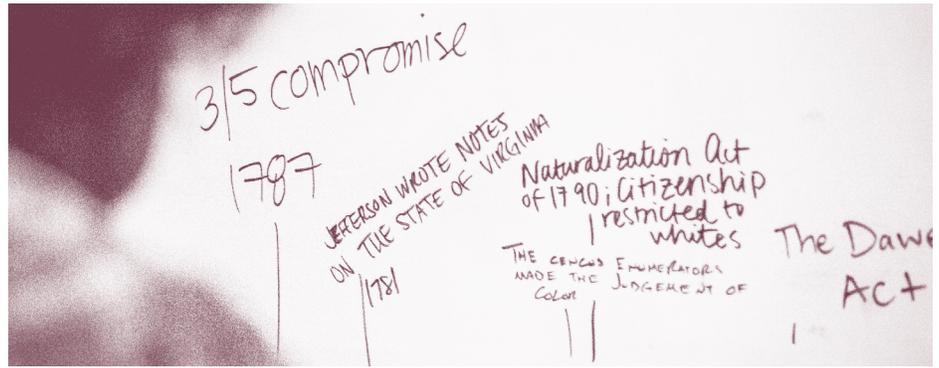
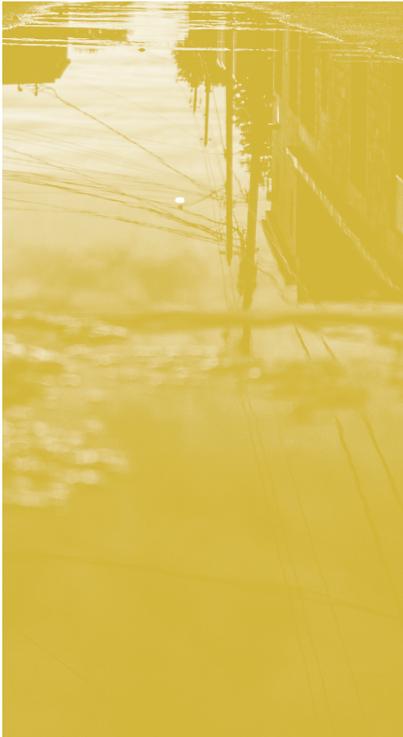


starter kit: faq's



Below are some common questions we have been receiving, but of course, this is not a comprehensive list and many of these questions require further dialogue. If you have questions or concerns or would like to continue the conversation, please email reconciliation@madeforfellowship.com.



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FAQ'S

race and theology

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT RACE AND/OR ETHNICITY?

Our modern notion of race is a social construct. Accordingly, the bible only refers to the human race as a whole. It does, however, make a distinction of ethnicities.

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

(Revelation 7:9)

This means that God does see and value ethnicities and cultures which he created in beautiful diversity. When it comes to how we should view ethnicity, we see Jesus lift up the ethnically “other” when he goes to Samaria and speaks to the woman at the well. Samaritans were despised and looked down upon by the Jews, yet Jesus also uses the Good Samaritan as an example of how we should love our neighbors. To put it in the context of 2020, Jesus was saying that Samaritan lives matter – not just because God loved them too, but also because it hadn't always been true in the Jewish culture.

HOW ARE CHRISTIANS SUPPOSED TO RESPOND TO RACE AND RACISM IN OUR CULTURE AT THIS MOMENT?

“Our ancestors sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.” (Lamentations 5:7)

When our country legalized slavery, an ideology was created of racial inferiority of people of color and racial superiority of white people. After the Civil War, that ideology continued through the legalization of concepts like ‘separate but equal’, through the 1950s, and then in the War on Drugs through today. (Think, why is it a war on drugs and not an opioid crisis?) Thus, we have indeed created a marginalized group of people.

Throughout the Old Testament, we are told how much God cares for the marginalized, the poor, and the oppressed and how God wants us to treat each other. Isaiah 58:6-7, Amos 5:18-24, and Micah 6:8 are particularly clear on this. Jesus, Himself, defined his ministry in the very beginning by saying,

“The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to

proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.” (Luke 4:18).

If Jesus is proclaiming good news to the poor, then the best news they could have heard would have been something that spoke to their specific condition as poor people in society. The poor would have been pushed to the margins of society. For our context in America, poverty and wealth are racialized, so the Good News we preach must minister to these conditions, or else it fails to be good news.

If we want to embody the commandment to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves (and in this time of global pandemic, it should also be clear that everyone is our neighbor), then we must work to set the oppressed free by dismantling racism in all its forms in our society.

Ephesians 2:14-17 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was

to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.”

If we want to embody the commandment to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves (and in this time of global pandemic, it should also be clear that everyone is our neighbor), then we must work to set the oppressed free by dismantling racism in all its forms in our society.

HOW DOES SCRIPTURE INFORM OUR PARTICIPATION & PERSEVERANCE IN JUSTICE WORK?

The Scriptures explicitly instruct us to participate and persevere in justice work on multiple occasions. Let’s look at three.

Micah 6:8 “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

The Prophet Micah is speaking to the nation of Israel, alluding to the prophets of old who have previously spoken truth to them. He then says in a nutshell, “it’s not a mystery how you should live. Do justice!” Friends, it is not a mystery how we should live. As followers of Jesus we are to do Justice in whatever context we find ourselves in. And in the context of America, racial injustice forms the foundation for so many other forms of injustice, and perpetuates them even further.

Isaiah 58:6 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

The Prophet Isaiah is speaking to Israel concerning the type of worship that was acceptable to God. He says that singing, festivals, ceremonies, fancy clothing and powerful programming isn’t the worship that God is seeking, but

Ephesians 2:14-17 “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.”

the worship that God is seeking has everything to do with working for Justice!

Luke 19: The Story of Zacchaeus is not just a story of one man’s personal transformation, but it’s a story that Luke highlights that illustrates to us the link between a genuine encounter with Jesus and Justice. As Zacchaeus repents of his wrongdoing to Jesus, he says this “Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Zacchaeus pledges to do justice by economically restoring the community he took from. To this Jesus responds by saying “Today salvation has come to this house!”

Luke 18:7-8 “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.” Jesus concluded a parable about a persistent widow who constantly cried out for justice. He affirms her cries for justice and says that God will grant her justice. Jesus tells this parable to illustrate a larger truth. The widow is a stand in for any people groups in society who find themselves oppressed. Jesus is saying that when the oppressed persistently demand Justice I am on their side and will bring it about. This is not a one off story, but an illustration about Jesus’ heart for justice.

FAQS

definitions

AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO BE COLORBLIND? WHAT IS RACE?

We like to say that race exists, but it doesn't matter (I don't see color). The truth is that race is a social construct: a human invention which falsely divides the human species into groups based on arbitrary characteristics (imagine if we were to group people based solely on eye color or blood type and classified them into subgroups called races). Yet, even though race doesn't exist, that doesn't

make the concept of race any less powerful. We are all socialized to see race and attribute certain characteristics to people based on those perceptions. When we refuse to see race, we dismiss the lived experiences of our sisters and brothers of color. We also neglect the necessary work of heart change in ourselves to overcome our learned implicit biases.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RACE, ETHNICITY, CULTURE?

Race, Ethnicity, Nationality explained through Jelly Beans...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqV3CK6QfcU>

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SYSTEMIC RACISM AND RACIAL PREJUDICE OR INDIVIDUAL RACISM?

Racial prejudice occurs when individuals make preconceived assumptions, often hateful or dehumanizing, based on race. Systemic racism happens when racial prejudice is combined with the misuse or abuse of power by systems and institutions; when one group of people has the power to control and misuse access to resources

based on race. Due to our racial socialization, we all have racial prejudices. The problem becomes exacerbated and magnified when those prejudices become systemic and used to enforce laws, customs, and systems which advantage one group over another.

FAQS

history

HOW DOES UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL CONTEXT HELP US UNDERSTAND THIS PRESENT MOMENT?

Bryan Stevenson, an attorney, author, and social justice activist, believes that there are four institutions in American history that have shaped our approach to race and justice. These institutions are slavery, the period of racial terror which followed the Civil War and which included lynching and convict leasing, Jim Crow (the apartheid era of segregation and suppression of basic rights), and finally mass incarceration. Stevenson says that the North won the Civil War, but the South won the narrative. That narrative, according to Stevenson, includes the idea that blacks were

only three-fifths of a person – incapable and incomplete. He says, “The racial-equality principle that is in our Constitution was never extended to formerly enslaved people, and that is why I say slavery didn’t end in 1865. It evolved.”

Thus, historical context is everything. If we don’t understand how we as a society developed, we will never be able to change the racist systems that have shaped us. The only way forward is to go back through.

HOW DOES SLAVERY CONNECT TO THE PRISON SYSTEM AND POLICE?

Slavery ended in 1865 with the ratification of the 13th Amendment which stated that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” The loophole here is found in the words, “except as punishment for crime.” This meant that slavery was illegal except in the case of criminals. The result was that after the Civil War, states and local governments which had previously depended on slave labor began passing laws intended to criminalize black people, particularly black men and boys. One such law was the vagrancy law which required that a person be able to show proof of employment. This law was selectively enforced on black people. The punishment was several months in prison with time added for the costs to the state for legal fees and “upkeep” of the prisoner. At the same time, these prisoners were leased out by the state as laborers often on the same plantations from which they had just been freed.

Today, due to politicians who campaign with promises to be tough on crime, we have three strikes legislation, mandatory minimum sentences, and the “War on Drugs.” And, we now have people serving lifetime sentences for nonviolent crimes like possession of drugs and writing a bad check. This has led to the U.S. having the highest incarceration rate in the world. Not coincidentally, we also have the “prison industrial complex” in which prisoners are hired out to large businesses, working for a few dollars a day. Further, the accumulated effects of 250 years of slavery followed by 100 years of Jim Crow in American culture has been to fear, vilify, and criminalize people of color in general and black men in particular. It is estimated that one in three young black men will fall under the jurisdiction of the legal system (jail, prison, parole, probation).

All this cannot help but impact the police who are, in many ways, simply executing the will of a society that never really

dismantled the racism that is at its roots. This is how we can have the killing unarmed black men, women, and children who are going about doing everyday things like driving, jogging, playing, eating, or sleeping. This is how a policeman who has sworn to protect and serve can kneel on the neck of a man accused of passing a bad check and slowly kill that man with little emotion or apparent regret.

FAQS

whiteness

WHAT IS WHITENESS AND SHOULD I FEEL GUILTY FOR BEING WHITE?

The problem is not the actual color of our skin but rather the systems and socialization in our culture which have given us advantages or priorities which make whiteness superior. As part of the dominant culture, we have been taught not to see our race. Once we do see our whiteness, we often react with feelings of guilt and shame. That's a normal response but staying there isn't helpful.

People of color are not looking for an apology for the color of our skin. They are looking for an understanding in us of how we benefit from being white (gaining access to

privileges like being able to engage in normal life activities without worrying about whether it could cost us our lives) and a commitment to change. It is important to see that across all institutions and systems (i.e. law, housing, education, banking, etc.) we as white folks are set up to be given the benefit of the doubt while our sisters and brothers of color are not. When we look at it that way, we can see that a more appropriate response is to repent of this communal/structural sin and work for true equality and justice.

I KEEP HEARING ABOUT WHITE PRIVILEGE, BUT HOW CAN I HAVE PRIVILEGE IF I GREW UP POOR?

While you may not have many material resources, even the most disadvantaged white person in the United States still benefits from being white. You may face challenges, but it won't be because of your skin color. Being white will allow you to move anywhere in any space that is seen as normal, neutral, or good. Your presence won't be questioned if you walk or jog down the street in a suburban neighborhood.

You don't have to think about your race or worry about how you represent your race. You don't have to worry about your safety because of your race. You can expect that your race won't be an issue as you negotiate systems and institutions like health care, banking, housing, education, and law enforcement.

AS A WHITE PERSON, HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO SHOW SUPPORT?

As white folks, we need to first show up and listen to our sisters and brothers of color and believe their stories. We do incredible damage when we try to explain to them how their experience wasn't really about racism. The truth is that they have a much stronger understanding of racism than we do – their lives often depend on it. We also need to educate ourselves about the systemic realities of racism.

Racism isn't just about hateful individuals or a few bad apples. It's about systems and the trees which produced those bad apples to begin with. Finally, we need to stay engaged- read, listen to podcasts, attend webinars etc. The Center has a list of resources for you to get you started.

I OFTEN FEEL SHUT DOWN BY BLACK PEOPLE. WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO SAY?

It's important for all of us to be at the table. We are all impacted by race and racism and nothing is going to change if only people of color are there. The problem is that many white folks are used to having a voice and expressing their opinions. (If you don't believe that, watch next time you are in a large multiethnic gathering and folks are asked to respond to a question. More often

than not, you'll see that the folks who respond first and have the most to say will be white). Because of our lack of understanding of how racism works, we show up more like kindergarteners while our sisters and brothers are working on college dissertations. It's not that we aren't important, it's just that we have so much to learn from the folks we haven't been listening to.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS ANGER THAT I FEEL AGAINST OTHER WHITE PEOPLE?

Often when white folks become aware of the injustices of the systems that exist in our country, we are shocked and begin a process much like the 5 stages of grief. Anger at other white people is definitely part of that. It's important to know that is totally normal, but not a place you want to

stay. It can make you believe that you are better than other white folks who don't know as much as you do and keep you from helping them along their own journey of racial understanding. Think of them as someone who is caught in their own trap and don't realize it.

FAQS

race x politics

SOME PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH ARE POSTING SOME REALLY STRONG POLITICAL STATEMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA. WHERE DOES THE CHURCH STAND POLITICALLY?

As Pastor Tate says, it's about policies not parties.

When we look at the country's political parties within the church, we see two general camps forming up. On one side there is the Republican party with its value of individual responsibility, meritocracy, and capitalism. In the Christian context this value of the individual focuses on evangelicalism and personal salvation. On the Democratic side of the aisle there is more of a concern for social reform and social aid. Christians with these values are naturally drawn to taking care of those who cannot care for themselves and ensuring social justice.

This means that in times when issues of injustice become violently clear and folks are taking passionate positions, political parties are going to become more oppositional, especially when the leaders of both parties started out as divisive. The thing is, neither side is a complete reflection of biblical values in total. It's not that one side is right or wrong, it's just that God wants more. In other words, neither position should be mutually exclusive of the other, because neither position is mutually exclusive to God.

IN PARTICIPATING IN PROTESTS, ISN'T THE CHURCH CONDONING VIOLENCE INSTEAD OF PRAYER?

The church does not condone violence, but in focusing on evangelism, too many of our white evangelical pastors have ignored issues of race and racial justice. Therefore, MLK's Letter from Birmingham Jail remains the best answer to this question. It is an important document to read in its entirety, both from a social justice point of view as well as a theological one. Here is a quote:

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct

action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

WHAT ABOUT BLACK ON BLACK CRIME?

This is a question that really distracts from the issue at hand. And, if we are honest, what we're doing is continuing the narrative that black folks are more violent and therefore less deserving of fair policing. What we need to understand is that most violent crimes are committed within race. Further, violent crimes are an issue of economics. This means that when you look at poverty, violent crime rates are similar across races. Though, it is interesting that white on white crime is never spoken about. Because of the systems that have held black folks down even in the last

few decades, (i.e. redlining, unfair lending practices in banking, mass incarceration, etc.) there is a higher rate of poverty in the black community. Think of it like playing the game of monopoly and allowing black folks to join in only after most of the properties had been bought up. Or like a foot race in which they were allowed to start running only after everyone else is 3/4 of the way through. So, yes, black on black crime exists, but that's not the real problem or even the point.

IS THE CHURCH SUPPORTING THE BLACK LIVES MATTER ORGANIZATION? DON'T ALL LIVES MATTER?

While the church is not aligning itself with the organization, it does support the statement that black lives matter. The statement needs to be made, not because black lives matter more than other lives, but because our society has not valued black lives the way it has other lives. Think of how the statement that, "All men are created equal," did not include black lives. Think of how after the Civil War and Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws (i.e. separate but equal) were introduced that prevented the black community from flourishing. Think of how today's policing and mass incarceration rates have the greatest negative impact on

the black community. As Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, says that the North won the Civil War, but the South won the narrative. That narrative, according to Stevenson, includes the idea that blacks were only three-fifths of a person – incapable and incomplete. He says, "The racial-equality principle that is in our Constitution was never extended to formerly enslaved people, and that is why I say slavery didn't end in 1865. It evolved."

So, yes, of course all lives matter. But that was never in question.

WHAT ABOUT BLUE LIVES?

Yes, blue lives are valuable too. We are grateful for those who truly work to protect and serve, and there are many in law enforcement who do. The difference is that law enforcement has the whole power of the state/government behind it which is therefore subject to abuse. Yes, there are bad apples, but it is also time to examine the tree which

produces bad fruit. When we take a closer look at systems like mass incarceration and the school to prison pipeline, we can see that people of color in general and black people are specifically up against far more than just a few bad apples.

FAQS

church reopening

WHY ISN'T FELLOWSHIP REGATHERING IN PERSON?

Covid-19 is not discriminatory in who it infects. However, the severity of the disease very much depends on age and underlying health issues. The result is that the elderly and those with compromised health (often due to disparities in the healthcare system and the stress of living as a person of color in the U.S.) are dying at much higher percentages. Therefore, as an intergenerational and

multi-ethnic church, regathering in person for church services means putting at risk a much larger portion of the church body than for churches who are mostly white. This would be contradictory to the gospel message of loving your neighbor as yourself.