

Crucial Questions

How Does God Change Us?

CONNECT:

What is your experience with diversity? What was taught in your family growing up?

PREPARE:

- A core belief in Christianity is that people can change because Christians are being transformed into the image of Jesus. Do you think that when people say they want to change they really mean it?
- Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. Read also Galatians 2:20. What is the encouragement in regards to change, especially when reading both of these verses?
- Read the following quote (written 60 years ago) and discuss the relevance of it for today.

“There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. . . . But the judgment of God is upon the church [today] as never before. If today’s church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the 20th century.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

- As much as we would like to believe otherwise, the problem of racism is as close as your heart and mine. Read the following quote. How do you see pride as the root of the sin of racism?

“Racial tensions are rife with pride—the pride of white supremacy, the pride of black power...Where pride holds sway, there is no hope for the kind of listening and patience and understanding and openness to correction that relationships require...The sin of pride will subtly contaminate all our relationships, even where it is not recognized. A disease does not have to be diagnosed in order to infect and kill. The cross of Christ is the key to killing pride and living in humility.”

— John Piper

Community Group Discussion Questions

STUDY AND DISCUSS:

There are 5 Necessary Actions to Change:

1. WE NEED TO LISTEN

- Read James 1:19 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-3. How do these verses challenge you to listen better?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. If our facts, figures and statistics are right, but we have not love, we're wrong. How do you see this in your own life?
- Truth is consistent but experiences differ in how we apply that truth. What is it that causes you to want to dismiss another's view?
- The history of racism in America that lasted hundreds of years doesn't get cleaned up overnight. Read the following quote and discuss how you have maybe been oblivious to race.

“the dream of the civil rights movement in the 1960s has not been realized in the way most of those involved had hoped. Which means that the situation we find ourselves in is not one of educational, economic, residential, political, or medical equality. Nor is there a growing integration of our lives, but rather, for many, a retreat into greater separation. In some ways, inequalities are greater, and segregation is on the rise. For most African Americans, these realities shape their consciousness profoundly. The majority culture (which for a little while longer is still white) has the luxury of being oblivious to race.”

— John Piper

- Here is another quote from this past week:

“The anger and fear and pain felt in the black community isn't prompted by this one incident alone. It comes out of the legacy of slavery, and Jim Crow, and too many times where power and force were used against them in ways that are evil and unjust.”

— Kevin DeYoung

- Read Galatians 6:2. What is the burden that we can help our black brothers and sisters carry right now?

2. UNDERSTANDING

- How do you explain the difference between listening and understanding?
- Read John 1:14 and Hebrews 4:15 and discuss the biblical term of understanding as “listening incarnationally”?

Community Group Discussion Questions

- If we are going to change, our perspectives have to change. How does the following quote affect you?

“Black skin has more dehumanizing stereotypes associated with it than any other skin color in America, if not the world. When a black person presents himself in an integrated situation, he knows that his skin alone may bring these stereotypes to life in the mind of those he meets and that he, as an individual, may be diminished by his race before he has a chance to reveal a single aspect of his personality. . . . He will be vulnerable to the entire realm of his self-doubt before a single word is spoken. . . .”

— Shelby Steele

3. CONFESSION

- In Luke 18, Jesus tells a well-known parable about two men praying in the temple. How does this parable convict you in regards to race?
- Read Galatians 5:19-21. Often people justify their actions when looking at that list. When it comes to racism, rarely does anyone think they are guilty of that. Instead of saying, “Thank you I’m not like that”, could you say, “Am I like that? Am I not seeing it?”

4. REPENTANCE

- Sin tries to hide sin. Sin, unchecked gives birth to more sin. If you fight sin, it doesn’t go down easily. It doesn’t always die. We must listen and understand and confess and repent continually. Discuss the following statement by Pastor Jay, “Fighting sin in your heart has to be more important than your self-preservation, your self-righteousness, your need to be right or you won’t kill it.”
- In the battle against sin, you are never staying the same. Your heart is being formed by everything you participate in, either more like Jesus or less like Jesus. What you feed, grows. What you starve, dies. If battling sin is necessary in order to change, why do you think so many people don’t truly want to change?

5. ACTION

- Read James 4:17. If we are meant to take the grace and love of Christ to the world around us, how do we know what this looks like in the case of racial issues?
- Read Acts 2:1-11. What happens when the Holy Spirit comes to the church? How is this scene so powerful for our current events?

Community Group Discussion Questions

- One of Martin Luther King's most well known quotes is that, "It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11 o'clock on Sunday Morning". Do you see this to be true in our church?
- Read the following quote. If change doesn't happen with a passive approach, how is this true in our churches?

"Recall that in the Jim Crow era, "Most evangelicals, even in the North, did not think it their duty to oppose segregation; it was enough to treat blacks they knew personally with courtesy and fairness." The radicalized system itself is not directly challenged. What is challenged is the treatment of individuals within the system"

—Michael Emerson, Christian Smith

RESPONSE:

- We need to own our part in any sin of the church. Read the following quote and discuss how you can do your part to bring change.

"Jesus did not come into the world to endorse anybody's platform. He doesn't fit in. He created the world. He holds it in being by his powerful word. He will return someday to judge the living and the dead. And he came the first time to die so that left-wing activists and right-wing talkshow hosts would be broken in pieces for their sin and put back together by the power of grace. He came so that from that day on Jesus himself would be the supreme treasure and authority in our lives. He came so that we would become radically devoted to the glory of God. He came so that the kind of racial diversity and racial harmony we would pursue is Jesus-exalting, God-glorifying, and gospel-formed."

— John Piper

PRAY

Pray that the sin of racism would be revealed where it needs to be revealed. Pray that we would be the body of Christ that moves in this world to make the world look more the kingdom of God where we would have love and compassion like Jesus.