

EXCERPT



The Offensive Church
Breaking the Cycle of Ethnic Disunity

July 18, 2023 | \$22, 208 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0597-2

Crises around race have put the church in a reactive, defensive posture, but Jesus wants more. He wants Christians to play offense by discipling people into a new humanity that pushes beyond mere diversity so that the church becomes the aroma of Christ to our culture and gains ground against the demonic foothold of racism in all its forms.

Discipling People into the New Humanity

Jesus' final prayer before the cross was a plea for oneness among his followers. Today, I might have more fortune praying to win the lottery than for oneness among Jesus' followers. But who or what is the culprit for this seismic rift in the body of Christ? The fault line is present and the earthquake is happening . . . right now.

I fear if followers of Jesus do not act, the strides taken over the last twenty years in the multiethnic church will be irreversibly revoked. It's one thing to have never tasted, quite another to have tasted and walked away.

I believe the solution is a matter of discipleship, but not as we know it. To be a disciple is to be a learner and to live like Jesus, imitating his example. The problem is that individualistic discipleship in the Western world is not the kind of discipleship Jesus envisioned. When we think of discipling someone, we envision showing them how to read their Bible, pray, steward their money, and understand what life in the Spirit looks like. We teach them about grace, the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ, and what justification and sanctification mean.

Yes and amen to these things! But they are not all discipleship is. Christian discipleship has its origins in Eastern culture, which values the communal far more than Western culture does. Dallas Willard's diagnosis was right: the problem with Christianity is we've made converts but not disciples. Jesus' paradigm for disciple making was not a succession of one-on-one meetings; instead, he formed a group of twelve very different individuals, teaching them to follow him and to love one another.

Although they were ethnically homogeneous (all Jewish men), they possessed profound differences. Their group comprised fishermen, tax collectors, and even a Zealot. When they jockeyed for position and power with one another, Jesus patiently waded into their humanity and called them not to the low ethic of tolerance, but to the high ethic of love. . . .

The problem of race in America can never be truly remedied without a commitment to disciple people both vertically and horizontally. As long as the homogeneous church is the norm, we will continue to chase our tails in a dizzying circle, ready to pass out over the problem of race. Even more maddening is that the growth of the multiethnic church, from 7 percent to 22 percent, has yielded little to no fruit with regard to the problem of race. Simply getting people of different ethnicities to sit, sing, and take notes in the same space is not enough. There is a profound difference between diversity and ethnic unity. What's missing is communal discipleship in which we are formed in the way of Jesus and into the new humanity with one another.

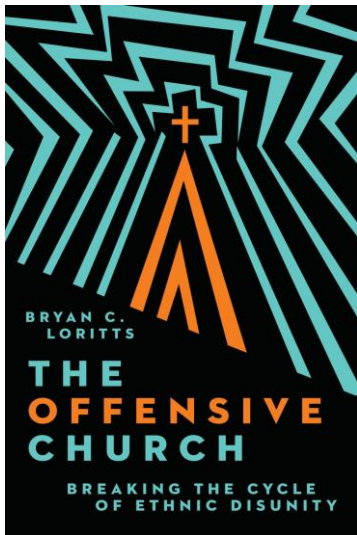


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If there's one thing my years of working in and consulting with other churches desiring to be multiethnic has taught me, it's that we don't know each other across the ethnic divide. When clips of George Floyd's murder were playing over and over on the television, one of my sons, seething with anger, declared all White people were bad. While validating his anger, I also reminded him of the many dinners we had shared with our White friends and how good people like Uncle Adam and Aunt Nikki had been to us. These and many other White friends I've traversed the terrain of life with have kept me from such sweeping indictments. Transformative healing and power come from simply doing life together. Truly, we hurt in isolation but heal in community.

When it comes to matters of race, I have seen that most churches are comprised of three groups: the ready, the resistant, and the reluctant. The resistant ain't reading this and have no plans to. The fact that you have this book in your hands means you probably skew toward ready: you're in a three-point stance, eager to take these things to your pastor, leader, or congregation and get a plan together.

In working with Christian organizations and churches over the last several decades, I've concluded that the biggest group is the reluctant. They're open in varying degrees to the discussion but are highly cautious. While they're naturally immature in their thinking, they can be brought along with the right leadership, pace, and discipleship. The reluctant need a shepherd, not a prophet.

In the aftermath of George Floyd's death, I fielded several calls from distraught leaders who, filled with prophetic fire, had stood before their White congregations with the purest of motives, denouncing White privilege and declaring Black lives matter and the need for reparations. They even announced that if the people weren't on the same page, they should question the legitimacy of their faith. The problem with this approach is that the people in those congregations had never been disciplined communally into these things. The leaders went from zero to seventy in a matter of seconds. Unable to deal with the pastoral whiplash, the reluctant looked for the exits en masse.

Jesus didn't just send Peter to Cornelius the Gentile's home to preach the gospel. No—he prepared him by first sending him to the home of Simon the Tanner and called him to work these things out in a communal context. At first hesitant, Peter ultimately embraced the call to take the gospel crossethnically to the Gentiles, crossing over from a reluctant to a ready posture. The result was a multiethnic revival.

I write *The Offensive Church* to outfit you with what you need to move from reluctant to ready. A return to communal discipleship demands courageous, reliable leadership and relational environments. It's time the church of Jesus Christ stop reacting to the problem of race and instead lead proactively by discipling people into the new humanity.

-Adapted from the introduction

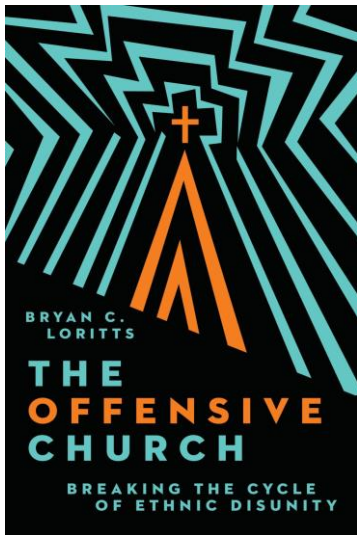


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Brian Loritts, Serving the Multiethnic Church

*"If the church in North America does not discover the New Testament ethos of multiethnic community, the church in North America will fail in accomplishing its mission. I know of no better voice to show us the way than my friend Bryan Loritts. In his new book *The Offensive Church*, Bryan shows us the way forward rooted in a gospel-centered missiology of making disciples in community. This is a must-read for anyone serious about joining in God's activity in North America and the nations!"*

—Vance Pitman, president of Send Network and founding pastor of Hope Church Las Vegas

Bryan Loritts (DMin, Liberty University) is the teaching pastor at The Summit Church. An award-winning author of eight books, Loritts has spent the bulk of his ministry serving and resourcing the multiethnic church. He cofounded Fellowship Memphis in 2003 and serves as the President of The Kainos Movement, an organization committed to seeing the multiethnic church become the new normal.

His ministry takes him across the globe annually, as he speaks at conferences, churches, and retreats. Loritts has been a featured speaker for Catalyst and the Global Leadership Summit.

Currently, he serves on the board of Biola University and is a regular visiting professor at Grimke Seminary. He is also the Vice President of Regions for the Send Network, the church planting arm of the SBC, where he is responsible for training church planters in multiethnic church planting.

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