

crossing cultural boundaries

What is Culture?

- The customary beliefs, social forms and traits of a religious, social or racial group.
- Culture embraces family life, religion, politics, education, healthcare, law and justice, art, music ... put simply, it is ... 'The way of life in a community'.
- A person's cultural background shapes the way they see the world around them.

Group Exercise: The Monkey and the Fish Story

During a particularly bad typhoon, the wind is blowing, the rain is driving down, but monkey sits securely in a safe, dry place. After a while he notices a fish in the river ahead of him. The fish moves against the current but then keeps sliding back.

Monkey thinks to himself, 'that fish is struggling, it might be in danger'. He thinks of how he could possibly help the fish. Looking around he sees a tree leaning over the river. He climbs perilously out on to the limb and manages to get hold of the fish. He pulls the fish out and places it in a dry, secure place. He says, "Now, fish, you'll be fine". The fish flops around a bit and then seems to settle into a quiet and peaceful rest.

The monkey swells up with joy, he saw a creature that needed help and he was able to help him. What a wonderful feeling!

Discussion

What were the good things about what the monkey did?

What were not so good?

Potential pitfalls when entering another culture

- We observe some people or situations and make unreasonable comparisons with our own cultural background.
- We don't understand what we see so we make _____.
- If what we see doesn't fit our own frame of reference we tend to view it as _____, so that unknowingly we can quickly build a superiority complex.
- We can become judgemental in our minds and even critical with our mouths.
- These wrong attitudes can easily _____ our mission!

How to be culturally sensitive

- Normally we think in terms of right and wrong, but we should aim to develop a new category in our thinking - _____ .
- Ask questions about the culture and try and understand why they do particular things. You will be surprised how much sense they might make!
- Try to _____ a little towards the host culture. Learn a few words and phrases of their language. Dress in a way that will not offend them. Try the local food!
- When we make the effort in these ways we communicate acceptance and respect. In turn your hosts will think that the visitors are worth _____ to.

Culture Shock

You may experience what is commonly called 'Culture Shock' resulting from an accumulation of individual changes to what we are used to. Things like language, food, clothing, sanitation, noise, transportation, weather, different perspectives on 'time/punctuality' and just being away from your family and friends. You may well see extreme poverty and this can be overwhelming, stirring up feelings of inadequacy and thinking "how can I be of any use to these people?"

Culture shock can result in tiredness, irritation, withdrawal, home-sickness, criticism or unexplained weeping. It is normal and most people are able to quickly get over it, but don't keep it to yourself! Talk it through with someone and pray for the Lord's strength.

Final Thought

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev7:9)

Jesus expects and _____ cultural differences ... so should we!

avoiding dependency

“Good intentions can undermine the church or ministry we are sent to plant or help.”

Why? Before we answer this we need to start at the beginning. The purpose of missions is to ‘make disciples of all nations’.

How do we do that? By helping to plant and strengthen indigenous churches and ministries that are:

- Self-supporting,
- Self-governing,
- Self-propagating.

A church/ministry like this will be healthy and complete.

The great commission will only become a reality through the indigenous Christians.

What is dependency?

Dependency results when an indigenous church/ministry cannot function in the long-term without significant input from Missionaries, Short Term Missions or financial help from the ‘west’.

How does it happen?

- Usually unintentionally.
- When we disengage our head from our heart and don’t think about the negative impact of what we might be doing.
- Giving to individuals without going through the missionaries (field coordinators) and indigenous leaders.
- Making promises of future help even though we may not be able to keep our promise through no fault of our own. Consider: How would this make the receiver feel?
- Insisting on doing the things that we think they need.

What are the results?

When, in the name of Christ’s commission, we do for indigenous believers what they can (and should) do for themselves, we undermine the very church or ministry that God has sent us to help.

How can we prevent dependency?

- Always have in mind the goal of missions - to help plant and strengthen indigenous churches.
- Give them a head-start with projects and programmes, but have a long-term plan to hand over the reins; including teaching about business and enterprise.
- Encourage them to do what they can do for themselves .e.g. if there are lots unemployed, get them to do some of the work; and maybe facilitate the indigenous leaders to give them some financial or food support.
- Invest in micro-enterprises .e.g. simple farming, small businesses..
- Work alongside them and under them wherever possible.
- Strengthen them in the areas where we are able ... this will be different in each place.
- Handover ownership, responsibility and control of projects and ministries asap
- Invest time, money and training in indigenous Christians (especially leaders), who have a heart and passion for the work of the kingdom will be very fruitful.

“... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20)

What had Jesus just commanded the disciples? ... To go and make disciples of all nations!
We need to point the indigenous churches outwards.

Conclusion

Let us go at the outset with the goal of avoiding dependency; instead helping them become and stay a strong, healthy ministry and church.