

STEVE TAMAYO

# ETHNIC IDENTITY

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InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

Taken from *Ethnic Identity* by Steve Tamayo.

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com).

# UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

*Acts 6:1-7*

**O**ver the last several studies we've seen that ethnicity comes from God as a blessing. That blessing, however, has been complicated by our human brokenness and has become a source of pain for many of us. We need God to heal us. And as we're healed, God invites us to bring our healthy, whole selves into our Christian communities—communities marked by diversity.

As we grow in awareness about ethnicity in the Bible, we'll notice in new ways how ethnicity shows up in our communities. We might become attentive to the presence or absence of diversity in our churches. We might pay closer attention to the ways ethnicity affects power dynamics. We might also tune into ongoing conflicts between ethnic groups.

How can we live into our growing awareness in a healthy way?

**Group Discussion.** Where have you experienced leadership from someone from your own ethnic background, and where have you experienced it from someone from a different ethnic background? What kind of influence does this have on your picture of leadership?

**Personal Reflection.** Take a look at a recent conflict you've experienced. What role did ethnicity play? Consider how ethnicity shaped how the conflict was communicated, navigated, and resolved. (This particular conflict doesn't have to be around ethnicity or across ethnic lines; since every person has an ethnic identity, ethnicity shows up in every conflict.)

Our text for this study captures a significant conflict in the early church. Thousands of people have come to faith in Christ. All of the believers remain in Jerusalem. Although at this point they all are Jewish, they come from different ethnic backgrounds. Some have stronger Greek roots than others. It's in this context that the conflict appears. *Read Acts 6:1-7.*

1. What was the conflict about in this text?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why do you think Luke, the writer of Acts, gave the ethnic contours of this particular conflict?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Where have you experienced conflict in ethnically diverse communities?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Why do you think the Hellenistic or Greek-origin Jewish widows were being overlooked?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Come up with three unhealthy ways the Twelve *could* have responded to the complaint. Have fun with it!

6. What impact would those unhealthy responses have had on the community?

7. In what ways have you seen unhealthy responses in your own experiences of diverse community?

8. What impact did those responses have on you and the unity of your community?

9. The seven “servants” or “deacons” all turn out to have Greek names. This leads many commentators to believe that the apostles placed a group of Hellenistic Jews in charge of distributing the food to all the widows in the community. Why do you think they made that choice?

10. Even the Twelve struggled to navigate multiethnic spaces. But the Holy Spirit continued to work mercifully and give them opportunities to grow. Take a moment to write out places in your cross-ethnic relationships where you have needed or seen the Spirit’s mercy.

11. After this resolution, many people come to faith, including a large number of priests. How might the believers' response have been a witness to those watching the community from its edges?

12. What can you do this week to share your power and authority with someone who is being overlooked?

13. Where in your life do you need to speak up (as did the people who made the complaint) or step up (as did the seven Hellenistic deacons)?



*Ask God to help you live, love, and serve in healthy ways as you join his work in building a missional multiethnic community.*

#### **NOW OR LATER**

Make a four-column list. In one column list your five closest friends. In the next list the last ten people with whom you've had a meaningful interaction (for example, a conversation lasting more than ten minutes or an intense emotional engagement). In the third list people who have some social, spiritual, or vocational authority over you. In the final column list people over whom you have some social, spiritual, or vocational authority. The same people may show up on multiple lists, or one of the lists may be empty. That's okay.

Note the ethnic identity of each person on your lists. For example, if the author of this study was on your list, you'd note "White and

Cuban-American.” If you don’t know someone’s ethnic identity, write “unknown.”

What trends do you notice in your lists? Where do you see diversity or a lack of diversity? What would you like to see change?

Consider a recent conflict with someone on the list. What role did ethnicity play in that conflict? In what ways was this healthy or unhealthy?

Reflect on how social systems and structures shape your lists and interactions. These often operate in the background of our lives. Bring them to the foreground and ask the Lord: “What would you have me seek to change in order to participate more fully in the multiethnic community you’re forming in the world?”

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