



## The Distorted Gospel August 16, 2022

Dear Member of the JustFaith Network,

We are grateful that you are a part of our JustFaith community. Whether you are a graduate of one of our programs or you are just getting to know us, we hope this offering will help sustain you spiritually and/or equip you to work for justice.

Our monthly small group resource is sent on the third Tuesday of each month; you can access an archive of past resources by logging into your [JustFaith account](#). You can invite your friends, family, Sunday School class, or current/past JFM small group to join you in-person or via video conferencing. If you are new to video conferencing, Zoom tutorials are available on our YouTube page — [Click here to access](#).

While we hope that these resources will inspire and nourish your community, for a more robust experience, consider one of our longer programs. Click [here](#) for more information.

This week's small group experience is enhanced by participants having read a short reflection; click [here](#) for the reflection. Please share the link in advance so that all participants can come prepared to discuss; you can find the full link in the "Reflection" section that follows.

Last but not least, JustFaith Ministries is a nonprofit organization. All of our work is a collaboration with people like you. When you donate, your gift helps us sustain and equip individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#).

Also, please feel free to forward this resource to friends and family! In fact, we urge you to do so. We want this resource to reach as many people as possible.

Thanks for all you do in the name of love and justice,  
The JustFaith Ministries Staff



## Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

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When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

**Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you. Today we'll begin with an opening prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation about the reflection, before closing in prayer. This a time to care for one another and to be inspired to grow and act.**

**Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.**

*Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer*

### Opening Prayer A hard, deep call to obedience

You are the God who makes extravagant promises.  
We relish your great promises  
of fidelity  
and presence  
and solidarity,  
and we exude in them.

Only to find out, always too late,  
that your promise always comes  
in the midst of a hard, deep call to obedience.

You are the God who calls people like us,  
and the long list of mothers and fathers before us,  
who trusted the promise enough to keep the call.

So we give you thanks that you are a calling God  
who calls always to dangerous new places.

We pray enough of your grace and mercy among us  
that we may be among those  
who believe your promises enough  
to respond to your call.

We pray in the one who embodied your promise  
and enacted your call. Amen.

- Walter Brueggemann, [Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth](#)



## Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

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Ask these open-ended questions. If you are by yourself, journal about them.

*Note: If you are with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.*

- **Before we begin our reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

*Other optional questions include: Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week?*

## Reflection (25 minutes or so)

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Participants should have read the article and optional background paper below:

Reflection:

<https://sojo.net/articles/distorted-gospel-charlottesville-rally-keeps-spreading-white-christian-nationalism>

### Discussion questions

1. What did you find most compelling about the article?
2. Did any of the summarized history of white Christian nationalism surprise you?
3. The author writes, "White Christian nationalism creates insiders and outsiders; an "us-versus-them" feeling. If you don't share these views, you are the enemy." How have you experienced this?
4. Near the end of the article, Rev. Roberts states, "what will make America a great nation is not how many walls we build but how many bridges of understanding and love that we can create that unite all of God's people." Share some thoughts on how we might do that.
5. The author concludes by sharing that she is "focused." What is your focus? On what would you like to be focused?



## 6. What is your insight, hope, or prayer consequent to reading the article(s)?

### Announcements (5-10 minutes)

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- Join us on Zoom this Thursday, August 18, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time for a live presentation by Network staff members Joan Neal and Sr. Emily Tekolste on the topic of “Voting for the Common Good: How Are We Called to Participate in our Democracy?” Register [here](#).
- This resource is a small sample of the kinds of conversations had in our 8-session programs. For a more intensive experience, see a description of our programs; click [here](#).
- Let participants know that the materials for this gathering were free, put together by the JustFaith Ministries staff to equip more people for the work of peace and justice. To support the creation of more resources and programs, participants are encouraged to donate to JustFaith Ministries; click [here](#).
- Are there any opportunities for action or advocacy happening in your community this week? Invite participants to share ways to support the work of local groups advocating for peace, working for justice, or caring for the environment.

### Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

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Then say: **Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.**

*Pause for 30 seconds. Then share the reflection below.*

Invitation to Confession and Forgiveness  
Confession and Forgiveness through the Reading of Isaiah 1:12

**Reader One:** We are invited to confess our sins with the words of the prophet Isaiah.

**Reader Two:** When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me (12–13a).

**Reader One:** Forgive us Lord when we come to worship without walking humbly before you.



Reader Two: New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them (13b – 14).

Reader One: We ask forgiveness for the complicity of churches in the evils of colonialism felt around the world.

Reader Two: When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. (15)

Reader One: We ask forgiveness for our sins of injustice and oppression that suppress the diverse harmony of your creation.

Reader Two: Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (16,17)

Reader One: As we have been washed clean in the living waters of baptism, forgive us anew and reconcile us to one another and to creation.

Reader Two: Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. (18)

Reader One: May God in his mercy, free you from your sins so that you can do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

Reader Two: Almighty God hears our prayers, has mercy on us and forgives our sins.

Reader One: Thanks be to God.

Reader Two: God of all, our hearts and bodies are thankful for this opportunity to come before you to confess our sins of injustice and divisiveness. Together we come before you, a holy family, united in the beautiful diversity of your creation: some of us are Indigenous peoples, some of us are descendants of the enslaved, some of us are descendants of the enslavers, some of us are migrants, some of us are refugees, but all of us are part of the one Body of Christ.

Reader One: We praise you that through the living waters of baptism our sins, red as scarlet, were washed away and we were healed, as we became part of the beloved community, the family of God. We offer our thanksgiving and praise to you, Creator God.

Reader Two: Together on this journey, we celebrate with our hearts and eyes open to understanding and growing in the sacred wisdom that is shared and passed amongst all people.



**Reader One:** Help us to embrace unity with each other and remind us that we are of one family gathered by your Holy Spirit, in the midst of your creation. Amen.

From

<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/settimana-di-preghiera-per-l-unita/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-20230/fr.html>

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

**We are disciples on a journey.**

**We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.**

**We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.**

**If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.**

*Pause*

**We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world.**

**Amen.**