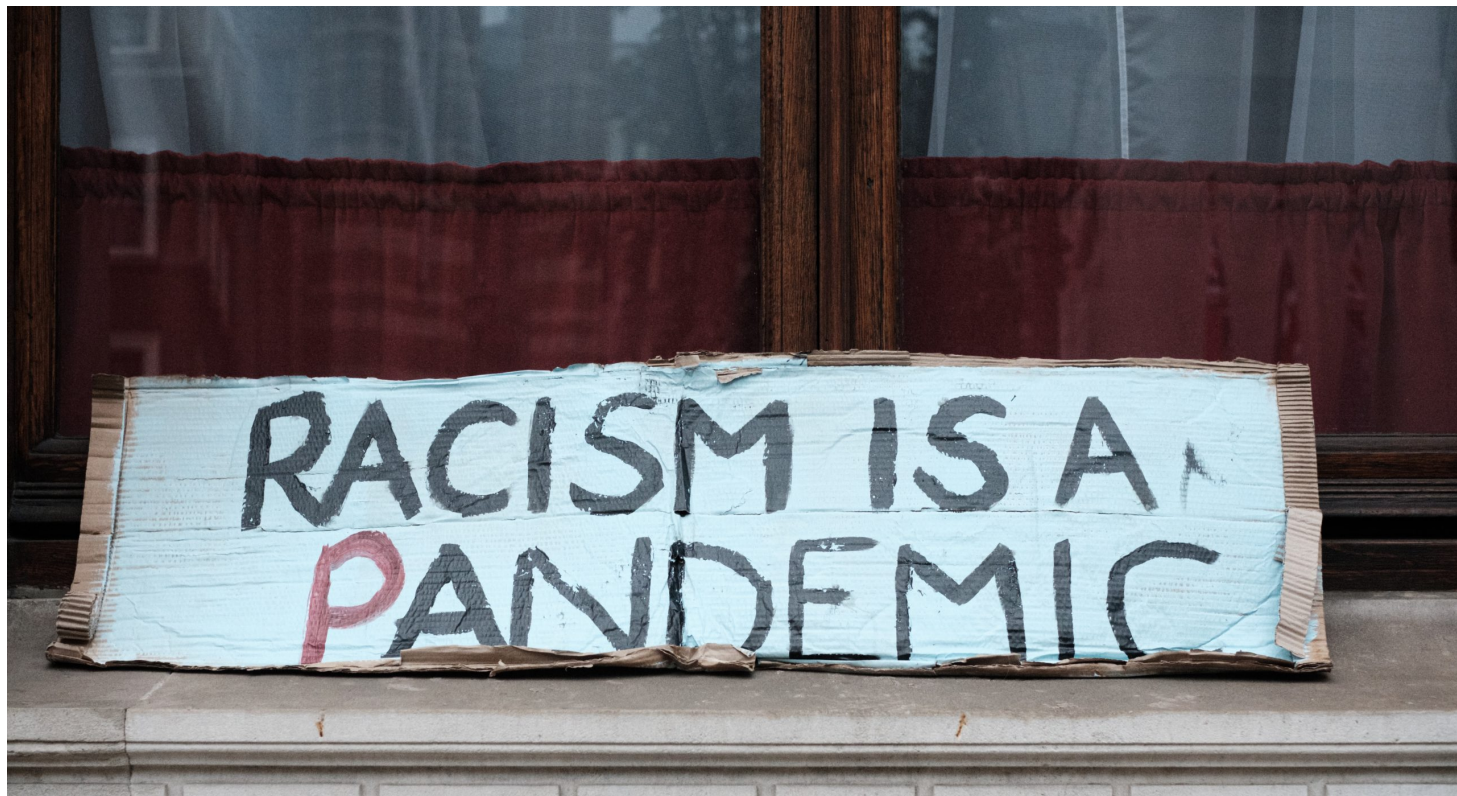


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How to start an Antiracist Book Group When Starting a Book Group Isn't Enough

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14-17 minutes



...with a focus on action and activism from the very beginning, we can move the impulse to read and learn into momentum towards supporting movements for change.

When Black people are in pain, White people just join book clubs. I hope you have heard this criticism at this point. This is a fair criticism, and yet everyone has to start somewhere.

For the past seven weeks a group in my congregation has been reading select chapters of Ibram Kendi's *How to be Antiracist*, and it has taught us all a lot. Each chapter we've read has resonated with people differently, and the general consensus has been there is a lot we did not know about racist power and it's history in our country. The hope in doing a book study on race in our congregation is that if we do it well, with a focus on action and activism from the very beginning, we can move the impulse to read and learn into momentum towards supporting movements for change.

Structure Models Action

We modeled some simple ways to be a more aware and intentional citizen in our systemically racist society through the way we set-up our book study.

- ○ **Purchase the book from a local, BIPOC owned bookseller** (we were even able to find a local bookseller that sold the e-book version), starting the conversation about economic inequality from the very beginning.
- **Start your book study each week with devotions from BIPOC artists, activists, and theologians** normalizing their voices in the spiritual growth of your congregation.

- **Mix personal stories with an understanding of policy and how we have all been complicit in allowing racist policies to run our nation.** This can be as simple as consistently asking what actions your group can take, and challenging responses such as “be kind to Black people.” Of course, kindness is important, but Kendi draws readers from their personal interactions to the systemic change that needs to happen and in following his lead we might move this book study into being a group of action and advocacy.

Here are the discussion questions we used as a starting place for each week of our seven-week book group and some resources we directed people to.

Week 1: Read “My Racist Introduction”

Devotions: Ibram Kendi’s [social media post](#) about antiracist work being rooted in love.

- How has racism affected you?
- What comes up for you when you hear the word Racist?
- Are there times you can think of that you have acted or thought racist things? What is the antiracist alternative to those thoughts/actions?
- What stood out to you in Kendi’s Introduction?
- A common debate in the world of antiracism is whether or not black people and other POC can be racist. (Kendi has received criticism specifically because of this introduction). This comes out of a [definition of racism being](#): prejudice against an ethnic people group by someone or a social structure in a position of power.
 - How does Kendi push against this idea?
 - How do we think about the power dynamics at play in racial situations?
- Have you ever missed or failed to see your own power in a situation? Have you ever been the person without power and struggled to explain the situation to the person in power?

Week 2: Read Chapter 1 – Definitions

Devotions: [Prayers for Racial Harmony](#)

- Let’s hash out these terms. How does Kendi explain them? Is that different from how you have understood them? Do you feel his definition is more or less helpful? (p.18-19)
 - Racist, AntiRacist, Systemic Racism, Racial Discrimination, Reverse Discrimination, Racial Power, No neutral when it comes to racism
- On page 19 Kendi writes “In order to get beyond racism we must first take account of race.” What do you think about this idea?
- How do you understand Jesus and the gospel in relation to society and government?
 - In what ways is the current power structure in the U.S. the same as the Roman Empire during Jesus’ time?
- Have you ever thought about the difference between saving and liberating black people? How do you define liberation?
- How has Christianity in general, in our congregation, or in your life been on the side of the slaveholders? The enslaved?
 - What is the antiracist alternative?
- Having read this chapter, are there parts of society or events in your life that make more sense now?
- Kendi writes about the importance of definitions and clarity in order to spark change, have you started defining anything differently since reading this book? In what ways do you hope to change/what systems or groups do you hope to change?

Week 3: Chapter 2 – Dueling Consciousness

Devotions: [“Sing Out, March On”](#) by Joshua Campbell and the Kuumba Singers in honor of John Lewis

- Can you think of examples in your daily life of solutions born out of Assimilationist, Segregationist, and Antiracist approaches?
 - What are some of the tensions provided by approaches that are not Antiracist? What would you change those situations/power structures/policies to be antiracist?
 - What impressions do you have/remember having about the war on drugs? How was this portrayed in the media?
 - Does Kendi’s explanation of these racist policies change your understanding?
- Have you seen, heard, believed, or perpetuated the “lazy black people” assimilationist idea?
- On page 28 Kendi writes that Americans are “trained to see people not policies.” Has this been your experience?
 - How can we change this?

- How does this connect or not connect with Jesus' focus on individuals?
- Are you aware of your own dueling consciousness?
 - How has the "standard white American" culture harmed you? How have you perpetuated this cultural standard?
- Where have you seen Black Self-Reliance be a positive thing? A racist thing?
- On page 33 Kendi writes that "the white body defines the American body." Do you believe this is true? How has that effected our country? How does that effect people in our country?
- How can you emancipate yourself and others from the dueling consciousness? How is this emancipation related or not, to Christian faith?

Week 4: Chapter 3 – Power

Devotions: "Together, You Can Redeem the Should of Our Nation" by John Lewis

- Where have you seen Black or other People of Color leading? Where have you seen People of Color being led by white people in our society?
 - What reasons have you heard for this unequal power dynamic? In what ways do these power dynamic perpetuate themselves?
- On page 37 Kendi writes: "Race is a mirage we would do well to see," how have you thought about race?
 - Have you been told my society to see or to ignore race (in general, and your race specifically)?
- How have you thought about the connection between racist ideas, power, and policy before reading this chapter?
 - Was any of the history of slavery and the idea of race new to you?
 - If you think about racist policy perpetuating racist ideas rather than the ideas or ignorance perpetuating policy does that change how you understand race dynamics in the U.S.?
 - If it is not ignorance and hate that fuels racist policy, but intentional power grabs, does this change how we react to racist policy? What is the antiracist response to proposed racist policy and to current racist policies?
- Kendi writes on page 38 that "the gift of seeing myself as Black instead of being color-blind is that it allows me to clearly see myself historically and politically as being antiracist."
 - Do you see yourself as a radicalized being? Are you aware of your race, or perceived race, and how that changed power dynamics when you're in a room? If you were to situate yourself and your race historically and politically in this moment would you be perpetuating racist power structures or antiracist? Would those with less racial power than you agree?

Week 5: Chapter 6 – Body

Devotions: Prayer for Big Structural Change from Prayers From Terry

- [Take this racial bias quiz.](#)
 - Note: no racial bias quiz is perfect, and most are only accurate when taken multiple times, but this is where we'll start our conversation this week so taking the quiz at least once would be helpful to your inner work and for our group!
- Kendi writes about being afraid of black bodies, have you ever noticed fear towards a certain person who was not a threat to you? Was this fear because of a media story? The neighborhood you were in? Race? Did that fear prevent you from doing the right thing as Kendi writes about on page 73?
- Have you ever thought about the manufactured fear Kendi writes about on page 76? How does the possibility of the manufacturing of fear change how to engage with media? Politics? Public policy?
- How has living in your body protected you in your lifetime? How has it put you in harm's way?
- How have you relied on (or not) your white privilege as you've navigated the world?
- How can you share the safety of your white skin, or the weight of black skin with others to make how our bodies are received in the world more equitable?
- How can we use our knowledge of policy and politics to change the narratives we tell about those who commit violent crimes? About those in poverty? About racial groups?

Week 6: Chapter 8 – Behavior

Devotions: Ibram Kendi's [social media post](#) about his 38th birthday.

- What behavioral stereotypes have you heard about different races? Which ones have you believed or perpetuated? How have you been effected by others believing racial stereotypes about you?
- What is your reaction to this week's definitions? How would one make racial group behavior fictional on a personal and policy level?

- Kendi writes on page 99 “I shaped myself to their beliefs,” how have you shaped yourself to what other people believe? How can you be antiracist and make it clear to others that you do not expect them to shape their behavior because of your expectations?
- Does Kendi’s historical exploration of the SAT and standardized testing change your understanding of intelligence and how it’s measured?
- What could we rename the achievement gap in a manner that placed the responsibility on the appropriate parties? Who is currently responsible for a student’s education and achievement? Who should be responsible?
- What do you think about Kendi’s proposition of changing achievement from a system of “levels” to a system of types of achievement? What are the pros and cons of this change? How would we make that change personally, culturally, and in policy?
 - Would changing how we understand achievement to be antiracist also make it more Christian?

Week 7: Chapters 10 & 11 – White and Black

Devotions: [Show Up](#) by Joe Davis

- On page 123 Kendi writes that “racist ideas love believers, not thinkers.” What point is he making with this sentence?
 - What does that mean about how we can be antiracist?
 - How does this fit or not fit with who we are called to be as Christians, people who believe and trust in Jesus?
- On page 125, Kendi writes that the binary thinking of “good and evil, God and the Devil,” taught in Sunday school was part of how he became racist. Has your faith ever caused you to over simplify our world? Has our congregation been a part of this dichotomy?
- What do you think about how Kendi separates the concept of Racist power from one particular racial group?
 - Kendi writes on page 129 about how even though ordinary white people benefit from racist power, they would benefit more from an equitable society, and the only people who would lose in the movement to equitable society would be those using systems to gain racist power. What do you think about this? Do you believe that everyone’s lives would be better if we moved toward equity? Why or why not?
- Does it change how we understand Anti-White racism if we frame it as a product of white racism as Kendi has on page 131?
- On page 134 Kendi writes “Maybe White people were not aliens. Maybe they became this way on earth.”
 - How does this quote converse with theology? If people have become racist on earth, is there hope? Where can we turn in scripture or theology for guidance?
- What are your reactions to how Kendi pushes back on the idea that black people cannot be racist because they have no power.
 - Have you ever acted differently because you have felt powerless or not responsible for the outcome of an event?
 - Is it possible to counteract the powerlessness myth as Kendi suggests while still having compassion for the extra emotional and physical burdens people of color carry in this country?
 - Kendi writes about abusive Black police officers, does this change your view of policing in our country? Does Kendi propose an antiracist approach to policing?
- Have you started to see history, or even the current state of our nation as a battle not between racial groups but between racists and antiracists? How is this approach more or less useful to you? Does it spark any action? Is it more or less hopeful?

Beyond Reading and Listening

Our book group has come up with a few different ideas on how we can continue this conversation and engage in antiracist work as a congregation. For us that means hosting a “what to do when...” group where we will talk and act through different racist situations our members have found themselves in and what an antiracist response would be. This group would not have the same energy or understanding around it without the shared definitions, and new historical viewpoint that reading *How to be Antiracist* has provided us.

I hope the process of thoughtfully reading and reflecting will prompt action in your congregation as well.

How to find devotional resources created by BIPOC

- Follow faith leaders from your denomination who are People of Color on social media. [Mihee Kim-Kort](#), [Terry Stokes](#), [Joe Davis](#), [Rozella Haydee White](#), [Lenny Duncan](#), etc.

- Follow BIPOC theologians, artists, and social justice leaders on social media. [Ibram Kendi](#), [Eric Barreto](#), [Wilda Gafney](#), [Kelly Brown Douglas](#), [Bishop Michael Curry](#), etc.
- Use old spirituals or other songs members of your group associate with the civil rights movement.
- Subscribe to [Daily Prayers for Anti-Racism](#)

Additional Resources

- [Anti-Racism Resources](#)
- [Summary of Kendi's Definitions](#)
- [A daily examen of living as an antiracist person](#)
- [Book group discussion guidelines](#)
- [Irbam Kendi's recent TED Talk](#)

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