

dear white peacemakers

DISMANTLING RACISM WITH
GRIT AND GRACE

Study Guide by Marla Taviano



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DAKOTA LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

1. Osheta Moore begins the book with a Dakota land acknowledgment. What did you think of this? Are you familiar with this practice? What is your understanding of the meaning behind it?
2. Who originally inhabited and cared for the land where you live? (Note: You can download an app like Native Land to help you find out.)

PREFACE: MARKERS ON MY HAND, A CALL TO EMPATHY

1. On page 20, Osheta writes that she was challenged by a friend to show up at the Special Olympics “because I rarely if at all make space to consider how people with disabilities move through their lives.” How did this make you feel? How do *you* make (or not make) space for that in your life?
2. What do you think about Osheta’s conscious choice to treat Coach Nelson as a potential friend instead of an enemy?
3. On pages 23–25, Osheta describes the different reactions she and her friend Lindsey had to Coach Nelson. Do you relate more to Osheta or to Lindsey in this situation, and why?
4. On page 26, Osheta writes, “Hate or retributive anger toward White people has no room in my heart. Only love.” Describe your emotions after reading these words.

COME TO THE TABLE

1. What emotions did you feel or experience as you read this letter? What specific phrases caused visceral feelings in your body?
2. Can you describe a time when you sat in a space specifically curated by a Black woman? If you have never done so, why not, and would you be willing to? Why are spaces like this important?
3. How does Osheta’s description of the Beloved Community (which begins on p. 29) contrast with other anti-racism work you might be familiar with?
4. Discuss Osheta’s use of the terms *white supremacy*, *Whiteness*, and *white privilege*. Do any of these make you uncomfortable? How do they challenge your prior understanding of these concepts? How are they helpful for you?
5. Have you ever wondered (or been asked) what anti-racism has to do with the gospel and the Bible? What compelling evidence does Osheta give for anti-racism being a Christian/biblical issue?
6. Are you familiar with any of the four Negro Spirituals that Osheta shares (p. 38)? Take some time to listen to each of them online as you read the book.
7. Osheta “love[s] this journey for [us]” (p. 45). What about this impending journey excites you? Overwhelms you? Scares you?

Wade In the Water

CHAPTER 1: GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER: FLEEING WHITE SUPREMACY

1. When and how did your anti-racism journey begin? Where do you find yourself now?

CHAPTER 2: YOUR NAME IS NOT RACIST, IT'S BELOVED

1. On page 54, Osheta lists a series of “why” questions asked by a group of White people on a learning trip. Which of these questions have you asked (yourself or others), and what others would you add? Be honest.
2. On page 59, Osheta describes the “mammy caricature” used against Black women. Where have you seen this in pop culture? What are your thoughts about this, and Osheta’s reaction to it?
3. On page 61, Osheta asks, “Why then do I base my anti-racism education on encouraging White people to own their Belovedness?” How would you sum up her answer to this question? How do you feel about her approach to anti-racism?

CHAPTER 3: LET'S FORGE A NEW WAY

1. On page 69, Osheta expresses that she thinks there needs to be a nuanced way to talk about White people’s pain as we come to terms with racism. How does this strike you? What do you imagine this looking like? What pain have you experienced on your anti-racism journey? How have you expressed it? Does this discussion change the way you want to process or express it in the future?
2. In this chapter, Osheta shares the pain she experienced when James Byrd Jr. was gruesomely murdered, and the subsequent layers of more pain caused by the silent complicity of her church. Can you put yourself in her shoes and imagine how she felt? How does your church typically handle issues of racial injustice (talking about them? silence?), and what do you think about their response (or lack thereof)?
3. Osheta writes on page 80: “I don’t speak for all Black people, and the pivots you’ll see me take in my journey to racial healing are mine. Some Black people will hold the same convictions I do or share experiences similar to mine, but we’re not a monolith—as [my friend] Amena says, there’s not one way to be Black.” When have you assumed that all Black people think or feel the same way? Why do you think this happens to Black people (and other people of color), but not to White people?
4. When it comes to her anti-racism work, Osheta describes how she came to the realization that (1) offering too much grace, and (2) offering too much grit were both unviable (p. 81). What is this third way she envisions? How do you interpret it?

CHAPTER 4: OH LORD, SHE PUT TOMATOES IN THE GUMBO

1. On page 94, Osheta writes that “the principalities and powers have thoughtfully woven xenophobia, fear of the other, into this world.” Where have you seen examples of this in the recent (and not so recent) past?
2. On page 96, Osheta writes, “When I encourage you, I must hold grace and grit together—grace to remember your core identity, grit to call you to live into a braver, bolder expression of it.” What are some ways she has already done this in the pages of this book?

3. “Table fellowship with one another is one practical way we can resist white supremacy,” Osheta writes (p. 102). What are some ways you have experienced this? If you haven’t, what are some ways you could work to make it a reality?

CHAPTER 5: NAH. AN EVICTION NOTICE FROM THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

1. What feelings did Osheta’s letter to Satan bring up in you? What connected with you? What would you add? Take some time to write your own letter drawing on these ideas.

PART II

There Is a Balm in Gilead

1. What did you feel when you read George Floyd’s last words? Read them again slowly, and imagine George saying them. Imagine what he was feeling. Let yourself feel it, too.

CHAPTER 6: TO HEAL THE SIN-SICK SOUL: REJECTING WHITE APATHY

1. On page 114, Osheta says she resisted wearing a stole to the protest because she wasn’t “raised in a tradition that put stock in religious garbs and to-dos.” How would you describe the culture of the tradition in which you were raised? How do you feel about your religious tradition? What effect has it had on your life? How do you feel about religious cultures that differ from the one you’re used to?
2. Osheta describes “white apathy” as encountering the pain and suffering caused by white supremacy but then ignoring it, rejecting it, explaining it away, or giving in to overwhelm (pp. 118–19). Describe a time (or two) when you’ve given in to white apathy. Why do you think this was your response?

CHAPTER 7: WHERE DOES IT HURT?

1. At the start of this chapter, Osheta shares a story about a Black anti-racism teacher she respects, but whose philosophy she doesn’t exactly share. Tell about an experience you’ve had with an anti-racism educator that was either positive or negative. What made it so?
2. Osheta learned from the great Ruby Sales to ask the question, “Where does it hurt?” (see p. 122). How would you feel if Osheta asked you that question personally right now, and what would your answer be?
3. Osheta describes a White friend telling her, “You’re just too nice. I need you to yell at me.” What was Osheta’s response? Have you found yourself thinking similarly to this friend? How did Osheta’s reaction make you feel?
4. On page 127, Osheta says that building a culture of peacemaking involves White people asking each other in community the following questions:
 - “What does it mean to be White?”

- “How has that affected people of color?”
 - “Where does it hurt?”
 - “What can we do together to protect and love our siblings of color?”
5. Work through these questions with a small group of White friends.
 6. On pages 129–130, Osheta says she’s known White people who have started on an anti-racism journey fully energized to “do the work,” but after weeks of reading, calling out, and studying, they reach their limit—they are burned out and over talking about racism. What experience can you share with this type of burnout? How did you respond?
 7. Take a few minutes (or longer) to evaluate where you are on your anti-racism journey. How did you get to this point? What obstacles are in your way right now, keeping you from moving forward? What do you need to help you keep going? Where might you find what you need?

CHAPTER 8: I’M SORRY AND I’M LISTENING

1. Osheta writes that “to be Black in America is to be constantly grieving.” Read slowly through the very condensed list of trauma that Black people have endured on pages 136–37. What would you add to the list? Make some time this week to make an even longer list, consulting reputable websites (or other sources) for help.
2. She also adds, “To be Black in America is to never be allowed to fully grieve” (p. 138). In what ways are Black people in America expected to push down their grief? Why do you think this is? How could you enter into a Black friend’s grief with them today?
3. Osheta says that the two most powerful phrases—and maybe the only appropriate things—White people can say in response to our Black sisters’ and brothers’ pain are “I’m sorry” and “I’m listening” (p. 143). Of course, these can’t just be empty words. What would these phrases look like, practically speaking, lived out in your life?

CHAPTER 9: LAST WORDS

1. Read aloud the last words of each of these men, women, and children. Stop after each one and observe a moment of silence for their precious lives. Don’t rush this. Give them the time they each deserve.

CHAPTER 10: IF I DON’T MAKE IT HOME SAFELY

1. How did you feel as you read about Osheta being stopped and interrogated by the police officer (pp. 151–53)? Be as descriptive with your emotions as you can.
2. Read Elijah McClain’s words on page 154 again slowly, imagining how he must have felt as he said them.
3. Let’s talk about the favor Osheta asks on pages 155–56. If she dies unarmed at the hands of police someday, she has some requests for us. First, right now, resist any and all urge to brush this off, to say you’re sure it won’t happen to her. History shows us that her brown skin means she is not safe. Which requests of hers hit you the hardest, and why?

CHAPTER 11: WE RAISE OUR HANDS

1. What would it look like in real life for you to raise your hands in surrender? In protest? In holy anger? In solidarity? Give an example or two of each.

Down by the Riverside

CHAPTER 12: AIN'T GONNA STUDY WAR NO MORE: DISARMING WHITE FRAGILITY

1. Let's talk about white fragility. What emotions, physical reactions, or both does that phrase bring up in you?
2. "Anti-racism peacemaking is an invitation to interrogate your defenses, know your fear responses, and respond with nonviolence," Osheta writes on page 170. What are some of your defense mechanisms and fear responses when it comes to racism and anti-racism? When have you seen or felt them in action? Where do you think those responses come from?
3. On page 171, Osheta says that grounded and generous White Peacemakers have embraced self-compassion and cultivated self-awareness through the following:
 - therapy
 - dialogue
 - spiritual direction
 - meditation
 - study

They also do the following:

- Implement practices that center them
- Have loving accountability
- Lay down the sword and shield of their inner critic and skeptic
- Do not think of anti-racism as a battle
- Engage with curiosity and mercy

Spend some big, deep time reflecting on these things and mapping out a plan you can implement in your own life.

- What are your first steps?
- What are some long-term goals?
- Who could fill necessary roles in your life?
- How will you compensate these people for their time?
- What resources do you need?
- What mindset shifts are in order?
- What other people do you want to invite on this journey with you?

CHAPTER 13: WHO TOLD YOU YOU HAD TO DO THIS ALONE?

1. On page 174, Osheta lists some calls to action that are often conflicting, confusing, or overwhelming. Read through the list. Which resonate with you? Which don't feel right, and why? Discuss with your small group, and listen respectfully to people's different perspectives.
2. Make a list of everything you can think of in your day-to-day life that has been influenced and tainted by white supremacy. Describe how white supremacy has influenced/tainted each thing on your list.
3. "If you want to dismantle white supremacy, you're going to need to get comfortable with trying and failing," Osheta writes on page 175. What are your thoughts and fears surrounding this statement?
4. On page 176, Osheta quotes pastor Bruxy Cavey: "Love is the most inefficient thing we'll do." Does this quote ring true to you? What examples can you give from your own life? What might this look like on your anti-racism journey?

- Summarize Osheta’s thoughts on meekness and humility from this chapter. What role do they play in anti-racism work? What are some of *your* thoughts on and feelings about meekness and humility, especially as they relate to your anti-racism journey?
- “Intellectual humility is curiosity,” Osheta writes (p. 181). When we start asking questions about our country’s history—why things are the way they are and how they got this way—it can be very uncomfortable. What are some uncomfortable things you’ve had to face as you embrace intellectual humility/curiosity as it pertains to U.S. history?
- Osheta ends chapter 13 with a piercing question: “Will you take on the yoke of anti-racism peacemaking?” Take some time to answer her honestly and thoroughly. If your answer is yes, name (or write about) how you plan to follow through. If your answer is no, name why you can’t say yes.

CHAPTER 14: YOUR LOVE IS NOT FRAGILE

- Were you familiar with the term *microaggressions* as Osheta uses it (“small, everyday ways White people often unintentionally harm people of color,” p. 185)? Make a list of microaggressions a Black person might face on any given day. (Don’t be afraid to consult online search engines; it’s not easy for White people to come up with a list when we’ve never experienced these things ourselves.)
- Have you ever said something similar to “If you knew my heart you’d know I’m not racist”? Explain the context. What do you think about Osheta’s words on page 186: “Peacemaking is not about intentions”? How does this shape how you might have these conversations in the future?
- Discuss the differences between intentions and impact. What are some examples of good intentions that had a negative impact?
- “It seems like purity of heart is directly connected to action,” Osheta writes (p. 191). Do you agree or disagree? Give some examples to back up your belief.
- Osheta believes her readers have good hearts (or they wouldn’t be reading this book), but she also believes that since White folks don’t have the lived experiences of people of color and don’t process everyday interactions through layers of racism, we’ll make mistakes (pp. 191–92). How do you feel about this? Do you believe Osheta? Are you willing to trust her?

CHAPTER 15: YES, YOU CAN TOUCH MY HAIR

- Reread Osheta’s letter to you (pp. 195–96), then write one back to her in response.
- How did reading about White women purchasing, selling, and owning slaves (p. 201) make you feel? (The book she mentions, *They Were Her Property*, is a powerful, painful, and important read.) What did you read that shocked or surprised you? What commitment could you make today to learn more about the truth of history?
- What does Osheta mean when she says, “I can tell where White Peacemakers are on their journey by how they interact with Black hair” (p. 202)? Share an interaction you’ve had with a Black woman concerning her hair. What happened, and how did you feel?
- On page 204, Osheta says that “mercy is one of the bedrocks of my approach to teaching anti-racism. But mercy is not irresponsible kindness.” What do you think she means by this? Think of some possible examples.

CHAPTER 16: CONFESSIONS OF A JUDGMENTAL ALLY

- Which of Osheta’s confessions in this chapter can you relate to? Now make your own list of confessions.

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around

CHAPTER 17: MARCHIN' UP TO FREEDOM LAND: LEVERAGING WHITE PRIVILEGE

1. Which parts of Osheta's letter to Rachel Held Evans (pp. 215–21) inspire you? What would you want a letter from a Black friend to say to or about you as a White Peacemaker someday? What steps do you need to take to become the kind of person that letter describes?

CHAPTER 18: FREE, BLACK, AND SOUTHERN

1. How did you feel reading Osheta's story of her encounter with the men in the truck with the Confederate flag (pp. 224–28)? Did your heart start pounding faster? Could you feel her anxiety and fear—her absolute terror? Sit with those feelings for a few minutes. Think about what it must have been like for her. Then think about the thousands upon thousands of other Black people who have experienced similar terror, over and over and over again. Sit with this for a bit.
2. Defenders of the Confederate flag say that it's a symbol of heritage, not hate. What do you think about this? What do you think the Confederate flag communicates to other White people? To Black people? To other people of color?
3. This question is for White southern Peacemakers: What are some creative ways you can live out what Osheta believes is a very specific calling to write a better future right where you live?
4. And since we know racism is in absolutely no way confined to the American South, for all the rest of you White Peacemakers, what can you do to write that better future right where *you* are?

CHAPTER 19: TWO SCOOPS OF JUSTICE AND PEACE, PLEASE

1. What are some things you grew up around that you didn't realize until much later were racist?
2. On page 239, Osheta describes a time her daughter asked her to share something about racism on social media and Osheta declined because, as she says, "Here's the thing about being a Black woman attempting to dismantle racism on social media: there are just some things that will not be heard from me by White people." Think of and share a time when a Black person shared something about racism and you didn't receive it well. Be honest.
3. On page 240, Osheta describes how righteousness is most often interpreted, translated, or thought of as a personal posture of devotion to God, being in right relationship with God. But the Greek word *dikaiosyne* Jesus uses actually describes God's heart for justice. Have you ever heard anyone say (or said yourself) that Christians are called to righteousness, not to be "social justice warriors"? Knowing what you now know about this word, how does this change that perspective?
4. Osheta's friend Amanda is an example of a White Peacemaker who uses her platform to speak up against racial injustice, to expose hard truths, and to hold people in power accountable (pp. 239–41). Are you comfortable following in Amanda's footsteps and bravely standing up and speaking out? If you're not comfortable with that, would you be willing to do it despite your discomfort? What might that look like on your Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter feed? In your daily life?

CHAPTER 20: WHEN “BLACK LIVES MATTER” SOUNDS LIKE “I LOVE YOU”

1. What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you hear the phrase “Black Lives Matter”? Has your thinking evolved over the past few months and years in any way? Discuss.
2. Osheta begins peacemaking discussions by letting the other person talk first. “When I make space for storytelling and unhurried sharing,” she writes on page 248, “we become disarmed. I can hear the humanity in them and hopefully they’ll hear the humanity in me.” What do you think about her approach, and how could you use it at the next opportunity?
3. On page 250, Trevor tells Osheta that today’s activists could learn a thing or two from Martin Luther King Jr., and she says she thinks both the activists and Dr. King were doing the same thing. What does she mean? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
4. Osheta worries that White Peacemakers will get caught up over terms like *Marxism*, *communism*, and *anti-gospel* (see p. 253). We could add even more: *Black Lives Matter*, *critical race theory*, *the social justice gospel*. Which of these terms have tripped or are tripping you up? What other terms concern or confuse you? Could you read more about them from the perspective of a Black author? Make a plan to start educating yourself today.
5. Osheta writes on page 256, “If you pull away from the Black Lives Matter movement, which is arguably the most impactful expression of the fight for human dignity of this moment, because it comes in a package you don’t like, then you don’t have enough proximity to the pain of white supremacy.” On the next page, she adds, “I say no more, White Peacemakers. No more arguing over whether we should say ‘Black Lives Matter,’ because it’s not even a question in God’s mind.” What is your history with BLM? When did you first hear about it, and what was your reaction? How do Osheta’s words contribute to your understanding of it? Are you willing to work through any negative thoughts and fears, and to share that Black Lives Matter?
6. “Anti-racism is an embodied practice,” Osheta says on page 261, and asks, “White Peacemakers, are you willing to suffer to make sure we live in a world that never forgets our *imago Dei*?” Are you? What might that look like lived out?

CHAPTER 21: WHAT WE’RE NOT GOING TO DO: A NEW ORIENTATION TO ANGER

1. Anger is a tough one. We’re never all going to agree on what is proper or appropriate or biblical/Jesus-like when it comes to anger. Osheta writes, “I want to be angry at the systems and I want to disrupt those systems in direct action like Jesus, but I never, ever want to weaponize my anger toward others” (p. 272). Later on she says, “There is a massive difference between retributive, reactive anger and the kind I feel every single time another Black person is killed.” What kinds of anger do you feel when it comes to racial injustice? Sit with these thoughts and feelings. Talk them over in a group. Or with a friend.
2. Another thing we won’t all agree on is how to handle activism, emotions, and interactions on social media. Talk about some of the things Osheta saw (and shared) online after Ahmaud Arbery was killed (see pp. 267–71). How did she feel and respond? How did *you*? How do you see your role as a White Peacemaker when it comes to engaging on social media?
3. On page 273, Osheta says that the first three tables she’s going to flip over as we dismantle white supremacy are scarcity, racial biases, and violence. Which three tables would you flip over first, and why?

CHAPTER 22: FORGIVING WHILE BLACK

1. Osheta says she does not think it is “appropriate to offer tear-filled statements and hugs without (1) any indication that the root issue is going to be addressed; and (2) a clearly communicated plan of restoration” (pp. 276–77). What do you think about this, and why? Discuss the examples of Black forgiveness she

shares: the Brandt Jean hug and the victims' family members forgiving Dylann Roof, as well as other similar incidents that come to mind. How did these stories make you feel? How do they illustrate the complexity of forgiveness?

2. What does Osheta see as the significant differences between forgiveness and reconciliation (see p. 280)? Do you agree or disagree, and why? Discuss the concepts of performative reconciliation, premature reconciliation, and weaponized reconciliation. What are the problems with these forms of reconciliation? Why might we be tempted to employ them?
3. What is meant by the term *cheap grace* (p. 281)? Give some examples of how you see this in our culture, or in your own life.

CHAPTER 23: WHITE SAVIORISM AND BLACK JOY

1. "White savior complex is at the core of this curation of Black pain and neglect of Black joy" (p. 288). Unpack this powerful statement phrase by phrase. What does it mean, what are the implications, and what can we do about this?
2. On page 290, Osheta writes, "Focusing on Black joy is powerful and important for building a counter-narrative to the daily rehearsal in the media of Black death and Black victimhood." What are some tangible ways you can appreciate and celebrate Black joy as a White Peacemaker?
3. What does Osheta say is the difference between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation (starting on p. 290)? What are the gut checks she says you can do to differentiate? What are some ways you can begin to right the wrongs of cultural appropriation in your own life? Community? Culture?

CHAPTER 24: BREATHING ROOM

1. What were your thoughts and feelings about reparations *before* you read this chapter, and what are your thoughts and feelings *after* reading this chapter?
2. Osheta shares a lot of powerful history here. Which events were you familiar with before reading the chapter, and what new things did you learn? If you're hearing some of this history for the very first time, how did it make you feel? Are you willing to make a commitment to learn more about U.S. history from the perspective of Black people? What would that look like?
3. Author Ta-Nehisi Coates says that for (White) Americans, giving up money wouldn't be the hardest part of reparations; it would be "acknowledging that their most cherished myth was not real" (p. 301). What are some "truths" you've always believed about American history, the American dream, and America as a "Christian nation"? How have these myths been challenged, and what thoughts and emotions are you experiencing as a result?

CHAPTER 25: PLEASE KNEEL FOR THE KINGDOM ANTHEM

1. Let's talk about your experience with church and patriotism. How was it spoken of or practiced in your past church or churches? What are your current church's views on patriotism, church and country, and so on? What feelings, tensions, or questions did this chapter stir in you? Be as honest as possible.
2. Let's unpack Osheta's words on page 310: "When I walked out of that church, I made a choice. I chose Jesus over country. I chose truth over lies. I chose to honor my identity as Beloved kingdom woman over lukewarm American believer. I chose the cross over the American flag. I chose the shalom of God over the manufactured peace of empire." What does she mean, and what do you think about her statement? Would you make the same one?
3. Osheta breaks down the Lord's Prayer, line by line (starting on p. 312), and applies it to her everyday peacemaking. Do the same thing with the prayer, using your own personal examples.

CHAPTER 26: AMEN! A BENEDICTION

1. Spend some time sitting still and listening to recordings of Negro Spirituals (the four that lend their titles to the sections of this book are a great place to start). You can find them on YouTube (just be sure to find choirs of Black people singing, and the older the recordings the better—for example, search for the 1953 recording of “Amen, Amen, Amen” by the Wings Over Jordan Choir). If you listened to them when you started the book, do it again. Just sit with them and listen in a posture of humility and prayer.

EPILOGUE: BY THE WATERS OF BDE MAKA SKA

1. What are some ways you can learn about the people who first inhabited the land where you live?

NOTE TO THE READER

1. What advice does Osheta give to White Peacemakers who might want to ask Black friends to share their stories or answer questions? How will you take her words to heart?
2. What is her warning about comparing Black leaders and teachers to one another? What does she suggest you do when it comes to your anti-racism learning journey? What steps will you take in this direction today and in the days and weeks to come?

BONUS

1. Take a few minutes to write a note or email to Osheta, thanking her for writing this book. Now is not the time to burden her with all your thoughts and fears and questions. And it’s definitely not the time for criticism or disagreement. Just write a simple, heartfelt note of appreciation for all the hard work she has poured into this labor of love. And maybe a few words about the impact it has had on your life.