

Title: WestPark Values: Part 2, Cultural Diversity

Speaker: Neil Chotai

Passage: Multiple

Big idea: God has given us a great opportunity as a culturally diverse church and we must be faithful to this opportunity.

WestPark Church
VALUES 

We are continuing our series on WestPark's values. Pastor Charles began our series last week, and shared with us WestPark's tag line, and encouraged you to memorize it.



We have 5 values and today we will be looking at the value of:



When you look at WestPark, you see that we are a congregation that is culturally diverse. We are made up of different ethnicities and generations that come together and reflect this cultural diversity.

When the pastors here were dividing up the value message topics, I wondered why I was given cultural diversity.

My cultural background is Indian. My grandparents on both sides came from the Northwest corner of India. In their day, it was part of the British Empire. The British were asking people to move West to current day Uganda and Kenya. So, both sets of my grandparents moved their families to the British East Africa, settling in Uganda. My parents were arranged to be married, and after me and my brothers were born, Uganda fell into a military dictatorship and commanded that all Indian people evacuate Uganda in 90 days. So, my family fled to the United Kingdom and were in a refugee camp for a few weeks in England. We lived in England for a few years and then relocated to Oshawa, Ontario.

In Oshawa, my brothers and I went to an elementary school of about 700 students. This was not a very diverse school. My brothers and I were the chocolate chips in the big vanilla cookie.

Years later I married my wife, whose heritage is from the British Isles. We recently discovered that she is 0.01% Indian, so our kids are majority Indian. So, we are your average “Indo-Afro-Anglo-Canadian” family.

All that to say, I no longer wonder why I was designated to teach on the WestPark value of Cultural Diversity.

I would like to launch the message with a passage found in Acts: 17:24-28.

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’
Acts 17:24:28

This passage of scripture is one of my favourite. Here we see Paul who is a Hebrew, a Roman citizen, and now also a Christ follower. He is following Gods call on this missionary journey and is in Athens, a culturally diverse area, preaching the message of the gospel.

The church is to also stand up in our world today and declare truth, declare who the true God is.

Let’s dive deeper into this passage.

Acts 17:24, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.”

Our God is not dependent on humanity, rather He is the Creator of humanity, and the earth depends on Him.

Acts 17:25, “And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”

This would have been astonishing to the Athenians who practiced providing for and serving their gods. To hear that God is the one who gives this would have been very different to what they were used to.

Acts 17:26, “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”

Paul takes us back to Genesis, and the creation of Adam. Where we see the story of God forming Adam in Genesis, we see this image of God walking in the garden, bending over to pick up some dirt, forming Adam, and breathing life into him.

As God creates, he is also the one who designate how long and where we live.

Acts 17:27, “God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”

God is here, He is close, and He loves and cares for each one of us. This is unlike what the Athenians thought about the gods. They thought that the gods where far off and did not interact with humans. But this God is close and cares and wants a relationship with humanity. This God has a name, His name is Jesus.

Paul then quotes some poets who were known among the Athenians.

Acts 17:28, “‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

Every single thing we are able to do is because of God. Listen to your breathing, that breath is given to you by God. He is the giver of life. He is our father, and we are his children. We are one in relationship with Him.

Canada is multi-cultural and multi-generational country. While there is lots of diversity, there is also disunity, because it is not based on God. God is the one who unites cultural and generational diversity.

We are a very multi-generational church, and while we are not perfect, we are unified in Christ.

One of the things that I like to do to is have groups that are multi-generation. We all learn from the generations before us. At men’s ministries on Tuesday nights, at the end of the small group teaching, I divide up the groups further in groups of 2 and put guys of different backgrounds together. What a beautiful image of unity between cultural and generational diversity.



60 years ago, a group of white Anglo-Saxon protestant gather together to pray for the start of a church in the North-west area of London. Those prayers and the continued prayers of faithful followers has resulted in what WestPark is today.

10 years ago, there was a burden to reach the Chinese speaking people in our neighbourhood, which resulted in the formation of our Chinese congregation. This congregation reaches more cultures than just Chinese, there are members from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

6 years ago, there was a burden to reach the Spanish speaking people in our neighbourhood. This resulted in the formation of our Spanish congregation. This congregation also includes many different cultural backgrounds from all over South and Central America.

5 years ago, our denomination, Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists, contacted us about starting an Arabic speaking congregation. At that time, there was a large wave of Arabic speaking refugees, and London had the most per capita of Arabic speaking people in all of Canada. Just like the other congregations, they are from all over the Middle East and North Africa.

Our English congregation is a beautiful reflection of different cultures and generations. We are a congregation of people from all over the world. What a beautiful reflection of the unity of Christ, we praise God for this unity.

I get the privilege of working with our language pastors, meeting with them weekly to pray for the needs of their congregations, and to celebrate their successes.



From left to right we have Joe - Associate Pastor of Chinese Ministry, Mario - Associate Pastor of Spanish Ministry, Mark - Associate Pastor of Arabic Ministry, and myself, often mistaken for the Spanish pastor, but the one who has the privilege of overseeing these ministries.

There are two amazing things that God has done. The first, God has put together these pastors who love their congregations and ministering to these language groups. The second, God has put together the four best looking pastors in one department.



Briefly, here are some biblical principles that affirm and reinforce this value.

Cultural diversity illustrates God’s creativity.

Diversity is, basically, variety. In recent times, the word diversity has taken on the specific connotation of “variety of people within a group”—the differences among the people being racial, cultural, gender-based, etc. Diversity was God’s idea. Even a cursory study of science reveals an amazing variety of plant and animal life. People, God’s final creation, are diverse, too. He did not create us as clones or robots. Our ancient scriptures, the Bible, says that God created two different genders.

[Mark 10:6, “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’”](#)

Meaning, the creation of male and female is diverse at its most basic state. The sexes are very different, yet complementary.

Another act of God that shows diversity occurred at the Tower of Babel, where we see different languages created.

Genesis 11:9, “That is why it was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”

Humankind was clustered together, and God wanted them to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”

Genesis 9:1, “Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”

To expedite their obedience, He confused their languages, making it impossible for them to work together. From there, humanity spread out across the earth, and people with the same language remained together. Over time, cultures, races, and regional dialects emerged and resulted in the diversity we now know.

God equally values every culture.

Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus is the one who unites us and our language, culture, worship preferences, leadership styles, programs. These all take second place to the unifying power of Jesus.

Ephesians 4:4, “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism”

No one culture, whether technically advanced and materially blessed, takes a premier position in any hierarchy.

The gospel knows nothing of a spiritual hierarchy because of the color of our skin, male or female, our language, our demographics, or our social standing.

We are not valued based on our genetics but our intrinsic worth because we have been created in God’s image.

Colossians 3:11, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

Here Paul denies the possibility that we are separate by national privilege, ceremonial standing, culture, and social caste or life circumstance.

Christ is all and is in all. He is in charge and all his followers gain equal access and spiritual privilege before Him. Nobody has an insider advantage.

God equally values every culture.

In heaven cultural differences won’t matter.

So, it shouldn’t matter on earth. We might even say that earth is practice for heaven.

John had a vision of eternity and wrote this in Revelation:

Revelation 7:9-10, “After this 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. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”

In heaven we will stand before the author of salvation cleansed from any appearance or effect from sin, accepted, victorious and honoured.

This side of heaven, we must honour each other as well.

In the nineteenth century there was a man by the name of William Seymour, he was a minister who founded a street mission. He was the second of eight children born to freed slaves from Louisiana. After an encounter with God, he reluctantly became a minister. He decided to attend a school in Oklahoma that would teach him more about God. Now, because of the racial segregation laws of the day, he was unable to sit in the classes, instead having to sit in the hallway to hear the theological lectures.



Time went by and he moved to Los Angeles and founded the Azusa Street Mission. Seymour created this place to invite all people of different races, backgrounds, and ages, to come and pray together. While it was amazing that these people were praying together, the results were that the walls of racism were being broken down. The colour differences were being washed away in the blood of Jesus.

As Paul stated in Acts 17, it is One God who created and sustains everything. It is the one God who destroys and eliminates the divides of age and racism, bringing unity. Cultural diversity based on anything other than God will collapse, for Christ is all and is in all.

The cultural diversity here at WestPark is strong, but the enemy hates it and will strive to divide. I ask you to pray for the unity of WestPark. Pray for the continued strength of our cultural diversity.