

STRONGER TOGETHER

A Gospel Lens on Unity



MARIA GARRIOTT

Stronger Together
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“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

John 17:20-23 (NIV)



STRONGER TOGETHER

A Gospel Lens on Unity

Bible Study & Discussion Guide



Study 1

The Gospel, Unity, and You

Open

1. If you are participating in this study with others, introduce yourself. Share why you are interested in growing in your understanding of Christian unity. What do you hope to gain from this study?
2. Self-reflection is vital in our quest to grow in maturity and unity. How does paying attention to one's own thoughts, behaviors, and emotions help us apply Scripture to life?

Reflect on Scripture

The Great Commission: Matt. 28:18-20

1. Jesus's final command to his disciples is called the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. How does the Great Commission relate to the idea of unity?
2. What challenges do you feel as you read this text? What encouragements are embedded in the passage?

Jesus Prays for Unity: John 17:20-23

This passage is pivotal in understanding the importance of unity. On the eve of his crucifixion, like a high priest in the Old Testament, Jesus intercedes with the Father on behalf of the people.

1. Why is it significant that Jesus compares our unity as believers to his unity with his Father and the Spirit?
2. What promises do we find in this passage?

Discuss the quote from this chapter: “The best testimony to the truth of the gospel is the quality of our life together. Jesus risked his reputation and the credibility of his story by tying them to how his followers live and care for one another in community.” (Christine Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us*)

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Keep a journal to record your thoughts about this study. Use your journal to respond to this lesson.
2. When did you first become aware of different cultures in childhood? For our next meeting, share your first interactions with someone of a different culture or background.

Study 2

The Gospel Frees Us

Open

How would you define “the gospel” or good news about Jesus to someone who had never heard of him?

Consider

1. What are some practical applications of Luther’s statement that we are simul justus et peccator (simultaneously justified and sinners)? How do we see this in our lives?
2. People are often uncomfortable talking about racial or ethnic bias because the discussion can bring up feelings of guilt, anger, or shame. Do you feel any of these emotions? How does the gospel address our guilt, anger, and shame?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following verses, which summarize the gospel.

Rom 8:1 No Condemnation for those in Christ

1. How does this verse apply to my daily life? To my struggle against selfishness and sin?
2. How does it apply to my pursuit of cross-cultural understanding and unity?

God Justifies: Rom. 8:31-34

1. What is the basis for my freedom from sin and condemnation?
2. Why should it encourage me that Jesus is advocating and interceding for me at this moment?

I Don't Care If You Judge Me: 1 Cor. 4:3-4

1. Paul says he doesn't care if people judge him. Do you? Why or why not?
2. What does Paul mean by saying that though his conscience is clear, he might not be innocent?

The Righteousness of God: 2 Cor. 5:21

1. After reading these verses, how would you define the gospel?
2. How would my life be different if I fully believed the gospel right now?

The gospel flies in the face of our desire to “do it my way” or earn our way into God’s favor. It is bad news because I must admit that I am so sinful and broken that I can’t do enough good works to impress God or deserve to have him love me. But it’s supremely good news because it means God sees the depth of my sin yet loves me anyway as I turn to him in faith and repentance!

- We live in daily repentance and faith, returning again and again to the gospel. Gal. 3:3 says, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”
- Our sanctification is an ongoing application of the gospel. Sanctification is also by grace, not by works. As we keep in

step with the Spirit, we are gradually being transformed and more like what God intended and declares us to be.

Colossians 2:6 says, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him.”

Activity: Preparing Our Hearts to Engage

These questions were adapted from material from Wellsprings Consulting to encourage deeper self-understanding, Christ-understanding, and care for one another. They are helpful to review before any challenging meeting or interaction. Review the list and discuss why this tool might be especially helpful in intercultural relationships. This is adapted from Shari Thomas and Tami Resch’s book *Beyond Duct Tape*.

Preparing Our Hearts

READY TO REPENT • READY TO WAIT • READY TO LISTEN

1. READY TO REPENT

- Am I ready to see and repent as God reveals my prideful heart and judgmental thoughts?
- Am I ready to see and repent of my junk and my idolatrous God substitutes?
- Am I ready to see and repent of wrong motives that drive my interactions?

When my heart refuses to admit and repent of my sin, I will see myself as better than others. My heart will be smug and condescending, which will weaken my effectiveness through unloving, self-righteous words and attitudes.

2. READY TO WAIT

- Is my spirit quiet so I can be a non-anxious, safe presence?
- Do I believe that God (and not me) will rescue the person I'm meeting with?

When I don't assume a posture of waiting on God, I will be impatient to "fix" others.

3. READY TO LISTEN

Listening to God:

- How is God pursuing me? How is God pursuing the person I'm meeting with?
- Am I looking and listening for God to show up?

When my heart refuses to listen to God, I will frantically feel the need to provide an answer. I will feel the weight of responsibility upon my shoulders to be wise.

Listening to Others:

- Am I ready to hear this person's story and ask follow-up questions, rather than talking about myself and my experiences?
- Do I see this person as truly created in the image of God with value and beauty?

"Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable."

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. When (and why) is it hard for you to apply the gospel to your own heart in conversations about race and culture? Write about this in your journal.
2. Make a Top Ten List of what the gospel is and a Top Ten List of what the gospel is not. For example, the gospel is based on grace, not my works. The gospel is not limited to people of a certain ethnic background.

Study 3

The Gospel Unites Us

Open

In this study, we'll discover what the Bible teaches about unity. How did Jesus demonstrate a commitment to unity among diverse people? Even though his ministry took place within Israel, how did he reach out to people of different cultures? What biblical passages do you know that deal with the unity of all believers regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, and other barriers?

Cleansing the Temple: Mark 11:15-18 and John 2:13-17

1. What do these passages about the cleansing of the temple teach us about God?
2. Do you share Jesus's anger when people are excluded from worshipping God on the basis of race, ethnicity, or social standing? Are there aspects of your worship traditions or practices that might inadvertently contribute to such exclusion?

Jesus's First Sermon: Luke 4:16-27

1. Zarephath was a Phoenician city near Tyre and Sidon. What was Jesus's intention in highlighting the widow in Zarephath? What does this passage reveal about Jesus?
2. How does Jesus's first sermon illustrate his plan to save people from every people group? How did his audience react? Have you considered the multicultural aspect of these verses before?

Activity

Your "lens" influences how you see yourself, others, the church, the world, and the Bible, not by our culture, the media, etc. But we are more complicated than that!

Understanding what has shaped our lens and our cultural beliefs is an important first step in pursuing unity across cultural differences. List some of the factors that influence the way you see the world.

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Watch one of the "Race and the Church" videos at <https://raceandthechurch.com> and respond in your journal. Share what you learned with someone.
2. Visit a historical site or museum where you can learn about a different culture or ethnic group.

Study 4

Jesus, the Barrier Breaker

Open

In this study, we focus on how Jesus intentionally ministered to those outside the Jewish mainstream.

Consider

Jesus's disciples were reluctant to go to Samaria and other areas where many non-Jews lived. What places in your community might you be reluctant to visit?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following verses.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: John 4:1-42

1. Women usually went to the well to draw water early in the morning, not at midday. Why might she have come at this time?
2. What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?
3. How might crossing a cultural barrier bring about transformation in your life?

Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman: Matt. 15:21-28 (parallel passage is Mark 7:24-30)

1. We know that Jesus is not cruel or racist and that God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34, Rom. 2:11). Why do you think Jesus initially ignores this woman, then draws her out?
2. What do we learn about people in this passage?
3. Read these passages in *The Message*, a Bible paraphrase. How does the author translate Matthew 15:24?

Bible scholar Dr. Jack Beck writes that Jesus came to the region of Tyre and Sidon not only to heal this woman’s daughter but also “to show that even in a place that had produced the likes of Jezebel, extraordinary faith could be found.”¹ Where (and among what people) do we sometimes not expect to find faith?

Activity

Discuss the differences between race and ethnicity.

Race	Ethnicity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The idea that humans are divided into groups based on inherited physical differences such as skin color, hair, etc.• Socially imposed, hierarchical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A group that shares a common, distinctive culture, language, religion, language, or traditions based on historic geographic origins and shared experience• Related to culture; often confused with nationality, but not the same

“Race becomes institutionalized in a way that has profound social consequences on the members of different groups.”²

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. People from the dominant Anglo culture in the U.S. have been known to say, “We don’t have a culture—not like you all do!” What does this statement reveal? How would you respond to it?
2. View and discuss this video clip, “Your English is perfect!”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ>

Study 5

Culture and God’s Story

Open

How would you define culture?

Activity

Let’s consider the concept of culture. Read through each of the following examples and check whether each observance feels “right” or “wrong” in your experience.

Is It Culturally Appropriate in Your Church?	Y	N
1. When we meet for discipleship, my friend is usually 30 minutes late.		
2. The pianist/organist plays music quietly during the pastor’s prayer.		
3. People nod their heads but don’t speak out loud to affirm the preacher’s points during the sermon.		
4. Church services last one hour.		
5. People wear their “Sunday best” to church.		
6. People worship with their bodies—clapping, swaying, or dancing in place.		
7. For a men’s activity, the guys went to a shooting range and then had a beer at someone’s house.		
8. Real wine is served at communion.		
9. Almost all songs are written by people of White European ethnicity.		
10. The sermon illustrations/quotes frequently cite people of other races.		

- 1. What questions did this exercise raise for you? What insights?
- 2. Which questions sparked Scriptural defenses, or objections, in your mind?

Reflect on Scripture

The Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (CFRR) paradigm answers the questions people across all cultures ask: How did it all start? What went wrong? How will it get fixed? How will it end? These questions form the structure of much storytelling, whether in movies, novels, or folk tales.

Read and respond to the following verses, which correspond to the Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration paradigm.



Creation

God Creates Humankind: Gen. 1:26-31

Chosen in Him: Eph 1:4-5

- 1. What are the implications of being created in the image of God?
- 2. What did God provide in creation? Do we still have these needs and longings?

Fall

No One Righteous: Rom. 3:10-12, 23

All Creation Affected: Rom. 8:22-23

For a full account of the Fall, read Genesis 3.

1. How has the Fall affected creation? How has it affected us?
2. List some of the consequences of our sin.

Redemption

Christ Redeemed Us: Gal. 3:13

A Redeemer: Rom. 3:23-25

1. Can you restate this in your own words?

Restoration

A New Heaven and Earth: Rev. 21:1-5

The Heavenly Jerusalem: Rev. 22:1-5

1. The Apostle John describes the vision God shows him of the new heaven and earth. What do you see about creation, about humans, about God, and about our relationships with God and each other?
2. As we look at the four stages of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, which stage(s) do we live in? How might this affect our relationships across race, ethnicity, and culture?

Revelation shows the fulfillment of God's plan to gather his people and live with them in the "new heaven and new earth." God restores our relationship with him, with each other, and with creation. Author J.R.R. Tolkien captures this idea in *The Return of the King* with the phrase "everything sad is going to come untrue."

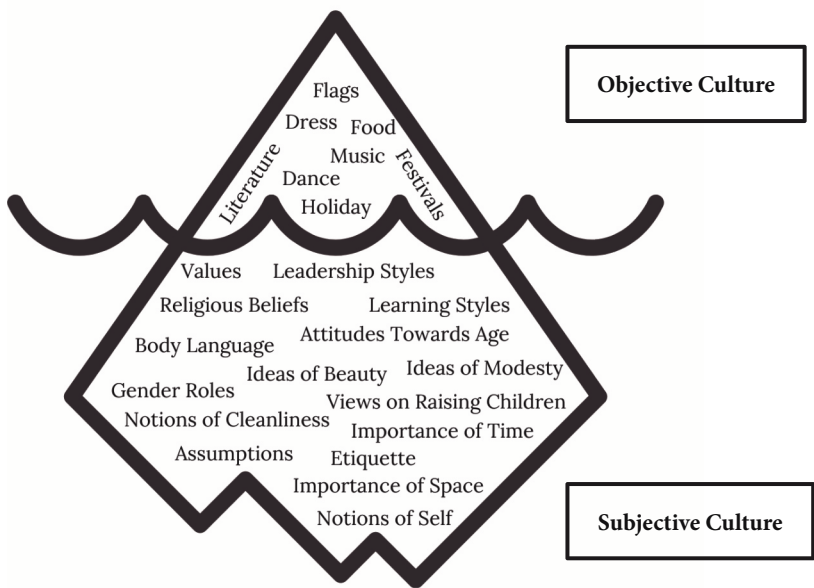
We live in the period between Jesus's first coming and his second coming, when he will make all things new. We are justified sinners

who live in a broken world that is being redeemed. Amazingly, God uses his people in this process of re-creation.

The Cultural Iceberg

We often don't realize we have a culture until it's changed or challenged. The first step in growing in cultural intelligence is learning more about one's own culture.

Many of our preferences are shaped by culture and determined by our experiences, backgrounds, ethnic group, geographical region, denomination, etc. Culture is like an iceberg: we generally only see what's above the surface (objective culture). Food, holidays, dress, music, and literature are easily observed and enjoyed by those outside the culture. Subjective culture is less obvious, but just as important. For example, how does this culture view childrearing? What are its ideals of beauty? How are the aged viewed? The less visible, subjective aspects of culture make crossing cultures more challenging. Discuss the Cultural Iceberg image below.



Ideas for Follow-Up

Watch a foreign movie and be alert to different aspects of subjective culture that differ from your own.

Study 6

Culture, Creation, and Fall

Open

The Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration view helps us have a gospel perspective on life, our world, and culture. How do these stages impact our relationships with God, ourselves, others, and the world?

Reflect on Scripture

Read these passages on Creation and complete the chart below.
God Creates Humankind: Gen. 1:26-31 Chosen in Him: Eph. 1:4-5

CREATION			
How we view SELF	How we view OTHERS	How we view GOD & the BIBLE	How we view THE WORLD

Re-read these passages on the Fall and complete the chart below.

No One Righteous: Rom. 3:10-12, 23
All Creation Affected: Rom. 8:22-23

IMPACT OF THE FALL			
How we view SELF	How we view OTHERS	How we view GOD & the BIBLE	How we view THE WORLD

Activity and Reflection

Dr. Kenneth Clark and Dr. Mamie Clark were African American psychologists known for their 1940s experiments using dolls to study children’s attitudes about race. Their expert witness testimony became part of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that found “separate but equal” segregation in public schools unconstitutional.

The Clarks showed children two identical dolls: a White doll and a Black doll. The experiments exposed the negative effects of racism and the internalized racist beliefs of the African American children. Social scientists are still reenacting the Clarks’ doll experiment. Watch and then respond to the Clarks’ doll experiment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkpUyB2xgTM>.

- Did this contemporary reenactment surprise you? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the children answered this way?
- Where do the children get these messages?
- How does culture send these messages?

Study 7

Culture, Redemption, and Restoration

Open

In this lesson, we'll look at how Redemption and Restoration impact our relationships with God, ourselves, others, and the world.

Consider

1. As we grow in sanctification, we become more aware of God's holiness and our sinfulness. How does having a larger view of the cross help us bridge that gap?
2. Does the principle of simul justus et peccator (simultaneously justified and a sinner) turn your heart back to the gospel in gratitude? How does it help us not wallow in guilt?

Reflect on Scripture:

Read these passages and complete the chart below.

Redemption and Culture

Christ Redeemed Us: Gal. 3:13

A Redeemer: Rom. 3:23-25

IMPACT OF REDEMPTION			
How we view SELF	How we view OTHERS	How we view GOD & the BIBLE	How we view THE WORLD

Cultural misunderstandings, racism, and prejudice are a result of the Fall. Redemption begins our process of sanctification as the Holy Spirit shapes us.

How does redemption impact our ability to be united across race, culture, ethnicity, and other divisions? How does redemption impact our cultural intelligence?

Restoration and Culture

A New Heaven and Earth: Rev. 21:1-5

The Heavenly Jerusalem: Rev. 22:1-5

IMPACT OF RESTORATION			
How we view SELF	How we view OTHERS	How we view GOD & the BIBLE	How we view THE WORLD

“Jesus’s vision for the climax of human history lauds the importance of ethnicity. (Rev. 7:9-20). . . . It includes people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. . . . At the end, we do not find the elimination of difference. Instead, the very diversity of cultures is a manifestation of God’s glory.”¹

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. In your journal, or with a friend from the group, share a time when you found yourself stereotyping someone from a particular ethnic group, region, or occupation.
2. When did you see, experience, or become more aware of racial bias this past week? Either your own experience, someone else’s, or in a news item?

Study 8

The Early Church Meets Culture

Open

How did the early church move from being a largely Jewish sect observing Jewish traditions to becoming a global, multicultural gospel movement?

Consider

How had God prepared the Jews to understand that his kingdom would embrace other nations as well? How had Jesus also shown this?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following verses.

Phillip and Ethiopian: Acts 8:26-40

1. What does this passage show us about God's love for all nations?
2. In what ways was the Ethiopian an outsider?

The Overlooked Widows: Acts 6:1-7

1. What possible solutions might the apostles have considered? What were the benefits of appointing qualified leaders from among the Greek-speaking believers?
2. How might our churches “overlook widows”—believers who are different from us ethnically or culturally? Who might these people be? How could we address this wisely?

Peter and Cornelius: Acts 10

1. God needed to show Peter the vision three times for it to sink in. Why? What concepts were so hard for Peter to accept? Why might Luke have included multiple retellings in Acts 10 and 11?
2. How does Acts 10:28 dovetail with Ephesians 3:1-6? What is this “mystery” God has revealed?

Jesus, our perfect representative, fulfilled the Mosaic law, so Christians don’t need to conform to ethnic Jewish life. God shows Peter that Jesus has broken down the dividing walls, uniting Jew and Gentile.

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. The apostles had to recognize their own cultural biases and deficiencies to ensure others were enfolded into the church and their needs met. Why is it helpful to think about our own culture as we consider our interactions with others from different cultures, backgrounds, races, or ethnicities?

Study 9

How Diversity Benefits the Church

Open

What blessings might we forgo when we fail to create an environment that welcomes others from different racial, ethnic, and economic groups?

Consider

What do you see as most beneficial about a diverse church? What aspects of diversity feel most challenging to you?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following verses.

One Body, Many Parts: 1 Cor 12:12-27

1. How does Paul stress the unity of believers?
2. What do we learn about God in this passage? About people?
3. Paul writes that if one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it. What would this look like in your church or community?

One in Christ: Eph. 2:11-22

Jews considered the divide between Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) too wide to cross. Yet the Cross bridges this divide!

1. Paraphrase this passage in your own words.
2. What do we learn about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in this passage?
3. What do we learn about people?

To picture the fully finished image of God you have to picture all of humanity unified in diversity under the lordship of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20) ... in our role as prophets proclaiming God's truth to one another and the creation in our words and deeds; as priests continually dedicating all of ourselves to God in our words and deeds; as royalty exercising dominion over the creation in our care to the glory of God.¹ —Dr. Irwyn Ince, *The Beautiful Community*

Activity

The first step in growing in cross-cultural intelligence is to examine one's own culture. The following categories from *Resilient Ministry* identify several cultural domains that we may juggle regularly. Use this list to reflect on your own culture. Share your reflections with your group.

1. Personal—What expectations did your family have for you concerning education, sports, or social/political involvement?
2. Generational—What generational divisions do you see in your church?
3. Geography and demographics—What are some cultural

characteristics of your region?

4. Economic status—Have you ever felt conspicuously different in a social situation because of your income or lack of it?
5. Socioethnicity—Have you ever felt like you didn't belong because of your ethnicity or race?

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. What diversity exists in your community? A few internet clicks to research local census information might open your eyes to people groups you might not have noticed. Is my church reaching these people?
2. To learn more, read Chris Sick's short book, *Tangible: Making God known Through Deeds of Mercy and Words of Truth*.

Study 10

Race, Redemption, and the Multiethnic Church

Open

The Bible puts forth the goal and expectation of a unified church. Do most American churches reflect the diversity of their neighborhoods? How can churches create a welcoming environment for all?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following verses.

One in Christ: Gal 3:26-29

In Galatians, Paul expounds on the “mystery” that Jews and Gentiles are united in the gospel. In this passage, he proclaims the unity and equality of several groups that were culturally and socially considered very unequal.

1. How did Jesus demonstrate this revolutionary principle in his ministry? Can you think of specific examples?
2. Does this passage mean we should be colorblind? Does our identity in Christ cancel out our ethnic and gender identities? Why or why not? Can you think of Scriptures to support your answer?

Theologian Esau McCaulley, a professor at Wheaton College, points out the flaws in a “colorblind” theology. He writes that in this Galatians passage, Paul shows his “missional flexibility” as he relates to both Jewish and Gentile culture.

The colorblind reading of Gal 3:28 is most flawed because it doesn’t take the context of the book of Galatians seriously enough. The question that runs from one end of Galatians to the other is, Who are the rightful heirs to the promises made to Abraham. ... Paul’s point is that being a Jew does not make you more of an heir to the promises in Christ than being a Gentile. It is a question about standing as it relates to the inheritance, not ethnic identity.¹

The Mystery of Unity in Christ: Ephesians 3:2-9

1. What is the “mystery” Paul is privileged to teach and preach?
What does the gospel accomplish for both Jews and Gentiles?
(v. 6)

Discussion: Multicultural, Cross-Cultural, and Intercultural

Creating a multiethnic church is difficult. Dominant culture worshippers may struggle to adjust worship styles, music, etc. to accommodate other cultural expressions. People may believe their cultural preferences are a biblical imperative. It’s easy to assume our background represents the biblical norm.

Discuss the following definitions from the Spring Institute.

What is the difference between multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural? While they all might be under the same roof, they describe entirely different rooms. The differences in the meanings have to do with the perspectives we take when interacting with people from other cultures.

Multicultural refers to a society that contains several cultural or ethnic groups. People live alongside one another, but each cultural group does not necessarily have engaging interactions with each other. For example, in a multicultural neighborhood people may frequent ethnic grocery stores and restaurants without really interacting with their neighbors from other countries.

Cross-cultural deals with the comparison of different cultures. In cross-cultural communication, differences are understood and acknowledged, and can bring about individual change, but not collective transformations. In cross-cultural societies, one culture is often considered “the norm,” and all other cultures are compared or contrasted to the dominant culture.

Intercultural describes communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships.

In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together.²

Discuss

- How do we know if something is a cultural preference or a biblical imperative in worship? For example, does the Bible speak to what music is appropriate? The level of physical movement? The use of prepared or extemporaneous prayers? How often should a church observe communion?

- Revisit the Readiness Skill in Study 2. How might this be helpful as we listen to others' perspectives in a multiethnic or intercultural church?

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Watch this video clip of Martin Luther King Jr. on "Meet the Press," discussing the problem of church segregation in 1966.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L_d8
2. Cultural Conversation Cards are a unique tool to encourage spiritual and cultural conversations about cultural values and experiences, family expectations, and ancestry. Find out more at www.culturalconversationcards.com

Study 11

The Miseducation of Maria Garriott

Open

Over half of the Bible is a history of God's dealing with humankind in both the Old and New Testaments. Why does God place such importance on knowing our history?

Consider

Why might this be helpful as we consider America's racial history?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following verses.

Tell the Next Generation: Ps. 78:1-20

God calls us to think soberly about our collective history. This psalm rehearses the history of Israel, focusing on God's faithfulness and the misdeeds of his people.

1. List some of the specific examples of God's faithfulness.
2. List some of the specific examples of the people's unfaithfulness. How did God respond?

The Stoning of Stephen: Acts 7

1. Why did Stephen recite this long history of Israel—which his religious hearers already knew?
2. What does his hearers' response reveal about their hearts?

Discussion

1. What facts in this chapter about American history were new to you? How are you responding to this material?
2. Why is it important to examine the past in any discussion of racial and ethnic reconciliation?

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Watch one of the “Race and the Church” videos online and be prepared to share a few points you learned from it. If you have time, write a journal response.
2. Watch a movie that explores some of American's racial history.

Study 12

Social Justice? Biblical Justice?

Open

Dr. Carl Ellis writes, “If we in the body of Christ let unbiblical understandings of ‘social justice’ prevail, then the social justice commanded by God in Scripture will remain unmet. Social justice is a biblical concept, and we must make a clear distinction between true social justice and today’s distortions of it.”¹

Consider

The chapter listed many Bible passages showing God’s command for justice, which are worth deeper study. What are some biblical principles of social justice?

Reflect on Scripture

The passages below are two examples of how God’s people tried to survive and/or pursue justice during oppressive situations. Read and respond to the following passages.

Abraham, Sarah, and Pharaoh: Gen. 12:10-20

1. Why did Abraham ask Sarah to lie? What were Abraham’s two bad choices in this passage?
2. Whom did God punish in this passage?

Theologian Carl Ellis says that “oppression is sin + power.” Oppression is imposing your sin on someone else. “Oppression increases your proportion of bad options, decreases your proportion of good options. If 80% of my options are good, chances are that I’ll choose a good option. But under oppression, 20% of options are good and the chance of choosing a good option decreases. Abraham had the choice of losing Sarah to Pharaoh and being killed or losing Sarah to Pharaoh and being paid.”²

Ellis points out that God got angry at Pharaoh. Abraham repeated this behavior in Genesis 20, when he entered the land of Abimelek, king of Gerar. In both passages, the oppressive rulers are rebuked by God.

The Hebrew Midwives Disobey Pharaoh: Exodus 1:15-22

1. The Hebrews lived under the ethnicity-based slavery Pharaoh had instituted. What two bad choices did the Hebrew midwives Shiprah and Puah have?
2. Whom did God punish? Whom did God reward?

Determining what is righteous behavior is challenging under oppression. Some theologians believe the Hebrew midwives did not break the ninth commandment “Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.” The purpose of the commandment is justice—protecting the reputation and possibly the life of another. The women disobeyed Pharaoh’s command to commit infanticide to obey a higher law.

Discussion

It is often challenging to discern how to advocate for policies or laws that align with God’s justice. For example, how should our country welcome the stranger or care for the poor? Discussions often break down along political lines. A conservative political

worldview might say that poor people need to bear more personal responsibility and that people are poor because of their choices. A more liberal worldview would claim that the poverty is due to society's impact and systemic problems with schools, government, etc. How might these two worldviews look at the story of Abraham and Sarah?

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Read and discuss Dr. Carl Ellis's article on the Gospel Coalition website, "Biblical Righteousness Is a Four-Paned Window."
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/biblical-righteousness-four-paned-window/>
2. Read "Justice Too Long Delayed" on the *Christianity Today* website. Discuss it or write about it in your journal.

Study 13

Repenting and Lamenting

Open

The Bible tells us to “mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15). How do we demonstrate that empathy? How does the gospel enable us to enter into the suffering of others?

Consider

Why might people want to avoid lament and move quickly to fixing? Why is it beneficial to take the time to lament?

Reflect on Scripture

Read and respond to the following passages.

Nehemiah 1

Powerful empires desired Israel’s trade routes, and the nation was conquered by the Assyrians (722 BCE) and the Babylonians, (586 BCE) who destroyed the temple and carried many Jews into exile. Some fifty years later, King Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonians and allowed Jews to return to Israel. Nehemiah has an important position with the Persian king in the capital city.

1. What did Nehemiah do first? What did lament look like?
2. What cultural, political, or personal obstacles did Nehemiah face in this chapter? How did he meet these challenges?

Psalm 79:8-9

1. What does the psalmist imply about past sins in these verses?
2. What reason does the psalmist give as to why God should help him and his people?

Dan. 9:1-19

Daniel reads from the prophecies of Jeremiah about the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 25, 29) and pleads for God's mercy.

1. What does Daniel ask God's forgiveness for?
2. What is Daniel's attitude as he approaches God?

Ideas for Action

1. According to author and professor Brené Brown, shame says "you are bad," while guilt says "you did a bad thing." Shame can lead to a spiral of paralysis and self-hate. Guilt, on the other hand, can motivate positive change. Why is this a significant distinction in the discussion of racial healing? What might lament look like for us?
2. Rev. Eric Mason, founder and pastor of Epiphany Fellowship Church in Philadelphia, says, "Our culture teaches us to 'just get over' pain. Lamenting allows us to enter it. It is emotionally healthy to enter into grief. It's also biblical.... [Lament] has historically been an important part of the black church.... To experience real change, we must learn to lament together."¹ Do you agree or disagree? Has lament been part of your church experience? Write your response.

Study 14

Privileges and Rights

Open

People of color in the U.S. have not enjoyed the same validation and economic and physical security as those of European descent, in both explicit and implicit ways. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Consider

After reading the chapter, what privileges do you see God has given you?

Reflect on Scripture

Paul's Privileged Background: Phil. 3:4-6

1. How does Paul describe himself here? What privileges did he enjoy because of his background and position?
2. Did he value his background? In what way?

Paul Renounces His Rights: 1 Cor. 9:15-27

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul lists some of the rights he has not claimed (including the right of financial support) because he doesn't want to create any obstacles to the gospel.

1. What intentional choices has Paul made?
2. How might you apply these verses to the concept of rights or privilege in our culture?
3. What privileges do you enjoy? List them. Consider your race, age, health, education, attractiveness, ability or disability level, natural talents, and skills. In what ways would you say, “I pulled myself up with my bootstraps,” and in what ways would you say, “I had very little to do with this advantage.”

Rev. Randy Nabors, who planted and pastored New City Fellowship in Chattanooga, Tennessee for 36 years and founded a network of multiethnic churches, points to 1 Cor. 9 as a biblical strategy for cross-cultural ministry.

Crossing cultures for the sake of Christ and to win others to Christ is an intentional process of becoming a “slave” to that people group. It is not becoming a casual and distant observer, nor a tourist, and not even a cultural anthropologist, but a slave...Loving your neighbor as yourself can be more complicated in a multiethnic and multicultural environment... Crossing cultures is a process of becoming It is an intentional, purposeful, and dedicated pursuit of listening to, learning from, engaging with, and feeling the pain, aspirations, hopes, and dreams of another culture.¹

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Professor George Yancey, author of *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (IVP, 2006) points out that Christianity offers a unique approach to issues of race relations compared to the secular ideologies of our day. Watch his presentation on The Gospel Coalition website. <https://>

www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/a-christian-approach-to-moving-beyond-racial-gridlock-an-alternative-to-secular-black-lives-matter-and-all- lives-matter-ideologies/

2. Ken Sande, the author of *Peacemakers* and *Relational Wisdom*, published “What You Can Do About Racial Tensions” on his website. It includes a video, “Black Parents Explain How to Deal with the Police.” Watch this video and discuss it. <https://rw360.org/2020/06/03/what-you-can-do-about-racial-tensions/>

Study 15

Repairing What is Broken

Open

The Bible explains both the inherent value and sinful tendencies of humankind. We exhibit dignity and depravity, both individually and collectively, and the structures and systems we create reflect that. Yet God uses his people to participate in his movement of healing and restoration through word and deed.

Consider

How does having greater cross-cultural understanding impact the way we partner with God in his restoration process?

Reflect on Scripture

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

Isaiah 58:1-10

Jesus's first sermon, which we studied in Lesson 3 (Luke 4:16-22), alludes to several passages in Isaiah, including these verses from chapter 58.

1. What do these verses reveal about God's desire?

2. What do these verses reveal about people?
3. Are there practical ways we can obey these verses?

Rev. Esau McCaulley says that Jesus quotes these verses to denounce “fake religiosity more concerned with ritual than transforming the lived situation of the poor. According to Isaiah, true practice of religion ought to result in concrete change, the breaking of yokes. He does not mean the occasional private act of liberation, but ‘to break the chains of injustice.’ What could this mean other than a transformation of the structures of societies that trap people in hopelessness? Jesus has in mind the creation of a different type of world.”¹

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Phil Vischer, the creator of Veggie Tales, records “Holy Post” podcasts providing a Christian view of contemporary issues. Watch his “Race in America” post on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGUwcs9qJXY>
2. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a useful tool to assess one’s cultural intelligence, or the ability to function effectively across various cultural contexts. The IDI is used by denominations, universities, businesses, and individuals to help leaders explore their orientation and thinking patterns when relating to people from cultures that are different from their own. Learn more at the Christian Cultural Intelligence Group <https://www.developingculturalintelligence.com/>

Study 16

Hospitality

Open

How can we create a welcoming environment for all? Share or write about a time you felt welcome and included into a community.

Consider

What comes to mind when you hear the word “hospitality”? Does your image line up with biblical hospitality?

Reflect on Scripture

Hospitality in the Early Church: Acts 2:42-47

1. The early church united Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, rich and poor. How do you see that unity demonstrated in practical hospitality here?
2. How did the world respond to this radical hospitality and unity?

The Sheep and the Goats: Matt. 25:31-46

1. What does this passage say about what God values?

2. What emotions do you feel reading this passage?

Ideas for Follow-Up

1. Darryl Davis, a respected Black musician, befriended members of the KKK. How did his practice of hospitality disarm an enemy? Watch and respond to his TEDTalk on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4gly9n9RBo>
2. Artist and designer Yang Liu was born in China but has lived in Germany since she was 14. She compares the differences between the two cultures in a series of images. View and discuss her images at <http://bsix12.com/east-meets-west/>

Study 17

A Harder Bridge to Cross

Open

In this lesson, we'll discover what the Bible teaches about caring for those who are materially disadvantaged, and learn a tool to help cross the socio-economic divide.

Consider

What obstacles do you face when interacting with people who are either much wealthier or poorer than you?

Reflect on Scripture

Store our treasures in Heaven: Matt. 6:19-24

Jesus assumes that his followers will give to the needy, and urges them not to call attention to themselves when doing so. He tells us how we deal with our treasure reveals our hearts.

1. What does this passage teach about God?
2. What does this passage teach about people?
3. How can I obey this passage in practical ways?

Faith Without Works is Dead: James 2:1-14

1. James, the brother of Jesus, writes believers to urge them to be “doers of the Word.” (1:22) What does this passage say about what God values?
2. What does this passage say about what people tend to value?

Ideas for Follow Up

1. The following resources would be especially helpful in guiding Christian engagement with the materially poor: *When Helping Hurts*, by Fikkert & Corbett; *Toxic Charity*, by Bob Lupton; and *Merciful: The Opportunity and Challenge of Discipling the Poor out of Poverty* by Randy Nabors.
2. Watch and discuss this video “Grace, Justice and Mercy” of a discussion between Rev. Tim Keller and Bryan Stevenson, whose book *Just Mercy* chronicles his nonprofit work to bring legal justice to the poor and the incarcerated. Stevenson sees his work as a logical extension of his faith. “To me, the Great Commission is a call to get proximate—to the places in our nation, in our world, where there’s suffering and abuse and neglect.” He admits that “If you do uncomfortable things, it will break you. But in brokenness, we are filled with grace and mercy.” <https://www.hfny.org/blog/what-we-learned-tim-keller-bryan-stevenson-last-week>

Study 18

Partnering with God in Restoration

Open

The author writes, “God is reweaving the torn fabric of society through his people, the church.” How does God use us in this process?

Consider

How does growing in ability to relate across cultures, ethnicities and races help us be better witnesses?

Reflect on Scripture

Zacchaeus Meets Jesus: Luke 19:1-10

To fellow Jews, Zacchaeus was a traitor; to the Romans, a tool. He collaborated with the Roman occupiers to collect burdensome taxes. Tax collectors also enriched themselves by extorting additional fees. So imagine the scandal, grumbling, and resentment of the crowd when Rabbi Jesus selected this taxman to host a welcome dinner.

1. What do we learn about Jesus in this passage?
2. If Zacchaeus’s identity had previously been tied to his wealth, what does his response demonstrate?

3. In *Christianity Today*, editor Timothy Dalrymple writes, “Zacchaeus had not personally designed the unjust system of Roman taxation. But ...he had participated in it and profited from it... Zacchaeus did not merely repent of his ways; he made restitution. He set up what we might call a ‘Zacchaeus fund’ in order to restore what belonged to his neighbors.” Do you agree that righteousness has practical expressions in justice? What might this look like today?

True Justice: Micah 6:8

In Micah 6, God condemns the violence and injustice he sees among his people. He says that true repentance, and true worship is accompanied by a godly life.

1. Paraphrase this verse. What is the true justice God requires?
2. How does this verse agree with other passages we have studied?

For Follow Up

Read and discuss the following article, which uses the mnemonic SCHOLAR to summarize the concepts in this study. Share with others how you might implement some of what you’ve learned.

Be a SCHOLAR

Cultural intelligence is fluid. We can always grow, and we need to keep growing because the culture around us continues to change. As we respond to the challenges of our culture, we contextualize but don’t compromise the gospel.

The following mnemonic device can help you remember some of the main points of these lessons on unity and growing in your ability to cross cultures effectively. Keep learning, listening, reflecting, and practicing!

Study God's Word and his plan for unity in diversity and his plan to redeem all ethnos (people groups) as revealed in Scripture. Our primary identity is in Christ; we are a new humanity, not just a new individual.

Confess- ask God to reveal how self-love and pride blocks our love of others who are different from us. Confess, and experience forgiveness. Have a humble, teachable attitude of gentleness and empathy; recognize your own cultural preferences as one way of looking at the world. Recognize that some of our ways of living are not in line with Biblical principles. Recognize our desire for the personal comfort and security of our own cultural context.

Have new experiences - Be intentional and curious! Place yourself in a different cultural setting – an ethnic restaurant, or a worship service from a different tradition. Reach out to other races and ethnic groups; listen to their stories and concerns. Ask what they see as strengths or assets of their culture or ethnicity. Befriend a minority family in your neighborhood, not as a project, but as people. Ask good questions (but be aware that many cultures consider direct “why” questions rude; do your homework first, and have cultural informants/ teachers).

Open up to a covenantal gospel- Recognize and confess corporate responsibility for national and church sins of racism as Daniel and Nehemiah did (see Dan. 9:1-19 and Neh. 1:4-7). Acknowledge and fight systemic injustices.

Learn from and be ministered to by people different from you; learn about other people groups, their histories and backgrounds. Read books or watch movies about different cultures/experiences. Listen to the experiences of others.

Anticipate hardships. Cross-cultural experiences create disequilibrium because they take us out of our culture zone, but they have a high potential for learning. Accept failure as part of the process.

Reflect- Become aware of the invisible influence of culture in our lives. Stop and consider what you're thinking, feeling, doing. Write in a journal, identify your cultural rules and preferences and their influences, and debrief with others.

Reflect

1. What are some of your key takeaways from this study?
2. What are some tangible steps you can take to implement this learning?

Ideas for Follow Up

1. Because we often have such dramatically different lived experiences, we must listen to one another's stories. This is especially true in cross-cultural relationships. A Story Feast, as outlined by Elizabeth Turnage, is an intentional gathering with others to share our stories. For ideas on how to do this, visit <https://encourage.pcacdm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/StoryFeastHandout18.pdf>
2. For additional ideas for follow up, visit the author's book page www.strongertogethergospel.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maria Garriott and her husband Craig planted Faith Christian Fellowship, an urban multiethnic, socio-economically diverse church in Baltimore, where they served for 38 years. In 2018, they founded Baltimore Antioch Leadership Movement (BALM), a ministry to multiply cross-cultural disciple-making leaders. Maria is a coach and network leader for Parakaleo, a global ministry to church planting women. She received a M.S. in Professional Writing and wrote curricula for The Johns Hopkins University School of Education for 20 years. She has published numerous articles, essays, and poems, as well as a memoir of urban church planting, *A Thousand Resurrections*. Maria and Craig have five adult children and seven grandchildren.