

JUSTICE & MERCY: TRUTH IN STORY

SCRIPTURE & SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE — JUNE 7

OPEN

In the wake of George Floyd's death and public protests throughout our country, Pastor Curtis began a new sermon series to help us understand how the gospel speaks to racial division and injustice, reflect on our own experience of race and ethnicity, and grasp the church's call to justice and mercy.

These are overwhelming (but necessary) topics to engage, so Curtis has laid out some *family guidelines* as we seek to embody love to one another in our conversations:

1. Keep our eyes on Jesus.
2. Act like a family (respond with grace; seek understanding; offer the benefit of the doubt).
3. Embrace the nuance (resist either-or thinking).
4. Listen well (don't "hear" what's not being said).
5. Stay 'til the end (lean into the discomfort—which is the place where growth happens).

Before entering into discussion, take a moment to be silent and still, become aware of your thoughts, emotions, and even tension in your own body. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring about comfort and conviction. Pray that the Spirit would increase our love for another and desire to follow Jesus wherever He leads.

DISCUSS

1. How are you coming into this discussion? Tired? Afraid? Angry? Sad? Confused? Insecure? Numb? Apathetic?
2. What are you hoping will happen over this series—for yourself? For our group? For our church? What fears or concerns do you have about this series?
3. What has been your experience of how "the church"—whether that's The Journey, the church you grew up in, or the American church more broadly—has engaged issues of race, justice, and mercy?
4. What stirred in your own heart and mind as Pastor Curtis shared some of the pain and trauma he has experienced as a black man?
5. Before sharing his own story, Curtis asked us to consider the Apostle Peter's story, and specifically, the time when Paul confronted him for his failure to act "in step with the truth of the gospel." Read GALATIANS 2:11-16.
 - a. What does the tension between Jews & Gentiles in the first century have to do with the gospel? Even more specifically, how does Paul relate the doctrine of *justification by faith in Christ* to this tension?
 - b. What significance does this passage—and many other passages in Paul's letters that deal with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles—have for the way we discuss race relations?
6. How has the Spirit been challenging and/or comforting you through all of this? How is the Lord prompting you to respond?

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PRAY

Consider using our corporate confession from this past weekend's worship as you close your time together. Leave space between sections for reflection and your own own prayers:

God, forgive us for preferring the absence of tension over the presence of justice. Forgive us for counting the cost of the work you have called us to do, and saying that it is too high, and then choosing to remain in our sickness. God, forgive us for empty words and token actions that cause more harm than good. Merciful God, forgive us.

God, You asked for our eyes to see the pain of poverty and injustice, but, in our privilege, we closed them, for we didn't want to see. Forgive us for being peace-keepers instead of peace-makers. Forgive us for accepting easy answers, half truths, and binary thinking that enables us to discount the realities of others in our community that are hurting. Merciful God, forgive us.

O God, we confess that we have clung tightly to power and control. With our mouths, we say we value Your diversity, but with our actions, we settle for shallow relationships and tokenism. Forgive us for the times we have spoken when we should have remained silent, and the times we have remained silent when we should have spoken. Merciful God, forgive us.

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. (2 Chronicles 7:14-15).