



A Conversation : Shane Philip and Dr. Efrem Smith
November 29, 2020

The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we have a special guest joining us, Dr. Efrem Smith, who is sitting down with Pastor Shane for a conversation about **Becoming A Multi-Ethnic Church**. Dr. Smith pastored such a church in Minneapolis, The Sanctuary Church, and now is co-leader of Bayside Midtown Church in Sacramento. His wisdom on this subject is evident as he speaks about multi-ethnic, multi-generational and multi-cultural churches in today's world as we move forward as ambassadors in God's Kingdom.

SCRIPTURE¹

Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God

Genesis 2:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule....over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

John 17:20-21 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 and I are one. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Revelation 7:9 Afterwards I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We, as though God were making his appeal through us, are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

OBSERVATION

Shane: We built The Crossing to be a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-generational church because we wanted all people to be welcomed in, to feel of value, to be comfortable here and to be used by God. So, we are so happy to have you, Efrem, with us today to share your wisdom and experience in building that kind of church. Please give us the Biblical background of multi-ethnicity.

Efrem: When we look at Genesis, God refers to his creation as being made up of nations, tribes, cultures, languages and peoples all made in His image – that of love, wisdom, and righteousness. They were all to multiply and reign over the earth and the environment including animals. But then – sin brought brokenness

¹ All scripture translation is NIV unless otherwise indicated.

to the world and we began to view each other based upon other characteristics -- race, power, prosperity and class. But racism is not Biblical. Without sin, we can assume that there would still have been ethnic diversity, but changing perspectives of each other based on race resulted instead in injustice and lack of love. Jesus came to reconcile us to His Father and make us whole again. He demonstrated this reconciling in the story of the Samaritan woman who was reviled by her community and an outcast there. Jesus made her whole through compassion and mercy as he built bridges between people throughout His ministry. In the Book of Acts, Jews disagreed about embracing Gentiles, but once they were deemed to be part of God's plan for redemption, ethnic groups of all kinds were welcomed in. St. Paul, in his epistles to the Corinthians, Romans, and Philippians recognized multi-ethnic and multi-cultural groups everywhere. These designations weren't based upon race. Paul visited Athens to bring the Gospel without confrontation by using cultural insights that were already there. For example, the Greeks worshiped many gods including an "unknown" god. So, Paul used that information to explain who that unknown God really was. He found an entrée into their cultural environment by recognizing that they already knew there was another alternative for their pantheism.

APPLICATION

Shane: Would you share with us the definition of the multi-ethnic church?

Efrem: If a church's majority of congregants is 80% or less, it is considered to be multi-ethnic. This definition comes from a book entitled United by Faith written by a team of Christian sociologists. They found that people feel they still have a voice in this environment even when they are ethnically different from the 80%. Sadly, statistics show that only 20% of churches meet this standard.

Shane: How is it measured?

Efrem: The Evangelical Covenant Church of which I am a participant has a six-fold test:

- 1) **Population.** Are we diverse? What tracking devices are we using to determine population?
- 2) **Participation.** How diverse ethnically are our ministry teams like ushers, small groups, children's ministry, greeters, security, and parking staff? Do they represent the less than 80% standard?
- 3) **Power.** How much diversity is evident where leaders make the decisions in our church?
- 4) **Purposeful Narrative.** How do we tell our story? How do we present our church in videos, on Facebook, in written materials, in photos, in graphics? Is it a diverse story?
- 5) **Pacesetting.** As an innovator, do other church communities come to us for guidance in building a multi-ethnic church?
- 6) **Practicing Solidarity.** Do we have community relationships with sister churches that are ethnically diverse with different races represented? What can we do to be more reconciling through our church with other communities and partners around us? Are we all justice-oriented Biblically?

Shane: We want our church construct to look like heaven, so what is the difference between multi-ethnic and multi-racial?

Efrem: As I have said, the structure of man-made culture is the result of sin. God based societies on tribes, nations, culture, language and ethnicity – not on race. That is not Biblical. God's solution is righteousness and justice with His laws applied. When the dominant race is less than 80%, then there is diversity. We need to be vehicles of God's forgiveness and peace to all people, no matter what their race or ethnicity.

Shane: So, you are saying we need to be color blind.

Efrem: We need to be skin color blind. If cheese has green spots, we need to notice that or we will be in trouble. My skin color is different from yours, but we can move from skin color diversity being our main division, to our common righteousness which is an expression of blessedness. It's okay to see diversity amid unity in the body of Christ. In Acts, Greek widows who were Jews were overlooked when food was distributed by the Apostles, so they created a group of "deacons" to take on that responsibility. The most vulnerable among them were served. They attacked the problem, not each other.

Shane: We need to see where we are not fair and just.

Efrem: God's justice 1) gives honor to Him, and 2) is a deep connection between righteousness and justice that brings empowerment and restoration to vulnerable people. This is where systematic sin has brought so much damage.

Shane: How do we do that?

Efrem: 1) Pray passionately for reconciliation. 2) Ask, "What does our church have that people can find a place here where they are welcomed and valued and can be used for God." 3) Ask, "Are we connecting with sub-cultures in our community to bring reconciliation and restoration?" Additionally, 4) we need to die to self – to put all others above us and our own needs.

Shane: We try to engage in community reconciliation through our relationships with community partners, and to study how the Gospel can impact those areas.

Efrem: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 says that Jesus is the ultimate reconciler, restoring where something has been broken. Genesis 1 is where it starts – the restoration of God's idea. We can be His vehicle connecting people to Jesus and one another. We can connect righteously through the Holy spirit – we can rediscover love and as we are empowered by love, rediscover Jesus. Do justly – love mercy – walk humbly with our God. We can't remake Jesus in our image and we can't view ourselves and each other by race, but only by Jesus. We must allow Him to help us die to ourselves.

Shane: How do we die to self?

Efrem: We need Christian discipline -- not being dividers, but reconcilers. In our occupations we are both **in** this world and **of** God and as salt and light we represent Him. Additionally, the church can't be held hostage by political parties or ideology, because we are citizens of the Kingdom of God – we are citizens of another realm – we are ambassadors of God's Kingdom.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for Pastor Efrem's wisdom and insight as he speaks to us about multi-ethnic churches. Help us to meditate on his words and become salt and light for your Kingdom. In Jesus' name.

QUESTIONS

What does our church have that people can find a place here where they are welcomed and valued and can be used for God? What do you do to welcome people in at The Crossing?

What percentage of the majority of our church attendees do you think is less than 80%? How can we track this number more effectively?

When have you experienced disunity in a group environment? What did you do to improve it? What are you contributing to the bringing of unity to all people here?

How diverse are the serving teams, small groups, children's ministries and life groups in which you participate?

How are you reconciling differences in your family? In your church?

What are the tasks and who are the people you consider to be beneath you?

How can you die to self every day in order to become a reconciler? What would your life look like if you did?

What walls are you breaking down today? What bridges are you building in your community?

Which of your social and business contacts are ethnically diverse from you? What are you doing to help them feel welcomed and valued?