

## MINISTERING CROSS CULTURALLY

**Purpose:** To help students become more sensitive to the differences of those from different cultures in our target area, so we can better communicate the gospel to them.

**Objectives:** By the end of this lesson you will

1. understand what makes American culture different from other cultures of the world.
2. know how to act around and develop relationships with those of different cultural backgrounds.
3. desire to be more sensitive to non-Americans and to reach out to them

**Key Verses:** 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Leviticus 19:33,34

### I. Introduction.

*Note to instructor: These notes assume an American audience. If this is to be taught in another culture, feel free to adjust it as needed.*

*Note to instructor: You could:*

- Start with questions like: “How many of you have lived in another country - short or long-term?” “What were some things you noticed were different from the American culture that you were used to?” “How did you respond or adjust?”
- Or do a Role Play that focuses on inter-cultural sensitivity,
- Or a Case Study (this actually happened) - An American Campus Crusade Campus Director on a summer project in Africa. He is soon to depart from the airport, and he is seeking advice from a field staff of the country. He asks, “If they ask me to give a bribe at the airport, should I say, ‘I’ll call the U.S. Embassy!?’” Questions: What’s “American” about this? How do you think the African Official, who is asking for a bribe, might respond? What other ways might the American respond if asked for a bribe? (Maybe an “un-American” response.)

*Debrief afterwards. This is only a small example of what cultural differences are like*

*Instructor may want to consider bringing a globe. You could point to it and say, “That’s our target.” Then read the paragraph that follows.*

We are called “to make disciples” of ALL the nations. For most of us, this will be in our own American culture. Our training and methods assume an “American” audience and mind set. But America is a melting pot and there are many non-Americans to whom we can minister. Since our target is the world which includes non-Americans, we need to know how to minister cross culturally. International students who are won to Christ can be very strategic in reaching the home country with the gospel.



In this lesson, we want to help you to be aware of these differences in cultures and to know how to adjust for them. In order to better understand how to communicate and minister cross-culturally, let’s first look at what makes Americans “American.” As we understand who we are

and what's important to us, we can better understand others. Let's look at what is typically American, because even in America there are many different cultures: north, south, northeast, southern Cal, urban, rural, etc.

## **II. The American culture is distinct from any other culture in the world.**

Below are a number of categories, and how the American culture is identified by each. Space is given for you to write down any further thoughts you may have on each category. If you disagree with what is listed, write down your thoughts.

*Note to instructor: Ask the class what they wrote down here in section II.*

- A. **TIME.** Time is money. Be on time.
  
- B. **BUSINESS/WORK.** This is related to the previous. Work brings success. Work hard and get the job done. Task before relationship. Work before pleasure. We are activists, not contemplative. Doing is better than thinking, reflecting.
  
- C. **INDIVIDUALISTIC:** Americans believe that each person stands on his own and is the master of his own destiny. "You can do/be whatever you want to."
  
- D. **PHYSICAL TOUCH.** In America, men hold hands with women, not other men (which would communicate homosexuality). Many Americans show affection in public. This is not so in many countries.
  
- E. **HOSPITALITY.** Americans are cautious of the stranger at the door. Unscheduled visitors mess up our schedules.
  
- F. **CLOTHING/DRESS.** Americans are casual. They don't dress real modestly. Women often wear what is considered to be men's clothes (pants) or what some countries would consider risqué.
  
- G. **SOCIALIZING.** Work and play don't mix. In America, we may say "good morning." Then we get down to business. In other countries, they may spend much more time greeting.

- H. **PERSONAL RIGHTS.** This is big in America. “I’ve got my rights!” “I’ll sue!” But when one crosses the border, the rules change.
  
- I. **ETHNOCENTRIC.** “I don’t see why every country in the world isn’t like the USA.” Americans are often seen as being geographically challenged - not knowing where in the world many countries are.
  
- J. **SPACE** (between individuals): Americans like space, want their own space, want space between them and the people they are talking to. Want to drive alone in their own car.
  
- K. **PROGRESS:** Progress is always good, new is always better. Old is to be removed when it gets in the way of progress.
  
- L. **HUMANITARIAN:** Americans come to the aid of the guy who needs help.
  
- M. **OTHERS:**

*See Appendix for more about what makes Americans "American".*

### **III. How shall we then live...around those of a different culture?**

- A. See their culture as **different**, not "weird" or necessarily “wrong”. Be a diplomat. II Corinthians 5:20. If something appears **different**, ask diplomatic questions.
  
- B. Claim God's **wisdom**. James 1:5. This wisdom is described later in James 3:13,17.
  
- C. Take **interest** in them and their culture.



Be a learner. Ask them about their culture and how they have found American culture different. Ask about their religion (share the gospel), people, classes in college, professors, housing, food, transportation, holidays, etc. Ask them to prepare you a favorite dish from their culture. Ask them to teach you simple greetings in their language. Look at each other’s photo albums. Be sincere. If you have spare time, do some research on their

country and bring any questions you may have to them.

D. Communicate **love** and **acceptance**.

Philippians 2:3,4. Consider them as more important than yourself. They are people just like you who need Jesus. God may use them in a great way to help reach their culture for Christ.

E. **Communicate** clearly.

They may still be learning English. Try to be conscious of the slang words you use. Speak slower and enunciate your words. Give them time to answer a question (silence is OK). Don't say, "See ya later" or "We'll have to get together sometime" unless you really mean it.



F. **Listen** well.

Listen not only to the words being said, but to the message being communicated. How do you know if you communicated? Ask clarifying questions. "Do you understand this? Explain it in your own words." The goal is not to communicate words but to develop understanding.

G. Be **observant**, especially of mannerisms.

In some cultures, direct eye contact may be offensive. The way American men cross their legs - showing the dirty bottoms of their shoes - may be offensive. Using the left hand may be offensive. If they are offended, they may not hear the gospel. Try to imitate - if it's not against the Bible (I Corinthians 9:22). Trust God for wisdom. He can and does work in spite of our weaknesses.

H. **Time**. Be flexible.

In many (not all) countries, it's not always necessary to be on time. Don't be demanding. If they are late, wait a bit.

I. **Invite** them over - especially for holidays.

Holidays can be lonely with their family thousands of miles away. Many countries celebrate Christmas and Easter. Use these good opportunities to share the real meaning of those holidays. Find out about their holidays. Invite them over and have them cook a dish they may eat on that holiday.



J. Ask to **meet other people** of their culture who may be in the area.

They probably know other people from their culture in the area. Ask to meet them and continue your ambassadorial duties. After all, you're beginning to be an expert in that

particular culture.

**K. Avoid:**

- speaking louder if they don't understand the first time you spoke.
- assuming they're not very intelligent if they don't have a good grasp of English.
- becoming overly cautious about offending an international.
- using Christian "lingo" when explaining the gospel.
- putting down their customs or political situation.
- apologizing for the truth of the gospel.
- assuming "yes" means yes when they talk to you.
- laughing at their cultural differences.
- dropping them if they don't embrace the gospel the first time you witness to them.
- using illustrations that don't relate to their culture.
- assuming all internationals are poor.

**L. Questions** one could ask internationals:

1. Has your experience in the U.S. been satisfying so far? Why or why not?
2. What has been the most difficult experience you have encountered since coming to the U.S.?
3. Can you name 2 or 3 peculiar traits of Americans that you have observed?
4. In your home country, what are students most concerned about?
5. Do you think the world situation is getting better or worse?
6. What is the basic problem of humanity?
7. In your opinion, who is the world's greatest teacher, example, or influence for good in all of history?
8. About which religious founder do you know the most: Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, or other?
9. What is your belief about God?
10. What is your belief about life after death?
11. What exposure to Christianity have you had?
12. In your opinion, how does a person become a Christian?
13. If there is a personal God, would you like to know Him?



## **IV. Conclusion**

Be aware that other cultures are different from your own. Different is not wrong, as long as it is not against biblical principles and commands. Trust God to give you wisdom and to use you to be a missionary to the world just outside your back door. Be an ambassador, tactfully representing something greater than the USA or any other country or culture in the world - the Kingdom of God.

In Genesis 12, God's promise to Abraham is to bless all the nations with the Messiah. Many Internationals are here in the U.S.A.

Some helpful tools to share the gospel in other languages are:

1. The “JESUS” Video. Log onto [www.jesusfilmstore.com/](http://www.jesusfilmstore.com/) and click on to “videos.”
2. The Four Spiritual Laws. Log onto [www.campuscrusade.com/four\\_laws\\_online.htm](http://www.campuscrusade.com/four_laws_online.htm)

## V. Assignment

- A. Ask God to lead you to nationals in your target area. Are there ethnically oriented clubs? What can you do to get to know them, to minister to them? Find someone from another culture, preferably from another country, and ask the questions in III.L above.
- B. Read the Appendix and answer the questions at the end.



## Appendix

Some of the Assumptions and the World View of North Americans by Dr. Paul Hiebert, taken from "Dynamic Equivalence...to Communicate Effectively" by E. Thomas Brewster, Ph.D. and Elizabeth S Brewster, Ph.D.

Americans see the world as rational, mechanistic and real. We believe that the external world is real and can be experienced. We believe the world operates in a predictable manner according to scientific laws which can be discovered. The American feels that man stands above nature and that by means of science and technology he can conquer nature in order to make it serve his ends. Economically we believe that a man's worth is measured by his ability to accumulate material goods, particularly those which help him control his environment and make life easy. People value labor-saving and feel that they have a right to material wealth. We assume that man should impose order on his experiences and actions. Any unsystematic, ad hoc, acceptance of transitory experiences is rejected. We also make a sharp distinction between the natural and supernatural. In the former, which is often considered the "real world," "natural events" are explained by means of scientific laws. To the latter are left miracles which must be accepted by faith.

Americans feel that the world contains almost unlimited resources, and place a premium on change and "progress." The amount of good (wealth, friends, etc.) can be increased so that one man's gain does not come at another man's expense; and there is a basic optimism that all things can be improved. "New" is equated with "better" and "progress," and all these are equated with "good." Americans feel that in order to make progress, problems must be identified and efforts made to solve them. Solutions are frequently sought in set formulas which, because they are thought to be based on some "law," will guarantee success automatically if carried out. Americans see themselves as the problem-solvers of the world. The fact that some problems may be insoluble is very difficult for North Americans to accept. Until now, there has been an implicit faith in the ability to solve problems through adequate analysis and funding. We reject the policy of "just muddling through." Americans are basically humanitarian--we are willing to come to the aid of unfortunates, but this humanitarianism expresses itself through institutional and impersonal means. Begging, on the other hand, which demands a personal involvement, is despised. The American society is oriented to success, which is measured by production and profit. The successful man "gets the job done," he "gets results." There is little room for failure. When something goes wrong, we must find someone or something on which to place the blame.

Basically, Americans are pragmatists. We are concerned with "know how" in order to get things done, and less with abstract wisdom or ancient knowledge. The real test is, "does it work?" Americans place a premium on efficiency and speed. Time is important, for time is money. We believe that work is inherently good. Enough of it will automatically lead to success. Work takes priority over eating, sleeping, playing, etc. It is geared to time, more often than to task. Therefore, we frequently create work to fill the time. We place a premium on activity. A low value is placed on contemplation and meditation. Problems must be attacked aggressively. There is a low tolerance for frustration, a refusal to accept ascetic renunciation, a positive encouragement of desire, a stress on power, and approval of ego assertion. The ideal person is aggressive, adaptive, accessible, outgoing and assimilated. North Americans have an insatiable ability to organize and institutionalize. We feel that this, tied to the formula approach to guarantee progress, should lead to success. The North American society is increasingly existential. It is concerned with the now and the immediate future.

North Americans are individual-centered--the individual is more important than the group. A man is his own master. He must make his own decisions, find his own identity and fulfillment, and assume moral responsibility for his own actions. The individual autonomy of each person is stressed. In interpersonal relations, this leads to contractual relationships. Horizontal relationships are valued over vertical or hierarchical ones. Peer relations soon become the strongest ones in an American's life and voluntary associations or clubs are the most common type of institution, other than the family in everyday social life. There is a preference for simple manners and direct, informal treatment of others. There is an emphasis on private ownership of property and on individual rights and freedoms. We believe that success and status belong to the individual, with the result that there is a great deal of social mobility. Social ties are tenuous and are readily sacrificed to "get ahead" in the world. And, for Americans, democracy is not only the best but the "right" way to organize group action and society.

Americans believe in a uniform moral world which is seen as subject to a single set of moral, social and psychological laws, just as there is a set of uniform physical laws. We tend to moralize much of our world, and morality is defined in terms of dichotomies: good-bad, legal-illegal, clean-dirty, etc. (Clean is an absolute virtue). This either/or approach often forces us into positions of exclusiveness--if one position is accepted, the other must be rejected. Finally, we feel that outsiders must be convinced of the rightness of our system and of the way that we look at the world.

What are your thoughts about this article? Do you agree with all the points or would you change some? Be ready to discuss this in class.

*Note to instructor: Ask the class what they wrote down here.*