From Handshakes to Hugs  Pastors Gareth Bowley and Robert Diamini

Gareth and Robert both grew up in South Africa, Gareth in a culture where he had good schools, didn’t have to work, attended a white church, and had no contact with blacks except servants at home. He came to Christ at age 8. He took part in the historic vote that brought down apartheid. Robert grew up with no vote or freedom and struggled all his life for even the basics of life and education, trusting God to provide. Robert came to Christ at age 16. In time, he moved to the same town as Gareth, attending a Zulu church with no whites. In the new non-apartheid ‘world’ all were equal and free but still divided due to the legacy of the past. In the midst of this, God urged Gareth to build a church to be a prophetic provocation with a cultural mix of peoples in South Africa. Today, Robert and Gareth are elders of Oasis Church, standing as partners pressing on with this same vision — an uphill climb to overcome South Africa’s history of segregation, even in the church. The good news is it is changing!

God spoke prophetically to Oasis Church, calling them to move from ‘handshakes to hugs.’ This communicated God’s heart for His church worldwide, not just in South Africa. Despite happy mingling, tolerance and worship in many languages, people kept to themselves in social settings. They were saved ‘individuals’ but were they a visible, tangible expression of the ‘family’ of God? This is the heart of our Father, to transition to a greater unity for His glory and purposes — His family on the earth.

“Once we were not a people,” outside of God’s promises, yet He drew us all to Himself. (1 Pet. 2:9-10) Collectively drawing near to God is, by association, bringing us near to one another. He has made us all one by creating in Himself one new humanity in Christ. (Eph 2:13-16) This unity and peace is not a result of tolerance but is a supernatural outcome of the finished work of Christ, proclaiming a unity beyond race, gender or class — diversity yet all one in Christ. (Gal 3:28) This is done already, not something to achieve, only to recognize as truth. Faith is both personal and corporate, joining us with other believers, forming a new people — the people of God. Salvation does not just change your destination (heaven) or purpose (worship) but changes your relationship with God and then with others. Believing in Jesus is not merely adding Him to your social context; you are added into His family on this earth — the Church. When we, the Church, understand this then we should be a prophetic provocation to our country and others. Being biblical requires more than a superficial tolerance of differences; it instead recognizes the miracle that we who were not a people have become a people of God belonging to Christ. When we are secure in our identity in Christ, we are free to be a multicultural people and can enjoy diversity rather than avoid it.

Why go from handshakes to hugs?  God challenges us to pursue a greater experience of unity with one another.

1. It is the heart of God for His church. Jesus prayed for us to be one people not a crowd of saved individuals. (Eph 2:14-16; 4:4-5)
2. God is more glorified by unity in diversity. It demonstrates His rule over all creation as King of Kings. (Eph 3:10)
3. To be a prophetic provocation to our nation, demonstrating His love.
4. To get ready for heaven. All nations will be represented in heaven.
5. To have greater joy and depth in worship. All are able to worship in their heart language.
6. To know God better. Culturally, we see only a small part of our great God. All together, we see Him more fully through others’ perspectives.
7. To take our part in God’s mission to the whole world — and to Calgary with its own diversity.

How can you practically go from a handshake to a hug?

1. Know that this is something God wants.
2. Pray, knowing that this will need God’s supernatural work in and among you.
3. Acknowledge this is a heart issue. Decide now to pursue the will of God for yourself and the city rather than the ‘comfortable’ path.
4. Develop your ‘cultural intelligence.’ We need others to show us the majesty of God.
5. Pursue a culturally diverse worship expression instead of separate services for different cultures. Move from your comfort zone.
6. Create contexts for cross-cultural connection. Hospitality and food are gateways to connect cultures. Serving is key, especially serving together as a team. Look for needs of others as an opportunity for connection.

This is an opportunity to reach the nations with the Gospel. How can you intentionally embrace our multi-cultural reality for His glory? We are here by God’s design. Embrace God’s purpose and use this diversity. Go beyond the tolerance of handshakes to hugs.
THE MAIN THING: Handshakes to Hugs – Pastors Gareth Bowley and Robert Diamini (Pastors at Oasis Church in South Africa)

Canada is a mosaic of nationalities and has a policy of multi-culturalism. Are we more comfortable if people keep to their own cultural group? Or do we see all people as children of God as Jesus did? God desires that we move from handshakes toward a greater unity as one family with Him as our Father.

Pursue Relationship: Opportunities to connect and pray as a group
1. What are your ethnic roots?
2. What traditions or language do you practice?

Pursue God: Time that is devoted to the Word of God
Observation and Reflection
1. Read the passages in the sidebar. How do they describe God’s family, the Church? In what ways is the Church called to be more than a ‘mosaic’?

2. Pastors Gareth and Robert’s experiences show that the church’s unity and peace are the result of a “supernatural unity in diversity” (Eph 2:13-16; 4:4-5). Discuss this ‘supernatural unity.’ Why does this matter to God and His mission in our city and our world?

3. Why should we go from ‘handshakes to hugs’? (See 7 points in Summary)

4. Using Acts 17:26-27, explain why we are here. What do you think God is doing through recent changes in demographics in Canada, Calgary and CSC? What does God want of us here and now?

Application
1. How can we intentionally and practically embrace this multi-cultural opportunity that God gives us? Individually? As a church? (Refer to Summary)

2. What helps or hinders us from embracing this opportunity individually? As a church?

Pursue Mission: Seek to be the Community of God’s people in your community

Pray for the leadership, outreach, worship and finances of Oasis Church in South Africa. Pray that Oasis Church will continue reaching people from all cultures and languages. How do you make cross-cultural connections in your own neighbourhood?

THE WORD (NIV)
2 Cor 5:16-19 - So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

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

Eph 2:13-16 - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Eph 4:4-5 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

1 Pet 2:9-10 - But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Acts 17:26-27 - From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.