

Key Questions: *How do I prepare well to serve overseas? What can I be doing now?*

Cross-Cultural Preparation

What is Culture?

- *Miriam Webster* defines culture as, “the customary beliefs, social forms, attitudes, values, and characteristics shared by people in a place and/or time.”
- Culture affects the way people see, interact with, and interpret the world.
- Culture is like an iceberg – there are “visible” elements and “invisible” elements. Often what we see is based on and informed by what lies beneath.
- In missions contexts, understanding culture (both our own and the culture of those whom we are trying to reach) will help shape how we send, serve, and share.

Six Cultural Realities

- All people operate under and are affected by a culture.
- It's difficult to evaluate one's own culture. Consider fish in water.
- People see and evaluate other cultures through their own cultural lenses.
- Culture can either point to or away from Christ.
- Every culture reflects common grace and every culture reflects the fall.
- Christians are unique as members of another “culture”, not of this world.
 - **Phil. 3:20:** *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”*

How Does Culture Affect Mission?

- **How We Send/Serve: Culture Shock**
 - *Definition:* “The feeling of disorientation experienced by someone who is suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes” (Oxford Languages Dictionary).
 - Opportunity for spiritual attack.

- **1 Peter 5:8** - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
 - **1 Corinthians 1:10** - I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.
 - Opportunity for sanctification.
 - **Galatians 5:22-23** - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
 - **Ephesians 4:29** - Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
- **How We Share: Contextualization**
 - Some Definitions:
 - *Miriam Webster*: To place something in a context, where context is defined as the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.
 - *9Marks Ministry*: Making the gospel and the church as much at home as possible in a given cultural context.
 - *Chase's Definition*: Making the gospel as understandable as possible by removing as many barriers as possible in a given culture without compromising truth.
 - Understanding and preparing to share the gospel in a particular context helps us obey **1 Peter 3:15**, *"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being **prepared** to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet **do it with gentleness and respect...**"*
 - Cultural Examples:
 - **Guilt Societies** – Society is focused on the concepts of law and punishment, with behavior affected by the feeling of guilt and the threat of legal penalty.
 - For example, nations with Judeo/Christian influence.
 - **Shame Societies** – Society is focused on the concepts of honor and shame, with behavior governed by the feeling of shame and threats of ostracism from relationships.
 - For example, nations with Middle-Eastern and East Asian religious heritage.
 - **Fear Societies** – Society is focused on power dynamics, with behavior governed by the feeling of fear and concern over retribution.

- For example, nations with tribal structures and influenced by animistic religions.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to pierce through all cultural barriers, but we don't want to erect any barriers unnecessarily.
 - **Romans 1:16** - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - **John 16:33** - I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
 - **Romans 12:2** - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

AT-HOME CASE STUDY: Read **Acts 17:16-32**. Consider the following:

1. Who was Paul talking to in this passage?
2. How did Paul start his Gospel proclamation?
3. How did Paul connect with his audience?
4. How did Paul point people to Jesus?

Biblical Principles for Cultural Engagement

PRINCIPLE 1 - Sacrifice Your Rights.

1 Corinthians 9:1-12 *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? 8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? **Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.***

PRINCIPLE 2 - Become a Servant of All.

1 Corinthians 9:19 *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.*

PRINCIPLE 3 - Become Like those You're Trying to Reach (within reason).

Acts 21:37-22:2 *As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? 38 Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" 39 Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." 40 And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: 1 "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." 2 **And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet.***

1 Corinthians 9:20-23 *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.** 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

PRINCIPLE 4 - Observe and Adapt.

Acts 17:22 *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.*

Romans 14:13-15 *Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 15 **For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.** By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.*

PRINCIPLE 5 - Actively Listen and Ask Questions.

Acts 17:2 *And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures...*

Acts 8:30 *So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet **and asked**, "Do you understand what you are reading?"*

PRINCIPLE 6 - Let Scripture Set Your Boundaries.

1 Corinthians 9:21 *To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (**not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ**) that I might win those outside the law.*

PRINCIPLE 7 - Look For and Use Gospel Bridges.

Acts 17:22-25 *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the*

objects of your worship, **I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.'** What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Acts 17:28 ...for "In him we live and move and have our being"; **as even some of your own poets have said**, "For we are indeed his offspring."

PRINCIPLE 8 - Trust the Word of God.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for **it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I decided to **know nothing among you** except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

PRINCIPLE 9 - Display the New Culture to Which You Belong.

Matthew 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Colossians 1:9-10 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

PRINCIPLE 10 - Meet People Where They're At.

Philippians 2:5-8 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 **but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.** 8 And being found in human form, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

PRACTICE: Practice sharing the Gospel without using theological words. This helps you consider the gospel afresh, and consider how to contextualize your presentation.

Applications for Cultural Engagement

- Commit yourself to knowing the Word of God.
- Pray for peoples of the world using tools like *Joshua Project*. Praying for other peoples will align your heart with God's mission to reach them, and will help you to have a global perspective.

- Be a humble student of other cultures, but don't think you have to know everything. Questions help open doors for ministry.
- Seek training through service; experience is the best teacher. How can you be interacting with other cultures now before you go overseas?
- Pray for wisdom and discernment and trust the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Preparation

• The Effect of Environment

- The change in your environment will have an impact on you spiritually. What are some practical things that you can do now to prepare yourself for these changes?
 - If you are accustomed to worshipping in a quiet private environment at a set time, experiment with doing your “normal” devotions in a bus station, on a street corner, or a busy hotel lobby.
 - Are you used to living alone? Try sharing a room with another person that you otherwise would not—and do your devotional time in that context.
 - Are you irritable when you do not eat? Begin to curb the normal reactions of your flesh through fasting and self-denial.
 - Consider the mental and spiritual impact on having to manage work, the absence from family, and dealing with family problems remotely. Go through scenarios. These things can be debilitating.
- The point of this type of exercise is for you to begin to understand the impact that these types of changes will have on you *spiritually*. If you find yourself in a position of great spiritual darkness and warfare and you cannot pray because your routine is broken, you are in trouble and your team will be affected. Experiment, practice, and assess the results by yourself or as a group.

• The Reality of Spiritual Warfare

- **Ephesians 6:12** *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*
- Spiritual preparation will involve preparing for the spiritual battles that will occur before, during, and after the trip. While it is true that our struggle is not a “flesh and blood” battle, these struggles most often involve “flesh and blood” people—ourselves, those to whom we are ministering, those whom we are working with, and those who are working against us.
- The following is a short list of potential scenarios to consider. Not all situations described below may have a clear bible verse that immediately comes to mind. If it is a situation where there is a clear biblical teaching, consider how you would

apply it. Ask yourself how the following situations would affect you. How might you respond? What passages of scripture should you memorize or become more familiar with which address these issues?

- You are in a city filled with idols and tourists. There is resistance or an apathetic response to the gospel and you are accused of being intolerant, imperialistic, or arrogant.
 - In some third world cultures, women are viewed differently than they are in western society. How should you as a woman (or a woman on your team) respond when being gawked at by a group of men or is addressed inappropriately on a crowded bus or train?
 - How will you respond to the customs official who is demanding a bribe or kickback in order for you to bring in your supplies? Which ethical issues will you fight for?
 - How will and should you engage a spouse or family member who is not wanting you to go on the trip?
 - Are you inclined toward depression? How will reverse culture shock affect you?
 - Your team members are broken people who may be oblivious to what is happening around them and how their self-centered fleshly responses are impacting the unity of the team. How would you approach them?
 - People form social cliques and attitudes can become very opinionated. How will the feelings of being socially ostracized from team members affect you?
 - People have different areas of giftedness and levels of skill; some are elevated where others are not. How will this impact your own inclinations toward feelings of pride or self-loathing?
 - Team members will have different theological positions, styles of delivery and leadership. How you deal with these issues will be amplified on the mission field.
 - How will you deal with legitimate fears in potentially hostile environments? How will they be exploited by the enemy? How will your fears impact the team as a whole?
 - ...and the list goes on!
- **The Value of Spiritual Preparation**
 - Not everyone on the team will take the time and put in the effort to prepare themselves. As a result, you may be the one person on the team that the Lord uses to maintain unity, set the right biblical example, or be the one that people come to for help.
 - Spiritual preparation will not make you immune from spiritual warfare and the struggles you have with your own sinful tendencies, but the process will help to

make you more aware of areas you may have otherwise been blind to and keep you and others from spiritual harm.

- Spiritual preparation will help to preserve and enhance unity and love within the team and reflect the glory and love of God to those who are watching.
- Spiritual preparation before the trip will help you after the trip by enabling you to more clearly keep in mind the big picture of God's overall plan—especially if you don't see clear evidence that your involvement made a difference.
- Spiritual preparation will help you to keep in mind whom you are serving, how you should be serving Him, and what your reward really is: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." (Colossians 3:23-24)

Lesson Summary

- While we can't prepare for every eventuality that we may face in missions, it never hurts to begin thinking and praying through common circumstances.
- Learning about other cultures and thinking about the best ways to share in those contexts now will prepare you well for overseas work.
- Training your mind to think through pathways to the gospel (gospel bridges) will help your general evangelism skills improve, even if you're not called overseas.
- Thinking in advance of potential areas of spiritual attack aids us in being aware of the devil's schemes.
- We can have confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture and the power of Christ to cover all areas of preparation and service.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you

1 Peter 3:14-15