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# **IN CHURCH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**

## **GROUP CURRICULUM**



# THE PURPOSE OF THIS CURRICULUM

is to create a context where Christians from different cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds can apply the content from the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven: Cultivating a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), by Jamaal E. Williams and Timothy Paul Jones. This curriculum guide includes a total of six sessions. Videos to supplement and enrich this study are available at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series).

Throughout this study, feel free to change the structure to apply the truth of Scripture to the needs of your group in the best possible way. The suggestions in this guide are just that—suggestions! Adapt them as needed for your context.

At least two weeks before the first group session, be sure that each participant has a copy of the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*. Be certain that participants who are not able to afford the book are able to obtain a copy of the book in a way that is dignifying and not degrading. Contact all participants prior to the first meeting to let them know they need to read the introduction and the first three chapters of the book to prepare for the first group gathering.

Much of the content in *In Church as It Is in Heaven* is sensitive and could bring a variety of emotions to the surface. If tension or conflict arises, guide the participants away from a mindset of “us-against-each-other” and toward a mindset of “us-against-the-problem in the power of the Spirit because of the gospel.” Regularly acknowledge that participants can agree about a problem while charitably disagreeing about specific solutions. Depending on your context, it may be helpful to establish limits of discussion on the “right” and on the “left.” If you think these boundaries might be helpful for your group, we recommend that you read George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). Yancey identifies different perspectives on racial issues in the United States, then critiques two unhelpful approaches from the political left and two unhelpful approaches from the political right.

# SIX-WEEK CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

	TITLE	TRUTH	TEXT
<b>Week 1</b>	Call to Worship: Learning to Love Multiethnic Kingdom Culture	The problem is not that we don't know what's right; the problem is that we don't love what's best	Revelation 7:9–12
<b>Week 2</b>	Lament: Grieving What Stands in the Way of Multiethnic Kingdom Culture	We will never long for a life like heaven until we lament the lies from hell that have kept us apart	Romans 12:9–21
<b>Week 3</b>	Offering: Giving for the Sake of Multiethnic Kingdom Culture	Gospel generosity happens when we follow the example of Jesus by releasing preferences, privileges, or possessions for the sake of fellow Christians	Genesis 11:1–9; Acts 2:1–11; Acts 6:1–7
<b>Week 4</b>	Passing the Peace: Welcoming One Another in a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture	God's peace is not the absence of conflict; it's the presence of welcome.	Romans 15:1–7; James 2:1–9
<b>Week 5</b>	Communion: Embracing the Fellowship of a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture	Live like Jesus has already broken down the walls between us, because he has	Ephesians 2:11–3:13; 1 Corinthians 11:17–34
<b>Week 6</b>	Benediction: A Blessing for the Road	Reconciliation is a blessing to receive, not a goal to achieve	Jude 1:24–25

# SESSION 1: CALL TO WORSHIP

## LEARNING TO LOVE MULTIETHNIC KINGDOM CULTURE

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### GET READY

1. Before leading this session, download the playlist from Amazon Music entitled “*In Church as It Is in Heaven*, by Jamaal E. Williams and Timothy Paul Jones.” If you use some other music service, you can find the songs listed at the end of this group curriculum guide so that you can make the playlist yourself.
2. Gather an index card and a pen or pencil for each participant.
3. Carefully study Revelation 7:9–12. To dig deeper into the background of this text, see Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987) and Thomas Schreiner, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2023).
4. Carefully study these sections in the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*:
  - Introduction: Broken City, Broken World
  - Chapter 1: The Evidence That Our World Has Yet to See
  - Chapter 2: The Gap in Our Love
  - Chapter 3: Liturgies of Love and Longing
5. Text or email every participant to remind him or her to read the Introduction and chapters 1, 2, and 3 of *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the first group session.
6. Pray that God will use these readings to open the minds and hearts of participants to a biblical vision of multiethnic kingdom culture.
7. If you plan to use the video “Call to Worship: Learning to Love Multiethnic Kingdom Culture” at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series), be sure to test the audio and video ahead of time.

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### SET IT UP (10 MINUTES)

As participants begin to arrive, play the songs from the playlist in the background.

Give each participant an index card and ask him or her to write down two things: (1) one key idea from the first three chapters of the book and (2) one fact about himself or herself that no one else in the group would know. Let participants know that other participants will see their cards.

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## **START TALKING (12 MINUTES)**

Ask participants the following questions to help them get to know each other:

- What are you most looking forward to about this study?
- What was your “highlight” during this past week?
- What was your “lowlight” during this past week?

Shuffle the index cards that you distributed earlier and redistribute them to the group so that each participant receives a different participant’s index card. Have each participant read aloud the card that he or she received. If someone struggles with reading aloud, let him or her know that it is acceptable to paraphrase the idea on the card rather than reading it aloud.

Encourage the group to guess which index card came from each participant.

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## **REVIEW WHAT YOU READ (12 MINUTES)**

Use the “one key idea” on each index card to review the content from the book.

Choose three of the following questions to reinforce the participants’ recollection of what they read:

- This book is an apologetics book. What is “apologetics”?
- The authors defined liturgies as “habits that shape our loves.” How would you define “habits” and “liturgies”?
- How is this book’s definition of “liturgy” different from what you usually think about when you hear this word? How do liturgies shape our loves?
- What might a celebration of multiethnic diversity look like in your church?
- The authors quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., as saying, “Eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America.” Why should Christians today care about this continued separation?
- According to chapter 3, how can multiethnic churches provide a unique apologetic for the truth of the gospel?

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## **VIDEO (OPTIONAL, 15 MINUTES)**

Play the video “Call to Worship: Learning to Love Multiethnic Kingdom Culture.”

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## **LISTEN TO GOD’S WORD ABOVE EVERY OTHER WORD (16 MINUTES)**

Read Revelation 7:9–12 and lead a discussion of this text.

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## **BRING IT ALL TOGETHER (10 MINUTES)**

Review the liturgies of love and longing described in chapter 3. Encourage each member to begin one habit this week that they will be able to sustain.

Make certain that participants are aware that they will be asked to begin five habits during this study.

Remind the participants to read chapters 4, 5, and 6 in *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the next session.

Close the session by reading aloud the lyrics of the song “Your House” by Bobby Gilles and Jonatan Barahona, from “A Corporate Call to Worship” at the end of chapter 3.

# SESSION 2: LAMENT

## GRIEVING WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF MULTIETHNIC KINGDOM CULTURE

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### GET READY

1. Gather an index card and a pen or pencil for each participant.
2. Carefully study Romans 12:9–21. To dig deeper into the background of this text, see John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) and Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018).
3. Carefully study these sections in the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*:
  - Chapter 4: Lamenting the Wound
  - Chapter 5: The Lies that Blind Us to the Ties that Bind Us
  - Chapter 6: Liturgies of Lament
4. Text or email every participant to remind him or her to read chapters 4, 5, and 6 of *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the group session.
5. Pray that God will use these readings to open the minds and hearts of participants to grieve past and present barriers that stand in the way of multiethnic kingdom culture.
6. If you plan to use the video “Lament: Grieving What Stands in the Way of Multiethnic Kingdom Culture” at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series), be sure to test the audio and video ahead of time.

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### SET IT UP (5 MINUTES)

As participants begin to arrive, play the songs from the playlist in the background.

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### START TALKING (5 MINUTES)

Give each participant an index card and ask each one to write down a brief description of a time when they needed fellow Christians to lament with them. Let them know that they will not need to share what they wrote with anyone else unless they wish to do so.

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## **REVIEW WHAT YOU READ (20 MINUTES)**

Choose three of the following questions to reinforce the participants' recollection of what they read:

- What surprised you the most about the history of racism described in chapter 5?
- In Psalm 19:12, David recognized that it is possible to sin without meaning to do so. What are some ways that Christians sin unintentionally?
- According to the authors, we may be far more wounded by the heresy of racial superiority than we know. What are some ways we might be unaware how the historical realities of racism have wounded us? How could these wounds cause us to wound others unintentionally?
- The authors described a service of lament that left people more wounded when they left than when they arrived. What distinguishes healthy lament from unhealthy lament in the life of a Christian?
- The Bible commands Christians to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15), yet Christians are also commanded to rejoice at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:16). How can a Christian life simultaneously include rejoicing and lament?
- Think about a time in your life when someone lamented with you. What impact did their empathy have on you? What can you learn from this when it comes to lamenting the continued impact of racism?
- According to chapter 6, how can shared practices of lament provide an apologetic that points to the reality of a divine Creator?

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## **VIDEO (OPTIONAL, 15 MINUTES)**

Play the video “Lament: Grieving What Stands in the Way of Multiethnic Kingdom Culture.”

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## **LISTEN TO GOD’S WORD ABOVE EVERY OTHER WORD (20 MINUTES)**

Read Romans 12:9–21 and lead a discussion of this text.

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## **BRING IT ALL TOGETHER (10 MINUTES)**

Encourage participants to look at the index cards on which they described a time when they needed someone to lament with them. Ask if anyone might want to share how Romans 12:9–21 applies to their situation. Do not pressure participants to share what they wrote. Simply provide space for



them to share if they wish to do so.

Ask participants to describe specific ways they can lament the past and present impact of the heresy of racial superiority.

Review the liturgies of lament described in chapter 6. Encourage each member to begin one habit this week that they will be able to sustain.

Remind the participants to read chapters 7, 8, and 9 in *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the next session.

Close the session by reading aloud the lyrics of the song "Let Justice Roll" by Bobby Gilles and Rebecca Elliot, from "A Corporate Lament" at the end of chapter 6.

# SESSION 3: OFFERING:

## GIVING FOR THE SAKE OF MULTIETHNIC KINGDOM CULTURE

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### GET READY

1. Gather an index card and a pen or pencil for each participant.
2. Carefully study Acts 6:1–7. To dig deeper into the background of this text, see John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).
3. Carefully study these sections in the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*:
  - Chapter 7: Seeing Both Sides of the Ball
  - Chapter 8: How God Made a Holy Mess and Turned It into a Heavenly Movement
  - Chapter 9: Liturgies of Giving
4. Text or email every participant to remind him or her to read chapters 7, 8, and 9 of *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the group session.
5. Pray that God will use these readings to open the minds and hearts of participants to become more generous with their preferences and resources.
6. If you plan to use the video “Offering: Giving for the Sake of Multiethnic Kingdom Culture” at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series), be sure to test the audio and video ahead of time.

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### SET IT UP (5 MINUTES)

As participants begin to arrive, play the songs from the playlist in the background.

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### START TALKING (5 MINUTES)

Provide each participant with an index card and ask each person to list their favorite part of worship services in their local church. This could be a favorite song or a favorite moment that happens in a worship service. Let participants know they will be asked to share what they write on their cards.

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## REVIEW WHAT YOU READ (20 MINUTES)

Review and discuss the content of chapters 7, 8, and 9. Choose three of the following questions to reinforce the participants' recollection of what they read:

- Dr. Dudley E. Flood helped people to consider different perspectives by using a sleight-of-hand trick that involved a ball that was red on one side and green on the other. Depending on where you're standing, I might see red while you see green. In order for me to see what you're seeing, I must walk around to look at the ball from your point of view. Describe a time when you came around to see someone else's "side of the ball"?
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost marked the inauguration of God's reversal of the curse that happened at the Tower of Babel. After Pentecost we still struggle to communicate cross-culturally, but God has given us a guarantee that he will reverse this curse at the end of time. What are some similarities between the people who gathered at the Tower of Babel and those who experienced the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost? What are some of the most important differences between Babel and Pentecost?
- The authors suggest visiting a church outside your own ethnic and cultural experience once every few months. Why might it be difficult to visit a church that doesn't fit your own ethnic and cultural experiences?
- In what ways was Jesus generous with his power and privilege? How should this change our habits of generosity? If participants struggle to answer this question, direct their attention to Philippians 2:1–11.
- In what ways were early Christians generous when a conflict emerged between Hebraic and Hellenistic Jewish Christians over care for their widows? (Acts 6:1–7).
- If someone rejects the idea of a divine Creator, that person cannot adequately explain a community that is generous with power, privilege, and possessions. How can this truth help you to share the gospel with unbelieving friends and neighbors?
- According to the authors, Christian generosity declares the truth of the gospel by functioning as a "rehearsal for martyrdom." How should this perspective influence your willingness to share resources, power, and privilege?

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## VIDEO (OPTIONAL, 15 MINUTES)

Play the video "Offering: Giving for the Sake of Multiethnic Kingdom Culture."

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## **LISTEN TO GOD’S WORD ABOVE EVERY OTHER WORD (20 MINUTES)**

Read Acts 6:1–7 and lead a discussion of this text.

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## **WRAP IT UP (10 MINUTES)**

Ask participants to share what they wrote on their index cards. Ask participants, “How has this preference been influenced by your generational, social, economic, or ethnic background?” Remind participants that their preferences are not wrong. It is good to celebrate the God-given joy that this practice brings! At the same time, all of us should be willing to recognize our preferences and to release them if this would be helpful for others.

Review the liturgies of giving described in chapter 9. Encourage each member to choose one habit to begin this week that they will be able to sustain.

Remind the participants to read chapters 10, 11, and 12 before the next session.

Close the session by reading aloud the lyrics of the song “All I Have Is Yours” by Rebecca Elliott and Bobby Gilles, from “A Corporate Hymn of Offering” at the end of chapter 9.

# SESSION 4: PASSING THE PEACE

## WELCOMING ONE ANOTHER IN A MULTIETHNIC KINGDOM CULTURE

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### GET READY

1. Gather an index card and a pen or pencil for each participant.
2. Carefully study Romans 15:1–7 and James 2:1–9. To dig deeper into the backgrounds of these texts, see John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018); and, Douglas Moo, *James*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).
3. Carefully study these sections in the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*:
  - Chapter 10: Going to War by Passing the Peace
  - Chapter 11: White Is Not a Neutral Color
  - Chapter 12: Liturgies of Hospitality
4. Text or email every participant to remind him or her to read chapters 10, 11, and 12 of *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the group session.
5. Pray that God will use these readings to open the minds and hearts of participants to develop gospel-centered habits of multiethnic, multisocioeconomic, and multigenerational hospitality.
6. If you plan to use the video “Passing the Peace: Welcoming One Another in a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture” at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series), be sure to test the audio and video ahead of time.

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### SET IT UP (5 MINUTES)

As participants begin to arrive, play the songs from the playlist in the background.

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### START TALKING (5 MINUTES)

Provide each participant with an index card and ask each person to write down a brief description of a moment in their lives when they felt most welcomed and least welcomed. Let them know that they will not need to share these descriptions with others unless they wish to do so.

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## **REVIEW WHAT YOU READ (20 MINUTES)**

Review and discuss the content of chapters 10, 11, and 12. Choose three questions to reinforce the participants' recollection of what they read:

- What can passing the peace in a multiethnic and multisocioeconomic church reveal to the world around us?
- Why can it sometimes be difficult for persons who are part of a dominant culture to notice how cultural backgrounds shape their preferences?
- Read aloud James 2:1–9. Remind participants that partiality can be ethnic and cultural as well as economic and social. Then, ask: Why should Christians resist every tendency toward ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic partiality?
- Define “colorblindness,” “multiculturalism,” and “secular antiracism.” Then, ask: Why have these secular solutions consistently failed to cultivate multiethnic kingdom culture?
- How does multiethnic kingdom culture differ from colorblindness, multiculturalism, and secular antiracism?
- According to the authors, “Our churches will never be diverse until our dinner tables are diverse.” How might ethnically, generationally, or socioeconomically diverse dinner tables strengthen a local church?
- What are some specific ways that New Testament Christians demonstrated ethnic, generational, and socioeconomic hospitality toward one another?
- How might a life of hospitality help to defend the truth of Christianity in your neighborhood?

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## **VIDEO (OPTIONAL, 15 MINUTES)**

Play the video “Passing the Peace: Welcoming One Another in a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture.”

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## **LISTEN TO GOD’S WORD ABOVE EVERY OTHER WORD (20 MINUTES)**

Read Romans 15:1–7 and lead a discussion of this text.

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## **WRAP IT UP (10 MINUTES)**

Ask participants if they would like to share what they wrote on their index cards. Do not pressure any participant to share. Pay attention to common themes related to what has made participants

feel welcomed. After everyone who wishes to share has done so, mention the common themes that you noticed. Then, ask: Based on what you've learned, how could you help someone who is different from you to feel welcomed?

If participants share recollections of times when they felt unwelcomed, these stories may be painful for them to share. Be sensitive to their stories, and be prepared to respond with compassion and care. Sometimes, the best words that you can say are simply, "I am so sorry that happened to you. How can we pray for you?"

Review the liturgies of giving described in chapter 12. Encourage each member to choose one sustainable habit to begin this week.

Remind the participants to read chapters 13, 14, and 15 before the next session.

Close the session by reading aloud the lyrics of the song "There Is a Peace" by Charlie Richardson, from "A Corporate Passing of the Peace" at the end of chapter 12.

# SESSION 5: COMMUNION

## EMBRACING THE FELLOWSHIP OF A MULTIETHNIC KINGDOM CULTURE

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### GET READY

1. Gather an index card and a pen or pencil for each participant.
2. Carefully study Ephesians 2:11–3:13 and 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. To dig deeper into the backgrounds of these texts, see Darrell Bock, *Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019) and Thomas Schreiner, *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).
3. Carefully study these sections in the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*:
  - Chapter 13: Learning Your Place
  - Chapter 14: Building Up Walls that Jesus Already Broke Down
  - Chapter 15: Liturgies of Communion
4. Text or email every participant to remind them to read chapters 13, 14, and 15 of *In Church as It Is in Heaven* before the group session.
5. Pray that God will use these readings to develop a desire within participants for gospel-centered communion with faithful Christians from a multiplicity of different ethnicities, generations, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
6. If you plan to use the video “Communion: Embracing the Fellowship of a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture” at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series), be sure to test the audio and video ahead of time.

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### SET IT UP (5 MINUTES)

As participants begin to arrive, play the songs from the playlist in the background.

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### START TALKING (10 MINUTES)

Provide each participant with an index card and ask each person to write a brief description of their most meaningful memory of participating in Communion (or, “the Lord’s Supper” or “Eucharist” depending on your church’s preferred terminology).



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## **REVIEW WHAT YOU READ (20 MINUTES)**

Review and discuss the content of chapters 13, 14, and 15. Choose three questions to reinforce the participants' recollection of what they read:

- According to the authors, "No matter where you live, there is a story—a narrative—woven into your location." What are some stories that have shaped the community where you live?
- Do you know how segregation shaped the demographics and neighborhoods in your city? What could you do to learn more about this story?
- Some churches in the nineteenth century built physical barriers in their sanctuaries to separate enslaved persons from their captors. What are some unseen barriers that have been built between different groups of faithful believers within churches and denominations today?
- What were some key problems with the ways that Communion was celebrated in the Corinthian church in the middle of the first century A.D.? If participants can't recall this section from the book, review 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 as a group.
- How could you initiate a habit of eating with people whose cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic background is different from your own? How can you make sure that you are sharing a meal as equals?
- How can the practice of Communion function as an apologetic for the truthfulness of the gospel?
- "Our goal is not to witness the world's love for us; it is to be witnesses of God's love for the world," according to the authors. What would change if Christians became more concerned with being witnesses of God's love and less concerned with earning the favor of the prevailing culture?

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## **VIDEO (OPTIONAL, 15 MINUTES)**

Play the video "Communion: Embracing the Fellowship of a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture"

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## **LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD ABOVE EVERY OTHER WORD (20 MINUTES)**

Read Ephesians 2:11–3:13 and lead a discussion of this text.

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## **WRAP IT UP (10 MINUTES)**

Ask participants if they would like to share what they wrote on their index cards. Pay attention to common themes in participants' descriptions of meaningful experiences of Communion. Mention the common themes that you notice. After everyone who wishes to share has done so, remind the participants: Each time faithful Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, their celebration points forward to a banquet with Jesus that will bring together Christians from every ethnicity. How should this multiethnic future change the way you think about the Lord's Supper here and now?

Review the liturgies of giving described in chapter 15. Encourage each member to choose one sustainable habit to begin this week.

Remind the participants to read "Benediction: A Blessing for the Road" and the afterword before the next session.

Close the session by reading aloud the lyrics of the song "Come and See" by Whitney Bozarth, from "A Corporate Hymn of Communion" at the end of chapter 15.

# SESSION 6: BENEDICTION:

## A BLESSING FOR THE ROAD

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### GET READY

1. Gather an index card and a pen or pencil for each participant.
2. Make plans to end the study by eating a meal together. Depending on your context, this might include assigning food items to different participants and/or requesting assistance from your church and/or obtaining plastic utensils, paper plates, and cups. Make plans to accommodate anyone who might not be able to prepare food to share; be sure that these accommodations are dignifying and not embarrassing. For example, if someone does not have the resources or capacity to bring food to share, consider inviting him or her to join you in preparing food; when the group gathers, highlight this individual's contributions to the preparation of the meal.
3. Carefully study these sections in the book *In Church as It Is in Heaven*:
  - Benediction: A Blessing for the Road
  - Afterword, by Jarvis Williams
4. Text or email every participant to remind him or her to read the benediction and afterword before the final group session. In the same text or email, remind participants what food items or utensils they should plan to bring to the final session.
5. Pray that God will use *In Church as It Is in Heaven* to cultivate a capacity among participants to pursue multiethnic, multisocioeconomic, and multigenerational kingdom culture.
6. If you plan to use the video "Benediction: A Blessing for the Road" at [www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series](http://www.ivpress.com/in-church-as-it-is-in-heaven-video-series), be sure to test the audio and video ahead of time.

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### SET IT UP (5 MINUTES)

As participants begin to arrive, play the songs from the playlist in the background.

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### START TALKING (20 MINUTES)

Provide each participant with an index card and ask each person to write the one most important truth that they recognized through their reading of *In Church As It Is in Heaven*. Let participants know that other people will see what they share on their index cards.

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## REVIEW WHAT YOU READ (25 MINUTES)

While sharing the meal together, shuffle the index cards, redistribute the cards, and ask participants to read the cards they receive and to summarize in their own words the most important truths written on the cards they received.

Organize into smaller groups of three or four persons and share an extended time of fervent prayer, pleading with God to cultivate multiethnic, multisocioeconomic, and multigenerational kingdom culture in your church.

Close by asking each member to share testimonies for what God has done in their heart through the study.

Review the habits that participants have chosen to incorporate into their lives. Encourage each participant to choose one of these habits to maintain after the study has ended.

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## DIG DEEPER (5 MINUTES)

If participants want to dig more deeply into a pursuit of multiethnic kingdom culture, you could recommend one or more of the following resources:

- Adams, Isaac. *Talking about Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022. This book is an excellent next step for individuals to begin having good conversations about ethnic reconciliation.
- Gray, Derwin. *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says and the First Christians Knew about Racial Reconciliation*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2022. Focusing primarily on the role of the church, Derwin Gray provides help for leaders who want to pursue multiethnic unity.
- Horton, D.A. *Intensional: Kingdom Ethnicity in a Divided World*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2018. *Intensional* is a straightforward book that helpfully reinforces many of the same points that are made in *In Church As It Is in Heaven*.
- Linne, Shai. *The New Reformation: Finding Hope in the Fight for Ethnic Unity*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2021. This book from Christian hip hop artist Shai Linne looks at ethnic unity as an outgrowth of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
- McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020. New Testament scholar Esau McCaulley considers how the African American experience shapes biblical interpretation.

- Perkins, John M., with Karen Waddles. *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018. In this beautifully written book, civil rights leader John M. Perkins offers one last plea for American Christians to prioritize ethnic unity.
- Williams, Jarvis. *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021. In this biblical theology, renowned New Testament scholar Jarvis Williams digs deeply into God’s design for diversity.
- Yancey, George. *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. Sociologist George Yancey critiques secular models for multiethnic unity and presents a pathway for collaborative conversations.

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**VIDEO (OPTIONAL, 10 MINUTES)**

Play the video “Benediction: A Blessing for the Road”

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**LISTEN TO GOD’S WORD ABOVE EVERY OTHER WORD (5 MINUTES)**

End the study with a blessing by reading aloud Jude 1:24–25.

# PLAYLIST FOR GROUP SESSIONS

To download this public playlist, search Amazon Music for the playlist entitled *"In Church As It Is in Heaven"*, by Jamaal E. Williams and Timothy Paul Jones."

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## CALL TO WORSHIP

- "Your House" (Sojourn Music)
- "Made Straight" (Propaganda, featuring Audrey Assad)
- "Come and See" (Whitney Bozarth and Sojourn Music)

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## LAMENT

- "Wake Up, Jesus" (The Porter's Gate, featuring Liz Vice)
- "Kingdom Come" (Common Hymnal, featuring Kierre Bjorn)
- "Let Justice Roll" (Sojourn Music)

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## OFFERING

- "It's Not Working (The Truth)" (Propaganda, featuring Courtney Orlando)
- "All I Have Is Yours" (Sojourn Music)

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## PASSING THE PEACE

- "God Will Heal Our Wounds" (Common Hymnal)
- "Come and Tear Down the Walls" (Noise Village, featuring Jenny Wahlström)
- "There Is a Peace" (Sojourn Music)

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## COMMUNION AND BENEDICTION

- "I Know It Was the Blood" (Shirley Caesar)
- "Not Just For Me" (Common Hymnal)
- "Glory" (Common and John Legend)

# APPENDIX:

## THE WORK THAT SOME CHURCHES MAY NEED TO DO BEFORE CALLING BLACK AND BROWN LEADERS

by Jamaal Williams

After working through this curriculum, some of you might be considering how your church can move in a more multiethnic direction by hiring Black or Brown staff members. If that's an area where God is cultivating a new vision in your church, this appendix is for you. There are some realities that I (Jamaal) hope you will consider before you move in this direction. My goal isn't to discourage you; it's to prepare you to pursue this vision in a healthy way.

After ten years of serving at a thriving and historic African American church, the Lord called my family and me to a new assignment, serving in a predominantly White church, fifteen minutes away in the same city. I knew it would be a daunting task. It happened in 2016, a year packed with national, political, and racial strife. And yet, we left the church we loved with confidence. Throughout the process, our historic African American church was supportive and helped us to make the decision, and everyone involved in the process sensed that the transition was the Lord's will.

But obeying God's will does not mean all things will be easy.

In fact, I could argue on the basis of Scripture and personal experience that stepping out on faith into new seasons of life often comes with intense testing and trials. My family and I expected many of these hardships. We were crossing cultures, leaning against a stronghold of racial division and classism. We were leaving a beloved, historic African American church and stepping into a large, well-known, predominantly White church. At the same time, some of the hardships associated with this transition resulted from the church's lack of preparedness in hiring an African American staff member.

With this in mind, I want to point out a few simple realities that I wish my church had understood back then and that I wish I would have had the awareness to articulate.

### **1. Many Black and Brown leaders in majority White spaces regularly experience isolation and exhaustion because they feel like cultural outsiders.**

Growing up as a Black man with exposure to different sitcoms, musical genres, and travel destinations than my White colleagues, I found myself unable to participate in group conversations for lengthy portions of time. And that's not to mention the theological categories that some Black and Brown persons may express in different ways than their White brothers and sisters.

Many days, I went home exhausted because no one seemed to recognize these realities. Even worse, sometimes it felt as if my colleagues assumed I was not as educated or intelligent because I did not get every cultural and theological reference immediately. As time progressed, I began to muster energy and confidence to interact in a way that helped them see that all of us need to enter conversations as learners, listening and working to understand these references in ways that included everyone.

## **2. Many Black and Brown leaders in majority White spaces live with a heightened sense of spiritual warfare.**

Dr. Russell Moore, now editor of *Christianity Today*, spoke at my installation service at Sojourn Church Midtown. Part of what he talked about was how this move from a predominantly Black church to a predominantly White church would come with massive spiritual warfare.

He was right.

The day after the installation service, I threw up on the highway on my way to the office. A few hours later, I would be in a hospital, struggling to walk and enduring all sorts of tests. This mysterious health challenge would linger for years, leaving physicians with many guesses but no real answers. Like Paul, I felt that God had allowed a thorn in my flesh and that Satan was using this thorn to buffet me (2 Corinthians 12:7).

This conflict showed up not only physically but also mentally. In majority White spaces, it's easy for Black and Brown leaders to second-guess themselves constantly, not knowing how to interpret neutral and negative interactions. There is a weight of wondering whether this interaction is because of my ethnicity or because of other natural cultural differences. While these feelings aren't necessarily from Satan, the Evil One can use neutral and negative experiences of this sort to exhaust Black and Brown leaders. If you call a Black or Brown staff member to serve in your church, make certain that you are someone who prays for this leader as he or she works to navigate cultural differences while experiencing spiritual warfare.

## **3. No race or ethnicity is monolithic.**

Bryan Loritts has written a book entitled *Right Color, Wrong Culture: The Type of Leader Your Organization Needs to Become Multiethnic* (Moody Publishers, 2014). In this book, Loritts develops a parable of a majority White church that hires a Black pastor. The book narrates three types of people that a church might find itself considering.

The first type of person is represented by Carlton Banks from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. This person is well-educated and largely identifies with White upper and high-class cultures.



The second type is represented by Malcolm X. To some White persons, this individual seems harsh, militant, and sharp around the edges. The third type of Black leader, says Loritts, is represented by the actor Denzel Washington. Loritts argues that White churches should look for Denzel, a Black leader who can play a variety of different roles and who can be comfortable crossing lines and building bridges. While I agree a Black leader in a White church needs to have the capacity to cross cultures, I also want to highlight a challenge: sometimes people can look at the “Carlton Banks” leader as if this individual is not authentically Black simply because he’s not a “Denzel Washington.” There is no single Black culture; there are Black cultures, just as there are White cultures and Latino cultures. Black people do not all preach alike or read the same type of books. Some of the most hurtful moments on staff during that first year at Sojourn Church Midtown were the moments when I was made to feel “less Black” because I did not fit someone’s stereotype of what it means to be Black. Leaders and members of majority White churches should get to know the person they are hiring as an individual without trying to make this individual fit into anyone’s predetermined definition of a Black or Brown leader.

#### **4. Leaders at White institutions that hire Black and Brown candidates should share the burden of ethnic reconciliation.**

When I came to Sojourn, the congregation hadn’t done any deep work in ethnic reconciliation. As a result, during the early days, I was not I found myself carrying almost all of the weight related to racial issues. If anyone said anything from the pulpit about a racial issue and it hurt or confused a church member, the email was forwarded to me, and I was expected to deal with the issue. If any racial issue came up in a staff meeting, all heads turned to me. To some degree, this made sense because I could frequently bring a unique perspective as the only black person on staff. At the same time, the weight of carrying the full weight of these conversations all the time began to catch up with me. Thankfully, many of the pastors at Sojourn Church Midtown quickly grew and did their best to share the burden of ethnic reconciliation with me. And yet, ideally, the church would have taken at least a few steps in this direction before they hired me.

If you lead a majority White church or organization, do some deep work with your staff before hiring a Black or Brown leader, so that you can share one another’s unique burdens. If you’re a Black or Brown leader who’s considering stepping into a role in a majority White church, don’t enter this assignment lightly. Do your research, count the cost, and be ready for spiritual warfare. At the same time, know that the Lord can use your presence and your voice as he cultivates multiethnic kingdom culture in that space.