

## Cross-Cultural Strategies

### Focus Scripture:

**I Corinthians 9:22-23 (NIV)**  
**To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.**

**Description:** The students will analyze cross-cultural communication, field observation, missionary strategy, contextual ministry, etc.

**Aim:** For students to understand and evaluate strategies for cross-cultural ministry.

### Outcome:

Students will recognize the importance and necessity of cross-cultural strategy, and they will evaluate essential elements and principles needed for strategy development.

### Application:

Students will determine the cross-cultural strategies that are applicable in their ministry context.

**Time:** 60 minutes

### Materials Needed:

- Skit script & volunteer
- Markers/Pens/Pencils
- Lesson 3 PowerPoint
- Copies of "Case Studies"
- *(optional)* Ethnic music as the students enter. *(see Extras)*

## Cross-Cultural Strategies

### Warm Up:

#### Skit: Lost in Translation<sup>1</sup>. (10min.)

Recruit someone ahead of time to perform the skit with you. This role play is a humorous illustration portraying how communication cross-culturally can be challenging. Use the skit as an introduction to this section where students will analyze cross-cultural strategies. The script is found on page 3.

After performing the skit, lead a group discussion about what they saw. Help them bring out the following observations:

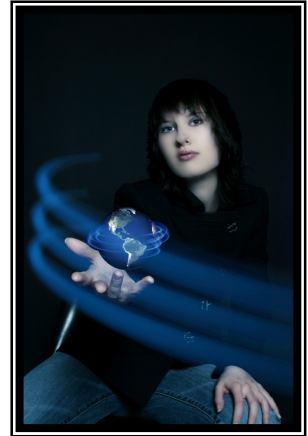
- ◆ The speaker used confusing phrases.
- ◆ The speaker used Christian "lingo" or "Christianese."
- ◆ This shows how easily we can be misunderstood crossing cultures.

The reality is that we do have some major cultural differences to learn to work through in order to effectively build relationships and communicate the Gospel. Today, we are going to analyze several case studies in order to better understand the need for a strategy and contextual ministry.

### Transition:

#### PowerPoint: Cross-Cultural Strategies. (10 min.)

Use the Lesson 3 PowerPoint presentation to transition into the case study activity. The PowerPoint will begin with the focus scripture, I Corinthians 9:22-23, and then move into an introduction of strategy principles for the case study activity.



**Notes:****Cultural Study:****Case Studies<sup>2</sup>. (35 min.)**

Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5. Provide each group with copies of the Case Studies (pages 4-5). Give the groups 20 minutes to review each case study and write down their thoughts as a group. Have the students think about the problems in each case study and how one could better respond in each of the situations. Tell the students that these are true stories about real life experiences overseas on the mission field. Each story has a key principle that is foundational to ministering cross-culturally. Use the Leader's Guide on pages 6-7 to debrief with a group discussion. Allow about 20 minutes to debrief and discuss together as a group.

**Wrap Up:****Walk and Talk. (5 min.)**

Have the students get into pairs to take time to process and apply what they have learned. Once the students have paired up, have them "Walk & Talk" around the room. Explain that as they "Walk & Talk" strolling around the room to share one principle that they have learned and how that information will help them when they work cross-culturally and/or travel overseas. Allow the students to "Walk & Talk" casually around the room for about 3-4 minutes. You might want to notify the students at the midway point so that each person will have time to share.

Conclude with prayer for the group asking God to give them wisdom and sensitivity to new cultural settings. Ask the Lord to help the team to minister more effectively across cultural contexts. Close the prayer by turning the Focus Scripture, I Corinthians 9:22-23, into a prayer:  
*Lord, please teach us to learn to minister to people in ways that do not bring harm. Help us to meet the people where they are... in their context. Help us to become weak, to win the weak. Help us to become all things to all men so that by all possible means that You, God, will use us to lead them into a relationship with You. Lord, we do all these things for the sake of the gospel, that we may share in its blessings and bring glory to Your name! Amen.*

## Lost in Translation<sup>1</sup>

Speaker	Translator
1. Tell them I am pleased to be here .	1. He says to tell you he's very happy to be here.
2. When you asked me at lunch to speak to you today, I had butterflies in my stomach.	2. At lunch I ate some flies that got into my stomach before speaking today.
3. But now I'm really happy to have this opportunity to be with you.	3. It's OK. I'm really happy to have a chance to eat them with you.
4. I'd like to talk with you today about the contextualization of theology in the 3rd world setting.	4. I'd like to talk to you about a text from another world.
5. But first let me share with you my testimony.	5. First I want to share my . . . ??????
6. When I was just a kid...	6. When I was just a small goat...
7. I didn't understand the implications of what Christ did for me when He died on the cross.	7. I did not understand what happened when Christ died at the intersection.
8. But then He convicted me of sin through His Holy Ghost.	8. But a ghost arrested me for it.
9. I had been a real lady-killer. I lived a life of [girls], booze and drugs.	9. I had killed a lady. Oh, I'm too embarrassed to translate what he just said. But then he took medicine and got better.
10. He set me free.	10. I was let go.
11. He made me a new creature.	11. I was made into a new animal.
(excited, faster and LOUDER)	
12. Now I have a new life. I'm forgiven my past. I am part of the body of Christ. They are my family. I'm so excited. I want to tell you all about it!	12. He's very happy. Please clap for him.

The script - except for the title - is an excerpt from this resource:

Ragan, Larry. *Help! We're Going on a Short-term Trip! - Leader's Manual*. (Marietta, GA: Culture LINK, 2001), 74.

# Case Studies

Read each case study and make note of the problem. What would you suggest that the characters do differently and how should they respond to any problems? What are some key cross-cultural principles that we can learn from this situation?

## Incident 1

A team responded to the need of a new congregation for a church building. The well-meaning team wanted the congregation to have the very best they could offer. With this in mind, they proceeded to build a good sized building looking much like the one they had back home in the U.S. Care was taken to provide as much comfort as possible including an air-conditioning system that was rare in the country. The team did all the work on the project & was pleased when they saw the complete building.

Proudly, the team returned home. One month later they received a hefty electric bill from the church with the note that said, "You built this church and thus it belongs to you. We are sure you want to pay the electric bill."

The team....

## Incident 2

The evangelism team included a pastor, a former International Mission Board (IMB) trustee and several successful businessmen. From the minute they stepped off the plane, the poverty of India weighted heavily on their minds. The team was working in an area where Baptist churches were thriving. Although they were poor with limited resources, the churches were growing & supporting their bi-vocational pastors.

After prayer one evening the team discussed their feelings. They decided that they could do something about the poverty. Each team member would buy a moped for his local counterpart. Additionally, they pledged to provide salary support so that the pastors could become full-time ministers. Word of the team's generosity quickly spread. The local missionary heard about it from three angry, frustrated pastors who had not been teamed up with the volunteers. The missionary sought out the team.

Together they...

## Incident 3

Two things in India overwhelmed the volunteers: heat & poverty. They responded to both in ways that created on-going problems for the local churches and missionaries. In the heat, the youth music team went against their stateside training and preparation and put on their shorts and tank tops. "It is too hot!" the young women protested.

Then they proceeded to the local bazaar while their sponsors and their hosts rested. They had been to the bazaar the previous day and had passed out Scripture portions and invitations for a showing of the Jesus film. Although their interpreter protested to their dress before they left the hotel, he went along with them embarrassed and worried about what might happen.

In the bazaar a large crowd gathered. The team joyfully handed out Scripture portions and invitations not knowing that their dress was marking the entire team and its message as immoral. Later that evening the local pastor, missionary and interpreter met with the team and...

## Incident 4

A group of volunteers were assigned to help start a mission in a very poor community. As they walked the streets with the missionary and some local believers, hundreds of people came out of their houses. They were very cautious about the presence of the Americans in their community. The volunteers saw this as a golden opportunity to share the Gospel. Without the knowledge of the missionary, they began to give away “power bracelets” with a short printed description of their purpose. However, the volunteers were not aware that many of the people could not read. They also were not aware of the strong beliefs about supernatural powers in the community. A flood of adults asked for more “power bracelets.” The volunteers were thrilled at the response.

Very soon the missionary realized what was happening and knew immediately that the people wanted the bracelets because the different colored beads represented the spirit gods that they served. For them the “power bracelets” were another means to manipulate the spirits.

After the missionary explained this to the volunteers they...

## Incident 5

The volunteer team arrived ready to help build or restore churches in Russia. Almost immediately there seemed to be some communication issues about what, who, and when tasks were to be done. The team had only 14 days for the work excluding the time it took to travel. The Russian hosts were very hospitable but did not seem to have a definite plan for utilizing the volunteers.

Local building supplies were hard to obtain and tools were limited. The work was hard manual labor. Bricks had to be scrubbed and cleaned; mortar was mixed by hand; any woodwork was completely done by hand. Nevertheless, progress was made.

On the last day of work the Russians announced that they were all going to quit working at noon so that they could have a big celebration and bid farewell to the American friends. The volunteers, although very tired, were dismayed that they were going to lose a good half day’s work just to party. When the team leader suggested to the Russian pastor that they might celebrate later and work longer, the pastor laughed heartily and said, “Friend, we must celebrate.”

## Incident 6

Judy and Mike went to Brazil to work with a pastor and a local missionary in outreach evangelism among young people. They taught some ESL classes and led some Bible Studies. Elena, a high school junior, attended several of the activities. One evening after class, Elena sought Judy out to tell her that she had been considering accepting Christ for a while. After hearing the lesson that Judy had taught she wanted to become a Christian. Judy was thrilled and shared more Scripture with her. Together they told the pastor of Elena’s decision.

Several days later Mike ran into Elena in the market. Elena told Mike she had several questions about the Bible. Mike suggested that they step into the nearby coffeehouse and discuss the questions. The coffeehouse was dark and cool. They sat at a table for two hours and discussed Elena’s questions. After an hour or so as they emerged from the coffeehouse, they bumped into the pastor & missionary. As soon as Elena had said goodbye the missionary and the pastor told Mike that he was out of line to have been in the coffeehouse with Elena. Mike was shocked!

# Leader's Notes—Case Studies

## Incident 1

### Leader Guide:

What did the team do? They paid the electric bill, and sent another volunteer team within a few months to take out the air conditioner & install ventilated windows that were common in their region.

What were some mistakes that were made? The team assumed that what works in the U.S. will work there. They transplanted a U.S. style church rather than seeking what would best fit the context.

Note: The team had a strong desire to provide their friends with the very best. But, "best" is defined differently depending upon the location and circumstances. Assumptions can often lead you astray.

Also, the church members did not have ownership of their church. It would be better to build it together and build it in a style that is more fitting to the context. A key cross-cultural ministry principle is to avoid dependencies.

## Incident 2

### Leader Guide:

Together they... returned to mopeds to the store. And apologized to the pastors.

What were some mistakes that were made? In their efforts to do a good thing, the team caused great dissention among the believers in the town. They did not ask the missionary how they could respond to the poverty appropriately without causing harm. The group assumed that they could help "fix" the poverty situation. But, in reality, the churches didn't need "fixing." The pastors did not need full-time salaries. They were already thriving and growing without any American "help." Avoiding dependencies upon American money is very important. The ministry is best reproduced when it supports itself.

Again, in this situation there was no malicious intent on the part of the team. They just had no idea what the repercussions of their actions would have on the town. It is a very good idea for the team to discuss their feelings throughout the trip. This is important especially when dealing with poverty and people suffering. It is also good to talk with the missionaries on the ground about these issues. They have dealt with the same feelings and might have some encouraging words.

A key cross-cultural ministry principle is to avoid dependencies and repress the need to "fix things." If you have a pressing desire to help in a greater way, then ask the missionary how to help.

## Incident 3

Later that evening the local pastor, missionary and interpreter met with the team and... this team was reassigned to another city. They had ruined their ability to minister effectively with those townspeople. Unfortunately, they had also damaged the reputation of the missionaries since the team was associated with them. All volunteers must be accountable ministering in overseas. The entire ministry and reputation of the missionaries are at stake. Sometimes the rules seem silly. But, there are very good reasons for them.

It is obvious that the team should have listened to their leaders and followed the guidelines that they learned in the training. It is often difficult for national helpers to speak out against the behavior of guests. The team was warned by the local translator, but they did not listen. If a national warns you about behavior or dress it is a good idea to listen.

The key cross-cultural principle in this case study is to minister in context. A simple change of clothing would have prevented this situation.

### Incident 4

After the missionary explained this to the volunteers they... had to gather up all the bracelets in the village and burn them. The missionary had to explain to the people that the team had made a mistake and that the bracelets were not meant to honor their spirit gods. There were long-lasting effects from this cross-cultural mistake. It took many months for the missionaries to recover from the confusion and regain the ground that was lost in starting a new mission.

What were some mistakes that were made? It is very important to communicate and cooperate with the missionaries on the ground. They know the people and the culture and can often help the team avoid any cross-cultural mistakes. You are visiting to assist the missionaries with their long-term strategy. So, it is important to seek the missionaries instructions—even with small things like handing out bracelets or candy to children. It is amazing how even handing out candy can be very dangerous in another country!

The other mistake that was made was that the team failed to understand the culture. There really is no way that they could have known that the colored beads represented spirit gods. This is why it is important to depend upon the knowledge of the missionaries.

A key cross-cultural principle here is to minister in context.

### Incident 5

Leader Guide:

The major issue here is that the team is functioning with a time-oriented mindset. Time orientation of the Americans conflicts with the event orientation of the Russians. The team is agenda driven and the hosts were relationship driven. The project is the focus of the Americans, where the people are the focus of the Russians.

There is a worldview conflict when the Americans are dismayed by the idea of losing a half day's work. Time is valued differently by both cultures. One positive observation is that the team was not daunted by the hard work or the conditions.

A key cross-cultural ministry principle is to minister in the cultural context. Make adjustments to your agenda based upon the needs and context of the culture and situation.

### Incident 6

Leader Guide:

What were some mistakes that were made? Mike did not remember that it was not acceptable to be alone with the opposite gender in that culture. Cross-cultural training can easily be forgotten when you're distracted by someone responding positively to the gospel. Often people will want to chat with you more about Jesus. Make sure to have someone with you. Protect one another from this type of situation, too. Look out for each other and partner up with your teammates if you see them wandering off with a national. It's easy to forget because it is not natural for us to think about these things. You don't want to risk giving the wrong impression & damaging your witness and/or your reputation.

A key cross-cultural ministry principle is to minister in the cultural context. Life in this region of the world has different social rules for males and females spending time alone.

Notes:

## EXTRAS

### Other Helpful Resources or Add-ins:

- **Music**

One optional add-in would be to play music in another language as the students enter the room or return from a break. Christian music in Spanish, Japanese, or another language would be a great way to set the atmosphere and subtly lead into this next lesson.

Please answer the following questions to provide feedback and helpful ideas for  
**Lesson 3—Cross Cultural Strategies**

1. Were the instructions written clearly and easily understood? If no, please explain how to improve them.
2. How was the time frame? Were you able to complete the lesson in 60 minutes? Please explain.
3. Were the students able to grasp the concepts of worldview and make life application? Please explain your answer.
4. What are the strengths of this lesson?
5. What are the weaknesses?
6. Do you have any ideas, resources, or suggestions for improvement?



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ragan, Larry. *Help! We're Going on a Short-term Trip! - Leader's Manual* (Marietta, GA: Culture LINK, 2001), 74. [The script - except for the title - is an excerpt from this resource.]

<sup>2</sup>International Mission Board Volunteers in Missions Department. *Cross-Cultural Training*. (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 1997), A-51 - A-58.