



[Title Slide] We're going to spend the next few weeks looking at what the Bible tells us about race and how our faith should shape our attitudes and conversations around race. This might seem like a challenging task given that race is a social construct that has largely come about in the last four or five hundred years,¹ long after the Bible was written. Human nature throughout history has sought ways **“to put power in the hands of a few to the detriment of many,”**² as Jemar Tisby eloquently put it. Over the thousands of years of recorded history there have been a variety of ways that cultures have identified and created caste systems, ways to give some power over others. A few hundred years ago that system for much of the world became based on the color of skin.

The Bible may not directly address racism, but it has a lot to say about power and abuse of power, the value of each person, and the mistreatment of others, and that's where I think we can find some valuable truths for us to consider when it comes to conversations around race today.

I'm going to give you a bit of a spoiler alert: here's where we're headed over these three weeks: [Slide] when I look at Scripture, there are three big truths or challenges that jump out to me as particularly applicable:

1. Faith leads to lament
2. Faith leads to connection
3. Faith leads to action

Paul wrote in Galatians, giving us a key passage for this series:

[Slide] *Galatians 3:26-28 (NLT)* ²⁶ For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The topic of race is a big one in our country and it's contentious. I know for some of us, it feels easier to not talk about race so we can avoid conflict or saying something that might offend someone – or worse, get ourselves

¹ Jemar Tisby, *Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 27.

² Ibid, 16

labeled racist or culturally insensitive. If I'm honest, as much as I want to talk about this, I'm also worried that I'll end up bumbling my way through it.

And yet, as Christians, who know God's desire is for this world to be a world without classes, without caste, without racial mistreatment, to be a world where we can all truly be one in Christ. And we have a responsibility to be an example of God's heart for humanity in our world.

In America, the church – in particular the white church – also has a responsibility because white Christians played such a significant role in the spread and protection of slavery and the creation of the social construct of racism in our country. Yes, there were individuals and groups that took stands against slavery, but it was not the majority.

[Slide] Propaganda, hip hop artist and spoken word poet, wrote, **“The United States was not formed for the flourishing of ‘all’ people, seeing as how every people group other than wealthy white males had some moment where they had to fight to be included in the Constitution.”**³

Minorities have had to fight for freedom, for the right to vote, for the right to be considered fully human. Women have had to fight for the right to vote, to have equal pay, to even be able to open a bank account without a man giving permission. And that legislation was only enacted in the 1970s. The list could go on and on.

Before the Civil War, 25,000 Methodist Church members owned 208,000 slaves – 1,200 of those members were pastors.⁴ The reason there is a Southern Baptist Denomination boils down to a debate over slavery, with Southern pastors defending slavery as a God-ordained institution and arguing that it was in the best interests of the slaves, ultimately leading them to leave the Baptist denomination and form their own.⁵

One of the great failures of Christians in America has been silence. Yes, there were many who did not have slaves. In the Methodists' defense,

³ Propaganda, *Terraform: Building A Better World* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2021), 176.

⁴ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/13/676333342/southern-baptist-seminary-confronts-history-of-slaveholding-and-deep-racism>, accessed October 5th, 2024.

there were almost 1.2 million Methodists in 1844⁶ - it was a minority that were slave owning.

So how did the color of skin become a way to power, to justify the mistreatment of others, the dehumanization of people created in God's image? So many were silent. So many content to just not say anything.

[Slide] Jemar Tisby wrote, **“Historically speaking, when faced with the choice between racism and equality, the American church has tended to practice a complicit Christianity rather than a courageous Christianity. They chose comfort over constructive conflict and in so doing created and maintained a status quo of injustice.”**⁷

The silent church played a large role in allowing it to happen through inaction. This has been a pattern throughout our history. During the Civil Rights movements, the white church responded with silence again and when it did speak up, it was to tell Martin Luther King, Jr., and others to back off, be silent, and be patient.

[Slide] Tisby also wrote of the white evangelical church's complicity with racism today: **“It looks like Christians responding to black lives matter with the phrase all lives matter. It looks like Christians consistently supporting a president whose racism has been on display for decades. It looks like Christians telling black people and their allies that their attempts to bring up racial concerns are ‘divisive.’ It looks like conversations on race that focus on individual relationships and are unwilling to discuss systemic solutions.”**⁸

[Slide] Austin Channing Brown, author of *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, wrote, **“I learned pretty early in life that while Jesus may be cool with racial diversity, America is not.”**⁹

As you all know, it's still a problem. Black teenagers experience “an average of five instances of racial discrimination (individually, vicariously,

⁶ <https://peopleneedjesus.net/2014/03/28/the-missional-split-of-1844/>, accessed October 4th, 2024.

⁷ Tisby, *Color of Compromise*, Kindle location 248.

⁸ Ibid, Kindle location 3291.

⁹ Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2018), 22.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What stands out to you from today's lesson? What do you agree with? Disagree with? Why?
- Jemar Tisby wrote, "You cannot pursue true racial justice without authentic relationships with people who are different from you." Is he right? Why or why not?
- Why does God value diverse relationships?
- How can we pursue diverse relationships in a way that honors God and respects others?
- Read James 3:8-12; why are words so important?
- In what ways do our words matter when it comes to race? Who is someone you know who is a good example of this?
- What can we do this week to pursue diverse relationships and use words in a way that honors God?



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WEEK THREE | ACT

FAITH LEADS TO ACTION

1. SPEAK UP
2. CREATE
3. JOIN & GIVE
4. LEARN

Joshua 7:10-13 (NLT)

¹⁰ But the Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why are you lying on your face like this?" ¹¹ Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen some of the things that I commanded must be set apart for me. And they have not only stolen them but have lied about it and hidden the things among their own belongings. ¹² That is why the Israelites are running from their enemies in defeat. For now Israel itself has been set apart for destruction. I will not remain with you any longer unless you destroy the things among you that were set apart for destruction. ¹³ "Get up! Command the people to purify themselves in preparation for tomorrow. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Hidden among you, O Israel, are things set apart for the Lord. You will never defeat your enemies until you remove these things from among you.



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James 2:14-17 (NLT)

¹⁴ What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? ¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

James 1:19 (NLT)

You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

HOW WILL MY FAITH LEAD TO ACTION?

Galatians 3:26-28 (NLT)

²⁶ For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

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