiving it.** It's an attitude that basically says, "What's in it for me? What do I get out of this?" Not, "What can I give?"

And it seems that whenever we operate in this spirit of entitlement, we are more susceptible to diluting real action steps toward gospel progress in controversial matters with mere words. This is very much an American spirit.

Now don't get me wrong. I love the United States of America. There's no other place in the world I'd rather live than here. But I want you to understand. Those of us who are believers in Christ must understand this: We have dual citizenship. We have a place we live here in this world, and we have a place in heaven from where we've come. We have temporary citizenship on earth and eternal citizenship in heaven. We live in two places at the same time. And because of that, one of the things we have to be careful of as Americans is to remember that when it comes to God's agenda, God's agenda is not an American agenda. **God's agenda is always God's kingdom.**

When we remember this, we're more apt to act more boldly with real, transformative action when it comes to dealing with matters in our nation that disrupt the spirit of the gospel and biblical unity in our churches. In Galatians 2:11-13, the Apostle Paul discussed a confrontation he had with a fellow apostle, Peter, about Peter's exclusive attitude toward Gentile believers. He had to remind Peter that the statements of unity between Jews and Gentiles, between the circumcised and uncircumcised, had to be undergirded with congruent action.

Peter was so self-absorbed with his Jewish heritage and die-hard beliefs that he actually helped lead other Jewish believers into the sin of hypocrisy against non-Jews, who were constantly fighting against those thinking there needed to be the extra requirement of circumcision added onto their salvation.

It should remind us about how in our American church culture, it's so easy for us to become self-absorbed as a believer. We put all our resources and money into our own churches, and we bring all the good news of the gospel inside, lock the doors and give to each other. When we do this, we forget that there are many other nations and

people among us from other ethnic backgrounds and nationalities who have heard nothing of the name of Jesus.

I'm not saying we shouldn't celebrate the goodness and blessings of our nation. What I am saying is we have to remember that America isn't God's darling nation. It isn't His favorite. Yet even here, we have over 200 nationalities in this place we call home.

It's OK for us to love our nation. But we must remember that Jesus has one nation (1 Peter 2:9). He has one kingdom interest—His kingdom (Matthew 6:10). God has made all people in the image of Himself. We have to be careful that we don't create God in our image.

While we love America, we must never be so patriotic that we can't hold our country and hold our political parties accountable for when they are being ungodly and divisive. We can't be afraid to hold our Christian leaders accountable for when they fail to undergird the rhetoric of unity with the activity of unity.

In Matthew 19, there's a parable of a rich young ruler. In verse 16, the young man asks the question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Now, anyone who truly knows the gospel should know that something's wrong with that question right away. You don't spell salvation "D-O." You spell it "D-O-N-E." That's because it's the finished work of Christ on the cross that provides salvation. Not His work on the cross, plus baptism or plus our good works or plus our American spirit. It's based only on what Christ did.

Thankfully, Paul was so convinced of this fact for himself that he didn't mind holding Peter, Barnabas or anyone else accountable if their actions didn't align with their statements for gospel unity. And if we're going to achieve that same gospel unity, we'll have to be willing to take those same measures of accountability with those around us who are in error.

Session 4

MORE THAN A STATEMENT /

Prayer

Father, it's hard to know what to do, what to say, how to say it and when to say it. We need wisdom from above that doesn't just know the difference between right and wrong but what's better and best. Help us to have godly wisdom as we listen, lament and are patient in the midst of our sanctification and the purification of your Church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

✚ SCRIPTURE READING: GALATIANS 2:11-13 (CSB)

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. ¹² For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. ¹³ Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

WE MADE A STATEMENT, NOW WHAT?

The historical friction between Jews and Gentiles—a religious and ethnic strife—was like a long battle of fighting rams. In their own ways, each group became skilled in “othering”⁷ the other. Imagine their surprise when this new message of the gospel engrafted Gentiles and Jews into the family of God—and Gentiles didn't have to be circumcised or become ethnically or religiously Jewish to get there.

In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to speak to the elders about a series of debates they'd had about the role of circumcision in the life of Gentile Christians. The Jerusalem Council considered the matter and—through the boldness of Peter, Barnabas, Paul and James—decided not to place the added yoke of circumcision (a distinctly Jewish tradition and law) on Gentile Christians.

In Galatians 2, when Paul addresses Peter, he doesn't simply make a formal statement about sin like the Jerusalem Council. He confronted Peter lovingly and directly. This moment, and the Jerusalem Council, were steps in the direction of oneness through gospel consistency.

Similarly, with the racial tensions in North America, formal statements are a good first step. The harder part are the succeeding actions—the long work of learning, repenting, welcoming in “the other” and righting wrongs.

Beyond our declarations on social media, our retweets and our public messages to our churches, **what could we do to help further repentance, restoration and oneness across ethnic and racial divides?**

⁷“Treating people from another group as essentially different from and generally inferior to the group you belong to.”
– Macmillan Dictionary

Here are a few suggestions:

- ▶ Engage this topic on an emotional level, not simply an informational or statistical one. For many black men and women, this is a life-long and personal issue, not merely a factual one.
- ▶ Refrain from immediately jumping into “fix-it mode.” Listen, love, care for and lament with brothers and sisters in Christ whose experiences may be different than your own (Romans 12:15). Be steadfast in love.
- ▶ Start by addressing issues of racial injustice in three institutions⁸:
 1. **The Family:** Racism and prejudice are learned behaviors. When we disciple our kids, we must give them a robust soteriology⁹ and a robust anthropology.
 2. **The Government:** The problem of sin begins personally, but it also affects the structures, systems and laws of our nation.
 3. **The Church:** The government can change laws, but it can’t change hearts. Only the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit through God’s people can do that.

To our white brothers and sisters—when a black man or woman is killed by law enforcement in what appears to be implicit or explicit bias—heed these words:

“Even when you’re not sure what the facts are yet ... in that moment you can say, ‘I recognize this as a long history of pain, and that’s a tragedy. We’re still in a society where this is a question, and I grieve with you [black men and women], and I’m angry with you that this stuff still happens¹⁰.”

Related Verses: Acts 15; Romans 12:15

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ What are common fears (or other causes) that instigate the “othering” of a group of people in a society or church?
- ▶ As a minority or majority culture, what are your next steps toward oneness?
- ▶ In 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention released a statement condemning racism¹¹, but we still see it in our denomination—subtly, overtly and systemically. Why was that statement not enough?

↓ DIG DEEPER

“Addressing the Sin of Racial Division” by Dharti Lewis (Blog Post) / **The Color of Compromise** by Jemar Tisby (Book and RightNow Media Series) / **Insider Outsider** by Bryan Loritts (Book) / “Race, Justice, and the Church” by Eric Mason (Video) / **Right Color, Wrong Culture** by Bryan Loritts (Book) / “When White Supremacists Keep Coming to Our Towns” by Christine Hoover (Blog Post)

⁸ More on this in session four of the video *Undivided: More Than a Hashtag*.

⁹ Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation.

¹⁰ J.D. Greear, session four in the video series.

¹¹ Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Session 5

PRE READING /

The Church as The Cure*Derwin Gray*

When I was a kid, although I loved my family to death and still do, I admit that we had some rough times. But the thing is, although certain things were bad, I didn't know exactly how bad until I became an adult and began to raise my own family.

The stuff I thought was normal was incredibly dysfunctional. When I was a kid, I had a best friend named Joe. He was from Queens, New York, and I was at his house all the time, eating Italian food and hanging with his family. I felt like a black Italian. It was great.

Why did I hang there so much? Because there was a certain unity and beauty his family had that made me want to be a part of it. There was something about their family vibe that drew me into them. Their unity was powerful and something different from what I'd experienced.

Back in November, as a part of our "Who We Are" sermon series at Transformation Church, I preached a sermon about unity. It wasn't a milquetoast summation of how we all need to join hands and sing "Kum Ba Yah." **I talked about the necessity of being uncomfortable enough to embrace the truths of how Jesus expects us, the Church, to be a tutor to the world on how to break down the demonic barriers of division we've made.**

What Paul did in Galatians 2:14 epitomizes what it means for us as Christ's disciples to run to the tension and discomfort of confronting attitudes, beliefs, and traditions that don't align with the unity of the gospel. Paul's commitment to contend for the integrity of the gospel through the destruction of

divisiveness was deep enough to where he challenged a fellow apostle, Peter, for his hypocrisy.

It reminds me that for too long Christians have struggled with caring primarily about Christians who look like them or are similar to them in other ways.

In John 17:20-23, Jesus prayed a powerful prayer, both for believers and disciples of His day, and for those who, at that time, had not yet been born. It was a poignant prayer for unity. Verses 20 and 21 are particularly important. Jesus said:

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me" (NLT).

If you boil this portion of Jesus' prayer into the most succinct terms possible, Jesus was essentially saying, "Be one." Why? Because, unity is a signpost that Jesus was sent. Verse 22 says: **"I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one."** Unity is a portrait that people can look at and say, "Wow! God really did send Jesus."

It's easy to see these passages of Scripture—both Jesus' prayer and the second chapter of Galatians—and say, "Yeah. Let's do this!" But let's not gloss over the difficulty of what was being asked of Jews in this time.

Can you imagine if you're a Jewish

person and you heard stories of the oppression of your people? Stories such as, “The non-Jews kept our ancestors in slavery for 400 years in Egypt, then we got set free and some other non-Jews called Canaanites, Hittites, and Jebusites tried to destroy us. Then another bunch of non-Jews called Babylonians made us slaves again; now these non-Jews called Romans are oppressing us.” And these are the people Paul says, “I want y’all to create a family with them in Jesus.”

Do you see how hard that is? Yet it shows how great our cross is and how we cannot afford to shrink back from the difficulty of reconciliation.

When I was a young Christian, I was told that if I wanted to grow a big church, I should make sure to not speak about things that make people uncomfortable. People told me, “if you don’t do that—if you stay away from what’s uncomfortable—then your church will grow big.”

I couldn’t help but question their advice. If we take on that mindset, what are we really doing? We’re entertaining people. How absurd is that? The world is burning down around us, and we’re being told to be content with using our place in Christ as the Church to just entertain people.

I believe the opposite is true. I believe we must allow God’s Spirit to lead us into holy confrontation of the issues, attitudes, and mindsets that threaten gospel unity, particularly in matters of racial reconciliation. I believe God has left us, the Church, here, not to be the distraction or diversion, but to be the cure and the solution.

Are we willing to say this is sin?

Dhati Lewis

Are we willing to say that any type of division caused by racism, discrimination and prejudice is a spiritual and moral problem? Many of us have a desire and a vision to lead diverse congregations.

But if vision is simply a preferred future, does that mean addressing racist divisions is simply a preference for us? Is it just something that's good for some, but not needed for all?

For me, the answer to this question is personal.

Almost 17 years ago, my wife (at the time fiancée) and I were in premarital counseling. During our first major engagement disagreement, we went to see our counselors (a white couple who were leaders in our church). Our issues were pretty standard relationship issues. In this particular instance, I wasn't being sensitive toward Angie. She shared her frustration with the counselors, and do you know what their response was? They gave her an article about why people who marry interracially are in complete disobedience and are just trying to get back at their parents.

The sad reality is that I really believe they were genuinely trying to help us. As we looked for help from my African-American community, we didn't get better answers. I approached many of my African-American friends and asked them, **"Would you rather I marry a white Christian woman or a non-Christian black woman?"** More often than not, my friends told me it would be better to marry a non-Christian black woman.

Both sides justified their responses. Both sides approached us as well-meaning people trying to keep us from harm and danger. But in our whole engagement journey, not one person took a stand to say that division caused by racism, discrimination or prejudice is a spiritual and moral problem. No one was willing to call it sin.

So, this is what I want to ask you today. Are you willing to call racial

division a spiritual and moral problem? Are you willing to address it as sin? In Galatians 2, Paul calls division a "deviation from the truth of the gospel." Division is serious. The truth of the gospel is at stake.

We live in a world that is so divided because of the presence and dominion of sin. Sin leads to brokenness in every possible way. But you and I, the Church, we are God's ambassadors, an army with the mission and message of reconciliation. **Our calling is to show the world how the gospel makes it possible for us to be whole, for sin's brokenness to be made right and for divisions to be healed.**

Sin brings separation and division. Any division caused by racial prejudice and discrimination is sin. It is more than a social issue. It is a deviation from the truth of the gospel. If we are going to be undivided, we must recognize this deviation, confess and repent.

Session 5

MORE THAN A SOCIAL ISSUE /

Prayer

Father, like Adam and Eve, we are (and I am) tempted to cover up my sin, but freedom is found in repentance. It takes humility to admit when we are wrong and to treat others as more important than ourselves. Give us Christlike humility so that we are willing to humble ourselves in this area. In Jesus' name, Amen.

✚ SCRIPTURE READING: GALATIANS 2:14 (CSB)

¹⁴ But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?”

THE HOPE OF HUMILITY

We don't *intend* to deviate from the gospel. Sometimes it happens without our even recognizing it, and, oftentimes, we need a brother or sister to point out our error. That's why the plank in our own eye is so hard to see, but the speck in our brother or sister's eye appears to be glaring.

As we've discussed, Peter's hypocrisy created greater division in an already sensitive relationship. We can infer Peter repented upon Paul's correction. He later writes in 1 Peter 5:6, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time.”

It takes great humility to acknowledge where we have been wrong, to turn from our sin and embrace the truth of the gospel—**that neither our failure nor our triumphs define who we are or solidifies our acceptance to God.**

But even as Christians, it's scary to dig into the crevices of our soul to see what sin lingers. If gospel humility allows us to be honest enough, we can confess we have all done what we shouldn't do and have failed to do what we should—especially related to racial injustice.

Our Christlike humility will lead us to a clearer and more accurate representation of the kingdom of God. It is the right-side-up kingdom that looks upside-down to the world. It is a kingdom

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If gospel humility allows us to be honest enough, we can confess we have all done what we shouldn't do and have failed to do what we should—especially related to racial injustice.

where the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, the meek and the righteous are blessed. It is a kingdom where we consider the needs of others are more important than our own.

“IF, THEN, THERE IS ANY ENCOURAGEMENT IN CHRIST, IF ANY CONSOLATION OF LOVE, IF ANY FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT, IF ANY AFFECTION AND MERCY, MAKE MY JOY COMPLETE BY THINKING THE SAME WAY, HAVING THE SAME LOVE, UNITED IN SPIRIT, INTENT ON ONE PURPOSE. DO NOTHING OUT OF SELFISH AMBITION OR CONCEIT, BUT IN HUMILITY CONSIDER OTHERS AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOURSELVES. EVERYONE SHOULD LOOK NOT TO HIS OWN INTERESTS, BUT RATHER TO THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS.

– **Philippians 2:1-4 (CSB)**

Related Verses: *John 17; Colossians 2:12-17; Philippians 2*

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ **What should humility look like for you and your church in this conversation?**
- ▶ **How are we taking away from the gospel message by our division?**
- ▶ **How have we caused or perpetuated division? What does it look like to confess our role in causing or perpetuating division?**
- ▶ **Why does unity in the Church matter to God? Why should it matter to us?**

↓ DIG DEEPER

Advocates by Dhati Lewis (Book) /

“The Gospel Compels Us to Talk About Race”

by Courtney Reissig (Blog Post) / **“Racial Unity**

with Crawford Loritts” (Video) / **A 60-Minute**

Conversation on Race in America (Video)