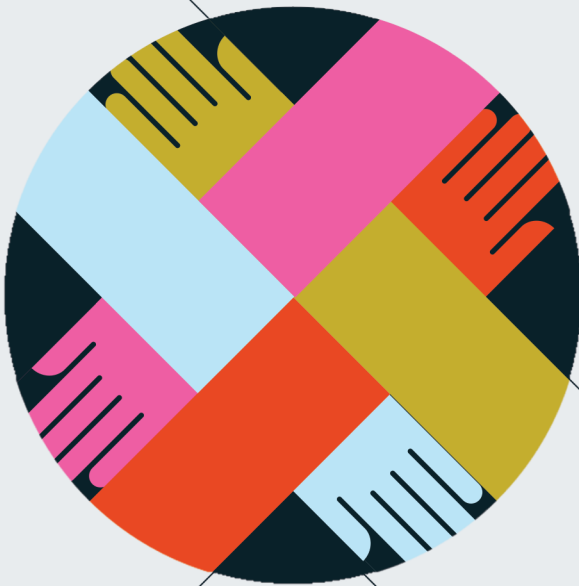


Skot Welch

Unfractured

a Christ-Centered **Action Plan**
for **Cultural Change**



“A roadmap for those topics we’re trained to avoid. Skot takes the most complicated matters of life and offers simple and profound clarity through Scripture and personal testimony. The takeaways in this book are numerous and compose the recipe for the Christ-centric life those who believe are thirsting for.”

Katie Appold, MPA, owner, Nonprofit Nav; executive director,
AIRS; adjunct professor of nonprofit leadership,
Cornerstone University

“Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that the church would be one. As Christians who are in pursuit of God’s will, we have to eventually deal with the things that are keeping us from being united as the body of Christ. In *Unfractured*, Skot Welch opens the dialogue about how the identity crisis we have as Christians keeps us divided, and he helps us center ourselves on Christ, without whom no unity is possible.”

Joel Brooks Jr., pastor, Stones Church, Kalamazoo
and Grand Rapids, Michigan

“In this urgently needed book, Skot Welch delivers both a prophetic punch and a practical action plan for cultural change in a world of increasing division. As you read, you’ll be troubled, encouraged, changed.”

Jeff Crosby, publishing executive; author, *The Language of the Soul*

“Despite the increasing desire of organizations to build diverse teams, the value of diversity and the ways forward often need to be clarified. *Unfractured* presents Skot’s knowledge of diversity and cultural intelligence from his lived experiences and life as a black professional. His approach is intriguing, thought-provoking, and practical.”

Terumi Echols, president and publisher, InterVarsity Press

“Skot Welch is a steady and reconciling voice. His newest book, *Unfractured*, is filled with research, reasoning, and warmth. It

pierces without polarizing. It's theological and thoughtful and shows us the better way as Christians living in a divided world."

Scott Hagan, PhD, president, North Central University

"Some may take offense at this book's honest and often uncomfortable approach to religious racism. But if you're ready for a hard conversation that will renew your mind and align your heart with the heart of God, you won't do better than to read this beautiful book by my friend Skot Welch."

Stan Jantz, CEO, Come and See Foundation

"*Unfractured* dares to push Christians into a new era by challenging us to embrace our true Christ-centered identity. Once we start walking in the identity that Christ intended for us, we can truly shift the culture. *Unfractured* lays out practical and actionable steps for us to get there."

Xavier "X" Jernigan, The Voice of Spotify; deacon,
Emmanuel Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York

"*Unfractured* is the racial-unity book the church needs. Welch provides a Gospel-centered framework that helps leaders work against racism, toward unity. With uncompromising biblical understanding of human value and a call to action against deceptions that would cause Christians to devalue life, Welch provides tangible actions to unfracture the kingdom."

Dr. Desirée Libengood, associate vice president of academics,
North Central University

"I count it an honor to call Skot a personal mentor. Over the years, I have witnessed how these thoughts like having a Christocentric, ethnoconscious identity have transformed church culture. Skot's grace, patience, and love allow a rare opportunity for this trusted guide to help churches navigate this sensitive space."

Rich Nibbe, executive pastor, NPHX Church, Phoenix, Arizona

“Skot has reminded us that we were put on earth to serve God with everyone, everywhere, and in everything, unto God. Thank you, Skot, for bringing us back to our true identity, and for challenging us to remember that we all have a purpose and plan on earth. We are uniquely and wonderfully made, and we thank you for this book that is a work of heart for us all.”

Janis Petrini, Purpose Driven Talent

“Skot Welch has written a timely and powerful book that challenges us to rethink how we talk about race and ethnicity in the church and beyond. With biblical insight and practical wisdom, he shows us how to celebrate our diversity, embrace a new kingdom language, and engage in compassionate conversations that lead to reconciliation. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to be part of God’s redemptive solution for our broken world.”

Samuel Rodriguez, lead pastor, New Season; president and CEO,
National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference;
author, *Your Mess, God’s Miracle*; executive producer,
Breakthrough and *Flamin’ Hot*

“For those interested in experiencing the transformational power of a unified church, you must read *Unfractured*. Skot Welch draws on years of diversity, equity, and inclusion experience to provide powerful insights and effective tools for us to heal fractures caused by secular influences and cultural differences to become a unified church.”

Deloris S. Thomas, PhD, president, Joseph Business School

Unfractured

Unfractured

A Christ-Centered **Action Plan**
for **Cultural Change**

Skot Welch



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To my “Ever Moers”—
The love of my life, my wife, Barbara,
and my wonderful children Brandon and Brooks.
You exhibit, daily and for “ever more,”
God’s heart for me. I love you.

To my precious family—
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and to my mom, who is now in heaven,
who have loved me unconditionally from Day 1.
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(as well as my other in-loves—brothers and sisters),
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To my mentors/pastors—
Thank you for always being there for me,
helping me to mature, and speaking into my life—
and for speaking life into me.

Additional Resources (and Sounds)

For resources including an “Unfractured Sonic Landscape” playlist on Spotify, deeper-dive podcasts, as well as information on how to become a certified facilitator of the *Unfractured* curriculum, scan this QR code:



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To Him who was, who is, and who is to come.

The power of this book is the result of God's grace and help.

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You make Him smile.

Preface

A New Language for a New Church Era . . . For God's Family

What do you think of when you hear the word *language*? I know what I think of: the funny story my friend Sharon shared with me about her introduction to the French language as a college freshman. As a native English speaker majoring in Spanish because she hoped to enter the world of elementary education in California in the late '70s, for some reason, the university required her to enroll in classes of yet another language.

Each day, Sharon moved from her 10 a.m. Conversational Spanish 300 class to her 11 a.m. Introduction to French 102. To make matters worse, the professor did not allow anyone to speak anything but French in class. Sharon thought *oui* would be pronounced “oo-we” instead of simply “we,” and she was completely thrown off by the silent letters. For example, *Bordeaux* is pronounced bore-doh instead of “bore-dee-aux.” And she had thought English was weird.

Nevertheless, she managed to get an A in that class because the teacher was just that good at using hand signals, a pointer, and

repetition. Sharon eventually changed her major to liberal studies, and taught successfully for thirty-five years in California—as an English teacher. The moral of the story for her: Language and mastery take time, and we are all in different places in our journey. We should be patient with each other and with ourselves.

I tend to agree. Language is more than the different tongues spoken by varying cultures around the world. Language is a tool for effective communication. And with so many languages, one would think we'd be able to get our ideas across to each other. But unfortunately, in our current social environment, and especially amongst the body of Christ, when it comes to effectively communicating the unity we should be displaying to the world, we are running around like the folks at the Tower of Babel who had just had their language changed. As long as their language was the same, they were of one purpose—building a tower to reach to heaven to make a name for themselves. The problem was, in their case, they weren't supposed to be making a name for themselves. They were supposed to be living in a way to honor God's name, so God put a stop to their efforts by confusing their language. When they discovered they could no longer connect verbally, they found others who talked like they did—who spoke the same language—and headed off to establish their own communities, leaving the tower as an unfinished reminder of their folly.

The society of Babel was fractured because of the people's inability to communicate.

The church is fractured today because of people's inability to communicate. But thanks to the unifying blood of Jesus, this fact does not have to remain true. God has given us a tower to build—His kingdom. The completion of the building on earth is our responsibility and can only be done as we learn to communicate effectively as one body, the church. The family.

But we have problems. Strained racial and ethnic relations, deceptions of various sorts of “privilege,” low esteem, and the like have driven a wedge between segments of the church—between

the “black church” and the “white church” specifically—that has effectively separated us for so long that decidedly different languages have developed. And unfortunately, we seem to be just fine with this reality. However, I don’t think God is. Romans 12:4–5 says, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (NIV).

Diversity, you see, is God’s idea. He obviously enjoys it, or He wouldn’t have created it in the first place. But when our differences (e.g., ethnic, denominational, political) take precedence over God’s Word, and we bow at the altar of those man-made distinctions instead of at the foot of the Cross, we have a big problem. This is where we are today. We cannot work together as a body until we are able to communicate effectively. Until the fracture is fixed.

So, here’s a new language for a new church era. The explanations of truths, understandings, and change suggestions herein will reverse the trend of separation so the body of Christ can function as an unfractured whole, bringing glory to our God, who can then operate on our planet through the unity of His family. Let’s enroll in class and learn a new language, shall we?



See False Identities

When you received Christ, how did that recalibrate your thinking and change your life? Did it mean a change from a lifestyle you were following or from the culture you were in? Since becoming a Christ-follower, what culture have you continued to live in? Do you still follow that culture, perhaps even at the expense of your allegiance to Christ? Have you paid much attention to your new identity as a Christian, or is your life much the same as it was BC (before Christ)? Your true identity is who you are in Christ. We are called to be Christ-followers.

God had you in mind when He “created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He created this beautiful ecosystem—the earth, the stars, the sea, and vegetation—all for humans, for you and me (Genesis 1:1–2:2). God said everything created was good but reserved an extra exclamation for His creation of humans. Look at how Genesis 1:26–29 (CSB) relates this part of the story:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky,

the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

So, God created man
in his own image:
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.” God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that He had made, and it was very good indeed. When God got to that point in the creative work—when He created human beings—God said, “Wow, that’s *very* good!”

Think about God’s “wow.” God was overjoyed when He made you and me. We are human beings completely adored by our Heavenly Father, even though we’re imperfect because of the Fall. Adam’s disobedience made him the progenitor of all human beings to follow, and he passed to us a sin nature that never should have been a part of our identity. Through Christ we find our true identity, and that new, true identity is the part of us that connects heaven to earth.

Understanding Identity

Now, our sinful identity and Christ’s sinless identity are diametrically opposed, so it’s quite an adjustment to get into the swing of living as believers. Like acclimating to a new neighborhood or adapting to the culture at a new job, becoming comfortable with

our identity as a new creation in Christ takes some getting used to. In fact, Galatians 6:15 affirms, “What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation.” And we need just such affirmation to keep moving forward in the transformative growth that is shaping us into the vision God has for each of us.

Understanding identity is foundational because it is at work in many different ways in our society today. Our identities are being shaped by every message we receive. We internalize those messages, repeat them, and look for examples around us to affirm what we believe. But there’s a higher, transcendent narrative (Christocentrism) that God intends for us to take in as our truth.

We all need to be affirmed. While on earth, even God the Son received affirmation from God the Father. At Jesus’s baptism, God pointed out Jesus as our unique Savior. Luke 3:22 tells us that “the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, ‘You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.’” Again, at the transfiguration, God set Jesus above two of the most important patriarchs of the faith:

About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus’ glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, “Master, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.

Then a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him.” When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone.

Luke 9:28–36

Cultural Identity

We see that even Jesus received affirmation, but what is the standard for it? How are we to relate to one another? We are not affirmed in a vacuum. The standard for affirmation must be above the one that identifies only based on culture. The Bible clearly speaks about the blessing found in unity.

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.

It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Psalm 133 NKJV

Understanding false identity is critical when it comes to who we allow to name us. To be named solely by our political affiliation, denomination, or race (or ethnicity) is to be identified with the stereotypes strongly held by and about those groups. It's crucial that our identity comes from God's mind and heart. We must allow our Father God to name us and always wear that name on top of all else.

It is possible to follow a culture rather than Jesus. Christian culture has tied itself to stuff that's not aligned with the Bible's perspective. Love of the world is why we're so divided in the faith from one another.

So how do we start down the road to change? As Einstein put it, "We have to learn to think in a new way."¹ Some have gone on to paraphrase this as "We cannot solve a problem by using the same level of thinking used to create it." Today, we might state

it this way: To solve our cultural and racial divides, we need a new language. A language that is not rooted in the wisdom from beneath but the wisdom that comes from above.

We can start by identifying or naming ourselves as family with each other first. You see, identity is sneaky and subtle. We all have a part in shaping culture simply because we're present in it. We must look at ourselves first and ask, *How do I think about culture? Do I identify with God first?* And we must know that we will be held accountable for what God called us to do in regard to unity.

Christ-Centered Community

Community affirms our new, Christ-centered identity. We were created to function in true community because life is a full-contact sport, face-to-face with fellow human beings in real-time.

I am blessed to come from a family that instilled a deep sense of belonging and identity in me. In my earlier days it was primarily about being a Welch. We are a very large and loving family and have a presence in our community that goes back four generations. The Welch family is the family that gets “adopted” by other individuals as their surrogate family. So, as you can imagine, this tends to spread out and cover a city pretty well. I always felt that I could go to any of my relatives' houses at any time and be welcomed with open arms. Yes, I'm blessed. Since my early identity was built on such strong, solid ground, I think it has been fairly easy for me to understand the importance of identity.

I knew who I was as a Welch, and when I became a follower of Jesus, I needed to delve into knowledge of my new identity. Becoming a Jesus-follower was and is the decision that changed my core—Skot Welch, a son of God whom God created African American, to be a father, husband, a son of Ruth Ann Welch and Fred Griffis—you get the picture. There are so many facets to my identity, but the most important facet is the only one that connects heaven to earth and that is Skot Welch, a son of God.

Everything else that I have been created to be—father, husband, African American, even a Welch—must bow its knee and comes after my relationship with Jesus.

My relationship with Christ—and with other Christians—is preeminent. I should look at and make decisions—every decision—from and through the lens of Christ first. It is this point of origin that helps make me more effective in all the other facets of life. I’m not saying this is easy, but kingdom prioritization brings a clarity that I believe makes other decisions somewhat easier.

The habit of sending every decision through the sieve of “what would Jesus do” is a process and a journey, but it is my prayer that every Christian would start this process and embark on this journey. If we as a community of believers pursued being what I call *Christocentric* Christians, a very clear and specific behavioral shift would follow, impacting our relationships with one another in communities, congregations, and families in a phenomenally positive way.

Ever since we became more conscious about this way of life, my wife, Barbara, and I have worked to instill this mindset into our children, who are young adults. My prayer is that they would go further faster in promoting and bringing about racial unity and understanding not just in the church but also in the marketplace, where God continues to increase their influence.

I was brought up in church. I was a pretty good kid, too, probably because my mom and my family were old-school in the area of discipline. I always knew that my aunts and uncles had the authority to offer correction when they felt it necessary, but because I was the first child born to the family and the oldest “big cousin,” they rarely did. Yes, I was a bit spoiled. Still, values like discipline-by-village were solidly connected to and shaped by the church. My early years as a Christian were also shaped by some amazing and wonderful pastors and congregations—Pastor Lyman Parks Sr. of First Community A.M.E. Church (African Methodist Episcopal), who was also the first African American mayor of Grand Rapids,

Michigan, and Reverend Dr. Clifton Rhodes Jr. of Messiah Missionary Baptist Church. Even today, as I write this, I get pretty emotional when I think about these great men and the wonderful congregations they led for so many years.

These people of God loved me, always made time for me, and always made sure I knew how proud they were of me. That expectation, those continual votes of confidence, made me always strive against disappointing them or the people in the congregations who adopted me as their surrogate son or grandson. They expected great things of me, and by God's grace, I yearned to measure up. Even when I would mess up or do something I knew wasn't the right thing, as a maturing young person, I knew the expectation of others mattered a great deal. So when I faltered, the prayers, love, and confidence in me from adults around me helped me to get back up.

I believe this had everything to do with my coming to Christ. I was surrounded by the love of God through so many people—not perfect people, but incredibly generous and loving individuals.

During my formative years of eight to ten years old, I lived overseas with my mom and stepfather, Phillip Jones. My stepdad was in the army. He and my mom married not too long after they met, and before I knew it, we were headed overseas. Korea! What? I didn't even know what a "Korea" was. I just knew that I would be leaving my extended family, whom I adored with all of my heart.

But a time that could have been a lonely journey, a catastrophic blow to my confidence, turned into an incredible two years of growth immersion in this amazing and beautiful culture. Being thousands of miles away from all that was familiar, my parents made sure they created community for me as quickly as possible. Some of my stepdad's friends and my mom's friends quickly became family.

It occurred to me many years later that I was essentially homeschooled before *homeschooling* was cool. You see, my parents

chose to live in the village with the local citizens instead of on the Camp Casey military base. My mom and stepdad would head to base every morning and leave me with our housekeeper and friend of the family, Gloria (not her Korean name).

Gloria tried her best to make sure I didn't get into too much trouble, and that worked most of the time; however, I was the *only* American kid in the village—not just the only African American kid. Being eight years old, I made friends with the village kids and learned just enough Korean to be dangerous. I also made friends with the folks at the local Tae Kwon Do school, restaurant, tailor shop, and so on.

Gloria took me everywhere she went and introduced me to the locals to make sure they knew who I was. She also put them on notice that they should watch out for me if she wasn't around. Community was happening. By the time I returned to the States, I was an adopted child of the village and knew my way around every nook and cranny of that small city. Even today, I consider Korea a part of my story of home.

That's just one example of how I took advantage of being an army brat. Having the opportunity to experience various societies and ethnicities gave me a strong taste for travel and for other cultures. And praise God, I've had the pleasure of going to many cities and countries around the world. (Wow, thank You, Lord, for my upbringing.) This isn't to claim, by any means, a perfect upbringing; no one has one of those. But it is to say that the environment in which I was brought up made my decision to follow Christ a fairly easy one.

Accepting Christ was like diving into another new culture, only this immersion has eternal significance and consequences. God will guide us in the area we're specifically called to. I've worked at the intersection of diversity, inclusion, and innovation for more than two decades, and I love it. I love people. I love the fact that we aren't the same. I love being in rooms where unity in God's mosaic is embraced.

Don't Conform—Transform

Once we say we're born again, what happens after that? Most of us simply add the Christian label to all we've already been. That may be salvation, but it's not regeneration. Regeneration means we stop being what we used to be and start being the new person Christ molds us to be. Of course, all Christ wants us to be will not manifest at once, but we should be cooperating with the Spirit helping us to work that new person out. We will be going through the transformation until the day we die, and although we won't reach perfection, we can strive for excellence in our transformation.

There's a difference between a culture of excellence and one of perfection. Perfection focuses on what's wrong, the mistakes. Perfection sees five A's and one C- on your child's report card and asks, "What's going on here? Why did you get that C-?" Excellence sees that same report card and says, "You are doing an amazing job. Look at these five A's! I can tell you worked hard to get them. Did you try your best in this C- class? What help do you need to pull up that grade?" We honor people by celebrating all they are without tripping over what they are not. As humans, we are all in development. When there's a culture of excellence surrounding us, we thrive. In rooms with an atmosphere of perfection, we suffocate.

The man in the Bible at the pool of Bethesda lived in a community of the sick and was named by his sickness. Jesus showed up and asked him a simple question, "Do you want to be well?" His identity had so long been characterized by his sickness that he didn't know how to accept the excellence of health Jesus was able to give him.

Do we want to be well? Do we want to break from our community identity if that means stepping up to God's level? Just because we've made a mistake doesn't mean *we are* a mistake. Our mistakes, illnesses, etc. don't need to define us unless we want them to do so.

Feeling ashamed about a wrong we committed is not the same as being shamed. Many times, we don't know what we don't know. And we won't know what we don't know until we expose ourselves to those who are not like us.

Victor Not Victim

As Christocentric Christians, our identity cannot be based on what our grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles spoke into our lives unless what they said identically matched the Bible's dictates. In the Christian culture we've created, we often look to be persecuted. We've built walls and constructed a narrative that supersedes what God says. The Bible is a book about escape from bondage to freedom. The problems of our separation from each other cannot continue to be seen as larger than God Himself. The voice we most agree with is reflective of the idol that's already on the throne of our heart.

Go on the Journey

We must elevate the way we think in order to be Christocentric Christians. We're going to prioritize affiliations, denominations, political parties, communities, social and ethnic identities, etc. while we explore how to be one. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other (Romans 12:4–5).

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So, it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13

And Jesus said it best:

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

John 17:21

Notice in the above verse that our unity as believers is not just what we say but what we actually do. It is what made Jesus’s ministry attractive to those who didn’t know Him. We must begin to think the way God thinks about unity and see false identities for what they are. God loves us too much to leave us blinded by lies.

Don’t you find it interesting—actually alarming—that we can be so polarized while John 17:21, among other verses, clearly calls for unity among the Christian family? We call each other names and divide along political lines, denominational lines, and other lines we imagine and create. The division may satisfy our need for comfort, but division breaks God’s heart. How can we overcome it?

Closing the Fracture

1. In the time since becoming a Christ-follower, what culture have you continued to live in?
2. God says, “Wow,” about everything He created, including the many cultures that exist.
 - A. List three things about your culture of origin about which God has said “Wow.”
 - B. Now list three things about another culture about which God has said “Wow.”
 - C. Now list three things you and another culture have in common about which God can say “Wow.”

3. In what ways have you seen yourself following culture more than you are following Jesus?
4. Do you want to be well? What scares you about becoming totally immersed in Christ culture?
5. Are you willing to transform?

Glossary of Chapter Terms

Ethnic—Someone or something associated with a particular group that has a shared national origin or cultural identity.

Racial—Relating to the major groupings into which humankind is sometimes divided on the basis of physical characteristics or shared ancestry although “race” cannot be seen, as it is in actuality a socioeconomic construct. The concept of “race” was created by man.

Diversity—A combination of our differences that shape our view of the world, our perspective, and our approach. All the ways we are alike and respect for the ways that we are different.

Racism—“The assumption that psychocultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that races differ decisively from one another, which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to domination over others.”² Racism may also be defined as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different race or ethnicity.”³

Culture—Culture represents “the values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world.”⁴ Paraphrase: It’s the way we do things. . . .

Mosaic—A decoration “made by inlaying small pieces of variously colored material to form pictures or patterns.”⁵ All God’s people.

Christocentric—Having Christ as center; Christ-centered.

Ethnocentric—Having one's culture or ethnicity as center; culture-centered.

Cultural Identity—"Identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, gender, and religion."⁶