

RACISM REALITY CHECK

First Church sends a youth servant team out every summer. In three months they usually cover hundreds of miles and work in many small towns in the southern states around them. This summer they've decided to help rebuild three black churches that were burned down. In cooperation with a number of denominational groups, they believe they can make a substantial contribution to the three churches. Everyone is excited about this year's summer mission.

And then Lisa comes home from college to work with the youth team—and she brings her black boyfriend with her. Even though First Church is in the deep South, Lisa thinks her church is beyond racism. She quickly learns how wrong she is.

Kids in the youth group stare, act funny, distant, even cool to both Lisa and Carver. Yet what's even more difficult for Lisa to understand is the response of the adult leaders—the men and women of God whom Lisa has admired while growing up in the church. These are the same adults who taught her the meaning of the Christian faith, of love—of unconditional love. Yet now they are noticeably shaken and uneasy about Lisa and Carver.

Talking informally with the youth group, these adults make it clear that they are not racists, but realists. "You can't go into the deep South and help people," they reason, "if you flaunt your interracial relationship in front of them."

Nevertheless, the couple joins the team. When they arrive at their first church to begin working, blacks and whites together, it's clear that neither the black nor the white kids they work with on the team are comfortable with Lisa and Carver's relationship. Lisa is shocked. How can the church condone racism, she thought? How can the very community of blacks and whites who are working together to rebuild a black church have trouble with a black and a white relationship? It was crazy.

To Lisa and Carver their relationship is a powerful testimony to the fact that there are one in Christ. There is no racism in Jesus. But as the summer progresses, tensions get worse by the day. Resentment builds when some members of the group mention that maybe Lisa and Carver's relationship is hindering the group's ministry in the small towns. They feel that interracial relationships are becoming more of an issue than Jesus.

Finally three team members approach Lisa and Carver late one night. Something has to be done, they say, to restore unity in the servant group and to alleviate the tension in the small towns where they minister.



"Christians like to help black people"

—they just don't like to work with them, date them, be friends with them, live in the same neighborhood as them, go to church with them, socialize with them, or have anything to do with them. Helping black people becomes just another form of racism.

16-year-old black sophomore female

The Stats

Seventy-one percent of 9-to-13-year-olds said they have close friends of a different race or ethnic origin.

New York Times
October 8, 1995

By the Book...

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak...So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge...Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

1 Corinthians 8: 9,11,13

All chapters...

Book of Ruth

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

1. If you were Lisa or Carver, what would you say to the team?

2. Is it right to force a group of racists to accept your point of view when you are trying to help them?

3. What are Lisa and Carver's options at this point?

4. How do you respond to the statement, "We're not racists, we're realists"?

