"Waking Up White" Week 4 – Transformation
Main Themes, Chapter Summaries, and Small Group Questions

Main Themes:

- Independence versus Interdependence; moving to a multicultural approach
- Understanding our role in solidarity and accountability; there is no neutral
- The importance of personal openness to vulnerability, learning, and growth

Chapter 34 – Becoming Multicultural: "Creating a racially just world demands a reconsideration of the assimilation ('melting pot') model long enforced in America. By creating one dominant culture and multiple pissed-off, marginalized subcultures, the approach has wreaked havoc on America's economic and social systems… The alternative, a multicultural approach, makes sense to me for many reasons. First and foremost, it's more humane, and more humane means more people able to strive and achieve. Second, collaboration creates benefits… But there's a major catch: it's much harder than one might imagine because it starts with personal change… In my experience, I could not begin to develop a multicultural sensibility until I first looked deep within myself to understand the ways in which the culture I'd lived in ended up living in me."

"There's no rule that says I have to reject my culture… Learning to value other cultures' ways has demanded of me a kind of psychic stretching that taps into my human potential. As I let go of believing in 'one right way,' I'm discovering new ways to think about myself and the people and events around me."

"Change requires flexibility, adaptability, open-mindedness, and resilience – qualities I'm stretching myself to develop but that many people of color already have embedded in their subcultures.

Chapter 38 – The Rugged Individual: Learning to value both independence and interdependence. This chapter contains the story of Rosie, the Haitian student who, without permission, would walk across the classroom to help fellow students. "Rosie and I were caught in a classic cross-cultural clash, one for which I was completely ill equipped. When confronted with cultural difference, my first reaction had long been to see what people didn't have that I did, not what they might have that I didn't. I saw Rosie's 'inability' to work independently as a flaw, a deficit, not her exquisite ability to tune in to the needs of others as a strength and an asset."

"Every culture creates unique strengths… I had a story in my head about Rosie… I was asking her to conform to a value and behavioral style that contradicted hers…As I reflected on Rosie's socialization toward interconnectedness, I wondered how I'd so thoroughly bought into the idea of independence as superior, when interdependence was also revered in my family."

"How interesting that my white-skinned, Anglo family understood the old Ubuntu philosophy: 'I am what I am because of who we all are.'"

Chapter 40 – Bull in a China Shop: How habits that seem so innocuous to me can alienate people of color. This chapter includes the story of when Debby sat down for lunch while attending the "White Privilege Conference" and asked a black man named Henry, "what do you do for work in Chicago?" Her friend, Barbara, explained later, "for people of color, it can easily be felt as you questioning someone's credentials. And frankly, most cultures around the world don't rank what you do for work as a hot topic of conversation. This glorification of professional status is a white culture thing."

"Part of becoming multicultural means letting go of the need to be perfect, or even polite, as you've known it." It means being willing to be authentic and to stay engaged when it gets uncomfortable… The key is to keep learning and always take feedback when it's offered."

"Could there be any greater irony than having once thought myself raceless only to discover that not only do I have a race, but nearly all my thoughts and actions are born of the culture in which it's embedded? I know now that I am not raceless; I am a living, breathing expression of the white culture."

Chapter 41 – From Bystander to Ally: "I've learned that when it comes to race, there's no such thing as neutral: either I'm intentionally and strategically working against it, or I'm aiding and abetting the system."

"If racism were a person, they would definitely be a bully. Racism intimidates and silences. It commits violence. As Coretta Scott King said, 'In this society, violence against poor people and minority routine. I remind you that starving a child is violence; suppressing a culture is violence; neglecting schoolchildren is violence; …even a lack of will power to help humanity is a sick and sinister form of violence.'"

"Opportunities abound for white people to move out of the bystander role and into the ally role in an effort to prevent racism from getting fueled and refueled every day, across every sector, and in every state, city, and town. Unlike playground bullying, racism does not offer up a single person to point to and deal with. The worst racism operates silently and often unknowingly in people's hearts and minds."

"The white ally role is a supporting one, not a leading one."

Chapter 42 – Solidarity and Accountability: Sharing the burden of racism. In this chapter Debby Irving teaches us about the word "solidarity" by sharing the story of an elementary school teacher shaving her head. The teacher had a student (Suzy) undergoing chemotherapy who had lost her hair. "In the same way Suzy's teacher stepped up to demonstrate that Suzy was not alone, white people have the opportunity to be in solidarity with people of color."

Debby also shares the story of not knowing the name of a black friend's daughter during their conversation at a sporting event, being troubled by her stupidity, paying attention to what she felt, and then calling her friend to apologize. "Tolerating the discomfort of owning up to my blunder gave me the opportunity to share the discomfort caused by racism and send the message: 'This situation stinks, but I want to be in it with you so I can get out of it with you.' By holding myself accountable for what I knew was a misstep, I was able to stand in solidarity with Rebecca."

"I don't think it's too much to ask to meet another person halfway. Best of all, it is something I can do because it's in my control. Surely I, living on the advantaged side of the racial equation, can expand myself to be a part of a more inclusive and united America. All things considered, it feels like a fairly small request to meet people of color on common ground by sharing the burden of being uncomfortable and out of my element."

Chapter 45 – Normalizing Race Talk: This chapter contains the powerful story about students in Ms. Edwards' class figuring out and knowing their skin paint color combinations.

"Knowing that speaking one's truth and listening to others' truth is a crucial step in racial healing is one thing. Having the language to pull it off is another."

"Increasingly I am able to go into these conversations free of the need to make a particular point or make myself look good. I am humbled by the collective intelligence that emerges when people use conversation to deepen understanding. I've freed myself from the rigid notion that I have, or will ever have, all the answers. I've also let go of the belief that answers are fixed in time and space. Even when I hit a conversational dead end and feel defensive or fed up, I've found out that by rethinking that moment later on, I'm better prepared for the next conversation. It's a learning process…"

Chapter 46 – Whole Again: Debby Irving shares a quote from Father Gregory Boyle's book "Tattoos on the Heart", 'When we relearn our loveliness, we begin to foster tenderness for our own human predicament. A spacious and undefended heart finds room for everything you are and carves out enough space for everyone else.'"

"Self-examination and the courage to admit to bias and unhelpful inherited behaviors that may be our greatest tools for change. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to expose our ignorance and insecurities takes courage. And love. I believe that the most loving thing a person, or a group of people, can do for another is to examine the ways in which their own insecurities and assumptions interfere with others' ability to thrive. Please join me in opening your heart and mind to the possibility that you – yes, even well-intentioned you – have room to change and grow, so that you can work with people of all colors and ethnicities to co-create communities that can unite, strengthen, and prosper."

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Opening question – what did you "wake up" to, or what stirred in you during the reading this week?
2. As a group, make a list of five conversation starters that have nothing to do with identifying a person by where they're from, what they do for work, or any other sorting and ranking criteria. For example, think about how you'd feel asking or being asked, "So what was the most interesting thing that happened in your day today?"
3. What qualities make a good ally? What behaviors or attitudes can compromise our allyship? Are we being allies for the right reasons? Can we be an ally for the wrong reasons?

4. Today's work to dismantle racism begins in the personal realm. What inner work do we need to do on an individual basis? And, what "outer work"? Do we ever stop doing the internal work regarding social justice? What is the "rhythm" of inner and outer work? How do we integrate our faith into this inner and outer work?
5. Large group discussion question: Given what we are learning how do we as individuals and as a church need to change? What does that look like in your/our life together?