

Multiethnic Church

A six week course for small groups to help develop healthy, integrated churches!



The church family at Sundon Park Baptist Church

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The Racial Justice Group is delighted that **Malcolm Patten** (*Senior Pastor of the Blackhorse Road Baptist Church, east London*) has written this insightful and challenging six week course for small groups to help develop healthy multicultural congregations. It is a timely publication.



Throughout the country many Baptist churches are now being compelled to cultivate churches where culture and ethnicity matters, and where each culture and ethnic group is fully affirmed. For those churches about to embark on this multicultural journey, and those already on it the Racial Justice Group recommends this resource as an aid to assist growth in this challenging area of cultivating congregations which desire to reflect the richness and diversity of the Kingdom of God.

Wale Hudson-Roberts (*BUGB Racial Justice Networker*)



Introduction

We live in a multiethnic world and the Western world in particular has become increasingly diverse over the last 60 years. This increase in diversity is reflected in many of our churches where it is common to find people of different ethnic backgrounds, differing languages spoken, and different ways of looking at the world. This often gives a new lease of life to a 'bring and share' church lunch, but much more than that, it presents us with a wonderful opportunity to build an inclusive, prophetic, worshipping community that demonstrates the love of God at work. After all, Jesus said that people will know that we are followers of him because of the love that we show one another ([John 13:35](#)). When we are so different yet are able to live, serve and worship together in harmony, this is a tremendous witness to an often fragmented and broken world. At a time when there is so much controversy over immigration, and conflicts between people of different backgrounds make the headlines in the news every day, a healthy integrated church is able to engage in its mission to its local community and the wider world with conviction and credibility.

There are four convictions regarding multicultural churches that undergird this course:

- 1** We can all experience personal spiritual growth as we listen and learn from people of different ethnic backgrounds to our own. The principle here is that none of us are called to follow Jesus on our own. We are always called to follow Jesus as part of a community of fellow disciples, learning from one another, encouraging one another and, at times, rebuking one another. In this way we grow together as disciples of Jesus. This principle recognises that learning to put ourselves into the shoes of another from a different ethnic background can considerably enhance our understanding of God's word and appreciation of one another.
- 2** Our churches are strongest when people of every ethnicity present are empowered to contribute and participate. One of the most difficult things that a church with people of differing ethnic backgrounds will face is the challenge of diversifying the leadership and the many roles people take up in church life. However, just as we believe that we can grow personally as we encounter people from differing backgrounds, so we believe that our churches can grow spiritually as we allow the different perspectives and approaches to church life to come to the fore.

- 3** Multiethnic churches are needed to reach multiethnic communities with the love of God. Cross-cultural mission occurs when people of one particular ethnic background cross over to reach out to people from another ethnic background. This is happening all around the world and God has used, and continues to use, cross-cultural mission to reach people with his love and grace. Multiethnic churches present a new and exciting opportunity to reach out in two ways. First, they may have a head start in being able to understand the cultures and customs of ethnic communities in their neighbourhood. Second, multiethnic churches are often the kinds of churches that second generation immigrants are looking for. They have grown up in this country across two cultures and a church that is multiethnic is a natural place for them to feel at home.
- 4** Multiethnic churches delight, honour and glorify God. Many people who are part of multiethnic churches testify to the joy and delight of being part of a diverse community. Problems will inevitably arise; misunderstandings happen and prejudice rears its ugly head from time to time. But when it is good, it is very, very good, and the Bible says that when brothers and sisters live together in unity, there the Lord bestows his blessing ([Psalm 133](#)).

This resource is primarily designed for use in a house group setting, but it can be adapted to be used personally or as part of a programme for the wider church. Proceed prayerfully! This resource will challenge you to be sacrificial. It will challenge you to let go of old ways and embrace new ways. It will challenge you to make space in your church life together to empower others amongst you to share their God given gifts for our mutual benefit and enrichment. It will challenge you to explore your own prejudices, unlearn ungodly attitudes and practices and learn ways that honour God. Whilst sacrifice is by nature painful, it will lead us as individuals and as church communities to better reflect the image of God in our midst and be better followers of Jesus in the local communities in which we serve.



Session 1:

A vision for building healthy multiethnic churches

Aim:

To discover from the Bible God's intention that his church be made up of people from different ethnicities.

Opener

Jesus said, "Is it not written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?"

Jesus in Mark 11:17 (Quoting from Isaiah 56:7)

'A multicultural church is one that knows and accepts that it is a community of difference, and that values this difference rather than fears it. A multicultural church knows that it is a community *because* of the rich diversity that exists, not in spite of it. [A multicultural church] recognises that when people accept, respect and value their ethnic and cultural differences, they are better equipped to move forward together in creative and life-enriching ways.'

Katalina Tahaafe-Williams

'[Multicultural churches] need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, of achieving [spiritual] unity without cultural uniformity, and cultivating among its citizens both a common sense of belonging and a willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences.'

Adapted from a quote by Lord Bhikhu Parekh

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

The Revd Martin Luther King, 1963

'I looked again. I saw a huge crowd, too huge to count. Everyone was there—all nations and tribes, all races and languages. And they were standing, dressed in white robes and waving palm branches, standing before the Throne and the Lamb and heartily singing: Salvation to our God on his Throne! Salvation to the Lamb!'

Revelation 7:9 (from 'The Message')

Q Which of these quotes stands out for you most and why?

Reflection

I went to visit my local church. When I walked in I could hear the music group warming up. It was strange as I first heard familiar tunes but then different rhythms and sounds. People welcomed me, and as I looked around before the service began proper, it seemed there were people of different ages and from different walks of life but also people of different ethnic backgrounds. What struck me was that they intermingled as they talked to one another. People seemed to know each other's names and seemed pleased to see each other. It was as if they spent time together in other ways and in other places. As I looked around, it seemed that the people who were obviously leaders of the church and the people in the music group were people of differing ethnic backgrounds. It made it interesting to wonder how this Sunday service would go. I noticed as I looked around that the décor wasn't uniform in a corporate kind of way. There were pieces of artwork hanging of differing styles and the colour scheme in the building did not make it obvious what the dominant culture of this church would be. The books on the church bookstall reflected authors of different genders and different ethnicity. I wondered whether the church had tried to be too politically correct!

All suspicions were gone when the service started with confidence and enthusiasm. People of different backgrounds participated in the service and it was clear looking around this congregation that despite their ethnic diversity, everyone in the service felt at home in this church, that their participation was valued in this church, and that they were able to worship freely in this church. There were men in suits, and some in jeans and t-shirts, ladies with hats and young people with dyed hair. We sang loud songs and quiet songs, old songs and new songs. We sang new songs to old tunes and old songs to new rhythms. The prayers in the church took us around the world, people leading in prayer for issues or parts of the world which they knew lots about. A man prayed in his own language; I didn't know exactly what he was praying, but in a way I did (and I knew that God understood every word!) and was able to join in the 'Amen' at the end. I reflected on the fact that I don't always hear (or agree!) with some of the prayers that are mumbled in English! I noted from the newssheet that they used different people to lead worship and to preach week by week, and that this allowed different styles to be reflected in the services. I figured this could make it difficult for some who like things the same, week by week, but was tremendously exciting for people like me who likes to be surprised by the Holy Spirit when I wander into church on a Sunday.

As the last song was being sung I looked at my watch and was surprised how the time had passed quickly. People seemed less concerned if the service finished a little early or a little late because they were more concerned about what was happening here than what would be happening elsewhere later that day. There was a sense that this was the highlight of their week, that they were building something together, and that this journey that they were on following Jesus together was unfolding week by week before their very eyes. More than that, they knew that they were all a part of it, and God was in their midst.

- Q** *How does this experience of someone walking into a church service strike you?*
- Q** *Do you think this is good picture of what a healthy integrated multiethnic church would look like?*
- Q** *Why/why not?*

Bible exploration: Mark 11:15-17 and Revelation 7:9

If Jesus were to act today in the way that he did in the temple in this bible passage he may well find himself being arrested for a breach of the peace! He would certainly have some explaining to do, which makes it obvious to us that he is far from happy as he overturns tables, scatters money and birds, and obstructs the way of the merchandisers. So why was Jesus so upset?

We sometimes use this passage to argue that we shouldn't have jumble sales or table-top sales in church, but there is a more important reason why Jesus was upset. There is a clue here in the fact that Jesus quotes from [Isaiah 56:7](#): 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.' [Isaiah 56](#) anticipates that people from every nation will come to covenant with God's people and worship the God of Israel. This is not something new in the Old Testament. When Abraham was called by God in [Genesis 12](#) he was called to lead a people who would be a blessing to all the nations around them. [Isaiah 56](#) continues in a similar vein anticipating that people of every nation would come to worship the God of Israel.

We also need to understand that the temple in Jesus' day was a segregated place. The outer courtyard was the place where *any* who worshipped the God of Israel could gather. However, only the Jews could pass through into the inner courtyard, and then only Jewish *men* could pass through into the colonnades around the Priest's court. The point is this, in the temple as it was in Jesus' day, the outer courtyard was the only place where the Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel were allowed to gather. Yet this outer courtyard was the place where all of the moneychangers and those selling animals for sacrifice set up their stalls. Once that space has been filled up with the money changers and those selling birds and animals for sacrifice, where do believers of other ethnic backgrounds (the Gentile believers) go? While the Passover was taking place, they couldn't worship at the temple because the space was completely overrun with the stalls, animals and birds. They had been effectively pushed out and excluded from the temple at this festive time for the space where they worship had gone. This is the reason why Jesus was so upset. Instead of his father's house being a house of prayer for all nations, it had become a house of prayer for the privileged few. It may well have been convenient for the Jewish leaders to locate this market place in the courts of the Gentiles. After all, sacrifices were needed and at the time of Passover demand would be great. But we should not underestimate the extent to which the decision to allow this trading to go on in the outer courtyard was dismissive of the Gentile believers who had converted to Judaism. They were being ignored and pushed out. Their right to participate in the worship at the temple was being treated with contempt. No wonder Jesus was so indignant and challenged them so strongly about it.

When we are thinking about the potential for our churches to be multiethnic communities, we need to remind ourselves that this is God's heart for his people. From [Genesis 12](#), to [Isaiah 56:1-8](#) the doors are thrown open to people of any and every nation to covenant with God's people so long as they are ready to covenant with Israel's God. This open and inclusive gesture is echoed in the declaration that 'my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations' ([Isaiah 56:7](#)) which Jesus quotes when clearing the temple in [Mark 11](#). This vision of a multicultural gathering of believers becomes evident in the New Testament and culminates in the vision of John in [Revelation](#).

In [Revelation 7:9](#) we find an amazing glimpse of one aspect of the new heaven and the new earth as it is revealed that people from every nation, tribe, people and language will stand together to worship the Lord Jesus. When there is so much strife and conflict in our world today, this vision of God's people standing together whatever their ethnicity or nationality is a challenge for us as to whether we can begin to see that level of integration fulfilled in our churches today.

Questions

- Q 1** *What stands out to you from these bible passages that you had not noticed before?*
- Q 2** *Why do you think the temple rulers were not too worried about the Gentiles' space being taken up with the money changers and animal sellers?*
- Q 3** *What does [Isaiah 56](#) teach us about God's heart for people of all nations?*
- Q 4** *Have you ever felt that you were not welcome in a church?*
- Q 5** *Reflecting on [Mark 11:15-17](#), what obstacles may there be in your church that may make it difficult for people from other ethnic backgrounds to feel at home?*
- Q 6** *Thinking about [Revelation 7:9](#) what do you think are the benefits of worshipping together with people from different ethnic backgrounds to your own?*



Session 2:

Who am I?

Aim:

To reflect on how your life has been shaped by people from different ethnic backgrounds to your own.

Bible exploration: Ethnicity in the Bible

Sometimes it is said that the Israelites in the Old Testament were a 'pure' race, and that mixed marriage was prohibited. But in fact that is not the case. Although the Israelites generally shared common ancestors, they were also a mixed bunch, united by their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob rather than by their parentage. They were to maintain exclusive worship of God rather than be exclusive as a people group. Many people think that mixed marriages were forbidden in the Old Testament but on the occasions when it was condemned, it wasn't that they feared marriage between those of different ethnic backgrounds but they feared marriage between those of different faiths which would compromise their devotion to the God of Israel.

Here are three examples of how the Israelites in the Old Testament became multiethnic:

1 *Joseph and Asenath*

Genesis 41:50-52: In this example, Joseph is now the second in command to Pharaoh in Egypt. He has settled in Egypt and marries an Egyptian woman called Asenath. He has two children called Manasseh and Ephraim, who become 'fathers' of two of the twelve tribes of Israel. As a result, these two tribes have a mixed heritage, 50% Israelite through Joseph and 50% Egyptian through Asenath.

2 *The Mixed Multitude*

Exodus 12:38: In this example we read that when the Israelites were liberated from Egypt other people left with them, described in scripture as a 'mixed multitude'. Who were included in this mixed multitude? We do not know exactly other than they were clearly people who were not Israelites. They are likely to have been other ethnic groups who were also being treated harshly by the Pharaoh, especially those from the Upper Nile area of Cush (Sudan in today's world) who we know to have travelled to the Nile delta region to find work. In Numbers 12:1 we discover that Moses had married a second time to a woman from Cush. These people not only escaped

from Egypt with the Israelites, but many of them integrated within the nation of Israel and became a part of them.

3 The women in the lineage of Jesus

[Matthew 1:1-17](#) lists the ancestors of Jesus. There are four startling inclusions in this list, Tamar (v3), Rahab (v5), Ruth (v5) and Bathsheba (v6). The story of Tamar is found in [Genesis 38](#) and Rahab in [Joshua 2 and 6:22-25](#); suffice to say they were both Canaanites. Ruth was a Moabite ([Ruth 1:4](#)) and Bathsheba was a Hittite ([2 Samuel 11:3](#)) which shows something of the ethnic diversity within Israel as a nation.

What is evident from these three examples is that the Bible clearly shows that the people of Israel and the heritage of Jesus include those of various ethnic backgrounds. What we can deduce from this is that multicultural churches stand in a grand tradition from the very beginnings of the nation of Israel that is embracing of all and of any who wish to covenant with the people of God.

Q 1 *What stands out to you from these Bible passages that you had not noticed before?*

Q 2 *Who was the apostle Paul?*

Q 3 *Using these scriptures: [Acts 16:37](#); [Acts 22:3](#); [Philippians 3:4-6](#); first describe Paul's identity and then consider your own:*

	<i>Paul's</i>	<i>Yours</i>
<i>Place of birth</i>		
<i>Citizenship</i>		
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
<i>Key influences</i>		
<i>Religious / political persuasions</i>		

Your story

Use a blank sheet of paper to sketch out the journey of your life. Include the place where you were born and grew up, maybe you went into work or university, and maybe you travelled for those things. Did you meet people of different ethnic backgrounds along the way? Include places you have lived in along the way and where you are now. Consider the cross-cultural experiences along the way – friends, neighbours, work colleagues, television programmes, food you enjoy, films you have watched, or places you have visited on holiday.

- Q 1** *Were there particularly exciting times or times of growth?*
- Q 2** *How have your encounters with people of other cultures affected your life positively?*
- Q 3** *How have your encounters with people of other cultures affected your life in a negative way?
Were there any particularly difficult times or times you were treated badly?*
- Q 4** *How have you tried to deal with your negative experiences?*



Session 3:

Stereotyping and scapegoating

Aim:

To think about how we sow the seeds of prejudice in our lives

Opener

English stereotypes:

English people are very punctual.

English people dress in a strange way, for example, wearing socks with sandals.

English people love their pets more than other people.

English people eat a big breakfast in the morning with sausages, bacon, eggs, toast and baked beans.

English people like second-hand shopping.

English people are always drinking tea.

From the internet

Q *Do you agree with these stereotypes?*

Q *Would you add to them?*

Q *If you are not English, can you list stereotypes that you often come across of your nationality?*

Real life story: George

The term 'stereotyping' was originally used in the field of printing, where it referred to a solid plate or mould which would be difficult to recast once it had been cast.

Phil Clements and John Jones (authors)

George (not his real name!) is an older white man who is part of a multiethnic church. When asked how he thinks the church has changed as a result of people from different ethnic minorities coming along he observed that people come to church later than they used to. He said,

"Well I do think the lateness of people walking in is to do with their culture because they are very laidback time wise in their country."

When asked which cultures he had in mind he replied,

"I think it's Jamaican and West Indian. I have two friends who are Jamaican and they are punctual ones... one more punctual than the other, but I know one of them gets absolutely horrified when people are late."

He then went on to say,

"We have West Indian people next door, but they are completely different, they are so quiet, they are not outgoing people. Very quiet, very nice, you never know they are there. Although they are Jamaican, again they are very different personalities to a lot of other Jamaican people I know."

(Note: This is based on a real life situation but names and some details have been altered to protect people's anonymity.)

Q 1 *What stereotype does George have in his mind of Jamaican people?*

Q 2 *How does George deal with the fact that the Jamaican people he knows best do not fit the stereotype?*

Q 3 *What does that teach us about the nature of stereotypes?*

Bible exploration: John 4:1-42

It's interesting to note that at the beginning of the passage in [John 4](#) an observation is made that the Pharisees were accusing Jesus of baptising more disciples than John the Baptist. The Pharisees were clearly jealous of Jesus becoming so popular. So jealous in fact that they were blaming Jesus for things which he hadn't done! As [John 4:2](#) makes clear, it wasn't Jesus who was baptising but his disciples. Because the Pharisees disliked Jesus, they looked for opportunities to find fault and to exaggerate what they considered those faults to be.

As we enter into the main story in this passage, we find at the centre of it a woman who seems to have attracted all the prejudices that could possibly be thrown at a person!

- » She was disliked by the Jews because she was a Samaritan; Samaritans in the eyes of the disciples of Jesus were heretics and trouble makers;
- » She lived in a patriarchal society and, given that she has had five husbands and is now with someone she is not married to, it is evident that she has been abused by those who ought to have cared for her;
- » as a result she is now shunned by those who ought to have protected her.

We can imagine the way people used her as a scapegoat:

One Jewish man says to another, "Don't travel the Samaria road as people are always being robbed, it's the Samaritans you know."

One Samaritan lady says to the other, "I know my daughter has become pregnant but she has been led astray. It's people like 'her' who have made my daughter like that. It never used to be like this around here, in our day those things never happened."

What is amazing in this bible passage is that after Jesus had talked with the woman, he then took the disciples into the village and they spent two days there experiencing hospitality from these 'Samaritans'. It is likely that this is the first time that these grown men have actually chatted like friends with Samaritans, entered their homes or eaten their food. It would have been a real life learning experience for them and undoubtedly, their prejudice towards Samaritans would have reduced dramatically. When we read in [Acts 1:8](#) that Jesus told the disciples that they would be witnesses in Samaria there were, in fact, already people there whom they had met and made friends with. The people in this Samaritan village would have been delighted to meet them again and hear what had happened to Jesus, the Messiah.

It is important for us to realise that it is part of our sinful human nature to generate stereotypes and subsequently scapegoats. This happens within church communities as well as outside in our everyday lives. Often people look for others to blame when they themselves are going through hard times or other people appear to be gaining more advantage than they are. 'They are taking our jobs' or 'They are taking over' are the type of comments often heard regarding immigrants, particularly when as a country we are going through times of austerity.

The antidote for this sinful aspect of our humanity is by getting alongside people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and getting to know them better. Jesus didn't see the Samaritans as part of the 'they-people' but as individuals. When we spend time with people we begin to understand each other and grow in our mutual respect for one another. The best way to do this is to work on mutual tasks together. We can reach out to people and intentionally invite people into our homes, or invite them to become part of our house group or music group, or flower arranging team at church. We have to be intentional about this or it simply won't happen.

When we begin to act intentionally in this way we will begin to discover ways in which we have stereotyped and made scapegoats of others. We all harbour prejudice and so should not be surprised to find it within ourselves. But it is a good thing when we find it within ourselves because it shows we are learning and growing in our Christian lives. We can repent, confess our sin, and grow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

However there is more to it than this for we will also discover that when we do diversify our friendships and groups in church, that our own lives are enriched as a result. One of the ways we learn and grow is through seeing life through the eyes of another, especially someone of a different ethnic background to our own. In [Ephesians 3:17-19](#) the apostle Paul prays for the Christians at Ephesus that they may, together with all the saints grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. We all want to know Christ better, and understand his love for us more deeply. One of the ways I can do this is by building relationships with other Christians who are from different ethnic backgrounds to my own.

Questions

Q 1 *What stands out from this bible passage that you have not noticed before?*

Q 2 *How do you think people stereotype you?*

Q 3 *What stereotypes exist in your church or local community?*

Consider these quotes:

'It's easy to blame [the] traffic jam when you're late and in a hurry.'

Toba Beta (Indonesian author)

'As the feeling of being disadvantaged increases then the tendency to find someone to blame, a scapegoat, becomes more likely.'

Malcolm Patten

'It's too easy to criticize a man when he's out of favour, and to make him shoulder the blame for everybody else's mistakes.'

Leo Tolstoy (War and Peace)

Q 4 *Have you ever been a scapegoat? How did it feel? How did you react?*

Q 5 *Have you ever made a scapegoat of someone else?*

Q 6 *All societies have people-groups that they like to blame for their society's mistakes or misfortunes. Can you think of the scapegoats in our society today? Why do you think people often define such groups in ethnic terms?*

Q 7 *When stereotypes lead to us treating people differently we call this discrimination or racism. Do you think there are people-groups within your church or community that are not offered the same opportunities as others?*



Session 4: Deepening fellowship

Aim:

To encourage you to develop meaningful friendships with people from different ethnic backgrounds to your own.

True story: 'Give us friends!'

The landmark 1910 World Missionary Conference caught the imagination of the churches in both West and East. Most of the 1,200 representatives were from North America and Northern Europe. However seventeen of them were from the 'Global South' and that included Bishop V S Azariah from India.

Notably, one of the best-remembered speeches of the entire 1910 Conference at Edinburgh was that of Bishop Azariah who appealed for friends. As a delegate of that historic conference, the Indian Bishop spoke on the theme of the 'Native Church and Foreign Mission'.

Bishop Azariah addressed the gathering saying, "I do not plead for returning calls, handshakes, chairs, dinners and teas as such. I do on the other hand plead for all of them and more if they can be expressions of a friendly feeling, if these or anything else can be the outward proofs of a real willingness on the part of the foreign missionary to show that he is in the midst of the people to be to them not a lord and master but a brother and a friend... we ask for love. Give us friends."

Q *How easy do you think it is to build friendships with people of other ethnic backgrounds to your own?*

Bible exploration: Ruth 1:1-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Everyone loves the story of Ruth! It begins with a famine that caused a family to leave their homeland and migrate to Moab where they could make a living and settle for a while. Despite only intending to go 'for a while' they ended up settling there for longer than they imagined. Tragedy struck as the father of the family died leaving Naomi a widow with two sons but happiness came as they married local women, Orpah and Ruth. Ten more years passed by and further sadness when the two sons, still not having produced heirs, both died. Hearing of a revival of fortunes back in her home town of Bethlehem Naomi decides to trek back.

On the journey Naomi tries to persuade Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab. Eventually Orpah is persuaded to stay. But Ruth is having none of it! She insists she will not leave Naomi alone and with a beautifully poetic outburst, memorably recorded for us in verse 16, she persuades Naomi to allow her to accompany her to Bethlehem.

So here we have, from the pages of the Old Testament, a story of tragedy and tenderness, immigration and migration, mixed marriages and childless marriages, and then a beautiful covenant commitment between an older Israelite woman and a younger Moabite woman that, come what may, they will stick together and journey together in life, in faith and in hope.

If you are familiar with the rest of the story found in the book of Ruth then you will know how they settle in Bethlehem, and God provides food and protection for them and how Ruth eventually marries Boaz and bears a son, Obed, who was to become the grandfather of King David. It is an example in scripture of God 'working everything for the good of those who love Him!' ([Romans 8:28](#))

In [1 Corinthians 1:9](#) Paul speaks of us being called together into 'fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ'. The use of the word fellowship here signifies a coming together of people for a purpose, in this case, to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and serve him in the world.

Deepening fellowship together in multicultural churches requires us to commit together as people from differing ethnic backgrounds and journey together for the sake of Christ in our world. It assumes a love covenant towards one another in a similar manner to that which Ruth made to Naomi. This means that, in Christ, we are committed to one another in the continual process of building a healthy, integrated, multiethnic church, regardless of the ups and downs that will come our way. Sometimes hard things will be spoken, conflicts will arise or difficult decisions will need to be made. Things will need to be discussed, diverse voices listened to and wisdom prayerfully sought. We can only endure this if we are committed to one another in and through the love of Christ. It becomes a powerful statement of our intentions therefore when we are able to look one another in the eye and say that because we are brothers and sisters in Christ we will be friends.

Questions:

- Q 1** *What stands out from these Bible verses that you have not noticed before?*
- Q 2** *Why do you think Orpah returned home and Ruth pledged herself to Naomi? How do you think this example reveals the emotional strain of having family across different nations?*
- Q 3** *Thinking about Ruth's commitment to Naomi, what examples of good healthy relationships or friendships between people of different ethnic backgrounds are there in your church?*
- Q 4** *What do you think are the difficulties of building cross-cultural friendships? How do you think they can be overcome?*
- Q 5** *What do you think are the benefits of building cross-cultural friendships?*

Practical task:

Consider something you could do over the next couple of weeks to deepen your cross-cultural experience. For example, you could:

- » Invite someone of a different ethnic background to your own to come and share a meal with you
- » Visit a church which has a very different cultural feel to your own
- » If there is one nearby, offer to help at a local refugee project to help you empathise with people who have been forced to leave their own country
- » Do some research into the ethnic diversity in your own town or city and share that with your group or your church.



Session 5:

Developing leaders

Aim:

To help you encourage and empower people of different ethnic backgrounds to participate more fully in the life of your church.

Opener

'I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will!'

Charlotte Brontë in Jane Eyre

Onye ji onye n'ani ji onwe ya

(He who will hold another down in the mud must stay in the mud to keep him down.)

Igbo proverb quoted by Chinua Achebe in The Education of a British-Protected Child:Essays

'If you are looking for an example of drawing out and building up unnoticed strengths and resources within and around people and communities, then perhaps a prime example is the story played out by Jesus in the Gospel accounts identifying and calling twelve of the most unlikely individuals and intentionally growing them as his disciples. We see them journeying with Jesus, observing as he teaches, heals etc, and then we see him releasing them to do the same.'

Gale Richards

Q Which of these quotes stands out for you most and why?

True story: Monica's story

A Pastor of a multiethnic church tells the story:

"We needed a new church administrator. Although it would be down to the Church Meeting to vote a new administrator into position, the leadership discussed what possibilities there were amongst the people of the church. What became evident to me very quickly was that this leadership team, made up of white men, were only coming up with names of other white men to nominate for that position. So I threw in the name of Monica. The reply was unanimous, "Who is Monica?" Monica is a black lady, originally from an island in the Caribbean, who had been a member of the church for over ten years. We left the issue for prayer and consideration.

"The next leadership team meeting came around and we spent a little time again considering possibilities for a new administrator. The same names were raised again, so I asked, "What about Monica?" The reply this time was, "Is she able to do the job?" My reply was that she was a committed Christian, had been a midwife for many years, was secretary of her allotment club and worked in a voluntary role in administration for a local Christian charity. I also mentioned that she was retired and had some time on her hands. It seemed to me she was eminently equipped to do it. We left it for further prayer and consideration.

"When the next leadership team meeting came around and the issue was raised again the reply was different, "We've been thinking maybe Monica would be a good choice." Monica was duly nominated to the church meeting, was voted in unanimously and is proving to be an excellent administrator."

This story exposes a major issue when seeking to develop a healthy integrated multicultural church: we are creatures of habit! If we only develop meaningful friendships with those similar to ourselves then how can we hope to discover others, from a different ethnic background to our own, who have the potential to fulfil a particular role in the church? It is also the case that if we have imagined a role in church life being fulfilled in a particular style, which may relate to a person's cultural upbringing, we may only perceive people from a particular cultural background fulfilling that role.

For this leadership team, existing friendships with those similar to themselves and preconceived ideas regarding what a 'good' church administrator would look like had led to them having too narrow a focus on who would be most suitable. This effectively created a glass ceiling in the church structures for anyone beyond that. It will always take longer to develop a more integrated leadership than it will to appoint people who fit the mould, but fortunately this leadership team was fully committed to developing an integrated multicultural church and was able to work through those issues and empower somebody different. This has proved to be for the strengthening of the team, and the church, as a whole. The Pastor of this church observes that since appointing Monica as the church administrator, "she has gone about the role in a different way, but in so doing has strengthened the church by encouraging more people of different ethnic backgrounds to participate, has strengthened our pastoral care by making us more aware of the customs and needs of those from other cultural backgrounds, and has brought differing perspectives to resolving some of the ongoing issues in church life."

Q *If you have leaders in your group, invite them to tell the story as to how they came to be leaders in your church.*

Q *Has anyone else in the group previously been a leader in another church either here in the UK or in another country?*

Bible exploration: Acts 6:1-7 and Acts 13:1

It is sometimes said that a vision for change often emerges when there is a widely recognised complaint. Here in Acts 6 it is clear that amidst the amazing growth of the church in Jerusalem a complaint arises from among some of the Gentile Christians that their older people were not getting the pastoral care they deserved. More to the point, the older people amongst the Jewish Christians were being well looked after and so prejudice was beginning to rear its ugly head. It is likely that the reason this happened was that the Jews already had effective systems for caring for their elderly widows which they carried over into their new church environment. However, this meant that the Gentile believers were being left behind.

It's worth observing that even amongst the oft-imagined 'super spiritual' atmosphere in the early church, very ordinary human problems were coming to the fore and that this particular problem had an ethnic element to it. If left unaddressed it would undoubtedly fester and lead to increased resentment between these two ethnic groups in the early church. This problem required a bold and wise solution.

It is to the credit of the 'Twelve' that they handled this issue so well. We can notice three things about what they decided to do:

- 1** They brought all the disciples together (Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians) and invited them to discern those amongst them who would be really good at the pastoral care of their elderly folk. Because of the work that they were doing, they did not presume that they would know who would be the best people to do this particular task.
- 2** They made only one stipulation, that those appointed should be 'full of the Spirit and wisdom'. There was no 'tokenism' here. Tokenism is when we simply appoint people to a task because of ethnicity or skin colour without any concern about their ability to accomplish the task. There was instead a very confident assumption in the minds of the apostles that there would be Gentile believers in the congregations there who would meet the criteria (even though at this point they didn't know who they may be!).
- 3** The outcome of this process was a good team of Gentile believers who had so far gone unnoticed in scripture and reflected the ethnicity of those they were preparing to serve. They would understand any cultural sensitivities of those widows and although, on the face of it, this solution could be seen to undermine an aspiration to integrate the believers, clearly this compromise proved fruitful for everyone.

Now turn over a few pages to [Acts 13:1](#). We are now in Antioch a few years later. The 'prophets and teachers' listed are Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul. Who were these people?

- Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus ([Acts 4:36](#));
- Simeon who was called 'Niger', literally 'the Black man' which indicates his origins from Africa;
- Lucius from Cyrene in North Africa;
- Manaen, possibly a slave of Herod's father, a Palestinian Jew;
- Saul of Tarsus, a Jew from Asia Minor, (Turkey in today's world).

As can be seen from this list, it represents an ethnically and culturally diverse team of leaders appropriate for leading a church in one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. Antioch itself was divided into five sectors – the Greek, Syrian, Jewish, Latin and African sectors and therefore any real hope of reaching the people of Antioch and modelling what a true Christian church should look like depended on the leadership reflecting people from these diverse backgrounds. As a result of their intentional approach to developing an integrated leadership they would be able to become more effective in reaching every corner of this city. In this way, their inclusive strategy enabled the gospel to reach more people and the church to grow.

What we have seen so far shows how ethnically diverse the early leadership of the church was becoming. However, we can also see in the Bible that the early leadership of the church was becoming increasingly diverse both ethnically and in terms of gender. So in [Acts 18:26](#) both Aquila and his wife Priscilla (Jewish Christians) were involved in teaching Apollos about the Lord, leading to the apostle Paul describing them both as ‘fellow-workers in Christ’. Paul goes on to say that not only he, but ‘...all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.’ ([Romans 16:4](#)). Another example is Lydia, a Gentile convert to Judaism, who was converted to following Jesus in response to Paul’s message and became host to the new church in Philippi ([Acts 16:14, 40](#)).

It is remarkable how that as the good news about Jesus spread from place to place and new churches were springing up in every town and city, just how diverse their leaders were and how this enabled the church to continue to grow.

Questions:

- Q 1** *What stands out to you from these passages that you had not noticed before?*
- Q 2** *How does the process of appointment that the apostles used compare with the process of appointment of leaders in your church?*
- Q 3** *How well does the ethnicity of the leadership of your church reflect the different ethnicities present in your congregation? Why do you think that is?*
- Q 4** *Are there people in your congregation that are not being encouraged to use their gifts fully in the life of your church? What may be holding them back? How can you encourage them?*
- Q 5** *How do you think the diversity of the leadership of the early church enabled the church to continue to grow?*



Session 6:

Communities of hope

Aim:

To inspire you to foster and nurture a multiethnic church life that will draw others to Christ.

Opener

To remind you, this course has enabled you

- » to see what the Bible says about God's desire to see healthy integrated multiethnic communities (session 1)
- » to consider what influences have made you the person you are (session 2)
- » to examine the way we stereotype people and make scapegoats of people and how that encourages prejudice and racism amongst us (session 3)
- » to see the benefit of developing friendships with people of different ethnic backgrounds than your own (session 4)
- » to appreciate the benefit to the mission of the church if we take the time to develop a diverse leadership (session 5).

Q *As we begin the last of this series of studies, think for a moment what you have learnt, or have been reminded of, so far, and consider how it will change the way you live.*

Q *Decide on one action point that you are willing to commit yourself to.*

Q *Share this with your group.*

Real life stories:

Look through some national and local newspapers, or news websites or apps, that are available and search out some stories that have a specific ethnic or cross-cultural element to them, whether for good or for bad. Be aware of how the different newspapers may present these stories.

Share your findings with your group.

Bible exploration: Ephesians 2:11-22 and Acts 16:11-40

In [Ephesians 2](#) the apostle Paul declares that Christians of different ethnic backgrounds are bound together in Christ because of the cross (verses 14-16). In session 2 we looked at [Mark 11](#) and how Jesus was angry with those who were occupying the only part of the temple of where Gentile believers could gather. Here Paul says that Christ has 'destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility' (v14). He is clearly referring to the wall in the temple which separated the outer court from the inner court, in other words, the wall that segregated Gentile believers from Jewish believers. That wall bore an inscription that 'no Gentile must pass on pain of death'. But Paul is emphatic that such a division is rendered redundant in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ and that both Jewish believers and Gentile believers are fellow citizens and members of God's household (v19). He describes this in terms of the two becoming one (vv14 and 15) and the same sentiment is expressed in [Galatians 3:28](#) 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

This does not mean that our ethnic background is no longer of any relevance. Paul was very conscious of his own identity as a Roman citizen ([Acts 16:37](#)), a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee ([Philippians 3:5](#)). Our ethnicity and cultural upbringing are all an important part of who we are and why we think and act in the way that we do. There will undoubtedly be aspects of who we are that we want to change, but there are also aspects of who we are that we cannot and should not want to change and must cherish and value. When people say "I don't see colour, I treat everyone the same" it is often a way of saying "I don't want to see colour because then I have to cope with living with someone who sees things and does things differently to me. So long as I pretend we are not different then I can assume that everyone sees things the same way that I do." Our ethnic differences must not separate us or lead to prejudice between us. The fact that we can recognise and cherish our differences, and value and cherish each other, should enable us to become more truly and fully the church that God longs for us to be.

In [Acts 16](#) we read of the founding of the church in Philippi. There are three parts to this. First we read of Lydia, a Gentile convert to Judaism, becoming a follower of Jesus who happens to be a successful business woman (verses 13-15). Second, we read of the slave-girl (likely of Greek origin) who followed Paul around and was eventually delivered of her evil spirit by Paul (verses 16-18). Third, we read of the Jailer (likely of Roman origin, maybe a former soldier) and how the miraculous earthquake which blew open the prison doors led to his conversion (verses 25-34). At the end of the chapter we find Paul and Silas meeting in Lydia's home with 'the brothers and sisters' before they left Philippi and there in that first meeting of the church in that place the reality of [Galatians 3:28](#) was happening before their eyes. They would be very aware of the differences between them in terms of their background, status in life and upbringing, but they were together in Christ: of one heart and mind.

Multicultural churches can be beacons of hope in multicultural communities. This is because they are places:

- » which model the power of God to bring unity in diversity
- » where you can learn about other people, places and cultures
- » where you can improve your confidence to relate to people from different ethnic backgrounds to your own
- » where stereotypes and prejudices can be overcome
- » where justice can be pursued as we begin to understand how people are marginalised in our society
- » where reconciliation can take place as repentance and forgiveness are expressed
- » where non-believers will be drawn to Christ by the love and fellowship they see before their eyes

In a world where there is so much ethnic tension and conflict, it is not only vital that local churches are themselves reconciled communities, where Christians of differing ethnic backgrounds can live and worship together in peace, but that such churches bring hope to the communities in which they are situated so that the world may see we are disciples of Jesus ([John 13:35](#)). Healthy, growing multicultural churches are a wonderful witness to the power of the gospel to transform lives, transform relationships and transform communities.

Questions:

- Q 1** *What stands out from these bible passages that you had not noticed before?*
- Q 2** *Why do you think Paul used the image of destroying the wall of the temple to describe the new status of all believers?*
- Q 3** *Do you think there are barriers in our local communities or churches that need to be broken down?*
- Q 4** *Looking at the list of reasons why multicultural churches can be beacons of hope, which of those reasons excite you the most? Why?*
- Q 5** *As you come to the end of these studies what one thing would you want to pray for regarding your own growth, and what one thing would you want to pray for regarding your church?*



Leaders' notes

These notes are provided to help you, as the group leader, make the most of this course and ensure that the members of your group find it to be a fruitful experience that will enhance their appreciation of, and participation in, what God is doing in and through multiethnic churches.

This course is primarily aimed at churches which already have a significant proportion of people present who are from different ethnic backgrounds. However, it will also be particularly useful for churches that are situated in ethnically diverse communities and who are hoping to reach out into their communities for Christ. This course will help people have a vision for what kind of church you can become and prepare you for that.

Five tips to help you lead your group well

First, pray for your group and this course that they are about to begin. This seems an obvious point but it is surprising how many group leaders forget to pray for their group!

Second, be aware that this material may provoke strong reactions from some members of your group. People may say that talking about ethnic differences will encourage conflict or that your church doesn't have a problem with this because you treat everyone the same. The truth is that when people from different ethnic backgrounds take time to get to know each other better, it reduces prejudice, it reduces the potential for conflict and it enables everyone to be valued and appreciated as members of your church. So don't be afraid of this, but be prepared to listen intently, challenge a person's preconceptions, and patiently work through difficult conversations. We all harbour prejudice to some extent so expect aspects of this course to challenge everyone in some way. A good preparation for this course would be to read through a gospel and focus on how Jesus challenged the preconceptions of people and in this way helped them grow.

Third, be aware that people may share with the group painful experiences from the past. In a multiethnic church there will be people who have experienced racism and abuse to a lesser or greater extent. If people wish to share their experiences encourage the group not to move on too quickly, but hear and accept what they are saying and affirm the person willing to speak. You also need to be aware that people may have had experiences which they don't want to talk about and you may need to be sensitive to that too.

Fourth, encourage people to think about practical things they can act on to grow personally and to enable your church to grow in this area too. This course is about applying the bible to our everyday lives and when we do so it will always be a fruitful experience for us.

Finally, consider how you can prepare for each group session in advance. For example, session one will benefit from you bringing a diagram of the temple in Jesus' day to the group so they can visualise how the Gentile believers were discriminated against. In session two you can complete the exercise requiring you to sketch out your own journey in life and the cross-cultural encounters along the way. If you do this before the session you can use it as an example for others. In session six it will help the group to bring some newspapers and invite the group to search through them for stories. Thorough and thoughtful preparation will ensure each group session achieves its potential!

Feedback

Thank you for using this course and those of us who have prepared it are praying that it may be a blessing to your group and to your congregation. When you have completed the course, please take the time to offer some feedback to us. This will help us improve the course and encourage others to participate.

- 1 Briefly describe your church in terms of size and ethnic mix.
- 2 What worked well?
- 3 What didn't work so well?
- 4 Were any sessions particularly good or particularly bad? Why?
- 5 Would you recommend this course to another church that you know?

Please email the answers to these questions to: whudson-roberts@baptist.org.uk



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