

Elijah Company, Inc.
Basics2GO--->

Part4

An Online Course from Elijah Company

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Seminar Notes



Understanding Culture

- **Understanding Cross-Culture Living, its implications for missions and communicating the Gospel**

1. The Origins of Culture

· As an infant an individual begins a course on learning how to survive. Even before he or she leaves the doctor's hands, little sensors are on-line to discover what is safe, acceptable and profitable and what is not. In a normal situation the child quickly learns the "system" of his world, discovering that certain actions bring on painful results, while other actions are pleasurable. By the time he is an adolescent he will be molded by the world around him to where he can function naturally without much stress. When a person is "dislodged" from his familiar 'system', and put into another, "error" signs begin to flash and problems arise. These problems can manifest themselves in decreased energy, confusion, insecurity, stress and inability to carry on normal responsibilities.

2. The Goals in Relating Culture

- **To be sensitized to the distinctions of cultures and know principles of adaptation.**
- Reactivate one's cultural sensors .
- Enable one to survive the initial indoctrination.
- Highlight the "highly flammable" areas, or places where significant damage can be done emotionally or professionally.
- Enable one to have a smooth landing into a new country.
- Show that Christian testimony is enhanced through confidence and attitude.
- Instruct the missionary to use the culture's foundations as stepping stones for communicating the Gospel, and not as walls to keep it out.



3. Definition of Culture

· Culture is the way of life in a given society, passed down from one generation to the next through learning and experience. It includes behavior, communication, customs and taboos.

4. General Principles in Relating to Culture

a. Values - Values determine the basic motivation of a people, provide a society with distinction and produce loyalty patterns.

-80-90% of behavior within a given society is open to understanding if "values" are known.

-Values are the basic sentiments (things to strive for, die for, live for, etc.). These define what constitutes well-being, success, love, life.

-What areas of life do you value most? (example family, friends, solitude, etc.)

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

b. Perception of reality

Every culture has a world view that is right but incomplete. The Bible states clearly that “*we know in part*” (1 Corinthians 13). The plan of God seems to bring all the redeemed cultures together to form a mosaic. Therefore, no culture is right or wrong in and of itself. It is only complete when joined to others. This is perfectly portrayed in the poem

The Blind man and the Elephant



*Twas six men of Indostan to learning much inclined, who went to see the elephant,
(though each of them were blind) That each by observation might satisfy the mind.*

*The First approached the elephant, and happened to fall, against his broad and sturdy side, at once began to bawl: "God
bless me! but the elephant is very like a wall!"*

*The Second, feeling of the tusk, cried, "Ho! What have we here so very round and smooth and sharp? This wonder of an
elephant is very like a spear!"*

*The Third approached the animal, and happening to take the squirming trunk within his hands thus boldly up and spake, "I
see," quoth he, "the elephant is very like a snake!"*

*The Forth reached out an eager hand, and felt about the knee, "What most this wondrous beast is like is mighty plain,"
quoth he, "Tis clear enough the elephant is very like a tree!"*

*The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear, said, "E'en the blindest man can tell what this resembles most; Deny the fact who
can, this marvel of an elephant is very like a fan!"*

*The Sixth no sooner had begun about the beast to grope, than, seizing on the swinging tail that fell within his scope, "I see,"
quoth he, "the elephant is very like a rope!"*

*And so these men of Indostan disputed loud and long, each in his own opinion exceeding stiff and strong, though each was
partly right, and all were in the wrong."*

c. The problem of Ego

Ego - "An exaggerated sense of self-importance; conceit." (American Heritage Dictionary)

Self, or ego, is good as it was created by God to make us each unique. There is the natural sinful inclination to focus only on ourselves and feel that we are the best that can be - everyone else needs to pattern after us. Cultures, being a conglomeration of individuals programmed into a single "system," also act this way. It is referred to as ethnocentricity.

d. Ethnocentricity

Ethnocentricity is a compound word: ethno - Greek for ethnos or nation or people group, and centrality - meaning center. This portrays the idea "our way of life is the center of the universe." Though readily viewed as wrong, we would think that only rich and powerful cultures have this attitude. The truth is that every culture thinks of itself as best to be followed by all.



Humility - Ravi Zacharias calls humility a “precious jewel.” But like any precious jewel a high price must be paid for it. Knowing the humility of Christ will allow us to appreciate the very fact that we are wonderfully made and to see the wonder in others as well. This includes culture.¹

e. Non-verbal Communication

You may have heard the cliché, “Actions speak louder than words.” In cross culture communications this can be true most of the time.

Imagine a good-looking European businessman came to visit you. You and your family were excited to have this visitor from a different country so you invited him for dinner. After the meal, that you spent hours to make, the man leaned way back in your good dining room chair and let out the loudest, longest belch that you ever heard. If you are from North America, you would immediately begin to feel disgust and think of the impoliteness of this ‘guest.’ How would you be thinking and feeling about him the rest of the evening?

In certain cultures it is more than perfectly acceptable to belch - to belch indicates that the meal was thoroughly satisfying. To not belch would be an insult. If your guest knew this he would have spared you the embarrassment. The same will be true of you if you do not know the cultural “norms,” taboos, and customs. You may one day innocently do something that is completely normal and acceptable in your culture, only to greatly offend those in the host culture.²

· Appearance _____

· Body Posture _____

¹ See Appendix H - Humility The Beauty of Holiness

² Non Verbal Communication is expounded on in Appendix H



- Distance_____
- Eye Contact_____
- Facial Expressions_____
- Hand and Arm Gestures_____
- Silence_____
- Smell_____
- Touching and Physical Contact_____

g. Components of Intercultural Effectiveness

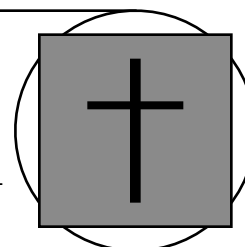
The Incarnational Model - Jesus was the best cross-cultural communicator of the Gospel. He left heaven, became a man, learned the customs of men, gave up His divine privileges. He is our missionary model. Scripture says “He humbled Himself, became a servant” (Philippians 2)



Sit and Learn - Identify with them, know them, know their thinking. When you enter into a new culture practice being an investigative reporter. People love to answer questions about their country and way of life. Be an ardent student of their history, customs, values, verbal and non-verbal communication.

Stand and Serve - Build trust by loving actions. There are two things to do: ask God to give you the jewel of humility, and risk becoming less in your own eyes. Remember "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." Love is a universal language.

In cross-culture settings the missionary is a square peg in a round hole. By becoming more Christ-like we ex-



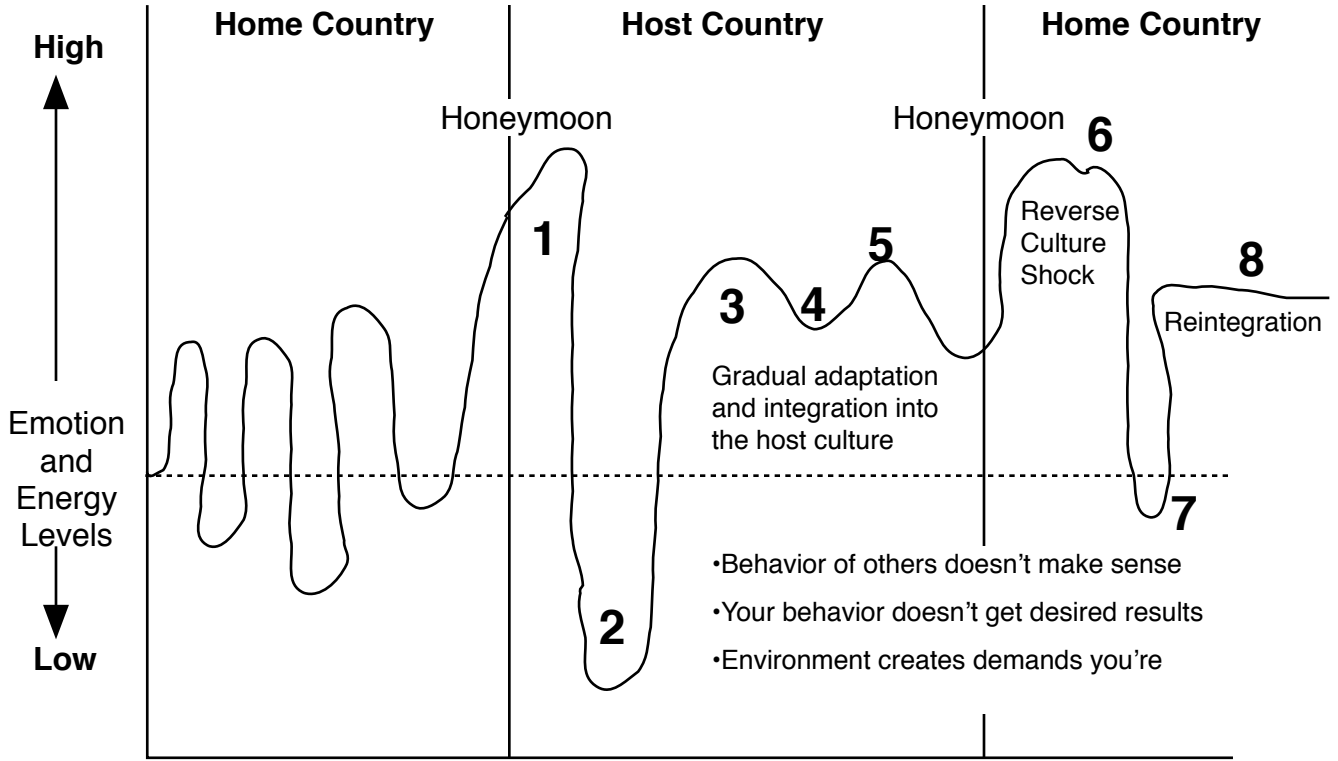
i. Culture Shock

Cross-cultural communication is simply a strategy for operating successfully in a culture different from our own. Culture shock is the anxiety, disorientation, and feeling of alienation that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols.

There are three or four stages in culture shock and then the same stages in reentry culture shock but to a lesser degree.

1. Honeymoon stage
2. Rejection stage
3. Recovery stage
4. Acceptance stage
5. Reentry or reverse stage

Cycles of Cultural Adaptation



Adjustment Stages

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Initial Anxiety or Elation | 5. Acceptance of Host Culture |
| 2. Initial Culture Shock | 6. Repatriation Anxiety / Elation |
| 3. Superficial Adjustment | 7. Reverse Culture Shock |
| 4. Anger / Disillusionment | 8. Reintegration |

