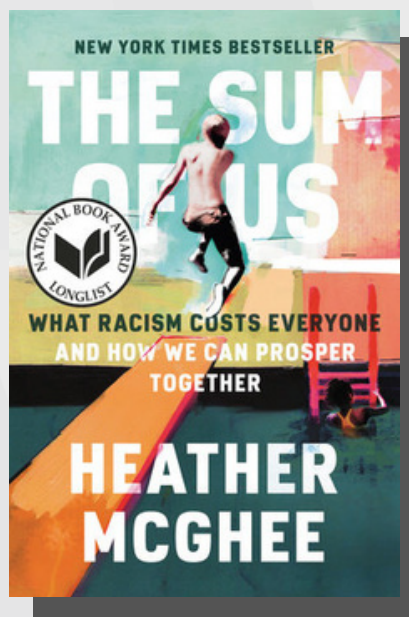


PAGES FOR PROGRESS

A Study Guide on the book, “The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together”

By Heather McGhee



Preface

The first cohort of Pages for Progress met in the fall of 2023 to read and study the book “The Sum of Us,” by Heather McGhee to dig deeper into the book, and educate ourselves to be better advocates.

In the following pages, you will find a general overview of each session followed by detailed guidelines. This study guide can be used in small groups in your local church, district, annual conference, ecumenical groups, or neighborhood community groups. The group can meet in person or virtually.

If you have any feedback or questions on this study guide, please email seminars@umcjustice.org, we’d love to hear from you!

This study guide is possible because of the spirited and insightful discussions from the Fall 2023 cohort. A big thanks to the cohort!

Principal Authors

Aimee Hong
Senior Executive Director of
Education and Engagement

Rev. Camille Henderson-Edwards
Director of Economic, Health &
Gender Justice

Structure

This study is organized into three Sessions. Each session includes a time of welcome, establishing communication guidelines, a theological grounding, a book discussion, and a closing. It is approximately 90 minutes in duration.

Reading Assignments by Session

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 3

Session Two: Chapter 4 to Chapter 6

Session Three: Chapter 7 to Chapter 10

Session Overview

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Begin with prayer.

This is also an opportunity to get to know the group and establish communication guidelines.

We recommend the Communication Guidelines created by Eric Law, from The Kaleidoscope Institute

Respectful Communication Guidelines

- **R** take Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others
- **E** use Empathetic listening
- **S** be Sensitive to differences in communication/cultural styles
- **P** Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- **E** Examine your own assumptions and perceptions
- **C** keep Confidentiality
- **T** Tolerate ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers.”
- **S** Step Up/ Step Back. If you notice that you are speaking a lot, step back to create space for others to speak. If you notice that you have much to share but not, take courage and speak up so that others can learn from you. (*Not from Eric Law, but from previous study groups.)

(Source:
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/eric-laws-respectful-communication-guidelines>)

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Each of the theological grounding sessions was created to correlate with the chapters assigned for that week. The reason for this is two-fold:

- (1) so that we don't separate our religious self from the realities of the world, and
- (2) so that we practice what it means to live with “holding the newspaper in one hand and the bible in the other.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Each question was created with the assigned readings in mind to go deeper into the chapter topic and/or to understand the social analysis through a faith lens. It is recommended to provide the questions in advance to give the participants time to develop their answers.

If you have a large group, we recommend breaking up into smaller groups/ breakout rooms in Zoom for the book discussion.

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Each session ends with a reminder of the assigned chapters for the following gathering and a benediction.

The 2023 Fall Cohort ended each session with the benediction given by Bishop Woodie White at the 1996 General Conference in Denver, Colorado.

Feel free to close with the benediction by Bishop Woodie White or with another prayer.

Benediction

And now,

May the Lord torment you.

May the Lord keep before you the faces of the hungry, the lonely, the rejected and the despised.

May the Lord afflict you with pain for the hurt, the wounded, the oppressed, the abused, the victims of violence.

May God grace you with agony, a burning thirst for justice and righteousness.

May the Lord give you courage and strength and compassion to make ours a better world, to make your community a better community, to make your church a better church.

And may you do your best to make it so, and after you have done your best, may the Lord grant you peace.

Amen.

Resources to Take Action:

Creating Change Together Toolkit -

umcjustice.org/creatingchangetogether

Building Power Together Toolkit -

umcjustice.org/buildingpowertogether

Sessions

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 3

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the first session of Pages for Progress as we read and study, *The Sum of Us*, by Heather McGee. Since this is our first gathering, let's go around and get to know each other. Please share your name, why you joined this book study, and your hopes for the gatherings.

Pause for a time of sharing.

Pray: Let us pray. God of justice, who knows us by name, we thank you for this time to study together, to have our eyes open, to have our hearts stirred, all in hopes of becoming agents of change. May your Spirit guide us during this time. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Say: Since this is our first gathering. We will spend a few minutes on communication guidelines to create a safe space for everyone to share and discuss.

Create or introduce Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Say: The passage that we will be looking at today is from Mark 5:21-43. We are going to hear it read in its entirety first and then we will hear it again in smaller sections and together parse what the passage is trying to tell us.

Invite participants to take turns reading.

You may ask participants if anyone would like to lead the group in prayer. If no one volunteers, you may lead the group in your prayer or open with the prayer below.

Read: Mark 5:21-43

Pause before reading the passage in sections for the second time

Read: Mark 5:21-24

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Note: A few points to mention, if not mentioned by the participants.

- *Before this passage, Jesus was in the region of the Gerasenes/ Gadarenes, a Gentile region, where he encountered Legion and performed an exorcism. In this passage, Jesus is back in Jewish territory. (Mark 5:1)*
- *The crowd is referenced multiple times. Usually, the crowd represents the poor and there is a lesson to be learned here. (Mark 5:21, 5:24, 5:27, 5:30, 5:31)*
- *Jairus is a synagogue ruler. One of the rare named characters in Mark. He is both head of his household and head of the synagogue. He comes on behalf of his daughter (no name) and approaches Jesus from the front, as an equal. (Mark 5:22-23)*

Read: Mark 5:25-34

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Note: A few points to mention, if not mentioned by the participants.

- *The bleeding woman approaches Jesus from behind him- differed from the way Jairus approached Jesus. (Mark 5:27)*
- *The woman has no name and has been bleeding for 12 years. (Mark 5:25)*
- *According to the Levitical Purity Code (Leviticus 12:1-8, 15:19-30) she is considered unclean and ostracized from her community.*

- *Reference to exploitation – she suffered under the care of physicians and spent all her means but only grew worse. (Mark 5:26)*
- *The disciple discourages Jesus from stopping to help the woman. But Jesus’ priority is the nameless, status-less bleeding woman over the expected priority of the synagogue leader. (Mark 5:31)*
- *Jesus calls the bleeding woman “daughter” giving her status as the “daughter of Jesus” and healing her physically from her hemorrhage in front of the crowd. (Mark 5:34)*

Read: Mark 5:35-43

Ask: What do you notice in these verses?

Note: A few points to mention, if not mentioned by the participants.

- *Jairus’ daughter is twelve years old. (Mark 5: 42)*
- *The little girl is brought back to life in private (Mark 5:40) and Jesus orders them to keep the miracle a secret. (Mark 5: 43)*

Ask: As we consider the whole passage, what societal issues do you see at play in this passage? (class, gender, health care, economic, ...)

Pause for discussion.

Ask: Mark intentionally frames the bleeding woman and Jairus’ daughter by the number 12, compelling the reader to compare the two. What do you see between these two individuals? How do you understand the concept of "the sum of us" in these two individuals?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: In this passage, Jesus poses the possibility that we don’t have to live in a zero-sum society where some gain

while others lose. Is it possible to imagine this in our society?

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

If you have a large group, break up into small groups for the Book Discussion.

Question #1 - How does Heather McGee's exploration of the zero-sum theory provide insights into how racial and economic dynamics intersect in society, and what implications does this have for addressing systemic inequalities?"

Question #2 - What are some other examples of "pools" (public goods) that were destroyed because of racism that could have benefited everyone?

Question #3 - Cuban-American theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz defines kin(g)dom of God "as a modern understanding of God's activity in and through Christian communities, connoting inclusion, care, mutual support, solidarity, and unity in an ethic that calls us to treat one another as family." How does this definition compare to the traditional understanding of "Kingdom" and the metaphor of "Kingdom of God?" How does the distinction between "Kingdom of God" and "Kin(g)dom of God" impact our understanding of the Solidarity Dividend as defined by McGhee as we seek a justice-centered society?

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

If divided into small groups, bring groups back to the main group.

Say: As we close our gathering today, let us be mindful of the Communication Guidelines that we shared earlier and reflect on our thoughtful dialogue and put them into practice. Please read Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 for our next meeting.

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop White (located in "Structure") or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Two: Chapters 4 - 6

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the second session of Pages for Progress! Let us start with prayer.

You may ask participants if anyone would like to lead the group in prayer. If no one volunteers, you may lead the group in your prayer or open with the prayer below.

Pray: God of mercy and justice, we thank you for this time to gather to connect, share, learn, and grow. May Your Spirit continue to be with us. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Say: The passage we will be looking at today is from Mark 5:1-20.

Read: Mark 5:1-20

Ask: In verse 9, Jesus asked the demoniac, "What is your name?" There is power in naming things and facing the truth of what is. Denial is dangerous and it also perpetuates harm. In 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa gathered after the end of apartheid to give witness to those who were victims of gross human rights violations. They gave "name" to what happened to them and as a nation recognized and repented of the harm to work towards reconciliation and restorative justice. The road to freedom and liberation includes acknowledging our name. We are and have been Legion. What are the "names" of the demons possessing our society? What are the effects of possession?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: In verse 17, after witnessing that the man was no longer possessed, the people begged Jesus to leave their town. As a nation, are we fearful like those who begged Jesus to leave- to live without being possessed? Are we afraid of liberation? Are we clinging to the safety of being possessed (zero-sum, internalized oppression)?

Pause for discussion.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

If you have a large group, break up into smaller groups for the Book Discussion.

Question #1 - How did systemic racism contribute to the housing crisis during the Great Recession, and what long-term effects has this crisis had on racial disparities in homeownership and wealth accumulation? (Chapter 4)

Question #2 - What factors contributed to white workers refusing to unionize, and how did this decision impact the overall labor movement and workers' rights, particularly in terms of wage stagnation and labor conditions for all workers? (Chapter 5)

Question #3 - How do voting restrictions in your state, such as voter ID laws or reduced polling locations, impact minority communities, and what steps can be taken to address and combat the racially discriminatory aspects of these restrictions? (Chapter 6)

Question #1 - Additional Resources

- “The Secret Bias Hidden in mortgage-approval algorithms”:
<https://revealnews.org/article/the-secret-bias-hidden-in-mortgage-approval-algorithms/>
- “For people of color, banks are shutting the door to homeownership”:
<https://revealnews.org/article/for-people-of-color-banks-are-shutting-the-door-to-homeownership/>

Question #3 - Additional Resources

- Voting laws and legislation by state:
<https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/states>

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Bring back small groups to close the session together.

Say: As we close our gathering today, let us keep our eyes open, seeing how history is not in the past but continues into the present. Consider ways to get involved in our community to reconcile our past and liberate the future. For our next gathering, please read the last portion of the book, Chapter 7 - Chapter 10.

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (below) or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Three: Chapters 7 - 10

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome everyone and thank you for joining our third session of Pages for Progress! Before we begin, let's open in a word of prayer. Would anyone like to share any prayer requests?

You may ask participants if anyone would like to lead the group in prayer. If no one volunteers, you may lead the group in your own prayer or open with the prayer below.

Pray: Let's pray. God of mercy, God of justice, God of compassion; we invite your Holy Spirit into this (digital) space. We ask that you hear our individual and collective prayers. We ask that your Spirit dwell among us as we gather. Open our minds and our hearts so that we may come to know more of who you are. We thank you for this time of reflection and discussion. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Begin the session by inviting participants to take turns reading each paragraph of 1 John 4: 7 – 21.

Read: 1 John 4:7-21

Ask: What themes, words, or phrases stood out to you from your reading of this chapter?

Allow 2 – 3 participants to share their reflections.

Say: I believe a recurring theme that was introduced to us in earlier chapters of 1 John and made clear to us in this

chapter is the concept of Divine love. 1 John 4 makes it very clear that God is love. What I appreciate about this chapter is that it goes beyond simply naming that God is love but describes what markers of this love look like.

Ask: What are some descriptors that the text provides to describe what this Divine love looks like?

Allow 2 -3 participants to share their findings. Be sure to ask them to identify what verse they found their descriptor from.

Say: I want to highlight a few additional descriptors to add to the list you have created. The text infers that God's love for us should have a direct influence on how we show love to others. Verses 20 and 21 say this, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

An additional framework for this descriptor of Divine love is also found in John Wesley's discussion of social holiness. Wesley highlighted that "The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social, no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. Social holiness is the practice of obeying Jesus' commandments to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, loving your neighbor as yourself, and loving one another as Christ loves."

To be sure, our discussion of love is not simply to talk of love in the form of admiration. To abide in God is to know what God's love looks and feels like. And this week, chapter 4 highlights for us not only the descriptors of this love, but the mandate that we are to reflect Divine love as we have received it. One of the ways we demonstrate our love to

God and others is by walking in truth and pursuing action. What we can glean from 1 John 4 is that our experience of Divine love necessitates our active participation in it.

Ask: When you think of the type of love described in 1 John 4 and reflected in Wesley's description of social holiness, where have you seen this at work in your life or ministry?

Allow 2 – 3 participants to share their reflections.

Say: I'd like to highlight one last descriptor for you to consider. Verse 18 says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." I believe an important descriptor of this love is that it is not true love if fear is present. This is such an important descriptor because I find that so many people often lead with fear or fear tactics and call it love.

Ask: Where, in your lived experience, have you seen fear masked as love?

Allow 2 - 3 participants to share their reflections.

Say: Heather McGhee also highlights this fact. That what we now see as social injustices were once seen as mechanisms of love towards a specific community but were really tactics of fear in the preservation of self. McGhee outlines how segregation, climate change, and white fragility are all examples of this. Given our theological framing, take 3 minutes to write down your reflections to this question – What role does Divine love play in the presence of segregation, climate change, and white fragility?

Set a timer for 3 minutes for participants to write without interruption. After the 3 minutes invite participants to share their reflections.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Question #1 - In Chapter 7, McGhee states that white people are the most segregated in America. What are the costs of this segregation and what are the benefits of integration?

Question #2 - McGhee writes about Richmond, CA, one of the many sacrifice zones in America. How do these environmental sacrifice zones affect not only the immediate communities residing in those areas but the broader society as a whole? (Chapter 8)

Question #3 - James Baldwin said, “What they see is a disastrous, continuing, present condition which menaces them, and for which they bear an inescapable responsibility. But since, in the main, they seem to lack the energy to change this condition, they would rather not be reminded of it,” Wendell Berry refers to this as the “hidden wound.” Jim Wallis explains this “hidden wound” of Christians. What role did Christians play, and how can we find the “path to the promised land for all?” (Chapter 9)

Question #4 - Do theological ideas like repentance, resurrection, hope, and joy have a role in achieving the Solidarity Dividend? Consider this article from CNN that highlights the Social Gospel movement in light of the current United Auto Workers strike.
(<https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/13/us/social-gospel-movement-uaw-strike-blake-cec/index.html>) (Chapter 10)

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Bring back small groups to close the session together.

Say: Now that we are all back together, who would like to share a reflection or new thought that was discussed in your small group?

Allow 1 – 2 participants from each group to share a highlight of the discussion.

Question #2 - Additional Resources

Publica did extensive research on sacrifice zones, this link provides many articles and reports on sacrifice zones.

- <https://www.propublica.org/series/sacrifice-zones>
- <https://projects.propublica.org/toxmap/>

Say: Thank you for participating in our last book study discussion meeting. The purpose of Pages for Progress is not only to learn from the book but to put into practice what we have learned and connect it with our faith. That requires us to ask questions that impact our communities and the bigger global world. It means to invest in our communities so that all may thrive and truly live into the kin-dom that God created. May we continue to live in faith, seek justice and pursue peace.

Before we leave, would you receive this benediction by Bishop Woodie White (or a closing prayer / benediction of your choosing).



UMCJUSTICE.ORG