

# BE *the* BRIDGE

WITH TASHA MORRISON,  
STEPHANIE NANNEN,  
AND JUDY WU DOMINICK



# THE BRIDGE TO RACIAL UNITY

FREE SAMPLE

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

Welcoming Diversity and Healing  
Into Our Communities

# THE BRIDGE TO RACIAL UNITY



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# PROLOGUE



On the night before Jesus was crucified He prayed this prayer for His church:

*Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.*

*"I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.*

*"My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I*

am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

*“Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.*

*“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.*

*“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!*

*“O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. I have revealed you to them, will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.” (John 17)*

Jesus, we wrote this discussion guide with the hope that You would use it to help Your church become a better answer to Your prayer.

# INTRODUCTION

*“I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.”*

—John 17:23

## **The journey toward racial unity is not an easy process.**

It can feel daunting to dive into the unknown abyss of racial conversations. It takes courage to move toward what is uncomfortable and unnatural. Many of us look around and see racial divides. Things feel stuck, and we want to do something. We have read the Scriptures and prayed for unity. But how do we, the body of Christ, actually become one? How can the words in John 17 come alive in each of us and in our communities? How does unity begin to permeate our entire being? How do we become light in a dark world full of racial division? How do we become a witness and a voice for racial unity?

The purpose of this discussion guide is to help us get unstuck. It is designed to facilitate conversations that have the potential to heal racial divides—a first step in our collective journey toward racial reconciliation. This guide will aid you as you navigate conversations and work to build relationships. Our ultimate goal is to achieve racial reconciliation as a reflection of our ministry of reconciliation in Christ. The concept of racial unity—many differently shaped, differently functioning body parts coming together to form a single, unified body of Christ—provides a foundational framework for the work we must do to achieve this goal.

## **How is this Guide to be used?**

This guide is designed to be used in a racially diverse, small group setting. The content of the guide relies on individual members to share their experiences and work through the reconciliation

process with one another. A leader's guide is available (and highly recommended) to help prepare for and facilitate each of the nine sessions. Each session focuses on a different topic and is guided by Scripture, prayer, discussion, and relevant background information.

## What are the goals of this Guide?

- For God to be glorified
- For the church to be credible
- For Christians to develop biblical tools that empower them to be the bridge between people divided by racial and cultural differences, and thereby bring healing and transformation to communities

## Who is this Guide for?

- Are you heartbroken by the racial divide in your country, your city, your church, or your family?
- Do you want to experience greater diversity, richness, and depth in your relationships?
- Do you want the church to demonstrate God's heart for all people groups to the world?
- Do you feel fearful and awkward about connecting with others of a different race?
- Can you no longer tolerate the injustice, apathy, and fear you see around you?
- Would like the church to be a distinct and transformative voice in the conversation on racial healing?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then this study is for you. It is designed to provide tools and support for individuals and groups interested in the process of gospel-based racial bridge building.

## What can I expect from engaging in this process?

One of the most daunting aspects of embarking on a journey like this is not knowing what to expect. It may be helpful to think of it as you would any aspect of your Christian discipleship—a Spirit-led rearrangement of categories, assumptions, values, and beliefs.

- You'll develop greater awareness of God's desire for people of every tongue, tribe, and nation to form a unified body in Christ.
- You'll be given tangible steps to take in order to transform your current views and vision regarding racial diversity.
- You'll have your assumptions and stereotypes challenged and your world-view expanded.
- You'll begin to bring interracial healing and transformation into your sphere of influence.

## What will be required of me?

- Humility and openness to learning new things
- Listening to—and really hearing—others
- Willingness to trust God and take risks
- Commitment to the process, even when it gets difficult
- Disconnecting from privilege and power

## Welcome to the work of racial reconciliation.

As you embark on this journey, know that you are following in the footsteps of other bridge builders who have pursued and found reconciliation with their brothers and sisters in Christ from all races and backgrounds. May God help you find a group willing and excited to step into these broken places in the body of Christ, to watch what He will do.

# THE BRIDGE TO TRUTH



Belief in the existence of absolute truth is foundational to the Christian faith, as is belief in a loving God who knows and reveals truth. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Unfailing love and truth walk before you as standards" (Psalm 89:14). Jesus makes it plain that He is the truth of God embodied: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

And yet when it comes to historical truth, we're often satisfied with partial truth. Elie Wiesel, survivor of the Holocaust, explained why in his Nobel Prize lecture:

*Of course we could try to forget the past. Why not? Is it not natural for a human being to repress what causes him pain, what causes him shame? Like the body, memory protects its wounds. When day breaks after a sleepless night, one's ghosts must withdraw; the dead are ordered back to their graves.*

He went on, however, to issue a call to remember both good and evil:

*But for the first time in history, we could not bury our dead. We bear their graves within ourselves. For us, forgetting was never*

an option. Remembering is a noble and necessary act. The call of memory, the call to memory, reaches us from the very dawn of history. No commandment figures so frequently, so insistently, in the Bible. It is incumbent upon us to remember the good we have received, and the evil we have suffered.<sup>1</sup>

Note how God called the Israelites to remember their period of slavery in Egypt:

*“The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give you when he made a vow to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, be careful not to forget the Lord, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 6:9–12)*

And He called them pass down knowledge of their history to their children as they taught them God’s laws:

*“In the future your children will ask you, ‘What is the meaning of these laws, decrees, and regulations that the Lord our God has commanded us to obey?’ Then you must tell them, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand. The Lord did miraculous signs and wonders before our eyes, dealing terrifying blows against Egypt and Pharaoh and all his people. He brought us out of Egypt so he could give us this land he had sworn to give our ancestors. And the Lord our God commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear him so he can continue to bless us and preserve our lives, as he has done to this day.’ (Deuteronomy 6:20–24)*

What does a comprehensive narrative of American history look like? Unlike that of Israel, the historical narrative of the United States is not of one people group but many. And American history can look quite different depending on whose memories we excavate: Native Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, or Anglo-European Americans. Our greatest challenge is finding a way to weave all the segregated memories into a single tapestry. Navajo writer Mark Charles refers to this challenge as an endeavor

to create a *common memory*. In the book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, James Loewen explains, “American History is important. More than any other topic, it is about us. Whether one deems our present society wondrous or awful or both, history reveals how we arrived at this point. Understanding our past is central to our ability to understand ourselves and the world around us.”<sup>2</sup>

In our first three sessions, we will look at the steps we must take on the **BRIDGE TO TRUTH** in order to move toward true racial reconciliation. The first step is **AWARENESS**. As mentioned already, awareness for many of us requires a significant expansion of our knowledge of history.

Once we become aware of truth, we must fully acknowledge it. **ACKNOWLEDGMENT** is a powerful way to see our own brokenness, as well as the brokenness we have inherited. As we acknowledge the part we’ve played in creating and sustaining racial disunity, we can then begin to envision our role in forging racial solidarity.

When God begins to open our eyes to the racial injustice around us—things that are unsatisfactory, unreasonable, or unfair—we begin to recognize our own complicity, or participation, in it. This new sense of awareness can provoke uncomfortable feelings of **SHAME AND GUILT**. If we are to process these emotions well, we need tools to help us navigate their dynamics within both our souls and our communities. We will discuss a biblical framework for shame and guilt that will help us appreciate their redemptive potential.

# SESSION 1

## AWARENESS

### 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14–21

*Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.*

*So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

*And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

## Background

A group of forty-seven Christian leaders from six continents—and some of the most conflict-ridden countries in the world—joined forces to create a theological vision for reconciliation as God’s mission in a world filled with destructive conflicts. They came to define reconciliation as “God’s initiative, restoring a broken world to His intentions by reconciling ‘to himself all things’ through Christ: the relationship between people and God, between people themselves, and with God’s created earth. Christians participate with God by being transformed into ambassadors of reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup>

The first step in the biblical reconciliation process is **AWARENESS**. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines awareness as “knowledge or perception of a situation or fact.”

Because so much of our country remains racially segregated along geographic lines, it’s possible for people to live for many years without any awareness that relationships between racial groups are still broken and in need of reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps you were taught to be “colorblind”—to “look beyond” someone’s race and see them simply as a human being. While there are often good intentions behind this colorblind approach, it actually nurtures a problematic type of blindness, or unawareness, about our country’s racial history and its current racial realities. For this reason, it ends up doing more unintended harm than accomplishing intended good.

**Awareness begins with listening to and hearing others.**

## Discussion Questions

1. What experience in your life has been most influential in making you the person you are today?
2. Tell a story about a time when someone of another culture made an assumption about your culture and it caused you harm. How did that make you feel?
3. Describe your ethnic culture. What is one thing you love about your own culture and one thing you wish were different?
4. What difference would it make if diversity were more of a reality in our friendships? In our schools and communities? In the church?
5. What is the difference between *diversity* and *racial reconciliation*?
6. If we are all created in the image of God (the imago Dei), what does that say about ethnic diversity? What does that say about the nature of God?
7. What are some ways we can celebrate our differences?

## Prayer

All-knowing God, help us, Your bride the Church, to become more aware! God, give us a willingness to study our past for the purpose of seeing how it has affected our present, and how it will affect our future. Give us the grace to use this understanding to help further the kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

NICOLE KING

## Homework

- If you are doing this study in a group context with a leader's guide, at the end of your group time, you should have received a note card with the name of someone from the group. Write a note to the person whose name is on the card you receive.
- Visit a church congregation of a different ethnicity, or create an experience that involves racial diversity (for instance, shop in an ethnically distinct part of town, attend a concert where you'll hear music of another culture, try a restaurant featuring another culture's food).

## Supporting Scriptures

Colossians 1:19–22

James 2:8–9

## Additional Reading

Debby Irving, *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Elephant Room Press, 2014).

James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (The New Press, 2007).

## Homework

Conduct your own research on the reconciliation process Rwanda entered into following the 1994 genocide, as well as other similar efforts in other nations like South Africa and Canada. Write down your responses to these stories, and reflect on what principles you can take from their efforts and apply to your own life, and to our nation.

Spend time in prayer, asking God what He is calling you to next in the area of racial reconciliation. How can you take the next step to share what you have learned with others? Be prepared to discuss this topic in your next group time.

## Supporting Scriptures

Matthew 5:23–25

Ephesians 2:16–22

Colossians 1:19–22

## Additional Reading

Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart* (IVP Books, 2013).

Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (IVP Books, 2016).

# ABOUT

In 2012 Latasha Morrison felt discontent. As she drove through the heart of Austin, Texas, she asked God, “Why am I here? Why did you lead me so far from my family and my community on the East Coast?” God replied, *I brought you here to be a bridge.*

So Tasha gathered a diverse group of friends to talk about what this might mean, and together they began to form a vision. They said, “We believe that if people could come together as equals, at a table like this, with open Bibles and humble, prayerful hearts, to talk to each other honestly and, more importantly, really listen to each other, we could change the story of race in our country.”

Tasha’s friends committed to meeting together regularly. They would open up the Scriptures, talk, listen, laugh, cry, and pray. Between meetings, they educated themselves about our country’s racial history. Sure enough, over time, each person’s life was changed. And they all agreed that if every person in our country had the opportunity to take part in a group like theirs, real healing along racial lines could take place.

That’s how Be the Bridge was born. The sessions in this discussion guide are based on the questions Tasha’s first group investigated. Thousands of lives have been changed since then, all because of this simple idea.

Be the Bridge became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2016 and has expanded to include more tools, training groups and workshops, and consulting services. Our mission is to inspire the church to have a distinctive and transformative response to racial division; to equip bridge builders to develop vision, skills, and hearts for racial unity; and to partner with existing organizations who have a heart for diversity, racial justice, restoration, and reconciliation.

For information about how to get more involved with the BTB movement, check out our website at [www.bethebridge.com](http://www.bethebridge.com).

The journey toward racial unity is not an easy process.

Diving into the unknown can be daunting and it takes courage to move toward what is uncomfortable. Many of us look around and see that our communities are more divided than ever. Things feel stuck, and we want to do something. We have read the Bible and we have prayed for unity. But how do we, as the Body of Christ, actually become one?

This guide was the result of a need we saw: people were having discussions about race and diversity within their own circles, but not outside of them. Many have a desire to make a difference, but feel awkward, unprepared, afraid they will offend. Or they look around and realize they only know people who look and think like they do. But personal growth and understanding comes by hearing multiple perspectives. Empathy is built with time and trust.

The goal of this guide is to provide a resource that would allow for bridges to be built not only between cultures, but between people. The work of racial reconciliation begins when two people from different background sit down to have the same conversation.

**That's the bridge we build together.**



BE *the* BRIDGE

