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BEEN IN THE STRUGGLE

PURSuing AN
ANTIRACIST SPIRITUALITY

STUDY GUIDE BY MARLA TAVIANO



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FOREWORD BY DREW G. I. HART

1. On page 14, Drew Hart writes, “This book offers a much-needed prophetic and pastoral word from elders in the antiracist struggle. As you read you can tell that it draws on decades of experience and insight.” And this: “We need to hear from a lot of voices right now, but we need this book because we desperately need to sit with our elders and hear from people who have been in the struggle and are willing to pass their wisdom on to us” (p. 15). What have you learned from elders in your life as it pertains to antiracism, and what do you hope to gain from this book?
2. *Extra credit:* Read Drew Hart’s powerful and important book *Who Will Be a Witness?*

INTRODUCTION

1. On page 24, the authors write that “over the years we have learned that resistance to antiracism work is fairly predictable.” Share an experience you’ve had with resistance to antiracism work.
2. On page 28, the authors share that they grew to embrace “a far more intersectional approach in which connections between racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism were made forthright and uncompromising.” They’ll discuss this more later in the book, but what are your initial thoughts and reactions to this “intersection of isms”? In what ways do you see them connecting?
3. Regina and Tobin chose to start the book with the narrative of their relationship for two primary reasons: (1) spiritualities are about *stories*, and (2) spiritualities are about *relationships*. Do you agree or disagree? What examples can you share where stories or relationships (or both) played a powerful part in your spirituality?
4. On page 32, the authors discuss the importance of precise language when writing about any kind of identity. “Naming, as we know, is power, and too many times racist power has been used to confer on people names that they did not choose, and to deny people the power to name themselves.” Discuss examples of this. Why do you think precise language matters, or does this idea trouble you? Why do you think that is?
5. On page 34, the authors state that “one of the fundamental divides between Black and White communities when addressing racism” is “the articulation of individual versus communal approaches to racial issues.” How have you seen this played out?
6. “An antiracist spirituality,” the authors say on page 35, “needs to be good for sitting with grief and fostering joy.” What are your thoughts on this?

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS AN ANTIRACIST SPIRITUALITY?

1. On page 39, the authors write that “if we are ever going to be successful in tearing down the mansions of White supremacy, we are going to have to move through conflict, past perceived slights, and forward to a beckoning future amid challenging conversations and events.” What examples of conflict and perceived slights have you already experienced? Are you ready for more? How do you know?
2. On page 45, the authors warn against confusing the preparation for the work of antiracism with the actual work of antiracism. Both are important. How do you know when your preparation is complete and it’s time to get to work?
3. Read the section on pages 46–47 titled “Defining an antiracist spirituality” out loud either to yourself or with your small group. What do you think of this definition? Discuss your thoughts.
4. On page 50, the authors say that “an antiracist spirituality challenges us to unify clear-eyed reckoning with measured compassion.” Based on what you’ve read, what do they mean by “clear-eyed reckoning” and “measured compassion?” Talk about what each of these things entail and some challenges you see when it comes to marrying the two.

5. On page 52, we read: “While not allowing us to ignore the past, an antiracist spirituality calls us forward.” Not everyone agrees on what “ignoring the past” or “moving forward” looks like. What do these ideas mean to you?
6. The authors give one “final” definition of antiracist spirituality on page 53. “An antiracist spirituality is a way of being in the world that draws on the unknown and unknowable—which some call Spirit, others name the divine, goes by the word of Mystery, relates to us as God—to encourage, empower, and enthuse amid the intention and the action to undermine the systems of White supremacy around us.” Which words do you use for “God” and how comfortable are you with other words?
7. *Extra credit:* The authors share just a brief overview of the lives and work of Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers, and Anne Braden. Read more about one of these elders (or all three) and take notes on other things about their stories that stand out to you.

CHAPTER 2: ANTIRACISM AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

1. In her book *Black Womanist Ethics*, Katie Cannon talks about how Christians are told to choose suffering, but “for African Americans, suffering in a brutal racial caste system was not voluntary.” How would you answer the authors’ question: “What [do] Christian ethics and theology have to say about that?” (p. 56).
2. You may have heard it said that “talking about racism is a distraction from the gospel.” On page 57, the authors speak to the need to understand the history of White supremacy and its effects on the economy, politics, and other systems. They say that “racism, and other isms that marginalize, harm, and destroy people, must also be named as sin.” How do you feel about this, and how might you convince someone who doesn’t believe it to be true?
3. On page 61, the authors talk about Whiteness as the norm. What does this mean to you? Give practical examples.
4. “Segregation did not happen accidentally,” the authors write on page 61. It’s the result of interlocking policies and people agreeing with them. And our churches carry on this tradition of segregation. What is the racial/ethnic makeup of your church? Why is it what it is? Dig as deep as you need to for answers.
5. On page 63, the authors write, “A church committed to antiracism must equip itself by recalling stories of racialization—how did people become ‘raced,’ and what does that mean in the U.S. context?” How would you answer this two-part question?
6. How “can we create interracial, antiracist spaces where Blackness is loved and valued and seen as imaging God” (p. 66)? Share some possible examples.
7. On page 67, there are three questions to ask “if we are trying to understand how the past has created the present in order to shape a different future”: *What happened? Why did it happen? What do we do now?* How would you answer these questions?
8. *Extra credit:* Read *Black Womanist Ethics* by Katie Cannon, mentioned on page 56.

CHAPTER 3: THE SPIRITUALITY OF EMBRACING BLACKNESS IN AN ANTI-BLACK CULTURE

1. On page 70, we read that “the Black/White, good/bad dynamic shows up in the language of faith.” What are some other examples of this besides the ones mentioned? The authors write that some people aren’t convinced there is a connection here. What do you think?
2. The authors recognize that there may be discomfort around the words *racism* and *anti-Blackness*. What do you feel when you hear these terms? What do they mean to you? Share honestly about any discomfort you experience.
3. “We must not underestimate the sheer number of people who had to cooperate with this system [of racialization] in order for it to be beneficial,” the authors write, “and in continual operation to exist for as long

as it did” (p. 73). Brainstorm a list of people (in general or specific) who cooperated with racialization throughout history.

4. What do you know about lynching and mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline? How might you go about learning more?
5. On pages 77–78, Regina talks about how when she was a child the adults in her life rejected anti-Blackness via Black poetry, literature, and art. “They are the carriers of my culture,” she writes; “they are my sacred texts. They bear witness to the struggle to be seen, heard, understood, and valued.” How might you (and your church) incorporate Black art into your life? What impact might this have when it comes to antiracism?

CHAPTER 4: ANTIRACISM AND POPULAR CULTURE

1. The authors make a bold, and rather exciting, statement on page 80: “The choices we make about popular culture frequently set the stage for how we approach interracial relationships, conceive of an antiracist future, and work to bring that future to fruition. If we learn how to engage with popular culture with integrity, we can be far better equipped to live our antiracist values in our daily lives.” The church has had a complicated relationship with popular culture over the years. Take a few minutes to think back to your formative years (continuing up to the present) and what your church or churches had to say (or not say) about popular culture. Then unpack the authors’ statement. What do you think they mean?
2. In *The Lord of the Rings* saga, the bad beings (orcs) are dark-skinned, while the good beings (elves) are light-skinned. And all the heroes are White and male. The message is explicit, the authors say: “White lives are normative, White lives are brave, White lives embody goodness” (p. 82). What are some of your favorite movies and TV shows? What messages do they send about White and Black lives?
3. On page 86, the authors say that “an antiracist spirituality invites a more grounded and intentional engagement with cultural resources.” What do they say about cultural appropriation and cultural honoring? What do you understand the differences between those two concepts to be?
4. On pages 88–89, the concept of a “White savior” is discussed. What is the difference between a White savior and a White person taking action to dismantle racism in an appropriate way? Give some personal examples of White saviorism. What can White people do to make sure they don’t fall into this trap?
5. History professor Felipe Hinojosa observes that “if all we do is call out and focus on the presence of racism in society without crafting and lifting up alternatives that point to and envision a new way forward, we and the movements in which we are situated will invariably collapse and grind to a halt” (pp. 90–91). What are some possible alternatives that point to and envision a new way forward?
6. The last section of this chapter (starting on page 92) is called “Love and belovedness.” Based on what you read in this section, how would you describe a healthy, loving interracial relationship?
7. On page 98, the authors suggest that sometimes, “the most powerful statement of love” can be to wish someone well but then walk away from the relationship. Share a time when you have made this choice.
8. Sometimes, White folks “have too often brought their neediness for affirmation and approval rather than been willing to sit with the discomfort of a racism exposed” (p. 99). Have you experienced this? Share an example.

CHAPTER 5: ANTIRACISM AND IDENTITY

1. On page 101, the authors write about the idea that “Black characters should take care of White ones.” This Black caretaker is referred to by Christopher John Farley as the “Magical African American Friend.” The MAAF is defined as a “well-established Hollywood trope in which an African American character plays a

salvific role in the life of a White person . . . even if it means sacrificing oneself to do so” (p. 102). Are you familiar with this concept? What are your initial thoughts?

2. On page 105, the authors take the MAAF trope out of the movies and demonstrate how it shows itself in the church. William Pannell, a Black Mennonite leader, was “useful” to White Mennonites as long as he was helping to save them. “Once he challenged White Mennonites to save themselves and began naming their racism directly, that interest waned,” the authors write. Why do you think this is? What personal examples can you share?
3. Tobin and Regina have worked to guard against the MAAF trope in their work together (p. 106). How might you work to do this in an interracial partnership or friendship you have?
4. Tobin says it has taken him longer to be comfortable in his skin as a White man (p. 107). What are the different parts of your identity, and what is your comfort level with each part and why? Take turns sharing your thoughts.
5. “Integration without restitution and reparation is cheap” (p. 108). What does this mean to you?
6. On page 108, the authors say: “An antiracist spirituality that has integrity in working across racial lines of distinct racial identities is in the end marked by three foundational practices.” What are those three practices, and what do they look like lived out?
7. Regina regularly reminds her students that the work requires more than the work itself. “If there is not joy in it, you’re not going to keep doing it” (p. 112). Is there joy in your work right now? If so, give examples. If not, what could you do to infuse more joy into it?

CHAPTER 6: RESPONDING TO WHITENESS

1. If you’re White, take some time to think about (and share) your cultural heritage. Where are your ancestors from? When did they arrive in the United States? Which cultural traditions do you still honor and celebrate from your country or countries of origin? If none, why do you think that is? Talk about how watering down cultural identity was necessary for full inclusion in the White community years ago in the United States (see p. 117). What impact has that had on you?
2. On page 117, Tobin writes that “jettisoning specific cultural practices created a cultural vacuum that White people have often sought over time to fill by appropriating the cultural traditions of other groups.” What examples can you think of?
3. What negative effects of Whiteness does Tobin discuss on page 119? How have you experienced negative effects of Whiteness?
4. White participants in Tobin’s workshops often ask: “So what are White people supposed to then do? Are we supposed to become more White? Stop being White? Neither seems quite right” (p. 121). What are Tobin’s suggestions? Now add some of your own. If you don’t have suggestions, then what additional questions or concerns do you have about Whiteness?
5. “White caucusing” is when a group of White people get together to talk about what it means to be White. Tobin says it can be uncomfortable, but it “remains a powerful tool” (p. 122). Read and discuss the section on pages 124–26 titled “How to hold a White caucus with integrity.” Make a list of things to do and not do when holding a White caucus.
6. In the final section of the chapter, starting on page 126, the authors share some things that have worked—and not worked—when talking with White people about racism. Which things have they found ineffective? And which strategies have led to better results? Share experiences from your own antiracism work, both negative and positive.

CHAPTER 7: ANTIRACISM AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT AND CRISIS

1. “When race constrains the lives of People of Color, they feel and see it. When race benefits White people’s lives, it’s credited to the myth of meritocracy and not a system that advantages some and disadvantages others” (p. 133). Why is this? And what are some ways you can think of to help White people see the truth?
2. The authors quote antiracism educator Robert Terry on page 135: “Being white means not having to think about it.” Yet, they observe, “Black people must learn ‘the ways of white folks’ in order to be safe.” What examples can you share that demonstrate the truth of this statement?
3. Regina regularly talks to White people who are sure they didn’t have a race problem in their home communities, because there were no People of Color there (p. 137). What are some reasons why a community might be all White? What examples of “historical amnesia and ignorance” can you think of, and how can we combat this?
4. Take some time to talk through the many ways that racial disparities are manifested in today’s society. White people seeing and treating Black girls differently than White girls. Black men being six times as likely to be incarcerated as White men. Racially segregated neighborhoods. Racist representation in media. White people calling on law enforcement to control Black bodies. When it comes to fighting these disparities, do you feel hopeful or hopeless, or somewhere in between? Why?
5. “People often worry about saying the ‘wrong thing’ when it comes to race” (p. 147). Do you feel this? Share an example of a time when you had this fear. What are some ways we can help ourselves and others overcome this fear so we can move forward in our antiracism work?
6. What is the racial makeup of the average White person’s social network? (See p. 152.) What is yours? How does this make you feel? What concerns and fears do you have regarding the relationships (or lack of relationships) in your life?
7. Oftentimes, diversity efforts encourage people to “transcend” race or to “fast-forward to teachings on love and forgiveness” (p. 153). Why is this problematic, and what needs to happen instead?

CHAPTER 8: THE SPIRITUAL WORK OF INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION (OF PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS)

1. Read through the three questions at the top of page 160. How would you answer each one as you start the chapter?
2. Tobin’s wife, a nurse, talks about the importance of a diagnosis before initiating a therapy. Similarly, the authors write, “we have to know what kind of racism we are confronting before we develop a strategy to deal with it” (p. 164). Spend some time reading and reflecting on the charts on page 165. Discuss actual examples of racism you’ve seen or heard about and what some helpful responses might be.
3. What are the three paradigm shifts the authors believe White institutions need to move through? (See p. 167.) What challenges do you see for each one of these?
4. “All work to dismantle institutional racism needs to start from the analysis that predominantly White institutions have been structured to serve White people” (p. 169). How does this statement make you feel? Do you agree or disagree? How would you go about convincing someone of this, and why is it important?
5. On page 173, the authors note that as White people begin antiracism work, they often act or speak harshly to other White people. Share any experience you have had with this, whether you’ve done it yourself or someone has done it to you. What do you think about Dody Matthias’s words “Leave no one behind” as a guiding principle? What would this look like in your daily life?
6. On pages 174–80, the authors list the “first three steps” to starting an antiracist journey. What are they, and where do you find yourself (or an institution you’re a part of) on this journey?

- Carefully look over the chart on page 177 and self-identify where you are in the work of your organization. How do others in your group self-identify? Is there a group consensus, or no? If not, why not?
- “Rather than set spiritual questions and the disciplines and practices of spirituality on a shelf separated from and above the day-to-day challenges of being human and operating within institutions, we emphasize again and again that the spiritual dimension as we have described it here counts. It matters. It needs our attention” (p. 180). What are some practical connections you see between spiritual disciplines and anti-racism work?

CHAPTER 9: THE SPIRITUALITY OF INDIVIDUALITY VERSUS A COLLECTIVE APPROACH

- At the end of antiracism workshops, White people often comment, “I am overwhelmed.” Yet members of African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Indigenous communities have “lived and died with the realities of racism” for generations (p. 181). How would (or do) you feel as a Person of Color hearing this statement?
- In this chapter, the authors share true historical accounts of collective responses to racism. Talk about these stories and the impact they had on you. What other similar stories have you heard?
- “Collective action is powerful action,” the authors write. And “it is always intentional” (p. 189). Share an example of a time when you were part of collective, intentional action.
- The authors acknowledge that “being part of a group brings challenges as much as it does possibilities. Egos clash. Leaders fail. Families drift away. To invest one’s self into a community, whether religious or civic, is to risk heartbreak and disappointment” (p. 190). Have you experienced one or more of these things as part of a group? Please share.
- When discussing the corporate nature of spirituality, there are three elements to explore: the container, the content, and the consumption (see pp. 200–206). What is your understanding of each of these elements; how do they fit together; and why are they important?
- Theodicy* is a word that “asks how we reconcile the prospect of an all-powerful, all-good God with the very real and recurrent reality of evil in the world” (p. 203). What do the authors say are the key differences between how the White theological tradition and the Black theological tradition address this problem? How do you personally address it?
- The authors say that twenty-first-century political discourse has often been defined by anger. “Yet an authentic and robust antiracist spirituality needs also to make room for an anger at the injustice of racism that does not shut down others or prove abusive” (pp. 204–5). What might making room for that anger look like in an institution you’re a part of?

CHAPTER 10: ANTIRACISM AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

- “The work of antiracism has at least three broad components: bearing witness, fostering justice, and sustaining work for the long haul” (p. 207). What do you think the authors mean by each of these components, and what are some examples of each?
- At the bottom of page 213, the authors write that “racism reinvents itself over and over again, generation after generation, refreshing and renewing itself to fit in with the times.” Talk about the different forms racism has taken over the past several decades and what it looks like today.
- On page 214, the authors say they know change is possible, but it has taken hundreds of years just to get to where we are today, and “it will take more than fifty or sixty to approach real equity for Black people and other People of Color.” Do you think this estimate is correct? Why or why not? What things would need to happen for equity to be a reality?

4. On page 217, the authors say that it's tempting to shame people who reject the truth about the history of this country's racism, but shame is a poor motivator of change. "However, we can make a distinction between shaming people and uncovering the truth and dealing with what has happened in the past." How do we make this distinction? Share any struggles you have had with shaming others or being shamed.
5. On page 219, the authors talk about the problem with "racial reconciliation." What does the word *reconciliation* imply, and why is this problematic?
6. The authors quote Audre Lorde, who said, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (p. 220). They go on to say that if we're not working on our own wholeness and healing, it's hard to work toward it on behalf of others. What are your thoughts on this, and what might be necessary for you to do (or not do) as you work on your own wholeness?

CONCLUSION

1. On page 226, Regina says that she and Tobin concluded that they'd be doing antiracism work for the rest of their lives. "I can't just stop and say, 'I can quit you, antiracism,'" Regina says. Do you see your anti-racism work as a lifetime commitment? Why or why not?
2. On page 229, Regina makes a connection between the Christian origin story that begins with breath and stories of Black people whose lives have ended while saying "I can't breathe." What thoughts and feelings do you have about this?
3. On page 230, Tobin talks about "the reality of historical trauma for White people." It's very different from the trauma of minority groups and can't be compared, but it's still real. How would you answer these questions he asks: "What do we do with the legacy of having gone along with these horrors? How has that legacy affected our physical and emotional being?"
4. Read through "A coda" out loud (pp. 233–35). Choose three statements that resonate most deeply with you, and explain why.