



TALKING  
ABOUT RACE

*Gospel  
Hope for Hard  
Conversations*

ISAAC  
ADAMS

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN REFLECTIVE

*Talking about Race*

Copyright © 2022 by Isaac Adams

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Zondervan titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email [SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com).

ISBN 978-0-310-12442-9 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-12443-6 (ebook)

ISBN 978-0-310-12444-3 (audio)

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.Zondervan.com](http://www.Zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Any internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

*Cover design: Micah Kandros Design*

*Cover art: © MicroOne / Shutterstock*

*Interior design: Denise Froehlich*

*Printed in the United States of America*

# INTRODUCTION

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read Ephesians 4:17–32 aloud and pray. What does this passage mean for your conversations about race? In what ways have you not lived up to it? In what ways have you lived up to it by God’s grace? Ask a friend you disagree with on racial issues how they think you’ve done in these conversations (and assure them you won’t respond with sinful anger).
2. The introduction claimed, “Just like in the world, there is broken trust between ethnicities in many American churches.” Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God’s people have been tempted to be like the world. When it comes to race and racism, how have American evangelicals given in to this temptation? How have they fought it?
3. Do you think there’s broken trust between ethnicities in your church and city? Is your congregation one in which you can have honest conversations about race? Why or why not?
4. I’m speaking primarily to and about evangelicals in America. However, while America has its own racial history, racism is not unique to America. What international examples of racial strife can you think of? What lessons do these examples provide?


## CHAPTER 1

# SETTING THE SCENE



### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What was reading the story of Malachi Brewster like for you?
2. What's your earliest memory of recognizing race and/or racial tension?
3. When conversations about race come up, how do you feel?
4. Why do you think the families who began LRCA wanted to move out of the city?



## CHAPTER 2

# A MAJORITY MASK— MEET HUNTER

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion


1. Read 2 Chronicles 20. When we're overwhelmed, to whom should we turn? Take a moment to turn to God in prayer as you think about the matters this chapter has raised.
2. At what points, if any, did you resonate with Hunter's story?
3. What does Hunter get right? What does he get wrong?
4. Describe the mask Hunter is wearing and who he's hiding from. (Hint: he's hiding from more than one person.)
5. Is Hunter's fear of being called a racist right or wrong? Why?
6. How would you help Hunter think through the conversation he wants to have with Darius? Does it matter if Darius speaks first in that conversation? Why or why not? Which Scripture passages inform your answer?
7. What parts of this chapter, if any, challenged or bothered you?
8. Do you pray for people like Hunter in your life? Why or why not? If you do pray for them, what do you pray?



# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR HUNTER

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Has there been a time when you spoke about race in a tone-deaf way, or someone spoke in a tone-deaf way to you? What was the result?
2. How can keeping in mind our own background and someone else's background affect how we think about race?
3. In conversations about race, is your bent to speak about individual actions (animal behavior) or structures (the cage) first? Why? How might keeping both these realities in mind change how you speak about race?
4. When should you lead with lament in conversations about race? What would it look like for you to do so?
5. Would you have counseled Hunter differently than I? Why? In what ways? From which passages of Scripture?



## CHAPTER 3

# A MINORITY MASK— MEET DARIUS

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read Psalm 6. What does the psalmist's confession teach us about what we can do with our sorrows?
2. At what points, if any, did Darius's story resonate with you?
3. What does Darius get right? What does he get wrong?
4. Describe the mask Darius is wearing and who he is hiding from. (Hint: he's hiding from more than one person.)
5. When it comes to being honest about race, is "getting things off our chest" a loving thing to do? Why or why not? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?
6. Should Darius's pastor have asked Darius to give a word of hope? Why or why not?
7. Are Darius's white brothers and sisters wrong for reaching out to him during the racial tragedy? Is there a better way they could reach out? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?
8. Should Darius follow some of his friends to a different church? Why or why not? Is he wrong to convince those leaving to try to stay? Why or why not? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?

9. Do you pray for people like Darius in your life? Why or why not? If you do pray for them, what do you pray?





# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR DARIUS

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you resonate with the fatigue Darius feels? If so, how do you work through that fatigue?
2. How does our freedom in Christ affect how we think through where we'll go to church?
3. Would you have counseled Darius differently than I? Why? In what ways? From which passages of Scripture?

## CHAPTER 4

# A MAJORITY MASK— MEET ANNA BETH AND SAMANTHA LEE



### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. At what points did you resonate with Anna Beth's story?
2. What does Anna Beth get right? What does she get wrong? What about her sister?
3. Describe the mask Anna Beth is wearing and who she is hiding from. (Hint: she's hiding from more than one person.)
4. Are Anna Beth's parents wrong for being concerned for her safety when it came to Anna Beth teaching in an inner-city school?
5. Is Anna Beth treating her church fairly?
6. Samantha Lee defines racism primarily as a feeling in the heart. Is her definition of racism a good one? A bad one? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?
7. Were there any other parts of this chapter that challenged or bothered you?
8. Do you pray for people like Anna Beth and Samantha Lee in your life? Why or why not?



# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ANNA BETH

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion (for Anna Beth)

1. Have you had a catalytic event in your life (or multiple events)? What was it? How did you respond?
2. Would you have counseled Anna Beth differently than I? Why? In what ways? From which passages of Scripture?



# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SAMANTHA LEE

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion (for Samantha Lee)

1. Would you have counseled Samantha Lee differently than I? Why? In what ways? From which passages of Scripture?
2. What questions/statements have you found to help clarify and advance conversations about racial issues? What questions/statements have you found to hinder them?



## CHAPTER 5

# A MINORITY MASK— MEET JANE (EUN-JI)

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. At what points did you resonate with Jane's story?
2. What does Jane get right? What does she get wrong?
3. Describe the mask Jane is wearing and who she is hiding from. (Hint: she's hiding from more than one person.)
4. Should the race conversation be primarily black and white? Why or why not? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?
5. On the scale of 1 to 10 below, how important is your race/ethnicity to your identity as a Christian?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not Important

Very Important

6. What parts of this chapter challenged or bothered you?
7. Do you pray for people like Jane in your life? Why or why not?



# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR JANE

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do your conversations about race usually wind up being about the black-white divide only, or are they more expansive? Why?
2. How can we make our conversations about racial matters more inclusive, and why should we?
3. Why should Christians remember our shared identity in Christ? What happens if we don't? Why is this identity hard to remember?
4. How can Christians keep the emphasis on our shared identity in Christ in our conversations about race? How can we do so without sounding like we're denigrating the experiences of others?

# A MAN AMONG MASKS— MEET THEIR PASTOR

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Jesus feel about churches like Pastor Bruce's? How should we?
2. At what points did you resonate with Bruce's story?
3. What does Bruce get right? What does he get wrong?
4. Describe the mask Bruce is wearing and who all he is hiding from. (Hint: he's hiding from more than one person.)
5. Is letting the news of racial tragedies “blow over” a wise pastoral strategy? Why or why not? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?
6. Is Pastor Bruce wrong to be suspicious of the books suggested to him? Why or why not? Which passages of Scripture inform your answer?
7. Do you regularly pray for your pastor as he shepherds your fellow church members amid race relations? Why or why not?



# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THEIR PASTOR

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How have you treated your pastor as he navigates racial tensions? Have you reached out to him to talk about race matters? Have you encouraged him? Criticized him? Why or why not?
2. When it comes to matters of race and racism, how does realizing more of what we're up against change our perspective?
3. What are some pitfalls of idolizing unity? Of idolizing diversity?
4. Take some time to pray for your pastor now.



# WHY SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT RACE ACROSS COLOR LINES?

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of the six reasons for engaging in conversations about race across color lines resonated with you the most? Why?
2. Which reason did you disagree with most, if any? Why?
3. How does the gospel uniquely give hope to both perpetrators and victims of racism? Does the gospel give you hope regarding racism? Why or why not?
4. Before moving on to the next part of this workbook, pray that you would be more honest, hopeful, and humble in conversations about race.

## CHAPTER 8

# WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT RACE ACROSS COLOR LINES?



### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of the reasons for why it is so hard to talk about race across color lines resonated with you most? Why?
2. Which reason did you most disagree with, if any? Why?
3. What reasons would you add to this list? Why would you add those reasons?

# CLOSING THE SCENE

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What do you think Hunter said to Brother Mack? How do you think Brother Mack responded?
2. You'll remember Jackson and Clay from the opening scene. As regards race, what kind of world do you think they'll grow up in? What kind of world would you like them to grow up in? How can you, by God's grace, be a part of making that kind of world?

# GLOSSARY

*Christian.* A person who has trusted in Jesus's death and resurrection for salvation by faith alone. While a Christian will not live perfectly in light of this trust, they will live repentantly, in accordance with Scripture.

*church, local.* A congregation of baptized believers who gather regularly in one place for the administration of the Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

*church, multiethnic.* The general standard of a multiethnic church, established by sociologists (though not mandated by Scripture), is a local church in which one ethnicity does not make up more than 80 percent of the whole congregation.

*ethnicity.* A word that refers to the way people identify with each other based on commonalities such as language, history, ancestry, nationalities, customs, and values. In the Bible, the Greek word *ethnos* in the New Testament can refer to people groups (who, most basically, would recognize "us" as being different from "them") but can also refer to a nation. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus referred to "all nations" (all *ethnē*).

*evangelical.* Entire works have been devoted to defining this word. Yet, for my purposes, I simply mean Christians who believe in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture and the gospel message as defined below.

*evangelicalism.* For the purposes of this book, I use *evangelicalism* to refer to the larger subculture that evangelicals have built

around their churches and institutions (schools, publishing houses, music, political involvement, etc.).

*gospel.* The gospel is the joyous declaration that God is redeeming the world through Christ and that he commands everyone everywhere to turn from sin and trust Jesus Christ for salvation. Each of us has sinned against God, breaking his law and rebelling against his rule, and the penalty for our sin is death and hell. But because of his love, God sent his Son, Jesus, to live, for his people's sake, the perfect, obedient life God requires and to die on the cross in our place for our sin. On the third day, Christ rose bodily from the grave and now reigns in heaven, offering forgiveness, righteousness, resurrection, and eternal blessedness in God's presence to everyone who repents of sin and trusts solely in him for salvation.

*race.* A word that can refer to "the human race or a specific ethnic group, but which can be falsely used to mean a category of people with an inherently different value than other people."<sup>1</sup> When Scripture speaks of "race," it means group, class, or kind. Biblically, there is one human race, there are many ethnicities, and there are two spiritual races (those in Adam and those in Christ).

*race conversation, the.* You may hear this phrase often. It is a catch-all term for conversations relating to ethnicity, race, racism, racial justice, racial reconciliation, and so on. The trouble is that the term is so broad that we may be talking about different ideas that overlap but also have important distinctions. Ironically, there is no one "race conversation," thus one person might be having one kind of conversation about race while their listener is desiring another. Hence the frustration we often see.

*racial-justice conversation, the.* Generally, conversations about racial justice revolve around addressing the injustices different

ethnicities, particularly African Americans, have experienced and experience still—both in the church and in broader society. This conversation highlights transgressions that prevent fellowship between believers and other image bearers from flourishing. Racial justice is often emphasized by those in the racial minority. And so, with an eye toward the suffering community, this conversation focuses on Christians loving one another and their neighbor, regardless of the neighbor's religion (Mark 12:31). It focuses on not withholding good to those to whom it is due when it is in our power to do it (Proverbs 3:27). Many Christians appreciate these aims in theory but disagree about how to best carry them out.

*racial-reconciliation conversation, the.* Generally, conversations about racial reconciliation revolve around Christians of different ethnicities faithfully living in step (in the present) with what Christ has done (in the past) through his death and resurrection: He has made one new, united humanity (Ephesians 2:11–22), a chosen race (1 Peter 2:9). This conversation highlights the importance of unity between believers. Racial reconciliation is often emphasized by those in the racial majority. And so, with an eye toward the church, this conversation focuses on Christians loving one another and building relationships, a goal Christians appreciate. However, many other Christians find this goal, often evoked by calls for unity from the majority, to sound hollow, hypocritical, and out of touch if sins regarding race are not addressed.

*racial tragedy.* A lamentable event that, regardless of who is right or wrong, echoes or connotes racial tensions and dynamics.

*racism.* Biblically speaking, racism is ethnic partiality (James 2:1). This partiality can be expressed individually (as we see in Numbers 12 with Aaron and Miriam toward Moses's

Ethiopian wife) or structurally (as we see in Esther, with Haman's state-sponsored initiative to annihilate the Jews); and it can be expressed overtly or covertly.

*structural racism.* An unjust system (e.g., written or unwritten laws, traditions, procedures, formal or informal habits, cultural practices) that wrongly favors an ethnicity (or race). Structural racism is so insidious because it can operate regardless of one's individual intentions.