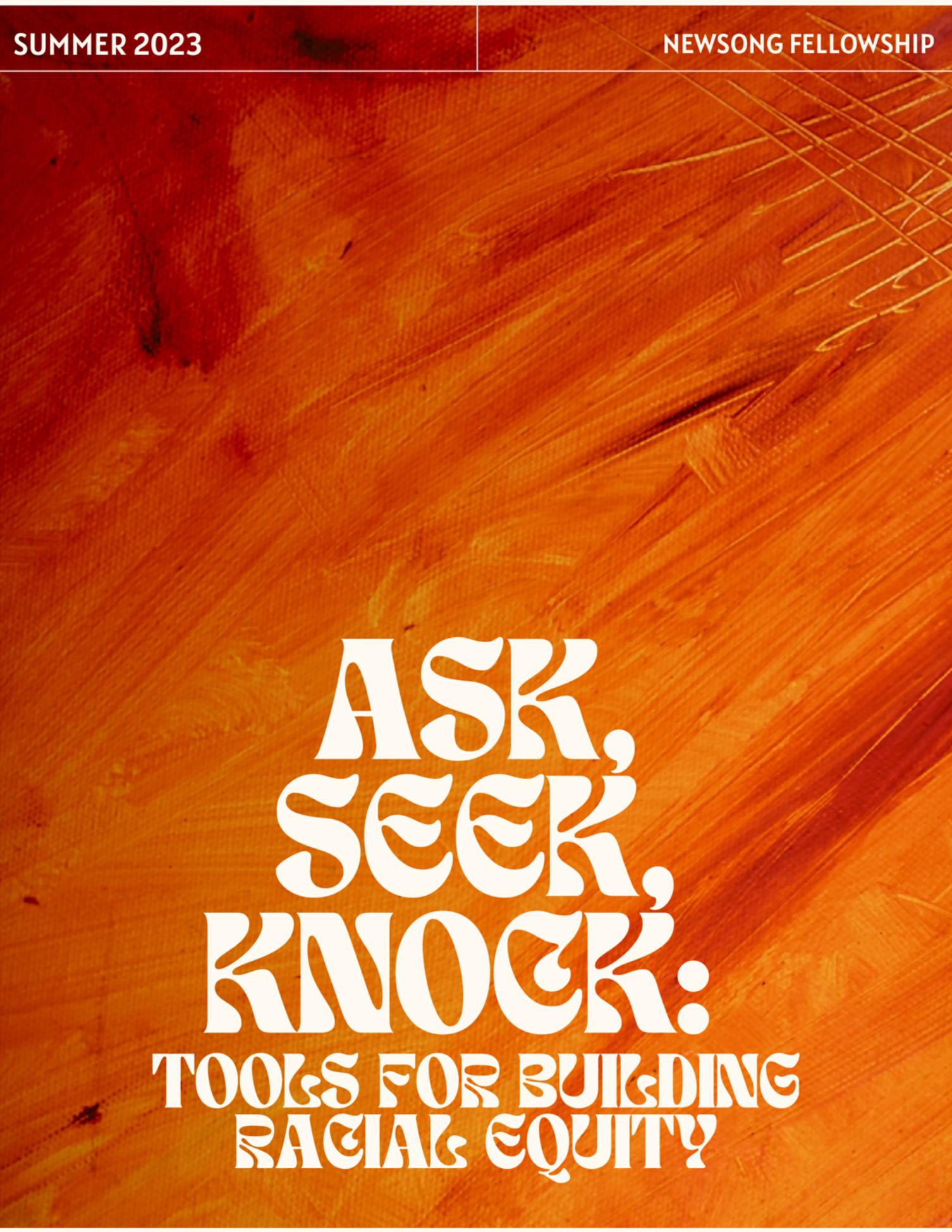


SUMMER 2023

NEWSONG FELLOWSHIP



# ASK, SEEK, KNOCK: TOOLS FOR BUILDING RACIAL EQUITY

# A Letter from the Editors

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## WELCOME TO THE NEW VERSION OF ASK, SEEK, KNOCK: TOOLS FOR BUILDING RACIAL EQUITY!

We've reformatted to a new, longer setup that will come out twice a year so that we can bring you more resources and more to think about with each issue. We've gathered in these pages books, shows, podcasts and more for the whole family, including an all new section specifically to help the littlest ones in our lives begin to engage in the work of racial justice.

This kid's section, put together by our children's ministry director and an elementary school teacher, is a really exciting addition. So often, as adults, we care deeply about issues of justice and inequity, but we struggle to know how to talk to our children about it. As we try to develop new tools for ourselves, it can feel nearly impossible to provide for our kiddos as well. We hope that this new space for kids can start to help you engage God's work of justice and racial equity with your whole family.

**Here's what we know...** *the work of racial justice  
is a lifelong journey.*

The history of racism in and around us goes back before the founding of our very nation, and we will not see its end in our lifetime. And yet, as people of faith, we can proclaim the Good News that God is still reigning, even now, that Christ's birth, life, and death are a testament to the importance of God's Kingdom here on earth. We each have the opportunity to be the people who bring out the Shalom of God in the world. The articles and resources in this edition of ASK are meant to challenge us, to comfort us, to embolden us. They are a reminder that none of us are alone, and we can all contribute to fighting racism, which we know is an attack on God's people.

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*we're so glad you're here!*

Editors: Jake Apple • Tim Burge-Lape • Kristina Heckelman  
Grant & Mikhaela Romoser-Claunch • Caleb Romoser

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Please reach out to [askseekknock@newsong-fellowship.com](mailto:askseekknock@newsong-fellowship.com) if you've got questions, comments, or concerns. We'd love to hear from you!

# A Lived Experience

BY: DAVE ROMOSER

The first time I participated in the White Privilege cohort, several years ago, I was surprised by how naive I had been my whole life in terms of racism and white privilege specifically. I had grown up in a foreign country that didn't have the history with slavery that we do, and yet I began to realize that although I would have claimed at that point that racism seemed non-existent there, it was just much more subtle and, as a white boy, I would've been one of the last ones to experience its impact.

In terms of my understanding of racism once I came back to live in the United States, I would've likely described it as still "present" but that it was, to a considerable degree, mostly part of our "history". My first direct encounter with racism, that forced me to see what I'd so easily missed all those years, happened in a church where I served at the time as I witnessed the lengths to which its leadership would go as it "discreetly" but actively worked to assure that a black teenager who wanted to become a member wouldn't be allowed to. I was stunned by the level of overt and intentional racist language and behavior when their effort failed. Still, I would say I held on to the notion that this particular scenario was an anomaly. The Church by and large isn't this way... or so I wanted to believe.



By the time I went through the cohort a second time, the pandemic was in full swing and the death of George Floyd had been the tipping point for a whole new wave of protests and reactions. Once again, I was caught off guard and stunned by the degree to which it and the systemic racism it revealed was dismissed or downplayed by such a vast number of Christians. I realized then, just how helpful it was to have a space to process all that was once again being stirred up within me. I came to see that working through my own lens of white privilege would be a much more needed, meticulous and ongoing process than I had anticipated if I was going to be and continue to lead Newsong into becoming apprentices of Jesus; people who participated in the coming of the Kingdom here and now.

# Undermining God's Loving

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BY: TIM BURGE-LAPE

With book bans sweeping the nation over the last year, I've been thinking about how my own anti-racist journey began with books. Growing up in a predominantly white small town, one of my main exposures to people of Color was through literature. My mother taught for thirty-five years, and if I learned anything from her, it was the importance of reading. Each night before bed we would read together. We kept track of the books we read by writing little blurbs about each one on notecards that we stored in a little green box in the cubby of my headboard. I adored it - our collection of books we read together. We finished The Chronicles of Narnia by the time I was six or seven and when the first Harry Potter came out, we also read that together. I was in third grade and my Evangelical mother wasn't afraid of witchcraft in a book. Instead, she encouraged me to read more and more, to love a good story, and to understand the truths about what the story taught me. I realize now that's where my love of the Bible and all its stories began. My mother was a teacher who believed that books should be read.

I look back on my memories of reading with my mom, and I am grateful. I'm grateful that I began encountering people who did not fall into the categories that predominantly made up my small hometown; cis, White, heterosexual.

Empathy and compassion blossomed in me as I encountered books by authors different from myself, and I realize now that it was the real start of my anti-racist education. I didn't know that's what was happening to me at the time, but it began my quest for more knowledge of things never taught to me in school growing up. I learned about Black people's experiences through slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights movement of the 50s and 60s. The atrocities of White people had been glossed over my entire childhood and were now being laid bare before me in memoirs and novels.

What I gained through books as I entered my teenage years was twofold: first was an understanding of the world as seen through eyes different from my own, and second was finding comfort and healing through LGBTQ stories specifically. Reading books helped to both stretch me and also not feel so alone in the world. For these reasons, it is both sad and angering to hear about the book bans happening across the U.S. In some instances, the very books that are being banned are the books that helped me step outside of myself and cultivate empathy for others. These books helped me to be more Christ-like, which is why these book bans are so deeply disturbing to me.



# & Redemptive Nature

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Art by @ariadelsole on Instagram

It has become apparent that these bans are rooted in both racism and anti-LGBTQ sentiments. PEN America, an organization cataloging and advocating against book bans in the U.S., notes that in the first half of the 2022-23 school year, 30% of the 874 books banned dealt with race, racism, or featured characters of Color. The prior school year in total saw 1,648 unique book titles banned. Of these books, 40% of them (659 specific books) feature main characters or prominent secondary characters of Color and 21% of them explicitly address issues of race and racism.

It is a wonder to me that the Bible has not been banned. The Bible contains almost all of the themes found in these books that are being banned, such as violence and physical abuse, sex and sexuality, issues of mental health, race and racism, and grief and death. To ban books with the same themes as those found in Scripture is to undermine God's loving, redemptive nature. God uses these themes in the stories of Scripture to call those in power to account for their sins and to uncover unsavory truths about the way power works in favor of the oppressor. These stories are meant to help those who have been wronged say "me too," to be a healing balm.

Many children encounter horrific things early in life. The Bible, along with the books on these banned lists, are a way for children (and even adults!) to understand and name what has happened to them sometimes without even having to utter a word. It may, like it did for me, give them the courage to speak up about it and to seek healing and wholeness. To remove books written by people of Color about people of Color is to further remove diverse representation in our schools and libraries. Continuing to ban these books is indeed perpetuating racism and preventing the flourishing of all of God's beloved family.



# For the Family

## LET'S GET IT RIGHT THIS TIME

By: Reggie Joiner CEO of Orange

Every generation takes a cue from the generation before it.

**how they see God...**

**how they see each other...**

**how they see the world...**

The hard truth about racism in any generation is that it doesn't just happen by accident. It is...

**a reflection**

**a response**

**a reaction**

To what the adults around them did or did not do.

The Church is called to be a compass for every generation.

**To inspire faith where there is doubt.**

**To instill hope where there is despair.**

**To incite love where there is hate.**

Every kid and teenager is watching how the church handles the issue of injustice and discrimination

**For the sake of a generation's faith,**

**For the sake of a generation's future,**

**Let's show them what love really looks like.**

As a church family we invite questions to help shape our faith journeys, but when it comes to anti racism, it may be difficult to know where to start. Here are some resources to help our youngest antiracist learn more about how to love our neighbors.



Read: *Last Stop on Market Street*  
by Matt de la Peña

In this heartwarming picture book, we go on a short trip in the city with CJ and his nana. CJ is full of questions and his nana is full of patience as she guides him to the last stop on Market Street. But where are they going? You'll have to read to find out! Check it out from the Newsong bookshelf downstairs.



Watch: Tab Time with Tabitha Brown on YouTube

Visit with Tabitha Brown on her mission "to help heal the world." Ms.Tab explores topics like sharing, taking care of yourself, and being a leader. You can even do crafts with DJ Khräfty!

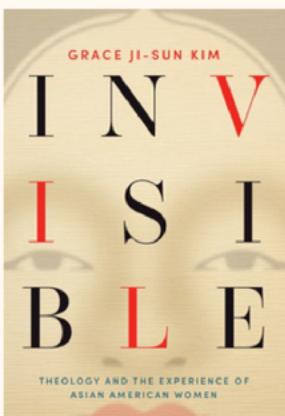
# Resources

READ • LISTEN • WATCH • FOLLOW

## Invisible by Grace Ji-Sun Kim

In Invisible, Grace Ji-Sun Kim examines encounters with racism, sexism, and xenophobia as she works towards ideas of ending Asian American women's invisibility in dominant culture. She uses biblical, sociological, and theological narratives to empower the voices of Asian American women. This book reads like a memoir as she shares the story of her heritage, her family history, her immigration, and her own experience as an Asian American woman.

She shares and empowers women of color to move beyond their experiences of oppression and invites women to reclaim their space in the kingdom of God!



## @Jemartisby

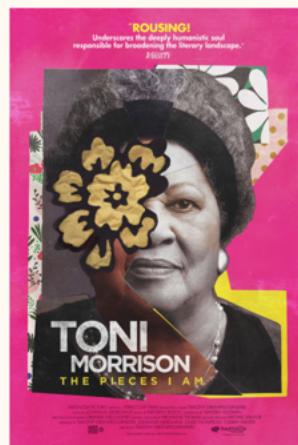
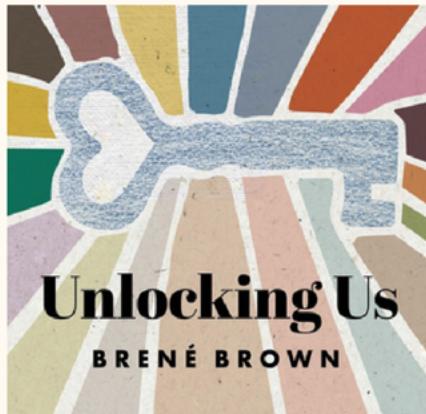
Jemar Tisby came to faith through the reformed tradition, but through time found that Evangelicalism in the United States was closely tied to White Nationalism. He describes it as finding that he wasn't really invited to a seat at the Table. Dissatisfaction with the tradition that had first breathed life into his Christian journey led him to start The Witness: A Black Christian Collective. He is interested in helping people become life-long advocates for racial justice, specifically within the Church. His Instagram is a great starting point for anyone interested in pursuing racial justice within the context of the Christian faith.



## Unlocking Us with Brené Brown: Brené with Ibram X. Kendi

Brené talks with professor Ibram X. Kendi, New York Times bestselling author of "How to Be an Antiracist" and the director of the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research. Brown writes, "we talk about racial disparities, policy, and equality, but really focus on 'How to Be an Antiracist', which is a groundbreaking approach to understanding uprooting racism and inequality in our society and in ourselves." Dr. Kendi is currently the Andrew

W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University. In 2020, Time magazine named him one of the 100 Most Influential People in the world.



## Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am

This documentary on Netflix explores the life, writing, and genius of the late Toni Morrison - one of America's greatest writers.

She wrote about Black joy and life, and she wrote, as she says in the documentary, to and among Black people. Her intentionality was to not address a white audience, white experience, or with reference to "the White gaze," as she said: Black life was the sole subject. This documentary highlights the triumph that was Toni Morrison and the triumph that continues to be her life's work.

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**we'd be honored for you to join us**  
Sundays at 10am in person,  
or streaming live on YouTube