

Fall 2024

NEWSONG FELLOWSHIP

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

TOOLS FOR BUILDING RACIAL EQUITY



America the Beautiful by David Hammons, 1968

A Letter from the Editors

Welcome to this edition of ASK SEEK KNOCK, and thank you for reading and engaging as we continue on our dedicated journey toward justice and equality. Like our other editions, we continue to remain steadfast: to amplify voices, educate ourselves, and foster a more inclusive community. As always, ASK continues to highlight and provide a range of stories and insights—that highlight both the progress we’ve made and the work still ahead. Our hope is that these stories not only inform, but also inspire action and reflection. We encourage you to keep this newsletter handy, highlight it, keep it on your refrigerator, cut out phrases and keep clips that inspire you. We hope this helps move you into a contemplative journey of learning and unlearning especially in such a political season.

As you dive into this issue of ASK let’s ask ourselves- How do we see this political moment we are in right now? And, what do I know about God, Son, and Spirit? We can all agree that we are followers of a Creator who loves and values all people, which means we too should stand firm in our beliefs of equality and love. In the words of Senator Raphael Warnock, “We are all we’ve got.” This truth echoes in our hearts as we continue the sacred work of dismantling racism and building a world where all people are treated with dignity and respect.

When I think about this current political moment, I am reminded that our work is far from over. Senator Warnock recently reminded us that democracy is not a state, but an act. This reminder requires us to be engaged and take action as individuals and as a community to join our Creator in fostering a more loving and inclusive world.

So together, my friends and siblings, let’s remember, we are all we’ve got. Let’s continue to bear witness and learn from one another that the work of co-creating a more just and loving world begins with us and is then extended to those around us. Whether through education, advocacy, or everyday interactions, every step forward matters. We encourage you to engage with the content, share your thoughts, and, most importantly, lean into the hope of a better tomorrow.

As you engage with this edition of ASK, let us breathe in the spirit of freedom and justice that this election season embodies. In her book *Black Liturgies*, Cole Arthur Riley shares this breath prayer:

May the same God who spoke to Harriet [Tubman] make the sound of liberation clear as night to us. May the divine hold us in the same holy darkness that protected our ancestors on the journey. And as we remember, may they shield us from despair, knowing that our story is more than pain. Ours is the story of dignity. Let us reclaim it.

In this prayerful breath, may we reflect on our collective stories and find the strength to carry on towards progress and commitment to a future where every voice is heard and every person is valued.

Inhale: There is more for us.
Exhale: We claim it.

Editors: Jake Apple • Tim Burge-Lape • Kristina Heckelman • Caleb Romoser



Please reach out to askseekknock@newsong-fellowship.com if you’ve got questions, comments, or concerns. We’d love to hear from you!

Remember the Widow

BY: TIM BURGE-LAPE

Mark 12:28

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

The greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors. Another place in Scripture Jesus says that all the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments. All of Scripture is a working out of how to love God and love our neighbor. As we enter election season, these commandments seem ever more important in our lives. Not because we need to “get along” with those who might have differing opinions on how our government should run, but rather it requires me to center someone other than myself. When I head into the voting booth in November, I must consider all of my neighbors no matter who they might be and bring them into the booth with me.

In thinking about who I bring into the voting booth, I look to Jesus. There are many places in Scripture we can look to understand the kind of world God wants for us, but I find one of the easiest places to see this is in the life and ministry of Jesus.

We can look at the sermon on the mount (Luke 6:20-36), for instance, and see that, *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.”*

God cares, in particular, about the physical well-being of humans.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

God loves, not just those we love, but also those we hate.

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WHEN I HEAD INTO THE VOTING BOOTH
IN NOVEMBER, I MUST CONSIDER

ALL OF MY NEIGHBORS

NO MATTER WHO THEY MIGHT BE
AND BRING THEM INTO THE VOTING
BOOTH WITH ME.

[illegible]

Time and time again, Jesus makes the circle wider, always including more people than we would want to include.

While Scripture is bursting with stories of God's expansive



VOTE by Lisa Feng, 2024

Remember the Widow continued

love and inclusion, there is one in particular that keeps coming to my mind that might directly impact our civic engagement and how we vote.

As he [Jesus] taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widow's houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Mark 12:38-44

We often read these as two separate stories. The first we often read to be about the scribes' lack of humility, and the second to be about giving everything you have, just like the widow.

But, when we read it together without the headings in our Bibles separating the two, we see Jesus call out the scribes for "devouring widow's homes" and then immediately tells us about the plight of a widow who gives all she has, and all she has is very, very little. What we miss here are all the ways in which the money given in the temple is meant to be used. One of those ways is to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger among them. Jesus is pointing out the hypocrisy of those who pray loud prayers and adorn themselves from the riches of the temple tithes, while the widow who gives all she has should actually be benefiting from those tithes.

Ten verses earlier, Jesus says the greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor. And now, Jesus chides the leaders of the Temple for the misuse of power and wealth instead of caring for the widow who gives all she has.

Jesus' love command seems to go beyond doing something nice for a neighbor, but rather radically transforming the way we govern ourselves so that all our tithes and offerings are spread amongst those who need it most.

Hmm... sounds a bit like the way our taxes are supposed to work. While the Jewish people were under Roman occupation and it was the Romans who took taxes from the people, the Jewish Temple in its day was in its own way a form of government. It worked as a way of governing how the Jewish people lived and worshipped and how they were meant to take care of one another. Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy of the leaders and the injustice of their power, prestige, and wealth not just to stir the pot, but rather to upend it, to create something new.



The only way to create something new is to work with what we have, to fine-tune it and make it better. Jesus invites us to participate in the inbreaking of God's kingdom into our own. While democracy isn't the end-all-be-all for systems of governing ourselves, it is an incredible tool we can use to bring about God's reign here and now. Because of this, our vote matters. Our civic engagement matters. If participating in this earthly kingdom will help realize God's dream for creation, then we ought to do what we can to bring that about.

Because of this, it is this passage of the widow that is at the forefront of my mind as we head into election season. It is the vision of the widow giving all she had, and the injustice that she only had two coins to give. I believe we can laud her for her generosity while also calling the powers to account that allowed her to be in a situation where she only had two coins to give. When thinking about our city, state, and country, I think about our unhoused friends at the OWL. I think about the stories of women who died in childbirth because they couldn't get adequate health care. I think about my friend with diabetes who has insurance to pay for her medication, and then I think about all the folks who aren't afforded that same access to expensive life-saving medications. I think about those with less privilege in our society, due to their race, their gender, their ableness, their sexuality, and I wonder what policies would benefit them the most. What candidates best represent the people for whom Jesus contended? Who would Jesus call to account today?

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WHAT CANDIDATES BEST
REPRESENT THE PEOPLE FOR
WHOM JESUS CONTENDED?

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WHO WOULD JESUS CALL TO
ACCOUNT TODAY?

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There are many ways to call the powers to account, and one of those ways in our democracy is through our vote. So, as you go into this election season, may you take the widow into the voting booth with you. May you take refugees seeking asylum with you into the voting booth. May you take the woman who died in childbirth into the voting booth with you. May you take the unhoused adults and youth into the voting booth with you. May you take Jesus' command to love God and to love your neighbor so seriously that it impacts the way you vote and the way you shape our democracy.

We gather at this hallowed place because we believe in the American dream.

We face a race that tests if this country we cherish shall perish from the earth and if our earth shall perish from this country.

It falls to us to ensure that we do not fall for a people that cannot stand together, cannot stand at all.

We are one family regardless of religion, class, or color for what defines a patriot is not just our love of liberty, but our love for one another.

This is loud in our country's call because while we all love freedom, it is love that frees us all.

Empathy emancipates, making us greater than hate or vanity. That is the American promise, powerful and pure. Divided we cannot endure but united we can endeavor to humanize our democracy and endear democracy to humanity.

And make no mistake, cohering is the hardest task history ever wrote, but tomorrow is not written by our odds of hardship, but by the audacity of our hope by the vitality of our vote.

Only now, approaching this rare air are we aware that perhaps the American dream is no dream at all, but instead a dare to dream together.

Like a million roots tethered, branching up humbly, making one tree.

This is our country from many, one, from battles won, our freedoms sung, our kingdom come has just begun.

We redeem this sacred scene ready for our journey from it. Together we must birth this early republic and achieve an unearthly summit.

Let us not just believe in the American dream. Let us be worthy of it.



This Sacred Space
by Amanda Gorman

Resources

For the Family

WATCH

How to Talk to Kids About Race with Jemar Tisby

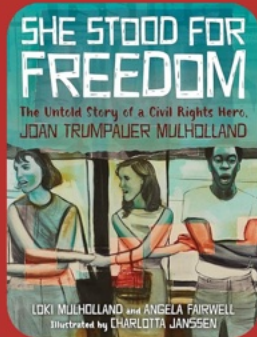


In an episode of Home School, The Atlantic's animated series about parenting, author Jeremy Tisby offers advice on how to have a conversation with children about race, from experiential learning to watching classic animated films.

READ

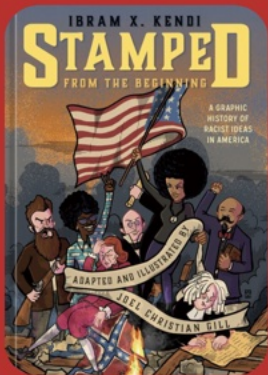
She Stood for Freedom: The Untold Story of a Civil Rights Hero, Joan Trumpauer Mulholland

This picture book biography of Joan Trumpauer Mulholland follows her from her segregated childhood in 1950s Virginia through her college years, when she joined the Civil Rights Movement, attending demonstrations and sit-ins. She was the first White person to join in the 1963 Woolworth's lunch counter sit-ins in Jackson, Mississippi. She also participated in the Freedom Rides of 1961 and was arrested and imprisoned. Her life has been spent standing up for racial justice. **Ages 5 and up**



READ

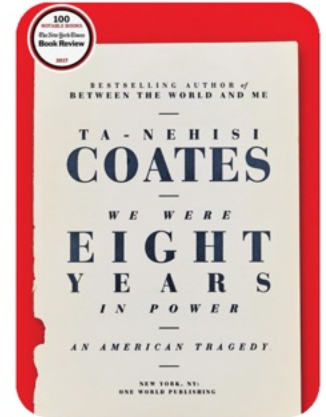
Stamped From The Beginning: A Graphic History of Racist Ideas in America



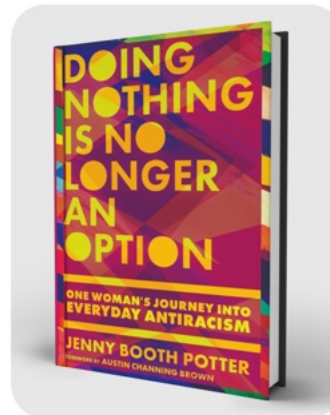
In collaboration with award-winning historian and comic artist Joel Christian Gill, this stunningly illustrated graphic-novel adaptation of Dr. Kendi's groundbreaking *Stamped from the Beginning* explores, with vivid clarity and dimensionality, the living history of America, and how we can learn from the past to work toward a more equitable, antiracist future. **Grades 7 - 12**

We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Coates, a National Book Award winner, is a journalist, a cultural critic, an author of fiction and comic books, and more. In this collection of essays written during the presidency of President Barack Obama, Coates examines the realities of race, class, and power in America today. As we are currently in an election year, now is an opportune moment to reflect on where we've been and how we got to where we are, and Coates is an incredible guide to that reflection.

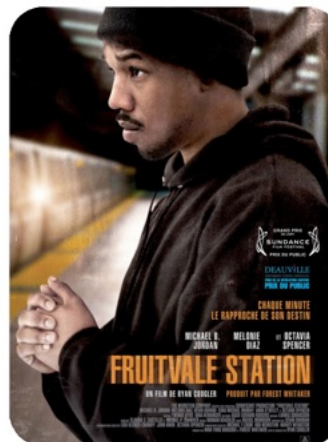


Doing Nothing Is No Longer An Option by Jenny Booth Potter



As a White woman in the evangelical church space, Jenny Booth Potter retraces her steps from unawareness and complicity in racism towards atonement, action, and progress. In doing so, she helps to chart a path for many of us who are White and ready to finally do something.

Fruitvale Station



Directed by Ryan Coogler, who also directed the Black Panther films, this film is based on the events leading to the death of Oscar Grant, a man killed in 2009 by Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer Johannes Mehserle at the Fruitvale district station in Oakland, California in 2009.

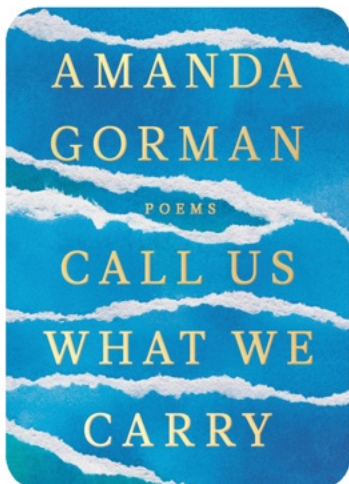
Hamilton by Lin-Manuel Miranda

Based on the 2004 biography *Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow, the musical covers the life of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton and his involvement in the American Revolution and the political history of the early United States. Composed over a seven-year period from 2008 to 2015, the music draws heavily from hip hop, as well as R&B, pop, soul, and traditional-style show tunes. It casts non-white actors as the Founding Fathers of the United States and other historical figures. Miranda described Hamilton as about "America then, as told by America now." It is available for streaming on Disney+.



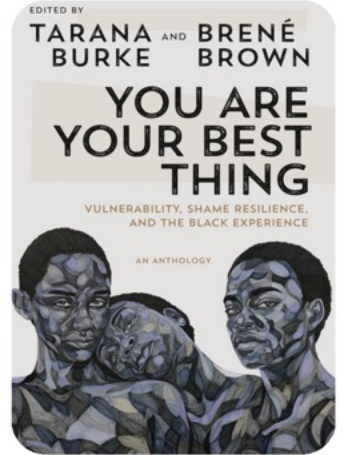
Call Us What We Carry by Amanda Gorman

Formerly titled "The Hill We Climb and Other Poems", the luminous poetry collection by #1 New York Times bestselling author and presidential inaugural poet Amanda Gorman captures a shipwrecked moment in time and transforms it into a lyric of hope and healing. In *Call Us What We Carry*, Gorman explores history, language, identity, and erasure through an imaginative and intimate collage. Harnessing the collective grief of a global pandemic, this beautifully designed volume features poems in many inventive styles and structures and shines a light on a moment of reckoning. *Call Us What We Carry* reveals that Gorman has become our messenger from the past, our voice for the future.



You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience

This collection of essays features a dynamic group of Black writers, organizers, artists, academics and cultural figures. These leaders discuss the topics the two editors, Tarana Burke and Brené Brown, have dedicated their lives to understanding and teaching: vulnerability and shame resilience.



@revjacquilewis

Rev Dr. Jacqui Lewis is a pastor at Middle Church in New York City. She is an author, activist, and public theologian who has written for many media outlets in addition to her own books. She also hosts a podcast called "Love. Period." Her work often centers on the development of an antiracist, just, fully welcoming society for all.



Showing Up For Racial Justice



Wondering how you can take action? Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) mobilizes white people for justice across the country. Through campaigns, education, and action opportunities, they move people to reject racism and complicity— and to join movements for change. From their website, "we organize white communities to join fights for racial and economic justice. We are working towards a world where everyone has the opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive. And we believe that white people have an important role to play."



VOTING IS OPEN NOW!

Use the QR Code to the left to go to Vote.org to register to vote and learn how you can vote right now, by mail, or on election day.

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we'd be honored for you to join us

Sundays at 10am in person,
or streaming live on YouTube