

We had a great discussion of Jemar Tisby's book *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice* led by Bill Poston in Soapstone's Dismantling Racism Book Group.

Tisby centers his argument on what he calls the ARC of Racial Justice with ARC being an acronym for Awareness, Relationships and Commitment. Awareness is the knowledge, information and data required to fight racism. Relationships with other people help us see those most adversely impacted by racist ideas and deeds. We must commit to deconstructing laws that have a disparate impact on people of different races and rewrite the rules so they lead to greater equity among people of all races.

Tisby says Christianity must be included in the fight against racism. Christians have a responsibility to address racism because Christians have practiced racism in the past. At the same time, Christianity teaches all people have been made in the image of God and are equal in His sight. Jesus' call that we love our neighbor provides the reason and courage to seek racial justice.

Tisby says racism must not be dismissed lightly. It must be treated as an offense against God and human beings and considered to be a sin of separation that requires reconciliation. White supremacy is the assumption that white people and their culture are inherently superior to other cultures. This assumption has given social, cultural and political advantages to those deemed white.

When we define racism as individual behaviors, we fail to understand the systemic and institutional forces that led to separation. We must address the issue of power – economic, political, cultural and more. In the U.S., white people hold much of the power, and this is true even in churches and denominations. Racial reconciliation efforts must deal with power and control. People who control money determine the funding of programs and financial support of ministries. The people in positions of power actually get to decide a community's priorities and policies.

When we examine the history of our community, church and denomination for racism, we can identify issues that call for us to confess and repent of communal failure. We should look at our diversity, who is present; equity who has access to a community's resources and on what terms; and inclusion, the sense of welcome and belonging extended to individuals. We should have a written statement that expresses our views on diversity, equity and inclusion and live up to these goals.

We need to study history not simply to know more about the past but to know more about ourselves. For example, the history of red-lining and restrictive covenants show how black people have been relegated to certain neighborhoods. Learning these facts and why they are significant is a key to understanding and fighting racism today.

Martin Luther King, Jr called us to work to be the beloved community, where love is an action that uses the levers of power to bring about justice. In seeking the beloved community, we must be concerned for our neighbors and address the structures and systems that enable or inhibit their opportunity to flourish.

Our group discussed that Soapstone should:

- Welcome all
- Develop our relationship with First Born Church of Deliverance
- Partner with black churches in reconciling activities
- Provide budgetary support for racial justice

We discussed the importance of electing officials that support racial justice, encouraging fair elections, opposing gerrymandering, taking part in voter registration efforts.

Tisby says fighting racism does not consist of a set of isolated actions but instead developing a lifestyle that is oriented toward racial justice.

Our group agreed Tisby defined steps to fight racism and talked about the role of congregations in working for racial justice. He provides practical actions you can take to fight racism so that instead of feeling overpowered by the problem, you feel empowered to take action.