
Good White Racist? Confronting Your Role in Racial Injustice

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Six-Week Small-Group Study Guide

The fact that you've picked up the book *Good White Racist?* suggests that you want to become a better ally to the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community and start doing the hard work necessary to end racism and dismantle white pseudo-supremacy. That work requires asking hard questions and, frankly, getting a little uncomfortable—ok, more than a little uncomfortable. Exploring and discussing this book as a church group or book club will require humility and openness as you challenge one another to examine your assumptions about race and racism and work together to combat racial injustice. It may be hard, but it is holy work, holy discomfort, as we do our part to create a world in which all God's children are honored in their full humanity.

Each session includes three main elements:

- **Opening Up:** This section asks one or two personal questions, designed to help the group practice honesty and vulnerability with one another. All participants are encouraged to answer these questions as an icebreaker to the session.
- **Discussion Questions:** Seven deeper questions encourage participants to wrestle with the concepts introduced in the chapters being covered each week. Let conversation flow as the group considers these questions together.
- **Next Steps:** Each session concludes by asking what steps participants took in response to the Action Items suggested at the end of each chapter of the book, and invites discussion of further actions that might be taken.

Depending on your context, you may want to open and/or close each session with prayer.

The demonstrations that have occurred nationwide in the past year, protesting the police violence that resulted in the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among so many others, have reignited debates among white people over the proper way for Black Americans and their allies to protest. As these and other debates enter your conversations during this study, consider the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, quoted by Michael W. Waters in the foreword to *Good White Racist?*:

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.¹

May those of us who extol moderation remember these words and strive to become not a stumbling block to freedom but a passionate ally in the pursuit of justice. May the readings and discussions of the next six weeks be a big step in that direction.

1. Excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Reprinted by arrangement with The Heirs to the estate of Martin Luther King Jr., c/o Writers House as agent for the proprietor, New York, NY. Copyright 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; copyright renewed 1991 Coretta Scott King.

WEEK 1 – LET’S TALK ABOUT RACE

READ: INTRODUCTION, CHAPTER 1, AND CHAPTER 2

This session introduces the concepts of race, racism, whiteness, and privilege, while challenging participants to increase their tolerance for the discomfort that is common (particularly for white people) when talking about race.

Opening Up

Everyone is encouraged to answer these questions. Introduce yourself to the group as you do so.

What scares or worries you most about discussing race and racism? Knowing that these conversations will likely be at least somewhat uncomfortable for you, how will you stay motivated to continue listening, learning, and challenging yourself?

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to consider something “good”? Is something automatically bad if it is not good? How does our difficulty holding two things in tension make it difficult to talk about tough subjects and honestly assess things?
2. Do you find it difficult to think about violence and cruelty in the history of the U.S.—things like genocide of indigenous people and the long history of slavery that began in 1619? How might the U.S. be different if we could simultaneously honor the positive and lament the negative?
3. On page 14, the author outlines three types of racism: institutional, individual, and systemic. Why do we tend to focus on racism on an individual level—certain people’s bigotry, or “one bad cop,” rather than looking at the systems that perpetuate inequality? Knowing that racism is more than personal animosity, do you identify with the author’s description that follows of good white racists?
4. When news breaks of a police officer shooting an unarmed Black person, or violence that erupts in the context of protest, how do you process that news? Do you notice any implicit biases at play, like the author describes on page 23?
5. Did it surprise you to read that race is an invented, fluid, or arbitrary concept? Why do you think the definition of who counted as white evolved so much over the centuries from the Age of Discovery to the 20th century? Is race really about the color of your skin, or is it about something else?
6. In Chapter 1, the author shares a story about her mother babysitting a Black boy who was then mistreated by her neighbor. What are some of your earliest memories around race? What messages (spoken or unspoken) did you receive around racial difference when you were growing up? Did those messages include elements of tribalism, fear, or shame, as the author describes in Chapter 2?
7. Why do we need to talk about whiteness in order to combat white pseudo-supremacy? Is it possible to achieve equality for BIPOC without examining whiteness?

Next Steps

Each chapter ends with a list of Action Items. Take turns sharing any “Learn,” “Think,” or “Act” steps you took from the lists that appeared at the end of Chapter 1 or Chapter 2.

Suggestions included following some BIPOC leaders and educators on social media, learning more about your own heritage, and making an effort to notice your own racist thought patterns when watching the news or interacting with others.

What did you learn from these actions? Are there any steps you can consider taking in the next week?

WEEK TWO – STEALTHY RACISM

READ: CHAPTER 3 AND CHAPTER 4

This session examines the invisible ways in which whiteness exerts its power through gaslighting, defensiveness, and oppressive language structures, and how these things reinforce the status quo.

Opening Up

Everyone is encouraged to answer these questions.

What is your attitude or approach to controversy on social media? Do you avoid posting or commenting on anything that might cause conflict? Are you bold in sharing things and engaging in intense dialogue, or do such conversations make you anxious?

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a microaggression (e.g. “you’re a great leader, for a woman”)? Can you think of a time you may have committed one against someone else?
2. Were you familiar with the concept of psychological manipulation known as gaslighting? How would you feel if you had a legitimate concern and someone suggested you were wrong, bad, or simply imagining things? Have you witnessed any interactions like this in a racialized context?
3. The author says that reactions to Colin Kaepernick and the Take a Knee movement are intentionally missing the point. Do you agree? Intentional or not, how can we help racial injustice (i.e., the point) not be overshadowed by emphasis on the flag, anthem, and military?
4. It may seem hard to believe or admit that we are “tools for the empire,” as the author says on page 44. Why do you think so many white people choose not to speak out against overt racists shouting slurs or pointing weapons at unarmed protestors? What makes us more likely to defend police officers who kill unarmed Black people than to demand justice?
5. Phrases like “not all white people,” “not all cops,” and “all lives matter” may ring true for some, but they are not helpful. How do these responses detract from legitimate concerns that BIPOC are expressing?
6. It is a mark of privilege to have your own language and dialect be considered the standard or official language. How have you seen language, silencing, and “political correctness” play out in racial dynamics recently?
7. Let’s check in on our discomfort level. The fourth of the author’s Four Ds is “disappear,” a response that can be tempting when conversations get too uncomfortable. What might help you “stay in the room” when you are tempted to disappear?

Next Steps

Take turns sharing any “Learn,” “Think,” or “Act” steps you took from the lists of Action Items that appeared at the end of Chapters 3 and 4.

Suggestions included researching the racist origins of some common phrases, reflecting on the Four Ds, and sticking around to simply listen and learn when BIPOC are describing their racial experiences.

What did you learn from these actions? Are there any steps you can consider taking in the next week?

WEEK 3 – DEBUNKING OUR MYTHS

READ: CHAPTER 5 AND CHAPTER 6

In this session, we'll begin to understand how our education systems reinforce the white-dominant status quo and perpetuate myths that end up being used as justifications by many good white racists to maintain their own comfort levels and persistent racist behaviors—even while claiming to despise racist ideology.

Opening Up

Everyone is encouraged to answer these questions.

What do you remember observing about race when you were in grade school? How diverse was your school? What did you learn about the history of BIPOC communities in the U.S.?

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways has education in the U.S. been designed to support the status quo? How was this apparent in our history, and how do you see it playing out still today?
2. Black boys tend to be more harshly disciplined in school, and more harshly policed as adults. Why is this? How are white boys and men treated differently when committing the same infractions?
3. How does our emphasis on niceness contribute to racism? How is this connected to diversity education or multicultural celebrations?
4. What are the children in your life learning about American history and literature as it relates to race? What changes would you make to the curriculum?
5. Of the justifications discussed in Chapter 6, which have you heard before? Have you ever asserted any of these things?
6. How did slavery benefit even whites who did not own slaves? How does that legacy continue today, even for those of us whose ancestors did not own slaves?
7. Why is a strategy of “stop talking about race and racism will go away” not effective? What does happen when we refuse to talk about race or claim not to see color?

Next Steps

Take turns sharing any “Learn,” “Think,” or “Act” steps you took from the lists that appeared at the end of Chapters 5 and 6.

Suggestions included searching your public school system's websites for BIPOC leaders and perspectives and practicing how to respond when you hear someone using racist justifications to dismiss legitimate concerns.

What did you learn from these actions? Are there any steps you can consider taking in the next week?

WEEK 4 – OWNERSHIP AND INJUSTICE

READ: CHAPTER 7 AND CHAPTER 8

This session is a deep dive into the justice system, its impact on people of color, and the power that white people carry in public space. From suspicion in stores and coffeeshops to arrest and incarceration, people of color have very different, very damaging, experiences.

Opening Up

Everyone is encouraged to answer these questions.

Have you ever called the police for assistance or to report a crime? What was the context? In retrospect, do you notice any racial dynamics in play?

Discussion Questions

1. Considering the social contract that guides and restrains our behavior, what differences do you notice in expectations and repercussions between Black people and white people navigating the same society?
2. What “while Black” incidents have you heard about recently?
3. Have you ever been surprised to see BIPOC in a certain neighborhood or establishment? Did you notice the racist assumptions in your reaction? Describe your thought process.
4. In what ways have you seen news or entertainment media portray Black perpetrators differently from white perpetrators? How are their backgrounds, motives, and even their crimes described differently?
5. The author describes a billboard she saw urging parents to “stop telling your children to fear [the police].” How do you talk about police in your home? Does pushing for accountability and changes in policing mean a person is anti-police?
6. What are the consequences of white assumptions that Black men are inherently criminal? How do you think inequities in rates of stops, arrests, and sentencing could be remedied?
7. Were you aware of the clause in the Thirteenth Amendment that permits slave labor for convicted felons? While there are some benefits for prisoners to have work experiences while incarcerated, do you believe that the incentives this system gives courts and corporations to imprison more people are just?

Next Steps

Take turns sharing any “Learn,” “Think,” or “Act” steps you took from the lists that appeared at the end of Chapters 7 and 8.

Suggestions included reflecting on how you would feel if you were policed the way BIPOC are, preparing an action plan for if you ever witness someone being policed in this way, and writing to companies that benefit from prison labor.

Are there any steps you can consider taking in the next week?

WEEK 5 – DOMINION AND DIVERSITY

READ: CHAPTER 9 AND CHAPTER 10

This session continues the concept of the white ownership of space and the ways in which white society consumes bodies of color. We will also dive into the role of white Christianity in perpetuating racism.

Opening Up

Everyone is encouraged to answer these questions.

How diverse is your personal web of relationships (friends, family, workplace, etc.)? How diverse is your church?

Discussion Questions

1. What areas of your city are historically Black? Do you know the history of how that came to be, and whether redlining, gentrification, or mid-century urban planning played a role?
2. On page 121, the author says, “The concept of white dominion over Black and Brown bodies is deeply embedded in the Christian faith.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. What products or entertainments do you or your family consume that use BIPOC faces and/or cultures but do not profit or authentically reflect the people in those communities? Think in terms of food, sports teams, costumes, holidays, fashion, and so forth.
4. Have you ever used a relationship with a member of the BIPOC community to justify yourself (e.g., “I have Black friends!”) or absolve your guilt (e.g., “You don’t think I’m racist, do you?”)?
5. Have you ever experienced “good intentions” going awry in your relationships with people of color? How did you work through the awkwardness or embarrassment that followed?
6. How do you think white Christians in the past justified excluding Black Christians from their pews and their communion tables? How does token diversity in churches today (a Latino youth minister, BIPOC faces on the website, or a Black gospel song performed by a mostly white choir) stand in the way of real justice and antiracism work?
7. What do you think Jesus would say about the state of racial justice in the U.S. today? How do you think the church could practice repentance for its complicity in racism?

Next Steps

Take turns sharing any “Learn,” “Think,” or “Act” steps you took from the lists that appeared at the end of Chapters 9 and 10.

Suggestions included researching the geographic and demographic history of your city and speaking up about racism and the need for antiracist work in your church.

What did you learn from these actions? Are there any steps you can consider taking in the next week?

WEEK 6: GOING FORWARD

READ: CHAPTER 11

In this final discussion we'll reflect on what we've learned and discovered throughout this study, and begin to imagine a new way of being white in the world that does not dominate others but participates fully in a peaceful and just community.

Opening Up

Everyone is encouraged to answer these questions.

How have you been changed or not changed by this book study? What has been the most transformative insight you've gained over the past six weeks?

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think the role of white people in the fight for racial justice differs from that of people of color? What might your role be?
2. On page 144, the author says we should be “healing ourselves from our own racism.” On page 127 (back in chapter 9), Dr. Robyn says they are “trying to help us all get free.” How does it strike you that white people need to be healed or set free from racism as much as BIPOC do?
3. What “stage of grief” are you in, when it comes to your racial awakening?
4. White people in the denial and bargaining stages of grief both try to explain away racist behavior or events. What is the distinction between those stages?
5. The author says there are three levels of true antiracism work: personal, interpersonal, and collective (pages 149–152). In which level or levels are you currently working most? How so?
6. Reparations can be a scary word for many white people. How has your thinking evolved on that topic? Where might we begin to right the economic wrongs that have been done to Black and Indigenous people in the U.S.? Where might we begin making emotional reparations?
7. After reading the author's closing section, “New Imaginations,” including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of the “Beloved Community,” describe in your own words what a world without white pseudo-supremacy would look like?

Next Steps

Chapter 11 included several pages of Action Steps, including supporting economic and emotional reparations and reimagining our institutional efforts at “diversity.” Have you taken any of these steps?

Consider the visions you described in question 7 above. What steps would it take to make that better world a reality? Beyond the feelings in people's hearts, or the beliefs in their heads, how would our systems need to be different? What would need to happen at national, state, local, and individual levels? What will you do to help make those things happen?