Ministering Cross-Culturally

THIRD EDITION

A MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

SHERWOOD G. LINGENFELTER
AND MARVIN K. MAYERS

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To Marvin K. Mayers (1927–2015), who became a spiritual mentor at a time when I had wandered far from faith, and whose scholarship, cultural insights, and practice of mentoring changed the course of my life. Marv freely gave the basic values framework for this book and his credibility as a published author to support this work for its initial publication. He invited me and my wife, Judith, to serve as faculty in the School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University, where this book was written. His life and legacy have touched the thousands of readers who have found this book a helpful guide for cross-cultural ministry.

—Sherwood Lingenfelter

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ
Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in
advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

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Preface

The subject of this book is the tension and conflict that missionaries, pastors, and laypersons experience when they attempt to work with people who come from different cultural and social backgrounds. The vehicle employed to explore this issue is a model of basic values that points to personal and cross-cultural roots of tension in interpersonal relationships and assists individuals in mastering such tension. The model was developed by Marvin Mayers and first published in 1974 in his *Christianity Confronts Culture*. It grew out of his experience as a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Guatemala, as an educator at Wheaton College, and as a trainer in cross-cultural ministries with Wycliffe. Since 1974, Mayers has extensively refined the model and further elaborated on its application in Christian ministries.

Sherwood Lingenfelter is the primary author of this book and the source of the various personal reminiscences it contains. He first became acquainted with Mayers and the model of basic values at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Norman, Oklahoma, in 1975. Using the model to analyze his own extensive experience in the Pacific Islands, Lingenfelter found that it very effectively explained the complex problems of social relationships he had observed in his fieldwork as a cultural anthropologist. After 1975, he served in various fields with SIL International as an anthropology consultant for translation

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and other related ministries. In these diverse assignments, he used the model of basic values to understand conflicts between missionaries and nationals and between one missionary and another.

Following this field service, Lingenfelter went to Biola University in 1983 to prepare students for cross-cultural ministry. He used the model of basic values to help students understand interpersonal conflicts between individuals from the same and different cultures. The students responded so enthusiastically that he began to present the model outside the university setting in various churches in Southern California. Members of these churches found the model helpful in clarifying problems between them and their friends and coworkers in the community, between husbands and wives, and between coworkers in the church. From the success of these presentations in various churches grew the idea for this book. Because Lingenfelter is so heavily indebted to Mayers for the model and for criticism and development of the manuscript, Mayers is named as coauthor.

The key purpose in working with the model of basic values is to equip people to follow what Scripture says about how Christians should relate to others. This volume examines various scriptural materials to see what they teach about relationships. It then explores how these scriptural principles can be applied in concrete behavior as people relate to others in diverse cultural settings.

We intend to make it clear that individuals—the work of God's creative activity—differ greatly in their values and orientations, as do the societies of which they are members. Each society rewards and punishes individuals in accord with its own particular biases. Therefore, persons called to minister in another cultural setting must be acutely aware of the cultural differences they will encounter. By helping readers identify their own value biases, we hope to create in them an increased sensitivity to others. Further, we challenge our readers to adapt their personal lifestyles to build effective bridges of communication with those in their communities who are in need. Throughout the book we attempt to discern from Scripture principles for effective Christian ministry and to draw from those principles applications for the daily realities of interpersonal relationships.

While this book is targeted generally at individuals who expect to engage in cross-cultural ministry, such ministry is to be understood as any ministry in which one interacts with people who have grown up learning values and lifestyle patterns that are different from one's own. In today's world, cross-cultural ministry includes not only people going as missionaries to and from the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Australia, but also those who are trying to be effective witnesses in the major urban centers of their nation and the world. For example, the members of an adult Sunday school class in a church in Whittier, California, may be as engaged in cross-cultural ministry as people who go from the United States to Asia or Latin America. Consider as evidence the fact that in the records of Whittier hospitals alone, more than twenty languages have been listed as the principal language of their patients. Further, Los Angeles has one of the largest Hispanic populations in the world.

Cross-cultural ministry, then, is something in which many thousands of ordinary Christians will engage. In colleges and Sunday school classes across the United States, Germany, Korea, China, and beyond, people have found the model of basic values to be a significant tool for understanding others in their own community and even for clarifying the tensions that exist in their own marriage or other relationships. One young Hispanic student at Biola University who completed a personal profile and listened to class lectures tearfully told us that for years she had felt there was something wrong with her because no one else seemed to share her personal values and lifestyle. She was overwhelmed to find that God had created individuals like her and that many cultures share her personal orientation to life.

Our objective, then, is to help readers gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the people with whom they live, and in the process to help them experience a deeper relationship with God and a more fruitful life of love and ministry to and with others.

The third edition of this book has been revised in several substantive ways, stimulated by questions from readers of the earlier editions. First, many mission and church leaders have used this book for training adults and youth for short-term mission trips. In order

to speak directly to short-term challenges, I have analyzed two short-term mission case studies, applying the basic values to reflect on cultural challenges for this type of ministry. Second, other readers have asked how the model of basic values may apply in urban and multicultural contexts, where ministry may engage people from two or more cultural backgrounds. I have sought to address this challenge in two ways: first, by emphasizing learning from those around you who come from different cultural backgrounds with the purpose of adding to your personal cultural repertoire in multiple ways; second, by refocusing from "incarnational ministry," which implies learning a single culture, to "radical discipleship," which emphasizes following Jesus in whatever context God places you.

The major shift from "incarnational ministry" to "radical discipleship" was prompted by a paper given at Fuller Theological Seminary by J. Todd Billings of Western Theological Seminary in which he quoted from portions of the first edition of *Ministering Cross-Culturally* (pp. 13–25), which presents the case that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is God's metaphor for those of us who hope to engage in cross-cultural ministry. I quote from Eric Landry's short overview of that lecture:

> Incarnational ministry, Billings suggested, "tends to conflate the unique incarnation with our process of learning a culture," framing the incarnate Christ as an example of coming to a new culture prepared to learn from and identify totally with the ones he came to reach. "Jesus was not, in fact, the model anthropologist," Billings remarked, pointing out that Jesus did not go home every evening to compile field notes on the day's observations of the first-century Jewish people. "The deity is not a culture because God is not a creature," so we cannot imitate the incarnation because it is not a human act, but a divine act—something only God can do. We must remember that Christ's mission is not identical to ours—his was redemptive, while we can only bear witness to that redemption. Billings stated, "The power in the incarnation is precisely in its uniqueness."[1]

1. For more information see http://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/entry/modern-reformation/2011/03/09/incarnational-ministry.

I agree with his point that the incarnation is "a divine act—something only God can do" and that "the power in the incarnation is precisely in its uniqueness." As I have read back through my work, I would no longer write the phrase, "If we are to follow the example of Christ, we must aim at incarnation!" (2003, 25). To state that we should "aim at incarnation" is clearly sloppy language and gives people poor direction for ministry. I have never imagined that humans could become "fully incarnate" into another culture, as Jesus, wholly God, became fully human in our world. In fact, my metaphor of becoming 150 percent persons makes that very clear. We can never achieve "full identification" with people of one or many cultural origins different from our own.

At the same time, I continue to be moved by the power of the *metaphor* of how Jesus came into our world and became one of us. I find it particularly compelling as presented in Philippians 2:1–12. Professor Billings chooses to call this "ministry in union with Christ" (Billings 2011). As long as he uses the Philippians text as Paul did to describe this union, and then teaches us to let go of our cultural biases and to add to our repertoire the servant values and practices of those we serve, then he and I have no disagreement.

I want to note a significant omission in the first edition of this work and give special thanks to Stephen O'Brien, who developed the short form of the basic values questionnaire for this book. This short form was extracted from a much longer questionnaire that Marv Mayers used at Biola University.

I also want to acknowledge Kimberly Todd and Courtney Koelsch, who have read this revision and provided very helpful feedback. Finally, I want to acknowledge Jay Galligher and his team for their work in making the basic values questionnaire available online.

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God's Metaphor for Ministry

Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God

In 1967 my wife and I and our two-year-old daughter flew from western New York State to the Pacific Islands. We landed on Guam, spent a couple days there, and then flew to Yap, a small island in the western Caroline Islands of Micronesia. For Americans, Yap is geographically in the middle of nowhere. It is almost a thousand miles from the nearest major nation, the Philippines, and in most other directions thousands of miles of ocean separate it from the rest of the world. It was here that we were to make our home for the next two years.

This began what has become a lifelong adventure for us in cross-cultural living, research, and relationships. I was a graduate student at the time, and our goal was to live in and learn about Yapese culture in preparation for my doctoral dissertation on the impact of twenty years of American administration on the Yapese and their culture. We were young and filled with ideals, and our hope was to apply this learning experience in a life of service to cross-cultural missions and ministry.

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Many years have passed now, and as we reflect on that experience, we have a much deeper understanding of our failures and our achievements. The Yapese taught us as much about ourselves as they did about their own culture. The experience of learning was often painful and never easy, but out of those years we developed a new comprehension of who we are and how we can live and work more effectively with others in a culturally diverse world.

The objective of this book is to share some of the conflicts and struggles we experienced and to explore their meaning for the larger issues of cross-cultural living, work, and ministry. To do this, we must go beyond specific personal experiences to the underlying principles of culture and communication through which we establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. The particular focus of this book is on priorities or values people use to order their lives and relationships with others. We will explore by means of both a questionnaire concerning basic values and case studies of how people within the same culture and in different cultures define standards and establish personal priorities that are often in conflict with those of others. Conflict arises not only from personal and cultural differences but also from the fact that people often attribute moral force to their priorities for personal behavior, and they judge those who differ from them as flawed, rebellious, or immoral. Personal judgments shared by many become social judgments, and society coerces individuals to follow its value system. Our goal is to help readers arrive at solutions to these conflicts and to suggest ways in which people moving within and across social and cultural boundaries can adapt to and draw on values different from their own.

A central thesis of this book is that the Bible speaks to all people and all cultures and that Jesus Christ is the only faithful example of divine love in interpersonal relationships and communication. Jesus is God with us—the reality of the love of God in human experience. As we explore situations of interpersonal conflict, we will continually return to Scripture to seek principles on which we can build more effective relationships and ministry within and beyond the boundaries of our homogeneous churches and communities. At

the same time, we will use insights from the social and behavioral sciences to pose new questions and to develop new perspectives from which to understand more fully the implications of biblical truth. By focusing initially on cross-cultural experiences, we will be forced to examine our basic assumptions about life and to question every aspect of our relationships.

Jesus: The 200 Percent Person

When we arrived on Yap many years ago, the first question we faced was where to live. A Yapese man took me to his village and showed me two locations where I could build a house. One piece of land was situated on an isolated section of beach with a beautiful view of a lagoon and a coral reef. The other was in the midst of several houses where children littered their yards with empty cans, and the voices and activities of mothers and children created a cacophony of sound from morning until night. Where should we live? The isolated beach was the dream spot that all middle-class Americans see in their fantasies of South Sea life. The lot in the village had all the characteristics that middle-class America tries to avoid—noise, litter, lack of privacy, and strange people all around. When I naturally chose the beach, my guide said gently to me, "If you want to learn to speak our language, the other place is better for you." His words broke my romantic reverie and challenged my personal interpretation of the right way to live. With a twinge of sadness, I admitted he was right and agreed to the village location. As I expected, the place was noisy, littered, and public, but he was absolutely correct; within a year we had all learned to speak the language.

My experience in this village on Yap gave me a deeper grasp of what John meant when he wrote in his Gospel, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). We hold the incarnation as a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith: God himself became flesh and dwelt among humans. We seldom ask, however, what the implications of this incarnation are. What did it mean for God to

become flesh? How did God plan and choose to live among us? In what manner did he come? Does his example have any significance for us as we are sent to others?

The first significant fact about the incarnation is that Jesus came as a helpless infant. In Luke 2:7, we read that he was born as Mary's child, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and placed in a manger. It is noteworthy that God did not come as a fully developed adult, he did not come as an expert, and he did not come as a ruler or even as part of a ruling family or a dominant culture. He was an infant, born into a humble family in a conquered and subjugated land.

The second significant fact about the incarnation is that Jesus was a learner. He was not born with knowledge of language or culture. In this respect, he was an ordinary child. He learned language from his parents. He learned how to play from his peers. He learned the trade of a carpenter from Joseph and studied the Scriptures and worshiped in the same manner as did all young men of his time. In Luke 2:46, we read that Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, listening to the teachers of the law and asking them questions. This is a profound statement: the Son of God was sitting in the temple, listening and questioning!

The implications of Jesus's status as a learner are seldom discussed, let alone understood or applied. God's Son studied the language, the culture, and the lifestyles of his people for thirty years before he began his ministry. He knew all about their family lives and problems. He stood at their side as learner and as coworker. He learned to read and study the Scriptures in his local synagogue and earned respect to the point that the people called him Rabbi. He worshiped with them in their synagogues and observed the annual Passover and other feasts in the temple in Jerusalem. He identified totally with those to whom he was sent, calling himself the Son of Man. Luke 2:52 tells us that he grew in favor not only with God but also with man.

The point is that Jesus was a 200 percent person. Philippians 2:6–7 tells us that Jesus was "in very nature God." He was and is 100 percent God. Yet Paul tells us that Jesus took "the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness." He was 100 percent human. When he spoke of himself, he called himself the Son of Man, identifying completely with those to whom he was sent. Let us move our thinking one step further. Jesus was more than simply human; he was also 100 percent Jew. The Samaritan woman in John 4 identified him as such, and he accepted this identification at face value. (Note by contrast that when people tried to make him a king, he resisted.) His disciples and even the Jewish leaders often reminded him of his Jewishness and its attendant cultural obligations (ritual washings, Sabbath observance, avoidance of unclean people and places, etc.). At the crucifixion, Pilate had inscribed over Jesus's head the words "King of the Jews." In sum, he was 100 percent God and 100 percent Jew—a 200 percent person.

Cultural Context

Culture is the anthropologist's label for the sum of the distinctive characteristics of a people's way of life. All human behavior occurs within particular cultures, within socially defined contexts. For example, in America, worship occurs in a specific context with distinctive characteristics. A church building, chairs or pews, music, readings from the Bible, a sermon, an offering, and prayers are all part of that context. The social organization of worship includes pastors, musicians, ushers, a seating arrangement by families, and a schedule of activities. If one were to go to Saudi Arabia, the context of worship would differ dramatically. The mosque would have no chairs, musicians, Bible, or sermon. Removing one's shoes, kneeling, prostration, and prayer would be the primary elements of worship. The sexes are carefully separated, and leaders and learning have only minimal significance. A Muslim entering an American church would not understand what happens there as worship. He may even deny that worship is possible in such a context.

Culture, then, is the conceptual design by which people order their lives, interpret their experiences, and evaluate the behavior of others.

A Muslim sees men and women sitting together and interprets this as sexual behavior. He evaluates such a situation by comparing it with his past experiences in his own culture. By definition, the commingling of the sexes cannot be part of the context he calls worship. Therefore, to a Muslim, what happens in American churches is not worship. Similarly distinctive definitions, rules, and values are specific to each socially defined context, and these specifics make up the conceptual designs or culture in accordance with which all of us live.

It is fairly obvious, then, that communication requires effective use of contextual cues. When a Muslim removes his shoes as he enters a mosque, it is a cue that he intends to worship there. A cultural cue is a specific signal or sign that people use to communicate the meaning of their behavior. Each culture has literally thousands of cues that signal a change of context and a corresponding need to follow the rules appropriate to the new context.

On Yap, an invitation to chew betel nut is a cue to initiate conversation. This cue is equivalent to offering a cup of coffee in the United States. In the United States, guests terminate a conversation by suggesting they must leave, whereas on Yap the host terminates the conversation by saying that it is all right for the guests to leave. A failure to grasp the meaning of such cues results in misunderstandings, confusion, and oftentimes interpersonal conflict.

Personal Culture

One of the marvels of God's creation is that no two people are exactly alike. These personal differences arise out of our unique genetic heritage and individual histories. Each one of us is born into a particular social context and family. It is within that context that we are socialized, or acquire what might be seen as our personal cultural heritage. For our purposes here, cultural heritage is the early learning a child unquestioningly accepts. This learning generally takes place before one is able to enter into dialogue with one's parents and make choices by conscious reasoning.

A human being is completely helpless at birth and lives through a period of near-total dependency on others that lasts almost six years. During this time, a child is subjected to the intensive influence of parents and a few other adults. During this intensive interaction, parents seek to teach the child certain forms of behavior, values, and modes of living. They do so through the process of reward or punishment, giving or withholding love. The child's personal temperament is also a factor. While the parents attempt to teach specific patterns of behavior, the child's temperament will to some extent counter the parents' teaching so that what they desire to pass on is rarely if ever accepted in full. Most parents will attest to the fact that children in the same family rarely share the same basic outlook on life, the same patterns of temperament, or the same values and goals. The personalities of children vary, even for "identical" twins. In addition, parents revamp their goals and methods of child rearing as time passes. As a consequence, each child emerges from childhood with a unique personal heritage.

Furthermore, every individual goes through a lifelong process of learning, or what anthropologists call enculturation. This larger process is the means by which an individual acquires the cultural heritage of a larger community. For children, this involves peer pressure and peer socialization, and learning in school and in play activities. By this time, the learning involves conscious dialogue both with adults and with one's peers, and this dialogue results in conflict and questioning as well as acceptance. In becoming more independent of one's parents, a child is increasingly influenced by persons outside the immediate family. The child develops an ability to choose what to accept and what to reject. At this point, peer-group influence becomes increasingly important in the child's life. As the child is exposed to new ideas and has an opportunity to select from among them, his or her choices are tempered by feedback from others who either accept or reject him or her. Through that acceptance or rejection the child begins to formulate a conception of his or her own world, a personal culture. The individual will then tend to congregate with those who

share similar ideas and interests and avoid those who do not, thus reinforcing his or her own personal choices.

Our personal culture as individuals, then, is unique; it is not the same as that of our parents or of any other individual. It is the product of the combination of (1) the personal cultural heritage acquired through socialization with our parents, (2) the broader cultural heritage acquired through enculturation and feedback from the community, and (3) our act of accepting or rejecting those forces. Each individual develops a personal lifestyle and a set of standards and values by which to order and organize his or her life.

Shared Culture

Despite the fact that we are all unique persons, we share common beliefs, values, and a way of life with many others around us. We not only share those beliefs but also reinforce them in one another and teach them to our children. The shared aspects of our personal cultures produce the common values, priorities, and standards for behavior that we apply in each social context. We begin to learn these things as helpless infants, and by the time we are adults, they shape much of what we are and do.

This shared culture has great value for us. Because of it, we are able to plan a career with a reliable expectation that we can actually accomplish what we envision. We are able to establish a family and friendships and to fulfill our mutual obligations to one another. When we find ourselves in situations of conflict with others, the standards and procedures of our shared culture furnish mechanisms for settling those disputes, and while the solutions are not always satisfying, the process is familiar and somewhat predictable.

In their collective sum, our personal cultures have enough in common with one another that outsiders look at us and see us as being alike, even though we find great differences among ourselves. These similarities may be reinforced by an institutional identity. We are German, Nigerian, Korean, Chinese, or American not because we are

identical but rather because international custom defines nationality by one's place of birth. Other parts of our identity we derive from our race, language, and the groups into which we are born or with which we affiliate during our lives. The groups and institutions of which we are a part coerce us to conform to standards shared by a majority of their members. We learn these rules so that they become natural to us, and we assume that exceptions to our behavior are unnatural and illegitimate. Acceptance in our groups comes at the cost of exclusion from the groups of others. An attempt to belong to groups whose standards are in conflict with ours produces emotional stress within us and antagonism in our relationships with others. For this reason, most of us choose to belong only to those groups within which we find people who have standards and values similar to our own.

As a consequence of our choices, the communities we form include some and exclude others. These social arrangements become an important part of our shared culture. We include those people who reaffirm our values and relationships, and we exclude those who in some way do not measure up to our standards or do not fit within our prescribed sphere of social relationships. This pattern of inclusion and exclusion often prompts us to fear and even reject the very people with whom we serve.

Culture is always learned and shared with others, and in this process, people perceive and respond to one another in culturally conditioned ways. This composite of our personal and shared culture becomes our *cultural repertoire*, a body of knowledge and learned skills of relationship, which we employ in every aspect of our daily lives.[1] Edward Hall (1976, 85) suggests that this is useful to us because it allows us to screen out information that is not essential and protects us from emotional and intellectual overload. Further, it allows us to predict, to some extent, the behavior of others in our own culture. At the same time, the screening process, grounded in the bias of our cultural repertoire, produces a blindness to cues from cultures not

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1. Repertoire is commonly used to describe a collection of musical pieces or plays that a performer knows and regularly performs.

our own. A Muslim cannot accept a Christian church service as worship, nor can a Christian accept a Muslim's prayer in a mosque as worship. This cultural blindness makes us ineffective communicators in alien contexts and leads us to assume that the problem lies with others rather than with ourselves.

The cultural bias we share with others in our communities becomes a consensus we use to protect ourselves from others. Through this consensus, we regulate the behavior of our members and reject those who refuse to conform. We become certain that our way of doing things is the proper way, and we are blinded to the possibilities of doing things differently or of engaging in new behaviors that might be beneficial to our community. Our very agreement becomes a distortion of the reality of our experience, a defense against other peoples and other ways of life. The comfort of our community becomes a bias toward others and blinds us to pathways for viable relationships that differ from our own.

It is because of cultural blindness that we must begin as learners in the other culture and adopt many of the priorities and values of the people we wish to serve. We must begin as a child and grow in their midst. We must be learners and let them teach us before we can hope to teach them and introduce them to the master Teacher.

The incarnation of our Lord is a mystery of God that occurred once in human history, yet the incarnate Lord Jesus tells us, "follow me." In this sense, then, his radical incarnation into human flesh and culture becomes the metaphor for our radical discipleship. Since we are born of the flesh, into a human culture, we can only become like Christ through our "dying to self" and taking up a new life of discipleship in Christ. The first essential step toward breaking our cultural habit of excluding others is a willingness to learn as if we were helpless infants. Missionaries, by the nature of their task, must become personally immersed with people who are different. This means adding significant new things to our cultural repertoire, being socialized all over again into one or many new cultural contexts in which we live and work. Even though we are adults, we enter a culture as if we were children—ignorant of everything, from the customs of

eating and talking to the patterns of work, play, and worship. Moreover, we do this in the spirit of Christ—that is, loving our neighbors as ourselves, so much so that we adapt their way of life, inasmuch as we are able, as our own.

A Personal Inventory

Take an inventory of the various cultural labels that apply to you. You might be, for example, 100 percent German, Nigerian, Korean, Chinese, or American. You might also be classified as a 100 percent southerner, easterner, or midwesterner, and more specifically as an Arizonian, Californian, or New Yorker. Theologically, you might be evangelical, fundamentalist, or liberal; denominationally, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Brethren, or Free Church.

When I arrived on Yap, I was a Pennsylvania-born preacher's kid who had learned to say "Yes, sir" and "Yes, ma'am" in Virginia, who had enjoyed Charles Dickens and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with black classmates in Ohio, who graduated from Wheaton College and married one of Wheaton's many distinguished English majors. I had received excellent Christian teaching, was licensed as a Grace Brethren elder, and had been trained at the University of Pittsburgh by internationally renowned anthropologists. I was clearly a 100 percent middle-class, evangelical American. I was definitely not Yapese!

What kind of persons should we become when we enter alien cultures? We can find some direct instructions in Scripture. In Philippians 2:5, Paul says, "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." First Peter 2:21 states, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Through the Great Commission, Jesus sends us out into all the world, and as his messengers we are to follow his example and practice our ministry in union with him. Since Jesus did indeed set the example, it was my responsibility to love my Yapese neighbors, learn their values and traditions, and live among them as Jesus loved and lived as a Jew with the Jews. How is this possible?

Adding to Your Cultural Repertoire

Malcolm McFee (1968) uses the concept of "150 percent person" to describe Black Foot Indians who are enculturated into white American society. He argues that they are still 75 percent traditional Black Foot, but they have also learned to adapt to and follow the larger American culture to the point at which some are 75 percent white as well. In essence, they have added to their cultural repertoire and become bicultural, 150 percent persons, yet somehow less than 100 percent of any culture.

Like these Native Americans, people committed to effective cross-cultural ministry will never become 100 percent insiders in another culture or subculture. The only way that is possible is the way Jesus did it, to be born into that other culture and to spend a lifetime in it. However, it is possible to "follow God's example," as Paul commands in Ephesians 5:1, and to "walk in the way of love" (v. 2) in the culture in which we hope to minister. Our goal should be to become more than we are, submitting to Jesus our Lord, and to the people and culture(s) to which he sends us for ministry. For me the challenge was to become at least part Yapese, even if that meant being less than 100 percent American.

To become a 150 percent person is more than an ordinary challenge. Discarding or setting aside something of one's national or one's social or church identity is almost sacrilege to many people. Our way of life is often equated with godliness, and we defend vigorously its apparent rightness. As such, this way of life has become our prison. We forget the example set by Christ, who, "being in very nature God," did not cling to that identity but instead became not only a Jew but also a servant among Jews (Phil. 2:6–7). We must love the people to whom we minister so much that we are willing to enter their culture as children, learn how to speak as they speak, play as they play, eat what they eat, sleep where they sleep, study what they study, and thus earn their respect and admiration. In essence, we must leave our prison, enter their prison, and become reasonably competent participants within it.

The excitement of becoming 50 percent Yapese was one of the highlights of my life. I will never forget the ecstasy of my first complete conversation in the Yapese language or the deep admiration I felt upon grasping their custom of sharing their personal possessions. I also remember the anxiety when I felt unwanted or burdensome to my host, the isolation when my speech was so poor that people did not want to be bothered by me, and the frustration and boredom I felt with the hours of what seemed to be trivial conversation. The lesson here is that becoming a 75 percent person in another culture will be a trial by fire, a test of inner strength and of personal faith, and most of all a test of the veracity of one's love. An individual who is not ready to give up aspects of one's personal culture for a time and to begin learning as a child is not ready for the challenge of cross-cultural ministry. Even short-term mission ministry requires cultural learning and adding new patterns of behavior to effectively serve others.

I have never become a 150 percent person, competent in two cultures; perhaps I learned enough to be 50 percent Yapese, but I doubt even that. But the most important thing I learned in Yap was humility. After two years of intensive language and cultural study, I was probably as culturally competent as a twelve-year-old boy, needing another ten years to become a mature person in that culture; my only hope was to keep on learning. This became a very valuable insight, which served me well in short-term ministries among the Deni in Brazil, the Yamba in Cameroon, and the Laka in Chad, and then in sixteen years among the faculty at Biola University. Each had a different culture, and unless I accepted the role of listening and learning as a child, I was doomed to remain an outsider. In every situation, the best that I could hope for was that local people would accept me as a "good student" of their way of life. However, I know missionaries of whom local people say "that missionary is one of us." They have earned this compliment through years of learning, loving, and identifying with the people they served.

If we are to follow the example of Christ, we must aim at radical discipleship. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must

deny themselves" (Matt. 16:24). These acts of self-denial are in fact the first steps of freedom in Christ. We must consciously release our attachments to home, income security, convenience, significance in work or ministry, and even comfort of family. We must enter a new community of strangers, often without many, if not most, of the comforts and symbols of home, and begin as children, learning at the feet of those we have gone to serve. We must be willing to continually add to our cultural repertoire and become at least culturally sensitive and responsive as "world" rather than "national" Christians. The challenges will shape us; the changes will trouble us. Our bodies will get sick; our minds will suffer fatigue; our emotions will sweep us from ecstasy to depression. Yet the love of Christ will sustain us so that we can identify with Paul, who said, "I have become all things to all people 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" (1 Cor. 9:22–23).

"World" Christians on Short-Term Ministry?

A few years ago I led six men and two women, students at Biola University, on a three-week drama ministry to Southern Chad in North Africa. While we clearly did not have time to learn the local Mbum or Laka languages, we faced all of the other challenges of cross-cultural ministry. Nobody really knew what it meant to "suffer for Jesus in Chad" until we got there. We expected the situation might be tough, but lacking experience we had no clue of what to expect.

We knew that Chad was a hot place, but we had no idea that it was also a cold place. The first night in the village where we were ministering, most of the team slept outside and discovered that the one wool blanket we each had was inadequate to keep out the 50-degree cold night air coming down on us. We expected that the toilet facilities would be different. We didn't expect we would have to walk so far, and that there would be such little water for personal bathing. For those who were sick, fifty yards every half hour during the night was no fun.

We knew we were eating African food, but no one knew what it was like to have millet mush and goat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Grasping the millet paste with our fingers and dipping it in the greasy goat gravy became an almost impossible trial for some members of the team. Upset stomachs, fever, diarrhea—everybody got sick at least once and some were sick for most of the time we were in Chad. There was no privacy—wherever we went we were a spectacle and people gathered to watch us. On some occasions 150 to 200 people surrounded us and stood for hours just watching.

Sin was often at our door! Our sinful attitudes were expressed most frequently in our joking behavior. We were most discontent about the food. We made jokes about eating at Taco Bell and the Olive Garden, and planning began early for a big celebration at Home-Town Buffet. We were not thankful for the food, nor grateful to our hosts. Most of us, if not all of us, at one time or another grabbed selfishly for the best pieces of meat in the pot. Some took more than their share. If we had the power, we would have surely turned the millet into pizza! We had critical spirits—sometimes we made jokes about the people, and we made jokes about one another. All of our jokes covered subtle resentments and rejections of one another and the local people. I was surprised at my own joking and realized that it was at times subtle criticism of team members. This was not the leadership to which Christ called me.

By the third day of our stay in the village of Nzoro we realized that we were neglecting our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. Several members of the team voiced a desire for a greater commitment to prayer, for collective worship, and for a renewal of commitment to our purpose. As we focused anew on our purpose for being there—to share the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—we experienced the freedom that Peter promises in 1 Peter 4:1. We began to arm ourselves with the attitude of Jesus Christ, and as we suffered, we determined to be done with sin. We had begun our journey of adding to our repertoire, recommitting to "follow Jesus," and becoming more than 100 percent Americans.