

THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

Sunday mornings at 8:30 via Zoom
January 10, 17, 24, 31, Feb. 7, and 14

The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism is both enlightening and compelling, telling a history we either ignore or just don't know. Equal parts painful and inspirational, it details how the American church has helped create and maintain racist ideas and practices. Jemar Tisby takes us to the root of injustice in the American church. This study:

- Takes you on a historical, sociological, and religious journey: from America's early colonial days through slavery and the Civil War
- Covers the tragedy of Jim Crow laws, the victories of the Civil Rights era, and the strides of today's Black Lives Matter movement
- Reveals the cultural and institutional tables we have to flip in order to bring about progress between black and white people
- Charts a path forward to replace established patterns and systems of complicity with bold, courageous, immediate action

The Color of Compromise is not a call to shame or a platform to blame white evangelical Christians. It is a call from a place of love and desire to fight for a more racially unified church that no longer compromises what the Bible teaches about human dignity and equality. A call that challenges black and white Christians alike to stand up now and begin implementing the concrete ways Tisby outlines, all for a more equitable and inclusive environment among God's people (*Christian Book Publishers*).

Please choose your level of participation. Any or all of the following are suggested:

1. Read the book, *The Color of Compromise*.
2. Watch the study guide videos available on Amazon Prime (search for *The Color of Compromise*).
3. Read the chapter "cheat sheet" summaries and questions provided.
4. Or, simply join the Zoom class discussion on Sunday mornings.

We suggest that you do ALL of the above, but any way that you enter into this study is wonderful! Listening, learning, reflecting, and developing hearts of greater compassion and justice are all part of our faith formation.

The Color of Compromise:

The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism

Weekly reading list

Week 1: January 10 – Complicit or Courageous Christianity

- Reading: Chapter 1 and Conclusion
- Amazon Prime “The Color of Compromise” video study 1 and 12
- Discussion questions

Week 2: January 17 – Making and Institutionalizing Race in Colonial America

- Reading: Chapters 2, 3, and 4
- Amazon Prime “The Color of Compromise” video study 2, 3, and 4
- Discussion questions

Week 3: January 24 – A War Over Slavery That Continued On

- Reading: Chapters 5, 6, and 7
- Amazon Prime “The Color of Compromise” video study 5, 6, and 7
- Discussion questions

Week 4: January 31 – The Civil Rights Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right

- Reading: Chapters 8 and 9
- Amazon Prime “The Color of Compromise” video study 8 and 9
- Discussion questions

Week 5: February 7 – The Age of Black Lives Matter

- Reading: Chapter 10
- Amazon Prime “The Color of Compromise” video study 10
- Discussion questions

Week 6: February 14 – The Fierce Urgency of Now

- Reading: Chapter 11
- Amazon Prime “The Color of Compromise” video study 11
- Discussion questions

Supplementary Resource: a video series for *The Color of Compromise* is available on Amazon Prime. These videos coordinate with the chapters of the book, are about 15-25 minutes in length, and are available for free for Prime members.

If you are unable to watch the videos or read the book chapters, the “cheat sheet” summaries provided for you will give you a good overview.

Sources: *The Color of Compromise* by Jamar Tisby; *CourseGuide* by Jamar Tisby; Chapter summaries by the Racial Justice and the Church Working Group of First Presbyterian Church, Berkeley, CA

The Color of Compromise – Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: The Color of Compromise

In the opening chapter, Tisby frames three critical ideas:

1. Why read *The Color of Compromise*? He argues that as the church we must be a people who are reconciled, specifically across the lines of racial division – and these lines of racial division exist within First Pres as well as outside our doors. For reconciliation to take place, the church must **repent!** But, to repent, Tisby argues, the church must first **confess**. And, he adds, that in order to confess, we must, first, **know** the truth about the church’s complicity with racism. Tisby argues that if we—the American church and First Pres in particular—do not do the “hard but necessary work of examining what went wrong with race and the church,” we are in danger of holding “simplistic understandings of the past and superficial solutions to racial issues in the present” (p. 20). To this process of moving from “truth telling” to reconciliation, Tisby adds another critical point. He describes his hope that our reading of the American church’s complicity with racism will also create a greater sense of **empathy** within us. That we will cultivate “the ability to weep with those who weep” for this, he concludes, “is necessary for true healing” (p. 23).

2. Christians and the church were complicit in the construction of race and racism—white supremacy—before and at the founding of the nation (Chapters 2 and 3).

That racism didn’t have to be the reality that in 2021 feels so inevitable, Tisby continues by arguing that the church’s complicity with racism continued through the Antebellum Era, the Civil War, Reconstruction (Jim Crow) and the civil Rights Movement in “the South” and “the North” (Chapters 4 – 8). And finally, Tisby notes that the church’s complicity with racism exists today (Chapter 9 – 10). Specifically, he writes that Christians fail(ed) to “decisively oppose the racism in their families, communities, and even in their own churches.”

3. Tisby’s third frame includes essential definitions for racism and white supremacy.

- **Racism:** a system of oppression based upon race (p. 16). It is prejudice plus power.
- **White supremacy:** a concept that identifies white people and white culture as normal and superior—even if they claim people of color as their brothers and sisters in Christ (p. 16).

“The malleability and impermanence of racial categories help explain how the American church’s compromise with racism had become subtler over time. History demonstrates that racism never goes away; it just adapts” (p.19).

Chapter 1 Questions

1. **As you read Chapter 1, how does Tisby contrast “complicit Christianity” with “courageous Christianity” (p. 17)?** Tisby cautions us that to read and discuss this book will be, for many Christians, an act of courageous Christianity; readers will find many reasons to “object” to the book’s thesis. He

asks us, nonetheless, to continue reading and discussing our shared history and responsibility to live out the gospel. **What feelings do you have as you read this chapter?**

2. Tisby defines racism as a “system” of oppression—one of “prejudice plus power.” How does this definition relate to and differ from your own understanding of racism? How do you hear others defining racism? And, how do you “sit” with a term like white supremacy, especially in light of Tisby’s definition?
3. Tisby explicitly notes, **“the goal of this book is not guilt”** (p. 22). As you ponder recent items in the news and your conversations with others, have you experienced guilt? If so, where do you feel that guilt is coming from? Why might guilt be a harmful response to these events? What might be a more productive response?

Chapter 2: Making Race in the Colonial Era

Tisby concludes Chapter 2 with a nod to MLK, Jr. Tisby writes, “the fierce urgency of now’ demands a recognition of the ways Christians, from before the founding of the United States, built racial categories into religion” (p. 39). This, then, is the focus of the chapter. The ways in which racism, which Tisby argues was not “inevitable,” was inscribed into social, political, and religious spheres of American life through the “immoral” choices and actions of the “explorers” and colonial settlers. Tisby notes that “the human cost in terms of suffering, indignity, and death caused by this commerce [the transatlantic slave trade] can never be fully comprehended, but the experience is often misunderstood or downplayed in the present day. The appalling nature of Christian cooperation with slavery cannot be understood apart from a description of bondage and its effects on Africans” (p. 29). He adds that this “process of dehumanization” of African slaves and indigenous peoples) occurred as “Christianity became identified with the emerging concept of ‘whiteness’ while people of

color, including indigenous peoples and Africans, became identified with unbelief” (p. 39). In this manner, Tisby frames how race in the Americas was, and is still today, a “social construct (p. 27).” Systemic racism was constructed by “Europeans, including Christians, [who] wrote the laws and formed the habits that concentrated power in the hands of those they considered ‘white’ while withholding equity from those they considered ‘Black’” (p. 27). He adds that “if people made deliberate decisions to enact inequity, it is possible that a series of better decisions could begin to change this reality” (p. 27).

Chapter 2 Questions

1. “Race is a social construct. There is no biological basis for the superiority or inferiority of any human being based on the amount of melanin in her or his skin”—yet racism persists in our society. What do you think is the root of racism? Why do we discriminate against people based on skin color? Is there any situation in which discrimination toward other races is justified?
2. Do you believe that racism can be unmade? What do you think about Tisby’s argument that the knowledge of our past, particularly our Christian past, must be turned toward propagating a more authentically biblical message of human equality, regardless of skin color?
3. As you read Chapters 2 - 4, reflect on your public and/or private education on race and racism in American history. What do you remember being taught? How, if at all, was race framed across American history? (in the colonial era? Revolutionary America? Antebellum America?)
4. Reflect on your religious education (Sunday School, Bible study, book reading, etc.). Where, if at all, has the history of the church’s role in the construction of race been part of the development of your faith journey?

Chapter 3: Understanding Liberty in the Age of Revolution and Revival

Tisby uses the lives of renowned evangelists George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards and the period of the Great Awakening (1730s-1740s) to narrate American’s emerging institutionalization of slavery. Tisby notes that within the era of the Great Awakening, “evangelicalism focused on individual conversion and piety. [Thus,] within this evangelical framework, one could adopt an evangelical expression of Christianity yet remain uncompelled to confront institutional injustice” (p. 50). As such, while the Church affirmed the idea of “spiritual equality,” it did not translate this to “social equity,” or “earthly liberation” for African slaves. In fact, Tisby concludes, the Church—as documented through the example of the Baptist Church—articulated a belief that slavery was “a civil issue outside of the scope of the church... [such that] the topic was an issue for the state, not the church” (p. 52). What one sees in this era of American history is the separation of one’s personal faith from one’s obligation to “live out” one’s faith in the world. Thus, the white church focused on the “souls” of African slaves all the while it “learned to rationalize the continued existence of slavery” (p. 55). Tisby notes, however, that within this historical period that Black Christians believed: Christianity also held out the hope of freedom. Enslaved people connected spiritual salvation with earthly liberation. They believed that spiritual equality might lead their white slave owners to see them as full human beings deserving of emancipation (p. 45).

About this period of history, Tisby concludes that “not even Revolutionary ideals of independence and equality or the religious transformations brought on by the Great Awakening could deconstruct the foundations of the social pyramid” (p. 55).

Chapter 3 Questions

1. During the Great Awakening, the church came to focus on individual conversion and piety, as opposed to “earthly liberation.” How do you see this focus being lived out today? Consider the ways that Black lives are “at-risk” across every major index of social harm and/or trauma (incarceration, school dropout, morbidity from COVID).
2. What do you think about the belief that nothing in the Bible forbids slavery? What is your interpretation of the book of Philemon? Do you think that the Scriptures seem to accept slavery as an established reality?
3. The Declaration of Independence reads, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Discuss this statement. Describe what you would see in a society that reflected these ideals.
4. Reflect on the Age of Revolution and revival. In what you have read of this era, what has disappointed you? What is your reaction to what took place during this era?

Chapter 4: Institutionalizing Race in the Antebellum Era

Tisby continues his review of American history in Chapter 4 with an examination of the “founding fathers” construction of the U.S. Constitution. Tisby notes that while the U.S. Constitution does not use the words “slave” or “slavery,” some scholars argue that it can be viewed as a proslavery document. He notes that “the nation’s political leaders used Black lives as bargaining chips to preserve the union of states and to gain leverage for other policy issues” (p. 59). Tisby, then, rhetorically asks: What about the church? His conclusion is clear: “the American church made similar compromises at critical junctures to preserve the status of slaveholders and to justify the uniquely American manifestation of slavery” (pp. 59-60). He adds that, “rather than defending the dignity of Black people, American Christians at this time chose to turn a blind eye to the separation of families, the scarring of bodies, the starvation of stomachs, the generational trauma of slavery” (p. 62). Tisby’s history lesson continues with the naming of “slaveholder paternalism” within American Christianity. He writes that these paternalistic attitudes viewed “the enslaved as perpetual children incapable of adequately making their own decisions, dependent on white people for guidance and protection” (p. 67). As such, Tisby notes that during the Second Great Awakening (1790-1840), white Christians, like Charles Grandison Finney, were “outspoken abolitionists” but not “proponents of black equality.” Accordingly, they “advocated for emancipation,” but not for the “social integration of the races” (p. 68). Tisby notes, once again, that the theology of the Great Awakening led to a fixation on individual conversion without a corresponding focus on transforming the racist policies and practices of institutions, a stance that has remained a constant feature of American evangelicalism and has furthered the American church’s easy compromise with slavery and racism (p. 69).

Chapter 4 Questions

1. How do you see slaveholder paternalism—which advocated for emancipation but not for social integration—as the seeds of a segregated society? How do you see this relating to our life together in the church, particularly when “the most segregated hour in American life” is 11 a.m. on Sunday?

2. Do you agree with the scholars who argue that the U.S. Constitution can be viewed as a proslavery document? Why or why not?
3. Identify the ironies of the Second Great Awakening in relation to slavery. How does one of the theological legacies of the Second Great Awakening, postmillennialism, conflict with the refusal of a majority of white Christians to take a definitive stance against slavery?
4. Do you see any similar patterns between the antebellum era and twenty-first century America? What do you think it will take to break institutionalized racism?
5. How does Tisby's telling of American church's history impact you?

Chapter 5: Defending Slavery at the onset of the Civil War (pp. 70-87)

Tisby concludes Chapter 5 by noting "the Civil War paints a vivid picture of what inevitably happens when the American church is complicit in racism and willing to deny the teachings of Jesus to support an immoral, evil institution" (p. 87). It is to this end that Tisby unpacks the "theological crisis" that slavery represented to the American church on the eve of, and throughout, the Civil War. While Tisby notes that portions of the church advocated for the abolishment of slavery, he concludes that "countless devout Christians fought and died to preserve the institution" (p. 71). For Tisby, a critical focus of the Civil War era was "the question of Christ and Caesar" (p. 79). For Tisby, "Caesar" had clearly declared that enslaving Black humans was acceptable. For instance, citing the majority opinion of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case, Tisby documents that "black people were of 'an inferior order' ... [and] that the Constitution did not have black people in mind when it outlined the rights and duties of citizens... [thus] black people 'had no rights which the white man was bound to respect'" (p. 73). Tisby adds that Lincoln "made it clear that abolitionists who opposed the institution of slavery could also be anti-black and even racist" (p. 74). Parallel to Caesar, Tisby documents the church's articulation of "Christ" through a review of the splits in mainline churches, chief among them, the Presbyterian Church. Within his thesis, Tisby reviews three main arguments made to "justify" slavery. First, he notes how the Church interpreted the "curse of Ham," a story from Genesis, as a Biblical "truth" that "slavery had been a regrettable but necessary reality ever since Ham's transgression" (p. 83). Second, Tisby notes that the church saw its evangelical mission as one of bringing enslaved blacks, a "morally inferior" race, "into close relations to a nobler race," whites (p. 91). And third, Tisby states that "the American church set up dualities between physical and spiritual, moral and political, ecclesiastical and social." Accordingly, a critical theological lens of the day was that "the church can merely assert what the Bible teaches and must remain silent on that which the Bible is silent" (p. 85). And since the Church could not cite a specific passage of scripture that forbid slavery, church leadership argued that the church was to "remain silent." Accordingly, Tisby concludes, that "in one stroke of dubious demography, slavery became the right and proper place of Africans" (p. 83). In summarizing the Civil War era, Tisby writes "the war decisively ended slavery, but the fighting did not end. The bullets of competing biblical interpretations continued to ricochet across the country" (p.70).

Chapter 5 Questions

1. Discuss the theological tension that lay at the center of the Civil War, as summarized by Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address. Were you surprised that Lincoln included this theological tension in his address?

2. Tisby argues that one of the best biblical cases against American slavery is to demonstrate how the form of slavery in the Ancient Near East was far different from the form practiced in the 18th and 19th century in America. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
3. Throughout Chapters 5 – 7, Tisby argues that maintaining a “distinction” between Christ and Caesar was critical to the American church’s theology and subsequent actions. How do you see this paradigm of the “two worlds” of Caesar and Christ embodied in contemporary American society? The American church? How do “the bullets of competing biblical interpretations continue to ricochet across the country”?
4. Tisby argues that the mix of Christianity, nationalism, and white supremacy created a “white Christian America.” How do you see the Church, and your own local church, living into this “white Christian America”? What alternative vision is God calling us to, and how might we live into this calling?
5. Read Genesis 9: 18-29 and evaluate proslavery advocates’ argument for “the curse of Ham” as a basis for race-based slavery’s existence. Is this a good interpretation of the passage? What seems to be the driving cause of such an interpretation? Are the counterarguments by abolitionists convincing?
6. What is your understanding of the mission of God and your role in it? What does your understanding tell you about your responsibility as a child of God to take care of His creation, including involvement in social issues? What social issues can cause splits in our churches today? How should we advocate for social justice while remaining in unity as the body of Christ?

With the end of the Civil War and the emergence of Reconstruction, Tisby posits, as he did with each proceeding era, that “Reconstruction could have been the start of a new America where black people enjoyed the full promises of liberty” (p. 89). And though Black people did see a meaningful increase in access to civic life, especially via the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, Tisby concludes “the dream was short-lived” (p. 91). Tisby documents, through the development of the Lost Cause narrative, Jim Crow laws and customs, and the Ku Klux Klan how America and the American church created a new social order designed “to reinforce the inferiority of black people in America” (p. 89). Tisby discusses how the “Lost Cause,” an alternative “narrative” of history was constructed to frame the pre-Civil War South “as a virtuous, patriotic group of tight-knit Christian communities” (p. 94). In particular, Tisby notes that “the Lost Cause provided the model for segregation that the southern churches accepted” (p. 94). He adds that many, especially southern women, orchestrated efforts to raise Confederate monuments that “not only memorialized Confederate soldiers, but they also inscribed white supremacy into the landscape of public spaces” (p. 95). He adds that churches celebrated “Confederate Memorial Day.” He adds that white “redeemers,” those inspired by “God’s plan to save people from their sins and make them into a holy nation,” used their power to block Black people from civic life, including voting (p. 96). He concludes that the work of the “redeemers” was an “overt appeal to white racial resentment” and “brought back the clouds of oppression to obstruct the bright rays of freedom” (p. 97). Tisby adds that the rise of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction was a “toxic ideology of hate” that fused Christianity, nationalism and white supremacy” and crafted a vision of a “white Christian America” (p. 100). To this mix, Tisby highlights the construction of Jim Crow laws and customs as a system to “reinforce the racial hierarchy” and the “social order” of slavery (p. 103). Throughout Reconstruction, Tisby notes that Christians’ failure to unequivocally condemn lynching, for instance, “poisoned the American legal system and made Christian churches complicit in racism for generations” (p. 109). He adds that “it’s not that members of every white church participated in lynching, but the practice could not have endured without the relative silence, if not outright support, of one of the most significant institutions in America—the Christian church” (p. 109). Tisby closes the chapter with a brief, but important, mention of the writing of James Cone. He does so to speak of how the Black church made sense of lynching through Christ’s suffering. Cones writes, “the cross helped me to deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me understand the tragic meaning of the cross” (p. 111).

Chapter 6 Questions

1. Lynching, residential segregation, and voter suppression are a few of the scars that Tisby argues are the result of either the American church’s silence or outright support. What other scars can you name?
2. How did Jim Crow dehumanize and terrorize black people? Discuss at least two dimensions of Jim Crow (segregation, sexual dimensions, convict-lease systems, etc.) to show how Jim Crow resulted in horrific atrocities.

3. Tisby focuses on the Black church's embrace of the cross as a way to "make sense" of lynching. He also notes that the Black church has focused on "the spiritual, political, and social equity of black people." What lessons can the white church learn from the Black church about suffering, redemption and equality before God?
4. What are the dangers inherent in the Lost Cause narrative? What do you think about southerners blending Civil War memory and Christian dogma together as a way of confirming their shared suffering and giving their losses divine significance?
5. In your assessment, how and why did the church fail black people in the Jim Crow era? Is this still happening today?
6. Respond to James Cone's theological reflection on racial terrorism. How might the reality of a crucified Christ comfort black people oppressed by white America?

Chapter 7: Remembering the Complicity in the North

Chapter 7 is a unique chapter that does not focus on a particular era in American history. Rather, Tisby focuses on the mythology of the North vs. the South. He writes: "Christians of the North [and the West and East coasts] have often been characterized as abolitionists, integrationists, and open-minded citizens who want all people to have a chance at equality. Christians of the South, on the other hand, have been portrayed as uniformly racist, segregationist, and antidemocratic. The truth is far more complicated" (p. 129).

Tisby adds, "the very conspicuousness of white supremacy in the South has made it easier for racism in other parts of the country to exist in open obscurity" (p. 129). It is this truth, the reality that "compromised Christianity transcends regions," that Tisby unpacks. Tisby opens the chapter with a discussion of the church's "wrestling with racism." He notes the continued racism of white Catholics and Protestants as he expands his earlier thesis to include the church's engagement with the social gospel – the church's efforts to ameliorate the "overcrowding, inhumane working conditions, pitiful wages, and chronic health issues local residents endured" (p. 115). While he notes the Catholic church's support for the "everyday" life conditions of the poor, Tisby notes that the Protestant church responded with a

“rebuke” “to those who are crying for equity and opportunity and improved material conditions” (p. 116). He concludes that, once again, the church insisted that “converting individuals to Christianity was the only biblical way to transform society” (p. 116). Parallel to the white church, Tisby documents how the black church continued to evolve in response to American’s racism. He writes, “Black Christians might take a more traditional or a more progressive stance, depending on the issue. While they often exhibited conservatism..., they also applied their religious beliefs to questions regarding the spiritual, political, and social equity of black people” (p. 116). Tisby notes how the emerging fundamentalist strain of Christianity was a leading voice within the church. He notes the view held by “conservative white Christians that public education promised only to inculcate their children with liberal social values and teach concepts that ran contrary to their interpretation of the Bible” (p. 121). To this Tisby highlights the development of Pepperdine as a unique form of Christian response, one that was once again complicit in racism.” He concludes, Pepperdine, and other schools like it, “indoctrinated a new generation of white Christians with ideas that would lend educational and ideological support to an individualistic approach to race relations” (p. 122). As part of Tisby’s critique of the “innocent” North myth, he chronicles the violent riots of the Red Summer, a response to the increasing concentration of Black people in the North following The Great Migration. He chronicles how racist practices attached to the GI Bill, “redlining” in the mortgage industry, and “restrictive covenants” in the real estate market led to residential segregation. To this reality Tisby adds the phenomena of “White Flight” as indicative “of the way racism has adapted to changing social conditions” (p. 127). He writes, “in many cases, churches not only failed to inhibit white flight but actually became co-conspirators and accomplices in the action” (p. 127). He adds, “rather than stay and adapt to a new community reality or assist in integrating the neighborhood, many white churches chose to depart the city instead” (p. 128). Tisby shatters the “innocence” of the North by reflecting on the experience of Martin Luther King, Jr. in “Slumdale,” a neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago. Seeking to protest segregated housing, King was confronted by counter protesters who waved Confederate flags. Tisby cites King: “I have never seen such hate. Not in Mississippi or Alabama. This is a terrible thing” (p. 128).

Chapter 7 Questions

1. How does the life of Augustus Tolton inspire you as a believer and what lessons do you take from it? How does the life of William J. Seymour inspire you as a believer and what lessons do you take from it?
2. Tisby’s deconstruction of the “innocence” of the North (and all of the non-South) is, in part, an effort to challenge the “narratives” of the “good” North and “evil” South. How does this reassessment of the historical record cause us to reassess our own “innocence” with regards to racism, inside and outside the church?
3. Interact with this criticism of the social gospel: “To those who are crying for equality and opportunity and improved material conditions, the Church repeats the divine message, ‘Ye must be born again.’” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
4. In your opinion, how does our society continue to discriminate against black people? How much progress do you think modern America has made in the area of residential segregation and higher education and training for black people?

Chapter 8: Compromising with Racism during the Civil Rights Movement

In Chapter 8, Tisby continues his contrasting of leading Christian figures, namely Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, Jr., while focusing our attention on the civil rights era. He does so in an effort to describe “two approaches to religion and justice” with regard to the Black community (p.132). Once again, Tisby notes that while Christians were involved in civil rights activism, others continue to promote a reading of the Bible that upheld racial segregation as God’s will. He thus concludes, “precious few Christians publicly aligned themselves with the struggle for black freedom in the 1950’ and 1960s” (p. 132). In his review, Tisby notes Graham argued “the heart of the problem of race is in loving our neighbor,” a continuation of a theology of early America of fighting racism “one friendship at a time” (pp. 134-5). Tisby shifts from his analysis of Graham to the view of “moderate” Christians, namely those who opposed King’s civil rights “activism.” Tisby concludes that the thesis of eight religious leaders who wrote to King revealed “the underlying problem of complicity with racism”: “The letter from white Christian moderates illustrates the broader failure of the white church, a failure to recognize the daily indignity of American racism and the urgency the situation demanded.... They were overly cautious when the circumstances demanded a measure of outrage and courageous confrontation.... promoting instead a gradual approach to resolving racial issues and minimizing the suffering and hardship of the marginalized, who had been waiting centuries for justice” (pp. 137-8) ... Christian moderates insisted on a ‘trust the system’ mentality—obeying the law, working through the courts and patiently waiting for transformation” (p. 142).

Tisby’s most clear contrast of Graham and King is their respective responses to the riots of the 1960s. Tisby cites Graham: “the rioting, looting and crime in America have reached the point of anarchy” (p. 149). And, thus, Tisby notes, that Christian “moderates,” those “who played it safe, refusing to get involved in the civil rights movement” (p. 132) “were complicit with the status quo of institutional racism” (p. 135). Tisby closes the chapter with a critical insight on King. He describes King as “the quotable King,” one who is framed by his famous “I Have a Dream” speech from the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Tisby writes that “King has been endlessly reproduced and selectively quoted, his speeches retain their majesty yet lose their political bite” (p. 148). He concludes that for many white, and even for some Black, church leaders, King’s “direct-action campaigns” were “radical,” such that he and other activists were labeled as communists. In sum, Tisby notes that only “a couple of decades after his death, white evangelicals finally came to recognize

King's contribution to American democracy and biblical justice. During his lifetime and the height of the civil rights movement, a large segment of the American church derided King" (pp. 150-1).

Chapter 8 Questions

1. Compare and contrast Martin Luther King, Jr. with Billy Graham. Do you agree with Tisby's assessment of their actions in the civil rights movement? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the everyday racism of American Christians. Did you learn anything in this section that convinced you about the way you live? How are you inspired to change?
3. Read John 4:44 (For Jesus himself had said, "Prophets are not respected in their own country."). How might this passage illuminate how Martin Luther King, Jr. and his contributions to the civil rights movement are appreciated today?
4. One response that is often heard among Christians is that the white Church must "listen" to the black faith leaders on issues of racial justice. As you consider Tisby's analysis of how white and black Christians see racial justice differently, what can the white church, (FPCD), learn from Tisby's framing of the black church? In other words, how can our beliefs about faith and justice be expanded by listening to our black sisters and brothers?

Chapter 9: Organizing the Religious Right at the end of the Twentieth Century

In Chapter 5, Tisby outlines how the church sought to separate “Christ” from “Caesar.” In Chapter 9, in contrast, he documents how the “Religious Right” committed to a worldview that inextricably linked Christ and Caesar. Tisby references, for instance, Falwell’s belief that the idea of “religion and politics don’t mix was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country” (p. 166). To frame his thesis, Tisby documents how “many politically and theologically conservative Christians strayed away from the use of explicitly race-based language and appeals.... [and] supported presidents and legal policies that disproportionately and negatively impacted black people. They accepted a color-blind rhetoric that still utilized racially coded messages” (p. 171). He posits that evangelicals could, thus, “hold positions on social and political issues that disproportionately and adversely harm racial and ethnic minorities, but they can still proclaim their own racial innocence” (p. 153). A classic example of this approach was the identification of the “welfare queen,” a “judgement against ‘lazy blacks’ who lack initiative and had no work ethic” (p. 170). This ideology stood alongside the “drug war,” which encompassed a set of policies that “intentionally focused on areas of high poverty where there were a high concentration of racial and ethnic minorities” (p. 169). Tisby notes that also during this period the creation of the “Southern Strategy,” a “racial backlash against the civil rights movement” by which disaffected white voters, including evangelicals, could be mobilized within the political sphere. A critical element of this strategy is the articulation that “America had been founded as a ‘Christian Nation’” (p. 158). This grounding of America as Christian, in turn, emboldened the “suburban warriors,” those who Tisby notes in previous chapters were part of “white flight” from the cities, to create private Christian schools as a means to maintain de facto racially segregated residential communities and schools. In sum, as Tisby argues in previous chapters, white supremacy in the church does not disappear but rather adapts. He concludes, “the American church’s complicity in racism has been less obvious, but it has not required as much effort to maintain. Nowadays, all the American church needs to do in terms of compromise is cooperate with already established and racially unequal social systems” (p. 160). As Tisby writes: “After more than three centuries of deliberate, systematic race-based exclusion, the political system that had intentionally disenfranchised black people continued to do so, yet in less overt ways. Simply by allowing the political system to work as it was designed—to grant advantages to white people and to put people of color at various disadvantages—many well-meaning Christians were complicit in racism” (p. 171).

Chapter 9 Questions

1. “Racism never fully goes away; it adapts to changing times and contexts.” How do you react to that statement? In our day, how has or hasn’t racism adapted?
2. “Though it was necessary to enact civil rights legislation, you cannot erase four hundred years of race-based oppression by passing a few laws.” How do you react to this statement? What does Tisby imply by this statement? What do you think we should do to eradicate racism?

Chapter 10: Reconsidering Racial Reconciliation in the Age of Black Lives Matter

Tisby concludes this chapter on “racial reconciliation” with the note that “centuries of racism in the American church cannot be overcome by ‘pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities’ that ignore the deep social,

political, and cultural divides that persist across the color line” (p. 191). Tisby’s analysis begins with the observation that white and black Christians see their faith through radically different “cultural tool kits.” He argues that “because their religious beliefs reinforce accountable individualism, relationalism, and antistructuralism, many white Christians wrongly assume that racism only includes overt acts, such as calling someone the ‘n-word’” (p. 181). In contrast, Tisby concludes that while black Christians “agree that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is necessary for a saving faith.... They also recognize that structures influence individuals and that addressing America’s racial issues will require systemic change” (p. 176). He documents this “divide” by citing scholars of religion in America. He notes how whites and blacks hold radically different viewpoints on “justice” regarding, for instance, the death of Trayvon Martin. He reports that nearly half of all whites were “satisfied” that justice had been served in the acquittal of George Zimmerman, while only 5% of blacks shared this assessment. Tisby adds that for many black Christians, “the reality that yet another unarmed black youth had been killed and no one would back legal penalties communicated a message that black lives could be extinguished with impunity” (p. 179). In similar fashion he notes that the “divide” between white and black Christians is evident in the Church’s response to the concept and movement that “black lives matter” (as opposed to the embrace of the particular organization named Black Lives Matter). Tisby argues that for the black church, “Black lives matter served as a rallying cry for protests, but it also acted as an assertion of the image of God in black people” (p. 179). Tisby adds that the black lives matter movement offers the white church the opportunity to affirm that “the existential equality of black people” as a profound statement of racial justice. Tisby, borrowing from Soong-Chan Rah, adds that the idea that black lives matter is also a lament against “the racist patterns of devaluing black lives in America’s past” (p. 179). In this context, Tisby notes that “black lives matter presents Christians with an opportunity to mourn with those who mourn and help bear the burdens that racism has heaped on black people” (p. 180). Tisby’s assessment, however, is that the white church’s response to black lives matter is one of a “reflexive rejection.” He argues that the white church has often framed the idea of black lives matter as “playing the race card” and “creating division” by speaking of race and racism (p. 181). He writes how the church’s contemporary response echoes a sentiment of the American evangelical church’s historical idea that speaking of “racial justice somehow indicate[s] a drift away from the ‘true’ gospel” (p. 182). And in a similar vein, Tisby notes that white Christians have responded to black lives matter with the phrase “all lives matter” (p. 191).

In sum, he notes that “the American evangelical church has yet to form a movement as viable and potent that addresses the necessary concept that black lives do indeed matter” (p. 180). He concludes that “those supposedly most equipped for reconciliation [evangelicals] do not see the need for it” (p. 184). Accordingly, Tisby calls the church to action! He borrows from the Southern Baptist Convention noting the church must “lament and repudiate historical acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest” (p. 172). Continuing the book’s discussion of “Christ and Caesar,” Tisby asks the church “Why did so many white evangelicals support Trump despite his obvious racist tendencies?” (p. 187). And, he finishes with the challenge: “if the church hopes to see meaningful progress in race relations... then it must undertake bold, costly actions with an attitude of unprecedented urgency” (p. 191). The actions or “solutions,” he notes are “not easy” nor are they “popular!” But, “no matter their difficulty or distastefulness... they are necessary in order [for Christians] to change the narrative of the American church and race” (p. 191).

Chapter 10 Questions

1. Borrowing from MLK, Tisby asks, “When it comes to opposing racism, have we as a nation overdosed on ‘the tranquility drug of gradualism?’” (pp. 192-3). In light of what you’ve read, how would you respond to this question – about our nation, the American church, FPCD?

2. Discuss the Travon Martin incident. What was your reaction to his death when it happened? What is your response to his death now? Is there any difference? If so, what has influenced you or changed your mind?
3. Discuss the concept *Black Lives Matter*. What was your first impression of *Black Lives Matter*? How does this section help you further understand the movement *Black Lives Matter*?
4. How does Lecrae's experience illustrate Tisby's claim that "Christian complicity with racism does not always require specific acts of bigotry. Being complicit only requires a muted response in the face of injustice or uncritical support of the status quo"? How did Lecrae's white evangelical fans show their complicity with racism or uncritical support of the status quo?
5. Where do you see God working in our current cultural circumstances? How can you participate in His work, in terms of eradicating racism?

Chapter 11: The Fierce Urgency of Now

Tisby writes Chapter 11 as a "response" to the history lesson that Chapters 2-10 is of the Church's complicity with racism—it's compromise of the gospel. He concludes that Christians' actions—"in some cases, they actively constructed ideological and structural impediments to equality"—has resulted in the fact "that large segments of the American church have lost all moral authority to speak prophetically against racism" (p. 211). But Tisby is not without hope! He writes, "many Christians today say they would have been active participants in the civil rights movement fifty years ago. Now, in the midst of a new civil rights movement, is their chance to prove it!" (p. 210). He invokes M. L. King, Jr.: "Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sun lit path of racial justice" (p. 192).

To frame his call for our movement toward the path of racial justice, Tisby borrows from the Reverend William J. Barber, Jr., by pleading for the Church to create a "third reconstruction" (p. 208). Across the chapter, Tisby notes multiple ways that another "civil rights movement" could address issues such as mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, de facto school segregation, funding for Black churches and clergy, the removal of Confederate monuments and flag, reparations, and voting rights. Much of this, Tisby argues, can emerge as the white church learns from vibrant Black Christians who, as they have lamented and rejoiced across American history, have somehow found a way to flourish because of faith.... [who] endure and struggle against present-day forms of racism" (p. 203). To this end, he recommends that Christians, first, increase our awareness of racism, second, develop meaningful cross-racial relationships, and third, make a commitment to action (ARC). Though Tisby starts with awareness, he adds, "no matter how aware you are, your knowledge

will remain abstract and theoretical until you care about the people who face the negative consequences of racism” (p. 195). Thus, he argues for the need to “care about the people who face the negative consequences of racism” (p. 195). Tisby continues that “developing awareness and relationships may create a burden for the struggles of others, but does that burden move you to act?” (p. 196). Specifically, he asks Christians, “are you willing to set aside preferences and prestige to take the side of the marginalized and the despised? More to the point, are you willing to address the systemic and institutional aspects of racism rather than solely work on an interpersonal level?” (p. 196). He notes that “many of the solutions proposed, solutions that actually might prove effective in changing the status quo, are often dismissed as impractical... are deemed too inconvenient to pursue”(p. 193).

But, again, Tisby is not without hope. Tisby’s prayer for the church “is that as people learn about how deep and far reaching the problem of racism is, these ‘radical’ solutions will start to seem more reasonable” (pp. 193-4). A final frame that Tisby presents for us, the church, is the call for “ecclesiastical reparations” (p. 199). Building on Matthew 5:24, he calls on us to consider “the obligations that the faithful have to one another in light of historical injustices” (p. 199). He adds, “much of the American church has not yet considered racism to be a serious enough sin to interrupt their regularly scheduled worship, at least not much beyond conversations and symbolic gestures, to repair the relationship” (p. 199).

Chapter 11 Questions

1. As you read Chapter 11 and you consider Tisby’s ideas for how racial justice might be enacted, what solutions seem too “radical” and “too inconvenient to pursue”? Why?
2. Discuss the four action steps Tisby suggests to increase your awareness of the issues and people involved in racism. (1. Watch documentaries about racial history. 2. Diversify your social media feed by following racial, ethnic, and political outlooks different from yours. 3. Access websites and podcasts created by racial and ethnic minorities. 4. Do an internet search about a particular topic instead of always asking your black friend to explain an issue to you.). Which steps have you already taken?
3. Discuss the three action steps Tisby suggests to develop interracial relationships. (1. Start with the people you know of a different race or ethnicity. 2. Find new places to hang out. 3. Join a sport, club, or activity with people who are different.). Which steps have you already taken to develop interracial relationships? Which steps haven’t you taken yet? Why?
4. Discuss the five action steps proposed for developing a lifelong commitment to racial justice. (1. Create something. 2. Join an organization that advocated for racial and social justice. 3. Donate money to an organization that advocated for racial and social justice. 4. Speak with candidates for elected office in your area about their views of racial justice and their policies. 5. Vote.). Which steps have you already taken toward developing a lifelong commitment to racial justice? Which have you not taken? Why?
5. ARC: Awareness, Relationships, Commitment. As you ponder Tisby’s entire book, assess your “ARC.” Where have you grown? Where do you need to continue to grow? In reading Tisby’s book, you are growing in “Awareness.” In what ways can you continue to grow your “ARC’s” moving forward?

Conclusion: Be Strong and Courageous

Though this is the book's closing chapter, we are electing to have you read it at the start of this book study. We suggest that this chapter establishes a frame for how we should read *The Color of Compromise*, as well as engage with subsequent action. Tisby's book, a "history lesson," documents how fear too often "holds the church back from more aggressive action to bring about justice" (p. 214). And, as he notes, this fear—and indifference and apathy—limits and undermines the church's voice in the world. In contrast, Tisby, invoking Joshua 1, commends us to be "strong and courageous." We acknowledge, as with Tisby, that the reading and discussion of *The Color of Compromise* is, for some, a risk. But, as Tisby notes, "standing for racial justice involves risk." Accordingly, we thank you for choosing to be "strong and courageous" as we collectively wade into the water to fight racism.