

*Just*Faith

*Purpose. From a
new perspective.*

JustFaith Week 11

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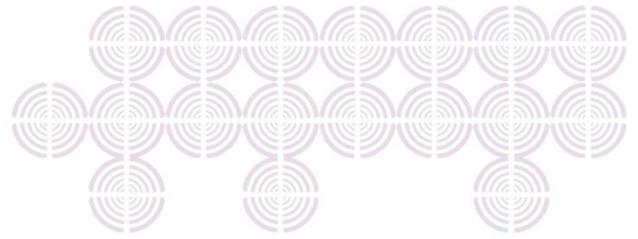


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(502) 429-0865

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Note to Co-Facilitators

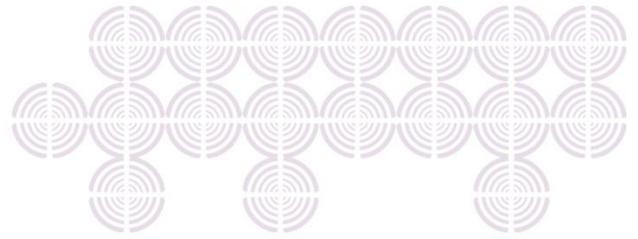
Several years ago, prompted by requests from participants across the country, JustFaith started to include a segment addressing the ongoing crisis called racism. No other component of the syllabus has ever generated so much controversy. Even as the JustFaith staff has searched for the best materials to address the topic, nothing so far has been found that has been able to draw all people into the discussion without some resistance and consternation.

This year we are again using a book entitled Rising to Common Ground: Overcoming America's Color Lines. (Note: Be sure to order the "Ecumenical Version" of this book; it has been revised for the purposes of the ecumenical version of JustFaith.) We think it's excellent, but it probably won't be without its critics. For one, it mainly focuses upon the dynamic between white Americans and African Americans. Racism, of course, affects people from many races and cultures and it is important that, throughout these coming weeks, all forms of racism are kept in mind. Racism is a hard topic, but it is important for people of faith to apply their hearts and lives to this reality, sometimes called "America's original sin."

Be prepared for some resistance. The historical oppression of African Americans has left a profound wound in our society. The legacy of white supremacy continues to do harm. The ongoing separation of racial groups from one another has meant that conversation, understanding and community have been fleeting. All of which means that silence, misunderstanding and separation have ruled the day. In a context like this, addressing the legacy will undoubtedly be difficult.

Therefore, be prepared to encourage participants. As difficult conversations happen, encourage everyone by the ready admission that this is very hard work. Continue to emphasize the faith commitments to compassion, community and reconciliation. Affirm the fact that this being hard work only makes it that much more important and valuable. And continue to call people to prayer. If there are tense or awkward moments in the discussion, simply ask everyone to consider taking some quiet time to be mindful of God's presence. Prompt such meditative time by asking, how might we speak in order to glorify God in this conversation?

Finally, remember that racism is ultimately about people. The purpose of reading a book like Tattoos on the Heart or watching a video like "Waiting on the World to Change," for example, is that it puts the faces of the marginalized in front of us in a very personal way. So, as the next three weeks unfold, attempt to create a space where *all* members of your group feel welcomed to share their stories surrounding race and ethnicity. Encourage your group to listen intently to the words of the visiting speaker this week. These could be very important moments for your group.



Week Eleven Components

Preparation for Week Eleven

- Review Week Eleven session information
- Copy Week Eleven handouts
- Gather prayer items
- Confirm with guest speaker(s) a week before and possibly the day before

Timing of the Session

Activity	Minutes
Prayer	5
Guest Speaker	55
Break	15
Business	5
Assign spiritual practice	5
Discuss reading	60
Closing prayer	5
Total	150

Welcome

Welcome participants warmly, then begin with prayer.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute **Week 11: Participant Handout A**. Assign a Scripture reader and three readers.

Scripture Reading

Read Isaiah 58: 5-12. Pause for a few minutes for silent reflection. Offer this Scripture reflection:



Again we hear the prophet Isaiah proclaim to the people of God that only when we live in such a way as to bring about the reign of God—caring deeply for one another, relieving suffering and reconciling injustices—only then will our own healing take place.

Throughout the Bible, we see God’s prophets and Jesus pointing to the test of whether faith has both an inward and outward reality. Does your faith lead you to serve, to reach out to somebody in need, to go beyond what the Law demands?

Let us reflect quietly on what God might be calling us to do to respond to poverty in our community, our city, our nation, and our world.

How can we become the Beloved Community?

Reread verses 5-8.

Conclude using the reading from **Participant Handout A**.

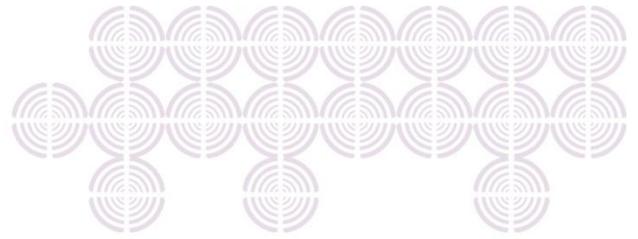
First Half (55 minutes)

Invite a guest speaker (or two) to join your group. The intention is for the group to gain insight into how one's racial/ethnic identity can uniquely shape their experience in the world. Ideally, this speaker may provide insight into the experiences of racial/ethnic groups with whom your JustFaith group has little experience. The invited speaker could be someone who has some experience working on issues of racism, or, perhaps, two such speakers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds who could share the challenges associated with this kind of work. As an alternative (or as an addition), you may consider inviting one or two people from your congregation or community who would feel comfortable sharing their day-to-day experiences of racism with the group. For names of potential speakers, contact your ecclesial church offices or local anti-racism agencies.

Break (15 minutes)

Business Items (5 minutes)

1. Assign reading for next week: Rising to Common Ground: Overcoming America’s Color Lines (Ecumenical Version), pages 37-81; Cloud of Witnesses, “Fannie Lou Hamer,” pages 101-109; and “Note to Participants for Week Twelve.”



2. Distribute “Note to Participants for Week Twelve.”
3. Pass out the Weeks 11-20 reading assignments (**Week 11: Attachment B**).

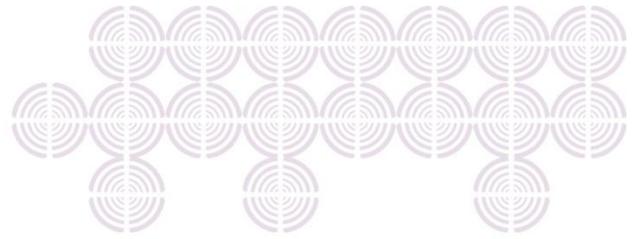
Second Half (65 minutes)

Assign Spiritual Practice (5 minutes)

Ask each participant to purposefully notice the diversity of color and culture (or lack of) as they go through the next two weeks. Ask them to take particular notice in their immediate and extended family, neighborhoods, workplace, grocery store, school, church, theatre, gym, volunteer location, etc. The group will be asked to report on their observations during Week Thirteen.

Discussion Questions (60 minutes)

- Rising to Common Ground, pages vii - 35
 - Cloud of Witnesses, “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” pages 81-89
1. Have someone read from the top of page four of Rising to Common Ground (beginning with “Many black children ...”) to the bottom of the paragraph. Consider the messages you received concerning “black” and “white” people as you were growing up. Share what you remember and share what you think the impact has been.
 2. Does learning more about the history and development of racism help you see the current problem and challenge more clearly? If so, how?
 3. Collum observes early in Rising to Common Ground, “By every possible measure of health, income, and education, our country, on average, simply works better for white people” (page 2). This simple fact, in and of itself, demonstrates that racism is alive and well today. How do you feel about these two statements?
 4. If you are white, do you have any close friends who are black? If not, why? If so, what has this relationship meant to you? If you are black, do you have any close friends who are white? If not, why? If so, what has this relationship meant to you?
 5. Collum claims, “It’s meaningless to call us ‘racists’ until we choose to consciously act on the idea that white skin confers superiority. Still, we can’t escape our participation in structural racism until we make a fundamental choice to reorient all of our thinking and acting” (page 17). How do you respond?



6. Collum writes, “The political control exercised by the dominant group in a racist social order is not a mere ego trip or superiority complex. Power, as common experience tells us, is usually wielded in the service of wealth.” (page 9). How does “power in the service of wealth” show itself racially today?
7. Have someone read the second to last paragraph on page six of Rising to Common Ground. Who do you know in your local community who is working hard to see a world where “there is neither black nor white”? How are they doing this? What are they committed to? What values are driving them to do this work?
8. On the top of page 82 of Cloud of Witnesses, Martin Luther King is described as “dangerous.” Why are holiness and “dangerous” so often linked? (Note: Think back to the video, “Portrait of a Radical.”)

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

A Circle of Prayer

Invite the group to form a tight circle and link hands:

We are disciples on a journey.

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

Let us quietly pray for one another and for our brothers and sisters in need.

(Pause)

If someone has a concern, a word of encouragement, or a short prayer to offer, please do so.

Words to Live By

Invite the group to echo this prayer.

Leader: **Let us take this prayer to heart.**

Repeat the prayer adapted from Psalm 116:5-6 after me:

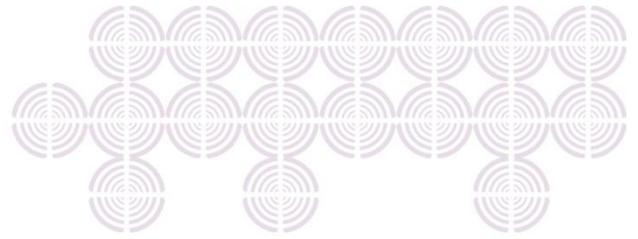
Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;

All: Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;

Leader: **Yes, our God is merciful.**

All: Yes, our God is merciful.

Leader: **When I was brought low, God saved me.**



All: When I was brought low, God saved me.

Leader: **May this prayer echo in our hearts throughout the week, as we walk, while we work, as we rest and when we pray for one another. Call to mind those who are suffering, in despair or fear. (Pause)**

A Sign of God's Peace

Leader: **Now we share in the peace for which our world hungers.
With a sign of peace we affirm one another for the journey ahead.
May we extend God's peace to all!**