

## Understanding Culture

### I. Understanding Culture and Missions.

#### A. The Purity of the Biblical Message.

1. Details our parameters for World Wide Evangelization.
  - a. All attempts to reach people are useless without Him.
  - b. All Attempts to change a people are useless without Him.
2. Declares to man the plan of God for World Evangelization.
  - a. "Missions" begins with God not man.
  - b. "Missions" is a Divine Effort not a Human Exercise.
3. Displays for all that Scripture is trans-cultural.
  - a. It is not an American Bible for poor heathen Masses,
  - b. It is rather God's Divine Message to all nations, cultures and peoples.
  - c. It is God's Message to Mankind and it is relevant.
  - d. God's word has reached men from every corner of the globe.
  - e. God's word has changed men from every corner of the globe.
  - f. God's word has called men from every corner of the globe.
4. Declares the standard for righteousness.
  - a. When we enter a culture it is our standard, banner and flag.
  - b. We hold men in all cultures to the Word of God ONLY.
  - c. We handle men in all cultures with the Word of God Exclusively.
  - d. We help men with the Word of God lovingly.
5. Details the Guidelines we use today when we enter a culture not our own.
  - a. We discover in the Word of God that Gentiles did not have to become Jews to be believers.
  - b. We discover the Word of God is not limited to the culture to which it comes.
  - c. Christ's

#### B. The Principles of the beliefs of man in a society.

1. Culture is the integrated system of ideas feelings and values in a society that establishes the accepted behavior.
2. Culture is the glasses we view all others out of our culture through.
3. Consider how culture affects a Society.
  - a. Culture Molds Physical Characteristics.
    - i. An African Culture may teach that it is normal to drill holes in a body for ornamentation and devotion.
    - ii. A Western culture may teach that drill holes may be done in the ears. The element that teaches drill many in your ear, navel, nose and eyebrow for rebellion is a SUB culture.
    - iii. A western woman pursues slim body.
    - iv. A woman from Tonga the fuller she is the more desired she is.
  - b. Culture Molds Ideas:

- i. Westerners have no problem accepting Atoms Electrons and Gravity and change our behavior as a result.
- ii. Easterners have no problem accepting the presence of Evil spirits and change their behavior as a result.
- iii. It shapes the ways we do things.
  - a. Whether to arrive on time by the clock or by social standings.
  - b. The way we fish.
  - c. The way we build houses.
  - d. The ways we cook.
  - e. The ways we govern.
- c. Culture Molds Values:
  - i. Teachers are esteemed in one culture and not in another.
  - ii. It determines what is true and what is false.
    - a. Malaria – Comes from Evil Spirits.
    - b. Malaria – Comes from Protozoan Parasite.
  - iii. It determines what is lovely or unlovely.
    - a. Singing in Mellow tones.
    - b. Singing in Shrill tones.
  - iv. It determines Right and Wrong.
    - a. Whether Lying is acceptable or not.

## II. Understanding the Differences between the Cultural and the Spiritual.

### A. Learning the Dimensions of Culture.

- 1. A man's culture is what shapes his ideas. What he holds to be true.
- 2. A man's culture is what shapes his feelings. How he feels in a situation.
- 3. A man's culture is what shapes his values. What he will believe to be facts.

### B. Learning the Dimensions of the Spiritual.

- 1. The Word of God –
- 2. The Spirit of God –

### C. Learning to determine when it is cultural or spiritual.

- 1. You must have Clear Discernment of when an Encountered Situation is to be interpreted as Spiritual or Cultural. Consider Acts

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#### a. An Example of when it was Spiritual.

- (1) The Church at Philippi was started after the Macedonian call. Acts 16:12-14
- (2) Lydia, a new Christian, and a Businesswoman, took in the Missionaries and gave them a place to live. 16:15
  - (a) This would be the first interaction with their culture.
  - (b) She is learning more about them and they her.

- (3) Then comes the first cultural hurdle in Philippi.  
16:16-19
  - (a) There is a woman who is possessed with an evil spirit.
  - (b) She is being used to bring income to other businessmen.
  - (c) Do they upset an anthropological and economic situation with the Word of God?
  - (d) They handled the situation by discerning what was cultural and what was sinful.
- (4) They then faced the human consequences for the spiritual deed, but not without divine notice and purpose.
  - (a) They were accused of cultural assassination.  
20-21
  - (b) They were stripped, beaten, and jailed.
- (5) They found the joy that can only come when you have done what was right. 22-28
  - (a) They Prayed in Prison.
  - (b) They Praised in Prison.
  - (c) They Proclaimed in Prison.
- (6) It is spiritual when people in a land have behavior in contradiction to God's Word.

b. An Example of when it is Cultural. -- A key to remember is that YOUR culture is just as peculiar to the ones you are reaching, as theirs is to yours. Furthermore just because your way is "American" does not make it right.

- (1) Paul faced a situation with the Corinthian Church.  
(1Corinthians 8) They were absorbed with whether or not to eat meat offered to idols.
- (2) He considered that an idol was nothing therefore the issue was moot. V4
- (3) He considered that the meat was not going to make him closer to God. Neither was the meat going to make him further from God. V8
- (4) Understand the essence of Liberty. A freedom to behave in a situation that is not sin.
- (5) Is their Culture a Spiritual Liberty that offends you as a weaker brother?
  - (a) Occasionally some things will become stumbling blocks to a weaker brother.
  - (b) Determine who is the weaker Brother. 12
  - (c) Determine if this is wounding a weaker conscience.
  - (d) Keep in mind that, Psalms 119:165 teaches "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

- (6) Do not allow their Liberty to be your Stumbling Block. V13

c. Understanding what is NOT Cultural.

- (1) Of Sexual
  - (a) Bigamy
  - (b) Adultery
  - (c) Fornication
- (2) Of Social
  - (a) Nudity
  - (b) Alcohol consumption

d. Understanding what may be cultural.

- (1) Speech
  - (a) Specific Words
  - (b) Phrases
- (2) Music –
  - (a) Drums
  - (b) Guitars
  - (c) Tambourines
- (3) Dress
  - (a) Men in skirts
  - (b) Women breast-feeding in worship services.
- (4) Administration
  - (a) Frequency of Service
  - (b) Times of Services

e. Understanding the James' Mission's Principle.

- (1) James 1:5 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."
- (2) Many times it will be a "Judgment Call" Rely on him make the best decision you can. You may later need to adjust, but do the best you can.

f. Understand the need of living by Romans 14

2. You must have an understanding of when it is "Biblical" or "American." *(We are most familiar with the American Culture and we believe the way we do things is right. In our country this may be found acceptable. However when you arrive on the field things must be analyzed for why we do them.)* We are there to deliver the Gospel not to Disrupt the Operation of the Norm.

a. It is Biblical if:

- (1) You have Biblical Text, taken in context, to relate it.
- (2) You have a foundational truth from scripture that directly speaks to this issue.
- (3) You have a Doctrine to substantiate you issue.

b. It is American if:

- (1) When you have no Doctrine, Reference, or Foundational Truth to base it on.

- (2) When you find that when asked by a national, your only honest response is "Because that is the way we do it at home."
- c. The American way may be good, right and proper. However, the Moldavian way may also be good, right and proper.
- d. Deliver the Gospel, Not Disrupt the Order of things.
  - (1) Their way may be slower, sillier, and strange, but it is their way and you are in their country.
- e. Learn to pick your battles.
  - (1) Fighting over whether they want a 4-hour service Sunday Afternoon and you want a 9:45, 11:00, and 7:30 service schedule may not accomplish your desired results.
  - (2) Fighting over whether the men wear skirts to church on Sunday because you are not used to it may upset the scheme of things even more.
  - (3) Souls lost over your rejection of their culture are in fact, Souls lost.
  - (4) Consider Proverbs 18:19 "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."

## Adjusting to Culture

- I. The Definition of Culture Shock.
  - A. Culture Shock is the disorientation we experience when all the cultural maps and guidelines we learned as children no longer work.
    - 1. Your Call – Your arrival – Your first days.
    - 2. Excited by new sights and sounds.
    - 3. You go to a restaurant and order food but you do not recognize it.
    - 4. You visit a market for oranges that do not look like anything Tropicana would ever put a label upon.
    - 5. You try to ask for something and realize you cannot communicate but must use hand signals to try to acquire your food.
    - 6. You go to pay and you do not know if you are being overcharged and the coins do not make sense.
    - 7. Now you see young people laughing because of your inability to speak. All that education for what purpose?
    - 8. Your host tells you take a bus...
      - a. But how do you get it to stop.
      - b. How do you know when you are told get off at the big green house and every house is green and the same size.
      - c. You feel like you are going to be on this bus forever.
    - 9. You go to a doctor and now you wonder has he ever treated an American before?
  - B. It is the multiplication of anxieties whether real or imagined that keep us from doing anything but staying alive.
  - C. Culture Shock is not:
    - 1. The sheer sight of poverty.

2. The sheer sight of dirt galore.
- D. It is when we are stripped of all of our normal ways of coping with life we are confused afraid and angry.
- E. Culture shock happens to many.

## II. The Details of Culture Shock.

### A. There is Language Shock.

1. Since childhood we talk gestured written and communicated with others so much so we no longer think about the process of communication. It is automatic.
2. Your vocabulary has been reduced to that of a child. All status of learning before you got here is irrelevant. You speak to a professor and bumble around.
3. Remember you cannot learn a language without making mistakes.
4. Language Shock creates a vicious cycle.
  - a. Unable to learn.
  - b. Unable to get along without learning.
5. Some seek to find the way to say things in English into their local language and miss the point of language learning.

### B. There is the Daily Routine Shock.

1. Our home culture we shop, cook, do our banking, laundering, mailing, going to the dentist and never think twice about how to do it or the ways to do it.
2. Now everything takes 3 and 4 times longer to get done. What you could do at home in an hour can take 3 hours to do two or three of them.
3. Life gets to take up all the time and not time is left for effective ministry.
4. Frustration mounts, as we are unable to do much of what we wanted to do because of the living stress.

### C. The Shock from Changes in familiar Relationships

1. Many of us rely on outside relationships for affirmation and adjustment.
2. The move to a new culture changes this and now you and your entire family are thrown into stresses with no outside relationships to help you cope.
  - a. They cry out for help at the same time you need help.
  - b. They get on your nerves and you on them
3. No longer do you have family and friends as emotional anchor points to help you.
  - a. The local people are still trying to understand you. Their humor is unfamiliar and your humor is frowned upon.
  - b. The local missionaries seem well-adjusted and too busy to help.
  - c. We are afraid to admit this weakness to them and therefore seek no help.
4. It is a loss of Identity.

- a. I am a Teacher, Preacher, and Missionary and belong to certain groups, fellowships and hold certain positions. (At Home).
  - b. Now what am I? The process starts all over beginning to establish your roles and positions in a new place.
5. You must assume the role of a learner, your former positions as a leader gave you security and status, now you must accept this new role otherwise you will meet with another aspect of Culture Shock.
6. Servants in the home can be another aspect in this shock.
  - a. Relating to them may be difficult.
  - b. If I do not use them I cannot get anything else done. If I do use them I want them to be my equal and invite them to the table to eat with me. (Thereby in many cultures creating another disaster)
  - c. Yet the same servants are who are helpful have intruded into the privacy of my home.
- D. Loss of understanding is a Shock.
  1. In our country we drive on the right, we do not bargain at the grocery store, and understand the meaning of a line to wait for something.
  2. Our new culture alters our old understanding.
    - a. If we point at something, we may offend.
    - b. If we use our left hand to shake hands, we may offend.
  3. When our understanding of a situation fails us we then become desperate because our lives become seemingly out of control.
  4. In the long run it is this sense of meaninglessness arising out of this confusion that can be the most damaging consequence of culture shock.
- E. Culture Shock weighs heavily on the Knowledge but may be even greater on our emotions.
  1. We FEEL deprived and confused.
    - a. The food we eat is strangely spiced.
    - b. The sounds are unfamiliar.
    - c. Entertainment is unintelligible.
    - d. We then long for one evening we would just like to watch the evening news, hear recognizable music, eat familiar food and have entertainment we enjoy.
  2. We feel homesick and despise this new way.
  3. We feel guilty to these feeling because we are not living up to our own expectations.
  4. We are angry with others and ourselves for our own slow progress.

### **III. Dealing with Culture Shock.**

- A. The real problem in culture shock is the psychological distortion that occurs undetected while we think we are functioning normally.
  1. Our perception of reality becomes twisted and wreaks havoc on our body.
    - a. Headaches, ulcers, lower back pain, high blood pressure, and heart attacks. Chronic fatigue

- b. Depression and Sense of Failure.
  2. Stress is cumulative and persists long after the event is over.
  3. To know how stressed you are, you must log all you have felt in the past year.
    - a. If in one year you have more than 150 points you are likely to become seriously ill in the next two years.
    - b. Following the Holmes-Massua scale most missionaries on their first term have about 400 points on this scale. PAGE 72
  4. Going abroad will not change our weak and sinful natures nor will it give us new talents.
  5. Unfortunately, if we think we are failing, we work harder to maintain our self-esteem. This works against us and multiplies the anxiety and the fear of failing saps our energy.
- B. There is a cycle to this Culture Shock. It is helpful to notice that that we are normal human beings if we have traumas in adjusting. This too shall come to pass.
1. The tourist Stage:
    - a. Fascinations are high.
    - b. Life is exactly like I told it in my slide presentation I made from survey trip.
    - c. We meet important people.
    - d. Eat in Fancy hotels.
    - e. It lasts from weeks to several months.
    - f. When most tourists are ready to leave then the reality hits you I am not going back home then the next stage.
  2. Disenchantment:
    - a. We set up our homes.
    - b. Take responsibility for us in this setting.
    - c. Language Problems, Shopping Problems transportation problems.
    - d. Concern for cleanliness overwhelms you.
    - e. You live in a fear of being robbed and assaulted.
    - f. We then respond in hostility because these things threaten our security.
      - i. Criticism of the people.
      - ii. They have many shortcomings.
        - a. Lazy
        - b. Inferior
        - c. We develop stereotypes
        - d. Characterize the country in negative ways.
    - g. This is the crisis stage.
      - i. We look for mail and fantasize about what we will do when we get home.
      - ii. We quit many times over.
    - h. The strangest thing about this if we do not leave is we discover we are learning to live in this culture. We find new resolve from a veteran missionary gives us new found hope to continue and we throw away the letters of resignation.

3. Resolution:

- a. Humor begins the mark of recovery.
- b. We start to laugh at ourselves.
- c. We sympathize with others we think are less fortunate.  
(Though this is arrogant of it self,) we begin to learn new ways.
- d. You will learn how to relate to others here and you will establish ministry log patterns in this stage on how you will relate to others.
- e. We seek to make their culture ours. We identify with the people.
- f. CS is not an experience to endure, rather the formation of how we will bind to the people.

4. Adjustments.

- a. We now begin to function from within the culture.
- b. We begin to accept the local foods, dress and customs and begin to enjoy them.
- c. We begin to cherish the friendships.
- d. Here we make our choice for ministry and living.
  - i. We can build our home o be a hide out and enter their world of poverty and living but retreat to our own world at night.
  - ii. We can "Go Native" and reject our past.
  - iii. Identify with the culture and seek a level of integration with our own.

5. Are Missionaries Balanced? Page 77

6. Reverse Culture Shock – Coming home and undoing what has been done.

- a. The excitement of returning.
- b. Irritation and we seek to change it back to the way it was when we left.

**IV. The Determination in overcoming Culture Shock**

A. Learning to Adapt to new Cultures.

- 1. Recognize your anxieties.
- 2. Learn the culture.
- 3. Build Trust.
- 4. Reduce stress by having realistic goals. Page 73
- 5. Do not take yourselves so seriously.
- 6. Take time off.
- 7. Share burdens.

B. This will strictly be a choice of yours.

- 1. People do what they want to do.
- 2. Stories can be related of those who fought it and those who flourished in the same culture.

C. Your calling is to a people.

- 1. You may not always understand the "why" of their behavior.
- 2. You may always have a better way to offer, but do not.
- 3. Learn to reach those people in their culture.

D. Scriptural Truths to help with Cultural Adjustments.

1. (Romans 12:18) "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."
2. (Colossians 3:13-15) "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. {14} And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. {15} And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."