

## **Adult Sunday School Class**

Crawford Memorial United Methodist Church

January 10 through February 14, 2021

Leader: Frank Leathers

Questions: contact the church office: (781) 729-5056 or [office@crawfordumc.org](mailto:office@crawfordumc.org)

**Book: Caste – The Origins of Our Discontents** by Isabel Wilkerson

“As we go about our daily lives, caste is the wordless usher in a darkened theater, flashlight cast down in the aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for a performance. The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power – which groups have it and which do not.” Front book cover.

“In a world without caste, being male or female, light or dark, immigrant or native-born, would have no bearing on what anyone was perceived as being capable of. In a world without caste, we would all be invested in the well-being of others in our species if only for our own survival, and recognize that we are in need of one another more than we have been led to believe.” Page 388.

**NOTE:** This is a very long book (over 388 pages). It is also difficult reading – sometimes painful. Read as much as you can – don’t worry if you can’t read it all. We will explore this challenging book together. We will not be able to discuss everything, so please help us focus on the topics that are most important and interesting to you.

**January 10** Man in the Crowd (Page xv)  
Chapter 1 – The Afterlife of Pathogens  
Chapter 2 – An Old House and an Infrared Light  
Chapter 3 – An American Untouchable  
Chapter 4 – A Long-running Play and the Emergence of Caste in America

**January 17** Chapter 5 – The Container We Have Built for You  
Chapter 6 – The Measure of Humanity  
Chapter 7 – Through the Fog of Dehli to the Parallels in India and America  
Chapter 8 – The Nazis and the Acceleration of Caste  
Chapter 9 – The Evil of Silence

**January 24** Part Three – The Eight Pillars of Caste (pages 99 to 164)

**January 31** Chapter 10 – Central Miscasting  
Chapter 11 – Dominant Group Status Threat and [Precariousness] of the Highest Rung  
Chapter 12 – A Scapegoat to Bear the Sins of the World  
Chapter 13 – The Insecure Alpha and the Purpose of an Underdog  
Chapter 14 – The Intrusion of Caste in Everyday Life  
Chapter 15 – The Urgent Necessity of a Bottom Rung  
Chapter 16 – Last Place Anxiety: Packed in a Flooding Basement  
Chapter 17 – On the Front Lines of Caste  
Chapter 18 – Satchel Paige and the Illogic of Caste

- February 7** Chapter 19 – The Euphoria of Hate  
 Chapter 20 – The Inevitable Narcissism of Caste  
 Chapter 21 – The German Girl with the Dark, Wavy Hair  
 Chapter 22 – The Stockholm Syndrome and the Survival of the Subordinate Caste  
 Chapter 23 – Shock Troops on the Borders of Hierarchy  
 Chapter 24 – Cortisol, Telomeres, and the Lethality of Caste
- February 14** Chapter 25 – A Change of the Script  
 Chapter 26 – Turning Point and the Resurgence of Caste  
 Chapter 27 – The Symbols of Caste  
 Chapter 28 – Democracy on the Ballot  
 Chapter 29 – The Price We Pay for a Caste System  
 Chapter 30 – Shedding the Sacred Thread  
 The Radicalization of the Dominant Caste  
 Chapter 31 – The Heart is the Last Frontier  
 Epilogue – A World Without Caste

### Overarching Questions

1. Caste, class, race, genocide – definitions, differences, inter-relationships. Similarities and differences between India's caste system, Nazi Germany, U.S. slavery, European colonization world-wide and treatment of indigenous peoples.
2. Do humans have an inherent biological drive and/or need for some form of social hierarchy?
3. Are we really ready to level the playing field for all humans – all 7.8 billion of us? Are we ready to compete for or share food, shelter, health care, resources, wealth, status, quality of life with that many people? What does a level playing field look like for us who are at the top of the heap compared to billions of people?
4. How do people in other economic levels, social levels, or caste levels feel about this? Women compared to men? 1% vs 5% vs 20 % vs 50% vs 90% vs 95%? First world vs third world? Races and nationalities? Political and social systems?
5. Are we really trying to do away with caste (social hierarchy) or are we trying to raise the quality of life and opportunity for people at the lower levels and remove obstacles to upward mobility?
6. Should we be doing more to teach our children/citizens about the dark, cruel, bigoted history of our country so that all people know, reject and banish these behaviors? How can this be done? Has it worked elsewhere – how?
7. Have you experienced or observed situations where caste assumptions or stereotypes have been part of the interactions?