

Cultivating Multiculturalism

Awareness & Transition

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CULTIVATING MULTICULTURALISM | Awareness | Biblical Standpoint

God's Design for Ethnic Diversity

God's Word changes our perspective on Ethnic Diversity¹

- All People Are Created in God's Image
- Israel Was Ethnically Diverse
- Black Africans Were Involved in God's Plan of Redemption
- Moses Married a Cushite (Black African) Woman
- People from All Ethnic Groups Are United in Christ
- The Book of Revelation Portrays a Multi-Ethnic Congregation

Help yourself and your children to understand God's Design for Ethnic Diversity²

- What does the Bible say about ethnic diversity?
- Correct common errors regarding the Bible and ethnicity
- Educate yourself and your children about cultures other than your own.
- Seek out interactions and relationships with people of different ethnicities.
- Model loving confrontation of prejudiced words and behavior.
- Be hopeful for a future where the Spirit will break down barriers between people of different ethnic backgrounds.

What is the biblical perspective on multiculturalism?

³Practically, the Bible is strongly in favor of multiculturalism in the sense that various languages, foods, styles of music, and customs are part of our human heritage. And all people, of all cultures, are equally valued by God. The principle of multiculturalism is seen in the Bible's teaching that race, culture, and gender do not separate us in God's eyes (Galatians 3:28; Romans 1:16). The Bible even encourages cooperation with cultural norms, so long as they don't conflict with God's commands (1 Corinthians 9:22; 10:33). So, in the sense that there are many colors, cultures, and races that God has created and that He values, multiculturalism is an extremely biblical concept. What God creates and values, we should also value. At the same time, love and care for our neighbors means tolerating a certain level of disagreement (Matthew 5:39; Romans 15:1; 1 Corinthians 8:13). So, a biblical view of multiculturalism involves a certain level of political submission and tolerance. Multiculturalism, in practice, is simply an expression of God's creativity.

There is much to be valued in different ideas, perspectives, and tastes (Proverbs 11:14; Romans 14:5). Christians are obligated to be loving, respectful, and tolerant (1 Peter 3:15–16; 2:17); at the same time, we are commanded not to participate in the sins of any particular culture (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 11:3), even those of our own culture (Romans 6:17–18; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

God Loves Diversity

⁴God created the races and their differences. God's heart of diversity explained with the migration aspects of the three sons of Noah. It's not a sin to be different. It is Godly to be different. Biblical origins and historical origins of different races we see today in the world.

Listen to a sermon from the church Legacy, Owensboro, KY USA to know how much God loves diversity.

The Cultured Palate – Developing a Taste for Cultural Differences

⁵We are not separated from who we are, instead we become new creatures in that context.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Understanding our identity in a diverse ethnic cultural setup

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

The Multicultural Congregation

1. values, encourages and affirms diverse cultural modes of being and interacting
 2. creates a congregational dialogue in which no one cultural perspective is presumed to be more valid than other perspectives
 3. empowers all cultural voices to participate fully in setting goals and making decisions
- Read Dan Sheffield's article on "The Cultured Palate – Developing a taste for our differences".

Embracing Newcomers

1. ⁶Extend a genuine warm loving welcome

Leviticus 19:33-34 33 'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. 34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

- God is expecting people to move
- We are not just to tolerate strangers, we are to love them with Agappe love, others centered love. We need to go beyond toleration and love them.

- We are to treat them fairly and care for them.
2. Receive people with right attitude
Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
 1. Accept them as they are
 2. Affirm them by respecting them
 3. Appreciate them by valuing them
 4. Nurture a multi cultural / multi ethnic heart among people
 5. Obey St. Paul's exhortation on hospitality
Romans 12:13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.
 6. Learn to go beyond welcome to embrace
 - 6.1. Embrace new comers - with your full arms wrapped around something or someone with full acceptance or affection. "Embrace a stranger as one's own"
 - 6.2. Choose to become 1 Corinthians 9:22 congregation, "To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Four Implications.

1. Not feeling superior, but humble
2. Not patronizing, but identifying
3. Not exclusive, but inclusive
4. Not us/them, but mutuality

Intentionally cultivating multicultural churches

⁷Our vision is to present our members "mature in Christ" as Paul preaches in *Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

To develop a multiethnic, multicultural church, we must operate out of our identities, rather than our preferences.

Colossians 3:11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Multiculturalism and the Church in Book of Acts

⁸The Book of Acts, gives an account of the beginnings of the Christian Church, starting from the day of Pentecost, to the imprisonment of Paul. The identity of the groups on the day of Pentecost were mainly Hellenists Greek speaking Jews from the Jewish diaspora. The Jerusalem Church in

its initial setting were predominantly Jewish Christians of the diaspora. The early apostles were originally from the Jerusalem Church. Some of the prominent leaders were James, and Peter. James seemed to be the 'resident apostle'.

There were cultural diversities with the fact that there were Jews and Gentiles. Cultural disputes were settled, especially with the widows of the Hellenists being neglected in their 'daily ministrations'. Seven officers were chosen to 'serve tables', whilst the apostles gave themselves to the spiritual ministry of prayer and preaching. The early church lived in community 'koinonia', and they practiced the community of goods.

Because of persecution, the church began to spread to other communities. The Church began to spread to the Gentiles. An Ethiopian eunuch embraces the Christian faith through the preaching of Phillip. At first, Peter is seen as the one who first took the gospel to the Gentiles. This came about when Peter saw a vision on the house-top in relation to the evangelizing of the Gentiles. The house of Cornelius, a Roman from the 'Italian band' embraces the Christian faith. Later, it was Paul, the apostle who is seen as the 'apostle to the Gentiles'

The first Gentile Church was established in Antioch by those disciples who were scattered abroad, because of the persecution. Antioch also becomes the first 'multicultural church' in the book of Acts. Not long, cultural, religious and doctrinal issues began to spring up within the early Church. Acts 15 and Galatians 2, gives some insight to the problems that were dealt with. The main issue was whether Gentiles must be circumcised and observe Jewish laws and customs, for them to be truly 'saved'. The Jerusalem Council, sometimes referred to as the Apostolic Council, through James, advised the churches of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia of their decision. The letter was taken by Paul and Barnabas to the churches mentioned.

In Acts 21, the account of Paul's visit to Jerusalem, and the meeting with James, brings out some very controversial issues. Paul is taken to task by James of his alleged attack against the Jews. It was alleged that Paul taught that believing Jews ought not to circumcise their children, and not to keep Jewish customs. James then asks Paul to prove what he taught was false, to take a vow with four men and pay for their purification as well; Paul submits to this instruction. After this, Paul is almost killed by a lynch mob, but the Roman tribunal comes in time to save Paul from the hands of the mob.

The period of foreign missions is especially attributed to Paul, through his missionary journeys. Some of them who accompanied Paul in his journeys were, Barnabas, Mark John, Silas, Timothy who was circumcised by Paul 'because of the Jews', and Luke the author of Acts.

In conclusion, the Church in Acts which began with predominantly Jewish believers, was not meant to be just a Jewish Church. God intended the Church to be a Church that reaches out to other cultures and nations of the world. The Church was meant to cross cultural boundaries, overcome racial intolerance and be the Church God intended it to be - a church that embraces all cultures and nations, irrespective of race, colour, language, or social status. If cultural differences should

exist, it must be overcome by meaningful fellowship, interaction and dialogue, just as the Jerusalem Council was able to resolve its cultural problems and through wisdom was able to bring about peace and harmony.

The early Church thrived amidst persecution from the religious leaders, and cultural differences of its day. The Church made an impact and a difference in the fabric of the then known society, and made inroads into other cultures and ethnic groups. Nothing was able to divide the Church, not even cultural differences. The words of the apostle Paul ring out, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:10).

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CULTIVATING MULTICULTURALISM | Awareness | Demographic or Statistical Standpoint:

The World is at Our door

¹While it has always been God's plan for the churches to go the world, this strategy is only half of God's equation for reaching the people who don't have a personal relationship with Christ. Over the centuries the church has missed or nearly missed an equally significant part of God's plan - reaching the world that God brings to the church. The New Testament Book of Acts records in its early pages how men and women were gathered together around the world. In Jerusalem these people heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, accepted it and returned to their countries as ambassadors for God.

Today history repeats itself in the US where over 1.1M of the world's best, brightest and/or privileged students of every nation are within minutes of a local church. Such a representative gathering is unparalleled in human history. These students are attending America's institutions of higher learning. Their present quest is not for land or gold but for the prestige of an American education or a grasp of new westerns technologies. These future leaders will return to their societies with the competitive skills for geo-economical race into the future.

Each year over 300, 000 students (Canada- 400, 000 students in 2019) and new international students and scholars begin a four year sojourn in American universities and other institutions of higher learning. While these students come to America with specific goals and plans, most of them are unaware of the divine plan from God. As caring and committed Christians come across their paths and offer friendship in Him , they can learn about the greatest friend of all - Jesus Christ.

Immersed in new culture and being away from family and friends, these international students are often lonely. They often feel out of place ,lost, and anxious about understanding new people and a new situation. Simple tasks can be bewildering for the international student - as they would be to us if we were overseas for a period of time such as how to locate housing, or banking, or the difference between a grocery store, drugstore, specialty shops and a department store. When these internationals face these challenges alone, daily life can be extremely discouraging toi them. 10/40 window is the geographical location where 62 countries are located. There are more than 1,746 unreached people groups in these countries. Yet their future leaders and executives are studying in our universities and living right on our doorstep. These future leaders can be easily reached with good friendship and love. Only few Americans will go and live in the 10/40 window countries, yet the majority of these Americans live within a few minutes of a 10/40 window student.

Art of Neighboring

The church must be like its neighborhood. The situation is so dynamic that everyday people move in and out of our neighbourhoods. It is key to know our neighbourhood to influence them for Christ. Some of the resources provided here really help the churches to know their neighbourhood well. If members of the church start influencing their neighbourhood no doubt that, the church will thrive.

At least in the urban setup our neighborhoods are no more mono-cultural. If we make an effort to understand who our neighbours are, we will find people from different nations living around us.²
&³ What if we took the time to get to know the people next to us and discovered that they aren't so menacing after all? Perhaps we would find that the people on our block are normal people just like us. At the end of the day, they long for a place to belong, a place to be accepted and cared for.

The people you don't know by name are strangers. You might occasionally see them, and they have hopefully seen you, but the level of your interaction with them is minimal; perhaps it's only a wave from the car on the way to work in the morning. You may even know something about them, but the bottom line is if you don't know their name, you really don't know them.

The first step to taking the Great Commandment literally is to move from stranger to acquaintance in your relationships with those who live nearest you. Learning a person's name is the first and easiest step you can take to become a better neighbor.

Once you have learned and remembered someone's name, your relationship has moved from stranger to acquaintance. That's a crucial first step. However, Jesus didn't tell us to become acquaintances with our neighbors; he called us to love them, and that means we need to have an actual relationship with them.

Moving from acquaintance to relationship is not as clean or as easily defined as the first step. There isn't a simple tool that can move you into relationship, because it is impossible to program relationships. All of us can, however, create environments where relationships might develop and grow into something significant.

It may sound weird to categorize levels of friendship, but we have found it's crucial to define where we really stand with our neighbors so we can know what to do next. And understanding the neighboring framework of stranger-acquaintance-relationship can help us accomplish just that. It prompts practical steps that we can take to make real progress.

If we take the Great Commandment literally, we must open our eyes and our hearts to love the people on the street where we live. The act of loving our actual neighbors is one of the simplest and yet most powerful things that we can do to make an impact in our world.

The solutions to the problems in our neighborhoods can't be found in governmental programs or getting more people to come to your church. The solutions are with people just like you in your neighborhood.

The solution is to get back to the basics of what Jesus commanded: love God and love your neighbors.

Statistical standpoint

⁴ All the Statistics Canada data is outdated as it is based on the 2016 census. **This section can be updated only in 2021 based on the latest census.**

Loving Muslims Together

⁵ Loving Muslims Together is about Canadian Christians having meaningful connection with their Muslim neighbors; learning to see God's heart for them and experiencing the joys of cross-cultural friendship. Provides a lot of resources and statistics to know and minister to the Muslims in our neighbourhood.

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CULTIVATING MULTICULTURALISM | Awareness | What God is doing in other churches / denominations?

Do we need to know about what other denominations are doing?

Charles Hermelink:

- Yes, I think it is indeed helpful to not just know, but be inspired by their expressions, stimulating our creative activity as well.
- I'd recommend focusing most on fellow Evangelical denominations, as we're looking for Gospel-sharing ministry expressions, not mere cultural-Christianity or social Gospel expressions.
- Might the EFC be a resource to guide which denominations to consider?

CULTIVATING MULTICULTURALISM | Transition

Pursuing diversity is a good thing. But we must be clear what we are talking about. A church can be multiethnic if it has persons of different ethnic backgrounds who attend.

But if people of various ethnic groups listen to the same music, eat the same foods, hang out at the same entertainment venues, and go to church together, that's not multicultural. They have assimilated to a common culture. It may be multiethnic, but it's still monocultural.¹

What we need to determine and understand is that moving a church from just being monocultural to multicultural is slow but rewarding. In the end we will be a reflection of the Kingdom of God who welcomes and impacts all those around us.

The following is a list of key principles to assist churches to move from a monocultural to a multicultural presence in their view, ministry and experience.

- Become a welcoming and understanding community
- Diversified leadership
- Celebration of cultural diversity
- Passion and awareness for the community

Become a Welcoming and Understanding Community

The first thing most people do when they walk into a church and look around is ask, "Is there anyone like me here?" That is a natural human question. If the person is young, he or she is probably looking for young people. If he or she is a parent, they are likely looking for families. If he or she is a person of color, they are looking for people who look like them.²

Whether we agree with this or not, it is a reality. We must also understand that first impressions matter and creating a positive, welcoming experience will only allow people to be open for future ministry.

Diversified Leadership

The leadership of the church must be reflective of those it serves. Space must be made for the development and experience that other cultures bring to the vision and ministry of the church. This includes both volunteers and staff. A simple question to ask is "Does the leadership look like the congregation?"

With diversity comes strength and perspective. We are often quick to judge a situation from our lens, but we need to replace judgment with curiosity, asking questions to understand better what others see, think and feel about a given situation. Research shows that diverse teams are smarter

than homogeneous groups and that they make fewer factual errors when discussing available information.

There will be training and cultural barriers that will need to be navigated, but the reality is part of leadership development always has challenges to overcome.³

Celebration of Cultural Diversity

What we must first recognize is that the gospel has torn down the barriers that often exist in cultures and communities. Part of presenting the body mature in Christ is helping them to see that in Christ, “there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythians, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11). What we are left with is simply “believers.”

The pursuit of diversity is not an easy path; if it were, multicultural churches would be the norm. The process is painful for pastors and congregants, alike. Not only does it challenge heart-level issues of prejudice, but it challenges lifelong preferences regarding music, expressiveness in services, preaching style and more.

There needs to be a commitment to building consensus out of a coalition of different cultural groups so that one cultural group does not dominate or control the ministries of the church. With the arrival of new cultural groups a church eventually realizes that the tensions being felt around the different customs and expectations of each group can be a place for dialogue and not division. This was the experience of the early church as recorded in Acts 6:1-6 and Acts 15.

To be multicultural, not just multiethnic, requires us to not only acknowledge and celebrate each other's culture but also to make space for it in our ministry experiences.

Passion and Awareness for the Community

The church is called to be a lighthouse to those around them not just to those like them. Today, our communities are very diverse and multicultural and so should the church be a reflection of those in the community it serves.

Often, we struggle with finding common ground with those around us. What we need to recognize is that language and ethnic background are not the only foundation to build upon. Many communities are economically and employment/service based. We have much more often in common with those around us than those outside our neighborhoods.

The multicultural church recognizes the need to reach across every barrier to see those around them and the world come to know Christ as Saviour. A diverse missions program can also assist in growing a healthy world view both of those around us and those in areas in need of the Gospel.

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