

FOUNDATIONAL STUDY COHORT 9

A VIRTUAL STUDY FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN RACIAL HEALING AND JUSTICE



Offered by the
RRG (RACIAL RECONCILIATION GROUP)

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2019, a small group in a Northern Virginia church got together to learn about one of our country's original national sins, chattel slavery, and its insidious legacy impact on America today. A pastor and his wife, experienced group facilitators, guided us along with two basic resources, both of which are described further below. The first resource gave us common ground, the second resource provided strong study references and time for reflection. The material was and is flexible; some participants only had the chance to skim it while others dove in deeply for our weekly discussion. The discussion group's code of conduct encouraged humility, respect, and giving grace to each person in the room. **The journey educated us, humbled us, and encouraged us to dive deeper into making a difference, including offering this study again and again, resulting in sharing this study across the country.** We have come to call this study our "foundational study", anchored by the American Lament which is further described below.

WHAT HAPPENED BECAUSE OF THIS STUDY

Our racial reconciliation group (RRG) came into being as a community because of this study, which is anchored by the American Lament devotional. This study, lovingly referred to as our "foundational study", provides an opportunity to gather together in humility to listen and learn. **We hope more and more individuals and churches share this study. It is more than a history course—we learn the transformational power of lamenting in a way many of us have never understood or collectively experienced before. We cannot change the past, but we can learn from it to offer healing, hope, and to build a better future.**

FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE VIRTUAL GROUP STUDY

The study group starts by viewing of *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*, a 4-hour documentary series presented in 1-hour segments by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Class participants will view portions of the documentary in the study as well as in advance of the next class to allow time for open discussion.

The series explores the transformative years following the American Civil War, when the nation struggled to rebuild itself in the face of profound loss, massive destruction, and revolutionary social change. The twelve years that composed the post-war Reconstruction era (1865-77) witnessed a seismic shift in the meaning and makeup of our democracy, with millions of former slaves and free Black people seeking out their rightful place as equal citizens under the law. Though tragically short-lived, this bold democratic experiment was, in the words of W. E.B. DuBois, a 'brief moment in the sun' for African Americans, when they could advance, achieve education, exercise their right to vote, and run for and win public office.

<https://www.pbs.org/weta/reconstruction/>



Racial Reconciliation Group's logo by an 11-year-old native born Virginian. Inspired and adapted from the symbol of the cross and the Adinkra reconciliation symbol from one of her ancestral lands—Ghana, West Africa.

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After viewing the documentary series, the study group explores “An American Lament”, a devotional journey through our nation’s history that winds from the slave trade through the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement to modern-day inequalities. The journey makes room for individual education and reflection daily, and group discussion weekly. Enveloped in scripture and prayer, this resource provides both education and spiritual formation around the historical legacies of slavery while also presenting practical steps for moving forward. <https://repentanceproject.org/index.php/an-american-lament/>

VIRTUAL GROUP DISCUSSION DATES/TIMES

Guests: All are welcome
Meeting Place/Time: 7:00 – 9:00 PM ET Monday Zoom Meetings
Dates: June 5, 2023 through July 31, 2023
RSVP: **Registration Link:** [Register Here](#)

Donation: Although this study material is free and available to the public, we believe in "Paying it Forward." Please consider making a donation to: The Repentance Project for their continual work in Racial Reconciliation. [Donation Link](#)

For a suggested amount toward a memorable anti-racist action, please consider an hour of your wages, which can make a meaningful contribution to move this work forward.

For more information about the Racial Reconciliation Group, please contact: racialreconciliationgroup@gmail.com

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What kind of time commitment is involved? The study and small group setting is most enriching if you can participate each week, learning and growing together.

What do I do if I fall behind? Fear not. Do what you can when you can. Together as a group, we benefit from everyone’s learning.

Who created the Study Guide? The Repentance Project was started by another small group: “We were Black and white Christians, about 15 of us, from Orlando, D.C., Richmond, Minneapolis, and Atlanta, from churches, non-profits, foundations, and the government. We met at a small farm in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, at Corhaven, a property set apart as a place to meet God. It is also hallowed as a place where at least 24 former slaves are buried. Together they asked tough questions further described in [Our Story – Repentance Project](#)

What motivates the facilitators to commit to this teaching and study group? The best way to answer that question is to provide brief testimonials:

Prior to joining the group, I was astounded by the absence of Christian voices condemning the murder of unarmed African Americans at the hand of police. The murder of George Floyd, captured on video, was particularly outrageous and infuriating. We watched his life snuffed out by a police officer who was undeterred by the camera, suggesting he had abused people before without consequences. The entire world reacted in



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condemnation--except the Evangelical Church in which I had spent the last 50 years. I assumed they would react to injustice as I did. Instead, they were silent with only a few exceptions. But, in this group, I found allies, a community of believers committed to representing Christ to the world. Carl R.

The documentary "Reconstruction: America After the Civil War" opened my eyes to history that was never taught in school. The devotional "An American Lament" deepened my understanding of the continuing legacy of slavery, and it encourages me to act on that new understanding. Debbie L.

In April 2021, I was introduced to the Racial Reconciliation foundational study group and noticed the open hearts of the people involved. I found respect and sincere compassion and felt safe enough to share a traumatic, personal story of racial injustice that occurred over 50 years ago. The historical part of the study answered many questions that I, as an African American, had regarding the plight of my people after slavery "ended." The Repentance Project Lament brought me to a place of understanding and healing. I believe that the healing of our nation starts with the healing of individual hearts. This study addresses the effects of history and brings one to a consciousness that causes you to question; what part can I play in helping to reconcile and heal our nation? Gwendolyn P.

*Racial Reconciliation is **intentional**. You have to want it. It then takes education (listening and learning). When one recognizes the terrible wrongs that have been done (and continue to be perpetuated) and says "I'm sorry! I didn't know" and another says "I forgive," a powerful healing takes place in both and change begins. This is what I experienced as an African American attending this racial reconciliation study. Healing. And now a rippling affect has taken place as new groups are formed, more learning is done and healing is spread throughout each community as each one sets out to bring change and reparations to our country and beyond.* Inece B.

I wanted to share a bit on how the racial reconciliation class changed my thinking. I was looking forward to the class and learning more, but I honestly wasn't prepared for what I would learn. Some of the things I remember from school, but in my mind they were all in the wrong order, and there was so much more.

What I really wasn't prepared for was the repeating cycle of progress and setback that happened over and over in the decades since the civil war and that it even continues to this day. Nor was I prepared to hear again and again heartbreaking and brazen stories of violence and hatred toward African Americans. It was tempting to walk away because it was so hard to hear.

But I realized that walking away was in itself a privilege that my African American friends did not have. This story in some way or form is interwoven with their lives and for them there is no escaping *it*. The very least I could do was listen and let it soften my heart and draw me closer to my African American friends. The class will educate you, challenge you and change you. I highly recommend it. - Doug S.



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