

# Introduction

*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. —Genesis 1:27*

More than a decade ago, some courageous colleagues shared that their experiences as people of color on the team I was managing and the program I was leading didn't feel good. They were treated differently than the White people. They were tired of hearing prejudiced comments that people like me weren't addressing. Their feedback was a punch in the gut . . . and it was the most instrumental feedback I have ever received as a professional and a person.

To back up a bit, I was in my early thirties and had worked in a lot of diverse settings. I loved Jesus. I served the poor. I had worked for nonprofits both professionally and as a volunteer and loved many people of color well . . . at least, that was my intention and belief. I was an advocate for justice. I was working for an organization fighting for educational equity because I believed in what God teaches so clearly in the Bible—*all people are created in his image*—and I knew that so many kids of color weren't getting a good education in our country. Even with all of that as a part of my story, I had never been confronted with, nor really thought about the fact, that I was a White person contributing to the system of racism in our country.

I am so thankful for the “teachers” I had then and have had for more than a decade as I have continued to explore what it means to be White in America; I now know my White skin has shaped my life and will continue to shape it until the day I die. A lot of the reading and studying I have done related to race and racism has been from texts written from a secular viewpoint. For me, though, with every read, I have thought, “This is what God would say about this, I think,” or “This lines up so well with who I know Jesus to be or what the Bible would teach in this area.”

I often say, “You don't know what you don't know,” and in the case of this topic, White people can actively *choose* “not to know.” But I believe (and I pray) that most White Christians, if given the gift of feedback I was given, would choose to learn more and act differently. We would recognize that it is impossible to follow the greatest commandment of *loving God and loving our neighbor* (Luke 10:27) without realizing the ways that we are degrading our neighbors when we are complicit in a system that advantages people like me (a White person) simply because of the color of my skin.

From the start, I want to recognize the limitations of my own perspective. A lot of my thinking and learning connects to the oppression of Black people vs. other people of color. But I am learning daily to increase my cultural competence. The image of God is not in black and white; it's incredibly colorful. There are many different races, ethnicities, and cultures in our world, and one could spend a lifetime learning and never become an expert. I am grateful there are hundreds of people writing about race.

So with that, I am passing along this gift for other White Christians who have not yet grappled (or perhaps are early in their journey of grappling) with the color of their skin and what that means in their quest to *love mercy, seek justice, and walk humbly with their God* (Micah 6:8). I believe that becoming more self-aware in this area and then acting out of this awareness is fundamental in our walk with Jesus.

### **Know Better. Do Better. Repeat.**

When I was in college, I had the opportunity to take a poetry class from Maya Angelou. If I close my eyes, I can still see her in the chairs next to us in Wait Chapel. I can hear her deep and glorious voice sharing her wisdom. I treasure the fake strand of pearls she gave me for the final performance of the class. The one thing that she said over and over again during our class was, "Human beings are more alike than we are unlike." She wasn't discounting the diversity in our world but rather reminding us of our shared humanity. We all yearn for love. We all hurt. We all dream. We all wonder if we are good enough. We all struggle. We all laugh. We all cry. We, my friends, are all made in the colorful image of a beautiful and loving God.

Angelou said something once that has shaped the entire structure of this book: "When you know better, you do better." Like every great quote, there is so much depth to those words. She calls us up to a higher standard without any guilt for not knowing in the first place.

That's what I hope to accomplish in this book. This isn't a book about guilt. The point is not to make you feel bad for the things you didn't know. Instead, the goal is to help us all know better so that we can start doing better. We can't *do better* until we *know better*, so Part One is all about learning what it means to be White and follow Jesus. We are going to talk about everything from White privilege to microaggressions and learn about the ways (big and small) that we are intentionally (and unintentionally) hurting people with different skin tones than us. Then, in Part Two, we will put our newfound knowledge into action and talk about practical ways we can start *doing better*. But most importantly, we must realize this journey is never over. The more we learn, and the more we do, the

more we realize how much further we have to go. So, in Part Three, we'll talk about the importance of repeating the process over and over again. First we learn, then we do, and then we repeat.

The first time you start thinking about being White and where Whiteness even came from (spoiler alert: this is a made-up concept), you are going to question things, and maybe even the author or history itself. As you go deeper, you may start feeling guilty because of what White people have done in this world. You may get mad and try to deny things like White privilege. You may convince yourself that you have worked so hard for your (fill in the blank: college, job, house, car) that you refuse to believe that your skin color mattered. And then, be it in a few weeks, a few months, or even longer, if you keep learning and praying, you will eventually realize that you can more authentically show your love for Jesus when you embrace your Whiteness and use your privilege to help seek justice for *all* God's people. It is worth the journey, I promise. As a friend recently reminded me, "God does not call us to easy." This work matters as we try to become more like the image of God, and it matters on this side of eternity as we do our part to help the world become more just.

I can't remember living in a more divisive time than this. Our world, country, and cities need image bearers like you helping to bring God's kingdom to earth. I believe there is a beautiful intersection between the words of Jesus and the words of scholars on this subject. My hope and prayer in writing this is that more White people who love Jesus grow deeper in their understanding of their racial identity and fight harder to help end systems of oppression in our country. Let's do this!

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." (Isaiah 42:1).*