

# becoming all things



## SMALL GROUP GUIDE

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# BECOMING ALL THINGS SMALL GROUP GUIDE

## WELCOME

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Welcome to the *Becoming All Things* Small Group Guide!

This guide includes four sessions and is meant to be a companion to Dr. Michelle Ami Reyes' book, *Becoming All Things: How Small Changes Lead to Lasting Connections Across Cultures* and the *Becoming All Things Teaching Kit*.

The four lessons are:

Lesson One: Worshipping God as Cultural Image Bearers (Rev. 7:9-10);  
Lesson Two: Developing Our Cultural Identities for God's Glory (Gen. 11);  
Lesson Three: Connecting Across Cultures for the Sake of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23); Lesson Four: Representing Jesus by Embracing Cultural Discomfort (Acts 15).

Each of these four teaching sessions equips you with a biblical framework for cultural identities and cross-cultural relationships. They also offer practical small steps to pursue the diverse kingdom of God in small groups, families, organizations, and the church as a whole. See "Further Resources" at the end of the study guide to inspire you to go deeper.

By the end of this series, you will better understand the meaning of gospel-rooted diversity and multiculturalism, you will have a roadmap for developing and celebrating their God-given cultural identities, and you will be able to bravely embody the model of Jesus to love people of different cultures.



# LESSON 1

## WORSHIPPING GOD AS CULTURAL IMAGE BEARERS

### Preparation

To prepare for Lesson One, follow the breath prayer below. You can also dim the lights and/or light a candle. Breath prayers are an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. The prayer is recited to the rhythm of our breath as a way to ground us in the reality that prayer should be as natural as breathing. Use this opening time to put aside all other thoughts from the day. Ask God to help you be present with those you are with and be attentive to what God might impress upon you during this time.

### Breath Prayer

Take three deep breaths

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Here

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Ready

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: Show us Your Way

### Big Idea of the Message

In the first message of the *Becoming All Things* teaching series, we learned that our cultural identities are fundamentally tied to our spiritual identities.

Read Revelation 7:9-10 aloud together.



Rev. 7:9-10 is a picture of the ideal humanity with each person retaining their ethnicity, story, and voice. Here we see believers as multiethnic and multicultural, coming from all the nations of the earth to worship God together. Multicultural means the equal presence and value of more than one distinct cultural group, which can include but also go beyond ethnic groups and is manifested in various behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communication styles. We must value people of every language, not for multiculturalism's sake, but to showcase the power of unifying in worship before the Lord Almighty.

### Reflection Questions

- What were you taught about your culture from within the church and/or within society at large?
- How have messages from the church and society shaped your ability to see and value (or not see and not value) your culture and the culture of others on a day-to-day basis?
- In your own words, explain what the Bible says about multiculturalism and why it matters.
- How does Revelation 7:9-10 help us better understand the relationship between our cultural and spiritual identities?
- If multiculturalism is tied to true worship in Revelation 7:9-10, then choosing not to develop your cultural identity and/or celebrate the cultural identity of others will inhibit your worship of God. How does that sit with you?
- How can we better differentiate between tokenism (i.e., the practice of only making superficial gestures toward diversity) and true, biblical multiculturalism?
- Oftentimes the equal presence and value of more than one distinct cultural group in any space makes people feel uncomfortable. Can you recall a time when you felt uncomfortable around a person or group of another culture?
- What are ways that you, as an individual, as a church, and/or as an organization can better embrace cultural discomfort?  
In what ways can your church, organization, school, and/or small group grow in multicultural expressions of worship?



## Benediction

Read the following benediction aloud. Whether you're reading this alone or as a group, each person should sit up straight, close their eyes, and lay their hands palm up on their knees to receive this benediction.

*May the God who created a world of diversity and vibrancy,  
Go with us as we embrace life in all its fullness.*

*May the Son who teaches us to care for stranger and foreigners,  
Go with us as we try to be good neighbors in our communities.*

*May the Spirit who breaks down our barriers and celebrates community,  
Go with us as we find the courage to create a place of welcome for all.*

- Clare McBeath and Tim Presswood

## Practical Takeaway

Listen to the following song, [Aasha Meri | Nations of Worship ft. Allen Ganta, Sam Alex, Prakruthi Angelina & Philemon Anand](#), at least three times this week. Each time, ask God to help you and your church, school, and/or organization to intentionally grow in its ability to make space for multicultural expressions, ideas, teaching, leadership, and worship.



## LESSON 2

### DEVELOPING OUR CULTURAL IDENTITIES FOR GOD'S GLORY



#### Preparation

To prepare for Lesson Two, follow the breath prayer below. You can also dim the lights and/or light a candle. Breath prayers are an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. The prayer is recited to the rhythm of our breath as a way to ground us in the reality that prayer should be as natural as breathing. Use this opening time to put aside all other thoughts from the day. Ask God to help you be present with those you are with and be attentive to what God might impress upon you during this time.

#### Breath Prayer

Take three deep breaths

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Here

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Ready

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: Show us Your Way

#### Big Idea of the Message

In the second message of the *Becoming All Things* teaching series, we learned that God desires his image bearers to spread into the world and develop distinct cultural identities.



Read Genesis 1:28, 9:1, and 11:1-9 aloud together.

In Genesis 1-11 we see that developing our cultural identities and flourishing as ethnic peoples is how we lean into God's vision for humanity. At the Tower of Babel, the dispersing and diversifying of people is God's intervention to continue his plan in creation - his push to further spread, multiply, and develop diverse ethnic identities. Moreover we see from Genesis 11 that our cultural identities are rooted in both the *imago Dei* and the fall.

At Babel, humans were trying to define who they were (culturally, spiritually) apart from God. So part of learning to embrace our cultural identities and value them means learning to differentiate what is good and right from what is an idol.

### Reflection Questions

- What were you taught about the Tower of Babel growing up (if anything)?
- What is encouraging or hard about interpreting Genesis 11 through a lens of ethnic flourishing?
- What are your ethnic roots?
- What generation did your family arrive in the U.S., if you are from a non-Native context, or what tribe(s) are a part of your story?
- What stories can you recall or discover about your ancestors that demonstrate cultural narratives or customs within your own family?
- What are specific ways you can begin to lean into and develop your cultural identity?
- What narratives do you need to learn and/or unlearn in your cultural identity?
- What are the idols in your culture?
- In what ways can you explore the attitudes, mindsets, and values embedded within your ethnic heritage?

### Benediction

Read the following benediction aloud. Whether you're reading this alone or as a group, each person should sit up straight, close their eyes, and lay their hands palm up on their knees to receive this benediction.



## **You, the One**

You, the one  
From whom on different paths  
All of us have come.

To whom on different paths  
All of us are going.

Make strong in our hearts what unites us;  
Build bridges across all that divides us;  
United make us rejoice in our diversity.  
And at one in our witness to your peace,  
A rainbow to your glory.  
- *David Steindl-Rast OSB*

## **Practical Takeaway**

Reflect on the following questions this upcoming week: What is my story? What are my ethnic roots? What values and traditions do I have because of my cultural community? You can spend time praying and journaling through these questions. You can also discuss these questions with your family. To take this practice a step further, consider taking a DNA test such as 23andme or ancestry.com as well as reading a book (historical or fictitious) about your ethnic heritage.



# LESSON 3

## CONNECTING ACROSS CULTURES FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL



### Preparation

To prepare for Lesson Three, follow the breath prayer below. You can also dim the lights and/or light a candle. Breath prayers are an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. The prayer is recited to the rhythm of our breath as a way to ground us in the reality that prayer should be as natural as breathing. Use this opening time to put aside all other thoughts from the day. Ask God to help you be present with those you are with and be attentive to what God might impress upon you during this time.

### Breath Prayer

Take three deep breaths

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Here

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Ready

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: Show us Your Way

### Big Idea of the Message

In the third message of the *Becoming All Things* sermon series, we learned that each of us is called to go on a journey of becoming all things to all people.



Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 aloud together.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, the posture of the Apostle Paul to become all things to all people means that he desires to see the world through other people's eyes, to value what they value, and both honor and center their way of life. For example: Paul knew how to talk with Jews in the synagogues and discuss philosophy with Greeks in the public square. Inherent in the posture of becoming all things to all people is seeing each person as a unique individual. No two Jews and no two Gentiles are the same, and Paul's goal is to learn how to connect with as many of them as possible. Most importantly, becoming all things to all people is missional. We adapt our words, behavior, and body language to each person in order to point people toward Christ. In other words, becoming all things to all people is an extension of our call to love our neighbor.

### Reflection Questions

- What challenges have you experienced in the past when trying to connect with people of other cultures?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 again. Then imagine for a moment what it would look like today if everyone committed to becoming all things to all people for the sake of the gospel. How would our world look differently?
- In what ways is it hard for you to adapt and change?  
What questions, fears, and hopes are stirring within you as you consider what it means to become all things to all people?
- None of us are exempt from racial biases. Take a moment to reflect on a time that you stereotyped a person of another culture in your mind (even if you didn't verbalize these thoughts). How did this bias impact how you felt about that person or how you treated them and/or their community? Additionally, recall a time that someone intentionally or unintentionally stereotyped you and how that encounter felt.
- In what ways are you a unique individual? How are you both similar to people of your ethnic heritage and also different?
- What is one practice you can begin implementing today to see and treat people of every culture as unique individuals?



## **Benediction**

Read the following benediction aloud. Whether you're reading this alone or as a group, each person should sit up straight, close their eyes, and lay their hands palm up on their knees to receive this benediction.

### **For the Diversity of Races and Cultures**

O God,  
you created all people in your image.  
We thank you for the astonishing variety  
of races and cultures in this world.  
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,  
and show us your presence  
in those who differ most from us,  
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect  
in our love for all your children;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*- From the Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition*

### **Practical Takeaway**

Think of a friend, coworker, neighbor, or someone from church who has a different cultural background than yourself. Invite them over and ask if they would be willing to discuss the following questions together: What is your story? What are your ethnic roots? What are some of the special celebrations in your culture? What do you wish more people understood about you? What do you wish more people understood about your community?

Note: you will not be able to achieve much depth or connection if you only have five minutes to converse. The above questions are best done around a table over a meal or coffee. Make sure that adequate space is given for you to listen, process, and honor the person you want to connect with.



## LESSON 4

### REPRESENTING JESUS BY EMBRACING CULTURAL DISCOMFORT



#### Preparation

To prepare for Lesson Four, follow the breath prayer below. You can also dim the lights and/or light a candle. Breath prayers are an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. The prayer is recited to the rhythm of our breath as a way to ground us in the reality that prayer should be as natural as breathing. Use this opening time to put aside all other thoughts from the day. Ask God to help you be present with those you are with and be attentive to what God might impress upon you during this time.

#### Breath Prayer

Take three deep breaths

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Here

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: We are Ready

Inhale: God of all People

Exhale: Show us Your Way

#### Big Idea of the Message

In the fourth message of the *Becoming All Things* sermon series, we learned that loving our neighbor means not demanding that everyone be just like us.



Read Acts 15 aloud together.

In Acts 15, the apostles challenge Christian leaders in Jerusalem to stop demanding that Gentiles become Jewish to be considered part of the family of God. In other words, under the new covenant, our faith must be contextualized from one person to the next. New covenant Christianity calls for cultural accommodation, which means that we don't demand that people change who they are. We change ourselves for them. The practice of cultural accommodation lowers the cultural barriers to the gospel.

When we meet people where they are, we enable the maximum number of people to hear of Christ without giving them additional grounds to stumble. At the same time, we must discern what is culturally a nonnegotiable from what is difficult or burdensome. Paul would never distort the gospel to accommodate cultural preferences, i.e., the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3-4) must not be changed.

### Reflection Questions

- Recall a time you became angry or uncomfortable around a person of another culture. What provoked those emotions in you? How did you respond? If you could replay that situation, how might you say or do things differently?
- What lifestyles, actions, and perspectives do you consider “normal”?
- What parallel types of “culture wars” from Acts 15 do you see in the church today?
- How can we as followers of Jesus contextualize our faith from one person to the next? What is an example of how we can do this well?
- What is a way that you can become more mindful that your way of life is not the standard?
- How can you better embrace discomfort?
- What thoughts, prayers, or practices can you apply despite feeling uncomfortable in order to love your neighbor?



## Benediction

Read the following benediction aloud. Whether you're reading this alone or as a group, each person should sit up straight, close their eyes, and lay their hands palm up on their knees to receive this benediction.

### Celebrating Diversity

Almighty God, through your Holy Spirit you created unity in the midst of diversity; We acknowledge that human diversity is an expression of your manifold love for your creation;

We confess that in our brokenness as human beings we turn diversity into a source of alienation, injustice, oppression, and wounding.

Empower us to recognize and celebrate differences as your great gift to the human family. Enable us to be the architects of understanding, of respect and love;

Through the Lord, the ground of all unity, we pray.

- *Author Unknown*

### Practical Takeaway

Practice deep breathing this week; each day if possible. The more we are in tune with our bodies and can recognize when discomfort or even anger is beginning to rise, the better we can respond to ourselves and the situation in healthy and biblical ways.

To practice deep breathing:

- Find a quiet place free of distractions.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your stomach. After a short pause, slowly exhale while counting to three.
- Continue this pattern of rhythmic breathing for five to ten minutes until you feel relaxed.

The next time you are in a situation where a person of another culture makes you uncomfortable or angry, practice deep breathing and pray to God to help you stay calm and love your neighbor well.



## FURTHER RESOURCES

Want to read other books on culture, faith, and the church? Check out the following curated list from Dr. Michelle Ami Reyes:

1. J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003).
2. Sarah Shin, *Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming Our Ethnic Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2017).
3. Orlando Creso, *Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009).
4. Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020).
5. D.A. Horton, *Intensional: Kingdom Ethnicity in a Divided World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2019).
6. James K. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).
7. Derwin L. Gray, *Building a Multiethnic Church: A Gospel Vision of Love, Grace, and Reconciliation in a Divided World* (Thomas Nelson, 2021)
8. Marvin J. Newell, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture: Biblical Principles for Mission Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016).
9. MelindaJoy Mingo, *The Colors of Culture: The Beauty of Diverse Friendships* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020).