



grow. pray. study.

May 31, 2020 “A Dream Still Deferred”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-6

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Breaking down walls of division, distrust

MONDAY 6.1.20 Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-6, 8:4-8, 14-17

A string of appalling, unjust deaths have made us see more clearly that terrible racial divisions continue to blight our country. In Bible times, there were similar divisions, more often based on ethnic identity than simply skin color. Hatred and distrust between Israelites and next-door Samaritans went back over 500 years, to Israel's return from exile in Babylon (cf. [Ezra 4:1-5](#)). But the early Christians obeyed Jesus' mandate to preach in Samaria, and openly welcomed their former enemies into their community.

- Jesus treated Samaritans, not as enemies, but with respect and compassion (cf. e.g. [Luke 17:11-19](#), [John 4:4-6, 39-41](#)). How did his example precede, and help to prepare, the apostles when it became their turn to reach out to and accept Samaritans? In what ways are you modeling racial, cultural and inter-faith inclusiveness for your family, your friends, and your business associates?
- If any hesitation or doubt remained (and it likely did), the Holy Spirit showed the apostles that God accepted Samaritans the same way God accepted anyone else. Later, when some people criticized Peter for baptizing Roman soldiers, he answered, “If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God's way?” (Acts 11:17) Are you able to accept and welcome all members of God's human family? To reach out to anyone the Holy Spirit places in your path?

Prayer: Lord God, you made many different trees, flowers, birds and horses. Forgive us for sinfully thinking that somehow you only made and loved humans who were just like us. Amen.

All God's children

TUESDAY 6.2.20 Galatians 3:26-29

Jesus and his followers regularly broke down walls of division and distrust. The biggest divide the first Christians faced was between Jews and Gentiles (of which the divide with Samaritans we read about yesterday was a subset). The apostle Paul wrote that Christ's saving work bridged all the gaps that separated people. Paul's heritage and upbringing were Jewish, but he insisted that in Christ being “Abraham's descendants” united people rather than setting some apart as favored and privileged.

- When he was trained as a rabbi, Paul no doubt learned and used a traditional morning prayer that included the words, “Lord, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile, a slave or a woman.” Scholar John Stott wrote, “Every person belongs to a certain race and nation, has been nurtured in a particular culture, and is either male or female. When we say Christ abolished these distinctions, we mean not that

they do not exist, but that they do not matter.” * What inner changes does it take to truly make those distinctions not matter?

- If we hear Christians calling each other “brother” or “sister,” for many of us that has a rather quaint, old-fashioned ring. But when Paul wrote that “you are all God’s children,” he wasn’t trying to be quaint. He was forcefully reminding those who wanted to sort people out into “better” and “worse” that we’re all members of God’s family. What helps you view other people as brothers and sisters in God’s family? What do you find that makes that harder for you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, all the evidence we have says you loved every person you ever met, even the ones who didn’t love you. Keep growing that remarkable quality in my heart. Amen.

* Stott, J. R. W. *The message of Galatians: Only one way*. Leicester, England, Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986, p. 100.

No distinction

WEDNESDAY 6.3.20 Romans 3:21-30

“All have sinned” and “all are treated as righteous freely” are well-known Biblical phrases. Sometimes we read especially the second one as “I am treated as righteous freely,” and that’s an important truth. But we must never miss the fact that one major message Paul delivered in these verses is that God accepted Jews and Gentiles (people of different ethnicities, with vastly different backgrounds) on exactly the same basis.

- Once I realize that I am a sinner God accepts through sheer grace, Paul said, that throws out any bragging. But most of us are polite people—we’d never “brag,” right? Have you ever seen a (quiet, carefully hidden) sense of superiority lead one person to set himself/herself apart from (and a bit above) others? How can you keep that kind of thinking from creeping into your attitudes, and so avoid those divisions?
- Paul asked, “Is God the God of Jews only?” in a way that clearly assumed that the answer was “no”. Practice plugging other labels (e.g. Americans, United Methodists, white people, etc.) into that question, and honestly monitor your inner responses. Ask God to help you set aside any feelings of superiority and exclusivity this exercise shines a light on for you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you didn’t accept me because I’m such a superior specimen. Thank you for your grace. Help me extend your grace to all the people with whom I share your world. Amen.

“It’s a matter of equality”

THURSDAY 6.4.20 2 Corinthians 8:9-15

Christianity didn’t only bridge ethnic or gender divides. In a world with wide gaps between the privileged wealthy and the abused poor, Christ-followers also reached across economic divides. Paul took up a collection from areas where people were prospering to help Christians in Jerusalem suffering from poverty. He saw Christ’s ideal for God’s people as the opposite of “class warfare.” Christ’s example called for deep-seated mutual concern and burden-sharing.

- “Your plenty will supply what they need,” Paul wrote to the relatively wealthy Corinthian Christians. Do you tend to see yourself more as someone who has plenty or as someone who is in need? Has the impact of the current pandemic changed that perception in any way? How does the truth that we’re one human family under God reshape how you relate to issues of plenty and of need?
- At the end of this passage, Paul made an intriguing reference to the story of the Israelites receiving manna to feed them in the wilderness (cf. [Exodus 16:15-18](#)). Every Israelite, Exodus said, gathered only as much manna (food) as needed. No one tried to “corner the market.” Is there a principle in that story that applies to life today? Do you believe Paul’s goal of equality is out of date in the 21st century, or worth seeking to seriously live out?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I find the word “mine” so appealing, but it can make me grasp the assets you make me a steward of much too tightly. Teach me how to keep growing into your spirit of generosity. Amen.

One Spirit, one Lord, one God

FRIDAY 6.5.20 1 Corinthians 12:3-13

We humans are different from one another in many ways. But Paul was convinced that those of us who follow Christ must model for the world that what connects us to one another is far greater than anything that might divide us. We all serve one Lord, we’re all led by one Spirit, we’re all the children of one God. With all our different backgrounds and gifts, we all form one body—the Body of Christ. And that unity is so much bigger, he said, than any division by race or social status.

- It is a fact, not an opinion, that people from many different races and backgrounds love, worship and serve the same Lord. How can that fact break down the walls of separation and mistrust that create divisions even among Christ-followers? How can that enable Christ-followers to become models and agents of healing to the larger world? What forces in you try to keep the walls in place?
- In your family, your church, your workplace, when can you see the differences between people bringing depth, richness and strength rather than conflict or division? How can celebrating the strength that grows from our differences help to keep us from building walls of separation?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at times I’m tempted to use the word “us” in narrow ways, trying to shut those “different” people out. Remind me that, in you, “us” is a big, inclusive word for all the people you love. Amen.

“Christ is our peace”

SATURDAY 6.6.20 Ephesians 2:11-20

God created one big, diverse human family. Christ came to restore the unity to that family that had split into many warring camps. As the ongoing instrument to make that happen in real life, Ephesians said he brought the church into being. When the church is being what it should be, what God calls us to be, then it is a place where the walls of suspicion, fear and mistrust are down, and no one is a stranger or an outcast. In the church, we’re called to make unity in Christ a real, living force, one that works actively against injustice, hatred and prejudice wherever we find it.

- Ephesians said that on the cross Christ broke down the walls of hatred and suspicion that separate people. Who do you find it hard to like or to trust? How does it affect your feelings when you realize that Jesus died for them, too? To what extent is Jesus the “cornerstone” of your faith experience? What other things (traditions, sociological groupings, human leaders, etc.) are you tempted to build your faith on instead of Jesus? How does choosing the wrong cornerstone for your faith lead to division rather than unity?

Prayer: Loving Jesus, my heart aches when I see the angry divisions in our world and the pain and suffering they cause. But you see so much more than I do—how your loving, unifying heart must ache. Make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer Prayers of peace and comfort for:

Jim O'Brien and family following the death of James E. O'Brien (father), 5/9/2020

Carolyn Davidson and family following the death of Melvin Wayne Davidson (husband), 5/11/2020

Kathy Doerfler and family following the death of Ocie Faye Kinnerson (aunt), 5/17/2020

Cathy Eichelkraut and family following the death of Laurel (sister), 5/17/2020

Sherry Perry Laubenstein and family following the death of Jimmie Johnson (father), 5/22/2020