

HOLDING UP YOUR CORNER

YOUTH RESOURCE

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# CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Diversity Terms	5
Segment 1: Introduction to Terms and Concepts	7
Segment 2: Acknowledge	15
Segment 3: Affirm	20
Segment 4: ACT	30

## INTRODUCTION

### *Why this resource?*

The amount of tension and division in our society is overwhelming. Often, we look at the problems of the world and think, “what can I really do about it?” For many of us, issues of injustice can often seem staggering and irreversible. We do not know what to do or how to begin. Systems and structures are so complex that it is difficult even to grasp exactly what is going on, and so even in times of crisis, we typically do less than we know we could. For others, issues of injustice are nearly invisible to us, simply because we have not yet encountered experiences that are different from ours.

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbor and to model a different way of being in relationship with one another.

This resource will help students to determine where and how to start by encouraging them to acknowledge those things in our world that are neither right nor righteous; supporting them in theological reflection and exploration in order to hear God’s call for us to respond; and empowering them to take actionable steps to address bias, prejudice, or other injustices.

### *Guide for facilitation*

As a facilitator, it is your role to guide conversation and to help participants to think through and come to their own conclusions about the material being discussed.

### *Facilitators must*

- Ensure all participants feel comfortable enough to contribute. Invite quiet participants to speak up, and encourage participants who dominate the circle to listen to others.
- Remain neutral. Before facilitating this conversation, examine your own biases on the topic to ensure you can remain neutral while leading the discussion.
- Be prepared. Study materials thoroughly before facilitating a dialogue.
- Keep the conversation focused and on schedule. It is important to address questions and allow participants ample time to process their thoughts; however, as facilitator, you must ensure the conversation stays on topic and that participants adhere to the timeline of the event.
- Handle any issues, tensions, or conflict that arise by moving the conversation along. If something troubling is said, give other participants the chance to address it (e.g., “Does anyone have a different opinion?”). It may be helpful for

facilitators to rephrase comments to achieve clarity (e.g., “I believe you are saying \_\_\_\_\_. Is that what you meant?”).

- Prioritize “asking” over “telling.” Facilitators can repeat or summarize information from the conversation, but they should focus on asking questions to further conversation rather than dominating conversation.
- Ensure that the conversation is oriented around dialogue rather than debate. Debate focuses on winning while dialogue focuses on finding and exploring common ground and understanding. Encourage participants to keep an open mind, to listen to opinions that differ from their own, and to seek to understand rather than influence one another.

## DIVERSITY TERMS

Conversations around diversity can be hard to enter into, especially if we don't fully understand the words that others use to describe complex systems. Here are definitions for terms that will come up over the course of your two-day conversation. Keep this list handy to refer to as needed.

**Ally:** a person of a social identity group who stands in support of members of another group; typically a member of a dominant group standing beside member(s) of a targeted group (e.g., a man who advocates for equal pay for women).

**Bias:** an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

**Bigotry:** intolerance of cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, or political beliefs that differ from one's own.

**Discrimination:** unfavorable or unfair treatment toward an individual or group based on race, sex, color, religion, national origin, age, gender identity, physical or mental abilities, or sexual orientation.

**Identity Group:** a particular group, culture, or community with which an individual identifies or shares a sense of belonging.

**Oppression:** severe exercise of power and subjugation that works systematically, institutionally, and interpersonally to privilege one group and disadvantage another.

**Prejudice:** to prejudge; to form an opinion without knowing the facts; a feeling, unfavorable or favorable, toward a person or thing prior to, or not based on, actual experience (a prejudice, unlike a misconception, is actively resistant to all new evidence).

**Privilege:** advantage or benefits that individuals or groups of individuals enjoy because of membership in a dominant identity group (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, class privilege). Privilege is often invisible to those who benefit from it.

**Race:** a historically and socially constructed category used to differentiate people based on physical characteristics such as skin color.

**Racism:** unequal treatment of, or violence against, people because of their race; the belief that some races of people are better than others (racism can be perpetrated by both individuals and institutions).

**Stereotype:** a relatively rigid and oversimplified conception of a group of people in which all individuals in the group are labeled and often treated based on perceived group characteristics.

**Systemic or Institutional Oppression:** a nexus in which established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups.

## SEGMENT 1: INTRODUCTION TO TERMS AND CONCEPTS

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will create ground rules for conversation.
- Students will be able to describe an empathic model of transformation.
- Students will be able to describe and provide examples of social constructs.

### LESSON COMPONENTS

- Scripture and Reflection
- Introduction: Empathic Models of Transformation
- Activity: Setting Ground Rules
  
- Activity: Battle of the Sexes
- Lesson: Social Constructs
- Prayer
- Level Up: Deliberative Theology

### SCRIPTURE: MARK 2:1-5 (CEB)

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!"

### REFLECTION

In this story, we don't get much information about the man on the mat. We don't know what's happened to him; we don't know if he's always been this way or if he has some kind of disability, injury or disease. All we know is that he is unable to bring himself to the place of hope and healing, and that four men come along to carry him. The Bible doesn't tell us who these men are. Are these family members of the man on the mat? Friends? Perhaps. But it is also possible that these four men are strangers to this hurt one. So these four men come along, and they each lift a corner of the mat. And when they can't get through the door, they rip the roof off the place in order to bring the hurt one to the source of hope and healing—Jesus.

## Discussion Questions

- If you were one of the men aiding the man with paralysis how would you react when you saw the crowds after getting him that far?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the men who carry the man with paralysis?
- What does this verse teach us about God?
- What does this verse teach us about God's call on our lives?

## INTRODUCTION: EMPATHIC MODELS OF TRANSFORMATION

The men carrying the man with paralysis in today's scripture reading were EMTs (emergency medical technicians) of antiquity. They were responsible for taking a hurt one to the place of hope and healing, just as modern emergency medical technicians take hurt folks to the hospital. However, these men weren't medical technicians—rather, they themselves were **empathic models of transformation**. They saw a hurt man lying in the street and instead of walking by and continuing their day as planned, they decided to prioritize the needs of someone else. They were empathetic—they were able to put themselves in the hurt one's place and see his pain. They *cared*, and this motivated them to act.

That is what God requires of us. As Christians, we follow a pretty radical example. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus ignores social custom and tradition in order to create transformation. As his followers, we are called to continue this transformation of the world around us. We are called not to live by the ways of the world, but according to God's will, which guides us toward love and justice.

There are a lot of things in this world that are neither right nor righteous. That's probably why you're using this resource right now. Our world is divided and tense. We all exist within our own comfort zones and echo chambers. In order to follow God, we have to turn ourselves into models of transformation. We have to be the proof that there is a better way.

In order to become **empathic models of transformation**, we must:

Acknowledge: those things that are neither right nor righteous in our world, and our place within unjust social, political, and economic systems.

Affirm: the humanity of those who are marginalized.

Act: in a way that reflects our beliefs. Once we know better, we have to do better.

We can't figure out how to become empathic models of transformation until we learn to see the world in a different way. We need to think about our lives and our relationships differently. We cannot change the world until we first change ourselves and our own understandings.

Over the next few hours, days, and weeks, we will be examining and questioning the things that we believe to be true in order to find God's truth and to become agents of transformation. This is a feat that is easier said than done. Questioning the things we assume to be true requires us to think about things that we don't know—or that we haven't thought to think about before.

Throughout this study, we will question our assumptions. We will challenge our biases and prejudices, and we will confront our ignorance. This kind of self-work requires much from us. After all, we'll only get out as much as we put into this effort. True transformation requires us to be vulnerable, honest, and authentic. It will require us to step out of our comfort zones and to share deeply with one another.

#### ACTIVITY: SETTING GROUND RULES

When engaging in dialogue about difficult subjects such as race and inequality, it is important to set a tone for conversation that allows all students to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. While it is possible to create a list of rules or expectations for students to follow, allowing them to generate and form consensus around expectations empowers students to engage in conversation in the face of discomfort by naturally creating an environment that is conducive to collaboration. This process should take no longer than thirty minutes.

##### *Instructions*

- Ask participants to brainstorm ground rules to ensure that they are comfortable participating in respectful group conversation. Record suggestions on a whiteboard or sticky notes. All ground rules should be stated in positive language (e.g., "Listen while others are speaking," rather than "Don't interrupt").
- Ask participants for feedback on the suggested rules; adjust, combine, or add clarity as necessary.
- Adjust rules until consensus is reached. It is vital that all parties agree to follow the rules as created by the group at this stage.
- Agree on a signal for people to use when feeling uncomfortable or attacked (e.g., saying, "Ouch!" or "Oops!"). If someone feels uncomfortable with something that is said, the word *ouch* can signal this discomfort and alert the facilitator to these feelings. Individuals who say, "Ouch!" should be given the chance to explain why they are upset or uncomfortable. Participants who unintentionally create

discomfort can respond with “Oops!” to signal no ill intent and a desire to correct the situation.

Place the ground rules somewhere visible within the meeting space so they can be referred to as needed.

### *Suggested Ground Rules*

It is likely that your group will not need suggestions in order to develop ground rules, but these examples will help get the ball rolling if your participants are shy at the start of your conversation.

- Assume the best.
- Keep an open mind.
- Step up and step back, step up and step back. If you are normally quiet, push yourself to speak more. If you normally speak a lot, push yourself to listen more.
- Speak from your own experience. Use “I” statements.
- Keep confidentiality.
- Use active listening.

### ACTIVITY: BATTLE OF THE SEXES

Today, we’re just going to start by warming up and practice questioning our assumptions. Close your eyes and think of a girl. Just a generic girl. Think about what she looks like. What does she like to do? How does she act? Now think of a boy. What does he look like? What does he like to do with his time? How does he act?

### *Instructions*

- Divide whiteboard or poster into two columns: boys and girls. Ask students to provide words, traits, or qualities that are associated with each identity.
- For example: boys are messy, aggressive, and athletic; girls like makeup and are more nurturing.
- Record answers on the board.

### *Note*

If students are resistant to provide answers (because they already have discovered the lesson in this activity), push students to provide examples of stereotypes associated with gender. We want to know what society says about boys and girls.

### *Discussion Questions*

- How do these lists compare with the person that you really are? Do you have the qualities that we listed?
- How do you feel about these definitions of what it means to be a boy or a girl?
- How did making this list feel?
- What other identities could we use in this activity?
- What would our list look like if we used the words *white* and *black*, or *gay* and *straight*?

### LESSON: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

#### *Definitions*

**Identity Group:** a particular group, culture, or community with which an individual identifies or shares a sense of belonging.

**Social Construct:** an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society.

**Race:** a historically and socially constructed category used to differentiate people based on physical characteristics such as skin color.

We just learned in our activity that gender is a social construct. A social construct is an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society. We are all assigned a sex at birth—it is a medical reality—but the way we are expected to live out our gender is socially constructed. Society has told us that girls are prissy, delicate, and should like dresses and dolls, while boys are strong, rough, and don't cry. However, these stereotypes don't really match up with most of us as individuals.

God created us in our diversity. People come in different shapes, sizes, and colors with different preferences, experiences, and interests. Throughout human history, we (humans) have turned this spectrum of humanity into a limited number of categories or boxes. All of us were raised in a world where these categories carry a lot of weight. These social constructs guide our impressions of other people, and how others perceive us.

Other categories like race, class, and nationality are also social constructs. While Americans are used to categories like black and white—the reality is that we live in a world with millions of skin tones. Politicians, businessmen, scientists, and doctors throughout history have divided us

into categories that are based on how we look. God did not create black and white people—God created humanity and we’ve decided to subcategorize.

#### PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Prepare our hearts for some hard work. Please be with us through the coming weeks as we begin to figure out how we can be agents of hope and healing in our broken world. Forgive us for all of the times that we will fall short, and catch us when we fall. Extend your grace over our efforts and help us to be honest, authentic, and vulnerable. We know that spiritual growth requires us to be uncomfortable and unsure, but we have assurance that we will not go through this process alone. Transform our hearts. Transform our lives. Transform our world.

In the name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.

#### LEVEL UP: DELIBERATIVE THEOLOGY

*What is theology?*

Merriam-Webster defines *theology* as, “the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; *especially* : the study of God and of God’s relation to the world.”<sup>1</sup> Our theology is our god-talk.

#### *Embedded vs. Deliberative Theology*

Those of us who were raised in church or families of faith already have some theological understandings. We grew up in families that taught us about God. We attended services or Sunday school classes that told us what some biblical stories meant. We learned how to carry the theology that we grew up in—usually assuming that the understanding of faith that we developed as children is more or less what faith is all about.

These understandings that we absorb from the people around us and religious authority figures make up our **embedded theology**—the theological things that we have been taught. An **embedded theology** is one that we take for fact.

The truth is that theology is much more complicated than we learn when we memorize Bible stories as kids. The Bible is a long and sometimes confusing book. Some passages don’t immediately make sense, and sometimes it seems like verses directly contradict one another.

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<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “theology,” accessed January 19, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>.

Imagine your faith life as a large tree. Our **embedded theology** is the root system of the tree. It is where growth starts, and it provides the foundation and nourishment for the rest of the tree to grow.

As the tree grows and matures, the trunk begins to grow as a sprout turns into a sapling. As we grow, we begin to interact with our faith on a more personal, individualized level. The trunk of our faith tree is **deliberative theology**.

**Deliberative theology** requires us to examine those things that we have assumed to be true or those things that we have taken for granted. It is an understanding of God, God's relationship to humanity, and God's call on our lives that arises out of reflection and conversation.

Building a **deliberative theology** can be difficult and uncomfortable. After all, it is always hard to question those things we hold most dearly. It can be hard to let go of the simpler answers from our childhood in order to interact with God and God's word on our own in order to grow in understanding and faith.

The tree of our theology eventually blooms into branches that represent how we live out our faith. They develop into our prayer life, our ethical actions, our worship, and so much more. Our **deliberative theology** gives us the strength and resilience to grow our faith lives into strong, healthy, and mature metaphorical trees.

### *Asking Theological Questions*

In order to begin constructing a **deliberative theology**, we must first learn how to ask theological questions while reading biblical texts. Our goal with these questions must always be to further our understanding of a passage while deepening our understanding of God. When reading from the Bible, we must always look for the principle behind the passage. We may not be kings—but passages providing instruction to biblical leaders still has something to teach us. Asking theological questions of the text allows us to gain better understanding of the meaning behind the passage and helps us to determine how this new understanding affects how we live out our lives as Christians.

Throughout this study, build a habit of asking the following questions while reading the Bible:

- What does this passage teach us about who God is?
- What does this passage teach us about people?
- What does this passage teach us about the relationship between God and people?
- What does this passage teach us about relating to others?

**Practice this exercise by reading a familiar passage and answering these theological questions for that text.**

## SEGMENT 2: ACKNOWLEDGE

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to describe at least two forms of systematic inequality.
- Students will be able to share their autobiography.
- Students will be able to provide a Christ-based response for injustice and inequity.

### LESSON COMPONENTS

- Scripture and Reflection
- Activity: Racial Autobiography
  
- Lesson: A Picture of Inequality
- Prayer
- Level Up: Scientific Racism

### SCRIPTURE: GALATIANS 6:1-3 (CEB)

Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are important when they aren't, they're fooling themselves.

### REFLECTION

We live in an age that is dominated by critical comments. TV show hosts, magazines, and Internet articles rip apart celebrities for what they wear, how they look, and even how they parent. Our social media pages are full of celebrity gossip and advertisers that tell us that we aren't thin enough, athletic enough, pretty enough, rich enough. People spew hate at one another from behind the safety of their keyboards. Harmful stereotypes and assumptions allow politicians and citizens alike to criticize those who are marginalized and oppressed: "They wouldn't be poor if . . ."

God calls us into a different way of life. As Christians, we have a duty to break out of the cycle of criticism in order to share one another's burdens. We have to reserve judgment and reach out instead with love and understanding. No one is so right that they don't need forgiveness, and no one is so wrong that they don't deserve grace.

### *Discussion Questions*

- What is the core message in this passage?
- What do you think it means to share someone’s burden?
- How can we “forgivingly restore” someone (or something) that has fallen into sin?
- What does this verse tell us about who God is?

#### ACTIVITY: RACIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Communicating across differences can be really hard. It requires us to see the world from different perspectives. The first step to building this communication is getting to know ourselves and beginning to share ourselves with others. Today we are going to do an activity that will help us get to know and share a bunch of different parts of ourselves.

Our lives are largely defined by our experiences. As we grow up, we assume that everyone’s life looks more or less like ours: that every school is like ours, that every family is like ours, and that everyone’s relationship with the leaders in their community is like our relationships. However, this is not really the case. Our heads are full of all sorts of assumptions of things that are true for everyone, when in reality, it may only be so for us or for people who look and act like us.

This exercise will focus on racial identity, but will require us to think about all of our identities. Our identities are all of those things that make us who we are. Each one of us has a whole bunch of identities that intersect with one another. For example, I am a \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m also \_\_\_\_\_ at the same time. All of our different identities connect in order to make us one, whole, unique person. We call that intersectionality. We are intersectional when we pay attention to the many identities that make up everyone we meet.

A racial autobiography examines the formation of one’s understanding of and relation to race. The practice of constructing a racial autobiography allows one to consider the many factors involved in the formation of these understandings. It is vital to reflect upon and analyze our understanding toward race, and any shifts in thinking we’ve experienced in order to define and share our autobiography.

#### *Supplies*

Paper, crayons, colored pencils, markers, pens or pencils.

#### *Instructions*

- Print or project questions where students can see them.
- Distribute paper and art supplies to students.

- Have students fold their paper in half to form four evenly-sized boxes. Each box provides space for students to answer one racial autobiography question.
- Review questions with students while providing short examples for each question.
- Provide brief examples of how you would answer each question—this will encourage vulnerability and sharing in students.
- Encourage students to express themselves however they are most comfortable—writing, drawing, using song lyrics, or just using stick figures and symbols.
- Give students ten to twelve minutes in silence to answer the following questions:
  - What were you taught about race growing up (from family, friends, media, church)?
  - How do you identify (in regard to race)? What does your racial identity mean to you?
  - What other identities are important to you?
  - What experiences have you had with diversity?

### *Debrief*

- What did you notice about the discussion at your tables? Were your experiences mostly similar, or were there a lot of differences? Why do you think that is?
- How did it feel to write, draw, and share answers to these questions?
- How can you (we) continue this conversation on your (our) knowledge, experience, and perceptions on or around race?
- Were there any moments of discomfort in this activity? Why do you think you felt that way?
- Who can you share this exercise with? Your parents? Your friends?

## LESSON: A PICTURE OF INEQUALITY

### *Definitions*

**Systemic or Institutional Oppression:** a nexus in which established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups.

**Oppression:** severe exercise of power and subjugation that works systematically, institutionally, and interpersonally to privilege one group and disadvantage another.

**Racism:** the unequal treatment of, or violence against, people because of their race; the belief that some races of people are better than others. (Racism can be perpetrated by both individuals and institutions.)

## *Reflection Questions*

- Jesus tells us that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. What does that mean in the face of inequality?
- How do we love people who are different from us? How do we love people we've never met?
- Galatians 6:1-3 asks us to share the burden of the oppressed. What does it mean to share another's burden in light of this new information?

## PRAYER

Creator God,

Please open our eyes to the injustices of the world around us. Help us to live creatively—to think outside the box. Give us the courage to examine our stories and open our hearts to the stories of others. Transform our hearts. Transform our lives. Transform our world.

In Jesus's name we pray. AMEN.

## LEVEL UP: SCIENTIFIC RACISM

Last segment, we learned that gender is a social construct. Race is likewise a social construct. Diversity and difference in skin tone is a reality. However, the racial categories that we assign to different hues is a system that was built by humans over the course of our history. Many of us have either met individuals or seen folks in the media that don't fall into our neat racial categories. Sometimes, the line between black and brown is skewed. Does light skin make someone white? What is that individual having parents of different racial backgrounds? Race isn't so simple (or as black and white) as we have been raised to believe. These categories are not innate to us, but are put on us by society.

### *Historical shifts in whiteness*

On its surface, it may seem easy to tell who counts as "white." We have a specific expectation for skin color, eye shape, and hair texture. However, not all of those who identify as white today would have been considered white throughout American history. For example, Jewish individuals were seen as "other" and were not accepted into white identity until the time in-between World War I and World War II. Prior to this, Jewish individuals were considered "others" and "outsiders." Many white supremacist groups continue to exclude Jewish people from the category of whiteness.

Even prior to the assimilation of Jewish communities into white identity, our country experienced multiple waves of new immigrants that were considered "other" despite little diversity in skin tone. During the Industrial Revolution, Irish and Italian individuals were

considered “other.” These communities that often lived in tenement housing were seen as separate races—each with its own vices that made it a burden on society. Only later, after culturally and socially assimilating, these ethnicities were included in the American category of whiteness.

### *Historical shifts in blackness*

Perceptions of blackness and what black identity means have also changed throughout time. During American slavery, black folks were believed to be “brutish and strong.” Experts of the day argued that while blacks were intellectually inferior to whites, they were capable of hard physical labor because of a natural predisposition not to experience pain as white individuals did due to a “primitive nervous system.” Scientists even studied the shapes of slaves’ heads compared to those of their masters’ to support these theories—this branch of science was called Phrenology. After the Civil War, the perception of blackness shifted to stereotypes of the laziness and sickly nature of black people—directly contradicting “earlier scientific findings.”

While the color of an individual’s skin did not change, the meaning or construction of his or her racial identity did change—it was given different meanings throughout time. Unfortunately, we can still see the residual effect of these constructions in damaging stereotypes such as the notion that black students cannot achieve the same academic heights of white students, or the assumption that all black people are inherently athletic.

For more information about the construction of race (and the “science” that supported it), check out *RACE—The Power of an Illusion*, a three-part PBS documentary about race in society, science, and history.

## SEGMENT 3: AFFIRM

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to define privilege and describe a form of privilege that they have.
- Students will be able to describe current forms of lament.
- Students will be able to ask emotion-based questions about historical events in order to connect them to the present.

### LESSON COMPONENTS

- Scripture and Reflection
- Lesson: Privilege
- Activity: Privilege Walk
  
- Lesson: Hearing the Hollering
- Activity: Lament and Protest
- Prayer
- Level Up: Letter from Birmingham Jail

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 137:1-4 (CEB)

Alongside Babylon's streams,  
there we sat down,  
crying because we remembered Zion.  
We hung our lyres up  
in the trees there  
because that's where our captors asked us to sing;  
our tormentors requested songs of joy:  
"Sing us a song about Zion!" they said.  
But how could we possibly sing  
the Lord's song on foreign soil?

### REFLECTION

In this passage, the Jewish people have been captured and taken from their lands. The people have been enslaved, and their captors are demanding entertainment! They are asking for joy and song from a people who have lost everything they have owned, whose temple was destroyed, and who have been forced to leave their homes behind. The Jewish people are left wondering, "How can we sing praises amidst all of this injustice and pain?"

### *Discussion Questions*

- What emotions is the psalmist describing? How do you relate to these emotions? Have you ever felt like this?
- How can a person honor God while dealing with strong emotions?
- How would we rewrite this verse to apply to a modern-day American context?
- What does this verse teach us about who God is?

### LESSON: PRIVILEGE

#### *Definitions*

**Privilege:** advantage or benefits that individuals or groups of individuals enjoy because of their membership in a dominant identity group (e.g., white privilege, male privilege, class privilege). Privilege is often invisible to those who benefit from it.

We all have identities that grant us privileges. We live in the United States—there are privileges that go along with that (we have access to public services like schools and roads. We have more economic power and access to health care than those who live in the developing world). We're also Christians in a predominantly Christian nation—there are privileges that go along with that too (schools and offices close for some of our religious holidays, people do not assume we are terrorists because of our faith).

Privilege can be hard to understand because it is often invisible to those who have it. The folksinger Ani DiFranco describes privilege as “a headache that you don't know that you don't have.” Privilege protects us from some kinds of disadvantage or struggle, so privilege is ultimately a lack of these experiences. If we spend all of our time with people who share a lot of the same privileges that we have, we might not understand the difference in experience and perspectives that others may have.

Does anyone have an example of identities that carry privilege? Can you think of an example of privilege? *Record student answers on whiteboard or poster paper.*

#### *Example*

Some white folks have a hard time understanding recent protests against police systems. If all of my experience with police officers have been positive, I might not understand what black folks are “complaining about.” The reality is that black folks get pulled over at a disproportionate rate. In 2016, the Missouri attorney general released a report that stated “the rate at which African-American motorists were stopped is 1.75 times that of the rate at which White motorists were

stopped. In other words, accounting for their respective proportions of Missouri’s driving-age population, African-Americans were stopped at a rate 75% higher than Whites.”<sup>2</sup> And it’s not just in Missouri; The Bureau of Justice Statistics last reported on traffic stops in a 2011 report that stated, “A higher percentage of black drivers (13%) than white (10%) and Hispanic (10%) drivers were stopped by police during 2011” and that “A lower percentage of white drivers stopped by police in 2011 were searched (2%) than black (6%) or Hispanic (7%) drivers.”<sup>3</sup>

If I haven’t been exposed to these unjust practices myself, I might not know they even exist. My privilege makes it invisible.

#### ACTIVITY: PRIVILEGE WALK

Today’s exercise will ask you either to take a step forward (to signify an advantage of privilege) or backward (to show a lack of advantage or privilege). We are all unique, with our own intersections of identities, so at the end of this exercise, we might be all over the room. Where we end up shows us our place within systems of power. It doesn’t say anything about who we are as human beings.

This exercise is like that old improv comedy show “Whose Line is anyway?”—it’s all made up and the points don’t matter. Privilege is a social construct—it was invented by people. And where you end up at the end of the exercise doesn’t really matter. What matters is what you do with your privilege, and what actions you take after you are aware of your privilege.

#### *Instructions*

- Participants should stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a line across the room without speaking. This exercise takes up a good deal of space.
- Be sure that each student has enough room to take ten steps forward and ten steps backward. Some questions may require all students to take a step, while others might not require any of your students to take a step.
- Students who do not feel comfortable are not required to take steps (for example, a student might not want to share that he or she has gone hungry because his or her family could not purchase food).
- While this exercise is most impactful when students fully participate, the questions themselves will force students to examine their own privilege, even if other students aren’t taking steps.

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<sup>2</sup> “Statewide Findings.” *2016 Vehicle Stops Executive Summary*. Missouri Attorney General Josh Howley <http://ago.mo.gov/home/vehicle-stops-report/2016-executive-summary#summary>

<sup>3</sup> “Police Behaviors During Traffic and Street Stops.” *US Department of Justice Special Report*. September 2013. <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=702>

## PRIVILEGE WALK

1. If you were ever called names because of your race, class, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
2. If you consider the layout or features of a location before making plans (e.g., Are there stairs? Can I use the bathroom?), take one step back.
3. If you were ever ashamed or embarrassed of your clothes, house, car, and so on, take one step back.
4. If your parents were professionals: doctors, lawyers, and so on, take one step forward.
6. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step back.
7. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
8. If you started school speaking a language other than English, take one step back.
9. If there were more than fifty books in your house when you grew up, take one step forward.
10. If you ever had to skip a meal or go hungry because there was not enough money to buy food when you were growing up, take one step back.
11. If you were taken to art galleries or plays by your parents, take one step forward.
12. If one of your parents was unemployed or laid off, not by choice, take one step back.
13. If you attend private school or summer camp, take one step forward.
14. If your family ever had to move because your family could not afford the rent, take one step back.
15. If you were regularly told that you were beautiful, smart, and capable by your family, take one step forward.
16. If you were ever discouraged from academics or jobs because of race, class, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.

17. If you are encouraged to attend college by your parents, take one step forward.
18. If you were raised in a single-parent household, take one step back.
19. If your family owns your family's home, take one step forward.
20. If you regularly see members of your race, ethnic group, gender or sexual orientation portrayed on television in degrading roles, take one step back.
21. If you were ever accused of cheating or lying because of your race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
22. If you ever inherited money or property, take one step forward.
23. If you had to rely primarily on public transportation, take one step back.
24. If you were ever stopped or questioned by the police because of your race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.
25. If you were ever afraid of violence because of your race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.
26. If you were generally able to avoid places that were dangerous, take one step forward.
27. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.
28. If your parents did not grow up in the United States, take one step back.
29. If you have ever been scared to live in your neighborhood, take one step back.
30. If you can find bandages at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.

### *Privilege Quiz: Debrief Conversation*

Ask participants to remain in their positions and to look at their position at the site and the positions of the other participants. Ask students, “What do you notice?” Students may be spread across the room, or grouped closer together depending on the diversity of the group. If students are grouped together, point out shared identities—if the group is spread far apart, note the differences in lived experience.

Students should return to small groups or a whole group to discuss the following questions:

- What happened?
- How did this exercise make you feel?
- What were your thoughts as you did this exercise?
- What have you learned from this experience?
- Did you notice any times when everyone moved in the same direction? What does that teach us?
- Was there a time when you were the only one who took a step? How did it make you feel? Had you considered your situation unique in that way before?
- What can you do with this information in the future?

### LESSON: HEARING THE HOLLER

A few segments ago we talked about the identities that shape our experiences and perspectives. It shapes how we respond to protests, activists, and social upheaval. This becomes glaringly obvious in the media portrayal of the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, following the shooting of an unarmed teenager by a Ferguson police officer.

For some residents of Ferguson, Michael Brown’s death was the final straw. Individuals in this community, who were not adequately represented in local government and who were regularly pulled over and made victims to predatory ticketing practices, had had enough with the unfairness and injustice of social, political, and economic systems in Ferguson.

The upheaval following Michael Brown’s death in Ferguson was the boiling-over of frustration, anger, and pain that this community has felt for a long time. This release of frustration is also displayed in the Bible—it is called lament. Lament is the way that prophets and leaders expressed their frustration and pain to God. Laments list the struggles that have been faced—those who lament cry out to God for help and attention. “See my suffering, see our suffering.”

*Read the following examples of biblical lament*

Psalm 22:1-2 (CEB)

“My God! My God,  
why have you left me all alone?  
Why are you so far from saving me—  
so far from my anguished groans?  
My God, I cry out during the day,  
but you don’t answer;  
even at nighttime I don’t stop.”

Jeremiah 9:10 (CEB)

I will weep and wail for the mountains,  
and lament for the grazing lands in the wilderness.  
They are dried up and deserted;  
no sound of the flocks is heard;  
no sign of birds or animals is seen;  
all have vanished.

Esther 4:1-3 (CEB)

When Mordecai learned what had been done, he tore his clothes, dressed in mourning clothes, and put ashes on his head. Then he went out into the heart of the city and cried out loudly and bitterly. He went only as far as the King’s Gate because it was against the law for anyone to pass through it wearing mourning clothes. At the same time, in every province and place where the king’s order and his new law arrived, a very great sadness came over the Jews. They gave up eating and spent whole days weeping and crying out loudly in pain. Many Jews lay on the ground in mourning clothes and ashes.

*Reflection*

- What do these verses have in common?
- What verbs are contained within these passages?
- What does lament look and sound like?

Lament is still a big part of the human experience. We all cry out in moments of pain, confusion, and fear. As Christians, we are called to change the ways we respond to hollering around us. We must intentionally work to hear those whose pain is so often ignored. We need not only to see and hear the hollering around us—we must also respond. When we encounter these modern forms of lament—we must first seek to listen. We must be willing to look for hurt beneath the

shouts and cries of those who are desperate for things to change, even if we do not understand their pain initially. We have to ask what is causing that pain, and what we can do about it. In times of upheaval and unrest, we must learn how to hear the hollering, or howling, of those who hurt. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that “riot is the language of the unheard.” It is a desperate cry of attention to the places of injustice and pain. It is the release of pressure that has built up over years, decades, and generations. We have to ask what is causing that pain, and what we can do about it.

Ultimately, we can't come to understand the hollering of others without stepping outside of our own comfort zones. I cannot understand another by searching on the Internet for them or watching from afar. We have to be willing to listen—to step outside of ourselves and our own experiences in order to engage with the experiences of another.

#### ACTIVITY: LAMENT AND PROTEST

Protest is direct action that seeks to bring attention to an issue in order to bring about change.

Here are some examples of protest:

- Sit-ins: lunch counters, disability activists in congressmen's and congresswomen's offices
- Strike: teachers strike, union strike
- March: march on Washington, women's march, march for science (blocking traffic or organized with roads closed)
- Die-in: Black Lives Matter protests (blocking traffic)
- Protest art: graffiti art, puppets, protest theater

#### *Instructions*

- Print out ten to fifteen images of protests or riots. Photos can range in date from the civil rights movement of the 1960s to current protests around issues of policing. Use the examples of protests for inspiration while picking images that will speak to students within your context. Be sure to include some images that are from your community or a nearby city.
- Ask students to walk around the room and silently look at each image. Take a minute to soak in every image: notice the people in the picture. What are they doing? What would it be like to experience what is pictured? What would it sound like, look like, smell like, or feel like?
- After viewing all of the images, record one-word to one-sentence responses to these images on index cards (students do not need to write their names on the cards). Collect all index cards and read reactions aloud. Leave time and space for reflection about the exercise.

### *Reflection Questions*

- How did it feel to look at these examples of hollering?
- Who is hollering in our city or community right now?
- What can we do to make sure we hear the voices on the margins?

### PRAYER

All-loving and all-knowing God,

We pray that you will help us to hear the hollering of those around us. Break us out of our bubbles so that we may hear the cries of your people. Give us the strength to resist the urge to remain complacent—to pick comfort over righteousness. Be with us as we grapple with our own privileges, help us to be kind to ourselves, but push us to test our boundaries. Lord, we pray that you hear our cries of lament. Hear the cries of your people and guide us to hope and healing. Transform our hearts. Transform our lives. Transform our world.

In Jesus’s name we pray. AMEN

### LEVEL UP: LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

Learning to hear the hollering of pain and hurt behind what seems to be anger, or inconvenient or unacceptable behavior can be really difficult. All of us have the impulse to tell others what they should or should not be doing. “Those protestors blocking traffic are causing everyone to get to work late—they should just march on the sidewalk.” “Why are they shouting? People would listen more if they were nicer about it.” “Why are they breaking windows in their own community?!?”

These feelings are not new. While history has told us of the success of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the truth is that during that time, most people did not support the efforts of civil rights leaders and activists. In fact, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote about these types of statements in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

For this level up section, I encourage you to read “Letter from Birmingham Jail” either in its entirety, or read the section that refers to white moderates of the day. While reading the letter, underline any words that stick out to you. What words give you a physical reaction—either in your gut or your heart? Circle any phrase or sentence that gives you a strong emotional response.

*After reading “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” please discuss the following questions*

- What struck you most about the text? What words or phrases stood out to you?
- Who do you think is the white moderate today?

- What are some of the tensions present in race relations today? How do we bring them out in the open and deal with them in our own lives and in our own circles? What are some ways we can choose not to be neutral in the fight for justice?

## SEGMENT 4: ACT

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to differentiate activism and advocacy.
- Students will be able to brainstorm how they will act in the face of an unjust world.
- Students will be able to speak up for others in an empathetic, vulnerable, and accountable way.

### LESSON COMPONENTS

- Scripture and Reflection
- Lesson: Now That You Know Better, Do Better
- Activity: Advocacy vs. Activism
- Lesson and Activity: Speak Up or How to Disagree
  
- Activity: What are You Going to do About It?
- Closing Reflections
- Prayer
- Level Up: Liberation and Womanist Theologies

### SCRIPTURE: ESTHER 4:12-16 (CEB)

When they told Mordecai Esther’s words, he had them respond to Esther: “Don’t think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you’ll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. In fact, if you don’t speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family.”

Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: “Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren’t to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it’s against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will.”

### REFLECTION

In our previous segment, we learned about Mordecai’s lament. He came to the king’s gate crying, wearing only a sackcloth, and covered in ash. Jews throughout the land lifted their voices in mourning and lament. Esther, on the other hand, has a place of privilege—she is married to the king. As queen, she is safe from any ruling that endangers the Jewish community. In this

passage, Mordecai reminds Esther that the Jews will be saved whether or not she takes action now. Mordecai is confident that God will deliver God's people. But he reminds Esther that if she doesn't act, her family is in danger—and she could be too if she falls out of the king's favor. Mordecai also suggests that Esther might have received her privilege for this very purpose—to speak out in order to protect her people. We too can use our privilege to speak out for others—perhaps we too were made for such a time as this.

### *Discussion Questions*

- Where is the power or privilege in this story?
- Discuss the differences between Mordecai's and Esther's response to the unjust treatment of the Jewish people?
- What emotions are at play in this story?
- What power or privilege can we use to speak up for others?
- How do you think Esther felt when she was called to action? How does this compare to your reaction to similar calls to action (like the ones included in this study)?

LESSON: NOW THAT YOU KNOW BETTER, DO BETTER

### *Definitions*

**Bias:** an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

**Prejudice:** to prejudge; to form an opinion without knowing the facts; a feeling, unfavorable or favorable, toward a person or thing prior to, or not based on, actual experience. (A prejudice, unlike a misconception, is actively resistant to all new evidence.)

**Oppression:** severe exercise of power and subjugation that works systematically, institutionally, and interpersonally to privilege one group and disadvantage another.

Now that we've rehearsed our autobiographies, examined our privilege, listened to the hollering of others, it's time for us to start thinking about how we're going to respond to all of this new information! We are all called to act in a way that promotes justice, but that action will look and sound different based on the gifts and experiences of each individual. For instance, if you live in an all-white suburb, you might not have racial inequity in your neighborhood. However, it is likely that you can still address prejudice and racial bias in your community by talking about privilege. It's up to you to decide what you are going to do. How you act should reflect your gifts, passions, and local context!

## ACTIVITY: ADVOCACY VS. ACTIVISM

We can address the injustice we see in the world around us through **activism** and **advocacy**.

**Activism** is actions that are purposed toward achieving social, cultural, or political goals. Activism uses direct action.

**Advocacy** is the support of a cause or goal. Advocacy usually uses communication (written, verbal, or financial).

*Instructions*

- Instruct students to sort the following sentences into two groups: advocacy and activism.
- This exercise may be brief and easy, but should get students to start thinking about actions that they can take to address injustice.
- It may be helpful to bring back the pictures used for the lament activity to serve of examples of protest.

A student organizing a letter-writing campaign to bring awareness to educational inequity. Letters are sent to local politicians and state representatives.
A group of college students sits at a segregated lunch counter and refuses to move despite the fact that others yell and throw garbage at them.
A man donates money to a political candidate who cares about racial justice.
A parishioner requests a meeting with his or her pastor in order to start a justice reading group.
A young girl explains to her friend why using “that’s so gay” is not ok.
A large crowd of people marches through the streets to bring attention to issues of policing within their community.
A pastor holds a meeting to educate his or her congregation on race and racism
An artist paints graffiti quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. over a billboard that relies on racist stereotypes.
The entire factory floor walks out of work to protest low wages and insufficient breaks at work.
A group of individuals with disabilities sits in the offices of its senators and refuses to move until senators commit to supporting health care that supports individuals with disabilities.
A local politician hosts a community meeting to learn about environmental concerns in the community.
Students wear T-shirts to school to bring attention to a specific political issue (e.g., students wear BLACK LIVES MATTER T-shirts on a particular day to promote equity in school).

Answer Key: advocacy, activism, advocacy, advocacy, advocacy, advocacy, activism, advocacy, activism, activism, activism, activism, advocacy, activism

### *Reflection Questions*

- What are some other examples of advocacy?
- What are some other examples of activism?

### LESSON AND ACTIVITY: SPEAK UP OR HOW TO DISAGREE

Working to create social change is really hard work. It requires us to do uncomfortable things like examining our perceptions, questioning our motives, and consistently working to create relationships with folks who see and experience the world differently. It calls us to use our privilege in order to create more justice. One way we can use our privilege is by calling out prejudice, bias, and marginalization when we see it, even if we see it in our families, friends, and loved ones.

Society has taught us that it isn't polite to disagree; that we should avoid messy topics like religion and politics. However, God calls us to a different purpose. God calls us to be an EMT to those who aren't present with us. Sometimes this means we need to call other people out, even though it is scary and uncomfortable.

### *Instructions*

- Have students take turns reading through the “How to Disagree” tip sheet.
- After each section, ask students to reflect on what the title (terms like empathy, vulnerability, and accountability) means to them.

### *Reflection Questions*

- Can you think of a person or statement that you can disagree with or speak up on in the future?
  - How do you think you can speak up? What would you say?
- Can you come up with an example of a prejudiced statement?
  - How can we address this statement directly?
- What would stand in the way of you speaking up?
  - How can we prepare to overcome these obstacles?

## HOW DO WE DISAGREE?

*Empathy: No one is a villain—we are all trying our best*

We must always show empathy for those with whom we disagree—they are also a beloved child of God. It is our job as change agents to listen deeply with the intention of understanding. We must train ourselves to listen for the emotions, hopes, and fears that lie underneath perspectives different from our own.

### *Tips*

- Rephrase what you hear: “So what I’m hearing you saying is . . .”
- Find and respond to underlying emotions: “This seems like you’re really worried about . . .”
- Ask clarifying questions: “What do you mean by . . . ?”
- Listen to understand, not to respond.

*Vulnerability: Lead by example with courageous, authentic interaction*

In conversations of this kind, you get what you give. Frustration will be met with frustration. And vulnerability will be matched with vulnerability. We must be willing to learn and grow; we have to be honest about the places where we’ve messed up, been wrong, confused, or uncomfortable. Each conversation is not only an opportunity to move another toward justice, but is also an opportunity to look at our own perspectives and practices and to clarify our deeply held beliefs.

### *Tips*

- Share your misunderstandings and mistakes: “I used to be confused about privilege too, but then . . .”
- Share from your personal experience. Use “I” statements.
- Describe moments that have shifted your perspectives. What has changed how you think?

*Accountability: Hold yourself accountable to the things that you believe*

Be accountable to the things that you believe. Oftentimes, it feels easier to let the words and actions of others slide, to excuse offensive language or prejudices and even unjust behaviors because we know the other is “well intentioned” or “doesn’t know any better.” Confronting racism, or any other kind of injustice, is difficult work! It’s uncomfortable and awkward, but it is our duty to respond. The way you act and the things you say should reflect and evidence what

you believe. Don't shy away from what you hold in your heart just because you want to avoid discomfort. Instead, encourage those around you to grow in justice as a sign of love and respect.

### *Tips*

- Plan ahead. What are one or two topics that you can be ready to comment on or intervene in? What kinds of prejudice do you see regularly that you could address?
- If you see something, say something. Don't let prejudice go unnoticed.
- Be honest about your goals for the conversation: "I want to tell you why it bothers me that you call something *gay* to say it's bad."

**ACTIVITY: WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?**

Fill out the graphic organizer below to brainstorm and plan how you can do better now that you know better. Spend five minutes filling out the form independently and then share in small groups for ten to fifteen minutes. Feel free to adjust your plan as you hear the suggestions of others!

	<b>What can I say?</b>	<b>What can I do?</b>	<b>How can I connect?*</b>
<b>This Week</b>			
<b>This Month</b>			
<b>This year</b>			

\*The “How can I connect?” section should include strategies to meet, get to know, or engage with people who don’t necessarily share our identity categories.

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

- What can you do to become an empathic model of transformation in your home, school, and church?
- What might you need to educate yourself about so that you can empathetically and ethically relate to someone with a different identity and experience?
- How can you use your privilege (whatever it looks like) to act as a blessing for others?

## PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Please help us to continue the work that we have started here. We desire to become EMTs—to be agents of change in the world around us. Help us to see the injustice around us, and discover how you call us to respond. Help us to undergo a transformation. Push us out of our comfort zones so that we may be more like you. Send us strength and help on this long journey. Transform our hearts. Transform our lives. Transform our world. AMEN.

## LEVEL UP: LIBERATION AND WOMANIST THEOLOGIES

In segment 1, we learned about the differences between embedded and deliberative theologies. Today, we will continue our discussion of theology by looking at two specific schools of theological thinking: **liberation theology** and **womanist theology**.

*What is liberation theology?*

**Liberation theology** is a theological movement that interprets scripture through the plight of those who are on the margins of our society. In his 1970 work, theologian James Cone states that a theology of liberation is the “rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating to the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel—Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to say that our God is a God of and for those who are marginalized, oppressed, or overburdened.

This school of theology understands Jesus as a savior who suffered with humanity and tells us that we have a responsibility as Christians to address the injustices in the world around us in order to address and limit this suffering. Transforming unjust systems is a vital part of **liberation**

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<sup>4</sup> James H. Cone, “The Content of Theology,” in *A Black Theology of Liberation*.

**theology. Liberation theology** calls us to engage with the world in which we live to build God’s kingdom—rather than only focusing on personal piety and the future of our afterlife. **Liberation theology** is most often seen in African American and Latin American faith traditions.

*What is womanist theology?*

**Womanist theology** is an offshoot of **liberation theology** that pays special attention to the experiences and liberation of African American women. This theological movement is influenced by both **feminist theology** (which pays special attention to women) and **liberation theology** (which pays special attention to the poor and racially oppressed communities).

**Womanist theology** argues that both liberation and feminist theologies fail to address the concerns and experiences of women of color—who are also made in the image of God after all. This theology centers on the experiences and perspectives of black women while also seeking to address notions of gender, race, class, heterosexism (system of oppression against non-straight people), and ecology. Womanist theologians seek to find theological expressions in the women in the Bible, and also through the lived experiences of women.

*Continual revelation and a responsibility to ACT*

Both liberation and womanist theologies contain the concept of **continual revelation**—the idea that God continues to reveal God’s self in real time, particularly through the experience of those on the margins. After all, Jesus himself spent his time with those who were marginalized and ostracized in his community. According to this concept, we continue to hear God’s voice by listening to those who are in pain, who experience the pain that our social, political, and economic systems cause. We are called to act in response to the injustices around us. We are called as Christians to become agents of change!

When you go out into the world to ACT with new knowledge ask yourself, “What is God revealing to me?”, “What can this specific community that is hollering teach me about God?”, and “What can this experience teach me about myself?”.