

# Destino Leadership Institute

## Module 2: Stewarding Your Ethnic Identity

What an incredible gift we have been given to steward what the Lord has created and given us. Webster defines stewardship as “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.” From the beginning of creation, God entrusted us with what He had created. Genesis 1:26 tells us of our creation, and what we have been given stewardship of:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”*

If you keep reading in Genesis, you will see that though our world was once perfect, Adam and Eve were not obedient to what the Lord had commanded. As a result of their disobedience, our relationship with the Lord was broken, and sin had entered into the world. This act of disobedience forever changed the world, but God was still in control. Jesus would one day come to pay the price for the many acts of disobedience and sin that we commit, and make a way for us to know Him. Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience did not change that we were still stewards of what we have been given.

### **You have been given the gift of your ethnicity**

Depending on your life experience the range of how you think about your ethnicity can be along a wide spectrum. In my conversations with other Latinos, I have heard the following things as people process what it means that we have been given the gift of our ethnicity. (Note: I have heard these things said by people of all ethnicities. If you are of another ethnicity, or multiracial these are applicable to you too.)

- *“Why isn’t everyone Latino?!? It’s the best thing ever”*
- *“I’ve never thought about how being Latino was a gift. I mean, I know I’m Latino, but you’re telling me that it is a gift? I’m confused.”*
- *“I used to think being Latino was cool, but people have said hurtful things to me about being Latino, so now I’m not sure what to think”*
- *“I don’t even know another Latino. I don’t know what it means to be Latino.”*
- *“I don’t like being Latino, and wish I would have been born with another ethnicity.”*
- *“Why do we even talk about ethnicity? We are all the same.”*

Before you continue reading, take some time to reflect which of these statements you have either thought or said. Take some time to think about a particular experience that has impacted the way that you view your God-given ethnicity. Ask the Lord to show you how to live out of the fullness of how He has created you.

The Lord used people, and their unique ethnicity as a part of the greatest Story in bringing mankind back into a relationship with Him. Let’s look at the story of Esther.

### **...for such a time as this.**

In the Bible, the book of Esther is the story of a Jewish girl, who in God's sovereignty became the queen of Persia. Esther 2:7 tell us that Esther was an orphan who was being raised by a relative, a man named Mordecai. A certain man named Haman, who was an enemy of the Jews, was given a high position of power in the kingdom. In chapter 3 of Esther, we read that "all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed nor paid homage." Against the threat of punishment, Mordecai's decision would not change: he was a Jew, and as such would only bow down to God. Because Mordecai would not bow down, Haman decided He was going to launch a plan to destroy all the Jews in the empire. Guess who the Lord used to save the destruction of Jews? Esther. Esther's ethnicity was a gift and was stewarded to bring glory to God, and to save her people. In chapter 4, verse 14 Mordecai says to her, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" What a gift that Esther had in getting to be used by God! (Take some time to read the book of Esther, to get more of the details of how this happened)

Though I don't think Esther sat down and had conversations about how they should steward her ethnicity this is what is special about her story. 1) She was not alone, and lived life with other people. 2) She may have been fearful because of her ethnicity, but she did what was right even in fear. 3) God used her not because of what she had done, but because of who He is, and how He created her.

### **Your ethnic identity**

The first step in stewarding your ethnicity is to understand your ethnic identity. As I have walked through understanding and stewarding my own ethnic identity, I have learned that it is a journey. There are always areas you will be growing in. Take a look to see where you fall in the ethnic identity model. On the following page you'll find the ethnic identity model. This concept is detailed in [Being Latino in Christ](#) by Orlando Crespo. This model provides some practical ways for you to steward your ethnic identity.

### **High Assimilation/Low Ethnic Identity**

If you find yourself in this quadrant, it means you have done well at understanding and fitting into the majority culture in the ways mentioned in the bullet points but you may not be have as deep an understanding or may not be embracing your ethnic identity. If you are committed to growing in your ethnic identity, you will need to take some of the following steps: 1. Exploration. Make a decision that you will begin to ask questions about your ethnic identity by talking to family members and friends, reading books, or even taking classes that will help you in learning about your ethnic identity. 2. Appreciation. Looks for ways in which your ethnic identity is affirmed as a gift from God to bless you and others. 3. Association. Make a conscious choice to identify yourself as a member of your ethnic group, even in situations where it might bring you disapproval from others. 4. Interaction. Begin to meet and interact with others from your ethnic community who have a healthy understanding of their culture and can teach you something about yourself.

### **High Assimilation/High Ethnic Identity**

If you find yourself in this quadrant, you are likely in a position to be a bridge builder between your culture and other cultures. High assimilation and high ethnic identity is a place of real hope and strength but also of tension. You may even describe yourself as bicultural – possessing the ability to exist in two different cultures. You may find yourself being able to hold in tension the dualities of your existence as an ethnic minority even while operating in a majority culture context. If you find yourself in this quadrant, you will need to work on the following issues: 1. Exploration. Be intentional about exploring ways you can be a bridge person between cultures, to educate, inform

## Ethnic Identity Model

<b>Assimilation</b>	High ↑	<b><i>High Assimilation/Low Ethnic Identity</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies more as an American than as a Latino</li> <li>May speak little if any Spanish</li> <li>Feels at home in the dominant culture</li> <li>More likely to marry a non-Latino</li> <li>May be trying to distance themselves from Latinos or Hispanic culture</li> <li>Could possibly feel shame with ethnic identity (though not always)</li> <li>In friendships and social patterns relates to a high number of non-Latinos</li> </ul>	<b><i>High Assimilation/High Ethnic Identity</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moves back and forth between American and Latino cultures easily</li> <li>Might easily date or marry a person from any race or ethnicity</li> <li>At times feels at home with and distant from both cultures</li> <li>Can be/feel assimilated into majority culture but still retain a strong sense of ethnic identity</li> <li>Are interested in keeping their ethnic heritage alive and are quite knowledgeable about it</li> <li>Can serve as a bridge between cultures</li> </ul>
	↓ Low	<b><i>Low Assimilation/Low Ethnic Identity</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aren't at home in either of the two cultures in which they find themselves</li> <li>Can find themselves in this stage due to rejection by either majority or minority culture (and often both)</li> <li>Can feel estranged, disenchanted and disillusioned</li> </ul>	<b><i>Low Assimilation/High Ethnic Identity</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify more closely to their ethnic community than to majority culture</li> <li>May include ethnic minorities who feel white society will never treat them as equals</li> <li>Most likely will marry another Latino</li> <li>May have little interaction with majority culture in their daily life</li> <li>Likely to reflect Latino culture in language, tastes and dress</li> <li>Can include first generation Latinos who prefer speaking Spanish over English</li> </ul>
		← Low	High →
		<b>Ethnic Identity</b>	

and bring wholeness and healing to those in both cultures. 2. Appreciation. Being able to see your biculturalism as a place of strength and as an opportunity to thrive in relationships and ministry in a wide assortment of cultural settings. 3. Association. Learn the language of your ethnic heritage (if applicable) as a way to strengthen your ability to connect with and care for those in either culture. 4. Interaction. Find others from your ethnic group that are living successfully in the tension of both cultures. Be open to talking about your experiences, identifying your strengths, pain and victories, to continue to develop as a bicultural person.

### **Low Assimilation/Low Ethnic Identity**

If you find yourself in this quadrant, you very likely experience loneliness, a loss of direction and marginalization beyond what most ethnic minorities feel. To grow toward a healthy sense of ethnic identity, it is essential to find others who are able to give you perspective and wisdom for your life. If you find yourself generally living in a state of low assimilation and low ethnic identity, you may want to consider the following steps: 1. Exploration. Commit yourself to getting to know both the majority culture and your ethnic minority culture. You may want to choose

one to focus on for a season of your life. As this is not something you will be able to figure out on your own, you will need to seek out those around you who can help you. 2. Appreciation. Ask God to give you an appreciation of your life and how He has made you. Invite Him to guide you as you enter into your journey of self-awareness as an ethnic minority and a child of God. 3. Association. Make every effort to avoid isolation. Choose the difficult path of associating with others, trusting that God will bring people into your life that will care for you and give guidance in your ethnic journey. 4. Interaction. Try to find a church, ministry or organization that include ethnic minorities who have had a similar background and life experience to yours, and seek to learn how they have grown toward wholeness.

### **Low Assimilation/High Ethnicity Identity**

If you find yourself in this quadrant, you probably feel very comfortable interacting within your own ethnically specific community and have little desire to interact with other cultures. Remember that it can be to your advantage and can help in your own spiritual growth as you trust God in crossing cultural boundaries. You may want to consider the following ways to grow in your experience with other cultures in a way that will not undermine your commitment and love for your own ethnic identity: 1. Exploration. Begin to explore ways to step out of your culture. Do all you can to learn about other cultures, even when you think your approach to something makes more sense. Be willing to explore the possibility that you are ethnocentric (i.e. believing that your culture and ethnicity are superior to all others). 2. Appreciation. As you learn about different cultures, ask God to give you an understanding and appreciation for the values, beliefs, traditions and worldview of others. Look for opportunities to learn about and empathize with the oppression and sufferings of others. 3. Association. Begin to build cross-cultural friendships with people who are willing to openly share their lives with you. 4. Interaction. Be willing to step out and meet new people in your job, school or community. Also, be willing to speak out for the needs of others beyond your ethnic group as opportunities arise.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each quadrant?
2. Where would you place yourself? Why?
3. Which of these do you find yourself moving toward? What help is needed to get there?
4. Based on the quadrant you find yourself in, identify some needs you have for growing in ethnic identity. What resources (e.g. people, books, films, etc.) could be a source of learning and growth for you?
5. Based on the quadrant you find yourself in, what is God teaching you about yourself? Where are you hopeful and where are you discouraged?
6. How can you serve as a catalyst for others to arrive at a healthier place in their ethnic journey?
7. What are the dangers of using this information against others? How can it be misused in a hurtful way?
8. Based on your experience and knowledge, how accurate are these portrayals? What would you add, change or re-word?

## **Continuing to steward your ethnicity**

1. Read through Esther and consider how the Lord used Esther's ethnicity and unique experience to accomplish His will in saving His people. Spend some time reflecting on these questions with your coach:
2. Consider these questions:
  - a. What are some ways you feel like your ethnicity is a gift?
  - b. What are some instances where it feels like a burden?
  - c. Can you think of instances in the past where the Lord has used your cultural background and experiences to accomplish His will?
  - d. Consider your current roles (student, friend, member of your family, your job, etc.). How can you imagine the Lord using you in these roles, given your unique experiences, ethnically and culturally?

## **Conclusion**

Remember that your ethnicity is a god-given gift, and that we can steward our ethnicity to bring glory to God. Pray and ask God to give you direction in where to take a step of faith to continue to steward your ethnicity. Mordecai was sensitive to how Esther could be used to save the destruction of Jews. He took a step of faith, and Esther trusted and listened to Mordecai. As you continue to take steps of faith to steward your ethnicity it may seem lonely at times, but you are not alone. Ask other people in Destino to help when you have questions. You have been given such a gift in your ethnicity!