

**FACILITATOR
GUIDE
SAMPLER**

DIA LOG UES

— ON —

RACE

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Printed in the United States

24 23 22 21 20 19 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

ISBN 9781506454030

DIALOGUES ON RACE

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PUBLISHED BY SPARKHOUSE

510 Marquette Avenue

Minneapolis, MN 55402

wearesparkhouse.org

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ABOUT DIALOGUES ON

It's not news to anyone that we are living in a time of conflict, division, and disagreement. In politics, in religion, in education, in relationships and communities and churches, we are becoming people who can't seem to find our way out of the "us vs. them" pit of divisiveness. It doesn't matter who you think is "us" and who is "them." We all feel stuck.

And yet we know it doesn't have to be like this. In the face of cracking communities and strained family dynamics, the church is uniquely equipped to bring healing, hope, and wholeness to a hurting world. Ours is a faith built on hope, on the belief that we are all created in the image of God, on the assurance that no person or situation is beyond redemption. We believe faith is not only believing in God, but also doing the work of God in the world. We are the shining city on a hill, and the world needs our light now more than ever.

One small group resource isn't going to change everything, but it can be a catalyst for new models of relational repair and social action. It can give participants a set of tools they can use to have bridge-building conversations rather than explosive arguments. It can serve as a model of peacemaking for a community struggling with strife. In other words, it can help the church be the church.

That's the purpose of Dialogues On. Each course takes a small group through a topic using a book and video as the central resources, then adding a carefully created facilitator guide to help the group engage with the topic and each other in deeper, more intentional ways.

Dialogues On uses a two-pronged approach to equip groups for meaningful conversation:

1. Thoughtful, provocative essays from a variety of voices give participants a common starting point for discussion. No matter where someone sits on a controversial topic, they can benefit from getting more information to help them add nuance to their beliefs and recognize the complexities of a given subject.
2. A collection of simple but effective skills serves as a tool kit participants take with them into the world. It doesn't matter how much we know or how deep our convictions are if we are lousy conversation partners. But when we know how to listen, how to ask questions, how to empathize and tell stories and find common ground, we become people who can navigate difficult conversations without tearing up relationships.

In this course, your small group will discuss various issues related to race. Each week, your group will spend time sharing perspectives on what you've read. You'll have time to explore your ideas as a group, and time to process your ideas with a partner. You'll work together to create an action plan that fits your context.

Then you'll take all of that with you, into your jobs and homes and holiday dinners, and offer an alternative to conflict and division. You'll offer dialogues.

PREPARING TO FACILITATE

Whether you've been facilitating small groups for a long time or this is your first go, we've got your back. Facilitating well is more than just handing out pencils and making sure there are enough chairs. It's creating an environment where participants feel like they can be honest, that their ideas have value, and that they are part of a group that cares about their well-being. That environment starts with you.

This is particularly true when a group is talking about difficult topics and the point of the lesson is to bring up disagreement. As a Dialogues On facilitator, your primary role is to put some structure around the group's time together, giving them a kind of map they can use as they venture into some rocky terrain. This guide will walk you step-by-step through each lesson—we'll show you how on the next page. But creating an environment of honesty, trust, and safety involves having your own reliable framework to keep you oriented as a facilitator. Here's what we suggest:

- ↳ **START SIMPLE:** We recommend kicking off this small group experience with a dinner or other casual time to get to know each other, hand out the participant books, and create your community covenant (see page 8). This is a chance for people to talk a bit about what they hope to discover through this process and to work together to set expectations and ground rules. Participants should leave this event with their books and their first assignment: Read Chapter 1.
- ↳ **CLEAR THE ROAD, DON'T DRIVE THE CAR:** You don't have to teach this group. You don't have to steer them in a particular direction. Your role is to lay out each stage of the lesson, giving the group a goal to aim for and clear directions for getting there.
- ↳ **STAY FLEXIBLE:** You'll need to read the room as you work through the lesson, paying attention to times when the group seems ready to move on and times when they want to keep diving into whatever they're doing. If you need to skip some parts of the lesson one week, do it. If you find the group needs more time for their dialogues, give it to them.
- ↳ **DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW:** You are probably not an expert on the topics covered in this course. You're likely not an expert on group dynamics. And that's just fine. As the facilitator, you don't need to have answers to every question or have strong opinions about the topic. You can stay open to learning and having your mind changed, just like the rest of the group.
- ↳ **KNOW WHEN TO STEP BACK AND WHEN TO STEP IN:** This resource is built on the belief that we can disagree with one another without being disagreeable. Your group will undoubtedly experience moments of tension and even conflict as you discuss the topics each week. As the facilitator, resist the urge to jump in and solve the problem. Allow space for all voices to be heard. When you do feel like you need to step in, use your community covenant as a guide for resolving conflict well.

This small group process will ask you and your group to be a little uncomfortable at times, to take some risks, and to try some new practices. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide your time together and to nurture the connections you're creating.

HOW IT WORKS

This small group resource is made up of three components that work together to create an engaging experience of discovery for facilitators and participants:

THE BOOK: Each participant needs a copy of the book, *Dialogues on Race*. They'll read one chapter each week to prepare for your time as a group and come to the group ready to talk about what they read.

THE DVD: The documentary-style video component of Dialogues On brings life to the topic of the week, putting what can be abstract facts and figures into a human context.

THE FACILITATOR GUIDE: This resource was created to make it as easy as possible for you to guide your small group with minimal prep.

Each week's session follows this format:

PREPARE

The opening section of each week's guide is a general overview of the topic you'll be discussing. You'll also find some ways to talk about the topic with your group that can help them unpack the bigger picture behind the chapter they've read.

Each week you'll also have a dialogue technique for the group to practice together. These techniques are fairly simple, but they're surprisingly effective. They help people avoid running headlong into conflict and instead force more careful, thoughtful interactions, the kind that can build empathy and understanding—even between people who disagree.

Finally, you'll find a Bible passage that you can use any way you like. It can be a brief reading to help ground you in Scripture as you get started. It can be something you use during the reflection time later in the session. You can use it as a prompt for reflection during the week. Whatever you think will be most helpful for your group will work.

SET UP

In general, you need a room with seating that can be moved around a bit, enough space for smaller discussion groups to find a place to sit, and a wall or whiteboard you can use for group projects. You'll need a DVD player and monitor to watch the video each week. You'll also want some kind of timer or clock to help you manage the time.

We'll also give you a supply list to let you know what you'll need for the various activities each week. The activities were created with groups of fewer than fifteen people in mind, so if you have more than that, consider breaking into two smaller groups during the Welcome Activity and the Create project.

GATHER (10–15 MINUTES)

Each session starts with some time to settle in.

WELCOME ACTIVITY

Kick things off with a group activity that helps bring some focus to the week's topic. Sometimes it will be as simple as writing down some thoughts on sticky notes and posting them on the wall. Other weeks it might be a group brainstorming process or a team challenge. When you've finished, you'll spend a few minutes talking about the activity and setting up a framework for the rest of your time together.

WATCH

You'll spend five to seven minutes each week watching a video related to the week's chapter. This video component creates one more access point for participants to dive into the complicated issues that are part of this topic.

CONNECT (25–30 MINUTES)

This set of activities forms the core of each session.

DIALOGUE (10 MINUTES)

Before you dive into talking about the week's topic, the group will break into smaller groups of three or four people to have some heart-opening conversations based on personal stories and experiences. You'll give your groups a prompt to work with and introduce them to the dialogue technique to use as each person responds to the prompt.

Even if time is tight, don't skip this part of the session. It's a critical component of the dialogue process and lays an essential foundation for the conversations to come. When we have the chance to hear someone's story—to understand the lens through which they view a topic—we are far more open to what they have to say, even when we disagree with them.

RESPOND (5–10 MINUTES)

After sharing stories and practicing a dialogue technique, the group will discuss a short list of questions about the week's chapter and video. This is when the full group will dive into a discussion of the topic for the week. It's a time for participants to be honest about their questions, their concerns, and their uncertainties about the subject and to talk about them in a respectful community of friends.

You can decide the best way to introduce these questions. You can print them out and hand a copy to each small group, you can read them aloud one at a time, or you can write them on a whiteboard before you gather and work through them as a full group. No matter how you present the questions, they are intended to draw out a variety of responses from participants. They don't have to be conflictual, but this is where you might find group members disagreeing with each other. And that's okay. This is where robust conversations can lead to real breakthroughs as participants practice their dialogue techniques and remember the context they discovered in the dialogue part of the session.

CREATE (10 MINUTES)

You'll finish up the Connect time with a group project—sometimes this will take place in the small breakout groups; sometimes it will involve the full group. This is a natural place to condense your time a bit if you need to, but keep in mind that this part of the session helps participants interact with one another and process everything they've been talking about in a different way. Through art, visual expressions of ideas, and other hands-on experiences, the group will create a physical reminder of what they've discussed and discovered. If you can, leave these on display in your space to help you connect one week's conversation to the next.

REFLECT (10 MINUTES)

Wrap up your session with a time of reflection. Share your thoughts on the session using a set of questions that will remain the same from week to week. Having these regular moments of reflection will help participants track their progression through the course, giving them a way to see where they are changing, learning, and discovering. Before you leave, offer the group something to consider during the week, and a prayer to close out your session.

CREATING A COMMUNITY COVENANT

Your small group will be working through some heart-heavy content over the next couple of months. That's why it's important to start out with intentional community building. Before your first scheduled session, set up a time to meet in an informal setting to get to know each other, share a meal, and create a framework for your time together.

Groups function best when there are clear expectations and boundaries about how people will treat each other, what's acceptable and what isn't, and how the group wants to handle conflicts or violations of trust. Developing a community covenant that everyone signs onto might feel a little formal, but it's a tried and true way to lay out some rules of engagement that the group can turn to when conversations turn dicey or someone is feeling alienated. The covenant also signals that this group is more than a book club. You are up to something new here, something that will ask more of you than your average small-group experience.

Take time during your informal gathering to put together a community covenant you can all agree to. Your covenant can be as long or as short as you like, but make sure it covers two big factors of group dynamics: tone and conflict resolution. In other words, figure out how you'll talk to each other and how you'll solve problems. We've included a sample covenant on page 9 to get you started. Or you can kickstart the process with a little brainstorming:

- ↳ Pass out packs of sticky notes and pens.
- ↳ Take a moment to pray together and consider how God might move through this group.
- ↳ Ask people to write down their hopes and expectations for this small group experience—one idea per sticky note, using as many as they like.
- ↳ After a few minutes, have people post their sticky notes on a wall or other flat surface, reading out loud what they wrote on each note.
- ↳ If there are some common themes, cluster those notes together on the wall.
- ↳ As a group, talk about ways group dynamics can help or hinder you in reaching those goals or meeting those expectations.
- ↳ Now start fine-tuning those comments into a covenant.
- ↳ You want consensus on the covenant, so make sure that everyone offers input and that you have agreement on each point before moving on.

This process doesn't have to be complicated. Even if you end up with just a few things in your covenant, you'll have enough to get you started. And don't forget: the community covenant is a living document. You can always add to it as you go through the course.

USE THIS SAMPLE COVENANT AS A TEMPLATE FOR SETTING UP YOUR OWN SET OF EXPECTATIONS AND AGREEMENTS.

SMALL GROUP COMMUNITY COVENANT

IN THIS GROUP WE:

- ↳ Talk to each other with kindness and respect.
- ↳ Know we might be uncomfortable sometimes as we listen to and learn from others.
- ↳ Will accept loose ends and unfinished ideas—our beliefs are works in progress.
- ↳ Stay open to new perspectives and unexpected sources.
- ↳ Expect the Holy Spirit to change our minds through self-reflection and transformative conversation.
- ↳ Move toward unity even when we hold diverse perspectives.
- ↳ Tell stories from our personal experience, not rumors or second-hand accounts.
- ↳ Hold the stories of the group with care and confidentiality.
- ↳ Resolve conflict by assuming the best of one another and acknowledging that we all have something left to learn.
- ↳ Allow each other to be wrong.
- ↳ Recognize that thoughts aren't always beliefs.
- ↳ Trust the facilitator and respect the structure of the course.
- ↳ Know there are more than two sides to every disagreement.
- ↳ Don't use the Bible as a weapon or a tool we can manipulate to make a point.
- ↳ Acknowledge that there are multiple, faithful ways to interpret Scripture.

No matter how you create your community covenant, write it down on a poster board or other large piece of paper so you can display it every time you meet. Ask everyone in the group to sign it to remind each other of this commitment you're making.

WEEK 3: SAY IT LOUD

PREPARE

THIS WEEK

Few topics have been as polarizing in the first twenty years of the twenty-first century as race. Even the word race makes people uncomfortable. Most people think of race as a reference to ethnicity, which can be a helpful way to categorize or describe commonalities or shared experiences between people. But the homophone of the word, used to describe a contest between two or more people, might actually shed more light on the way we will talk about race over the next seven weeks—as a human construct used to elevate one group of people over another.

Your group will spend these seven weeks defining race and working through the many problematic ways it has wormed its way into our culture, systems, and structures. And that’s going to be awkward. People in your group are likely to feel confused, angry, and ashamed early and often during this dialogue. That’s understandable: words like racism and racist evoke strong feelings among both the people saying them and the people hearing them. This will not be easy. But, as Jimmy Dugan said about baseball in *A League of Their Own*, “The hard is what makes it great.”

The first chapter of the book describes how race played into some of the more shameful aspects of American history, specifically the chattel slavery of Africans and the near eradication of Native Americans. This is but the first time the book examines the connection between our past and our present. Some people in your group might feel outraged by the behavior of our forebears; others might feel defensive about the implication that they are held accountable for the actions of people they never knew. Remember that you don’t have to change people’s hearts and minds. Rather, your role is to help the group listen and learn from others through their stories or experiences as they work their way through these tough topics.

This week’s dialogue technique is **self awareness**. This is a theme that comes up multiple times in the book. In chapter 3, Rozella Haydée White writes, “Knowing who I am and the stories of my ancestors were critical parts of my upbringing.” In chapter 2, Kristofer Coffman invites us to, “first and foremost, no matter your background, learn about your own immigrant heritage.” Your group will do just that this week, sharing stories from their family of origin and the experiences that have shaped their identity. This work will create a foundation for the conversations to come. And you can help build this foundation by creating a safe space for people to share their stories. Model active, empathic listening for the group; make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak; and allow for some respectful disagreement. Remind the group—and yourself—that your goal isn’t to solve this age-old problem, but rather to learn and grow together toward greater understanding of a complex topic.

SET UP

WELCOME ACTIVITY

- ↳ Index cards, 4–6 per person
- ↳ Pens or pencils

CREATE

- ↳ Copy paper (4 sheets)
- ↳ Sticky notes
- ↳ Marker
- ↳ Pens or pencils
- ↳ Tape



BIBLE PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION

“And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

—Acts 2:6-11

GATHER

WELCOME ACTIVITY

Before participants arrive, write the word “RACE” in large letters on a whiteboard. Arrange chairs in a semi-circle facing the board. If you need more chairs, add a second row, but don’t create a closed circle. As people gather, give each person six to eight sticky notes and a pen. Indicate that this group will be discussing the topic of race—not the athletic competition. Let them know right away that the outcome of your time together probably won’t be consensus.

- ↳ Ask people to write a word or short phrase that describes or defines race. They can affix their note on the board near the word. People can write on more than one sticky note.
- ↳ Once everyone has posted at least one note and the board is full of sticky notes, read all of the notes aloud for the group. Resist the urge to provide commentary on what they wrote.
- ↳ If the same word or phrase appears on more than one note, stack those notes on top of one another.
- ↳ Once all words and phrases have been read aloud, give people an opportunity to add another note. New notes should be read aloud by the people who wrote them.

Ask the group to offer any observations about what appeared on the sticky notes. Did certain themes emerge? Were any contradictory ideas expressed? Were there any surprises or words that made you squirm in your seat? Keep this preliminary conversation flowing, and make sure everyone who wants to speak is heard.

WATCH

Our country has a long history of valuing white people over non-white people. The social construct of race began in pre-colonial times and still exists today. This week’s video provides an overview of racial history in the United States and asks us to consider a twenty-first century response.

CONNECT

DIALOGUES

Ask group members to pair up with someone they don't know very well. This doesn't have to be a complete stranger, but the less people know about their partner, the more interesting this activity will be.

DISCUSSION PROMPT

What groups or organizations do you belong to? How do these affiliations shape your identity?

What are words that define who you are—specifically, identifiers you don't choose? Consider your ethnicity, gender, family of origin, etc. How do these terms shape your identity?

DIALOGUE TECHNIQUE OF THE WEEK: SELF AWARENESS

People often think of race in terms of the groups people belong to, groups typically based on skin color. The idea that race is socially constructed rather than inherently true can be very hard to get our heads around. Invite pairs to sit facing each other. Ask one person to begin answering the discussion prompt. Set the timer for four minutes, and instruct the person speaking to fill that entire time. It can be difficult for some people to talk about themselves for an extended period of time, but their listening partner should avoid the urge to ask questions or turn this exercise into a conversation. When the timer alarm sounds, have people swap roles.

QUESTION FOR THE GROUP:

What did you discover about yourself when you were speaking? What did you learn about your partner as you listened? Which was easier for you? Why?

RESPOND

Now that you've had a chance to practice self awareness in partner groups, take some time to respond to what you read in this week's chapter and saw in this week's video.

- ↳ What information from the book and video was new to you? What was familiar?
- ↳ What is our present responsibility for our collective past?
- ↳ Why might someone resist the idea that race is a social construct?
- ↳ What do you think about the author's statement that race was "created by human beings as a way for some to wield power over others.?"
- ↳ What is your ethnicity? What is your race? In what ways do these identifiers reflect who you are? In what ways are they incomplete or inaccurate?
- ↳ The video indicates that failing to tear down a system of white supremacy is the same thing as supporting it. What is your response? Why do you think you feel that way?

TIP

Each person has about two minutes to tell their story, so use the timer to keep things moving.

CREATE

FAMILY TIMELINES

To set up this activity, provide a bit of biblical background for creating order out of chaos.

According to Genesis 1:2, “the earth was a formless void,” until God started organizing. Eventually God handed that task over to humankind. From that moment on, we have been both great and terrible at creating orderly structures. This activity will bring to light the benefits and drawbacks of this work throughout human history.

- ↳ Ask people to remain with their partner from the dialogue technique activity. Scatter a large number of connectable building blocks on a table. Make sure there are plenty of pieces in different shapes, sizes, and colors.
- ↳ Tell the entire group that they need to work together and organize the pieces. Don't tell them why or what they're making. Indicate that they must work together to establish an organizing structure for the pieces. Offer suggestions, like making piles of pieces according to color or shape, or putting equal amounts of each kind of piece in a pile.
- ↳ For Round One, instruct participants to construct a flower in 60 seconds using only the pieces in their pile. Allow groups to share their object when time concludes. Repeat these steps to create a rainbow in Round Two and a pizza in Round Three.
- ↳ Ask the pairs to discuss the process of trying to create categories for the pieces. What might they have done differently if they had known the kinds of objects they would be expected to create? In what ways did their chosen structure help their creative work? In what ways did it hinder it?
- ↳ Talk for a bit about the human impulse to create categories for people. Think back to your conversation about identity. How do we use these categories to define and understand ourselves? How might we define ourselves without them?

REFLECT

Gather back together as a large group to reflect on today's dialogue process.

- ↳ What did you discover about yourself or someone else in your small group?
- ↳ When were you most engaged?
- ↳ When did you feel challenged?
- ↳ What are you struggling with?
- ↳ What's changed for you?
- ↳ What do we want to do in response to the conversations we've had today?

READ AND CONSIDER

Encourage the group to take time this week to ask friends and family members to share stories about the heritage and experiences that have shaped their identity.

PRAY

PRAYER FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN RACE, FROM *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*

O God, our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

NOTES FOR NEXT WEEK