

Unchained

Generational Trauma and Healing

DISCUSSION GUIDE

How to use this discussion guide:

This is a discussion guide created to assist critical reflection and safe conversation as people view the Unchained documentary. This guide can be used for your own personal reflection as you watch the film on your own. The ideal use, however, is to use these together with a friend or a small group of people you know.

This discussion guide includes time stamps where you will be invited to stop the film to engage in dialogue and answer questions. When used in a small group, the film and discussion guide take anywhere between two and two and a half hours to complete together. This timing assumes an average of five minutes per discussion question – some taking less time, some taking more. If you choose to remove questions for the sake of time, please think carefully about the ones you choose to remove and do so with the input of at least one other person in the group when possible. If you do not have the full amount of time to devote to this, it can be done in two sittings by stopping at the 30:56 timestamp of the film and saving the accompanying discussion questions for the second group meeting.

We share these resources in hopes that they will facilitate beginning steps to true healing and greater equality. May this experience help to clear a healthy path forward.

Before you watch the film

Documentary link: <https://vimeo.com/232024836>

Slavery in America was a brutal, cruel, and immoral system that dehumanized, oppressed, and subjugated people of African descent. This documentary sheds light on the traumatic effects of slavery on both black and white Americans that are still being experienced by individuals, families, and groups many generations later. God calls the Church to do justice and love mercy (Micah 6:8), but too often God's people participate in systemic injustice and racial prejudice, either with actions or with silence. In order for healing to begin, stories of painful events and the impact they have had need to be shared in safe spaces with people who can bear loving witness.

As you prepare to watch, here are a few things to consider:

- There is a difference between feeling comfortable and feeling safe. When using these resources in a small group, conversations can become uncomfortable, but they should be safe for all present. Whoever convenes the group should take on the responsibility of caring for the safety of the group members. Consider creating ground rules to which the whole group can agree. This list should, at least, include the following:
 - Confidentiality
 - No interrupting
 - No correcting, attacking, or fixing
 - No minimizing someone else's experience
 - No shaming or blaming anyone
- Some of the content in the documentary is sensitive in nature and difficult to watch. Please take breaks to care for yourself, especially if you have experienced racial trauma.
- Be aware of how your experiences and perceptions of race, trauma, and slavery may influence your viewing experience. Remember the best posture is to come as a witness and a listener.
- If you are watching alone, please consider reflecting on these questions and/or writing your answers to them in a journal or notebook and sharing them later with someone who loves you.

Watch the film

➤ Watch from timestamp 0:00 to 10:31

As a young man, Dr. Gus Roman asked God why good things are done for white people, but not for black people. After praying this, he heard the answer of God: "No. Don't you ever believe that." Dr. Roman describes this as a turning point in his connection and conscious relationship with God.

Questions for discussion:

1. What does culture tell you that God is like in times of suffering?
2. In what ways does your experience with God resonate or differ from these cultural messages?

➤ Watch from timestamp 10:31 to 16:05

"Historically and sociologically, you have to understand that American culture was founded on democratic principles but understood those principles in white supremacist terms; and not just white supremacist, but white supremacist male terms."

—Rev. Greg Thompson

"Racism lay like a sleeping coil underneath the table at the Constitutional Convention. While the ink was still wet on the Constitution, racism was alive and well, breathing through the ink."

—Dr. Charlie Dates quoting Rev. Gardner C. Taylor

Rev. Thompson shares three patterns of thinking used to justify a system of enslavement:

- Animalization— "They're not human."
- Demonization— "They are human, but something is very wrong with them."
- Infantilization— "They are human, nothing is really wrong with them, but they are not our intellectual equals."

Questions for discussion:

1. In what ways do these patterns manifest themselves today?
2. What feelings do they evoke in you?
3. If you could respond to Rev. Thompson's statement, "Damaging another person damages you," what would you say?

➤ [Watch from timestamp 16:05 to 27:30](#)

Questions for discussion:

1. What examples did you see in this clip of trauma being passed down from generation to generation for both black and white people in America?
2. How does this reality make you feel?
3. What is the hardest part for you in hearing that trauma is passed down in this way?

➤ [Watch from timestamp 27:30 to 30:56](#)

"Other people listened to me. They didn't analyze, criticize, or judge. They just heard my heart and they were there to be a listening ear and a catalyst of healing."

–Rev. Keith Williams

Questions for discussion:

1. What are some of the things mentioned in this clip that can help people who are traumatized?
2. What kinds of things have most helped you heal from your own pain?

➤ [Watch from timestamp 30:56 to 42:17](#)

Questions for discussion:

1. What are some ways that the body of Christ, the Church, is a uniquely fit community for wounds of generational trauma to be healed?
2. What are some of the greatest challenges the Church faces when trying to unite and heal from generational trauma?
3. What are some of the things named in this clip that people with more power and privilege can do or not do, say or not say to help begin the healing process?

➤ [Watch from timestamp 42:17 to end](#)

Questions for discussion:

1. What are some things you saw or heard in this clip that can break the cycles and patterns of generational trauma?
2. Read out loud Exodus 6:9, Ephesians 5:21, and Philippians 2:3-11. How might these verses guide our responses to those who bear the wounds of generational trauma?
3. What are some of the questions you still have about the healing of generational trauma?

After you watch the film

ASSESS YOUR COMFORT LEVEL IN COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

It is normal to feel a lot of discomfort as you reflect on your own experiences with generational trauma and racial inequality. While there are many reasons we stay quiet about these problems, often our avoidance is motivated by fears of not being heard or of unintentionally doing harm.

In order to do the least amount of harm possible, it is important to assess our comfort levels and abilities to continue to have conversations about race and to listen well.

If you are using this guide with others, share in pairs your responses to any or all of these questions. Take 10 minutes each. If you are using this guide alone, please consider reflecting on these questions and/or writing your answers to them in a journal or notebook and sharing them later with someone who loves you.

Consider the following statements and select the one that best describes how you feel.

- ☐ I would rather not talk about race/racism.
- ☐ I am usually uncomfortable talking about race/racism.
- ☐ I am usually comfortable talking about race/racism.
- ☐ I am very comfortable talking about race/racism.

Complete the following sentences:

1. The hardest part about talking about race/racism is...
2. The beneficial part of talking about race/racism is...
3. The biblical mandates that help remind me to engage in conversations about injustice are...

Thinking back to what you saw and heard in the film, reflect on these questions:

1. What are some essential qualities of a good listener?
2. What are some *unhelpful* behaviors, statements, questions, etc. to avoid when listening to stories of generational trauma?

NEXT STEPS

After watching the film and reflecting on the questions in this guide, consider the following next steps:

1. If you watched this movie alone, watch it with a friend and see how their answers may be different than your own. Practice the good listening skills mentioned in this guide as you do.
2. If healing the wounds of generational trauma is something you would like to know more about, please email info@traumahealinginstitute.org or visit www.traumahealinginstitute.org for more information on how to continue to get equipped for deeper involvement in this kind of ministry.

Special Thanks

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