

BE ^{THE} BRIDGE

STUDY GUIDE



Hope's 10 for 10, which launched Nov. 2, 2019, details 10 goals for Hope in the next 10 years. With a fresh, updated vision for the next decade of ministry, we are ready to see the amazing ways God is going to move! This study is focused on goal #2, Unity Agents.



2

BUILD

**bridges of
harmony
for cultures
divided by race,
ethnicity, ...**

... creed, gender, sexual orientation, politics and worldview. Illuminate in our public teaching and private conversations a biblically faithful application of God's word to the issues of our day, avoiding ditches of legalism and relativism, rising above dismissive debates, calling instead for a "third way" of civility, compassion, respect, love and acknowledgment that the Christ who unites us is greater than the issues that could divide us.

Romans 12:16 | Colossians 3:14 | 2 Timothy 2:23



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Session 1:

How We Begin & History Keeps Account

PRE-READING: Foreword and Chapters 1 & 2

INTRODUCTIONS

Have each participant state their name and perhaps what drew them to this study.

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for joining you, ask him to guide your conversation and request that he reveal his truth to you.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In view of today's racial unrest, especially the demonstrations we've seen on our TV screens, were you shocked at the information presented? Was this new to you?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you studied the history of non-white cultures in America and how those cultures came to be here? What have you read/studied about those cultures or seen in documentaries or movies?
2. Latisha Morrison discusses the "posture of humility." What does that posture look like – not necessarily literally, but figuratively? Do you feel as though you have answers to racial reconciliation?

Read aloud: Deuteronomy 30:19-20

"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the Lord, you will live long in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

3. This word is from the Lord to the Israelites as they are about to enter the Promised Land after fleeing Egypt and traveling in the wilderness for 40 years. The key phrase here is **"...obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him."** Is God teaching you new understanding about racial tension in our country?
4. Morrison says "...there are these two perceived types of minorities – assimilated or non-assimilated ..." that lead to internalized racism, colorism and racial prejudice of one another. Does this ever happen – not just based on racism – in a Christian community? Are there non-assimilated people, regardless of color, who attend our church or church events?

Read aloud: Romans 3:22-24

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.

5. What does that mean to us, individually and collectively, in today's world? Do we think, maybe because we have had little or no encounters with racism, that we are without sin in regard to racism or prejudice because of color or ethnicity?
6. We can probably all agree that truth is important to our Christian faith. How can we learn truth regarding attitudes, prejudices (even those we are unaware of) and our responsibility, both individually and collectively, as Christians to act on truth?

Read aloud: Galatians 3:26-29

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Read aloud: 2 Timothy 2:15

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

7. Can we avoid the whole issue of racism and colorism because we live in a mostly white community? What steps or work do we need to do to learn truth?

CLOSING PRAYER

When your conversation is finished, take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. Then, have someone in your group close the group in prayer. If you want, have someone open the prayer and another person close.

PRAYER JOURNALING

Journaling is a wonderful way to talk to God. We invite you to use the following pages during your prayer time as you read through Be the Bridge with your group.

Date: _____

Today I read _____ **chapter(s)**

Takeaways as I read...

_____ *How I can apply this to my life...* _____



Dear God,

Teach me...

You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 2:

An Invitation to Emphasize and Removing Roadblocks to Reconciliation

PRE-READING: Chapters 3 & 4

OPENING PRAYER

You can use “A Prayer for Truth” on page 34 or your own prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read aloud: Lamentations 3:22-23

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.

1. How does God deal with our mourning? In reading this chapter, did you feel personal anguish, sadness, shame or grief because of the way people of color have, and may still be, treated in the “Land of the Free”?
2. On page 41 it says: “What is the purpose of lament? It allows us to connect with and grieve the reality of our sin and suffering. It draws us to repentant connection with God in that suffering.” If we are to live our lives striving to be more like Jesus, how do you think God might feel about our prejudices toward people he created?

In the book of Acts, God sends a powerful vision to the Apostle Peter.

Read aloud: Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.

Read aloud: Acts 10:45

The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was being poured out on the Gentiles, too.

3. One of Hope’s 10 for 10 goals is to “Build Unity Agents.” Combined with the over-arching mission of Hope to “Reach out to the world around us and share the everlasting love of Jesus Christ!” as well as Hope’s Vision to be “Powered by the Spirit to bring Christ to all cultures, revive the world with God’s love and make heaven more crowded!”, what does that mean for us? How do those statements influence our attitudes regarding racism?
4. What obstacles do you see in being more racially inclusive?

Read aloud: Ezra 9:5-11

At the time of the sacrifice, I stood up from where I had sat in mourning with my

clothes torn. I fell to my knees and lifted my hands to the Lord my God. I prayed, "O my God, I am utterly ashamed; I blush to lift up my face to you. For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our ancestors until now, we have been steeped in sin. That is why we and our kings and our priests have been at the mercy of the pagan kings of the land. We have been killed, captured, robbed, and disgraced, just as we are today.

"But now we have been given a brief moment of grace, for the Lord our God has allowed a few of us to survive as a remnant. He has given us security in this holy place. Our God has brightened our eyes and granted us some relief from our slavery. For we were slaves, but in his un failing love our God did not abandon us in our slavery. Instead, he caused the kings of Persia to treat us favorably. He revived us so we could rebuild the Temple of our God and repair its ruins. He has given us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem."

5. Ezra, a prophet, is expressing shame and guilt publically for things that others did. He is not personally responsible in any way, yet he is asking for God's mercy and forgiveness. Has it ever occurred to you to seek forgiveness for something you had nothing to do with and perhaps happened before you were even here?
6. As Americans we are sometimes reminded of the ways other races or ethnic groups were treated, including native Americans, slaves and, even more recently, those of Japanese decent, who were sent to camps during WWII. There are books that tell the stories and museums that document these events. Do you ever feel any personal need, as Ezra did, for confession for the sins of our long-gone relatives?
7. Were you raised in a collective community or a more individualistic one? Explain how this influences your perceptions of community today.
8. The New Testament has several examples of the first-century church's community.

Read aloud: Acts 2:44-47

And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper and shared their meals with great joy and generosity -- all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Before COVID-19, did you routinely experience community with your fellow believers? What did that look like?

If you choose and time allows, "Liturgy of Lament" on page 52 may be a very meaningful close for the chapter.

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Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 3:

Where Healing Begins and The Healing Balm

PRE-READING: Chapters 5 & 6

OPENING PRAYER

The prayer on page 100 is appropriate, and you may wish to use it with your own words added, perhaps at the end.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Did it ever occur to you as part of the white community that within the Black community there is embedded racism, "...rooted in society's unconscious bias toward lighter skin."?
2. From question 1 on page 97: In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Life Together," he wrote, "He who is alone with his sin is *utterly alone* ... But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner, now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you." What does he mean about being utterly alone? And what changes when we embrace the grace of the gospel?

Read aloud: James 5:16

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

3. *Why is confession to each other important? How is that different from confessing our sins to God?*
4. *Morrison states on page 106, "When we've been hurt, when we've been battered, sometimes anger and bitterness give us a sense of control. But the truth is, our bitterness and anger often control us." When we forgive, do you think the forgiven person primarily benefits? Explain that concept.*

Read aloud: Ephesians 4:31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

5. How does that apply to forgiveness? Morrison asks us: "How can you get rid of rage or anger until you've taken time to feel and recognize it? How can you forgive without understanding the wrong and hurtful actions you are releasing the perpetrator from?"

6. Forgiveness is not always “once and done.” It may be a process requiring you to revisit the hurtful situation, recognize it and again consciously ask God to forgive your attitude. How do you know when you have fully forgiven someone?

Read aloud: Colossians 3:13

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.

Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others

CLOSING PRAYER

Take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. You may also choose to use “A Prayer of Forgiveness” on page 119 in the book, asking someone in your group close the group in prayer.

NOTES:

Lined area for notes, consisting of 28 horizontal lines.



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I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 4:

Facing the Oppressed

PRE-READING: Chapter 7

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for those present and any who are absent, ask him to guide your conversation, and request that he reveal his truth to you.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. We are all aware that change can be difficult. Morrison says being aware and confessing wrongs are important and necessary steps in the reconciliation process. But they are not enough. *Repentance* is an essential element in this process.

Read aloud: 2 Corinthians 7:10

For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance results in spiritual death.

2. *Why is it that we are often so blind to our sins, especially sins that are culturally acceptable, such as racist comments or thoughts, yet we are acutely aware of sinful prejudices in others?*
3. *What excuses do we use or hear used for historical behaviors that clearly showed racism, such as the treatment of Native Americans or Black people? What can we say in response to those excuses? In thinking about this, remember what the Canadian Prime Minister said regarding their national history with Native Americans (pages 140-141).*
4. *How does self-preservation or personal pride hinder us from moving forward in racial reconciliation and repentance?*

Read aloud: Leviticus 4:13-14 (emphasis added)

*If the entire Israelite community sins by violating one of the Lord's commands, but the people don't realize it, **they are still guilty**. When they become aware of their sin, the people must bring a young bull as an offering for their sin and present it before the Tabernacle*

5. Under the Levitical law of the Old Testament, sacrifice was required when there was community-wide sin revealed. Jesus is the ultimate and final sacrifice for us, and we are no longer bound by the many Levitical laws. However, as a country, we have sinned. How can we show our sorrow and repentance for that behavior and move forward in a way that will please Jesus?

Read aloud: Matthew 3:4 (The speaker here is John the Baptist, who was sent by God to prepare the way for the salvation message brought by Jesus.)

Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.

6. How can we show by our lives that we have repented of racist thinking and prejudices? Considering that many of us live in all-white communities and often have only white co-workers and friends, what actions can we take to show our repentance?

Read aloud: Romans 12:2 (emphasis added)

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, **but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.** Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

7. What imbedded habits or behaviors do you see in our culture? Have recent events, such as the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis that triggered so many protests and riots across the country, had an effect on your thinking about race relations?

CLOSING PRAYER

Take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. Then, have someone in your group close the group in prayer. You may want to use one of the Prayers of Repentance on page 148.

PRAYER JOURNALING

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Takeaways as I read...

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Dear God,

Teach me...

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I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 5:

Facing God and Righting the Wrong Relationships Restored

PRE-READING: Chapters 8 & 9

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for those present and any who are absent, ask him to guide your conversation, and request that he reveal his truth to you.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read aloud: Luke 19:1-9

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham."

1. How is the desire to make reparations, the way Zacchaeus expressed, different from guilt? How does reparation relate to equality and equity?
2. It's been said the most segregated place in America is church services. How can reconciliation happen in our churches? What has to change to make it possible? And what will it cost churches, both white and of color, to reconcile?

Read aloud: Mark 16:6-7 (These are the words of the angel at the tomb of Jesus when the women arrived on Sunday morning to anoint his body.)

"Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. No go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died"

Read aloud: John 20:27

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

3. Jesus had obviously forgiven Peter for betraying him because he wanted his friend to be with them when he met up with them. And Thomas doubted, but Jesus was willing to help him with his unbelief by showing him the evidence. What does that tell us about the restoration of relationships in our own world?
4. Have you seen any positive signs of restorative reconciliation in our country? What about in our church?
5. This is nearly the end of the book. In looking back on the reading, the Scripture and discussions, where do you think the process of reconciliation and restoration gets off-track and loses momentum? How can we change that, even in small, incremental ways?

Read aloud: Galatians 6:9-10

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should be good to everyone – especially to those in the family of faith.

CLOSING PRAYER

Take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. Then, you may close or have someone in your group pray. One of the Prayers of Restoration and Reconciliation on page 100 would be very appropriate for closing after praying for requests.

PRAYER JOURNALING

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You are...

I confess...

I'm thankful for...

Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.

Session 6:

Building More Bridges

PRE-READING: Chapter 10 & The Afterword

OPENING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to open your group meeting in prayer. Thank God for those present and any who are absent, ask him to guide your conversation, and request that he reveal his truth to you personally.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. *Finishing a study such as this one is certainly a good thing. But there is more to do. " ... Despite how compelled you are in this moment by her message of racial reconciliation, you will be tempted to put this book on the shelf and move on to more comfortable pursuits." Though your previous ideas may have altered a bit, it will be easier to go back to familiar territory. It's important that individually and corporately we don't let that happen. How has this study had an impact on your thinking, perceptions and historical understanding?*

Read aloud: Matthew 22: 37:40

Jesus replied, " 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

2. We could look back to the age-old question of "Who is my neighbor?" However, we likely know in our hearts that neighbor here means anyone we come in contact with. What would it look like if we all, in every aspect of our lives, treated others as if we truly love them? Store clerks, maintenance people, co-workers, even strangers we encounter on the street, regardless of color, race, sexual identity, appearance of poverty or cleanliness?
3. In summary, discuss going forward how you can implement new feelings, thoughts, inspirations and ideas that came out of reading this book and participating in this study. Have you felt a nudge from God? One that is pushing you to change the direction of your life? If so, what are you going to do with that?

CLOSING PRAYER

Take some time to close your group meeting in prayer. Give everyone a few minutes to share a prayer request. Then, you may close or have someone in your group pray. One of the Prayers of Restoration and Reconciliation on page 100 would be very appropriate for closing after praying for requests.

PRAYER JOURNALING

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Specific Prayer Requests:

Amen.



lutheranchurchofhope.org