

UNDER OUR SKIN

GETTING REAL
ABOUT RACE.

GETTING FREE
FROM THE **FEARS**
AND FRUSTRATIONS
THAT **DIVIDE US.**

BENJAMIN WATSON

WITH ASHLEY WIERSMA

UNDER OUR SKIN
GROUP CONVERSATION GUIDE

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**TYNDALE®
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Under Our Skin Group Conversation Guide

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Designed by Alberto C. Navata Jr. and Dean H. Renninger

Published in association with the literary agency of Legacy, LLC, 501 N. Orlando Avenue, Suite #313-348, Winter Park, FL 32789.

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The stories in this book are about real people and real events, but some names have been changed for the privacy of the individuals involved.

ISBN 978-1-4964-1329-1

Printed in the United States of America

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7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION

They're called flashbulb memories or defining moments—those times when something big happens in the world, and from that day forward you're able to recall with great clarity exactly where you were, whom you were with, and what you were doing when you heard the news. You probably remember 9/11 that way. And maybe Hurricane Katrina or the Indian Ocean tsunami. People of a certain age may remember where they were when John Hinckley shot President Reagan or when the Challenger space shuttle exploded shortly after liftoff. If you're in your fifties or older, you may remember where you were when you heard that Elvis died or when President Kennedy was assassinated.

Psychologists would say we don't *actually* remember these moments with greater clarity or accuracy than any other memory in life, but such memories sure seem to have a unique impact in our minds. Time stands still, our breathing slows, and our attention focuses more intently as we grasp for details to make sense of it all. In an instant, our lives are changed.

That's what Ferguson was for me.

TRAGEDY IN LIVING COLOR

On the afternoon of August 9, 2014, I finished another day of training camp with the New Orleans Saints (the team I played for at the time) and headed back to the hotel to rest and get cleaned up for dinner. I absentmindedly flipped on the TV, thinking I'd see what was on ESPN, but news crawlers and "breaking news" banners caught my eye. Camera crews had descended on Ferguson, Missouri, a northern suburb of St. Louis where an eighteen-year-old kid had been fatally shot by a police officer. It wasn't just any kid, of course, and it wasn't just any officer. The facts that would fuel riots and national unrest in the ensuing weeks were that the young man who had died was black, and the man who had shot him was white.

Soon enough, details came tumbling out. Teenager Michael Brown had stolen cigarillos from a convenience store and reportedly had shoved the clerk who tried to stop him. Officer Darren Wilson, who was on patrol in the area, was alerted to the suspected crime and given descriptions of Michael Brown and a buddy who was with him.

When Officer Wilson located the two young men, he tried to blockade them with his patrol car. That was when tensions escalated. In a matter of moments, Officer Wilson would fire twelve shots, and Michael Brown would lie dying in the middle of the street.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

I sat on the edge of my hotel-room bed, shaking my head and thinking, *No, not again!* As a nation, we'd been racking up shooting after shooting involving black men and white cops, and I wasn't sure how much more we could take. I soaked up as much news coverage as possible before I had to go meet up with my teammates,

but I came away with far more questions than answers. How did a kid get killed for *shoplifting*? Didn't *someone* on the scene see what really happened? How many of these black-versus-white tragedies were we going to have to endure before things finally changed?

Hadn't we made more progress than this as a nation? As human beings?

For weeks following Michael Brown's death, coverage of looting, vandalism, riots, and protests—in Ferguson and around the nation—led nearly every major news broadcast, causing a deep-seated hopelessness to wash over my heart. A black man had been shot six times by a white cop. That police officer was only thirty feet away from the young man when the final shots were fired. That young man was unarmed. And now our nation, once again, was at war with itself.

ON BROKENNESS AND REPAIR

For the remaining days of that training camp, I did my best to focus on the job at hand, even as my thoughts were tough to corral. More than ever, it seemed as if something was broken in the world that might just be beyond repair. How do we begin to fix a situation that is centuries old? Though some progress began unfolding in the twentieth century, aftershocks of the transatlantic slave trade, which saw Africans being sold like cattle on the streets of America, continue to rumble beneath our feet even today. Blacks carry grudges about “white privilege.” Whites feel embittered toward blacks for refusing to “get over” the pain of discrimination, past and present.

Something had to give, but I wasn't completely sure what that something was.

Two days before Thanksgiving 2014, when a grand jury decided not to indict Officer Wilson in the Michael Brown shooting, the

pot of unrest was stirred once again, and the lines that already divided us seemed to grow wider and more impenetrable than ever. Not knowing what else to do, given the practical constraints I face during football season, I did what I often do when thoughts get knotted in my mind: I sat down with my phone, opened the Notes app, and started trying to make sense of what I was feeling. On the day when the Ferguson decision was reached, this is what I wrote:

I'M ANGRY because the stories of injustice that have been passed down for generations seem to be continuing before our very eyes.

I'M FRUSTRATED because pop culture, music, and movies glorify these types of police-citizen altercations and promote an invincible attitude that continues to get young men killed in real life, away from the safety of movie sets and music studios.

I'M FEARFUL because in the back of my mind I know that although I'm a law-abiding citizen I could still be looked upon as a "threat" to those who don't know me. So I will continue to have to go the extra mile to earn the benefit of the doubt.

I'M EMBARRASSED because the looting, violent protests, and law breaking only confirm, and in the minds of many, validate, the stereotypes and thus the inferior treatment.

I'M SAD because another young life was lost from his family; the racial divide has widened; a community is in shambles; accusations, insensitivity, hurt, and hatred are boiling over, and we may never know the truth about what happened that day.

I'M SYMPATHETIC because I wasn't there so I don't know exactly what happened. Maybe Darren Wilson acted within his rights and duty as an officer of the law and killed Michael Brown in self-defense like any of us would in the circumstance.

INTRODUCTION

Now he has to fear the backlash against himself and his loved ones when he was only doing his job. What a horrible thing to endure. Or maybe he provoked Michael and ignited the series of events that led to his eventually murdering the young man to prove a point.

I'M OFFENDED because of the insulting comments I've seen that are not only insensitive but dismissive to the painful experiences of others.

I'M CONFUSED because I don't know why it's so hard to obey a policeman. You will not win!!! And I don't know why some policemen abuse their power. Power is a responsibility, not a weapon to brandish and lord over the populace.

I'M INTROSPECTIVE because sometimes I want to take "our" side without looking at the facts in situations like these. Sometimes I feel like it's us against them. Sometimes I'm just as prejudiced as people I point fingers at. And that's not right. How can I look at white skin and make assumptions but not want assumptions made about me? That's not right.

I'M HOPELESS because I've lived long enough to expect things like this to continue to happen. I'm not surprised and at some point my little children are going to inherit the weight of being a minority and all that it entails.

I'M HOPEFUL because I know that while we still have race issues in America, we enjoy a much different normal than those of our parents and grandparents. I see it in my personal relationships with teammates, friends, and mentors. And it's a beautiful thing.

I'M ENCOURAGED because ultimately the problem is not a SKIN problem, it is a SIN problem. SIN is the reason we rebel

against authority. SIN is the reason we abuse our authority. SIN is the reason we are racist, prejudiced, and lie to cover for our own. SIN is the reason we riot, loot, and burn. BUT I'M ENCOURAGED because God has provided a solution for sin through his son, Jesus, and with it, a transformed heart and mind. One that's capable of looking past the outward and seeing what's truly important in every human being. The cure for the Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner tragedies is not education or exposure. It's the gospel. So, finally, I'M ENCOURAGED because the gospel gives mankind hope.

I felt compelled to share my stream-of-consciousness thoughts with anyone who cared to read them, but I had no idea they would elicit the kind of response they did. I also had no idea how to post something to Facebook, so I texted my publicist and asked him to sort that part out for me. Less than an hour later, my wife called to say that her Facebook account was going crazy. Over the next few weeks, nearly a million people “liked” my post, half that many shared it, and ninety thousand submitted comments. I knew that the “race issue” in this country was a big deal, but I did not foresee a response like that.

WHY THIS CONVERSATION GUIDE?

The reason you're holding this group conversation guide is that a handful of people believed enough in the message of my initial Facebook post to encourage me to write a book. That book, called *Under Our Skin: Getting Real about Race and Getting Free from the Fears and Frustrations That Divide Us* (Tyndale, 2015), is about how we as human beings—black, white, whatever—can erase the lines that historically have kept us apart, and how we can step into

a future marked by the unity that God says we should pursue. If you haven't already read it, I hope you will as you make your way through this study.

Here's what else I hope: I hope you will see yourself in the Ferguson story even if you weren't there; even if you don't know anyone who was there; even if the events that took place there have never caused you a moment's concern. As you work through this discussion guide, I hope you'll see that we *all* suffered a loss in Ferguson that day. The only way we will ever begin to solve the race problem we've been wrestling with throughout our history is with everyone pulling in the same direction.

I've sorted this study into four sessions. Each one addresses two or three chapters from *Under Our Skin*:

- Session 1 | Look Around: The Ways We Still Segregate (chapters 1, 2, and 3)
- Session 2 | Look Inside: The Problem with Racism Isn't Race (chapters 4, 5, and 6)
- Session 3 | Look Up: Erasing the Lines We've Drawn (chapters 7, 8, and 9)
- Session 4 | Look Again: Seeing Life with Divine Eyes (chapters 10 and 11)

Each session includes a Key Scripture passage; an overview of the issues discussed in each session called The Context; and The Conversation, which examines biblical principles that should guide our response to racism and offers questions to guide your group's discussion along those lines. You'll also find an invitation at the end of each session, dubbed The Call, and I encourage you to seize these opportunities to evaluate your assumptions, actions, reactions, and aspirations—perhaps more deeply than ever before.

As I wrote in my original Facebook post, the one emotion

that prevailed at the end of it all was *hope*. And I am hopeful that, through the pages of my book and through your participation in this discussion series, you and many others will be able to face the issues of racism, hatred, and division head-on and begin to make a real difference in our nation. I'm hopeful that we don't have to fall into the same traps as those who have gone before us. That we don't have to perpetuate mistaken perceptions of one another. That we don't have to stay on "our side" of the line—whatever line that may be. We can start fresh today and see one another the way God sees all of us. And we can finally get real about race and finally get free from the fears and frustrations that divide us. But that will happen only if we are willing to surrender our own agendas, our own "righteous indignation," and our own wisdom to the wisdom, power, and presence of Jesus Christ.

I suppose that's my ultimate goal for this four-week experience: that I might guide you straight into the arms of Jesus, the only one who can lead us out of the mess we've gotten ourselves into. As a nation, we can change laws in the interest of fairness and freedom. We've already done so, and we can do more. We can change education to remove inequities and help everyone have a fair shot. Again, we've already done so, and we can do more. We can change the conversation about race, and we should continue along that path. But what we really need—the only change that will truly have a lasting effect—is a *radical change of heart* for all of us. Your heart. My heart. We *all* need to change.

I want you to know that I'm in, 100 percent. I'm signing up here and now to put unity above all other desires. To make understanding and reconciliation top priorities. My prayer is that *you* will too.

B. W.

New Orleans, April 2016

LOOK AROUND

The Ways We Set Ourselves Apart

CORE TRUTH

Segregation is still alive in today's "desegregated" America, and we *all* help it to thrive.

THIS WEEK'S READING

Before your group meeting this week, read the following chapters in *Under Our Skin*:

Chapter 1: Angry

Chapter 2: Introspective

Chapter 3: Embarrassed

KEY SCRIPTURE

The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal GOD had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

The Woman said to the serpent, “Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It’s only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.’”

The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”

When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she’d know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on”—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

When they heard the sound of GOD strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from God.

God called to the Man: “Where are you?”

He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

God said, “Who told you you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?”

The Man said, “The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it.”

LOOK AROUND

God said to the Woman, "What is this that you've done?"

"The serpent seduced me," she said, "and I ate."

GOD told the serpent:

"Because you've done this, you're cursed,
cursed beyond all cattle and wild animals,
Cursed to slink on your belly
and eat dirt all your life.
I'm declaring war between you and the Woman,
between your offspring and hers.
He'll wound your head,
you'll wound his heel."

He told the Woman:

"I'll multiply your pains in childbirth;
you'll give birth to your babies in pain.
You'll want to please your husband,
but he'll lord it over you."

He told the Man:

"Because you listened to your wife
and ate from the tree
That I commanded you not to eat from,
'Don't eat from this tree,'
The very ground is cursed because of you;
getting food from the ground
Will be as painful as having babies is for your wife;
you'll be working in pain all your life long.
The ground will sprout thorns and weeds,

you'll get your food the hard way,
Planting and tilling and harvesting,
sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk,
Until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried;
you started out as dirt, you'll end up dirt."

The Man, known as Adam, named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all the living.

God made leather clothing for Adam and his wife and dressed them.

God said, "The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything, ranging from good to evil. What if he now should reach out and take fruit from the Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!"

So God expelled them from the Garden of Eden and sent them to work the ground, the same dirt out of which they'd been made. He threw them out of the garden and stationed angel-cherubim and a revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding the path to the Tree-of-Life.

GENESIS 3:1-24, MSG

THE CONTEXT

Take turns reading aloud both this section and the following section (The Conversation) as a way for your group to stay on the same page as you engage with the discussion questions.

At first glance, it may seem as if we as a nation have come far on the issue of desegregation. There are no more "whites only" drinking fountains. No more "colored" billiard halls. No more "For Rent" signs with disclaimers at the bottom specifying who

can apply. There are no longer poll taxes aimed at keeping black people from voting. The Klan is no longer banding together to parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, as they did in a brazen display of power in 1926. We're doing better than we were before the Civil Rights Act was passed, aren't we? Some Americans, at least, believe so: In a recent CBS News poll of more than one thousand US citizens, more than eight in ten white people and nearly six in ten blacks said that we are "making real progress" on getting rid of racial discrimination.¹

Certainly, passing laws that allow all people, regardless of skin color, to hang out on the same beaches, attend the same schools, and worship at the same churches represents steps in the right direction; but the fact is, real integration hasn't happened. Look around. Most American churches are made up of one racial group or another, but not both. Your neighborhood is inhabited by primarily one race. Your children's schools are populated by kids who are mostly one skin color. Despite our professed desire to break down barriers, we have taken a thick permanent marker to our lives, using bold lines to cordon off a little section of safety from anyone who doesn't look like us, talk like us, dress like us, or vote like us.

And those lines we've drawn? They're killing us as a nation and as followers of Jesus. Those lines of division are what keep us from knowing one another, feeling compassion for one another, and preventing the violence that has already claimed too many lives.

As time allows, discuss the following question with your group.

What are your views on the progress we have made as a country, in terms of blurring the racial lines drawn throughout our nation's history? Where is there still room for improvement?

THE CONVERSATION

In *Under Our Skin*, Benjamin talks about his grandfather's influence on him as a kid. "Pop Pop," who lived in Washington, DC, was larger than life to young Ben, despite Pop Pop's slender, five-foot-seven-inch frame. He dressed impeccably, kept a spotless home, and was known and beloved by everybody in his community. Pop Pop passed away at the age of ninety-three, just six months before Michael Brown was shot and killed. Had he lived to see that tragic turn of events, he probably would have said something like this to his grandson: "Benjamin, an awful thing has happened, and awful things will *keep on* happening. Don't let the awfulness around you cause you to live down to people's low expectations for your life. You rise above."

Pop Pop was like that. He was forever calling his grandchildren to a higher standard than what they would have chosen for themselves. "Make the most of what you have," he would say. "Be proud of who you are. Don't let the obstacles limit you. Overcome them." Regardless of everything Pop Pop had seen in his life as a black man growing up in DC, and regardless of the challenges he himself had known, wisdom flowed freely from his lips whenever he opened his mouth.

Our Words Expose Our Hearts

You can tell a lot about people by what they choose to talk about. Pop Pop was a prime example of that. And do you know who the *best* example was? Jesus Christ. In one of history's most divisive eras—when political, religious, racial, socio-economic, and relational tensions were sky-high—Jesus arrived on the scene and declared a wild vision for life on earth, a vision in which unity, not division, was prized. If anyone had a

valid reason for discriminating, it was Jesus, and yet he refused to walk that path. Instead, he came to make *all people* one.

In his prayer in the upper room, Jesus said:

The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—
 Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
 So they might be one heart and mind with us.
 Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.
 The same glory you gave me, I gave them,
 So they'll be as unified and together as we are—
 I in them and you in me.
 Then they'll be mature in this oneness,
 And give the godless world evidence
 That you've sent me and loved them
 In the same way you've loved me.

JOHN 17:21-23, MSG

One heart. One mind. Oneness that reflects maturity. Oneness that reflects God's love. These were the dreams that Jesus dreamed for us, the potential that he believes we have. In the most eloquent speech that Jesus ever gave, he laid out his plan for how this oneness was supposed to come about.

As time allows, discuss the following questions with your group.

Events such as Ferguson are troubling because they underscore the truth that we are not experiencing life as it was meant to be lived. Instead of unity, we're divided. Instead of coming together, we stand apart from one another. On the issue of race specifically, where do you see division in your own day-to-day world? Comment on any of the following categories that apply to you, noting which selections your group seems to share.

- In your neighborhood
- In your workplace
- In your children's schools
- In your circle of friends
- In your church
- In your recreational choices
- In your community
- Somewhere else?

How have these pockets of segregation come about? What dynamics or situations are responsible, and what fears, insecurities, or assumptions tend to keep those lines of division drawn?

Lessons from the Mount

Early in Jesus' ministry, just after he was baptized by his cousin John, he noticed that his teachings were drawing large crowds. In an effort to separate his true followers from those who were all about the spectacle and hype, he climbed a hillside to a place where he could be heard by the crowds, and he spilled the beans on what real followership would involve. In a lengthy discourse that takes three full chapters in the Gospel of Matthew to complete, Jesus says some pretty radical things. He talks about valuing other people:

Anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother "idiot!" and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell "stupid!" at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

MATTHEW 5:21-22, MSG

He talks about forgiveness:

Say you're out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don't lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him.

MATTHEW 5:25, MSG

He talks about trusting others:

If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar.

MATTHEW 6:22-23, MSG

He talks about selflessness:

Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*.

MATTHEW 7:12, MSG

“Contrary to popular opinion,” Jesus essentially told the crowd that day, “you’re not blessed when you’re at the top of your game, lording power over people you deem less important. No, you’re blessed *when you’re at the end of your rope*; when you feel that you’ve lost what is most dear to you; when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less; when you care; when you get your mind and heart put right; when you show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight.”²

On and on Jesus went, providing the crowd—and future generations—with heaven’s perspective on what is possible here on earth.

These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.

MATTHEW 7:24-27, MSG

You can't help but grin over that clarification; Jesus knows how we all roll. He knows that just like the crowd that day, which burst into whoops and hollers and applause after he finished, we will nod our head in agreement over his sermon and say, "Yeah! Preach it, Jesus. Come on!" And he knows that we'll then head off into our day and promptly forget everything we just learned. We'll stick that Golden Rule on bumper stickers and coffee mugs and magnets that litter our fridge, but when it comes to actually practicing it? Well, there's a little more to be desired.

As time allows, discuss the following question with your group.

In light of Jesus' teachings—including his exhortations from the Sermon on the Mount—what emotions do you think he would have felt over the tragic turn of events in Ferguson and the mayhem that ensued?

Walking the Talk

Back to the subject of practicing the Golden Rule, which we say we prize. As you survey the world around you, are you more

likely to find evidence of people accepting others—even people who have differing opinions on how the world works—warmly and with open minds? Or are you more likely to find evidence of people calling each other idiots—sometimes audibly, sometimes not—and thus committing murder as Jesus defined it?

Are you more likely to see people contemplating the question of what they wish others would do for them and then actively, enthusiastically, and selflessly doing those very things for other people; or will you instead find endless self-promotion and greedy grabs for more?

Is it more likely that you'll find enemies rushing to extend forgiveness to each other and beginning a peaceful relationship again, or will those same enemies rally an angry mob, dig in their heels, and prepare to fight?

Agreeing with Jesus that his way is better? That's as easy as it gets. Actually living according to that better way? That's another matter entirely.

This disparity between wanting our world to be as equitable and enjoyable as the one Jesus described, even as we neglect our collective responsibility in bringing that world into being, was at the root of the problem in Ferguson; in fact, it's at the root of every divisive situation the world has ever known. And though we may have vastly different memories, interpretations, and opinions of the events that transpired between Officer Wilson and Michael Brown that day, surely we can agree that “twelve shots fired and one man dead” is *not* one of the noble scenes that Jesus promotes.

As time allows, discuss the following question with your group.

What do you suppose it will cost us as a nation to come together in unity as Jesus encourages us to do? What do you think it will cost you personally?

THE CALL

Have one person read the following section aloud, and then discuss it as a group.

This dilemma we face—knowing that a unified reality is available to us, even as we stay entrenched on our own side of the line—is hardly a new one. It didn't come about as a result of Ferguson. Or as a result of Watts in 1965, or Harlem in 1935 and 1964, or even the Rodney King verdict in 1992. It didn't surface as a result of the Chicago race riots of 1919, or as a result of the Civil War. Beyond our own borders, it didn't surface as a result of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, unrest in the Congo, the evils of Nazi Germany, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the slave revolt led by Spartacus against Rome, or any of a thousand other violent escalations that have marked every era of human history. No, to find the origin of our dilemma, we must go all the way back to the very beginning of time.

This session's Key Scripture takes us to Genesis 3, where we find humankind's first act of disobedience toward God. The scene opens with Satan, disguised as a serpent, deceiving someone, which is exactly what he has always done best.

Have another person read the following section aloud, and then discuss it as a group.

The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal God had made. He spoke to the Woman: "Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?"

The Woman said to the serpent, "Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It's only about the tree

in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.’

The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”

When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she’d know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on”—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

When they heard the sound of GOD strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from God.

God called to the Man: “Where are you?”

He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

God said, “Who told you you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?”

The Man said, “The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it.”

God said to the Woman, “What is this that you’ve done?”

“The serpent seduced me,” she said, “and I ate.” . . .

[Then] GOD said, “The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything, ranging from good to evil. What if he now should reach out and take fruit from the Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!”

So GOD expelled them from the Garden of Eden and sent them to work the ground, the same dirt out of which they'd been made. He threw them out of the garden and stationed angel-cherubim and a revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding the path to the Tree-of-Life.

GENESIS 3:1-13, 22-24, MSG

There it is, staring at us in black and white: The first line of division in the world was drawn by God himself as a result of human sin. We went our own way, and we grieved our holy God. In response, he drew a line in the sand in the Garden and said, "Adam. Eve. You're out."

Although we would love to pin responsibility for segregation on someone else, our dilemma *has always been* the result of an inside job. The problem begins in our hearts, which so quickly turn away from God.

This week's call to action is as follows: Will you lay aside your assumptions about how we got into this divisive mess and declare before God and your fellow group members that you will become part of the solution rather than remain part of the problem? Will you sign up to be used by God to bring about the unity that Jesus envisioned, even if it costs you?

Maybe it will cost you just a little, such as standing in solidarity with members of a different race or ethnic group, as Colorado state senator Mike Johnston did when he left a note on the front doors of a black church following the church massacre in Charleston (see pages 43–44 in *Under Our Skin*). Or maybe it will cost you far more, such as the price paid by people like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and scores of other civil rights activists who sacrificed greatly to leave this world more unified than they found it. Only God knows what role he will ask you to play. The key question is this: If he asks you, will you say yes?

