

# Conversations that shape us

## RESPONDING TO RACISM

*A conversation guide*



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# How to use this resource

This conversation guide is designed for church small groups but could be used by any group wishing to discuss racism by starting with their individual heart postures. We encourage you to complete the guide at your own pace. As a framework, it will likely take four sessions to work through, allowing one or two hours per session.

We recommend breaking the sessions up like this:

- First session: Sections 1 to 3
- Second session: Sections 4 to 5
- Third session: Section 6
- Fourth session: Section 7

Materials needed:

- PDF conversation guide (on laptop)
- Pen and paper (or notes app)
- Whiteboard or sticky notes
- A Bible
- Projector or TV (optional)

As you go through the guide, feel free to invite participants to take turns reading the group portions out loud.

Before your group meets for the first time, leaders can encourage each participant to practice discussing racism with someone he or she trusts (a church member, mentor, etc.) to gain familiarity and confidence speaking about this topic. Leaders can find further information on how to use this resource and manage group discomfort at [TheEFC.ca/Racism](http://TheEFC.ca/Racism).

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# 1 | INTRODUCTION

This conversation guide explores biblical concepts that prepare followers of Jesus to effectively understand and respond to racism in a God-honouring way. It is a launching point to hear from God through the Bible on this issue. The Holy Scriptures are completely trustworthy and provide us with the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

While there are historical, political, philosophical and social dimensions to racism, it is also a sin issue. Racism is a sinful belief system that creates injustice by denying people their God-given humanity. It undermines the truth that all people are loved by God. All humans are created in His image and have equal dignity and value.

Scripture tells us that God the Father is reconciling all things in heaven and on earth to Himself through Jesus and that we are called to act as ambassadors of this message (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). As we explore key principles in God's Word, we can be better equipped to model walking in harmony with our brothers and sisters. When we seek reconciliation, we're joining with Christ, who prayed for our unity as His followers (John 17:11).

Our prayer is that as you journey through this conversation guide, you will be better prepared to engage in conversations about racism, justice and reconciliation.



## 2 | OBJECTIVE

This resource provides an introductory guide for individuals and small groups as they address racism. Its main purpose is to spark conversations about racism that are grounded in biblical reflection and prayer.

This guide can help remove some of the barriers that might hinder individuals from talking about racism and encourages the creation of a safe environment. It also explores racism as a sin issue and how we can respond to it according to biblical principles.

The desired outcome is to help prepare small groups to journey deeper in biblical reflection, conversation and transformation as they respond to God's heart of love and justice. It is intended to be a gateway to an ongoing conversation about racism and how it relates to us – both individually and within our churches.



# 3 | CONVERSATION PREPARATION

**Read these paragraphs out loud as a group and discuss the suggested ways of creating a safe environment together.**

Starting new or unfamiliar conversations can be unnerving. Discussing racism can unleash emotions that most of us have learned to bury. Sometimes we are afraid of saying the wrong thing or mentioning something that might be politically incorrect. We can be misled into thinking that certain things are better left unsaid.

When your group gathers, it's important to establish a safe environment so fears are addressed. This way, everyone can ask honest questions instead of being fearful about saying something wrong or offensive.

We need to acknowledge our fears and recognize that they can become barriers to talking about race and addressing racism. Through prayer, God can give us the strength and wisdom needed to facilitate these conversations.

Here are some ways you can nurture a safe environment.

ENCOURAGE	AVOID
Speaking for yourself (e.g. using "I" statements).	Projecting feelings/biases onto others in the group. Notice when these feelings/biases arise within yourself and acknowledge they belong to you, not necessarily to others.
Using a gentle, non-confrontational tone when you speak and waiting for appropriate, respectful times to share.	Feeling the need to fill the silence in between responses. Silence is okay; everyone thinks, feels and responds at a different pace.
Asking yourself, "I wonder what brought them to this belief?" if you feel judgemental or defensive when another person is sharing.	Trying to fix, save or set others straight. Trust the Lord to lead each person into all truth by His Word and Spirit and in His time (John 16:13).

**Try this:**

As a group, share your ideas for what makes a safe environment. Write everyone's answers on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and use the appropriate responses as the ground rules for your conversation time.

**Give each person a turn to complete the following sentences:**

- When I avoid talking about racism, it's because...
- When I remain silent when I hear a racist comment, it's because...

**Based on your responses above, discuss the following questions:**

- What emotions or thoughts are stirred up by this topic?
- How might Scripture enable you to respond to these emotions?
- When followers of Jesus confess their sins, what does the Bible say about God's response?



If members of your group are convicted of sins or biases, spend some time in quiet reflection and confess those sins individually.



**Read this passage:**

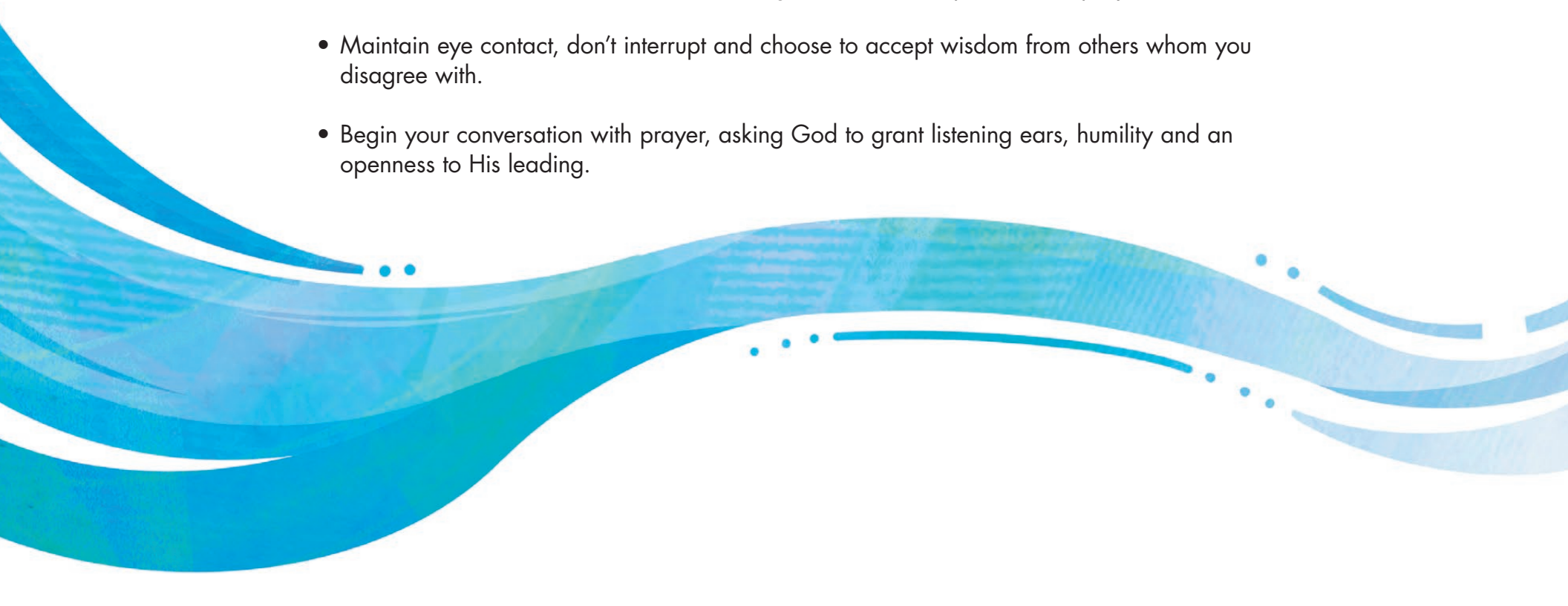
“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7).

- How might this perspective help you respond to fear, avoidance, hatred or silence?

The seven steps below for fostering Spirit-led conversations about racism are inspired by a resource called “Beginning Courageous Conversations About Race” by Glenn E. Singleton and Cyndie Hays.

Throughout the following sections of this conversation guide and any outflowing discussions, we encourage you to keep these principles in mind and use them to nurture fruitful conversations.

**1. STAY ENGAGED** in conversations with listening ears, a humble posture and prayerful hearts.

- Maintain eye contact, don’t interrupt and choose to accept wisdom from others whom you disagree with.
  - Begin your conversation with prayer, asking God to grant listening ears, humility and an openness to His leading.
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**2. EXPECT** to experience discomfort, knowing that God's Spirit can convict, heal and grow us through the unease.

- Don't try to ignore your reactions; be honest about them with God and those you trust.
- If you feel defensive or judgemental when another person is sharing, turn to prayer and then ask yourself, "I wonder what brought them to this conviction?"

**3. REFLECT** on biblical truth with prayer.

- Bring what you're learning into your Scripture reading and prayer and ask God to guide you.

**4. ACCEPT** a lack of closure.

- It's alright to have unresolved differences or questions since these conversations are just the beginning.
- Treat lack of closure as an invitation to keep your conversations going.

**5. LEARN** from and read the stories of others.

- Seek out resources, books, films, etc. created by people with different backgrounds from yourself and enjoy them with an open mind.

**6. ANTICIPATE TRANSFORMATION.** Our journey as Christ-followers involves unlearning the world's values and filling our minds with God's patterns of thinking instead (Romans 12:2).

- As followers of Christ, we trust that we are being increasingly conformed to Him, through the Spirit's power and according to our Father's will (Romans 8:29). Try to see your conversations as part of this God-initiated and God-oriented process.
- Pay attention to how you grow and change in this journey. Perhaps keep a notebook to document your thoughts along the way.

**7. CONTINUE LISTENING AND ENGAGING** in this conversation.

- Repeat steps 1–7 and take note of how they affect your conversations.

## 4 | DEFINITIONS

To help your group share a common language for your conversation, read the following definitions out loud. Together, discuss how these definitions compare with each of your understandings of the terms. Please note that while these definitions are widely accepted, they aren't definitive.

### **BIAS**

Prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

### **CULTURE**

A set of learned values, behaviours, symbols and beliefs shared by a group that is passed from one generation to another and changes over time.

### **DISCRIMINATION**

The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age or sex.

**ETHNICITY**

A group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or a racial, national, tribal or cultural origin or background.

**INDIGENOUS**

Originating in or native to a particular land or region. In Canada, it is used as an umbrella term that includes all First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

**PREJUDICE**

A preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

**RACE**

A form of classification based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry. The term can also refer to a group of living things considered as a category (for example, the human race).

**RACISM**

A form of discrimination that values and privileges some groups of people above others and denies the personhood of some based on skin colour, descent or national or ethnic origin.

# 5 | UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF RACE

**Let's address the idea of race. This section is also available in video format. Scan this QR code, click [here](#) or visit [TheEFC.ca/Racism](https://TheEFC.ca/Racism) to watch the video.**



There is no scientific or biblical support for the idea of different races. The Bible teaches that God created one race of people called the human race and that we were all made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). True, by Genesis 12, the Bible hones in on the story of Abraham's descendants, through whom all people would be blessed. Yet the New Testament recentres the story back to the Genesis vision of one human family (Galatians 3:26–29; Revelation 7:9).

God created the universe with a tremendous amount of diversity, and Scripture presents this as a source of God's glory (Psalm 104:24; Romans 11:36). But while created differences do exist, the concept of race as we know it today wasn't introduced until the 1500s.

The onset of colonialism led to the segregation and hierarchy of these differences in human beings. This invented system is still often accepted as legitimate today, distorting our ability to appreciate differences and opening up doors for racial discrimination.

In *One Race One Blood: The Biblical Answer to Racism*, authors Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware write:

The Bible does not even use the word “race” in reference to people,<sup>1</sup> but does describe all human beings as being of “one blood” (Acts 17:26). This, of course, emphasizes that we are all related. . . . Scientists have found that if one were to take any two people from anywhere in the world, the basic genetic differences between these two people would typically be about 0.2 percent – even if they came from the same people group. But these so-called “racial” characteristics that many think are major differences (skin colour, eye shape, etc.) account for only 6 percent of this 0.2 percent variation, which amounts to a mere 0.012 percent difference genetically.<sup>2</sup>

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1 The NIV does use the word in two places. However, in Ezra 9:2 the Hebrew is literally “seed,” and in Romans 9:3 the phrase “those of my own race” is, in the original Greek, literally “my relatives according to the flesh.”

2 Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware, *One Race One Blood: The Biblical Answer to Racism* (Master Books, 2019).

As a group, discuss the following questions and then pray about the reactions, convictions or topics that come up during your discussion.

- Check in with yourself. How did you respond internally to the information we just learned? Was any of it new to you?
- Why might others want to challenge your perspective on the topic of race?
- Has this section revealed any areas of growth in how you relate to people of other ethnicities?





## 6 | DISCUSSING RACISM AS A SIN ISSUE

**Read the paragraphs below as a group or individually. Make a note of any emotions, discomfort or fears that might surface.**

How can we address the racism that is embedded in policies, historical data and institutional practices? Perhaps the most powerful starting place is to address our own biases. Setting the table for an anti-racist and anti-oppressive way of living starts with a call from God to examine our own hearts (Psalm 139:23-24).

In the book *Race Matters*, Cornel West writes, "Race is an explosive issue because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust."<sup>3</sup>

The enemy has planted seeds of fear, apathy and distrust of others in our midst and we need to acknowledge those harmful seeds and remove them before they take root in our lives. Racism stands in stark contrast to the call of the gospel and God's plan for us to be in right relationship

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<sup>3</sup> Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Beacon Press, 2017).

with Him and each other. It is a form of evil that is utterly contrary to the heart and person of Jesus.

As with all sin, racism grieves the Holy Spirit. Allowing sin to persist in our lives or congregations disrupts the Father's will for us by creating divisions and causing harm. Racism needs to be framed as evil in order for us to effectively address it.

In the article, "Racism and Christian Witness," Dr. Mark Glanville, a Canadian professor from Regent College, writes:

How we understand sin, theologically, is relevant. If scripture describes sin solely as the corruption of individuals, then there may be room to conclude that racism is only expressed by radicalized individuals. Yet what if the problem of evil encompasses the whole creation distorted by sin, a good world that is yet enthralled to evil (Matthew 4:8–9)? What if the problem includes the devil and a host of evil forces (Ephesians 6:12)? What if it includes humanity following the "course of this world" (Ephesians 2:2), and if evil is also embedded in legal systems (Isaiah 10:1–2)? The biblical story insists that the problem of evil is as wide as creation, a cosmic evil that animates an intricate network of cultural systems. Does this not include racism?<sup>4</sup>

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4 Mark Glanville, "Racism and Christian Witness" (Regent College, 2021).



**Take a few minutes individually to complete this check-in and self-assessment chart.**

1. **Pause** and take a few moments to be still before God.
2. **Notice** what you are feeling. What emotions are you currently experiencing? How does your body feel? Name these emotions and sensations.
3. **Listen** for what God might be saying to you in your current state.
4. **Pray** that the Holy Spirit would help you to see, think and listen clearly to Him and to others.
5. **Reflect** and thank God for His presence, love and compassion toward you and your group throughout your conversations.

Read the perspectives in this chart and identify which views best reflect your own.

KINGDOM REALITY	WORLD'S PERSPECTIVE
We are created image-bearers of God	We must prove ourselves
Humans are equally valuable in the eyes of God	Human value is based on what pleases or impresses others in our society
We should treat each other as brothers, sisters and neighbours	We should engage with or ignore others based on what benefits us
We are called to act and react with love to further the interests of others	We should act and react with fear to protect our own interests
We can live with Spirit-led boldness and trust in God	We live with persistent uncertainty
We can release fears to God and know He provides a safe space to talk	We worry about saying the wrong thing
We are reminded of our own need to confess sins	We should avoid taking the blame, but instead point fingers at others
God values diversity	Diversity is a cultural buzzword and popular concept
Christ provides a unity that recognizes differences	We believe in invented divisions that separate

As a group, discuss what came up in the personal reflection time and ask how you can be praying for each other as you each grow in learning about racism.

# 7 | READ, REFLECT, RESPOND

## READ

Read these passages slowly together. Imagine yourselves as participants in each passage. As you read, write down the words that resonate with you. Take short breaks between passages to pray and reflect individually, asking God to speak to you through His Word.

### Genesis 1:27

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

### Isaiah 1:17

"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

### Micah 6:8

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."



**John 13:34–35**

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

**Galatians 3:26–29**

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

**Ephesians 6:12**

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

**Colossians 3:1–4**

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”



**1 John 4:19–21**

“We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”

**Revelation 7:9**

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”

As a group, have each participant share the words they wrote down from the passages above.

1. Which of the words or phrases in these verses had a significant impact on you? What was their significance to you and why?
2. Looking at the words or phrases you identified, pause and consider: How might God long for us to relate to one another in light of our differences?



**REFLECT**

**This section can be completed silently or out loud.**

*Living God, You who created all people in Your image, please help us to see our neighbours, in all their diversity, as You see them – beloved and precious. Open our minds and hearts to the leading of Your Spirit as we read this passage, so we are not conformed to the sinful patterns of this world but are renewed and transformed to know Your good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Slowly read through Psalm 101:1–2. As you read, ask yourself what the Holy Spirit is highlighting. Notice words that stand out to you. These are God’s words so let them saturate your heart and mind. After reading, pause for about 30 seconds.


**Psalm 101:1–2**

“I will sing of your love and justice;  
to you, Lord, I will sing praise.  
I will be careful to lead a blameless life—  
when will you come to me?  
I will conduct the affairs of my house  
with a blameless heart.”



Read the passage a second time. This time, examine what your role is in these verses. As you read, ask yourself, *What am I doing here?* God is speaking to you. Take 30 seconds to pause.

During the third reading, make note of God's promises and/or character. How is He characterized? Reading aloud may help you to reflect on who He is. God's desire is for us to know Him and follow Him. After reading, pause for about 30 seconds.

- After reading Psalm 101:1–2 three times, what did you take away from this experience?
  - What did you hear God say to you?
  - Is there anything the Lord is convicting you about?
  - How is God encouraging you?
  - How does this apply to your life?
- 

## RESPOND

**Read the following paragraphs out loud.**

From Genesis to Revelation, God's Word guides us through an evolving journey of understanding human sin – including racism – and how we can address it faithfully. It's difficult for us to have conversations about these issues in healthy and productive ways. Yet our Saviour's legacy, ministry and message are clear.

He calls us to love our brothers, sisters and neighbours as ourselves – regardless of nationality, tongue or deeply held beliefs. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus lived out this truth in the way He taught and ministered (Matthew 8:1–13; John 4; John 13:34–35).

More dialogue is needed to overcome worldly divisions and inequalities. And that dialogue will have a lasting impact if it is rooted in Scripture and brought into the light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

As you close the conversation you're having, it's important to appreciate the immense step of vulnerable, risky faith you and your conversation partners took in having this discussion. As a

call to action, we encourage you to *continue* these conversations about racism in a way rooted in biblical reflection, prayer and generous listening and conversation.

Continue reading, listening, learning and praying for reconciliation and justice in all places you find yourselves – at home, at school, at work, at church, in recreation, and in the public square. We hope that these actions won't just emerge from a desire to address current racially charged issues but from God's own desire, which we see in Scripture.

In Dr. Willie James Jennings' theological commentary, *Acts*, he notes that the book of Acts lays out God's desire for a new reality marked by the joining of Jews and Gentiles – a reality He brings about by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

As Jennings writes, while "the prevailing fantasy of people is to have power over others . . . the Spirit offers us God's own fantasy of desire for people, of joining and life together bound to a new destiny in God."<sup>5</sup>

We hope that the conversations you've started, rooted in biblical reflection and prayer, have given you a glimpse of God's desire for reconciliation and belonging. We pray you would continue to live in light of that God-given desire, as the Holy Spirit fans it into flame. ●

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<sup>5</sup> Willie James Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

# Resources

**Disclaimer:** *The views and opinions expressed in these publications are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of any producer of this resource.*

## CANADIAN RESOURCES

“What the Bible Says About Race” by the Canadian Bible Society  
 Undoing Racism resources from the Canadian Council of Churches  
 “Reimagining Belonging: Race and Place in Christian Communities” by Dr. David Leong – hosted by Regent College  
 “The Black Experience in Biblical Interpretation” with Esau McCaulley and Lisa Bowens – hosted by Regent College  
*Change the Story: A Small Resource on Racism, Canada, and the Church* by Rohadi Nagassar  
 Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Centre coaching and training

## INDIGENOUS RESOURCES

*The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* by Thomas King  
*Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, & Inuit Issues in Canada* by Chelsea Vowel  
*One Church, Many Tribes* by Richard Twiss

## INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

Study Guides on racism from Baylor University  
 “Family of God” podcast series by The Bible Project  
*One Race One Blood: The Biblical Answer to Racism* by Ken Ham and Charles A. Ware  
*The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* by Willie James Jennings  
*The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* by Jemar Tisby  
*How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice* by Jemar Tisby  
 “Reconciled: A Biblical Approach to Ethnic Unity” by The Center for Biblical Unity  
 “Transformative Justice: Being Church and Overcoming Racism” by the World Council of Churches  
 “Reading the Gospels while Black” with Esau McCaulley and N.T. Wright

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