

# **REFLECTION GUIDE**

### Welcome

Thanks for joining us for our teaching series on The Multiethnic Kingdom of God. We hope this reflection guide is a helpful supplement for you and those with whom you follow after Jesus.

The aim of this series is to put us in touch with God's heart to assemble a Kingdom people of every, tongue, tribe, and nation. This series will establish a biblical and missional foundation for our community. We want to express this in how we reach out to those around us with the good news of Jesus. We want to see this brought to life in our church through the kind of unity between different people that only the Spirit can bring. We want to do the hard work of bringing people together in the midst of tension, just as the early church did, through humility, listening, repentance, and lament. Our hope is that God would more and more make our church a window into the future, a picture of what His people will look like gathered around the throne.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

Christian, Tim, Hannah and the Hillcrest Team

### How to use this reflection guide

Throughout this series, our desire is to have a firm foundation of intimacy with God in prayer. In this series we will ask God to teach us about ourselves and help us to identify the ways in which we see the world. This self-reflective work is hard, and can be messy; God might show us challenging things about ourselves. We also recognise and believe that there is an enemy out there who likes to use disunity and division against us and the Kingdom of God. Our hope, then, is to establish and maintain prayerful, humble, and courageous hearts.

Each week will begin with an invitation to pray. We encourage you to begin with this practice, before moving on to the study and reflection sections of the guide

After you have spent time in prayer for yourself, our church, and our world, take some time to read the Scriptures provided and consider the questions asked.

You may simply want to go through the reflection guide on your own or with a trusted friend. It can also be used as a guide for conversation with your small group, family, or housemates. If you're working through this guide with your small group, plan to to do the reading and reflection on your own, and come to your group prepared to share.

# **The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer**

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.. - Jesus

### Pray

Pray through the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Lord, as we enter this series would you soften our hearts and give us a posture of humility. Develop in us a heart for your world, for unity, and restoration. We repent for the times where your Kingdom and love for people is not what shapes our focus. We are sorry for the times we miss the mark and have caused or participated in things that have created deep hurt. We pray for Your healing, for the hurt, grief, anger and pain that You see. Give us courage as we dare to ask You to open our eyes and ears. We believe that the power of the cross can break through our sin and the powers surrounding it.

Amen.

### Study

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

- To Paul, what does unity mean in this passage? What does it not mean?
- How does our heart posture influence the way we love one another?

### Read Psalm 133:1-3

- Why is unity so important?
- How have you experienced the goodness of unity in your own life? (for example in your family, friendships work, school, or sports)

### **The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer**

### Reflect

- As we begin this series, what hopes do you have?
- What excites you about the possibilities of experiencing a multiethnic church and living the multiethnic Christian life?
- What fears or concerns might you have about this conversation?
- Are there areas in our Hillcrest community where you see space for more unity? Are there areas that you think unity will be difficult to develop?

#### Do

What is your prayer for our Hillcrest community over the duration of this series? When and how do you commit to praying for our community?

### **God's Mission to All Peoples**

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. - Isaiah 2:2

### Pray

Read John 17:20-23. Inspired by the verses you just read, write a prayer for Hillcrest church and the body of Christ worldwide.

### Study

Read Genesis 12:1-3

- In this text we read the call of Abraham. In what ways is God's call to Abraham a response (and a surprise!) to the break up of people following the tower of Babel (found in Genesis 11:1-9)?
- How would you summarize God's heart for all the people of the world as he expressed to Abraham?

#### Read Acts 2:1-24

- How does Acts 2 reverse what happened at Babel, and begin to fulfill God's promise to Abraham?
- In what ways does this passage of scripture shape how we think about God's multiethnic Kingdom?
- How does God's Spirit move people in this passage? How does it shape perspective?

#### <u>Definitions</u>

Homogenous: of the same kind; alike.

Culture is defined as the set of shared attitudes, goals, practices and values of a country, group or institution.

A cross-cultural experience would be defined as experiencing a culture that is different from the one you usually live and/or work in.

Ethnicity includes culture, especially language, but emphasizes common ancestory and geography.

### **God's Mission to All Peoples**

### Reflect

- Consider your own ethnic and cultural background. How does your ethnicity shape the lens through which you see and experience life? Would you describe your ethnicity as a central part or your life or more peripheral, and why?
- Reflect on a cross-cultural experience you've had in your life. What was that like? How did you feel? What did you observe and learn?
- Have the churches or faith communities you have been a part of tended to be ethnically diverse or more homogeneous?
  - Why do you think that was the case?
  - What do you think/feel about that?
- What are some of the ethnic and cultural shifts predicted for our society?
  - As you think about these shifts, how do you think the church should respond? What might happen if the church doesn't respond?"
- How does Hillcrest express the mission of a multiethnic Kingdom? Where does it miss the mark?
- In what ways does intentional focus on multiethnic mission and community strengthen the announcing of the Good News?
  - What challenges might be inherent in this?

#### Do

Read Revelation 7:9-10. What do you draw out of this when reading through the lens of God's mission to all people?

## **The Multiethnic Hebrew Scriptures**

The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." - Isaiah 19:25

### Pray

Before beginning, spend time praying for people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in your life.

### Study

#### Read Numbers 12:1-8

- Who were the Cushites?
- Why does Moses' marriage to a Cushite cause Aaron and Miriam to respond negatively toward him?

Notice, particularly in the Hebrew scriptures, but also in the New Testament, how almost every person is identified by their ethnicity. (for example: "the Ethiopian Eunuch" in Acts 8, the Samaritan woman in John 4, Ruth the Moabite in the book of Ruth).

- Why do you think that this is? Can you think of other times in Scripture where we see this?
- If this naming of ethnicity is a reflection of God's intention for a multiethnic Kingdom, what does this say about how God sees and values ethnicities?

# **The Multiethnic Hebrew Scriptures**

Oftentimes terms like race, ethnicity, and culture get used without being defined.

- Race, that is dividing people into big buckets based on the color of their skin (red, yellow, black, and white) is a recent invention from the last few centuries. In the Bible they didn't talk about white or brown or black people, they talked about Egyptians and Philistines and Israelites. Thinking in terms of race came more recently and was used to create a hierarchy of what races were better and what were inferior.

Ethnicity, on the other hand, includes common ancestry and goes beyond that. "Ethnicity, on the other hand, is connected to one's values, language, geography, religion, dialect, and so on." (Williams, 153) "For example, Black people are ethnically diverse. African-Americans, Africans, Bahamians, Hatians, and Jamaicans (and a host of other ethnicities) are Black." (Williams, 16)

### Reflect

- Growing up, how was your family ethnicity and culture talked about?
- In what ways do people's ethnicities (both your own and other people's) impact your thinking?
- Have you ever spent time traveling or living in another culture? Describe the barriers or challenges that you experienced.
- Reflecting on your past, both growing up and more recently, how has it shaped your present worldview?

### Do

This week, take time to read a book or watch a movie that shares a cultural perspective that is different than your own.

### **Jesus the Boundary-Crossing Messiah**

They sailed across to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. - Luke  $8{:}26$ 

### Pray

Pray for the church in Bellingham and Whatcom County. Pray for a heart to reach all people of every tongue, tribe, and nation both around the world and across the street.

### Study

Read the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4. As you read, notice and highlight some of the boundaries that you see in the story and times where they are crossed.

- Name the boundaries you see in the story.
- Notice how Jesus goes to where the woman is. What does this say about Jesus' approach to cultural and social boundaries?
- What does Jesus, as a boundary crossing Messiah, say about the Kingdom of God?
- How does Jesus, as the boundary crossing Messiah, shape how we think about social and cultural boundaries in our own lives?

Jesus demonstrates the crossing of these boundaries and then sends His disciples out to do the same.

• What does this tell us about our own mission and place in God's story?

### **Jesus the Boundary-Crossing Messiah**

### Reflect

- Name three people outside your family with whom you share the closest relationships.
  - How many of these began in your local church or faith community?
  - In what ways do they share your same background?
  - In what ways are they different from you
- What are the benefits and challenges of developing cross-cultural relationships?

## What are some of the boundaries you see in your community/neighborhood/workplace/school?

- Has anyone ever crossed a boundary to meet you?
  How did you feel about that?
- Have you ever crossed a boundary (socio-economic, political, cultural, etc.) to meet another person?
   Where? Why? How did that feel?
- Jesus intentionally put Himself in situations where He was the minority. Have you ever been in a situation where you feel like a minority and how did you feel in those moments? What was it like?
- Would you describe yourself as someone who pursues or seeks out those moments of crossing cultural boundaries, or is that something you actively try and avoid? Why/why not?

### Do

Is there a boundary you could cross in the next 7 days to tangibly show care for someone?

# Ethnic and Cultural Tension, and the Kingdom of God

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... - Ephesians 2:14

### Pray

Read Acts 11:1-18. Reflect and write a prayer for the church in America today based on what you have just read.

### Study

Read Acts 15

• How do you think the Gentiles felt as the apostles and elders met to discuss the "entry requirements" for them to be a part of the Kingdom of God?

At the center of the debate was the practice of circumcision, a culturally held tradition that the Jews believed and taught as both pivotal and fundamental to their salvation, yet was being disputed as a no longer required practice. Circumcision, along with food laws, and keeping the Sabbath, were the cultural practices that marked out Jews as Jews in the first century. The question the early church was debating was whether Gentiles (non-Jews) had to essentially become culturally Jewish to be followers of Jesus.

- What do you think it was like for the Jews to see Gentiles beginning to claim and follow this Jewish Messiah?
- The Jews had to sacrifice something for the inclusion of the Gentiles. What do you think this was like for the Jews in the church? How did they feel and respond?
- What about for the Gentiles? The council, equally, radically alters their value system. What do you think it was like for the Gentiles to rearrange what they valued in their life in order to participate in the Kingdom of God?
- Some of the Jews were glad to hear the Gentiles had converted to following Jesus, but wanted the Gentiles to become culturally Jewish in order to be "saved" and participate in community.
  - In what ways has this same dynamic played out in church history, and does it still occur today?

# Ethnic and Cultural Tension, and the Kingdom of God

### Reflect

- Name some of the current culturally held faith traditions (eg. how we do water baptism, communion etc). How would you feel if those were changed or challenged?
- Where have you seen tensions between ethnic, cultural and racial lines in our country and community?
- What are two or three nations or ethnic people groups you know that have had historical conflict? Do they remain in conflict today? What is your prayer for them?
- In the church in America today, what are some examples of the divisions along ethnic, cultural, and racial lines?
  - Where have you experienced those divisions in your own life and in your faith community?
- Have you ever seen a faith community overcome divisions along ethnic, cultural, and racial lines?
- What divisions and lines have you noticed at Hillcrest or in your small group? How do you see them being navigated (or not)?

#### Do

Can you think of a conflict that you might have, or have had, with a friend or family member that has not been discussed or remains unresolved? Has the conflict gotten better or worse over the years? What next step could you take this week towards reconciliation?

# Living with Honesty and Humility in the Current Church Age

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. -Romans 12:15 - 18

Read Luke 10:25-37. Write a prayer inspired by these verses.

### Study

Read Philippians 2:1-4

- How does Jesus exemplify humility?
  What does that mean for us?
- What does walking humbly with others look like practically?
  - Who do you know that exemplifies this?

#### Read James 5:16

- How does James encourage believers to act?
- When is a time someone confessed to you and it brought healing?
- When is a time you have courageously confessed sin to someone else?
- What would a church community quick to confess sin look and feel like?

# Living with Honesty and Humility in the Current Church Age

### Reflect

- Recall a time when you tried to communicate with someone who didn't seem to be listening. How did this make you feel?
- Have you ever had a disagreement, frustration or hurt involving someone of a different race or ethnic background that can be attributed to miscommunication? If so, what did you experience? How was that situation resolved?
- What are two or three ways you might become a better listener?
- When you look at the world and the circumstances surrounding culture, race and ethnicity, what do you think breaks God's heart? What about your own heart? Why?
- How are Jesus-centered community, the Good News of Jesus, and God's multiethnic Kingdom all connected?
  - Are there areas of this that you find yourself hard-hearted or resistant to? Why?
- We recognize the very real need to be honest, and to both lament and repent for the pain and suffering caused by ethnic and racial divisions in our world. Where do you find yourself needing to repent or lament?

#### Do

After reflecting on those places where your heart breaks with God's heart and places where you have things to repent of, share with a trusted friend something God has spoken to you through this series of learning and reflection.

### Where Are We Headed?

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. - Colossians 3:11

### Pray

Pray for a softened heart, for ears to hear, and a desire for God to speak into your life through this week's reflection.

### Study

Read Revelation 5:9 and 7:9-10

- How do these scriptures relate to Genesis 12:1:3 (10 and 11) from week one?
- What does the song of the living creatures and elders say about the Kingdom of God and salvation?
- What unites all the people in these verses? How is their unity described?
- In what ways are ethnic and cultural differences talked about or evidenced in these scriptures?
- What does it mean for the church to be a window into this future?

### **Where Are We Headed?**

#### Reflect

- What excites you about the vision of heaven seen in Revelation 5 and 7?
- What hopes do you have for the church in the world and for Hillcrest in the decades ahead, when it comes to living out our role as God's multiethnic Kingdom?
- What hurdles are there in front of us as a community?
- Describe a church community, real or imagined, living out this vision described in Revelation 5 and 7.
  - How do they go about their mission?
  - What does community look like?
  - What does it look/feel/smell/taste/sound like?
- In what ways does intentional focus on multiethnic mission and community strengthen the announcing of the Good News?
  - What challenges might be inherent in this?
  - Has your answer changed from the first week you answered this?

#### Do

In the next 30 days share a meal or coffee with someone and learn about their story.

Take some time and write 3 key takeaways from this series. Share them with a trusted friend.

### Resources

### Books

- Reading While Black Esau McCaulley
- Redemptive Kingdom Diversity Jarvis Williams
- Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church Mark Deymaz
- A Many Colored Kingdom Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Stever Kang, Gary A. Parrett
- Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism George Yancy
- From every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race J. Daniel Hays
- From Mother to Son Jasmine L. Holmes
- The Color of Compromise Jemar Tisby
- Strength to Love Martin Luther King Jr
- One Blood John M. Perkins
- Prophetic Lament by Soong-Chan Rah
- First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament, by Terry M. Wildman