Spiritual Formation Exercise on Ethnicity and Story

*"Spiritual formation is the process of sanctification in which God uses every circumstance in saints’ lives for the purpose of conforming them to the image of Christ and making them into loving members of His family (Romans 8:27-29). Theologically, spiritual formation is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit upon the redeemed human heart which produces the fruit of the character of Christ."*

Everyone has an ethnic and cultural identity. Whether we are aware of it or not, this identity shapes how we interact with God, how we understand the gospel, and it influences the practice of our spirituality. The purpose of this exercise is to foster awareness and to process some of who God has created us to be.

**10 min → Briefing Norms for personal processing time:**

·This is a time to give yourself space to listen and connect with your heart and experience.

·Don't judge yourself; you are seeking awareness and understanding.

·Open the time in prayer. Pause and give moments of silence between questions. You want to do this in Him and with Him.

·Take a moment to talk to God: Ask Him, "Where am I right now and what do I come with?  A Joyful heart, excited and glad to be here? Take time to thank Him. Maybe some of you are tired, exhausted, distracted and bothered: talk to God about that too, and offer those things to Him, 'Cast your cares upon Him for He cares for you'``''Ask the Lord to open the eyes of your heart to see and understand how culture has influenced the way you see the world, others and God. Remember that you are made in His image and of value. Thank Him for that. Or maybe you are having a hard time embracing that today, talk to the Lord about it. Ask God to show you Himself in deeper ways. Ask Him to show you the positive aspects in how your culture has impacted you, as well as hurtful and challenging ones.

**30 min → Take time to consider, process and write on the following questions. Culture is not simply defined by your national or ethnic origin but includes your family environment, the region you grew up in, or any other affinity that has affected you. Your culture profoundly shapes and is shaped by your values, beliefs, and even worldview.**

1. *Spend time in your prayer life asking God to reveal to you how your culture might have contributed to your sin patterns.*
2. *Growing up, what did Jesus look like to you? What was his ethnicity? How did this aspect affect the way you understood Jesus? How did it affect “living out” aspects of the Christian life?*
3. *What do you value in your culture’s faith traditions, and what could you do without?*
4. *What are the aspects of your culture that you like? What aspects resemble Christ likeness? What do you see are the pervading sins of your culture? How has this cultural piece affected how you personally struggle and deal with sin? How many of these views are tied to culture? How many of these views are tied to Scripture?*
5. *Look around your church, home, school, workplace and other places where you spend time.  Do you notice a variety in culture, ethnicity and gender?  Have you asked others about their experiences of God and the world?  Ask God to open your eyes to see him through the eyes of others.*
6. *Write your spiritual autobiography.  In it, consider, what is your culture and how has it influenced your relationship with God?  What is your race and how has it influenced your relationship with God?*

Questions adapted from *Signature Sins: Taming Our Wayward Hearts,* Chapter 6: “Culture, Ethnicity and Sin” by Michael Mangis, Intervarsity Press, 2008.

**45 min → Then draw/paint a picture or write a poem, express yourself creatively to share your cultural story.**

As creatures made in the image of God we carry his attributes though they are expressed differently through our personalities and skills. One attribute we share with God the creator is creativity. This exercise gives you the opportunity to explore the creativity that God gave you. You might write a poem, a metaphorical story, a haiku, make a movie, draw a picture or any other number of creative ways to express yourself. Furthermore, as a leader, your ability to be creative and foster creativity is essential because in a rapidly changing world those who don't innovate don't grow.