

By now I hope you are familiar with “The AMOS group” and that we have been journeying together in a study of white privilege. I am excited to share why I participate and why I hope each of you will join us in the fall.

I have been reading and discussing books on racism & inequality, as many of you have, for many years now. One thing I have taken away from these is that relationships are the key to justice and change. And a key thing I know about relationships succeeding is that it requires deep and open listening. By participating in this small group journey on White Privilege, I have both deepened my relationships with the others in the group and enhanced my listening skills.

These sessions caused me to look deeply at myself in a new way. Admittedly, it’s not easy. I like to think I’m a person of action, so it is difficult for me to maintain an attitude of observation and education without jumping to solutions. Shame, guilt, vulnerability, worry, but also relief, bravery, openness, thankfulness, enlightenment, and a sense of a new kind of power were all feelings I encountered. It has been really helpful to me to be reminded that we are looking at a systemic cultural problem that we did not individually create.

*“...white privilege is not something that white people ask for or enjoy on purpose, nor does having white privilege make them a bad person...this is an opportunity to see the realities that are unfolding around us everyday and to expose them for what they are so that it’s clear what systems need to be addressed. Discussing white privilege is for the purpose of exposing the systems and institutions that have created advantages and disadvantages, not to demonize anyone.” -- from Let’s Talk: White Privilege*

I have learned many things through this process. Here are 4: the varied experiences we each bring to the topic of racial awareness; those of us who “get it” already are the most difficult to take through this process!; my own intolerance of those who I deem to be “the enemy” is just as hurtful and unproductive toward justice as their actions and words; and I’ve learned that it takes a long time for individuals to reflect before effective change can come.

But start small: Not one of us can shift the tide of systemic racism and white supremacy in our society, but every one of us can make small changes, bit by bit. How is our wealth invested? What does Black Lives Matter really stand for? What has PCUSA said about its importance? How do we spend our volunteer time and charitable donations? What thoughts or reactions can we learn to check, shifting over to a more open and unassuming comment?

Racism has, up until now, been a choice for white people to think about. It has never been a choice for black people. It can no longer be dismissed as something of which we are not aware. Will you join us?

Ruth Stowe Karasek