

**THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE** *in friendship with* Sojourners Magazine

# COVENANTAL RESTORATION

A 12 Session Series on Faith & Race

## **Introduction**

God is at work here, make no mistake. These are some of the most beautiful faces and voices I have ever heard. This is the most accurate collection of kingdom citizens on earth that I have reviewed thus far.

Racism and oppression have a long and painful past and present, it is an open, aching human wound that reflects a fracture in our relationship with God. Understanding how it was promoted and is still alive and acting out in the construct of our beliefs and systems and structures is the beginning of caring for this wound.

Although this series calls forward a lot of hardships that are still to be overcome and in need of compassionate care, what I have come away with, is that as long as God *is*, there is hope. Hope for a healed and equalized humankind, hope for the deconstruction of unjust beliefs, hope in that Love is the force energizing all things into being...*hope that God is for all, after all*, and that God gets what God wants in the end:

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands... (Revelation 7:9)*

May God bring you hope; in the midst of deconstruction—walls coming down, curtains tearing in two—may you focus on the cornerstone of Truth. May God renew your mind, enliven your spirit, and gift you with the virtues of the Divine's own heart. May God strengthen your stand, inspire your movement towards God's

dream for humanity, and increase Kingdom square footage with each step you make in Love.

Wherever you go, God will be there.

### **Note**

It may be worth your time to create a sacred time, space, or group to do and receive this work. You could use this study for personal reflection or in a small group setting. You can also use the films as a lectio divina practice, listening for a word or phrase that strikes you, and using that word or phrase in your prayer/meditation life.

This guide was written by Kelly Ann Hall,

The series includes 12 sessions:

**SESSION ONE** // A Beloved Community with Rene August

**SESSION TWO** // Restoration of Relationship with Reggie Williams

**SESSION THREE** // The Idol of Whiteness with Jim Wallis

**SESSION FOUR** // Stone Catches with Bryan Stevenson

**SESSION FIVE** // Holy Mischief with Simone Campbell

**SESSION SIX** // Politics of Radical Difference with Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

**SESSION SEVEN** // Refusing to be Enemies with Amal Nassar

**SESSION EIGHT** // Covenantal Restoration with Terry LeBlanc

**SESSION NINE** // Created for Abundant Life with Llewellyn MacMaster

**SESSION TEN** // A Fuller Picture of God with Michael A. Mata

**SESSION ELEVEN** // Pulling All Things Together in Love with James Forbes

**SESSION TWELVE** // Bring Your Fullness with Rashad Robinson

Series on The Work of the People here:

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/bundle/covenant-restoration>

## **SESSION ONE // A Beloved Community with Rene August**

*(Rene August is a veteran of the anti-apartheid movement and an Anglican priest, René August is a reconciliation trainer with The Warehouse, a worshipping community organization in Cape Town, South Africa that walks alongside churches as they seek to respond to the issues of poverty, injustice, and division in a city that struggles with some of the worst inequality in the world).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/a-beloved-identity>

### **Going Deeper**

How are you seeing disparity between what we say we believe and how we act as Christians?

How are you feeling lately about the term Christian? About what is done in the name of God? How do you define yourself?

How do you feel knowing that churches lie, and people believe those lies? Have you experienced this? What does it take to move into an awakening from these lies?

It's hard to reframe our expectations if we are not willing to challenge our beliefs. How do you think through your belief system?

What sort of diversity do you have in your small group/study group? How does that effect the understanding of Jesus and humanity that you might move through as a group?

### **Reflection**

*My wound is not my identity. Beloved is my identity.* —Rene August

Identity is such a struggle. We are easily identifiable by nationality and race, by sex and sexual orientation, but also through our life experiences, through society, through our successes and failures. Having these identifiers or qualifiers upon our beings for lifetimes creates a challenge towards grasping our identity given by God even before we were conceived.

The world systems tell us in one way or another that our value is based on what we earn or don't earn. But August suggests that God would like us to know "we are not equal to what we are able to produce, [but] are able to be loved because of who we

are.” She also suggests that finding our way back to our God-given identity might start with resisting lies that our world cultures imprint upon us.

We are God’s own.

We are not our skin color. We are not our bank balance or our empty pantry. We are not our wounds. We are not as dumb as the world would like us to remain. We are not slaves, we are the liberated. God has the last word on who we are, and God identifies us as his beloved.

Accepting our re-identification in Christ is not always an over-night success story. In my experience, and judging by experiences in my community, it is a gift that creates (in the willing) a sloughing of sorts. With the truth implanted and at work within us, we are able to challenge negative, oppressive beliefs as they arise and, once exposed, challenge them as lies.

Awakening, liberated people that stand together in the Truth disrupt oppressive systems. And, like August suggests, “it doesn’t matter where you start, the direction you move is more important. If you are moving in the way of loving more people and including more people, that is the right direction.”

Choose to love someone as you are loved. Resist the lies. Think for yourself.

### **Blessing**

Come and learn a new story about yourself.  
Come and learn a story of yourself who is compassionate  
Who can love  
Who can be defined by love  
Who can be shaped by hope and not wounds.

Come and live in a new story  
where everyone is invited  
to not be defined by what you have done  
or what has happened to you.  
but let us be defined in a new way  
by the identity Jesus gives to us  
that we are the beloved  
that I am the beloved  
that you are the beloved.

—Rene August

## SESSION TWO // Restoration of Relationship with Reggie Williams

*(Reggie Williams is an Assistant Professor of Christian ethics at McCormick Theological Seminary, in Chicago, Illinois. Williams' book *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic*, published by Baylor University Press, examines the impact of exposure to Christianity in the Harlem during, the Harlem Renaissance, on the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed by the Nazis in 1945 for his activism against them. Dr. Williams' current work continues to focus on the Harlem Renaissance by analysis of the intersection of race and religion in the work of Harlem Renaissance intellectuals, examining the figure of the human as calibrated in the Western world, as a problem for Christian Ethics. The Harlem Renaissance introduces a means to know black life differently than what is presented by white supremacy, and opens a different reality than what white supremacy offers the world).*

### Watch Film

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/restoration-of-relationship>

### Going Deeper

Williams reveals that racism is a construction of systems and structures around an ideal race: white, European, and masculine. What is your view of this from where you live? Is it in your sight? In your periphery? Out of sight?

*Christ is always with those whose backs are pressed against the wall by oppressive regimes... Christ is (where he says in Mt 25) in society as the hungry, as the imprisoned, as the naked, as the thirsty... —Reggie Williams*

If you shun people who are not the ideal, Williams says you are shunning Christ. Think about this.

Imagine breaking down the systems and structures that dehumanize people. Where is Jesus in this vision? Where is your church community? Where are you?

What is the first door of oppression that you can participate in opening?

### Reflection

*Christianity has been a mobilizing engine for the practice of idealized humanity which is, basically, white supremacy. —Reggie Williams*

The church has a sick and twisted history. For all the good that is possible, a whole lot of evil has also come through sanctuary doors. We have some belief issues. We have some trust issues. We have some fear issues. We have criminal issues. We have human dignity issues.

These issues of wrong-belief obliterate the message of the gospel which promotes the human dignity. At some point in history, people broke covenant and chose to dehumanize people groups by stealing them and terrorizing them into slavery. The vision that brings up in my mind as I imagine it is horrifying.

Love was lost, and fear became the force used to manipulate and control lives in many ways.

This is the table Jesus flipped. This is the wrong-side-up way.

I have seen the result of the promotion of fear-based beliefs drive people away from the church in droves, which is sad, but even worse I have seen people walk away from God. It is taking time, but the good news is, the deconstruction of these beliefs are what is bringing down the divisive walls of the church and resurrecting the temple of the heart.

Our minds are being renewed. Thank God. May God continue to bless our inner transformations with the courage and love to bring outward, communal change.

### **Blessing**

God, let me be enough.  
not enough power,  
or purpose.  
nor possessions  
or because of what little good i have done.

don't let me find myself  
by my own striving...  
but, perhaps  
by my own letting of you.

letting freedom  
letting clemency  
letting go  
and letting other people and things also be enough...

holding on to nothing  
fluidity

but don't let me completely loose to nothing,

to unstructure, to boundless...  
as much as i desire it.

God, build within, strengthen;  
yes, God, fortify me  
bind me to what matters,  
and let me resonate with my own existence  
lest I lose and forget me  
and you  
in the process.

### **SESSION THREE // The Idol of Whiteness with Jim Wallis**

*(Jim Wallis is president and founder of Sojourners in Washington, DC, a nonprofit faith-based organization, network, and movement whose mission statement calls for “putting faith into action for social justice.” Wallis is a bestselling author, public theologian, national preacher, social activist, and international commentator on ethics and public life. He is a frequent speaker in the United States and abroad, has written for major newspapers, does regular columns for Huffington Post and TIME.com, and appears frequently on ABC, CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, and NPR; on shows from Jon Stewart’s Daily Show to the O’Reilly Factor and Sunday shows like This Week and Meet the Press. Wallis also teaches at Georgetown University and has taught at Harvard University. He served on President Obama’s first White House Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and as the chair of the Global Agenda Council on Values of the World Economic Forum).*

#### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-idol-of-whoteness>

#### **Going Deeper**

Idols separate us from God. Wallis suggests that whiteness as an ideal is idolatry. Society worships whiteness. Take some time to contemplate what hearing this brings up in you. Express how you feel and/or what questions this brings up for you.

The church of the future will continue to be larger than borders. It continues to move towards God’s ultimate dream of a united humankind. This means people who have had animosity for generations will be worshipping side-by-side. Can you imagine it? Younger generations are already living it. Do you feel any resistance to

church of today being deconstructed? Or rebuilt anew upon its cornerstone of Jesus's imprint of Grace and Love?

Consider this statement by Wallis: *We are living out lies, the lie of race, race isn't even real it is a social construct, we created it to justify slavery. It isn't real, it is a myth. So we are living out this lie and we are stuck in it. We aren't free. It's a lie. It's not just people who are oppressed racially that are not free, it the part of that system who are white and don't even see what is going on...we are not free either.*

How are you imprisoned by white supremacy?

Are you ready and willing to be set free? Jot down a few "next steps" for you.

### **Reflection**

*Life is better when there is all of us. We have more energy, we have more perspective, we have more talent, we have more possibilities. —Jim Wallis*

Fear is what keeps people from moving forward. Fear of what the cost is. Fear of what the loss is. Fear of what we don't know. When we are afraid, it might be a good practice to make time to review what we do know:

We know that in the beginning, *the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* (Genesis 1:2)

We know throughout the Old Testament, that God is all about freedom of mind, body and will.

We know Jesus came to earth to walk out a new Way, and to inspire followers of the way.

We know Jesus taught: *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* (John 8:32).

We know Jesus died because he possessed an out-of-this-world kind of Love. (Gospels)

We have read Peter's vision about welcoming outsiders to the Way. (Acts 10:9-16)

We know that after Paul's transformation he wrote many letters to growing Christ-following communities to encourage inclusion and the spreading of the message to the ends of the earth.

We know our own transformation stories, and also those of the people we love. We know God is with us and for us. We know that God has a heart for all of humankind. We know that salvation is both individual and communal. We know



God doesn't want us to be afraid but nevertheless understands and loves us when we are.

When we are willing to step out in Love, I have found my fears to be somewhat relieved (not always removed) because the idea of where I am headed is known: Love is where I am going!

Love is where we are going!  
Right worship is where we are going!  
God's dream is where we are going!

What is the idea of whiteness or blackness to surrender? Brown or redness? I surrender it, and all my entitlements if it leads me out of right worship of God. If it leads to someone having less so I can have more. I let go of the construct, to my best ability, and agree to continue to let it go as revelations inspire me, and join Wallis in his hope for the global church:

*My hope is when people put their faith into action. It makes you no longer sociologically predictable. That somehow you are being spiritually transformed, it changes your behavior, your mindset, your way of thinking, your relationships. It changes how you are a citizen, how you participate in society. —Jim Wallis*

### **Blessing**

Forgive us, God,  
for white-washing your good news,  
for not accepting the stranger,  
for stripping you of dignity  
for violating bodies in the worst of ways,  
for judging by fear,  
imprisoning with hate.

We all need healing  
to overcome divisiveness  
and the fear that promotes it.

Lead us through forgiveness,  
restore wholeness  
*life is better with all of us.*

Move us forward, God,

to right our wrongs—  
faith-first, love-first  
You first.

## **SESSION FOUR // Stone Catches with Bryan Stevenson**

*(Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. Mr. Stevenson is a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated and the condemned. Under his leadership, EJI has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill and aiding children prosecuted as adults.*

*EJI recently won an historic ruling in the U.S. Supreme Court holding that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for all children 17 or younger are unconstitutional. Mr. Stevenson's work fighting poverty and challenging racial discrimination in the criminal justice system has won him numerous awards. He is a graduate of the Harvard Law School and the Harvard School of Government, and has been awarded 22 honorary doctorate degrees. He is the author of award winning and New York Times bestseller, *Just Mercy*. In 2015, he was named to the Time 100 recognizing the world's most influential people. Recently, he was named in Fortune's 2016 World's Greatest Leaders list).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/stone-catchers>

### **Going Deeper**

Check in with your heart on the issue of racism in America, both past and present. How does a heart reconcile such violence against humanity?

Does anyone ever profit from throwing stones? When and how does the church step in to advocate for injustice?

Change must come through us, the faith-filled. To the best of your ability (acknowledging that we all have blind spots to our character defects) admit where you cast judgment. Do you have an understanding as to why that is true for you?

What could it look like for you and your church community to be stone catchers?

## **Reflection**

*We know something about redemption. We know something about grace. We know something about mercy. We know that we are broken, but our brokenness doesn't define us, it opens us up to what grace and mercy can do. And that is the secret weapon...*—Bryan Stone

Society as a whole keeps an arms distance from real issues. Disengages. Looks away, and if despite our efforts to remain blind we do see, we look down upon. We start pointing fingers. We mark our territory. We judge. We lie. We erase, detach and separate. We incarcerate at an alarming rate. We create sacred spaces, and lock those up, too.

We throw stones to keep the issues from getting to us.

But, there is a radical change emerging in the hearts of the faith-filled. Strength is building. The kind of strength that toddlers show when they begin to trust their own legs enough to stand up and take a step while holding on to their parent's fingers. While we know that standing is in and of itself a statement, we also know that we are called to stand alongside and bear the weight of the oppressed.

Liberation belongs to God. Knowing this is what compels Jesus's following to become "stone catchers". Hopefully, the church will engage, listen and lead the faithful through the past and current hate-driven transgressions against humanity.

## **Blessing**

Face up my beloved,  
even at your most vulnerable,  
even when corruption demands your head—  
rest assured: I Am *for* you!

I will throw open the gates,  
even wider the doors of the sanctuary,  
to expose where religion plots against a brother,  
withholds and starves a sister,  
hangs its members on words  
spoken against empire;  
against building much of nothing.

And still,  
I will not turn my back against the mistaken,  
even though you have not understood much of me,

I remain who I Am:

Teacher  
Shepherd  
Liberator!

To the willing ear, I speak truth coupled with love.  
The wounded-in-action, I bandage with justice armed with divine perspective.  
The slipped, sunken, and fallen, I restore and even more so,

I love shamelessly!

Righting wrongs,  
washing hands,  
purifying hearts—  
I plant fields of goodness,  
there is more than enough!

My Glory will fill the land.  
It  
will  
fill  
the  
land.

I'll light the path and guide you myself—  
don't give up—follow me  
and your heart will know eternal peace,  
Yes, your heart will flow with my eternal peace.

*See this benediction come to life at <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/fill-this-land>*

## **SESSION FIVE // Holy Mischief with Simone Campbell**

*(Sr. Simone Campbell is the executive director of NETWORK— a national group of social justice advocates inspired by Catholic Sisters that lobbies in D.C. to mend the gaps in income and wealth in the U.S. She has led four cross-country “Nuns on the Bus” trips, focused on economic justice, comprehensive immigration reform, voter turnout, and (most recently) bridging divides in politics and society.*

*She wrote the famous “Nuns’ Letter,” considered by many as critically important in convincing Congress to support the Affordable Care Act, and is the author of “A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community,” published by HarperCollins.*

*Sr. Simone has received numerous awards, spoke at the 2012 Democratic National Convention, and has appeared on 60 Minutes, The Colbert Report, and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. She is a religious leader, attorney, and poet with extensive experience in public policy and advocacy for systemic change).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/holy-mischief>

### **Going Deeper**

*When hearts are broken open, hope emerges. And then there is joy. Joy is a communal virtue, as is hope. And when you have hope and joy together you have mobilizing...trouble making.—Simone Campbell*

What does social justice have to do with salvation?

How do we, as the faithful, respond to injustice?

Why do you think communities of faith, if seeded in the love of Christ, produce fear and hate?

Winning in often looks like the American dream: more money, more stuff. What is a less toxic measure of winning to you?

How do you see the Spirit stirring up your life?

In your community? How do you mobilize one another when the Spirit stirs?

### **Reflection**

*God is holding us together at every moment, God creates us at every moment. Sometimes God feels distant, but that is because God is so close. God is creating me...God is the hum of the universe,*

*God hums us into being all the time, and so God is not far, God is holding me together in love, God is creating you together in love, God is creating all of this in love. it is not separate...love is present at every moment.*—Simone Campbell

God is holding is holding you together. Sit with that for a moment.

With every living breathing moment you have, God energizes your being. God is the magnetic force that pulls you together. Love holds you together. Isn't that something?

Even during hard times. Because as Campbell suggests (and so much like with the human body) that is when we see how the community responds to injury. God didn't create us just for ourselves but for one another. We are born into families, into community. We need one another to not only survive, but thrive. Community involvement has been found to help heal a myriad of ills, including addiction and some mood disorders. Communities rooted in God's love, remind us that no one is disposable. That we are made to share everything from life experiences to food to shelter, to grief and hope and joy.

We are part of saving one another. Salvation is a communal exercise. My husband saves me with a loving glance as he walks through the door each evening. My kids save me when they laugh with abandon. My friends save me with encouragement when shit is hitting the fan; my cohorts save me when they encourage me to into "trouble making" with my art and work. To continue to follow Spirit as it leads, and trust God with my life. Because when we are mobilized by the Spirit, we, as hope generators, are able to co-create boundless possibilities where Love does win.

### **Blessing**

Section your choir, God,  
move us into place.  
Pass out lyrics and  
keys for the human race.

Hold us together, God,  
hum to your delight.  
Teach us to sing your tune  
help us until we get it right.

Teach us to sing your tune, God  
help us until we get it right.

## **SESSION SIX // Politics of Radical Difference with Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza**

*(Knowing intimately that the borderlands are a place of learning and growth, Robyn draws on their identity and heritage as a queer Latin@ in everything that they do. From doubt to divine and everywhere in between, their call as an activist-theologian demands the vision to disrupt hegemony and colonialist structures of multi-layered oppression. As an anti-oppression, anti-racist, non-binary Trans\*gressive Latin@, Robyn takes seriously their call as an activist theologian and ethicist to bridge together theories and practices that result in communities responding to pressing social concerns. Robyn sees this work as a life-orienting vocation, deeply committed to translating theory to practice, and embedded in re-imagining our moral horizon to one which privileges a politics of radical difference).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/politics-of-radical-difference>

### **Going Deeper**

Seeing through the lens of your community, who are the “crucified” people? Who is burdened by the systems in place?

Do you live with ongoing vulnerability of violence against your body? If so, where do you find sanctuary?

How can the faith-filled become sanctuaries to the suffering?

Are you willing to stand on the bridge with people who are different from you for the sake of unity?

### **Reflection**

*If we can figure out a way to be unified in our differences, we might be able to achieve collective liberation...that is what gives me hope. —Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza*

Holy Saturday. The day of waiting in the unknown. Although we have the benefit of Resurrection Sunday...but for the disciples of Jesus on that day, there had to have been the madness of the unknown. What was all of this walking out with this man of influence for now that he was gone? Would they be sought out, tortured and killed? As far as scripture teaches, there was no sign of Jonah yet, Jesus has not been spit out of earth's belly. They were hiding out in their extreme grief, pain and terror.

This is what minority groups, especially people in the LGBTQ community, experience every waking day. Extreme ugliness and hatred. A society of people who just turn away from them by communicating (in one way or another) that they are expendable, or worse, bring violence against their bodies. This is one of the reasons why the suicide rate in the LGBTQ community is so high, there has not been a resurrection day for their people.

Dr. Henderson-Espinoza also talks about bridge-building, one that is radical, rooted, and creates unified difference. Hopefully, people of the dominant culture—especially people called to a greater Love through the life of Jesus—will continue to step out in love, reach in to hear their stories, and become allies that support and raise up.

I think it is true that people in the church culture are often too quick to want to hear a transformational story. One that without a doubt announces to the world that Love wins...that God wins. This story is not there yet, which makes it extremely uncomfortable to get into and remain in the conversation...but we must. We must continue to have the same amount of courage to come and listen and promote justice and equality as many people need just to leave their houses each morning under fear of violence and death.

*I am all for hope, but it's got to be a hope for a revolution that is going to change the system that creates multi-system oppressions against my people and yours. —Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza*

### **Blessing**

When people hedge you off from the world,  
when you are outed  
because you are a lesbian,  
gay,  
bisexual,  
transgender,  
or queer...  
when you ache for the touch of human kindness  
for warmth and affection from your faith community...  
an embrace that reminds you  
Love  
Never  
Fails.



Come to Me.

Because I know forsakenness,  
I know its hurt—it's excruciating.  
It feels like it's never going to arrive at anywhere  
but nowhere with no one...

You have struggled to hang on to Me,  
and I want you to know,  
I AM here,  
hoping you can remain with Me,  
stay in your faith while also being honestly you...  
the one I love  
because I won't leave.

Come to Me.

I walked this Way for you  
leaving both mystery and miracles,  
leading lights so you might not only find Me...  
but discover more God along the way,  
have to reach for belief in dark,  
and be truly known in the light...  
come to God, come through Me

I  
will  
touch  
you.

I will.  
My love never fails.

## **SESSION SEVEN // Refusing to be Enemies with Amal Nassar**

*(Amal Nassar and her family cultivate peace and reconciliation through children's summer camps, education for women, and inviting visitors to their West Bank farm called the Tent of Nations. Guided by their desire for bridge-building, the Nassar family has spent 20 years welcoming people from all over the world and teaching those around them in the West Bank about nonviolence, love of the land, and reconciliation, saying boldly, "We refuse to be enemies").*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/refuse-to-be-enemies>

### **Going Deeper**

Can you imagine being surrounded, having no access to water or electricity, no permit to build...and having your orchard uprooted, and STILL peacefully resisting, STILL loving your enemy?

Are you a hope dealer? How do you keep hope alive?

How do we grow into people of reconciliation? Who refuse to be enemies?

How do we promote future generations to lead out in love?

### **Reflection**

*We say, we refuse to be victims, we don't want to sit and cry. We want to be creative people. We refuse to hate anyone. We do that under the slogan, "We refuse to be enemies". This is what Christ has taught us to do. —Amal Nassar*

Surrounded.

Land stripped.

1,500 fruitful trees at the time of the harvest.

Utilities and construction blocked.

Physical threats.

Since 1991.

and still...loving.

What Bible are they reading? This is not mainstream American theology. Aren't we supposed to organize troops? Shouldn't bombers fly over just to make sure they know we can? Isn't that how we deal with our enemies? Nassar suggests Jesus has taught them another way: to resist hating and to raise up a new generation grown without hatred.

Christ deeply rooted in the hearts and lives of humans produces such beauty. A church community here in Houston calls people like Nassar “hope dealers”. They have learned the value of hope in a world that loves to hate. They are the orchard. They are fruitful olive trees, with strong roots sunk deep in a life enriched soil.

Nassar’s story reminds me not to take Jesus’s words for granted. He is not owned or governed or manageable, not by the American church or anybody. He is not at work in us to build attendance in churches or to raise up tithing disciples. He is wild and on the move everywhere. He inspires people to heal the world, be it one child or one tree at a time. He is growing the most amazing orchard ever known, and the proof is right here in this film. People raising one another in non-violence. In peace. To allow their anger and hatred to be consumed by love and expressed in a way that feeds the world and doesn’t starve it.

God, do not pass me by. Take my life and plant it in you. Let my life become nourishment and healing for the betterment of the world.

### **Blessing**

Let Me in, beloved,  
to do My work.  
To till and turn the soil of your heart  
to remove weeds and pests  
its planting season...  
and I AM scattering seeds of hope.

Allow me to imbed in you,  
to water and tend.  
To spout and rise,  
reaching towards Light  
bending and winding  
flowering and fruiting.

Let Me move through you  
to feed the world.

Let Me move through you  
promoting life and hope for all.

## **SESSION EIGHT // Covenantal Restoration with Terry LeBlanc**

*(Terry is Mi'kmaq / Acadian. He and his wife Bev are in their 44th year of marriage. They have three adult children – twin daughters and one son.*

*In addition to being the Executive Director of Indigenous Pathways, Terry is also the founding Chair and current Director of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community. Terry holds an interdisciplinary PhD from Asbury Theological Seminary, specializing in Theology and Anthropology.*

*Terry serves as adjunct professor at George Fox Evangelical Seminary in Oregon, Acadia University and Divinity College in Wolfville, William Carey International University, and Tyndale University College and Seminary Terry is Mi'kmaq / Acadian. He and his wife Bev are in their 44th year of marriage. They have three adult children – twin daughters and one son.*

*In addition to being the Executive Director of Indigenous Pathways, Terry is also the founding Chair and current Director of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community. Terry holds an interdisciplinary PhD from Asbury Theological Seminary, specializing in Theology and Anthropology.*

*Terry serves as adjunct professor at George Fox Evangelical Seminary in Oregon, Acadia University and Divinity College in Wolfville, William Carey International University, and Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto, where he also serves as program elder for the University B.Ed. program. Terry has accrued over 38 years of community work in Native North American and global Indigenous contexts including as an educator in theology, cultural anthropology, and community development practice.*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/covenantal-resoration>

### **Going Deeper**

*We have constructed the ideas of race, so it has become very real...we refer to it, and we make reference on a regular basis to different racial groups...the role of the church is to look at the Imago Dei. —Terry Leblanc*

How does our construction of race affect our image of God?

The body of Christ contains all of our images in it. How does the church break the hierarchies that prevents us from organically embodying the fullness of the Imago Dei?

Imagine the two sided coin of justice and righteousness Leblanc mentions.  
Describe how justice and righteousness work together.

### **Reflection**

After a church service maybe 10 years ago, I was approached by a black man who must have noticed I was a pretty regular attender. He asked me one question: *Where are all the black people?* I must have looked pretty shocked, because I was. I hadn't ever considered where all the black people were. I looked at him, I looked around at the crowd as they were talking in clusters, and noticed, perhaps for the first time. White, white, white, my Vietnamese friend, a hispanic friend...oh. my. gosh., white, white, white...

*I don't know. Please stay.*

I don't want to be misleading, it wasn't like people of other ethnicities and races weren't welcome, it was just a founded by whites white culture in there. Everyone was welcome...we had homeless folks, LGBTQ folks, we were welcoming folks! I am not an expert, but part of my guess in why we kept being such a white population in one of the most diverse cities in the nation is because when black and brown image bearers came through the door they didn't see anyone in the community who resembled them. We just weren't resembling the fullness of humanity, of the image of God.

I think this can also be true in founded by blacks black churches and founded by hispanics hispanic churches. I think what we are growing towards now, in the cultivation of the church of the future, is a fuller and integrated community. So, how do we start? We should likely listen for a while, and analyze our structures and systems to see where we are boxing ourselves in.

Then, we can do do the work of building bridges from one racial community to the next so that people can move back and forth, influence one another, and begin to hold space together. Cultivating an organically diverse group dialogue and a fully blossoming representation of humanity.

### **Blessing**

I AM digging in  
pushing well into  
the deep of human beings  
and bedding down

Light intact,  
well planted  
and pulsing with My DNA,  
imprinting Creator  
informing creation

that I AM still at it,  
growing the human race,  
my children of earth  
encouraging mending  
and reunion

a beautiful garden  
of human becomings  
rising up  
rising strong  
rising knowing

that I AM still at work,  
yes, I AM still bringing life out of the soil.

## **SESSION NINE // Created for Abundant Life with Llewellyn MacMaster**

*(Llewellyn MacMaster is the manager of civil society relations in the division for social impact at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. He has been an ordained minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) for 29 years).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/created-for-abundant-life>

### **Going Deeper**

Can you have faith without questions?

Jesus came to give us abundant life. How can we help in the co-creation of life?  
How can we be life promoters?

Christians often talk about the Kingdom of God. How do you understand the Kingdom of God versus the kingdoms of this world? Talk about what you believe

will remain of this world, and what will pass away. How does that change your perspective on any worldly attachments you might have?

Giving our lives to God is not only about sharing our things. Its surrendering our soul back into God's care and to be used towards God's work of being reunited with God.

Write out what you believe 'human dignity' means.

Write out what you believe God thinks 'human dignity' means.

### **Reflection**

I am not one to brag, but I question God several times a day. Just when I get my footing secure and my legs feeling strong, I encounter some sort of suffering that knocks them out from under me. Its there, on my back looking up to the sky that some not-so-nice, especially not-so-faithful words come out of my mouth to God about life's hardness and wondering where the good is that I am expected to keep believing in.

God dignifies us with the honor of being who we are. That includes struggling well. In letting us be us, God coaches us over time into the scary art of being who we really are with one another. Being able to say our difficult truths even when death is on the line and trusting that our voice matters. Because it does. Opening ourselves to one another creates a whole new reality and realm of possibility for progress and change.

MacMaster says our work on earth is to "to reign with God" and promote the "abundant life" Christ came to impart. Therefore, God's invitation is to come alive, come along, come work, and come together. This is the knowing that enlivens our activism, our pursuit of dignity for all God's creation. This is the source of hope that pulls us out of the deep on our darkest days. When people violate the world with hate and separation and enemy-making and death-dealing, this is the Light within we get to pull from—this is the Light that brings hope to the hopeless. The Light that binds my empathic, broken heart back together, and makes it stronger for the wear. This is what encourages me to fully engage in Life and remain willing to let it break time and again.

## **Blessing**

I bless you, beloved,  
to feel some of this crazy love I have,  
My compassion for the world

I bless you,  
with the peace to be yourself,  
to live your life to the best of your ability.

I bless you  
with the Spirit of creation  
the ability to alleviate human suffering where possible  
sometimes with presence alone.

I bless you  
to come forward with all that you are,  
step out into the world, voice your thoughts—  
trust Me, I have you in My hands—  
I can handle it, I created you and will see you through.

## **SESSION TEN // A Fuller Picture of God with Michael A. Mata**

*(Mata has extensive experience in cross-cultural related programs on the congregational and community levels. Currently director of the Transformational Urban Leadership at Azusa Pacific Seminary, his skills and expertise lie in developing practical approaches to faith-rooted community development, congregational redevelopment, transcultural ministry and community conflict transformation. He was very involved in the rebuilding efforts after the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest, helping to organize the African-American, Latino and Korean evangelical leadership.*

*Mata serves or has served on the boards and advisory councils of local and national organizations such as the Latino Evangelical Coalition, Korean Churches for Community Development (KCCD) and Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). He was a founding board member of West Angeles Church of God in Christ's Community Development Corporation).*

## **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/a-fuller-picture-of-god>



## **Going Deeper**

Spend a few minutes with God reviewing your togetherness experience. How do you know God? What has your experience taught you about God?

How does your personal experience of salvation express itself in the world? How have you become Christ to others?

What does your experience teach you about what God hopes for? How do we aspire to God's hope for humanity?

Mata says that beyond his own experience of God, listening to other people's experience brings him a fuller picture of God. How have you found this to be true?

## **Reflection**

*Learning other people's view of God expands my view of God. My story of God is not the totality of God.* —Michael A. Mata

*The Bible is human.* I love how Mata speaks about Scripture. The Bible teaches us about God's interaction with humanity. Real people, real issues, real reconciliation stories, real hope that God is for us and not against us. That God weaves our individual stories into the tapestry of creation, each and every thread bringing more beauty to the whole.

When we participate in the holy act of listening and sharing with others, we not only come closer to understanding humanity, but God as well. We begin to see the beauty and purpose of community. Through interacting with one another, we see that we all carry a piece of Christ to share, and we all have the ability and really, responsibility to express Christ to one another.

I share my divine spark with you, and you share yours with me.

We become like Christ, we become God in the flesh as we touch with love, and liberate with truth. We become active in making things right. Our concerns become more about what God's hope is, and we faithfully work together towards making that hope reality.

We become God's accompaniment. We become "God with", and points of salvation to one another along the way.

## **Blessing**

Where there is darkness, let us bear Light.  
Where there people are silenced, let hymns be born.

Where there is injustice, send us to make right.  
Where bodies are bared, send us to adorn.

Wherever there is hunger, infirmity and strife,  
lead me there to love, care, and comfort, Lord  
take me and my life.

## **SESSION ELEVEN // Pulling All Things Together in Love with James Forbes**

*(The Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr. is president of Healing of the Nations Ministries and serves as national minister for the Drum Major Institute. He is senior minister emeritus of The Riverside Church in New York City where he pastored for 18 years.*

*He was the first Joe R. Engle Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in NYC and taught homiletics for 13 years. Additionally, Dr. Forbes is a highly acclaimed author, scholar, and nationally sought-after speaker, affectionately referred to in national and international religious circles as the “preacher’s preacher” because of his extensive preaching career and his charismatic style. Newsweek magazine once recognized Forbes as one of the 12 “most effective preachers” in the English-speaking world.*

*As a passionate educator, administrator, community and human rights activist, and interfaith leader, Dr. Forbes was twice designated as one of America’s greatest Black preachers by Ebony magazine. Dr. Forbes is a featured TEDex speaker and also a frequent guest and contributor to top national media outlets including Huffington Post, MSNBC, and others. He has authored several books, including "Whose Gospel?" (The New Press) and "The Holy Spirit and Preaching" (Abingdon Press).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/pulling-all-things-together-in-love>

### **Going Deeper**

Forbes says, *The church or communities of faith have a Word, which if the Word could be heard it could show us how we are one, how we can work for the common good, how we could serve God and have the fulfillment we long for. The church is sitting on this word. It is related to the golden*

*rule, it is related to the great commandment, it is related to love, it is related to caring for one another.* How is the church often quick to defend and protect the Word rather than share the Word? What does it mean to you to be the living Word in the world today?

If togetherness, if oneness in God is who we actually are, how do we work towards expressing unity in this technological age? Forbes asks, *What will it take to bring us together again?* How can we use today's technology towards wholeness versus fragmentation?

### **Reflection**

*God wants us to be one big happy family. How big? As big as Universe. And I think God would wish to see us stop destroying the fulfillment that is possible for us when we destroy one another or when we vie with one another for our place in the sun. We are the apple of God's eye, each of us as if we are the only one, and all of us because we are one in God's presence. —James Forbes*

Alienation.

Fragmentation.

Anxiety.

Inhumanity.

Cruelty.

Incivility.

Hope, nevertheless. God has prescribed the medicine for the ails of division. We need to stop here, and breathe into who God is: a unified three party being, or as Forbes' says so well the *Ultimate Relationality pulling all things together in the context of love and care for one another.* This echoes of the great commandment in Matthew 22:

*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Fulfillment comes through unity, through the pursuit and practice of one-body-ness. When we as Christians learn to work together towards God's dream of a different-but-united humanity, when God's creation becomes the priority we have seen human innovation reflect virtues such as love, compassion, and healing. We see the honest-to-goodnesses that God places in the human heart manifested for the common good, for the restoration of creationkind.

Because we are part of creation! Forbes mentions that *each little particle and each grand creation bears evidence of God*. God is energizing us into being in every moment. We are more like human “becomings” activated and mobilized by the Light, Life and actions of a God who energizes all things into reality. If we can begin to notice God enlivening all things at all times, the answer to the complexity of our schemes becomes simple: Love as God loves. Or as my friend Gregg Taylor says, be compassionate as our God is compassionate.

Love will, for the willing, deconstruct oppressive beliefs and systems.

Love will continue to move us towards itself, towards wholeness because God is Love and wholeness. Love will empower us, as Forbes says, *to stand up to help God save God's people...if we let God stand up in us, we will fulfill God's plan and we will experience God's promises through God's power*.

### **Blessing**

Fill our hearts with compassion, God,  
move us toward the center of who You are,  
and help us bring forward the wholeness you desire.

Let Love have its way,  
for the highest good  
from the tiniest detail to the vastness of Universe.  
Yes, let Love have its way, God  
for the restoration of all things unto You.

## **SESSION TWELVE // Bring Your Fullness with Rashad Robinson**

*(Rashad Robinson serves as Executive Director of ColorOfChange.org. With over 1 million members, ColorOfChange is the nation's largest online civil rights organization. Since 2005, ColorOfChange has been a leading force in holding government and corporations accountable to Black people and advancing visionary solutions for building a just society for everyone.*

*For the past four years, Rashad has greatly expanded the scope and impact of the organization, and continued to build a member-driven movement around the issues that matter most to Black folks. From fighting for justice for Black people hurt or killed due to anti-Black violence, to battling attempts to suppress the Black vote, to helping shape the successful strategy in the fight to protect a free and open Internet, ColorOfChange has been at the forefront of the most critical civil rights*

*issues of this century. In 2015, Fast Company named ColorOfChange the 6th Most Innovative Company in the world, "for creating a civil rights group for the 21st century").*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/bring-your-fullness>

### **Going Deeper**

Where do you suspect Jesus would stand in some of the current social issues?

Where do you find yourself when it comes to the Black Lives Matter and US Immigrant Rights movements? What personal issues have come up for you to work through?

Where does your faith community stand? What keeps your community from being able to move issues forward that you care about?

How do you use emotion and times of inspiration toward real systemic change?

### **Reflection**

*Even when I am afraid, I choose to face challenges with the fullness that I am.* —Rashad Robinson

As faith movements, we cannot remain blind to oppression and we cannot be afraid to approach issues of injustice. Jesus calls us not only to see oppressive systems but to also engage, love, and serve towards the breaking and rebuilding of systems that support:

Racism.  
Classism.  
Sexism.  
Hatred.  
Immigrants.  
Prisons.

So, how can we affect change? How did Jesus do it? By standing with. By speaking to. By listening. By gathering people together. By erasing the lines of who is in and who is out. By welcoming everyone in. By letting grace be the leader.

There are bridges to be built, and walking out to do.

There are table settings to be set out, and seats pulled up.  
There are words to be heard, and apologies and amends to be made.

Somewhere, standing with in the midst of all this heart sickness, this violence that we make on one another, is Jesus. Nudging us toward one another, nodding at our advance, holding in love and hope the healing and restoration of humanity. Saying, "I came to show you how to touch the afflicted, how to welcome the poor, how to dignify the wayward. Follow Me."

### **Blessing**

I AM never at a loss.  
My loves, My children,  
although you suffer  
inflict misery,  
violate life in its many forms...

I will never abandon My work.

I AM inspiring  
I AM creating  
I AM moving

I AM on the ground  
mobilizing hands,  
though small,  
and feet,  
though measured  
to come along with Me.

They receive, I receive.  
They move, I move.

And, lets not forget about hearts!  
I AM calling all hearts  
to care with compassion  
to understand through empathy...

to beat with desire!

Yes, although so many things are messed up...I AM still in it with you.