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Cultural Differences and the New Missionary

Every new missionary feels it—the excitement of travel and the romance of foreign sights. We sample esoteric foods, ride rickshaws, and buy finely embroidered blankets in the bazaar. We wander hesitantly through temples and watch devotees offer sacrifices to strange gods. We expected it all to be like this!

Then reality sets in. The realization dawns that this is now our home. Here our children will grow up as natives. And we must become one with these people with their unintelligible tongues and foreign ways before we can effectively share with them the Good News of the gospel. Suddenly, things that seemed romantic and exciting become strange and threatening. Questions arise. Can we really make this culture our own? Can we really identify with these people and plant a church among them? Will we even survive? When this shift occurs, we come face to face with one of the central concerns of all new missionaries: the problem of cultural differences.

Cultural Differences

People create a great variety of cultures. They eat different foods, build different kinds of houses, speak different languages, and greet each other in different ways. Yap women wear grass skirts reaching to

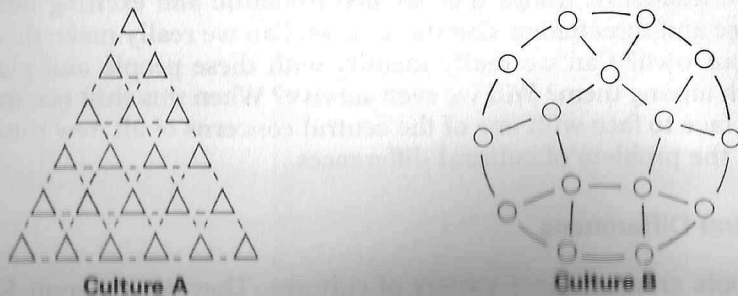
their ankles; Dinka men coat their bodies with ash; Muslim women are hidden in public in *burkas*; and some South Sea Islanders wear only lip plugs. The Masais of Kenya draw blood from a cow through hollow arrows and consider it a great delicacy, often mixing it with fresh milk. Chinese for the most part reject dairy products but are fond of pork. Muslims and Orthodox Jews abhor pork and like milk. Some African tribes make butter, but smear it on their bodies for decorative purposes (Nida 1975:77-78).

Less obvious yet more profound are differences in the ways people relate to one another and how they think about their world. American farmers raise crops to feed their families. Men in the Trobriand Islands raise crops to feed their sisters and their sisters' children. These men and their children, in turn, live on food provided by their wives' brothers. The Shilluks of Sudan speak of scorpions and crocodiles as their relatives; the American Indians of the Southwest eat peyote buttons to have visions of guardian spirits; and aged Eskimos used to walk out on the ice to die so as not to consume food, which was scarce in winter. All people see the same world, but they perceive it through different cultural glasses. And they are often unaware of their culture and how it colors what they see (Figure 10).

A study by Edward Hall (1959) illustrates how different cultures can be in their perceptions of time. Since all people live in time, we might assume that everyone sees it in the same way. Not so, says Hall. Americans, for example, place a premium on punctuality and define being "on time" as from five minutes before to five minutes after the set time. Someone arriving fifteen minutes after an appointed hour must offer an apology, but need give no explanation. Those arriving

FIGURE 10

Cultures See the World in Different Ways



From Paul G. Hiebert, "Anthropological Tools for Missionaries" (Singapore: Haggai Institute, 1983), p. 9.

more than a half hour "late," however, are "rude" and must offer a credible excuse (Figure 11).

In traditional Egypt, Hall points out, servants are expected to show up at the set time as an act of obedience. Men of equal rank, however, need to show their independence, and they do so by arriving at the "proper" time, an hour later. Only those who arrive a half hour after that must offer apologies.

There is no confusion when two Americans or two Egyptians meet, because they understand one another, but there is confusion when an Egyptian pastor and an American missionary meet. The American arrives "on time" at the set hour, and the Egyptian "on time" an hour later. The former is frustrated and complains (wrongly) that the Egyptians lack a sense of time, and the Egyptian is perplexed at the apparent subservience of the missionary.

Cultural differences can lead to humorous situations. Eugene Nida (1975:5-6) tells of early missionaries to the Marshall Islands who received their mail once a year, when a sailing boat made its rounds of the South Pacific. One year the boat was a day ahead of schedule, and the missionaries were away on a neighboring island. The captain of the boat left the mail with the Marshallese, who finally had in hand what the missionaries spoke about so often and with such anticipation. Unacquainted with the strange ways of the foreigners, they tried to find out what made the mail so attractive. They concluded that it must be good to eat, so they cooked the letters and found them unpalatable.

FIGURE 11

Use of Time Differs with Cultures

5 minutes before		
Appointed Time	Servants On Time	Everyone On Time
5 minutes after		Mumbled Apology Advisable
10 minutes after	Servants Late	Slight Apology Necessary
15 minutes after		Mildly Insulting
20 minutes after		Full Apology Required
30 minutes after		Rude
45 minutes after		Very Insulting
1 hour after	Equals On Time	Unforgivable
1 hour, 15 minutes after	Equals Late	
	Arab Time	American Time

degrees of lateness

From Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), p. 34.

When the missionaries returned, they found their year's mail turned into mush.

Cultural differences also create difficulties. For instance, two missionary women working in central Mexico were circumspect in their relationships with men, but thought nothing of drinking lime juice at breakfast for their health. The Indians, however, were certain the young women had lovers, for the locals used lime juice, which they called "baby killer," to produce abortions (Nida 1975:8).

In the next three chapters we will look at the effects of cultural differences on *missionaries*. In chapters 6 through 8 we will examine their influence on the *message*. In chapters 9 through 11 we will see how they affect the *bicultural community* within which the missionaries and nationals work.

How do cultural differences affect the missionary? We will look first at some of the difficulties young missionaries experience. In chapter 4 we will examine in more detail the ongoing problems that missionaries face in cross-cultural ministries.

Culture Shock

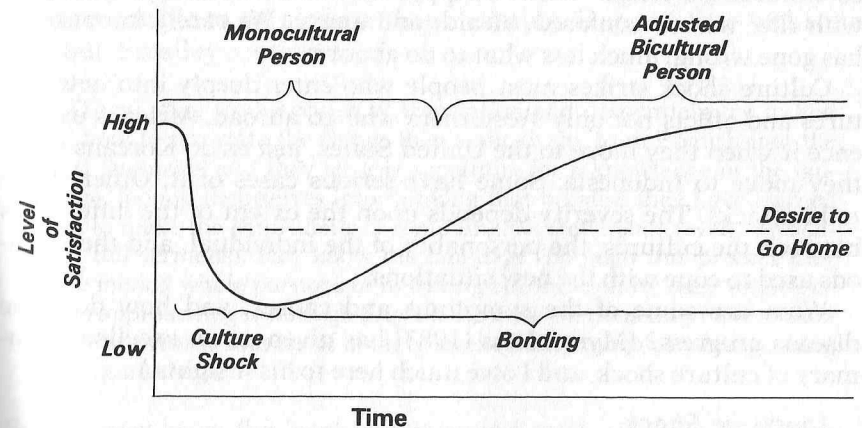
We are all excited and a little fearful when we enter a new culture. When the letter of appointment arrives, our level of personal satisfaction is high (see Figure 12). Our dreams have come true. This is what we have been planning and training for over the past few years.

The farewell at the church is even more satisfying. All our lives we may have occupied the pews but now we are center stage. Even the pastor takes second place. The good-byes at the airport are even more exciting, a sweet mix of sad partings and the thrill of new adventure.

Landing in a strange city abroad, our satisfaction is still high. We are tired from the flight, but there is the excitement of new sights and strange customs. We are really here. We can hardly believe it!

We stop at a restaurant and order lunch. But when it comes, we recognize only half of it as food. The other half looks inedible—like worms or even ants. Hungry, we stop at the market and ask for some oranges, but the woman in the stall does not understand us. We suddenly realize that all people do not speak English. Desperate for something to eat, we point like children to our mouths and stomachs and then to the oranges. When the vendor finally understands and gives us fruit, we face another problem. How are we going to pay for it? We cannot understand her, and the new coins make no sense to us. Finally, in desperation, we hold them out and let her take what she wants. We are sure we are being cheated. To make matters worse, the children nearby are making fun of us, obviously amused that these wealthy and

FIGURE 12
Culture Shock



From Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), p. 40.

educated people cannot speak a language any local three-year-old knows well. Inside we are angry and want to tell them how learned we really are, but to no avail. Our education is of little use to us here.

The next day our host sends us across town on a bus, with instructions to get off after five miles at the stop with a big brown house on the left and a small green one on the right. We set out confidently, but a few stops later we see a big brown house on the left and a small green one on the right. We know we must go further, but every stop thereafter is the same. Suddenly we are afraid of getting lost, but we cannot turn back now. We have visions of spending the rest of our lives riding around a strange city in a bus.

Later we get sick and are taken to a local doctor. We are afraid, for are not all foreign doctors witch doctors? Can they really cure us?

As anxieties multiply, we seem to get little done beyond keeping ourselves alive. Everything is strange, everyone looks alike, we have few friends to whom we can turn for help, and we cannot admit defeat and go home. Unlike the tourists, we cannot even go to the local Hilton and its familiar settings. What has happened to our dreams?

Causes of Culture Shock

What causes this psychological unrest when we enter a new culture? It is not, as we might suspect, the sight of poverty and dirt. Nor is it the fear of illness, although those in culture shock are often preoccu-

pied with cleanliness and health. Culture shock is the disorientation we experience when all the cultural maps and guidelines we learned as children no longer work. Stripped of our normal ways of coping with life, we are confused, afraid, and angry. We rarely know what has gone wrong, much less what to do about it.

Culture shock strikes most people who enter deeply into new cultures and afflicts not only Westerners who go abroad. Africans experience it when they move to the United States, just as do Koreans when they move to Indonesia. Some have serious cases of it. Others have mild attacks. The severity depends upon the extent of the differences between the cultures, the personality of the individual, and the methods used to cope with the new situations.

What are some of the symptoms and causes, and how does the disease progress? (Myron Loss [1983] has given us an excellent summary of culture shock, and I owe much here to his insights.)

Language Shock

The first shock we often experience in a new culture is our inability to communicate. Ever since our early childhood, we have talked, gestured, written, and talked some more—until we are no longer aware of the communication processes themselves. They have become almost automatic.

Suddenly, as strangers in a new world, we are stripped of our primary means of interacting with other people. Like children, we struggle to say even the simplest things, and we constantly make mistakes. Describing this, William Smalley (1978:698) writes:

Even after weeks of study [the missionary] is unable to discuss much more than the price of a pound of potatoes. He is unable to display his education and intelligence, the symbols which gave him status and security back home. He meets intelligent and educated people but he responds to them like a child or an idiot because he is not capable of any better response. . . .

The language learner has the uneasy feeling that people are laughing behind his back—and they are. His study is tiring, boring, frustrating. Nothing seems to go logically or smoothly, because logic is identified with familiar ways of talking and thinking. It is based on his language and academic tradition.

Many an overseas American who started out to learn a language has ended by rejecting it. The pattern of rejection sometimes means less and less study; the development of more and more English contacts. Sometimes it means illness, genuine physical illness.

Some people believe they simply cannot learn a new language. Others have a mental block against practicing things they do not

understand or cannot do well. But you cannot learn a language without making mistakes and without practicing it until you are familiar with it. Language shock can catch people in a vicious cycle—unable to learn, unable to get along without learning. Trapped, they seek some way out. Smalley continues:

[They] cling to the crutch of translation and desperately try to find out how to translate the things they want to say from English into the local language, and they let this substitute for a knowledge of the language, fooling themselves into thinking that because they have learned how to make the equivalents of some English statements (even “preaching” full sermons), they know the language. Through this process they have missed whole portions of it, having cut these off by their insistence upon approaching it through English. And the portions they have missed are ever-present sources of anxiety as they miss much of what is going on around them.

Some never learn the local language and work all their lives abroad through translators—in some cases for forty years or more!

Changes in Routine

Another frustration we face in culture shock is change in daily routine. In our home culture we carry out efficiently such tasks as shopping, cooking, banking, laundering, mailing, going to the dentist, and getting a Christmas tree, leaving ourselves time for work and leisure. In a new setting, even simple jobs take a great deal of psychic energy and more time, much more time. It takes two or three times as long to cook our meals in some countries, because we must light wood fires, and the chickens are still running around when we buy them. Elisabeth Elliot (1975:41) writes:

Then there were the simple things which, for safety's sake one ought not to overlook. They only take a minute. Like washing lettuce. “Avoid raw vegetables” is good advice for a tourist, but if you are going to live in a place (it was living we were aiming for, not mere tropical survival), you want raw vegetables sometimes. The book said to dip everything, lettuce included, in boiling water for a few seconds. This could be counted on usually to kill amoeba and always to kill one's zest for salad.

Life during the first year in a new culture is often a struggle simply to survive. All our time seems spent in cooking, washing clothes, marketing, and building or repairing our houses. No time is left for the work we came to do. Frustration mounts as the months pass and we are unable to do much teaching, preaching, counseling, or Bible translation. And there seems little we can do about it.

Changes in Relationships

Human lives are centered around relationships with relatives, friends, colleagues at work, bosses, bank tellers, clerks, and even strangers. Through these we gain our identity within a society and an image of ourselves. When our self-perceptions conflict with the images others have of us, we work desperately to change what they are thinking. If this fails, we are forced to change the ideas we have of ourselves. Few of us can sustain our beliefs or sense of worth without constant reinforcement from others. Even gossip is better than not to be noticed at all.

Maintaining relationships in our own culture, where we understand what is going on, is hard enough. In another culture, the task seems almost insurmountable. Our spouses and children have their own problems adjusting to a new language and culture, and they need extra attention at the very time we are crying out for help. They get on our nerves (and we on theirs), for we are thrown together in stressful situations with few outside relationships to sustain us. Other missionaries, if they are around, are often of little help because they are busy and seem so well adjusted and we are afraid to admit our weaknesses to them. After all, we now are "missionaries." Obviously, it is we who are at fault for our inability to adjust easily to the new culture. So we draw apart, afraid to share our deep anxieties.

Building relationships with the local people is even more stressful. We can barely speak their language and do not understand the subtle nuances of their relationships. Their humor escapes us, and ours makes them frown. Trying to listen to them in normal social activities drains our energies. Even going to church, which first excited us with its novelty, becomes tedious and contributes little to our own spiritual nourishment. We are lonely and have no one with whom we can share our self-doubts.

Added to all this is our loss of identity as significant adults in the society. In our own society we know who we are because we hold offices, degrees, and memberships in different groups. In the new setting our old identity is gone. We must start all over again to become somebody. Richard McElroy (1972:inside cover) writes:

During the first week of language study the new missionary experiences "role shock." In North America he was a leader, successful and secure. Suddenly, he is a learner, with a high school graduate teaching him Spanish phonetics—and correcting, correcting, correcting him. If the missionary does not make the role switch, he feels insecure, self-conscious and threatened. The experience brings out the worst in some students: stubbornness, rudeness, withdrawal, and hyper-criticalness.

Another shock is having servants around the house. They are often necessary to heat the laundry water, kill and pluck the chickens, and do other tasks that we could handle in the West by mechanical servants and pre-prepared food. Moreover, we soon find that we would have no time left to work if they were not around. And we are criticized if we refuse to give jobs to household workers. But how do we relate to servants? As Christians we want to be egalitarian, so we invite the servants to eat with us like guests. Yet this conflicts with the local understandings of the position of workers in the house and makes the servants feel uncomfortable. Since we also prize the personal privacy of our homes, we find the presence of servants around the house an intrusion.

Even participation in native life can be traumatic. When we try our hand at some of the local crafts or participate in some strange sports, we are slow and awkward, and our performance is like that of children. We also tend to see some dangerous religious significance in every doubtful activity.

Loss of Understanding

To become truly human is to learn a culture and understand what is going on. It is to know what to expect in life and what is expected of us. A North American knows to drive on the right side of the road, not to bargain with the clerk for sugar, and to stand in line at the ticket counter. An Indian knows the worth of a rupee, the way to bargain for a sari, and the meaning of *Tirupathi Venkateswara*. We need such knowledge to understand what is happening around us and to find meaning in our lives.

In a new culture much of our old knowledge is useless, if not misleading. When we point at something with a finger, the people are offended, for we have made a dirty sign. We offer help and keep quiet if the people reject it. Only later do we learn that in many societies people must always demur on the first offer and that we are expected to offer it a second time. The result is often embarrassment and confusion. William Smalley (1978:693) gives another example:

When I first went to Paris to study French, I and many other Americans like me found it difficult to know when and where to shake hands. French people seemed to us to be shaking hands all the time, and very unnecessarily so from our point of view. We felt silly shaking our hands so much, and we passed around among us the stories that we heard, such as the one about how French children shake hands with their parents before going to bed every night. . . . This small and inconsequential difference of habit in shaking hands was enough to bring uneasiness,

and combined with hundreds of other uncertainties brought culture shock to many.

When our knowledge repeatedly fails us, we become desperate, for our lives seem to be careening out of control. In the long run, it is the sense of meaninglessness arising out of this confusion that can be the most damaging consequence of culture shock. We seem to have lost our hold on reality.

Emotional and Evaluative Disorientation

Culture shock has a cognitive dimension, but it also involves emotional and evaluative disorientation. On the emotional level, we face both deprivation and confusion. The music we hear often sounds dissonant, the food strangely spiced, and the entertainment unintelligible. We long to hear recognizable music, eat familiar food, watch the evening news on television, and go out for the type of entertainment we have "at home." And long after we understand meanings in the new language, its fine emotional nuances such as humor, irony, sarcasm, poetry, and double entendre escape us.

We also face feelings of frustration that arise out of the cross-cultural setting. After the initial excitement of being abroad, we become homesick and begin to dislike the unfamiliar ways. We feel guilty because we cannot live up to our own expectations. We are angry because no one told us it would be this way and because we make such slow progress in adjusting to the new culture.

On the level of values, we are incensed at what appears to be a lack of morality: the lack of proper dress, the insensitivity to the poor, and what to us is obviously stealing, cheating, and bribing. We are even more shocked to learn that the people consider *our* behavior just as immoral. In New Guinea, for example, the nationals accused missionaries of being stingy because they did not freely share their foodstuffs and such belongings as clothes, blankets, and guns with those around them. After all, everyone must share. The local people, too, would share with the missionaries if they ran out of food.

Indian people considered the dress of missionary women immoral. In their society, the sexiest parts of a woman's body are the calves of their legs. Proper women, therefore, wear ankle-length saris—but missionary women wore knee-length skirts.

Symptoms of Culture Shock

The first days in a new culture are a chaotic mixture of fascinating new sights and shocking experiences. North Americans in India are

terrified at the sight of salamanders on their bedroom walls (they keep down the mosquitos) and snakes in the grass, remembering that twenty thousand Indians (out of seven hundred million) die of snakebite each year. Indians in the United States are equally terrified of freeway traffic, knowing that forty thousand Americans (out of two hundred thirty million) die each year from automobile accidents.

Bad as they may seem, these initial shocks are not serious. The real problem in culture shock is the psychological distortion that comes undetected while we think we are functioning normally. This twists our perceptions of reality, and wreaks havoc with our bodies. What are the symptoms of this cross-cultural malady?

Rising Stress

We all live with stress. Indeed, without it we would enjoy or achieve little in life. But too much of it can be destructive. How much is too much? It is hard to measure stress precisely, but Thomas Holmes and M. Masusu (1974) have given us a rough scale by which to estimate the stress created by various experiences in life. The scale runs from "no stress" to a maximum of 100 points for the death of a spouse (Table 1).

Stress is cumulative and persists long after the events that caused it have passed. To measure the present tensions we are experiencing, we need to total the stress points we have logged over the past year. Holmes and Masusu found that only one-third of those who scored less than 150 stress points were likely to become seriously ill in the following two years. But one-half of those who had accumulated more than 150 stress points, and four-fifths of those who had more than 300, were likely to have significant health problems within that time.

By these measures, most missionaries should be basket cases, particularly during their first term of service. In their first service year, new missionaries have usually experienced marked changes in their financial status, occupation, geographic location, recreation outlets, church routine, social activities, and eating habits. If they are young, they may have just been married or had a child. In addition, they face the stresses that arise out of moving into radically different cultures—tensions that Holmes and Masusu have not even attempted to measure. For example, James Spradley and Mark Phillips (1972) estimate that learning to use a new language in everyday activities alone adds more than 50 points of stress to the new missionary's life. It should not surprise us, then, that many first-term workers have scores that run over 400 points.

TABLE 1

The Stress Produced by Changes in Life

Nature of the Event	Points of Stress Due to Change
1 Death of a spouse	100
2 Divorce	73
3 Death of a close family member	63
4 Personal injury or illness	53
5 Marriage	50
6 Change in the health of a family member	44
7 Pregnancy	40
8 Gain of new family members	39
9 Change in financial state	38
10 Change to a different line of work	36
11 Change in responsibilities at work	29
12 Change in living conditions	25
13 Change in work hours or conditions	20
14 Change in residence	20
15 Change in recreation	19
16 Change in church activities	19
17 Change in social activities	18
18 Change in number of family get-togethers	15
19 Change in eating habits	15

From Thomas H. Holmes and M. Masusu, "Life Change and Illness Susceptibility," in *Stressful Life Events: Their Nature and Effects*, ed. Barbara S. Dohrenwend and Bruce P. Dohrenwend (New York: Wiley, 1974), pp. 42-72, © John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Physical Illness

One common consequence of high stress is physical illness. Among the more common sicknesses caused by prolonged stress are chronic headaches, ulcers, lower back pain, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and chronic fatigue. Stress also impairs our ability to concentrate and makes us accident prone. Cecil Osborne (1967:198) writes:

[Emotional] stress creates a chemical imbalance resulting in malfunction of glands and other organs. The body then becomes unable to provide resistance to germs which are normally held in check. Since the

mind tends to hand its pain, guilt and grief over to the body by an unconscious process, we find it easier to incur physical illness than mental anguish. For one thing, we receive sympathy, which is a form of love, when we are physically ill; but the person suffering from mental anguish or depression is likely to be told to "snap out of it" or to "pull yourself together."

Illness in a foreign setting, however, only increases our anxiety, particularly if the medical services we are used to are not available. In strange settings we easily become obsessed with health and cleanliness and magnify every symptom. Nor are such fears totally unfounded. We often do face strange diseases and dangers, and it is our lives that are at stake.

Psychological and Spiritual Depression

The most serious consequences of stress are often depression and a sense of failure. Caught unaware, we are unable to cope with the problems of living in a new culture. We are overwhelmed by constantly having to face confusing situations and the strain of learning a new way of life. There is little time for leisure—after all, is it proper for missionaries to relax when there is so much to do? Our support systems are gone. We are part of a missionary community made up of strong-willed strangers to whom we do not dare admit weakness, and there may be no one to pastor us when we fail.

There also hangs over us the sword of unrealistic expectations. The public's image of a missionary is a hardy pioneer who suffers great deprivations; a saint who never sins; an outstanding preacher, doctor, or personal worker who overcomes all obstacles—in short, a person who is creative, brave, sensitive, and always triumphant. When we are young, we almost believe that we can become such persons when we cross the ocean.

It is not surprising, then, that we face depression, often severe, when we discover that we are still very human. Going abroad has neither changed our weak and sinful natures nor given us new talents. Levi Keidel (1971:67) echoes the experience of many missionaries when he writes:

I began to stand my various manifestations of unchristlikeness up on a row to take a good look at them: bad temper, chafing against unavoidable circumstances, enslaving myself to legalistic motivation, ill will towards those who impeded my program.

To these I added recurrent terminal exhaustion. . . . I remember the counsel of my pastor when we first left for Congo: "Now Levi, you don't have to accomplish everything during your first term." Before I com-

pleted two years on the field I was taken to a hospital. . . . I was a bowl dipped empty and scraped raw by the ravenous appetite of demand.

Unfortunately, if we think we are failing, we work harder to maintain our self-esteem. But this only multiplies our problems, for the fear of failure itself saps our energies. Defeated, we conclude that we are faulty and not acceptable for God's service.

Sometimes we put on masks to disguise our weaknesses. For a time we can deceive others, even ourselves, but in the long run we know these are worthless self-images. Dwight Carlson (1974:65) writes:

Like other unresolved conflicts, the mask requires a lot of energy and leads to a host of problems besides fear, such as irritability, worry, anxiety, fatigue, excusing ourselves, blaming others, and, not infrequently, frank lying and deceit. . . .

When we refuse to remove our masks, we not only create internal conflict and fatigue, but we also hinder our own growth and the growth of others. Individuals grow by relating to other genuine people and seeing how they deal with life's problems. Christian leaders must be willing to first remove their own masks before they can ever expect others to do likewise. Only as we Christians are willing to expose our feet of clay will others feel (and maybe only then) safe to expose themselves and their needs.

The Cycle of Culture Shock

It is consoling when we are in culture shock to know that we are normal human beings and that in time the traumas of adjusting to a new culture will end. Furthermore, a knowledge of how culture shock progresses can help us to deal with it and turn it into a positive experience that prepares us for our future ministry. The first year or two is crucial in our adaptation to a new culture. How we adjust during this time will color our ministry for the rest of our lives.

Kalervo Oberg (1960:177–182) traces the steps we normally take in learning to live in a new cultural setting.

The Tourist Stage

Our first response to a new culture is fascination. We live in hotels, with other missionaries, or in homes not too different from what we are used to, and we associate with nationals who can speak our language and are gracious to us as foreigners. We spend the days exploring new sights and sounds and retreat at night to places insulated in part from the strange culture outside. We may be taken to see the local attractions and to meet important people who welcome us. And we

will respond with words of goodwill and appreciation for the local culture.

This honeymoon stage may last from a few weeks to several months, depending on the circumstances. Ordinary tourists leave before this phase comes to an end and return home to tell stories about the strange ways of the people. But as missionaries we have come to stay, which means we must begin the difficult journey of becoming members of a new culture.

Disenchantment

The tourist stage ends when we move from being outside visitors to becoming cultural insiders. This takes place when we establish our own homes, take responsibility for ourselves, and start making a contribution to the local community. It is here that frustrations and anxieties arise. We have language problems, shopping trouble, transportation woes, and laundry mixups. We are concerned about the cleanliness of our drinking water, food, and bedding and afraid of being cheated or robbed. We also feel left alone. Those who welcomed us so warmly have gone back to their work and now seem indifferent to our troubles.

The result is disenchantment. No longer is the strange culture exciting. Now it seems inscrutable and impossible to learn. Our normal response is hostility because the security of our lives is threatened. We find fault with the culture and compare it unfavorably with our own. We criticize the people and see each shortcoming as proof of their laziness and inferiority, developing stereotypes that caricature the host country in negative ways. We withdraw from the culture and take refuge in a small circle of foreign friends, or stay in our homes where we try to re-create the culture of our native land.

This stage marks the crisis in the disease. How we respond to it determines whether or not we stay and how we will ultimately adjust to the new culture. Most new missionaries drop below the "go home" line during this time (see Figure 12). We look for mail and talk about things we will do when we return "home." We write letters of resignation but do not mail them. After all, what would our friends or church say if we were to return?

Another process, however, is also at work during this stage, one we hardly notice. We are learning how to live in the new culture. We begin to realize that we can learn how to shop in the new language and use the local currency. As we make friends among the people, we start having good days. With a word of encouragement from older missionaries and national leaders, most of us throw away our letters of resignation and begin the long task of learning the language and adjusting

to the new culture. Those who cannot make this transition may have to leave before they experience a nervous breakdown.

Resolution

The emergence of humor often marks the beginning of recovery. We begin to laugh at our predicaments and crack jokes about the people instead of criticizing them. We begin to sympathize with others who we think are worse off than ourselves. Although we may still take a superior attitude, we are beginning to learn new cultural ways.

How we relate to the people and culture at this stage is particularly crucial, for the patterns of adjustment we form here tend to stay with us. If we develop positive attitudes of appreciation and acceptance of the host people, we have laid the foundations for learning their culture and becoming one with them. On the other hand, if we remain negative and aloof, chances are that we will remain foreign and never identify ourselves with the nationals. And since we are models of the gospel for these people, it, too, will appear to them as distant and foreign.

Not only is our first year, indeed our first month, crucial in molding our lifelong relationship to a culture, it is also the time when we are most adaptable to it. We have few preconceptions of what we should do and a strong idealism that has motivated us to come. Since we have not yet settled into comfortable routines that blind us to what is going on, we are willing, at this stage, to identify closely with the people and make their culture our own. In this sense, culture shock is not simply an experience to be endured. As the Brewsters point out (1982), it is, in fact, one of the most significant and formative periods in our whole missionary experience. To use their term, it is a time when we are "bonded" in one way or another to the new culture.

Adjustment

The final stage of culture shock comes when we feel comfortable in the new culture. We have now learned enough to function efficiently in our new setting without feelings of anxiety. We not only accept the local foods, dress, and customs, but actually begin to enjoy them. We cherish the friendship of the people and can begin to feel constructive in our work. If we take time to think about it, we realize that we will miss the country and its people when we leave.

We can adjust to the new culture in a number of ways. We can, for example, keep our distance and build a Western ghetto from which we sally forth to do our work. Or we can reject our past and try to "go native." A third possibility is to identify ourselves with the culture and

work for some type of integration with our own. (We will look at these alternatives and how they affect our ministry in the next chapter.)

Are Missionaries Unbalanced?

T. Norton Sterrett

Are missionaries unbalanced? Of course they are. I'm one. I ought to know.

A missionary probably began as an ordinary man or woman. He dressed like other people. He liked to play tennis and listen to music.

But even before leaving for the field he became "different." Admired by some, pitied by others, he was known as one who was leaving parents, prospects and home for—a vision. So he seemed to be a visionary.

Now that he's come home again he's even more different. To him some things—big things—just don't seem important. Even the World Series or the Davis Cup matches don't interest him especially. And apparently he doesn't see things as other people see them. The chance of a lifetime—to meet Isaac Stern personally—seems to leave him cold. It makes you want to ask where he's been.

Well, where has he been?

Where the conflict with evil is open and intense, a fight not a fashion—where clothes don't matter, because there's little time to take care of them—where people are dying for help he might give, most of them not even knowing he has the help—where the sun means 120 in the shade, and he can't spend his time in the shade.

But not only space, time too seems to have passed him by. When you talk about the Rolling Stones he looks puzzled. When you mention *Star Wars* he asks what that is. You wonder how long he's been away.

All right, how long has he been away? Long enough for thirty million people to go into eternity without Christ, with no chance to hear the gospel—and some of them went right before his eyes: when that flimsy riverboat overturned; when that cholera epidemic struck; when that Hindu-Muslim riot broke out.

How long has he been gone? Long enough to have had two sieges of amoebic dysentery, to nurse his wife through repeated attacks of malaria, to get the news of his mother's death before he knew she was sick.

How long? Long enough to see a few outcast men and women turn to Christ, to see them drink in the Bible teaching he gave them, to struggle and suffer with them through the persecution that developed from non-Christian relatives, to see them grow into a sturdy band of believers conducting their own worship, to see this group develop an indigenous church that is reaching out to the community.

Yes, he's been away a long time.

So he's different. But unnecessarily so now, it seems. At least, since he's in this country, he could pay more attention to his clothes, to what's going on around the country, to recreation, to social life.

Of course, he could.

But he can't forget—at least most of the time—that the price of a new suit would buy three thousand Gospels, that while an American spends one day in business, five thousand Indians or Chinese go into eternity without Christ.

So when a missionary comes to your church or your Christian group, remember that he will probably be different. If he stumbles for a word now and then, he may have been speaking a foreign tongue almost exclusively for several years, and possibly is fluent in it. If he isn't in the orator class, he may not have had a chance to speak English from a pulpit for awhile. He may be eloquent on the street of an Indian bazaar.

If he doesn't seem to warm up as quickly as you want, if he seems less approachable than a youth evangelist or college professor, remember he's been under a radically different social system since before you started high school, and maybe is unfamiliar with casual conversation.

Sure the missionary is unbalanced.

But by whose scales? Yours or God's?

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Reverse Culture Shock

The idea that we experience reverse culture shock when we return "home" after a long residence abroad may surprise us. After all, we are returning to a culture with which we are familiar. But that culture has changed, and so have we—more deeply than we know. Research shows that individuals who have adjusted most successfully to a new culture have the greatest difficulty in readapting to their old one (Brislin and Van Buren 1974).

In many ways readjusting to our native culture is like entering a new society. At first there is the excitement of returning. We are back with loved ones—relatives, friends, and colleagues. We are the object of much attention, pride, and excitement, and people listen as we tell of our strange experiences. We go out for the hamburger and Dairy Queen that we have dreamed about while we were abroad. In short, we expect to pick up our lives where we left off.

After this initial excitement subsides, we begin the serious business of reestablishing ourselves in the local culture. It is now that we begin to experience irritation and frustration. Things that once seemed so natural now look extravagant and insensitive in a world of need. People seem so parochial. They soon lose interest in our stories and turn to more important topics of conversation—changes in the latest models of cars, local politics, neighborhood gossip, and sports. We even find it hard to relate to our friends and relatives because they will not listen, or they listen politely but do not seem to understand what we

are trying to say. They keep asking ridiculous questions such as "Do people in Guatemala know what telephones are?"

Our frustration is intensified by the fact that all this is so unexpected. We have become strangers in our own culture! We are put into new roles that we did not expect. We are out-of-step with the lifestyles that once seemed so important but now seem so extravagant and self-centered.

Our initial response is defensive. We become angry and critical about local customs. Assuming an attitude of superiority, we withdraw from local events. Sometimes we wish we had not returned "home." We begin to realize that no place is home the way it used to be, that we are pilgrims here on earth.

Joseph Shenk (n.d.:5) describes this feeling:

"Vacuum" is a good word to describe the first six months we are home. We go from being the center of a lot of activity to being the center of nothing. We are on no committees. We have no community connections. At church people are a bit afraid they might say something which will trigger a speech from us about injustice or something so conversations are kept as superficial as possible. Evenings are quiet unless we are being put on display somewhere.

"Slippage" is another good word. While overseas economically and technologically we have stagnated. Our vocabularies have shrunk. We do not have clothes or vehicles or appliances or homes to match our contemporaries. Since individual worth in the United States and Canada is largely measured by these things it is very possible that we will experience sobering moments of self doubt. In that gasp of lostness we mortgage everything in order to acquire those trappings of relevance which are so important here. Then we discover that we are locked into very tight economic parameters for the next score of years.

Our second response is to try to change the culture. About a year after getting back, we are in danger of being sullen, angry people. We cannot comprehend the wealth around us and are eager for any opportunity to tell the "natives" how poor the rest of the world is. But the people do not seem to want to listen. This only reinforces our frustration and leads us to seek the company of people from other cultures or other returnees.

In time, however, we readjust in one way or another to our original culture. Sometimes our modes of adjustment are destructive to ourselves and others. We become abusive or withdrawn or we leave our home communities.

Normally, however, we again find our place in the society. We learn enough about sports and local politics to participate in neighborhood

conversations. We catch up on the latest music and styles of dress so that we no longer stand out in a crowd. We discover that we can build meaningful lives again in our original culture. Above all, we discover that we are not the same persons who left this culture—that profound changes have taken place within us in our years abroad, and that we will never fully fit back into our first “home.”

In readjusting, it helps to look at our original society as a foreign community and to enter it the way we entered the culture abroad. Often we are more tolerant of people in other societies than in our own. We need to learn from the “natives,” and identify ourselves with them as much as we can, without negating who we now are. We need to realize that they cannot fully understand us, for they have not experienced what we have.

Learning to Adapt to New Cultures

All of us experience dislocation in moving into new settings—some more than others. Tourists can minimize the shock by returning each night to a Hilton hotel, an island of Americana in the middle of an ocean of strange customs. There they feel at home and recover for another day of adventure. Missionaries, however, have come to make this new setting their home.

Culture shock is rarely terminal. With experience and patience, we all learn to live in one way or another in new cultural settings. We learn to eat the local foods and even like them. We find we can ride buses, and even if we are lost, we can find our way back home. We learn the language well enough to carry on ordinary conversations and order oranges in the market. We gain a feel for the value of the local currency. We make friends and discover that the local people do not all look alike. We find that the native doctor can heal us and that we are not going to die from our first sickness. In short, we learn not only how to survive, but also how to live and enjoy the new culture. Our level of satisfaction begins to rise. This place has become “home.”

Individuals differ greatly in the extent to which they suffer shock in new cultural settings. In part this depends upon their personalities. Some people are flexible and can live with a great deal of ambiguity, and thus find adapting to new ways quite easy. Others are rigid and need to have a great deal of control over their lives. The severity of shock depends partly upon the differences between their first culture and the culture into which they move. The deeper the differences, the more they must change to fit into the local scene.

But culture shock also depends on the methods used to deal with cultural differences. We can learn methods that help us minimize the

tensions of adapting to a new culture and that can, in fact, make it an exciting and growing experience. We can identify with the people in ways that will make our ministry more effective.

Recognizing Our Anxieties

The first way to minimize culture shock is to recognize our anxieties. It is perfectly normal to be afraid of new situations because of the uncertainties they contain. Fear is an important human response that alerts us to respond to immediate and specific dangers. In the long run, however, fear can turn into anxiety—a feeling of uneasiness and dread of some vague, unknown danger. In a sense it is a fear of the uncertainties we face in new settings. It is this anxiety, not specific fears, that is the most damaging part of culture shock.

How can we deal with anxiety when we do not even know what the enemy is? One way is to pinpoint specific anxieties, to recognize them so that we can deal with them. When we consciously look at our dreads, we find that many of them are unfounded. Others can be eliminated by making changes in our lifestyles, since most of them will leave if we learn how to live in the new culture. It helps greatly to know that we are normal when we experience anxieties, and that we can learn ways to deal with anxieties instead of covering them up and hoping they will go away.

Learning the New Culture

Learning a new culture can be either a terrifying ordeal or an exciting new experience. The difference often is the attitude we bring to the situation. If we are afraid of the unknown, we will tend to withdraw into a small circle of friends made up largely of missionary colleagues and national Christians. We will try to reconstruct as best we can an island of Western culture where we can live. The result is a small Christian community largely isolated from the world around it. Here we can carry out our mission work with a minimum of dislocation but with a minimum of witness to the people around us.

On the other hand, we can venture out to learn the new culture. At first this increases our anxieties, but we soon learn that the risk pays off. As our knowledge of the culture grows, our fears of the unknown decrease. We find, moreover, that studying a strange culture and meeting new people can be an exciting and fulfilling experience. We discover that many of the people want our friendship and are delighted when we make the simplest efforts to learn their ways. They are all too ready to be our cultural teachers if we are willing to be honest students.

We learn a culture best by being involved in it. Although it helps to

read all we can about a culture before we arrive, there is no substitute for participating in the lives of the people. For example, rather than buying a week's supply of groceries, we can go to the store daily and purchase a few items at a time. We can sit with people in the coffee shop or visit with them in the village square. We can invite them to our homes—after all, they are as curious about our culture as we about theirs—and accept invitations to visit them. We will find that friendships and opportunities to participate in the local culture multiply rapidly if we take time to relate to the people on a personal level.

It is important that we enter into a culture immediately, before we have established routines that insulate us from the people. As the Brewsters (1982) point out, it is better to plunge into a new culture and experience life as the nationals see it than to first establish ourselves in a foreign enclave from which we launch out to do our work. They add, "*From the very first day* it is important to develop many meaningful relationships with local people. The newcomer should early communicate his needs and his desire to be a learner. *People help people who are in need!* Then, when potentially stressful situations come up he can, as learned, secure help, answers, or insights from these insiders" (1982:8–9).

When we enter another culture as genuine students, the people are usually anxious to teach us, for they are proud of their culture. While learning about the culture, we build relationships that make us part of the community.

Interestingly enough, learning a new culture is also an important means of evangelism. We often find more opportunities to witness to non-Christians when we enter the culture as learners than in more formal missionary roles. As we study people, they become interested in us and our beliefs. As their students we are not threatening to them.

Finally, learning the language and culture well is critical to our future missionary service. During our first years, it is important that we learn to speak the language properly, which takes a great deal of time and practice. We are usually so intent upon learning how to communicate our messages that we overlook the sounds and structures of the language. Consequently, we learn to speak, but with foreign accents and broken sentences. We must take the time at the beginning to learn the sounds correctly, for errors soon become unconscious habits that are hard to change and stay with us.

Similarly, we need to learn the local culture in our first years. During this time we are more aware of cultural differences. Later we will lose our sensitivities to strange ways, and work will occupy much of our time. If we want to know a culture well, we must begin to study it immediately and continue to do so all our lives.

Building Trust

Learning to know a new culture and appreciate its ways is not enough. We can do this and still remain outsiders whom the people view with suspicion. As Marvin Mayers (1974) points out, the most important step in entering a new culture is to build trust. Only when people trust us will they listen to what we have to say.

Trust has to do with the value we place upon a relationship, although it is something we seldom stop to consider. Since we build relationships in order to accomplish something—to carry out business, to teach or learn a lesson, or to enter a marriage—we normally focus on what we want to achieve. We stop to consider the state of the relationship only when things go wrong.

Within our own culture, there are many cues that help us evaluate our relationship with each other. They include such things as titles and roles (we would normally expect to trust a preacher or judge); social context (we do not expect a checker at a supermarket to short-change us); and social standing (we are more suspicious of a vagrant than of a well-dressed person).

In a strange culture, however, we do not recognize such cues. Consequently, we find it hard to judge when we can trust a person. Nor do we know how to convince other people that we are trustworthy. There is therefore a great deal of mutual suspicion when a stranger comes to town, particularly when she or he is a foreigner. Relationships in mission service must take priority over the task, particularly at the beginning. Trust in the message depends first upon trust in the messenger.

Trust building begins with an *interest in* and *acceptance of* those among whom we serve. We have our reasons for coming to minister, but these are of little concern to the people. They have their own motives for wanting to relate to us. Only as these are fulfilled will they have reason to continue the relationship. Much later, after a relationship has been established, the people will continue the relationship for its own sake, as friendship and companionship.

Our interest in others must be genuine. People soon detect and deeply resent our building relationships simply to carry out our own goals, for this is a subtle form of manipulation. They feel "used."

True interest expresses itself in many ways. It is seen in our desire to learn about the people, their lives, and their culture. It is reflected symbolically in our willingness to wear their type of clothes, try their food, and visit their homes. It is demonstrated in hospitality, when we invite the people into our homes and let their children play with ours. And it is shown in formal rituals, through official visits, exchanges of

gifts, ceremonial banquets, and polite introductions. These formal ways need to be carefully studied and informally checked beforehand with those in the culture, for a mistake here is a public affront and hard to undo. Mayers (1974:34) tells how he invited the assistant mayor of a rural village to a banquet because the mayor was absent, only to find that he had offended the man who was hosting the occasion. The host had a higher social status in the village than the assistant mayor. When, through Mayers's error, he was forced to entertain the assistant mayor, he was publicly acknowledging the superiority of the assistant mayor.

Acceptance begins when we love people as they are, not as we hope to make them. At first this may be hard to do, in part because they are so different from us, and in part because we come with strong desires to bring about change. Unfortunately, we often unknowingly show rejection of other people as individuals. We cut them off when they are talking, laugh at their remarks, question their facts, talk down to them, and compare their culture unfavorably with our own. Or we avoid them, forget their names, or fail to trust them with money or tasks. One missionary never gave tickets to the "natives" because he was afraid they would lose them. By doing so, he expressed distrust as loudly as if he had said it in words.

Building trust requires *openness*. It is a two-way street. Before we can expect others to trust us, we must trust them. If we expect them to open up their lives to us, we must open up ours to them. We need to tear down the pretenses and masks we wear to impress others and must allow them to see who we really are, revealing our weaknesses and fears as well as our strengths. Trust also requires *consistency*. We need to be predictable so the people know what to expect, and what we say in private needs to correspond with what we say in public. It does little good to praise local customs if we make snide comments about them when alone with friends, for what we do in private reflects our true attitudes toward the people.

Finally, trust must be nurtured to maturity. At the outset it is often fragile and easily broken. Consequently, we must focus on building the relationship. We often agree with people not because we accept what they are saying, but as a sign of trust. Disagreement in the early stages of a relationship is often seen not as a difference in opinion, but as a rejection of the person. Later, as the relationship grows, it can stand arguments and dissensions. It can also serve as an effective bridge for the communication of the gospel, for the people can now trust the message because they have learned to trust the messenger. The final stage of a good relationship implies full trust and confidence

in another person and a total willingness to entrust oneself into his or her hands.

No task is more important in the first years of ministry in a new culture than the building of trusting relationships with the people. Without these, the people will not listen to the gospel, nor will we ever be accepted into their lives and communities.

Dealing with Stress

Another way to deal with culture shock is to reduce stress whenever possible. When we move into new situations, we experience a great deal of tension, so we need to monitor our feelings to see if we or other members of our family are growing tense, irritable, inflexible, and ready to explode at any minute. But what can we do to reduce the stress before it becomes destructive?

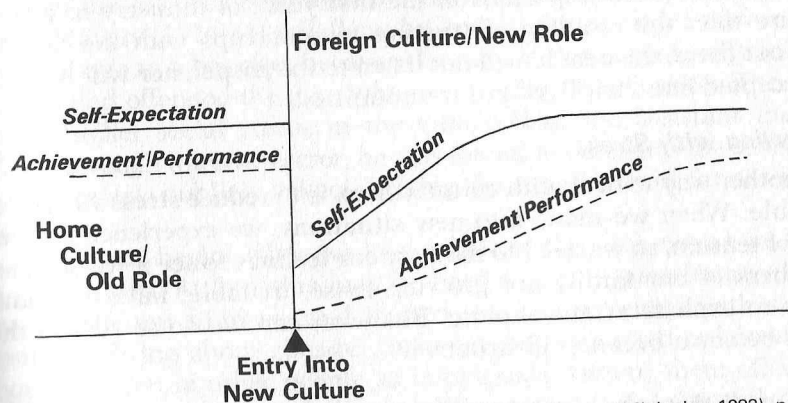
Set realistic goals. One important way to reduce stress is to set realistic goals. As Myron Loss points out (1983:67), Western Christians have come to equate spirituality with intense activity, and leisure is often seen as a waste of time. We need to recognize that we ourselves are God's first work. Only as we are physically and spiritually healthy can God use us in his work. We need to measure our progress more by who we are becoming than by what we are doing. We need to remember that we are human. We must take time for ourselves and our families—for leisure, exercise, and recreation; for reading and personal growth; and for our devotional life. We must avoid burnout in the short run and live in such a way that we have a lifelong ministry.

There is a second reason why we must set realistic goals during the first years of our ministry, namely, the fact that we simply cannot produce at the same level in foreign situations. We need more energy and time to perform even the simplest task, such as finding shops where supplies are available, papers can be duplicated, and checks cashed. Added to this is our frustration at not being able to "get to work" at what we have come to do. Most of our energy and time is spent simply on survival, and what little we have left must be given to learning the new culture.

Myron Loss charts this tension between our self-expectations and our actual performances in new cultural settings (Loss 1983:66, Figure 13). He points out that within their own culture, the self-expectation of well-adjusted people slightly exceeds their performance. In other cultures, this gap increases significantly. The only way we can deal with the stress produced by this great discrepancy between what we (and others) expect of us and what we, in fact, can do is to reduce our goals to realistic proportions.

FIGURE 13

Expectation Versus Achievement



From Myron Loss, *Culture Shock* (Middleburg, Pa.: Encouragement Ministries, 1983), p. 66.

Learn not to take ourselves too seriously. A second way to deal with stress is to see ourselves in proper perspective. It is natural to perceive ourselves as the center of activity and the present as the most important time. This, however, places great importance on everything we do and fills each moment with high tension.

We need to see present opportunities within the perspective of our lifelong ministry. Missing tomorrow's meeting, which seems so crucial to us now, will most likely be forgotten five years from now. On the other hand, taking time to learn the language and visit with the people, which now seem to keep us from our work, may in retrospect be the most significant achievements of our early ministry.

Similarly, we need to see our work within the broader ministry of our missionary and national colleagues. No one person is called to carry the full responsibility for the work. We may be needed, but we are not indispensable. The realization of this frees us from a false sense of our importance.

Humor is a great medicine for an excessive sense of self-importance, as it is a sign of inner security and self-esteem. We need to laugh with the people at our mistakes—we make many of them learning a new culture, and they are often very funny. Remember, people are not laughing at *us*, but at our strange ways and our cultural *faux pas*. Learning to laugh with them helps us overcome the fear of failure that so often keeps us from trying something new. We learn new cultures best when we try and fail, laugh, try again, and learn from our mistakes.

Flexibility, too, is a remedy for stress. We are often cantankerous,

unbending, and authoritarian when we are self-centered or uncertain. Then every change in plans and every unexpected event generate a great deal of internal stress. But it is hard to program life, particularly in cross-cultural situations and in vocations that relate to people. It is important, therefore, that we hold our plans lightly and are flexible in our lifestyles and in our dealings with human beings.

Forgiveness is a third antidote for the tension that arises from a false sense of self-importance. Ministering the gospel and serving as leader too easily infects a person with a spirit of perfectionism that can ravage his or her Christian life. In that case we begin by not forgiving ourselves and end by not forgiving our fellow missionaries, the national Christians, or the non-Christians around us. The message of God's forgiveness and salvation is blotted out, and we are destroyed by stress arising out of the deepest levels of our identity. After all, if we want to be anything, it is to be righteous!

But the heart of the gospel is forgiveness for sin and failure. So long as we remain on earth, we are not saints untouched by temptations and sins. We are saved sinners, helping one another amid our human failings to follow Jesus Christ. Like Peter, we need to cultivate a lifestyle of forgiveness both for others and for ourselves. We need to learn again and again that our righteousness is not of our own doing. It is a gift of God to repentant sinners.

Thankfulness is another counteragent to stress. It is easy in strange settings to notice everything that goes wrong and overlook the many things that have gone well. If we stop to think about the events of the day, we will find many moments of joy—mastering a new verb, making a new acquaintance, or watching with awe the sun's setting. Joy and thankfulness contribute a great deal to a peaceful life.

Treat ourselves. There are times in cross-cultural situations when, no matter how hard we try, our stress levels go up. Even our efforts to reduce tension produce more of it. We are simply fed up with the whole situation and want to leave. At such times we need to treat ourselves and withdraw from our involvement in the new culture. We may read a good book, go on a family picnic, or take a few days off. Sometimes, when homesickness for our original culture becomes too strong, it helps to go to the city and eat at a restaurant in a modern hotel. We all retain identities rooted in the cultures of our childhood, and we cannot starve those identities completely. Often a brief involvement in our first culture is all we need to prepare us for re-immersing ourselves in the new society.

A word of caution is needed here. When we go overseas, there is always the temptation to withdraw from the people and form a small

ghetto of our own. While this may temporarily reduce our stress, in the long run it prevents our entry into the new culture, which would reduce in turn the stress arising from living outside the local cultural frame.

Treating ourselves also implies that we can monitor the timing of particularly stressful situations. There are times when we are prepared to venture into bold new experiences and other times when we are already under such stress that we need to avoid them. Learning a new culture always involves stress, which is essential for growth. What we need is not stress avoidance, but stress management.

Share burdens. Paul advises us to bear one another's burdens, and this is particularly appropriate in missionary service. A missionary needs to be concerned with the burdens of others, particularly those of his or her spouse and children. This can help prevent the self-centeredness that is a by-product of high stress.

This advice, however, has two sides to it. While we are encouraged to bear the burdens of others, we must be willing to share our own with them and permit them to help carry the load. It is essential that as missionaries we find others to whom we can tell our troubles and turn for advice. Too often there is a tendency to feel that now we are leaders and therefore no longer need someone to pastor us. Nothing is farther from the truth. It is precisely as missionaries that we have the greatest need for someone to whom we can turn for spiritual and personal counsel. Like all vocations, being a missionary has its own problems and temptations. Unfortunately, mission agencies often do not arrange for someone to pastor those in the field, so missionaries are left to find someone on their own.

Beyond Culture Shock

Culture shock may dominate our attention in the first year or two of missionary service, but although at the time we may not believe it, this is a passing experience associated with entry into a new society. Not so with culture learning, which can and should continue throughout our entire ministry.

But culture shock is an important experience, for through it we develop the attitudes and types of relationships that will characterize the nature and effectiveness of our ministry in that society. It is crucial, therefore, for us to know what is happening to us when we enter a new culture, and to mold our responses accordingly.

Alicja Iwanska (1978:701-702) captured well the essence of cross-cultural attitudes and relationships, in her analysis of people living in

the northwestern United States. She found that they tend to divide their world into three broad domains of experience. The first is "scenery." This includes nature, the weather, politics, sports, and other events over which they have little control. Scenery provides them with topics for most of their casual conversations. They discuss the seasons, the climate of world affairs, and the Olympics. They suffer through vacations so that they can talk about them later at work and church.

The second domain, according to Iwanska, is "machinery." This includes the "tools" people use for work and for accomplishing their goals. Tools are cared for so long as they are repairable and needed, and then they are discarded. Tools include tractors and livestock, pencils and books, chairs and beds, clothes and homes. They are anything people use to "do the job." They are possessions.

Finally, Iwanska says, these Americans have a domain for "people." These are human beings to whom they relate, who are seen as thinking, feeling, and caring people like themselves.

The significant finding of Iwanska's research is that the group she studied did not see all humans as "people." They saw strange people, such as the American Indians, as "scenery." They visited the reservations the same way they went to a zoo, to see the sights. Moreover, they saw workers, such as Mexican migrant laborers, as "machinery," valued for their productivity and discarded like an old tool when they were no longer useful. The only humans the Americans saw as real "people" tended to be relatives and friends.

The importance of this illustration for young missionaries is obvious. We all tend to treat strange people and new cultures as scenery. We also tend to see those who work for us as machines, whether they are secretaries, nurses, or servants. The most crucial change that must take place in our adjustment to a new culture is to learn to see its people as "people"—as human beings like ourselves—and their culture as our culture. We need to draw a mental circle around them and us and say "we." We need to break down the barrier that separates us into "we" and "they." But this lesson is not new. It lies at the heart of the Christian message of love.