



9 Steps for Cross-Cultural Ministry

A LEADER'S GUIDE

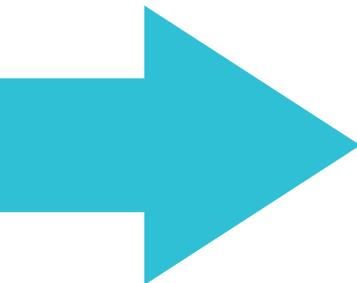
BOYD GUY

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PREFACE

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law... To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. Now I do all this because of the Gospel...

1 CORINTHIANS 9:20-23

For the mission trip leader, this short guide is designed to help you lead a training session with your team through the often misunderstood and underappreciated subject of culture. These are the nine points I discuss with my teams to help them begin to break down and think through the challenges of cross-cultural ministry. Each section concludes with a discussion question for the group. Leaders, be sure and note how individuals answer the questions. Their answers might just help you ward off issues before they become problematic on the field.

You will notice that the material is rooted in the work of Jesus Christ, the ultimate cultural communicator. His *message* was always grounded in a *method* of communication. That is the crux and standard for Christian missions and I observe that Paul modeled the same method in his ministry.

I am greatly indebted to the work of Charles H. Kraft whose writings have challenged me to be more Christ-like in my communication and a more effective representative of the Messiah.

I pray that this guide will be a tremendous blessing to the work you are endeavoring upon. To God be the glory!

~ Boyd Guy

1

WHAT'S FOOD GOT TO DO WITH IT?

I was enjoying one of the most pleasing regions (Menado) of one of the most beautiful islands (Sulawesi) of one of the most gorgeous nations (Indonesia). The beauty of the event was the more memorable due to a delicious meal with some fine Christian friends. As we shared the meal, one particular dish captured my attention. The local Christians obviously held this meat dish in highest esteem. I joined the group and “dug into” the special dish. Even in a land of spicy food, I had never tasted anything that approached the peppery heat of that first bite. It seared my mouth, cleared my sinuses, and made like a miniature lava flow as it burned its way down my throat. Though different, the meat was delicious. I ate as much as my tender, western mouth could take. Only later did I discover that it was dog meat!¹



GROUP DISCUSSION:

Why do you think that people in Menado, Indonesia consider dog the finest and best of foods, while westerners tend to experience repulsion at the thought?

2

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Boyd's Definition: Culture is cultivated and community-driven instruction that is socially transmitted within a given societal group that guides appropriate patterns of behavior.

What Culture Provides: What to eat, how to eat, how food is prepared, marriage, technology, housing, clothing, modesty, travel, types of music, ways of speaking, ways to relate to others in the social environment, inheritance, leadership, discipline, and other general patterns of living.



GROUP DISCUSSION:

Have you ever done something in another cultural setting and later found out that those actions were taboo or rude?



A few years ago, I played cards with a group of Americans at an airport not knowing that it was highly illegal in that country. I guess that explains the large crowd that gathered to watch and laugh at us.

3

THREE UNHEALTHY RESPONSES TO CULTURE

The Tourist Response: Everything in this culture is wonderful and far better than my own.

The Rejection Response: Everything in this culture is wretched and needs to be changed.

The Toleration Response: I can deal with these people and their strange customs for a temporary period in order to communicate, but I'll feel better when we leave.



GROUP DISCUSSION:

In your travels, have you ever experienced any of these thoughts?

What is a ***healthy response*** to a new culture?

4

JESUS AND CULTURE

Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

MATTHEW 9:14-17

GROUP DISCUSSION:

What do you notice from this passage that reflects the culture of the day? Remember what culture provides from step 2.

5

THE MESSAGE AND THE METHOD

You have heard Christians discussing the message of the Gospel, but the Bible offers more than just the message to proclaim. We are able to observe the method in which Jesus chose to communicate. Jesus was the ultimate cultural communicator and we can model the same approach in our mission efforts. Through the Gospel accounts, we can study both the *message* and the *method* that Jesus employed for effective communication.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Before we consider the method of communication, let's make sure that we are all able to state the message of the Gospel concisely. What is the Gospel message? Try to keep it as clear and concise as you can.

One verse I usually go to is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 where Paul gave a clear and concise explanation of what was *most important*.

6

JESUS STEPPED INTO HIS AUDIENCE'S CULTURE

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14

In the incarnation, God became man, lived for thirty-three years, made himself vulnerable, was the recipient of insults, criticism, and temptation. And in the process of setting aside his status which he had a right to retain, he put himself in a position to win, rather than demand, our respect, and to earn, rather than assume, our admiration and allegiance on the basis of what he did.²

In a similar manner, missionaries must set aside their home and culture, make themselves vulnerable, and earn through “becoming like them” the right to influence people of another culture.



GROUP DISCUSSION:

In what ways should you leave behind your culture and appropriate patterns of behavior to better communicate the Gospel?

7

JESUS DREW UPON THE CULTURE OF THE AUDIENCE

Jesus adapted his presentation style, illustrations, and dramatic openers by appealing to the listeners' occupation and tradition. In doing so, Jesus drew upon the culture to communicate appropriately to his audience.

To a Religious Leaders: Jesus would refer to the Scriptures, “*You have heard that it was said, ... but I tell you...*,” “*Haven't you read what David did when he...*,” and “*Haven't you read in the Law.*” This is the way that Jesus spoke to the religious leaders—he referred to the Scriptures (Matthew 5:21-22; 12:3, 5).

To a Seamstress: Jesus might say, “*No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth*” (Matthew 9:16).

To a Fisherman: Jesus might say, “*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19).

To a Rural Farmer: Jesus might say, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few*” (Matthew 9:37).

To a Shepherd: Jesus might say that the people of Israel are “*sheep without a shepherd*” (Matthew 9:36).

Jesus understood the occupations and context of his first-century audience. He allowed their employment settings to illustrate his spiritual teachings. By drawing upon their context, Jesus was able to maximize his illustrations to increase communication, clarity, and impact.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

What points of the receiving culture, the one you are traveling to, might you draw upon in order to share the Gospel effectively?

8

JESUS OFTEN RELATED INFORMATION USING STORIES

Everyone has a basic human need for stories. Through stories, individuals process their experiences by organizing them into tales of significance. Stories become the lenses through which people view and review their life. Stories allow individuals to make sense of their relationships, encounters, experiences, and all of human affairs.³

Jesus Christ, the ultimate teacher, who designed us with a basic human need for stories, often taught through parables. He painted pictures with his words through the use of similes and metaphors. This was central in his teaching. Thus, good storytelling must be central in Christian preaching and teaching.



GROUP DISCUSSION:

If someone begins telling you an interesting story, how likely are you to listen?

What makes someone a good storyteller?

9

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The effective communicator, Jesus Christ, spoke to people through their culture. Charles Kraft would say, to be an effective communicator of God and His Word, you must *“love people for Christ by respecting the only way of life that makes sense to them.”*⁴

This does not mean that missionaries should endorse everything that a culture supports, but they must have an understanding and appreciation of culture. This means for me, that when I travel on a mission trip, I need to understand my own culture, the receiving culture, and the biblical culture to effectively communicate Christian faith.



GROUP DISCUSSION:

How can you begin preparing now for the culture you are traveling to visit?

ENDNOTES

1. *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, edited by John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 260.
2. Charles H. Kraft, *Culture, Communication, and Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), 190-191.
3. Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000), 2.
4. Kraft, 2.

