

## **Race and Poverty: Five-Session Study Guide**

### **Introduction**

All too often, when the United States of America catches a cold, its citizens of darker hue and low socio-economic status catch pneumonia. The world saw this most dramatically during the rescue and recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina. Many were appalled to witness the disproportionately large number of images on television and in newsprint of black and brown people stuck in New Orleans without the means to evacuate. They were stuck on rooftops amidst rising and raging waters, and stuck in sporting arenas for days on end. As the waters subsided, finding decent and suitable housing for themselves and their families took many weeks.

I, too, was appalled when I saw those images. However, I was not at all surprised. For the first half of my fifty-plus years of life, little would have distinguished me from the people of New Orleans and its vicinity—“stuck” below America’s attention-meriting radar screen. I was a poor black boy and young adult from South Central Los Angeles who spent the first half of his life screaming, “I exist. See me!”

Among the poor in the United States, a disproportionate number are people of color. We need to ask ourselves why. I fear that far too many Christians, including middle class, dark-skinned people like me, are “stuck” in a kind of class-denying, color-ignoring kind of faith perspective. While far from being bigoted and mean-spirited, it does little good for the poor and oppressed—people Jesus refers to as “neighbors.” The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina forces us to reconsider what we think about race and poverty.

This study series, designed in partnership with representatives of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and American Baptist Churches, is intended to help us get “unstuck.” I invite you to join this journey of awareness, confession and repentance, redemption and reconciliation that calls us forward, and toward our neighbors in these days.

With abundant hope,

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Developed and published jointly by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA,

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