

Confronting Racism as Spiritual Practice

Book Study and Discussion Series, June 28-August 16

Overview and Study Guide

Prepared by Elise Edwards (rev. July 12, 2020)

I'm excited about the study we are undertaking, and delighted that you have decided to participate. If Christians are to confront racism sincerely, there are some questions we must ask. How has the American church, as an institution, been complicit in racism? How might we begin to address this in our worship, teaching, polity, and practices? We also seek to discern what actions we might take, individually and corporately, to address the systemic racism that is so much a part of our society.

Our Schedule:

Zoom book study and discussion on *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby
Sundays 4:00-5:30pm

Session 1: How (and Why) We are Going to Talk about Racism	Read Foreword and Ch. 1 before session	Sunday, June 28
Session 2: The Origins of Racial Conflict in Early America	Read Ch. 2-5 before session	Sunday, July 12
Session 3: The Jim Crow Era	Read Ch. 6-7 before session	Sunday, July 26
Session 4: From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter	Read Ch. 8-10 before session	Sunday, August 9
Session 5: What Now?	Read Ch. 11 and Conclusion	Sunday, August 16

How to Prepare:

Addressing racism (and other systems of oppression, marginalization, and devaluation) is challenging work, especially since so many of us do not know how to begin to meaningfully talk about race. We are—understandably—afraid of saying the wrong thing, causing others harm, and appearing to be insensitive or even outright racist. So I am going to ask you to do some preparatory work before our sessions as you read *The Color of Compromise* to guide you in self-reflection. I encourage you to set aside a journal, notepad, or notebook for you to collect all of your reflections from the readings and reflections and to keep it with you during our Sunday sessions to record new insights or orient you back to earlier reflections.

We ask that you make these commitments if you are joining the study:

- (1) Read *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby according to the schedule
- (2) Plan to attend at least three of the five Zoom classes as an attentive listener and discussant
- (3) Set aside time for reflection exercises in between meetings, even if you know you will miss a Zoom class.

If you are unable to uphold these commitments at this time, you are welcome to do a self-study, reading the book and reflecting on the questions in this preparation guide at your own pace.

The Sunday Sessions:

In the first part of our Zoom classes, we will review key ideas from the reading and get our discussion going about big ideas and then we will take a short (5-10 minute) break. After the break, we will meet in smaller breakout groups on Zoom led by a facilitator from the congregation. Several members of a household may be participating in the study together, but *if you have multiple connected devices and the available bandwidth*, it would be best for each individual to sign on separately during the break so that participants can join different breakout groups.

Consistent with way we do many things at DaySpring and with my own style of teaching, our sessions will follow a contemplative approach. That means we may move more slowly than you are used to in other classes, discussion groups, and book studies. While you will read multiple chapters that allow you to see the breadth of a session's topic, we will often spend our time on Sundays covering smaller selections of the reading and raising questions that bring historical developments to bear on the present moment. Learning from contemplative practices of the black church, ethicist Barbara Holmes explains that contemplative practices are about "a communal listening and entry into communion with the living God." (p. 43 in *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*). As such, contemplative practices do not always demand silence and stillness; they can be practiced in group activities that include videos, images, music, or spoken words. That said, we will have times of silence during our session. Silence can seem awkward on Zoom (or even face-to-face), but providing silence and a slower pace allows time for key insights to sink in and new ideas to form. Adopting this contemplative approach, I ask you to honor these agreements in our sessions.

As a participant:

- (1) I commit to being fully present during the Zoom sessions I attend. This means that, to greatest the extent possible given my unique circumstances and responsibilities, I will focus on our conversation and set aside other materials and tasks that will distract me.
- (2) I will do my best to focus on group members in the present moment and what we are talking about in the here and now rather than things we may have said in the past.
- (3) I will listen to others in a compassionate and non-judgmental way.
- (4) I will do my best to look beyond appearances to see others' depth and uniqueness rather than look at the roles they occupy (e.g. teacher, minister, father) or the way I might categorize them (e.g. millennial, white male, liberal).
- (5) I will do my best to focus on what is emerging between us rather than others' impressions of me and what I am saying.
- (6) I will speak for myself *in the first person* as I relay my experiences, feeling, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs. (e.g I feel... I sensed that... I wonder about...). I will speak the truth of my heart as I offer the insights, joys, struggles, and questions that are part of my journey. I will not speak for others.
- (7) I will encourage and honor my own and others' questions. I recognize that it is not my responsibility to analyze, fix, save, or advise others in the group. Instead, I trust that the Holy Spirit is present in our work together, and will guide each of us in this time through questions, not definitive answers.
- (8) I am free to remain silent and pass on some questions. I will protect others' need for silence.
- (9) I will observe time limits. I will limit my sharing to the time allotted and be mindful of allowing others' their fair amount of time to speak.
- (10) I will maintain confidentiality. What is shared in the group stays there. I may share with others outside the group what I have come to know, think, believe, etc. or share passages *in the book* that others' highlighted, but not others' experiences, feelings, and stories. I will not assume other participants are willing to continue these discussions outside of the Sunday sessions.

Preparing for Session 1 (Sunday, June 28, 2020):

How (and Why) We are Going to Talk about Racism

Read:

Schedule time this week to read the Foreword and Chapter 1 of *The Color of Compromise*. As you do, highlight passages that excite you or challenge you. Before our group session, you may choose to go back over one or two of those passages in a kind of *lectio divina*. Read it aloud slowly a few times, pausing in between to see what words or phrases jump put at you and what, if any, invitation might be there for you.

Contemplate:

Reflect on the questions below. You may choose to begin with prayer or to treat your reflection as an honest conversation with God. I encourage you to write out your responses. Stream of consciousness writing is perfectly acceptable for this type of reflection. Take your time with each question. It is better to deeply consider a few of them rather than to rush through all of them just to complete the exercise.

- (1) Why did I join this study? What is happening in me or the world around me that makes me willing to confront racism as a spiritual practice now?
- (2) When did I first learn about race? When did I first become aware of *my* race? Who told me and what did they tell me?
- (3) Who taught me about racism? Have I experienced racism myself? Have I witnessed it?
- (4) Look back at the section on “Why *The Color of Compromise* May Be Hard to Read.” Have I heard these objections before? Do I recognize myself in some of these descriptions?
- (5) What do I need to do to remain open-minded as I read and open-hearted as I discuss sensitive topics with others?

Optional: After you finish your reflection, highlight a portion you might be willing to share in a small group on Sunday.

Preparing for Session 2 (Sunday, July 12, 2020):

The Origins of Racial Conflict in Early America

Read:

Schedule time to read Chapters 2-5 of *The Color of Compromise* over the next two weeks. I encourage you to read no more than one chapter in one sitting. As you read, highlight passages that excite you or challenge you. Before our group session, you may choose to go back over one or two of those passages in a kind of *lectio divina*. Read it aloud slowly a few times, pausing in between to see what words or phrases jump put at you and what, if any, invitation might be there for you.

Consider reading Frederick Douglass' "[The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro](#)" during the Independence Day Weekend. Does the reading you have done so far in *The Color of Compromise* shed light on Douglass' criticism? (Note: NPR has a recording of descendants of Frederick Douglass reading excerpts from this speech. Listen [here](#).)

I also encourage you to visit "[Talking About Race](#)," a resource offered by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). This website has resources for educators, parents and caregivers, and people who are committed to justice. Choose the path that seems most relevant to you. Also, if you still have questions about race and racism as social constructs, or would simply like to dive deeper into the topic, read NMAAHC's "[Historical Foundations of Race](#)," which describes how the notion of race emerged in American society, how its rising influence justified the American form of capitalism, and how it was backed by philosophical, religious, and pseudo-scientific ideas that are largely discredited today.

Contemplate:

Reflect on the questions below. You may choose to begin with prayer or to treat your reflection as an honest conversation with God. I encourage you to write out your responses. Stream of consciousness writing is perfectly acceptable for this type of reflection. Take your time with each question. It is better to deeply consider a few of them rather than to rush through all of them just to complete the exercise.

- (1) Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of slavery statutes enacted in Virginia in 1667, which include the declaration that baptism does not render slaves free. Think through both sides of this issue: Why should undergoing conversion or baptism change a person's status and treatment by other Christians? Should Christians treat baptism as a religious rite without social consequences? You may choose to read the New Testament book of Philemon to see tensions in the early church over the status and treatment of slaves.
- (2) Tisby also discusses the presumed superiority of lighter-skinned people over darker-skinned people in early America. Talk a look around your home. Does the artwork tend to represent lighter-skinned people more than those with darker skin? What about characters in the books on your shelves? The tv shows and movies you watch? Who is more predominant and what does this say about subtle messages about ideals and the normative form of humankind?
- (3) Chapter 3 describes some of the ways enslaved Africans made Christianity their own during the Great Awakening. Do you know of any practices, beliefs, and traditions in African American Christianity or the black church that are different from the more dominant culture of Christianity? When you think of the spiritual traditions and legacies of African-American

Christianity, is this something you see part of the larger American Christian story or a divergence from it?

- (4) Do you believe that social reform comes *primarily* from individual conversion and commitment, or institutional reform? Think through several social issues and see if a pattern emerges: marriage and family life, abortion, racism, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, sexism, violence, greed/consumerism/materialism.
- (5) How has this affected your involvement in politics as a Christian? Think through several social issues and see if a pattern emerges.
- (6) Have you been taught that the Bible supports slavery? Or have you been taught that slavery goes against the Bible's teachings? Is one or the other true--or are they both true?
- (7) Imagine you lived in America during three different periods: 1808, 1908, 2008. Considering the race ideas circulating at these times and race you'd be understood as being, what opportunities do you believe might be open to you, and what opportunities might not? Would *not* talking about race during each of these periods have changed your situation? Feel free to discuss this with a conversation partner.

Preparing for Session 3 (Sunday, July 26, 2020):

The Jim Crow Era

Read and Contemplate:

Schedule time to read Chapters 6-7 of *The Color of Compromise* over the next two weeks. I encourage you to read no more than one chapter in one sitting. Some of the content in these chapters is graphic and horrific, but it is eye-opening. Let the weight of it sink in. Before our group session, contemplate whether there is any invitation for you in these chapters.

If you didn't have time to work through last week's activities, take the time this week to do so:

- Visit ["Talking About Race,"](#) a resource offered by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)
- Answer the questions

I also invite you to do the following:

- Journal about your questions or insights arising from the Sunday sessions.
- Begin to compile a reading list (or viewing list or listening list) of materials that can take you deeper into topics about race and confronting racism.
- Dive deeper into the African-American experience of Christianity by reading about the black church or viewing the PBS video series *This Far By Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys* on Vimeo:
 - Hour One: <https://vimeo.com/131837490>
 - Hour Two: <https://vimeo.com/142295034>
 - Hour Three: <https://vimeo.com/170417727>
 - Hour Four: <https://vimeo.com/354092018>
 - Hour Five: <https://vimeo.com/194298118>
 - Hour Six: <https://vimeo.com/362191948>

Note: Preparation questions and exercises for the following weeks will be added as we progress through the study.

Preparing for Session 4 (Sunday, August 9, 2020):

From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter

Read:

Schedule time to read Chapters 8-10 of *The Color of Compromise* over the next two weeks. I encourage you to read no more than one chapter in one sitting. As you read, highlight passages that excite you or challenge you. Before our group session, you may choose to go back over one or two of those passages in a kind of *lectio divina*. Read it aloud slowly a few times, pausing in between to see what words or phrases jump put at you and what, if any, invitation might be there for you.

Some of the historical developments in these chapters occurred in your lifetime, so highlight information that is new to you or that presents familiar events from a different perspective.

If you have never read Martin Luther King's [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#), get to it! For a deeper dive into policy issues and their spiritual ties consider reading King's "[Where Do We Go from Here?](#)" the [Movement for Black Lives](#)' platform, and then listening to "[The Spiritual Work of Black Lives Matter](#)" podcast from *On Being*.

Preparing for Session 5 (Sunday, August 16, 2020):

What Now?

Read:

Schedule time this week to read the Chapter 11 and the conclusion of *The Color of Compromise*. As you do, highlight passages that excite you or challenge you. Before our group session, you may choose to go back over one or two of those passages in a kind of *lectio divina*. Read it aloud slowly a few times, pausing in between to see what words or phrases jump put at you and what, if any, invitation might be there for you.

Contemplate:

What seems possible for you, as an individual, and you as a participant in other institutions (families, churches, schools, civic groups, etc.) to do about racism?