

# MULTIETHNIC CONVERSATIONS

## GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

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# BEGINNINGS

## ACTIVATING THE CROSS-CULTURAL WORSHIP MODEL

The cross-cultural worship model (CCW) formulated by Barron Witherspoon Sr. describes relational movement along a continuum beginning with integration and maturing to reconciliation.



The continuum begins with simple integration, which Witherspoon described as “the conscious effort to bring different races into physical proximity for corporate worship and fellowship.”<sup>1</sup> As relationships form, they progress from integration to penetration whereby those involved gain “subsurface insight into the core values and felt needs of people from another racial heritage.”<sup>2</sup>

Within this phase, “two Christians, from different cultural backgrounds, invest in each other’s spiritual growth and well-being.”<sup>3</sup> These relationships foster new knowledge and understanding of God from a different cultural perspective. In these relationships, iron sharpens iron even more so than it does in our own affinity group alone, as we increase the width and depth of personal and relational exchange.

Honest engagement, transparency, and trust in these cross-cultural relationships lead ultimately to reconciliation, which Witherspoon defined as “a state of Christian symbiosis characterized by high trust level, candid communication and shared leadership.”<sup>4</sup>

The groups you will be facilitating using *Multiethnic Conversations* are designed to help enter into or continue in the penetration stages leading to relationships of reconciliation. The topics that are covered—from theology to history and cultural competence to considerations—are designed to spark thoughtful discussion. These are the types of conversations that don’t always come about naturally but leave you feeling like you know your brother or sister in Christ so much better than before. You may also find that you know yourself better as you come to examine perspectives you weren’t aware of before!

As you learn from one another in groups, it is our prayer that your shared insights will lead to lasting relationships that will build God’s kingdom. We also pray that you will develop a lifelong conviction in your heart that coming together across every barrier of human origin to function properly as a church is God’s will for us. Our Lord has called us out to become one new humanity in him (see Eph. 2:15). Through our evident unity, we will reveal Jesus to the world.

## FACILITATING A SMALL GROUP



Three common teaching methods are presenting, training, and facilitating. The key purpose of presenting is sharing information, training has the purpose of teaching students how to do something, and in facilitating, the idea is to bring out what the group members think and feel. Rather than the facilitator sharing new information, the group members are encouraged to share their experiences for the purpose of mutual edification.

The small group sessions for this study are to be conducted as facilitation sessions. Your primary goal as facilitator is to get and keep your group talking, using the materials in this guide as a prompt. As an outcome, your group members will begin to see matters of history, race, and culture discussed from various perspectives. Below are some things to remember as you facilitate.

### **Provide a Safe Place**

On the next page, you will find a basic list of ground rules for the session. Throughout this time, participants will be asked to share on topics that can be emotional or even painful. Group members sharing out of their life experiences will have the greatest impact, but some will be reluctant to share if your group does not have a safe and trusting environment. For this to happen, you must make sure that all members adhere to the agreed ground rules. Encourage group members to hold each other accountable and speak up when someone is violating the rules. In addition, use the time provided at the beginning of each session to emphasize specific rules if you see opportune areas.

### **Stay Neutral**

As a facilitator, you should share the *least* of anyone in the group. If group members sense that you have a particular bias, they will be less likely to share. Therefore, if you see a point that needs to be made, try to get one of the group members to make it by continuing discussion on a given topic. There will have to be a healthy balance because you have to share enough that your group trusts you and knows who you are. Just take care not to dominate the conversation or take sides on controversial topics.

### **Keep Everyone Participating**

Sometimes group members can be shy and reluctant to share. In these cases, your group is losing the benefit of their experience. Other times, a group member becomes quiet because his or her feelings have been hurt, or his or her opinions have been disregarded. You are at risk of losing this person from your group. You should be scanning the room to notice who has gone quiet and encourage that person to participate. You can do this by using your body language. For example: direct a question towards a silent person with an extended arm and palm up. You can also use questions that encourage each person to give a short answer. It is not recommended that you call on anyone by name, because you might risk embarrassing the person. If your prompts fail, don't hesitate to connect with a quieter individual outside the group. Also, please pay special attention to international perspectives and make sure they are included when topics trend Black/White.

## Be Prepared

Before you start the small group, review all material so you know where it is going. Consider your experiences related to the material and where your limited sharing can add to the class.

Enjoy your group and remember, facilitating is a learned skill. The more you facilitate, the better you will be.

## GROUND RULES



1. While others are talking, please let them finish without interruption.
2. Speak in the “I” form instead of “we,” “they,” or “you.” This helps us take responsibility for our feelings and accept them as being valid. See examples below:

“I believe . . .” rather than “They say . . .”

“I felt angry that . . .” rather than “She made me so angry . . .”

“I think . . .” rather than “Don’t you think . . .?”

“I felt hurt when . . .” rather than “He hurt my feelings . . .”

3. Limit sharing to no more than three minutes so that others in the group will be able to share.
4. Try to share from the heart as honestly as you can. It is good to cry, laugh, and be angry in the group without condemnation from others.
5. What is shared in the group stays in the group and will not be shared with anyone else.
6. When the stop signal is given, all conversation must cease.

## NOTES



1. Barron Witherspoon Sr., *The Fallacy of Affinity* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010), 67.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 73.
4. Ibid., 78.



## ABOUT THIS STUDY

*Multiethnic Conversations* is designed to enable both individual reflection and deep conversation in your small groups. Here are some practical tips for using this study in your group.

### **Structure Your Group Well**

Consider having two facilitators, one White and the other a person of color, in order to model unity within your group leadership. If at all possible, ensure that the group is diverse, with no one group making up more than 80 percent of participants and no one singled out as “the only one.” If necessary, consider joining forces with another church or ministry to make this happen. Group members should commit to the group and attend consistently in order to build trust with each other.

### **Meet Regularly to Discuss the Materials**

This could be weekly, biweekly, or monthly depending on the frequency your group typically meets. Weekly or biweekly groups are recommended to discuss one week of material at each meeting. Monthly groups could discuss up to two weeks of material at a time.

### **Allow Time for Discussion**

Allow at least ninety minutes for your group meeting. There is a good deal of ground to cover in each week, and you want everyone to have plenty of time to share.

### **There Is More Material in Each Week than You Can Discuss**

You will want to hit the highlights. There are suggestions of questions and answers for each week on the following pages. Based on what your group has talked about, you will have your own thoughts about which ideas are most important each week. Think through each week’s questions and topics you want to focus on and feel free to rework questions to meet the needs of the group.

### **Everyone Will Not Do All the Reading Every Week**

Although the reading is designed to be very manageable, sometimes life will get in the way. There are two main ways this is usually accounted for:

1. Individual accountability. If someone in the group doesn’t do the reading, he or she is asked not to participate in the discussion for the week. This ensures that group members

are not misinterpreting points in the discussions, which may frustrate other members of the group.

2. Provide a summary of the week as you begin. This will give everyone an overview to begin discussion. Each person can add to the discussion from his or her personal experience.

### **Use the Activities for Extension as Great Discussion Starters**

For some weeks, there are extension activities that your group can do for further learning. These activities can provide real-life insight beyond what is learned in *Multiethnic Conversations*.

### **Have Fun!**

When your group is having tough conversations, it is the relationships in the group that will bring everyone back to the table. Don't be strict about the schedule; allow some time for laughter and fellowship. It makes everything else work that much better.





WEEK 1

# WHY MULTIETHNIC?

## KEY QUESTION



Why pursue a multiethnic life and church?

## ANSWERS



- The idea of multiethnic church is firmly established in the Scriptures:
  - Jesus *envisioned* the multiethnic church (John 17:20–23).
  - Luke *described* the multiethnic church (Acts 13:1–3).
  - Paul *prescribed* the multiethnic church (Eph. 2:11—4:6).
- Demographic trends show the church will become increasingly irrelevant without a multiethnic witness.
- The Great Commission requires cross-cultural outreach to make disciples.
- Apart from ethnically and economically diverse relationships, we cannot grow in our understanding of others who are different from ourselves.

## ACTIVITIES FOR EXTENSION



One reason our experiences survey may tend to favor those like ourselves is the unconscious bias we hold concerning others. Unconscious bias relates to the implicit associations our mind makes automatically concerning groups of people. To learn more about this concept and to test yourself for unconscious bias, check out this website: [implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](http://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html).

Don't forget to discuss your results next week!

## AFTER WEEK 1: FACILITATOR ACTIVITIES

Congratulations on completing your first group session. How did it go? Write down three things you think you did well. These may indicate some of your natural strengths as a facilitator. You should continue to leverage these strengths in future classes.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now write down the one thing you could do to improve your effectiveness. Be sure to keep this in mind for next time.

\_\_\_\_\_

As you went through this first week with your group, you may have noticed some topics you want to know more about. Below is a list of helpful materials.

- *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith
- *Cross-Cultural Dialogues: 74 Brief Encounters with Cultural Difference* by Craig Storti
- “Africans in America”: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html)
- “Race—The Power of an Illusion”: [www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)
- *The Fallacy of Affinity: The Case for Cross-Cultural Worship* by Barron Witherspoon, Sr.
- *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* by Soong-Chan Rah

Knowing a little more about your topics will help you feel even more comfortable with your class. If you have not already, begin by reading *Divided by Faith*. This book provides a backdrop for much of what is discussed in the group.

### KEY QUESTION



Why is now the time for the multiethnic church?

### ANSWERS



- There is a high level of conflict concerning race in the media. If we remain segregated, the church has no credibility in speaking to issues of race.
  - People want to talk about issues of race together. The multiethnic church can provide a safe place for those congregations.
  - Christ-followers living in community can help heal issues of systemic injustice by understanding them and working together to build the kingdom.
- At a time when America is becoming increasingly diverse, the evangelical church is growing only in White areas. Without reversing this trend, the church will shrink.
- Communication across cultures often fails because of unintended hurts. The church can be a place of cross-cultural friendships that enable mutual understanding.

### ACTIVITIES FOR EXTENSION



Step away from your preferences for a week when it comes to the media. Primarily take in a more conservative or liberal station or site than usual, or read articles from a racially/ethnically focused news source (try [thegrio.com](http://thegrio.com) or [univision.com/noticias](http://univision.com/noticias)). Report back to your group any difference you notice, and whether you saw another side of any issue.



WEEK 3

## OBSTACLES TO DATE

### KEY QUESTION



What obstacles have prevented the development of the multiethnic church?

### ANSWERS



- The Great Commission has been understood as a call to missions only, but it is also a summons to our local churches to reach the cultures all around us.
  - Follow the example of the Antioch church in Acts 13, a church of all people to all people.
- Many denominations in the US began as multiethnic, but bowing to prejudice in society, they became separated by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.
  - Churches have developed to meet distinct racial and ethnic needs. The multiethnic church must include the needs and cultures of all.
- We have believed that there is an innate tendency or need to divide by race. Race is a social construct that was created to justify inequality. There is no reason that division by race needs to continue in our churches.

### AFTER WEEK 3: FACILITATOR ACTIVITIES



During week 3, you may have noticed some talkative members of your group become a little less eager to share. This is normal. Your group is starting to get into the meat of the course. This will bring up uncomfortable feelings that group members may not be willing to share with each other yet. It's time to redouble your effort at building relationships within the group.

*The single most important thing you can do in this regard is get your group together for some grub.* Consider this get-together a must do! Table fellowship was important in Bible times, and it

remains important for building relationships today! If you meet regularly at church, have a potluck gathering in someone's home. If you already meet in a home, take time to have dinner together, preferably outside your normal meeting time. This will give your group time to get to know each other beyond the comments they may hear in class.

Make sure everyone in your group can attend the gathering. Pay special attention to socioeconomic issues: Is there someone in your group who doesn't have transportation? Might someone be unable to bring something to the potluck? Figure out the best way to eliminate these issues so your gathering doesn't create additional barriers to sharing.

In addition to this get-together, you should create an environment conducive to relationship building. If possible, allow time for prayer requests. Encourage genuine sharing. Relate the discussion back to what you already know about your group members so they feel as though they are being heard.

As your group members become more comfortable with each other, you will break through to that next level of trust and sharing will become easy again. Keep at it!

### KEY QUESTION



What systemic issues of race in society contribute to divisions in the church?

### ANSWERS



- In slavery, Christ-followers prioritized the need to develop America (through unpaid labor) over the humanity of those who were enslaved. Slavery was viewed as patriotic and godly.
  - Racism is the enduring legacy of slavery that still impacts society today.
- In the United States, African Americans and Latinos, on average, have worse jobs, lower income, and poorer education than Whites. Asians fare better than Whites in terms of income, but require higher levels of education to do so. There are many contributing factors about these racial inequalities that need to be understood in order to build unity in the church.
- There is a distinct difference between the collectivist thinking of Blacks and the individualistic thinking of Whites. This fact can lead to very different perspectives on a variety of issues.



WEEK 5

# WHAT GOD IS DOING

## KEY QUESTION



How is God already working to unite his church?

## ANSWERS



- The number of multiethnic congregations nearly doubled between 1998 and 2010. The number now stands at around 14 percent of all churches. While there is still much work to do, this is a seismic change in a short period of time.
- God is using multiethnic churches to heal deep fractures.
  - The Habasha people of Ethiopia and Eritrea were involved in a protracted war. Now people from these nations are worshiping together as one.
  - The church is becoming a place where issues of race can be openly discussed in order to bring solutions.
- The Holy Spirit is changing hearts and minds to enable us to walk, work, and worship God together as one.

## ACTIVITIES FOR EXTENSION



Fast one day this week. Ask God to speak to you about how he is already working in your life to heal divides. Seek to know what else he wants you to do. Be prepared to share with the group.



WEEK 6

## HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

### KEY QUESTION



How should I respond?

### ANSWERS



- Walk together with diverse believers in the body in “humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2–3 NASB).
- Recognize that there are political divisions in the body. Bridge differences by developing deep, cross-cultural relationships.
  - Christians should be moving from surface relationships to ones of reconciliation.
  - As you deepen relationships, use the “drive-through” method (see p. 79) and the Matthew 18:15 principle (see p. 157) to avoid unintended hurts.
- Start to think about how the multiethnic Christian life should impact areas outside of your worship service. Who have you recommended for a job at your workplace? Who lives in your neighborhood? Do they all look like you?

### ACTIVITIES FOR EXTENSION



Begin to educate yourself about another culture. Take a trip to a museum or cultural site totally unrelated to your background. If you are not able to visit, learn more about the site online. Write down some thoughts and share them with the group.





WEEK 7

# HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH RESPOND?

## KEY QUESTION



How should the church respond to the call to be multiethnic?

## ANSWERS



- Multiethnic churches must account for the needs of all without showing preference for any one culture, class, or gender.
- Follow the seven core commitments of the multiethnic church (see p. 174).
  - Embrace Dependence
  - Take Intentional Steps
  - Empower Diverse Leaders
  - Develop Cross-Cultural Relationships
  - Pursue Cross-Cultural Competence
  - Promote a Spirit of Inclusion
  - Mobilize for Impact

## ACTIVITIES FOR EXTENSION



Practice giving up your preferences. This week, do your grocery runs at an ethnic grocery store (Hispanic, African, Chinese, etc.). Note how you feel at not finding certain familiar brands. Relate your experience to being an immigrant in a new country. Report to the group what you learned.



WEEK 8

# LIVING A MULTIETHNIC CHRISTIAN LIFE

## KEY QUESTION



How can I live a multiethnic Christian life?

## ANSWERS



- Live out the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Cor. 5:14–20), reconciling men and women to God through Jesus Christ, and reconciling every tribe, tongue, and nation within the local church.
- Follow the example of Christ. Step into relationship with the so-called “undesirables” in your community.
- Create SMART goals based on what you have learned in this study (see p. 208).
  - Reexamine your relationships with diverse others. Decide to intentionally deepen those relationships in a mutually edifying manner.
  - Think about the changes you would like to see in your local church in order to welcome all people. Respectfully engage church leadership on those matters.
  - Once you are finished with this week, pray with your group and discuss the change you want to see in yourself, your community, and your church.

## AFTER WEEK 8: FACILITATOR ACTIVITIES



Congratulations! You started this journey with a room of individuals and you are ending it with a group of friends. Now it’s time to disband.

The end of a group is more emotional than you may think. You have invested time and energy in building trust and camaraderie that were reinforced week by week. The last week will feel bittersweet.

Here are a few things you can do to make sure the gains from the group are sustained and everyone leaves feeling like these weeks were time well spent:

1. Make sure the suggestions made by the group in week 8 actually make it to church leadership and are acknowledged in some way. There are few bigger disappointments than putting thought and work into something that seems to go unnoticed.
2. Set up a time for a group reunion. It is often great to reconnect with the group three to six months down the line. This should be a get together for food, fellowship, and sharing of successes. Find out who has met their goals. Discuss changes at the church you are excited about. The prospect of a future meeting will soften the end of the study and give group members another incentive to work on their goals.
3. Now that the group sessions are over, you can connect with group members in a different way. Have one-on-one meetings with those you wanted to get to know better. You can now share your thoughts more freely.
4. Leverage members who were enthusiastic about the group in future projects. I'm praying this won't be the last time you facilitate this study. Maybe one of your group members can co-facilitate next time?

Your time and commitment to this small group shows that you are a true advocate for unity among God's people. Thank you for your hard work to make this conversation a success!