

Combine Scripture, personal experience, and practical application, and you have a powerful message and model of God's multi-ethnic kingdom. This is a *must* for all church leaders who want to truly be the kingdom of God on earth in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Congregations will be transformed taking the journey through Sanders's book!

—JO ANNE LYON, General Superintendent of The Wesleyan Church

*Bridging the Diversity Gap* is a must-read for all leaders of churches and Christian organizations who desire to see their ministries reflect the multi-ethnic kingdom God has called us to. Alvin Sanders writes not only theory, but also practical guidance for transforming your ministry. He has mentored me for over five years as we have journeyed together to see the EFCA begin to reflect God's plan for his church.

—WILLIAM J. HAMEL, president of the Evangelical Free Church of America

In our highly racialized society, the church should be leading the way toward reconciliation, modeling before a world torn apart by conflict what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves. Christ has given the church the gift of reconciliation with which to bless the world. Yet it often seems like an uphill battle to build and sustain multi-ethnicity and multicultural understanding within our churches and institutions. Refined and tested in the crucible of real-life leadership, Alvin Sanders has written a positive and practical guide for Christian leaders who are willing to undertake the deeply spiritual work of asset-based diversity development. This book is an invaluable resource that should be required reading for all ministers and lay leaders who are ready (or not) to become intentional about embracing reconciliation as the mission of God in our fallen world.

—ARLOA SUTTER, executive director of Breakthrough Urban Ministries, Chicago

In *Bridging the Diversity Gap*, Alvin Sanders writes for the church as a practitioner and leader of leaders, lending his down-to-earth style to an otherwise overstuffed subject. As a church planter of an intentionally multi-ethnic church, this book is going to save me many years of headache and mission drift by pushing me beyond popular trends into the deep work of training staff and developing a healthy, multi-ethnic culture throughout the church. Inside are not just the principles for starting new multi-ethnic movements, but also the tools for senior leaders to create change in existing organizations.

—RICH JOHNSON, senior pastor of Sanctuary Columbus Church, Ohio

The term *prophet* is tossed around much too freely today. However, if one defines it as a Christian leader whose experience, wisdom, and heart for God enable that person to communicate complex truths with uncanny clarity, then Alvin Sanders qualifies. *Bridging the Diversity Gap* finds him shedding needed light on the church's call to reflect the values of God's kingdom. It's a challenging call, but you will not find a better teacher and guide than Dr. Sanders.

—EDWARD GILBREATH, journalist and author of *Reconciliation Blues*

Dr. Alvin Sanders's heart bleeds diversity. Like the apostle Paul who gave himself completely to the coming together of Jew and Gentile, Alvin has provided us with the "Pauline nudge" we all need to come out of our ethnic comfort zones, and reach across the divide. This book will be one you will return to again and again as you dream and labor to see your friendships, ministries, and churches reflect our future, diverse, and eternal reality.

—BRYAN LORITTS, lead pastor of Fellowship Memphis  
and author of *A Cross Shaped Gospel*

# BRIDGING<sup>THE</sup> DIVERSITY GAP

LEADING TOWARD GOD'S MULTI-ETHNIC KINGDOM

Alvin Sanders

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# INTRODUCTION

**F**irst things first—I am not a guru. My aim is to offer you a practical leadership process to lead your organization toward multi-ethnicity. Feel free to adapt the philosophy and process I am about to unpack to fit your particular situation. I've intentionally written this in a casual manner because so many books on this topic are written in a technical or academic style. I want it to seem like you are interacting with me in one of my presentations.

Basically, this is my story of what has worked for me. Hopefully, it will work for you. I want to be your guide, helping you take your good intentions and lead your organization across the ethnic divide. I know

many are out there who desire this, because over the years I have met hundreds of you. Many are frustrated because they can't seem to get permanent traction toward ethnic change within their organizations.

Every year I have the privilege of attending a pastoral learning community facilitated by Larry Osborne, who serves as teaching pastor of North Coast Community Church in Vista, California. It is one of the most dynamic learning atmospheres I have ever been in. Larry is the author of several books, most notably one entitled *Sticky Church*.<sup>1</sup> In the book, he makes the case that closing the back door of your church is even more important than opening the front door wider, and he offers a time-tested, proven strategy for doing so. Pastors, regardless of race, social class, and denomination love this book.

Years of attending those meetings and reflecting on *Sticky Church* are the genesis of this book. I wondered what would a *Sticky Church* “type” book look like that put forth easy-to-follow principles for Christian leaders of churches, nonprofits, and universities who desired to make multi-ethnicity “sticky”?

From my experience, there are three types of reasons why an organization feels compelled to pursue multi-ethnicity—financial, legal, or moral. Of course, there can be combinations of these, but one of them always seems to rise to the top as the foundational motivation.

The foundational motivation is extremely important because it sets the course for the rest of the programming. When it comes to

this topic, one cannot take some secular diversity program, sprinkle it with a couple of Scriptures, and expect it to have a strong impact.

I know this because I have been involved in secular diversity training. Sure, we can learn from those programs, but they don't meet the needs of our distinctively Christian situations. The philosophy that undergirds them is not designed for our organizations. The organizational culture is vastly different in the Christian context from secular institutions.

By organizational culture, I'm referring to the pattern of development reflected in our policies (courses of action), practices (habits and customs), and procedures (day-to-day rituals). Secular and Christian organizations share some similarities, but there are fundamental differences that make them distinct from one another.

If you work for a corporation, your bottom line is to make money. Christian organizations are typically nonprofits, so profits are not (or should not be) the main goal. Christian organizations are also unique in the nonprofit world, because they adhere to biblically based ethics. The combination of being both Christian and nonprofit means that these organizational cultures typically have dynamics that others don't.

For instance, I highly doubt Coca-Cola opens its board meetings with an extended time of prayer. In Christian organizations, people who work there have a heightened sense of ownership. After all, it is not just a place of employment, but an extension of their faith. In



fact, many have left much-higher-paying jobs in order to work in Christian environments. So things like faith, tradition, legacy, and shared governance hold much more sway in this context than the typical secular corporation or nonprofit.

The distinctive DNA of Christian organizations often unintentionally results in a stubborn culture that is slow and resistant to change of any type, let alone change with the potential to be divisive like racial diversity. To be successful, Christian organizations need to be, as Matthew 10:16 states, “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (ESV).

Here is the dirty little secret about the majority of those who have decision-making power within Christian organizations: Their time mainly consists of juggling three types of resources—people, money, and facilities. They work tirelessly to put a lot of people in the pews of churches, the seats of colleges, and in the programming of nonprofit ministries. They have highly orchestrated financial campaigns to erect beautiful buildings for ministry service. They work those budgets, making money stretch.

Don’t worry, as I am not about to lay a guilt trip on you about this leadership reality. What I will warn is to be careful about letting this be your only measuring stick as a leader. The need to focus on balancing people, money, and facilities can potentially create a huge tension for leaders interested in ethnic integration. Many of the constituents these leaders represent or work for really don’t understand the need for the organization to pursue diversity. Constituents

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may think resources and energy should be invested in “more important” matters.

There is only one sufficient answer to those who question the motives of these leaders: Multi-ethnicity is a mark of the gospel. Those other things are measured because they can indicate one kind of *success*. However, there is also the kingdom *significance* of both one’s leadership and the institutions being led.

The balance leaders have to strike is to be successful at managing people, money, and facilities, while keeping organizations significant for the sake of the kingdom. Many organizations have large numbers of employees, huge budgets, and beautiful buildings but are not significant to the mission field they are set up to serve. I know of one historically Christian college that the ethnically diverse residents of the surrounding neighborhood call “the plantation” with good reason. God cannot be pleased about that.

## KINGDOM PRIORITIES

Significance comes through one thing: chasing kingdom priorities. We as Christian leaders have a unique role in this world. We are charged to lead the citizens of the kingdom of God. If we are smart, we follow the example of Christ, mentoring those for whom we are responsible in the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the kingdom. We

often see Jesus testing the motives of people who followed him by challenging their priorities. His curriculum for his followers was modeling and teaching them characteristics of the kingdom.

One well-known example can be found in Luke 10:25–37, the parable of the good Samaritan. In this passage, an expert in the Hebrew law asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered by asking him what was written in the Law. The expert quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18—to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and mind. Jesus commended him for his answer.

But in Luke 10:29, we see a tension developing between kingdom significance and the world’s definition of success. The expert wanted to clarify whether it was enough to successfully keep the commandment according to his ethnic group’s definition of *neighbor* (only loving other Jews). So Jesus told the famous Good Samaritan story. Understand that in their world, Jews and Samaritans were heated ethnic rivals. They would have had no love for each other.

Imagine that while driving from St. Louis to Kansas City, I crash my car into a ditch. Some black pastors from thriving ministries see me (I’m black) in obvious pain but decide to keep driving. Then the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan pulls up to me. He tears his white hood to make a bandage for my wounds. He then pulls out some medicine from his first-aid kit from the trunk, applies it, and then calls 9-1-1. He trails the ambulance I’m in to the nearest hospital and tells the admitting nurse to bill him for any expenses incurred for my care.

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By now you may be smirking, because it is very unlikely for that to happen; and that's the point of the parable of the good Samaritan — kingdom transcendence (right belief plus right action) over worldly ethnic boundaries. By telling this story, Jesus was emphasizing that loving God will cause a radical transformation of how you treat people, especially those who are ethnically different from you. He was saying that if you truly love God, you will demonstrate that love by loving your neighbors just like the Samaritan loved the Jew in need. It was a lesson on kingdom significance versus worldly success.

It is important to note that the parable of the good Samaritan was considered to be a recounting of a true story that was commonly known to the audience Christ was addressing. It would be like mentioning 9/11 in the United States. Those of us who were around during that tragedy immediately have a common reference point. Jesus was giving them a literal, real-life example of what the kingdom looked like. Right belief *must* be married to right actions. Otherwise what you believe will be rendered powerless (Luke 10:36–37).

Another example of earthly success versus kingdom significance can be found in Matthew 15:21–28. Here we find an ethnically Canaanite woman, who at that time would typically be considered an enemy of Israel. She asked Jesus to cast demons from her daughter. No doubt her ethnicity, gender, and pagan standing played a role in the disciples, urging Jesus to “send her away, for she keeps crying out after us” (Matt. 15:23). To achieve success in the ancient Jewish

context, one didn't intermingle with her kind. No one cared about her needs; she was simply an inconvenience.

At first Jesus' response in Matthew 15:24 seems to be denying her request, seemingly calling her a dog in verse 26. (To be called a dog was an insult then as it is now.) But it soon became obvious that Jesus was not insulting the woman, but rather manipulating the situation to teach his disciples about the kingdom. They didn't think this woman was worth bothering with, mainly because of their prejudice toward her. In the end, Jesus not only granted her request, but also praised her for her faith (v. 28). His message was clear: prejudice and ethnocentrism are opposed to the kingdom.

A kingdom priority like multi-ethnicity is measured by the sincere work we do. Multi-ethnicity is a value that Jesus and the early church passionately pursued. Pursing a multi-ethnic vision may or may not enhance success in the world's eyes, but it will please the Lord. So here's a question for you to ponder: Is that enough?

## MY JOURNEY

The book of Lamentations might not be on the top of your reading list, but its lessons need to be heeded. The essence of the book can be found in Lamentations 1:16: "No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit."

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Lament is a part of leadership throughout Scripture. Moses, Esther, Jesus, and many more practiced lament. Lament wrestles with the tension between earthly reality and kingdom pursuit. To lament is to admit we don't have all the answers. It is the art of deep disappointment. I'm not talking about disappointment because your favorite sports team lost or because it rained most of the time during your vacation. I'm talking about the life situations that, if not dealt with, will lead to despair. Deep disappointment can be lethal to leadership, or it can be an opportunity to mature. By navigating lament, you can transform difference from a barrier into an opportunity. Learning to navigate lament defines my journey.

In April 2001, Timothy Thomas, a nineteen-year-old African-American with a history of nonviolent misdemeanors, was shot and killed by a Cincinnati police officer. His death caused outrage in the neighborhood of my then multi-ethnic church plant (River of Life), resulting in millions of dollars of damage due to rioting.

It was in this environment that we at River of Life started ministry in the very neighborhood that had been at the center of the rioting. River of Life became a tangible demonstration of what God can do when people from all walks of life live in unity for the advancement of the kingdom.

For seven years as the founding pastor, I was surrounded by the effects of ethnic conflict. In leading that wonderful ministry, I learned that *multi-ethnicity* is a verb and is much bigger than merely achieving

harmony. I have come to believe that it is a bridge to fulfilling the Great Commission, which is impossible without following the first and second Great Commandments: love God and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37–40).

When I pastored River of Life, 70 percent of those who joined were unchurched. Most told me one of the big reasons they came was the fact that everybody was accepted there, regardless of their cultural background. That is the heroic, happy ending. But to get to that point, I had to learn the skill of navigating lament.

The leadership journey always begins within. It is difficult to lead anybody anywhere we haven't been ourselves. At the core, leading toward God's multi-ethnic kingdom is an expression of God's work within us. The world is broken, and one of the results is division along racial lines. How broken is your heart over this? More importantly, are you willing to lead others to do something about it? Is healing this rift an organizational hill you are willing to "die" on?

Three years into the planting of River of Life, things were going extremely well. We started with my family and had grown quickly. Through the wonderful generosity of our parent church, we obtained an old hardware store to renovate. Through the gifts of foundations and Christian business professionals, 350,000 dollars had been raised toward renovation. People. Money. Facilities. We were on our way to success.

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Or so I thought. In a six-month period, we lost 35 percent of our people. I began to do exit interviews and could not believe my ears as to the reasons people left. They revealed a pattern of tension that indicated I had not done a good job of leading kingdom transcendence. “We don’t believe the races should worship together; I don’t want my kids involved with poor kids; black people are too loud; your wife shouldn’t be on stage opening the service because a man should do it.” Those exit interviews pretty much destroyed my paradigm of success.

I was in a place of despair. Here were people in whom I had invested for years, yet they had bailed on me and the multi-ethnic vision. To be honest, my spirit was weak, my will failing, and I was ready to resign. But before I did, I decided to fast and seek the Lord’s wisdom.

After I emerged, it was clear that God was not calling me to quit; he was calling me to focus on chasing the kingdom. Regardless of the response of the people, my job was to call them to truth and righteousness. Those years I spent shepherding a multi-ethnic church in the midst of an ethnically conflicted community have made me the Christ follower I am today.

My time as pastor of River of Life is the foundational part of my story. Another chapter is my stint as director of ethnic ministry at Cincinnati Christian University. I owe the people there a great debt. They allowed me to develop new theories of what to do, and then test-drive the ideas on the campus.



Some things I implemented soared with the eagles, and other programs crashed like the *Titanic*. However, overall there was great fruit. Among the highlights were ethnically integrating full-time faculty for the first time in school history, and making tremendous strides toward integrating the student body.

The present chapter of my journey is serving in senior leadership for the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). We continue to work toward reaching our goal to multiply transformational churches among all ethnic people both nationally and globally.

I share these snapshots of my journey for your assurance. What you are about to read was born primarily through my passion for God's multi-ethnic kingdom, on-the-job training, and time spent in the "ivory tower" of academia. I have worked extensively on this topic in the very real settings of a church and university and within a denomination. I have earned a PhD studying this topic, and I also serve as an adjunct professor at several seminaries. So be assured that what you are about to read has been tested.

## SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Let me list the biases of this book. The focus is narrow and only on ethnic diversity. Many people say, "But what about social class, gender, disability, age, etc.?" Within my organization, I actively work

to address them, and I encourage everyone reading this book to engage those other areas of diversity. I have chosen to specifically focus only on ethnicity within this work, which is my main area of expertise. Please don't misinterpret my narrow focus as somehow degrading the other forms of diversity. They are extremely important.

Another bias to be aware of is that the majority of my examples come from a black/white paradigm. I talk about other ethnicities, but my illustrations are skewed for a simple reason: I draw mostly from my life experience, which stems from being black and serving in majority white organizations. Although this is the case, the points made still hold for other cross-ethnic relations. I ask that this bias not be misinterpreted to mean other racial dynamics are not important.

The last bias to be aware of is that this book is aimed at majority-white, Christian organizations that desire to ethnically integrate and are either near the beginning of the process or have tried and failed. If your organization is further down the road, this will be helpful as well, but my assumption is novice level. Racially speaking, it's not that things can't go the other way. I believe there is a whole other set of issues if we are talking about, say, a majority African-American, Asian, or Latino organization that desires to become whiter. But I believe that would require somewhat different strategies.

What I am looking to do is give general insight and general solutions for your specific situation. We are cruising at thirty thousand

feet, not at the grassroots. How your specific challenges and solutions (in relation to the insight I am giving) play out is up to you. Actually, it is not totally up to you; it's up to you, your decision-makers, and the Holy Spirit.

Fight against your natural inclination to read this book alone and then act like Moses, descending from the mountain to lay out edicts for the people to follow. I know from both my personal experience and the many lessons I have learned from others that type of leadership style will not work when leading a transition to multi-ethnicity. The way to go is to harness the power of Christian leadership communities.

A Christian leadership community is a group of people who form their lives together to work toward leading kingdom citizens. Examples are a Christian university board, church (or nonprofit) ministry team, or denominational staff. These communities operate as spaces where people reflect on their life experiences. As they reflect, others offer varying viewpoints, allowing people to unearth common understanding as well as differences.

Knowledge construction in the midst of relationship is part of what binds us together as leaders. Therefore, you would be doing yourself and the organization you lead a great disservice to read this alone. You need a community of learners to process ideas. So if you are a senior pastor, read this with your staff. If you serve in nonprofit or university leadership, read it with your board and other decision-makers. Make sure to intentionally set aside times to discuss the

concepts presented. I recommend taking your time, reading a chapters and then processing the questions in the learning lab (at the end of this book) after each reading.

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

I recommend you read the chapters in order. Many of you are like me in believing that when you buy a book, you can scan and skip around, reading the parts you think are relevant to your situation. If you choose to go that route with this book, you will miss some key insights. The content flow is intermingled, each chapter building upon the previous one. You may not understand the reasoning of the later chapters if you haven't read the previous ones.

In part 1, I will describe the three challenges we all face with ethnic diversity. The first is rooted in ethnic borders (chapter 1). Ethnic borders are those cultural traits we tightly hold on to that define our ethnic identity. Most ethnic folk are aware of theirs while most whites are not. Most people, regardless of ethnicity, are typically not very flexible in moving the borders. Unearthing and negotiating these is half the battle.

The second challenge is racialization (chapter 2). "A racialized society is a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships. . . . [It is one] that allocates different economic, political, social, and even

psychological rewards to groups along racial lines.”<sup>2</sup> Racialization is why color blindness is not the answer.

The third challenge is unintentionality (chapter 3). Most Christian organizations did not have multi-ethnic in mind when they started. Besides not having multi-ethnic in mind, the Christian traditions from which our institutions sprung are not all the same. We all possess what I call “founding DNA.” Our efforts must be connected with this.

Will describe how to begin shifting your church, Christian college, or Christian nonprofit organization toward multi-ethnicity.

We begin to discuss why transitioning to multi-ethnicity is a very complex task (chapter 4). In fact, it may be unlike anything you have attempted to lead before. The leadership required is highly situational and contingent. It is more of an art than a science. I call the type of leadership you need to use “asset-based diversity development,” which is a philosophy that guides you to lead not from a base of deficiencies and needs caused by the three challenges, but instead to leverage differences by unlocking your organization’s capacities and gifts. This serves as your diversity bridge by creating a ripple effect. It requires making some basic shifts in thinking. Chapters 5 to 7 are about these shifts.

The first shift is from secular to spiritual (chapter 5). Theories of secular diversity are helpful and informative. However, they lack kingdom power and transcendence. They should never serve as the foundation for Christian integration efforts, but as supplements.

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Multi-ethnicity efforts based on secularized notions of diversity have little spiritual impact because their foundation is humanitarianism, not Scripture. Our number one asset is the Bible.

The second shift is from tweaking to transformative leadership (chapter 6). Getting to multi-ethnicity is not something where you can tweak a few things and move on. Tweaking is fear-based change. We are afraid to significantly rock the boat, so we hope we can tweak our way out of our predicaments. It never works.

The last shift is from accidental to accountability and alignment (chapter 7). What else is needed to turn your good intentions into good fruit? Your followers need boundaries because boundaries give clarity. If it is fuzzy to you, it will be a fog to the people you lead. People need to be pointed in the right direction and then held accountable. To do so will require leadership providing a basic framework to operate in.

The framework creates the asset of multi-ethnic clarity, providing the vision for the unified effort we all desire. No matter how good your intentions are, it is going to be hard to build multi-ethnic into your DNA unless you create a compass to guide people over the gap. If you don't develop one, you are guaranteed to create confusion, disappointment, and racial fatigue.

This book also includes a learning lab and a case study that will help you implement asset-based diversity development in your church or organization.

Don't expect to find all the answers in this book. I'm just passing along the lessons the Lord has taught me with the hope of blessing you. Hopefully, this is one of many steps on your journey. When a leadership team loves and pursues multi-ethnicity, the people start to understand and embrace it. If you are willing to boldly lead a team down this road, it will be one of the most satisfying spiritual walks you will ever experience.

## NOTES

1. Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008).

2. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.



# ETHNIC BORDERS

There are over seven hundred references to ethnic groups in Scripture. Seeing color is not ungodly. And the Bible does not ask us to give up our ethnicity or to replace it with some generic notion of nonethnic Christianity. After all, Jesus embraced his ethnicity.

Ethnic borders are cultural traits that define our ethnic identity for ourselves and others. Today, Christians are one in Christ, but our ethnic differences do not pass away with salvation. Christ's goal was not to eliminate ethnicity but to transcend it.

Organizations that accept ethnicity as a normal part of the human experience will acknowledge, appreciate, and leverage differences instead



of denigrating or ignoring them. These organizations would be following in the footsteps of our biblical forebearers.

## FAMILY FEUD

So let's start with some theological reflection, beginning with the real-world perspective of the biblical story. One way to view the Bible is as a narrative that intends to reframe reality through the lens of God. Readers are challenged to submit to the reality presented in Scripture, love the God who is represented, and obey his commands.

To understand our response to racialization from a biblical point of view, we must see how God's desire for unity operates throughout Scripture—from the very beginning, through the ebb and flow of sin and division, to the end. We must see how interrupting processes such as racialization is *God's* idea.

### One Family Divided

Think of people groups as one giant family—large, colorful, diverse . . . and dysfunctional! The Bible depicts a world of smaller, competing families known as nations. The links that form these families—whose members share familiar origins and basics of culture, such as language, values, attitudes, and beliefs—we label as ethnic.

Throughout the biblical record, we see a theme of struggle, discrimination, and conflict: one story after another of individuals and ethnic groups trying to advance their own interests over others. It is a sure recipe for division rather than unity.

If we are not careful, as we follow the biblical story, we might mistakenly think people ethnically different from Israel are “the enemy.” Yet in reality, we face an army of evil spiritual beings whose goal is to frustrate God’s efforts toward a united, inclusive family in Christ (Eph. 6:12).

When we watch the news and see stories of “ethnic cleansing” or when we look at a history book and see the abuses people groups suffered because of their race, we cannot forget that the root of these events is spiritual. Therefore, the primary way to address these and other evil atrocities should be rooted in spiritual practice.

When it comes to reconciliation, the first step of the church in a deeply broken world is not strategy, but prayer. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin wrote in *The Gift of Peace* that prayer is closing “the gap between what [we are] and what God wants of [us].”<sup>1</sup> We will not be successful unless we develop a vibrant, strong prayer life to close the gap.

The gap exists because, as sinners, we are all in some degree of rebellion against God. Psalm 2:1 asks, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?” The quick answer is because they are in rebellion. Let’s now take a look at the root of the rebellion.

## The Unraveling of Shalom

In Genesis 2, we see God's plan for unity in the garden of Eden. Relationships were perfect between people and God, between people themselves, and with the environment. It was truly a blessed state of existence. Actually, the word *blessed* does not accurately describe what was going on. A better word is a Hebrew one, *shalom*, meaning people living in a situation of completeness in every aspect of their human existence.

Take a moment and think of every single need that you and the world around you have. After compiling your list, imagine if they all were completely fulfilled. That's *shalom*. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve experienced it. Their physical, social, moral, mental, and emotional needs were completely met. And their spiritual relationship with God was without filters—100 percent pure. Theirs was a life with no worries.

Then the familiar story of Genesis 3 tells of the moment when the whole situation of *shalom* unraveled, beginning the dysfunctional mess of a family we have today. By *mess* I mean the change that occurs in the personal character of humans, brought about by the willful disobedience of Adam and Eve. With their sin, God's original intent for our world—to live in unity with each other and with him—was violated.

The consequences of the fall were instant: Confidence was replaced by doubt; honesty was replaced by deception; intimacy was replaced

by shame; fellowship was replaced by fear. Barriers went up between Adam and Eve and between both them and God. And along with the barriers came hostility.

God questioned Adam; Adam blamed Eve; and Eve blamed the snake. Adam and Eve showed the first signs of human conflict and rebellion against God, a rebellion that continues to have far-reaching effects. In Genesis 3:15, God spoke to the evil being (represented by the serpent) that started it all: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

This verse foretells how our world will be in continual conflict between humans and representatives of evil. The battle lines have been formed, and the world from now until Christ’s return will struggle in a messy conflict. The apostle Paul called the time between the fall and Christ’s return “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Traditionally, Genesis 3:15 has been interpreted as a foreshadowing of Christ’s eventual defeat of Satan. We know that Christ came to reconcile people to their God, to each other, and to creation.

## Reconciliation

Let’s now reflect on how Christ entered the world. A good place to start is with Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis 12:2–3, God promised them, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those

who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

See once again God’s desire for unity: a unified nation, bringing blessing to all. Yet to receive the promise of God, Abraham had to make a couple of choices: to stay in his homeland or go to a new one, and to stay with his biological family and promised inheritance or to leave to start a new family with his (infertile) wife. All the choices boiled down to whether Abraham was going to trust God and obey the call on his life. He had to act in faith. Abraham left behind more than family and comfort when he chose to follow God; he also left behind ethnic tradition. Let me explain.

In the ancient world, it was thought that gods were bound by certain criteria, one of which was that a god could not cross ethnic borders. The god of Ur and the Chaldeans could not be the god of, say, Egypt and the Egyptians. In other words, gods were segregated by ethnic enclaves.

The God of the Hebrews was challenging Abraham to break out of that belief system, declaring that he was the type of God who could travel anywhere and be over any people group. By agreeing to move, Abraham was agreeing to convert to an entirely different tradition. He truly was exhibiting tremendous faith.

In Genesis 15, God brought even more clarity to his plan for using Abraham and Sarah to restore unity. He declared that they would have a son, and their offspring would fulfill the promise of blessing

all the people of the world. And in Genesis 26:4, God reminded Abraham's son Isaac of that promise. Then, in Genesis 28:4, he reminded Isaac's son Jacob of the promise as well. The existence of a genealogy was in itself a confirmation of the promise.

The tangible blessing did not come overnight. After Genesis, the story expanded beyond individuals to the complete sum of Abraham's offspring, which eventually became known as the nation of Israel.

In Exodus we see the pitting of nation against nation as a contest between gods. For example, the famous plagues of Exodus 1–12 were each a “contest” between the God of Israel and one of Egypt's false gods. When God rescued the Israelites, he delivered the message that the God of Israel is the sovereign God over all, regardless of ethnicity. As more and more non-Israelites recognized this, they switched allegiances.

Consider Joshua 2 and the story of Rahab; read the story of Naomi and Ruth in the book of Ruth; ponder God's message to the Israelite captives in Babylon found in Jeremiah 29:4–7. Throughout the Old Testament, the message to the Israelites was clear that he was a God of ethnic inclusion.

## The Witness of God's People

We see from this brief look at the Old Testament that the main avenue God used to reveal himself was the witness of his people—Abraham's biological descendants, the nation of Israel. People who

wanted to know God often found him through Israelites. In the New Testament, the witness was expanded. A mystery was revealed.

The apostle Paul reminded the Galatians that they began their relationship with God the same way Abraham had: by faith (Gal. 3:6–9). Abraham’s real offspring are those who have faith in his God, not his ethnic descendants. The redemption of Christ permits *all* to enjoy the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14). No longer did people need to seek out Israelites and convert to Judaism. That was the old paradigm. We are now told to receive the promise of the Spirit and form communities of Spirit-filled people. These ministry communities are the primary vehicles for the nations to know God.

The stress of the New Testament is toward a community of people making their presence known by living differently as the people of God in their geographic region. As they do this, the people of their region will know where to look for God.

You can find examples of these ethical encouragements in each of Paul’s epistles. These instructions of how to live the Christian life are not geared toward individuals, but rather toward the community of believers. The concern is with the character of the church, stressing how the people of God should live in a rebellious, conflicted world. This is no small concern, as nothing less than the essence of the gospel is at stake.

Jesus set a clear pattern concerning how the gospel was going to spread: people influencing others to follow Jesus through the witness

of their lives. First there were twelve (John 1:35–50); then seventy-two (Luke 10:1); then at least one hundred twenty (Acts 1:15); then more than three thousand (Acts 2:41); then millions, all through the simple concept of Spirit-filled communities living differently from the world around them. We are citizens of the kingdom of God, a holy nation that acts as ambassadors of reconciliation to a conflicted world in rebellion (2 Cor. 5:11–21).

In a reunited family, value and significance don't lie in race, ethnicity, power, wealth, gender, or any other attitude found in the rebellious world. In the reunited family called the church, our values, attitudes, and beliefs have been radically restructured through the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:26–29). The source of this reunited family is none other than God.

We are told in 2 Corinthians 5:18 that God gave the church the gift of reconciliation. In a world where conflict reigns supreme, only God can cause a family reunion of all people. It is God's initiative and his work. The reunited family called the church becomes a witness to a world marred by conflict.

## PERSONAL IDENTITY

As we see in Scripture, ethnicity plays a huge role in defining identity. When speaking of identity, I'm using the concept in the sense



that it is the way we present who we are to others as well as ourselves. When constructing a sense of identity, we have to recognize that we are always partly unique and partly a creation of our society. These two aspects can never be isolated from each other.

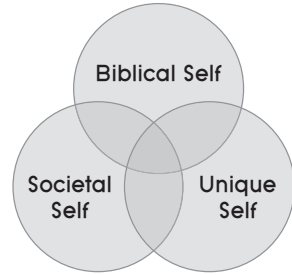
This is contrarian thinking for all of us who grew up in an extremely individualistic society like the United States. We possess a strong belief about the uniqueness of the individual, which sociologists call individualism. We tend toward placing individual choice at the zenith of how we view things. We are predisposed to thinking we are independent of everything when we form ideas about who we are.

So common thought is that we assume we can separate from societal connections and rationally think through situations independent of outside influencers (like race). But this is not the case. The thoughts we claim as independently unique to us are still dependent on where we learned what particular things mean, which is heavily influenced by the society we live in.

Saying we are always partly unique and partly a creation of society doesn't mean we have no individual uniqueness or that we can't possess a theology that embraces absolute truth. We obviously have a choice to form our own personal identities. But our unique self is shaped both by our society and our unique choices.

## Three Parts of Our Identity

As Christians we can think of ourselves as having three overlapping parts. The first part is what we often stress the most, which is our biblical self. Our chief identity is in Christ, and we spend our lives studying his teachings and trying to live them out the best way we know how.



The second part is our societal self. This is how we are identified by society. We all possess many labels. For example, I am labeled black, male, Christian, middle class, tall, etc. The list is endless. Each one of the labels assigned to me carries a certain connotation in the society in which I live. And I have no control over it. Some labels I reject and some I accept, but all have an influence in forming me.

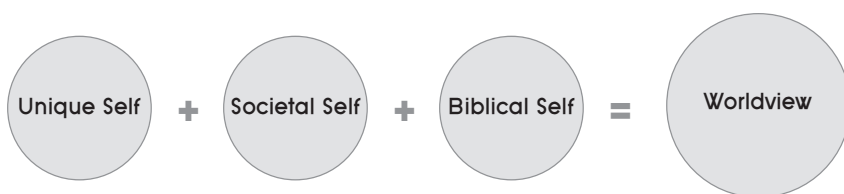
What we do have complete control over is the third part, which is our unique self. We personally associate a certain amount of importance to each label that has been given to us from society. I determine how important race, gender, social class, and other social labels are in my life.

Here is the mistake people often make. We focus so intensely only on our biblical selves, and it's not the full reality. You're biblical, societal, and unique selves are constantly informing one another, because they are intertwined. They are not fixed, but flexible, always evolving, and influenced by life experience. The person you were at

twenty-three years old is not the same as the person you are at fifty-three. Through this constant interaction, you form your personal identity.

For example, in certain ethnic communities, conversations about personal identity are very overt and active. A lot of times the conversations revolve around how much “whiteness” is allowable. Typically, from the white perspective, most haven’t thought deeply about what it means to be white in America. The ethnic identity we possess, like it or not, positions us in the whole racialization process, which I will talk about in the next chapter.

### Why Identity Matters



Consider this analogy as an explanation of why this matters in leading multi-ethnic organizations.

Occasionally, I receive free tickets to a sporting event. Sometimes I get cheap seats in the upper deck, from where the participants look like ants; more often though, I get tickets for great seats. When you sit in great seats, the action is so vivid and intense, the amenities are great, and you feel that you are part of the game. What if I gave you those tickets? And what if after the game, you did a little experiment?

You asked ten different people sitting in totally different parts of the stadium, “What happened?” You know what you would get? Ten answers containing both similarities and differences. In fact, even though each person was watching the same game in the same stadium, you might not be able to tell that based on the variety of responses. How you view the game is *totally* dependent on your seat location. People in the great seats would have a different perspective from those who sit in the cheap seats, even though they saw the same game in the same stadium.

Now imagine you have tickets to the game of life. If you think of life as a game being played in a stadium, then your personal identity (made up of societal, biblical, and unique selves) is your seat in the stadium. Everyone in the stadium can see the action, but no one sees it exactly the same. They have only the perspective from their seat. We label our seat location as our worldview. That is the practical implication we must pay attention to as leaders.

## The Twin Forces

Missions historian Andrew Walls uses the phrase the “twin forces of Christian history” to describe an indigenizing principle and a pilgrim principle.<sup>2</sup> The indigenizing principle says there is no such thing as a Christian who is not heavily influenced by the society to which he or she belongs. Applying this principle to our three selves means that we must reconcile the gospel with our societal selves in order for

us to accept Christ in our unique selves, creating our biblical selves. Combine the three and we have our worldview. This is why spreading the gospel is easier in certain situations than in others.

If a society revolves around Islam, it is going to be much harder to convince people there is another way to God. This is because we are somewhat a prisoner to our society and need to be liberated from many aspects of it. Walls describes this liberating force as the pilgrim principle. This principle requires us to change some societal values to which we are bound to match up with biblical teachings. The older saints at the church I grew up in used to call this principle being in the world but not of it. In seminary they called it sanctification. It's the process of eliminating those things from our lives that are sinful. For our purposes, it's moving from an ethnocentric perspective to a Christ-centered one.

Based on our personal identities, we all come to the table with ethnic values. When we talk about these values, we are talking about whether we consider something right or wrong based on our ethnic heritages. These values help us determine what we consider to be normal. We all have these rules of behavior—often learned innately rather than taught—and if someone violates those rules, they are considered abnormal at best and a threat at worst. These values make up our ethnic borders.

## HELP ME UNDERSTAND

Our personal identities are loaded with preconceived notions based on our societal and unique selves. But if we are to lead in multi-ethnicity, we want our borders to be flexible. One of my mentors, the late Glen Kehrein, taught me to master asking the question: “Would you help me understand?” Border flexibility consists of learning how ethnicity shapes both us and our views of others.

People often mistake the one way forward as to become an ethnic search engine of some sort, gathering as many bits and pieces of information about different ethnicities as humanly possible. That is the way to prepare for an SAT test, not real life. Gathering information is important but is only part of the equation of understanding. True understanding comes from combining our heads (information) with our hearts (emotions) with our hands (experience). All three together lead the way forward.

### A Journey of Understanding

In order to expand your borders, you need to take many personal journeys of understanding. I’m not talking about venturing out on some quest to find a person of color to befriend. And I am *especially* not talking about pressuring people ethnically different from you who you have hired to become your fishing buddy. I’ve had people ask me to be their friend specifically in order to learn more about my culture.

Who wants to be somebody's learning project? It doesn't work that way. I'm advocating making personal life adjustments—becoming an intentional learner for the sake of the kingdom.

When I planted River of Life, one of the first lay leaders, Pete, drove his family forty minutes one way to attend the church. One day I asked him why he did that. He told me about the journey of understanding his family was on. He and his wife Jamie from time to time took in boarders at their house. They lived in a somewhat rural place and had plenty of room to be hospitable. On one occasion, they had an African-American young lady look at a spare room. They felt good about her and decided to let her move in. Over dinner they discussed the situation with their kids. One of them did not sign off. When asked why, the kid said, "I don't know if I like black people." This threw Jamie and Pete for a loop. They decided they had to do something about the ethnic values of their kids. Their solution was to enroll their family to help me plant a multi-ethnic, inner-city church, where they faithfully served. It was much more than a "friendship project"; it was a lifestyle change.

When you isolate yourself within your own ethnic borders, you develop huge blind spots to the views of others. More than likely this means continual reinforcing of negative stereotypes. Trying to lead multi-ethnicity from that perspective is like the blind leading the blind.

If you want to go on a journey of understanding about married life, is it rational to exclusively hang with a tribe of single people?

I think not. You would want to hang with people who are successfully married, and as you encounter differences from your single status worldview, ask for understanding to gain insight into marriage. It's the same with ethnic learning.

Let me share a present journey of understanding I am on. I desire to flex my border and understand immigration from the perspective of my Latino colleagues. In doing so, I came across the story of Juan and Maria (not their real names). Their patchwork life in their native Mexico consisted of working long hours at whatever jobs they could find. When their first child was born, illegally crossing the border seemed the most logical move for a better life. After all, American companies were recruiting Mexicans to work. But a legal work visa took years to obtain, and the baby didn't have years to wait for food, clothing, and shelter. Juan and Maria chose to slip into California, find jobs, and start anew.

Soon, friends in their new land invited them to church, where Juan and Maria met Christ. Salvation changed their worldview and not having legal documentation bothered them. So they entered the process to become documented, legal workers. As the process continued, two more children came along, and a cousin's invitation prompted a move to the Midwest, where they found a new church family. But a routine traffic stop changed everything. When the police checked Juan's identification card, his name matched that of a wanted felon. By the time his innocence was clarified, the Immigration and Naturalization



Service had been called, and within a few days, Juan was deported back to Mexico. Maria was (and still is) struggling, to say the least.

The baby who inspired them to cross the border, now a teen, traded her dreams of college for the reality of working and helping to parent her siblings. Who is at fault? Juan and Maria for immigrating? The companies that lured them? The two churches involved in their lives? Government bureaucrats? In my journey, I've become aware of the need for economic and civil law to be reconciled . . . and soon.

I would never have arrived at that understanding by exclusively listening to the politicians and "talking heads" on TV that inform my societal self. I would also have never gotten there by discussing immigration exclusively with my black colleagues. The journey has been totally guided by my Latino friends. I have been given the gift of a unique perspective, and this has driven me to examine the whole issue scripturally, reforming my biblical self.

## Authentic Community

The vehicle for journeys of understanding is authentic friendship and community. When I say this, people often have visions of all races holding hands and singing "Kum Ba Yah" around the campfire. But that's not what I mean. I mean having long-term, true, organic friendships where you can experience sincere community with others who are not ethnically the same as you. It's by far the most effective way to learn about and become more comfortable with differences.

Leaders have a tendency to think they understand someone who is ethnically different because they may regularly watch TV shows, read books, or listen to certain musical genres. That might be helpful, depending on the content you watch, read, or listen to. I encourage this type of learning, but it's basic learning. Advanced learning only comes through relationship. If you study Spanish for three years in high school, it doesn't translate into understanding what it means to be Mexican.

You will read in the next chapter how one of the historical effects of racialization is distrust. When you regularly interact with people ethnically different through authentic relationship, it changes your values, attitudes, and beliefs about life. This creates the glue to form bonds of trust. It brings about understanding to help you deal with the inevitable ethnic conflicts that will arise as you lead. If you have no skin in the game, when you hear about hurt and sorrow that has been caused by racialization, you have a tendency to not care as much. Because of the journey of Juan and Maria, I will never again view immigration as an impersonal issue.

Being a part of a sincere community of people who are ethnically different from you, as an organic part of your life, makes you fully conscious of the world you live in. It is a remarkable learning lab where you remove ethnic blind-spots. You learn how *not* to do and say painful and offensive things. You learn what intentional things you can do to be fruitful. You become a natural-born swimmer, like a fish in water, easily adjusting your thinking to be more inclusive.

## Authentic Conversations

Besides long-term authentic relationships, the next best way to expand borders is through authentic conversations. This occurs naturally in long-term friendships and community, but at times there may be temporary God appointments made for you where you can gain insight. Pray and look for them. I denounce ethnic “friendship projects” but highly encourage constructive conversations that might lead to friendships. The more of these conversations you have, the more you learn about yourself and others.

To be open to potential God appointments, we need to stop placing troops at our ethnic borders. We can’t assume everyone who is ethnically different from us is out to get us. Yes, racialization exists but it doesn’t mean everyone has ulterior motives. Scripture does not teach that morality is based on ethnicity. We cannot have an us-versus-them mentality and expect any sort of success. Everyone cannot be a suspect.

I once participated with an evangelism training team, and a session was led by a slightly plump white man from Arkansas. His southern drawl was fierce. I’m ashamed to say it, but the term *redneck* immediately popped into my head when I met him. My ethnic troops were assembling at the border, and I only knew the guy for thirty seconds! I was sure he was a raving racist. As God would have it, the man sat right next to me at lunch break. I was looking for the escape hatch but was stuck. After introductions, he pulled out his wallet and showed me pictures of his grandkids, who looked African-American.

It turns out that his daughter was married to a black guy. As I talked to him, I found that he was a tremendously progressive thinker on race. I ended up learning a lot from him. After the interaction, I whispered a quiet prayer of repentance for being so narrow-minded.

### Common Ground

Most differences based on ethnicity are not morally inappropriate. Each ethnicity elevates certain values above others. As an African-American Christian, let's say I drew a circle that represented my values. Then somebody who is a Christian of a different ethnicity drew one that represented his or hers. Chances are that our circles would significantly overlap. Chances are also that there would be some values that we do not have in common based on our ethnic backgrounds. The question then becomes: Do we have so little in common that we cannot build a relationship with one another? My guess would be that, most of the time, we have enough in common to build a relationship.

## BORDER EXPANSION

Bridge builders recognize that differences exist, but they learn successful approaches for resolving conflict. They make border expansion part of their DNA by obtaining knowledge and applying it to their everyday living. They also provide spaces for significant

communication to occur to keep misunderstandings based on ethnicity to a minimum.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that treating everyone the same is somehow biblical. This may sound good, but it is not good practice. At times we must consider ethnicity in order to have successful relationships.

I knew of Christian leaders who claimed to want to reach a first-generation Latino community yet planned to cancel the Spanish broadcasts on the church's radio station. The broadcasts were considered special treatment of Latinos. I don't know how you reach an entire people group but don't plan to speak their primary language! These leaders changed their plans once their Latino constituents found out and expressed their displeasure. What these leaders initially forgot to do was to embrace the principle that ethnicity shapes our lives, and they forgot to make the adaptations necessary to further the kingdom. This is the most practical step that a ministry needs to take in order to practice reconciliation.

Adaptation based on certain needs is not a foreign concept. Youth pastors regularly adapt in order to spread the gospel in a way youth understand. Fund-raising consultants are often hired to help communicate clearly to people with financial resources to give generously. For some reason, when it comes to ethnic concerns, some see making special accommodations as wrong.

We must change that way of thinking.

NOTES

1. Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, *The Gift of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 14.

2. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 53.

# 6

## CHANGING THE ETHNIC GAME

It is much better to initiate change when you can than react to it. Generally speaking, all good leaders are change agents toward vibrant, organizational culture where people can flourish and be all God made them to be. The matter of bold, transformative leadership is big in any change process. Add on the complexity of racialization, navigating ethnic borders, and messing with founding DNA, and the process becomes even bigger. Leading multi-ethnic change is rough, but very doable. Don't let the roughness of the terrain fool you into thinking that it is an impossible task.

In our base text of Acts 6:1–7, the apostles made direct, administrative changes. They were structured one way to meet the needs of the church

during a particular season. When that season changed, they were more than willing to adjust. Smart leaders realize they are not slaves to structures or traditions. Structures are designed to serve the season the organization is in. Along with this, when seasons change, personnel changes are sometimes necessary. I have never seen a multi-ethnic change process where new structures, policies, practices, procedures, and people were not needed.

The genius of the leaders in Acts 6 was that they were able to make significant organizational changes (vv. 2–6) while keeping the organizational vision fresh and maintaining high morale (v. 7). This is what we are shooting for in the asset-based philosophy and change process. It is our main leadership responsibility.

## BENEVOLENT DICTATORS

At the beginning of the book, I advocated that you not read this book alone, because the reality is that if any serious traction is going to take place, it will not be solely up to you. It will be up to God, you, and your decision-makers. I believe as a general principle that leading alone is not a great way to operate, mainly because you eliminate any possibility of practicing transformative leadership.

Some of you reading this may believe strongly in being a benevolent dictator. However, I guarantee that you will not succeed with



this change process by using that style of leadership. Leading the multi-ethnic change process like a benevolent dictator is treacherous territory and a road you don't want to take.

I know our American, individualistic mind-set is to go all “Lara Croft” or “Rambo” when we want to make things happen that we are passionate about. Like those action characters, you may get what you want, but in the end you will leave a lot of destruction behind.

We need to be much more communal in our strategies. We want to lead a process where everybody emerges with their dignities intact. Leading through teams is much more beneficial and way more effective. It will change your organizational culture and make multi-ethnicity a part of the normal way of doing things.

I am a big fan of college football, particularly the Ohio State Buckeyes. Ohio State is known to have one of the best marching bands around. They are led on the field by a high-stepping, show-stopping drum major. The drum major may appear to be operating as a lone ranger, but that is not the case. He or she has worked numerous hours to stay in step with the rest of the marching band. And the drum major follows the lead of the marching band director. Think of God as the band director, major decision-makers as the drum majors, and the rest of the stakeholders as the band. I have learned the value of this metaphor the hard way. My personality and leadership style naturally leans toward being a benevolent dictator. I have paid the “dumb tax” in all of my ministry stops of trying to lead multi-ethnic change by

myself. I have learned from my mistakes, and that is why I am taking the time to implore you to not go down the lonesome leadership road. Let me briefly share five of the dumb taxes I have paid.

First, I only have a limited set of tools in my skills toolbox. I can only fix the problems with the tools available, and if all I have is a hammer and the fix requires a saw, I'm stuck. This means advancing only through my own limitations and solving a narrow set of problems, leading to some change. But the change is more like addition. If addition is to become multiplication, I must find people with other tools and work with them, multiplying efforts.

Second, lonesome leadership leads to arrogance when humility is needed. I am thinking more highly of myself than I should when I think *all* the organizational answers lie with me. This type of prideful thinking leads to things being about me instead of the organization God has entrusted me to lead. Everything I do is done through healthy teams, where their strengths compensate for my weaknesses.

Third, at times I have set myself up for inevitable failure by leading alone. It unnecessarily limits my sphere of influence within the organization. Eventually, if I only depend upon myself, I will hit a glass ceiling. By effectively involving a team in the change effort, ideas immediately cause positive ripples across the organization.

Fourth, I have a bias. When examining a presenting issue, all assessments and conclusions are slanted toward my particular worldview. It is the reality of the human condition. A team with different

perspectives that regularly engages in robust dialogue helps bring full consciousness to what needs to be done.

Fifth, I have found that benevolent dictators eventually have no followers. Leading alone is lonely. The end of the road is often being put in an organizational silo and feeling personally isolated. Even if you could be successful leading alone, God made the Christian life to be lived in community, not isolation, and we need to acknowledge this as we lead the change process.

If you are reading this alone, stop and bring decision-makers into the loop—now! I am trying to save you a lot of wasted energy and heartache of trying to be the lone change agent. Your decision-makers have to be on board with both the philosophy and process if any lasting change is going to happen. Bringing them on board is your starting point.

## THE CRITERIA FOR CHANGE

Now that you understand that you need a team of implementation leaders around you, let's talk about the team itself.

### Recruit Transformative People

My first principle for multi-ethnic change is to get the right people around you. More times than not, it is the people at the top of the

organizational chart who are the cause of building a culture of either tweaking or transformation. Tweaking is fear-based change as opposed to Word-based and Spirit-filled. You cannot embark on this journey from the posture of being afraid to rock the boat. You might as well face the reality that implementing multi-ethnic change is a boat rocker. This is not a cruise ship outing; it's white-water rafting, and you will not be able to tweak your way to success.

We talked in chapter 4 about the camps people are in (bridge builders, advocates, cautious, neutralists, traditionalists). You can see how these camps might hurt or help sustain performance. When it comes to multi-ethnicity, if you have bridge builders and advocates in a majority of your decision-maker positions, things will take off. If you have a bunch of people from the cautious camp, you will probably go in the right direction but at an incremental, slow pace. If neutralists and traditionalists dominate, good luck! They cannot take the organization where it needs to go from a multi-ethnic perspective. When they were hired, they probably were not vetted for multi-ethnic awareness and experience. They may not even have the skill set to move forward. Organizational charts matter. If people at the top don't get it, the rest of the organization will not progress. It's like speaking Latin (a dead language) to people who only know English.

Rare is the situation where gutsy decisions do not have to be made about C-, board-, staff-, or director-level leadership when getting serious about the multi-ethnic change process. At times this could be a

tricky situation. You might have someone who is great at doing certain tasks but clueless on the multi-ethnic front. Because of this, a bottleneck develops around the person, holding up things. This is because implementing multi-ethnicity is a process of recalibrating the organization for meeting the organizational mission.

When we hire, we are pros at screening for reputation and whether someone is wise in the field for which we are hiring. The multi-ethnic criteria fits under the broader umbrella of being Spirit-filled, and that is much harder to screen for. Leadership is spiritual in our organizations, and if someone is not showing the ability to love a neighbor, it is a sin. Nobody would blink if someone was let go for a sexual moral failure, but try selling the idea of letting someone go for “benign” racism, and it will probably won’t go over well.

I hope that you don’t think I am being a control freak. I firmly believe in honoring people for their faithful service, even if they don’t quite understand multi-ethnicity. But I also believe Christian leadership is a sacred trust of God’s mission, and I know that to understand the significance of loving our neighbors as ourselves requires us to be daring. After all, Jesus made it the second greatest commandment and likened it to the first (Matt. 22:37–40). When you sense changes have to be made, I encourage you to be gracious but to not back down from making them. Each day of apathy, color blindness, and confusion leads to the existence of an organization beautifully equipped to serve an ethnic world of the past.

## Charge the Multi-Ethnic Hill

The second principle is being willing to die on the multi-ethnic hill. If you are not willing to get fired or resign over implementing multi-ethnic changes, then don't even start the process. When approached about being the main leader to initiate multi-ethnic change for the EFCA, I told the president I would take on the challenge for three years. When he asked why only three, I said, "Because neither of us knows if the EFCA organizational culture can handle the changes I am going to advocate for." I told him it will take me at least that long to figure out if the decision-makers are serious. I am a skeptic at heart and see better than I hear. I told myself, at the three-year point, I will either make a decision to resign, because I think the organization is not serious, or I will be all in. I am happy to report I am going on year six, and things are going well.

As I write this, one organization I am consulting with is making budget cuts. Their CFO doesn't understand the goal of becoming more multi-ethnic. When it is time to make cuts, he always aggressively recommends gutting the diversity programs. During one of the decision-making meetings, one of the senior vice presidents said point blank to the president, "If we gut the diversity program, I will resign," and he meant it to the core of his being. We all have hills we die on. You have to decide if you are willing to die on this one.

If you don't make it a hill to die on, you will end up doing more harm than good by employing "push hard, then pull back" tactics.

The ethnics who value diversity, bridge builders, and advocates will feel betrayed; the cautious, neutralists, and traditionalists will sniff out that you are not truly committed, and they'll continue to do the same old thing. It is the quickest way to kill organizational morale.

### Seek Outside Input

The third principle for multi-ethnic change is to include outside voices. I mentioned this in chapter 4. On the surface, it looks like a contradiction to the inside-out part of the asset-based philosophy, but it's not. I recommend you bring in outside voices is to make sure that your internal focus does not become a toxic environment.

And like in nature, when things become internally toxic, it has the potential to be a killer. This is especially true if this whole multi-ethnic concept is relatively new to your organization. You need something to kick-start new ideas and ways of thinking. If you don't bring someone from the outside in, it will leave you vulnerable to groupthink, an actual phenomenon that happens within organizations. Generally speaking, it is when normal organizational opinion is pursued and direction taken even when there is no evidence that it will be productive. There may be clear evidence of other options that will solve the presenting issues, but people just won't go there. A skilled outside voice that points out the elephants in the room, names the critical issues, and suggests solutions is just what the doctor ordered for the needs of the organizational soul.

However, the advisors can't be any outside voices. They have to be people who have your best interests in mind. They have to operate with tremendous amounts of grace and humility and be bold enough to challenge old perspectives. The issues they may stir up will probably be unpopular, but it is necessary for someone to point them out, because if not done, the long-term sustainability of your change process is at stake.

## GENERAL GAME CHANGERS

In the United States, the health of our faith is dependent on our ability to learn how to demographically coexist together. If we don't figure it out, we are putting the effective demonstration of the gospel in peril. Gone are the days where it is acceptable to be 100 percent white in a community with 60 percent people of color. To unbelievers who live in an integrated society, that looks like an impotent gospel.

The term *transformational leadership* is one I've alluded to throughout this book. Let me take time here to be more specific about what I mean. A simple way I define it is getting people to do what they won't naturally do. It is the game changer in the multi-ethnic change process. This type of leadership designs change in a way that brings optimistic energy. It is practicing thoughtful formation of Word-based, Spirit-filled, innovative strategies. I've been encouraging



you to put the right leaders in place. Their primary task is to bring transformation to the policies, practices, and procedures of your organization that will cause ethnic others to self-select to become a part of your mission. It is organizational rejuvenation at its finest.

Transformational leadership will be the glue that makes the value of multi-ethnicity advocated in Scripture stick across the organization. It is the ripples of the ripple effect. Personally, we are to practice what we preach; and corporately, we are to preach what we practice. This is the heart of building the multi-ethnic kingdom.

Because of racialization and ethnic borders, there will be constant, mainly subconscious, pushback. This is natural, because organizations have the tendency to choose the path of least resistance. Being transformational interrupts the slide toward comfort. It is to be myopically focused and always craving more effectiveness.

Every multi-ethnic, organizational transformation will have a unique story. With this in mind, let me suggest several transformational components that successful organizations possess for leading toward God's multi-ethnic kingdom. The name of the meal prepared may change so to speak, but they will all have these ingredients.

### **Major Decision-Makers Are Front and Center**

This is the practical application of a top-down philosophy. Probably the best way to symbolize just how important this is to the organization is for senior leaders to constantly advocate for the

change. Noticeable, vigilant communication from this group exponentially increases the chances of eliminating the dandelion effect.

Not only do they create and maintain the innovation stage, but they also actively work against the inertia stage. They spearhead successful change by providing backup and pushing for goals to be met. There is a clear communication plan to make sure that there are no mixed messages sent throughout the organization. Every multi-ethnic change process needs champions for the cause.

The larger the organization you lead, the more likely you already have effective multi-ethnic change going on that you don't have a clue about. I am amazed that although I have been on the job for six years, I am constantly unearthing EFCA churches that are effectively doing multi-ethnic ministry that I did not know about. When they find out about what I do and learn they aren't alone, it is always a powerful moment. It means a lot to them that their passion is represented at the senior level of leadership and that they are part of an intentional denomination-wide effort. It strengthens their will to keep pursuing God's call on their lives and makes them even more loyal to the EFCA. It galvanizes support and increases the potential for building critical mass.

There is no such thing as senior leadership advocating multi-ethnicity too much. Every audience, whether large or small, needs to know just how committed to multi-ethnicity you are. It will be the biggest factor in convincing the cautious, neutralists, and even some traditionalists to get on board and embrace the change.

In terms of up-front decision-makers, let's go back to Acts 6. Besides having a good reputation, being wise, and being Spirit-filled, there was also another specific qualification that, although not overtly spelled out, was huge. In verse 5, do you notice something about the names of those put in leadership? They are all of Greek origin.

This suggests two things. First, they definitely were not ignoring ethnicity in the leadership selection process. And second, the leadership selected were probably part of the offended Grecian Jew church membership. Please don't overlook this fact based on modern-day politics. Nowadays people call this "affirmative action." I'm not here to be political but biblical. I don't think this means that ethnic people should automatically be in charge of the change effort or that quotas should be implemented (revisit chapter 3). After all, being Greek was only one of the requirements. It was the other three characteristics that made being Greek the game changer. Following the principles laid out in Acts 6, you need people of color up front who get it.

What is "it"? It is racialization, ethnic border negotiation, your founding DNA, loving neighbors, dependency on God, and effectively negotiating organizational polity. Finding these individuals who are ethnic and willing to serve is akin to hitting a grand slam. But if you put people who are rented or zealous in lead roles and who do not get it, you can prepare for the worst. Their ethnicity won't save them from leadership disaster.

## There Is Either a Formal or Informal All-In, Zero-Tolerance Policy

At both Cincinnati Christian and the EFCA, I started off as a one-man department given the responsibility of rippling the multi-ethnic efforts across the entire organization. In my benevolent dictator slant, I actually negotiated this type of setup in the job description. It's not the wisest way to approach things.

Experience has taught me that not involving everyone leaves the impression that organizational diversity initiatives are optional. My leadership personality smacked right up against the wall of reality. A shift had to be made in order for me to be more effective. Instead of me being the major initiator, I now spend most of my time coaching the coaches, so to speak.

My EFCA responsibilities now reflect how much diversity of all kinds is an organizational priority. We expect it to be a part of everyone's job responsibilities in some form or another. I work side by side with our president, CFO, senior development officer, and national and international vice presidents to develop strategic action plans. The hope is to integrate all staff into the process.

Of course the expectation regarding the level of commitment looks different for an accountant than it does for a missionary or pastor. But the embracing of what we call our "all people" value is a denomination-wide expectation. Our desire is to touch all of our organizational members.

## They Are Not the French Army

In military circles, the French army is known more for their ability to tactically retreat than for impressive victories. Here is a given: You will spend a lot of effort planning and leading diversity efforts, and you will have some failures. Accept mistakes as part of the learning process instead of a signal to retreat to the ethnic status quo.

Leadership fatigue is a real threat. I've run across many people who have completed the dandelion process and decide to give it up. Keep tackling the hard-hitting presenting issues, since many times the first run will not be successful. But it sets you up well for the second or even third run. Examining failed past efforts and mistakes is important and tremendously helpful. Knowing what *not* to do is just as valuable as knowing what to do.

Of course, at some point, you might have to prayerfully make a decision. First, second, and third runs are to be expected. Forty-eighth, forty-ninth, and fiftieth runs are not. It may be that you find yourself in a position that it's time to "shake the dust off your feet" and move on (Matt. 10:14). Don't feel guilty if this is the case or if you feel like you have wasted your efforts. If one church, college, or nonprofit won't listen, trust God and find an organization that will and apply the lessons you learned in your new leadership call.

## They Measure Success as a Value, Not Simply as Numbers

Numbers won't tell the whole story. When I pastored at River of Life, sometimes I had talks with young men who were lured to enter the financially lucrative trade of drug dealing. "Pastor, why would I give up this money to go work for minimum wage?" was always a question. My typical response was, "Well, if it's about the money, don't. But if it's about living a purposeful life and following Jesus, you must. You have a life-changing decision to make." The ones for whom it was only about the number of dollar bills unfortunately always ended up either dead or in jail, and the ones for whom following Christ was a value, we worked to transition them into legitimate vocations.

Remember that we are framing multi-ethnicity as spiritual growth. If you move away from this, you may be tempted to implement measures that will build numbers but not cause people to become like Christ. I know of some organizations that simply buy integration with salaries and benefits packages. They may be multicolored, but they are far from multi-ethnic. And their people are not transformed.

I've stressed throughout this book that we reach success when we institute multi-ethnic change as a kingdom value. That is more times than not a reachable goal. Maybe not as fast as you would like, but you can get there. The problem with focusing on numbers is that if you draw the numbers without building the kingdom value, you have missed the whole biblical point. If it is only about the numbers, it is fool's gold. Numbers are not everything. In fact, when it comes to

multi-ethnicity, it may be the worst way to measure things. You may be in a particular geographic location that makes gathering numbers extremely difficult. Or your organization may have 95 percent neutralists and traditionalists within decision-making positions. In neither instance will you see numbers anytime soon. Focus on the value, and the numbers will come.

A better measure of success is the percentage of people who are getting it. That is one thing to definitely measure, probably as a soft metric. What are you doing to ensure that as many people as possible are getting it? If you are located in a geographical place that lends itself to ethnic diversity, the more people on your staff who get it, the greater your numerical success will be.

### They Broaden the Diversity Agenda

Part of being in a post-civil rights era is to avoid isolating race as the only part of personal identity relating to multi-ethnicity. This attitude will come to light when you implement a multi-ethnic change process. It is nearly impossible to separate race from social class and gender. People are going to want to know what the plan is for other forms of diversity. Broadening the agenda could lessen the emphasis on ethnic diversity. However, we are not dealing with reality if we ignore the calls for diversity in gender, social class, and even clarification of how to address the homosexual-identified lifestyle. I believe that it is just part of the territory for the twenty-first century.

My primary response is to frame the whole issue as “in and out” group dynamics. The “other” is the other, whether they are the other racial group, the other social class or sexuality group, or the other in the forms of age or disability. I have a training team whose primary function is to develop specific training for topics such as poverty, gender, and sexuality.

The one thing that binds all the elements of changing the ethnic game together is the level of determination of the leadership. Decision-makers should expect major pockets of resistance. There will be a variety of motivations for the resistance, but rest assured, it will be there. People naturally gravitate toward keeping the status quo.

Whether or not your organization moves forward will often simply come down to how determined and unified the leadership is. Determination involves setting the course and not wavering. It means painting a picture of a preferred future, communicating it repeatedly, and holding people accountable. When this is done, change happens.