

CHARLES KIMBANGI

I am here with Owen Hylton who is currently senior Pastor of Beacon Church but who used to be an Elder at King's. Owen has also written the book 'Crossing the Divide' which is a call to embrace diversity, which we hope you will purchase and also read throughout this series. Owen, it's great to be with you today.

OWEN HYLTON

It's great to be here.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

Why don't you start by telling us a bit about how you grew up in South East London and a bit about your family.

OWEN HYLTON

My parents were Jamaican, born in Jamaica and moved to South East London in the early sixties and so I grew up in Catford all my life, until I left to lead Beacon. In the main that was great, I loved where I grew up, it was very diverse, which probably wasn't common round the UK at that time but Lewisham was definitely one of those places. Growing up particularly in the seventies you had a lot of overt racism in the area I grew up in and I had some bizarre conversations, I remember, with friends that I grew up with at school who were also members of a local right wing group and yet they were people I knew at school. Generally, I loved where I grew up, the friends I had, it was always very mixed.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

You wrote 'Crossing the Divide' in 2009. How did you come to write the book?

OWEN HYLTON

I think, having grown up in this kind of area and being part of King's Church for many years, I was part of King's when it became King's when two churches came together, and seeing our church grow in diversity and then when I was on staff realising that we needed ourselves to work out how we were going to embrace the diversity we were seeing. There was a period of time when I was studying at Spurgeons, and during that time I remember thinking to myself I wanted to write on this subject because some of the challenges we were facing

I could see were not going to be unique to us, they were challenges across churches and opportunities. I remember at Spurgeons College speaking to one of the lecturers there and telling him of my desire to write a book about diversity in the church and he gave me a little bit of advice and it kind of went from there.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

Since you wrote the book what changes have you seen in our culture and our churches related to diversity?

OWEN HYLTON

I don't know that I've seen any changes that have related to the book personally, but there have been loads of changes, because we now live in an age where people are much more direct and overt about what they think about issues around diversity particularly around immigration and there have been changes around that that we can observe. Also there have been changes of generational, so from my generation upwards, people who came to this country who were first raised in this country and sometimes they themselves aren't always welcoming of other cultures that are coming in and that what's I've found a bit strange. But then there's also been a more normalising of churches that are diverse. They are just there. And it's how they work it out and you can see that they are there to stay, that people are trying to work it out and that's been a positive thing.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

Well I've really enjoyed reading the book and one question I've been dying to ask is – if you wrote the book today what would you add to it?

OWEN HYLTON

There's probably a couple of things that I would add, partly based on my experience of the last few years. One was, I think I would just put more emphasis on the centre of the diverse church is Christ and unpacking of Ephesians 2 in a way I didn't do in my first book. That when Jesus died on the cross and when He brought people together from different nations and backgrounds He brought peace. He didn't just make peace between me and God, He made peace between me and my fellow man. So one of the signs that you are able to embrace Christ centred diversity is there should be peace

where there otherwise might be hostility or misunderstanding. That for me was quite a big truth that I've come to realise. The other quick thing would be the need for a greater level of acceptance of people and who they are and how they are and if I think about my own marriage to Pauline that begins with a fundamental acceptance, I accept Pauline before I challenge anything or get annoyed about anything there's an acceptance there. Just as we have been accepted by God, grace I've been saved so we should learn to accept each other and extend the same grace God has given to us to others. I'm not sure if I was developed in my thinking around those things when I wrote the book as I would be now.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

That's fascinating. You touched on acceptance there. As people read the current edition of the book, what's the main application you want them to go away with?

OWEN HYLTON

A good question. I think the main thing I'm trying to say in this book whether people get it or not, the main thing is diversity and people coming together who are different is fundamental to the purposes of God. It's all over the Bible, you begin in Genesis and go right through to Revelation it's all about groups of people coming together and that through that God is more glorified. That's why in my book every chapter has a biblical example of what I'm trying to say. Very deliberately. That's why I talk about that we're not just trying to respond to changes in dynamics in our world, if we were things would be more tricky now than ten years ago because of the impact of immigration that the negative impacts of immigration has made people a little bit more wary I suppose. I'm trying to say that this is not about those changes in social dynamics, this is about God's heart for people and for bringing people together. It's what He did at the cross and if you get it from that perspective you will pursue that regardless of what's going on around you. So that would be one that I would get out of that book.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

Very good, very good. What I notice in your book is that you challenged me and all readers to think about change and compromise. Can you tell us a bit more about that because are you really saying that in order to embrace diversity they need to compromise and change in some way?

OWEN HYLTON

Yes, is the short answer. But if I can just use my own example from my marriage it would have been a bit foolish of me to marry Pauline and never think that would mean change for me personally, but by marrying Pauline and going through this fundamental acceptance of her and her of me there was also this recognition that everything's up for grabs. Whatever thought I had about life before I got married may be affected now I am married and I think when it comes to diversity based on the fact that what we try to do is to draw together a people that glorify God and must be willing to change in order for that to happen. Sometimes I just need to get over myself. That's what I need to do.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

You put it straight. Lastly then, for the people watching how can we make the most of this Invited series?

OWEN HYLTON

I think it's a wonderful thing that you're doing, running this series. I've been so impressed with all the work that's gone on behind the scenes. The first thing I think personally is that people need to come to the series, to the groups, because this series will make talking about sometimes difficult issues easier in the groups because you're going to be opening it up, I think that's a great thing. I also think it's potentially very missional, because anywhere in the world where people are really working across the divide and making that work and being united is a massive example because it's not common so it's not just about invited, you come, but I think people can bring their friends. I know people who are not Christians who have read my book and they get over all the religious bit because they get this idea that people coming together from different backgrounds and the world in which they live and they want to know how to do it. So I think a series like this allows people to bring friends who can say 'wow, I didn't know you could pull people from different backgrounds ever got on like that'. I think it's a great witness.

CHARLES KIMBANGI

I don't know about you but I'm inspired and make sure you come on Sundays and get into a group, make sure you get a daily devotional and pick up this book, it's going to be awesome.

