

*Dancing*  
B E T W E E N  
*Cultures*

**CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT COACHING**  
for MISSIONS and MINISTRY

TINA STOLTZFUS HORST, M.S.

Life Development Publishing

v

Copyright © 2017 by Tina Stoltzfus Horst

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
<b>Section One: The Basics of Cross-Cultural Coaching</b>	<b>9</b>
Chapter 1 Diving into Culture	11
Chapter 2 Faith and Culture	21
Chapter 3 Lining up with Love	29
Chapter 4 Cultural Intelligence 101	35
Chapter 5 Becoming a Culturally Intelligent Coach	43
Chapter 6 Cultural Values	55
<b>Section Two: Cultural Values in Coaching</b>	<b>63</b>
Chapter 7 Autonomy and Community Values	65
Chapter 8 Applying Autonomy and Community Values to Coaching	73
Chapter 9 Risk and Caution Values	85
Chapter 10 Crisis and Non-Crisis Values	97
Chapter 11 Status and Equality Values	107
Chapter 12 Applying Status and Equality Values to Coaching	117
Chapter 13 Dichotomistic and Holistic Values	129
Chapter 14 Conceptual and Practical Values	141
Chapter 15 Task and Relationship Values	149
Chapter 16 Direct and Indirect Values	165
Chapter 17 Concealment and Vulnerability Values	177
Chapter 18 Time and Event Values	191
Chapter 19 Long Term and Short Term Values	201
<b>Section Three: Completing the Dance</b>	<b>207</b>
Chapter 20 Virtues of the Culturally Intelligent Christian Coach	209
Skills of the Culturally Intelligent Christian Coach	
Chapter 21 Assessment	221
Chapter 22 Utilizing Multiple Perspectives	229
Chapter 23 Culture Transformation	239
Chapter 24 Challenges to Finishing Well	247
Chapter 25 Responding to the Challenges: Discovering Shalom	255
<b>An Invitation</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Appendix: Cultural Values Chart</b>	<b>265</b>



## Introduction

On my first trip to India, I was asked by my hosts to meet with some of their friends and colleagues who did not have access to Christian life/leadership coaching or mental health counseling. I was trained in both at the time, so I quickly agreed. I live to help. Why wouldn't I use my skills if people had need of them?

With less than a week in-country, I began meeting with people. The first woman I met, Usha, was older than me by at least ten years and married with three sons, two of them adults. Her husband had a good job with a multinational corporation. It became clear early in our session that Usha, a talented, competent, and generous woman whom my hosts highly respected, felt stuck. She was not satisfied with her life at home, but saw few options for change. It was also clear that the men in her life had more power than she did and that everyone around her had expectations of her, about which she was ambivalent.

I used basic life coaching skills of intent listening, reflecting her words back to her, and summarizing. After we had explored her situation, I asked her about options for change. I asked vision questions. What do you see yourself doing when your last child leaves home? What do you see as your destiny or calling apart from your family? What is God saying to you about that?

I also asked questions to help her shift perspective. What would it be like if you felt more powerful in your marriage? What are some other ways to deal with your sons? I asked ownership questions. What do *you* want? What will *you* do to change this situation? What sacrifices will *you* make to get what you need? How will *you* change?

We got nowhere. At each point, Usha politely deferred or went around the question. Or she would offer something, then say it was not possible. She was very polite. I was very frustrated. At the end of an hour, no action steps had resulted. Going another half hour did not result in any either. At the end of ninety minutes, we said our polite goodbyes.

My sense at the time about that coaching conversation was that Usha was not ready to change. Years later, I have a very different perspective. Usha was taking

a courageous step to talk to a stranger about her home life. There may have been much more going on than she shared in that session. In fact, I would guess there was a lot more. Coming from a culture that valued concealment of vulnerabilities and indirect communication, it's amazing she told me any details at all about her relationship with her husband. Because her culture was Status oriented, and I was younger with younger children, it was even more a step of faith for her to consult with me. She may have done it only to honor the recommendation of our mutual friend. In fact, the entire meeting with me was likely very much out of her comfort zone.

My expectations that Usha could imagine and articulate new ideas, develop action steps, and move forward decisively to change her destiny stemmed from my own direct and egalitarian cultural values that embrace individual autonomy, initiative, and straightforward communication.

Usha very likely entered the session with none of those expectations. In her culture, status is seen as fixed, and individuals have little ability to change or impact their destiny.

Furthermore, taking action without having the blessing of others, especially those of higher status, may not have been a part of Usha's thinking. Deciding to significantly change what she did with her time might be analogous to an employee in my own culture deciding, without the knowledge or approval of their boss, to simply change their job description from cashier to manager and begin managing the store, starting today!

Because of these fundamental differences in cultural values and expectations, many of my questions may not have made sense to Usha. For example, my asking her what she wanted to do *apart from* her family would have seemed a very alien concept. How does one answer a question like that when you have lived within a web of relationships that define your identity since birth? The concept that she could feel more "powerful" in her marriage may have seemed equally alien. Finally, an indirect orientation in her culture would have predisposed Usha to go around obstacles rather than to confront or change them directly, as I would be likely to do. Questions about how she could adapt might have been a better fit than those asking her what obstacles or challenges she could act on to change.

As I reflect on this encounter now, I realize I would coach Usha very differently if I had it to do again. I did not use poor coaching technique. Let me repeat that! I did not use poor coaching technique. In other words, I employed active listening, used great questions, moved the conversation towards options, decision, action, and so on. But my approach and my understandings did not fit Usha's

culture. My own cultural expectations and values shaped my questions, the way I explained coaching, and my approach to the session. Therefore, I did not serve my client well. One of the things I most wish I had done is to have told Usha how honored I was that she confided in me. And I would have approached that session with ten times more humility the second time around.

As the founder and executive director of Coaching Mission International (CMI), an organization providing professional level life/leadership coaching and coach training to the missions world, I've spent the last decade learning how to adapt the coaching paradigm successfully in cross-cultural contexts. When I first began my training as a coach many years ago, I was an American with little cross-cultural experience or savvy. Within my first semester of coach training, God sent me clients who were living and working cross-culturally. These relationships grew and flourished, resulting in more opportunities to coach across cultures as well as invitations to teach, learn, and serve in Asia and Europe.

I learned to coach across cultures through trial and error as I worked with clients from six continents, logging thousands of hours of coaching and training. The people I learned most from were my own clients, both expats (expatriates or those who live in a country that is not their own) and indigenous leaders, passionately serving God around the world. Walking alongside these often-lonely leaders gave me a deep passion to see them resourced and supported. CMI was born as a result. Since its inception in 2006, CMI has provided tens of thousands of hours of coaching and coach training to leaders from over sixty countries in more than a dozen languages.<sup>1</sup>



*If we  
want to serve all  
our coaching clients  
with excellence, we  
must learn to adapt our  
coaching skills and  
paradigms cross-  
culturally.*

This book is about faith-based coaching. Specifically, Christian coaching. Christian coaches operate out of the awareness that God is the one who initiates and invites growth in people's lives. As Christian coaches, we get front row seats for the Spirit-inspired change process. Our goal is to be aware of and stay in step with what God is doing—God's pace, God's timing, and God's purposes—and to help the coachee become aware of and congruent with God's action in their lives. Jesus just did what the Father was doing, and that's what we get to do too.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Coaching Mission International, go to [www.coachingmission.com](http://www.coachingmission.com).

As coaches, we want to imitate Christ in attitude as well as in our actions. As my brother, Tony Stoltzfus, director of the Leadership MetaFormation Institute, and author of the bestseller *Leadership Coaching: The Disciplines, Skills, and Heart of a Coach*, often reminds us, we want to see our clients with God's eyes and to believe intentionally and concretely in the potential God has placed within them.

Before we go on, let me first introduce just what life and/or leadership coaching is to any reader not familiar with the terminology. For many, the term "coaching" raises a visual image of sports coaching. A sports coach yells directions from the sidelines or drills their team on a particular skill or play. But the terms "coach" and "coaching" have widened tremendously in this century beyond just sports coaching. Many roles that used to have consultant, pastor, or mentor in their title or job description now use the term "coach". Coaching can be a great method of helping people grow in a variety of contexts. Yet coaching is not simply mentoring, consulting, pastoring, or discipling under a different name.

The type of coaching addressed in this book is coaching that comes alongside another person, team, or organization to help them reach their potential. In this kind of coaching, coaches are not necessarily experts on a particular subject who might advise clients on action (as a therapist or mentor might), drill them on skills (as a sports coach or trainer might do), or even teach them better understanding (as a disciple-maker or pastor might). Life and leadership coaches are experts in the process of growth. They help coachees grow more effectively, quickly, and deeply, maximizing client potential. The coach's job is to provide encouragement, support, and accountability as the coachee determines goals and subsequent action steps. This kind of "coming alongside" is present and future oriented. It results in action, development, and change. Coaches can help coachees grow externally in their performance and effectiveness, transformationally in their character and inner resources, or both.

Part of the coach's expertise is managing the coaching conversation to aid in the growth process. The client leads in terms of direction: setting goals, developing options, deciding on action. The coach provides a conversational structure that leads towards growth. The conversational model referenced in this book is the "coaching funnel". The coaching funnel is a visual representation of the stages in a coaching conversation, including goal setting, exploring, options, decision, and action steps. After the first session, reporting/reflecting on progress also happens at the beginning of the funnel. For a great explanation of this model for the coaching conversation, consult *Coaching Questions*.<sup>2</sup>

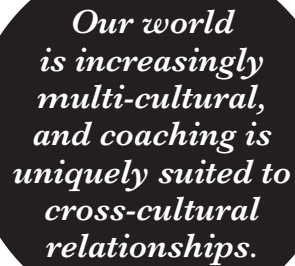
<sup>2</sup> Tony Stoltzfus, *Coaching Questions: A Coach's Guide to Powerful Asking Skills* (Redding, CA: Coach22, 2008), 30-31.

Coaching is at heart walking alongside the coachee, helping them reach for their potential in a new area, achieve a goal they have dreamed of for years, or struggle through a difficult transition and come out more virtuous, grateful, or resilient. We partner with God when we walk alongside others and help them grow.

I believe that coaching's time has come. Our world is increasingly multi-cultural, and coaching is uniquely suited to cross-cultural relationships. Our clientele is becoming—and will continue to become—more diverse. Greater mobility means we can serve those who've come from other cultures to our communities, churches, and organizations as new neighbors, partners, students, and visitors, and we can also travel to other places to coach among new people groups and nationalities. Continuing innovation in information and communication technologies means we can connect with new clients from other countries and language groups over Skype, cell phones, video conferencing, or webinars. Our teams and businesses will continue to become more multicultural. As Christians, being conversant with other cultures not only broadens our effectiveness with clients, but deepens our understanding and experience of God. And so, the necessity to understand culture and its global variants is a foundational skill for the twenty-first century coach.

To tackle this new frontier, great coaching technique and great heart are not enough. We cannot get by just by being great coaches. I am continually surprised when I hear otherwise savvy and experienced coaches tell me that they don't adapt their coaching style or approach when coaching someone from another culture. From my perspective, that's like refusing to switch from driving my car on the right side of the road in North America to driving on the left British-style on the streets of Ireland, India, or South Africa. Roads and motor vehicles may be similar in both scenarios, but refusing to adapt from my own culture's driving regulations is likely to end in a painful traffic collision. We shouldn't assume, as I did with Usha, that because we know how to coach in our own culture, the process, assumptions, or procedure for doing so will be the same in another culture.

Developing the cultural intelligence needed to coach excellently in cross-cultural settings requires inner transformation as well as new understandings and skills. I want to join God in his fierce love for all people. To do that, I must be willing to be changed in the process. As coaches, we know that growth takes time,



*Our world  
is increasingly  
multi-cultural,  
and coaching is  
uniquely suited to  
cross-cultural  
relationships.*

commitment, and the humble willingness to learn from our mistakes. If we want to serve our coaching clients well and if we hope to help others reach their potential, grow in character and Christlikeness, increase impact, and develop their gifts, we must learn to adapt our coaching skills and paradigms cross-culturally. That will require perseverance and sacrifice.

Are you a Christian coach working in your church or community, in business, with executives, in missions, in education, in health services, or some other niche? Is it your desire to become equipped to serve others with culturally intelligent coaching? Then this book is for you. Multiculturalism is here. Don't miss out!

This book is intended both as an introduction to faith-based culturally intelligent coaching and a continuing reference for new situations and cultures that the Christian cross-cultural coach might encounter. If you are a coach who has never coached cross-culturally, my hope is that in reading this book you will begin to understand and deepen your cultural intelligence. May you catch as well the incredible excitement and potential of cross fertilization that coaching across cultures brings.

If you've coached across cultures and been frustrated or wondered if you've failed, I hope you'll gain confidence, anticipation, and curiosity for what faith-filled, culturally intelligent coaching can look like. You will also learn practical ways to be effective in your cross-cultural coaching relationships. And if you already love coaching cross-culturally, I hope you'll pick up new insights and techniques, deepening your vision and anticipation of the positive impact culturally sensitive coaching can have.

It's important to note that the concepts in this book go well beyond coaching and can be useful for cross-cultural conversations and cross-cultural leadership in general. If you are not a coach, but are working or living cross-culturally, understanding and applying the principles and values in the following chapters will result in increasingly fruitful conversations across cultures.

The book is organized into sections for easier reference. Section One will answer the following basic questions as they relate to cross-cultural coaching: What is culture? How does it relate to faith? What is cultural intelligence, and how can it be developed? What are cultural values? Why are they important? These chapters are foundational to understanding the rest of the book.

Section Two is a set of chapters on various cross-cultural values. This section can be read in its entirety, or you can simply use it as a reference when you are



coaching others with differing cultural values. These chapters identify the principles and basic understandings about each value continuum, then go into detail about how to apply these in coaching. You'll discover how cultural values actually look and sound in the coaching relationship along with tips and stories from a multitude of coaches who are working cross-culturally. Depending on who and where you are coaching, some chapters may be more applicable to your needs. Any time you begin coaching a new client whose culture or values are unfamiliar to you, you can use these values chapters to gain understanding of what issues might arise.

Finally, Section Three covers virtues and skills that are critical for the cross-cultural coach. This includes character qualities like flexibility and skills such as assessment. We will also discuss the vital need for self-care in order to finish well in the challenging arena of culturally intelligent coaching.

How you read the book is as important as its content. As you peruse the material, I encourage you to experience it rather than approach it studiously or academically. God welcomes us to enjoy him through a growing relationship with him. Approach this process in similar fashion. Rather than thinking of culturally intelligent coaching as a discipline to be mastered, a course to be studied, or a skill to be obtained, allow yourself to approach it the way you might look forward to gaining a new friend. Growth comes as you learn to know and appreciate a new person over time.

Similarly, when it comes to cross-cultural coaching, expect fits and starts rather than smooth, upward progress. Gaining cultural intelligence means growing and allowing oneself to be transformed in the process. You won't accomplish that just by reading a book. As a coach, you know that learning happens when motivation combines with relationship, reflection, vision for the future, concrete goals, and practical application.

To help you internalize the material, you'll find questions for reflection and exercises to practice at the end of most chapters and sometimes in the middle. I also highly encourage you to find someone to coach cross-culturally while reading the material so that you have a context for application and insight. And of course, find a peer coach or mentor coach to walk with you. Doing the reflection exercises with a peer will help you apply new discoveries and understandings.

Take it slow. Read, reflect, apply, and practice. Gain vision and set goals. Read some more. Talk to other coaches who are on this journey. Consider starting a mastermind group. Coach cross-cultural clients. Read. Apply. Practice. Learn. And enjoy!

# *The Basics of Cross-Cultural Coaching*

- Diving into Culture
- Faith and Culture
- Lining up with Love
- Cultural Intelligence 101
- Becoming a Culturally Intelligent Coach
  - Cultural Values

# *Diving into Culture*

At 9:00 a.m. EST, I put on my headset, open my computer, and tap on my GoToMeeting invitation. It's time for the CMI (Coaching Mission International) quarterly staff meeting. We always meet at 9:00 a.m. because it's the only time that works. It's 6:00 a.m. for our west coast staff, 6:30 p.m. for those in Southeast Asia and 9:00 p.m. for those in the Far East. Jeremiah has the worst connection, and sometimes it's hard to catch all his ideas because of the static on the line and the cadence of his African-flavored English. We spend the first minutes sharing stories, laughing, and commenting on current events and headlines. After the meeting, our action steps are posted on our common project page, which we can all access online.

Ten years ago, our far-flung virtual organization would not have been possible. Today, with staff and partners on three continents and trainees on six, we communicate, meet, and work together almost entirely over the internet for little or no cost.

Our twenty-first century world has the technology to interconnect across national boundaries easily, quickly, and for the most part cheaply. Ideas travel the globe over the web. We Skype or phone partners, friends, and colleagues on the other side of the world instantly. Fashions, fads, news, and products move across the planet at lightning speed. We are connected at an unprecedented level.

All this multicultural mixing, high-speed communication, and crisscrossing currents of globalization might lead us to believe that cultures are becoming more and more alike and that the concept of unique "cultures" is on the wane. To the contrary, many experts believe that culture becomes even more important in the face of globalization. People and societies find national, religious, and ethnic identity in their traditional local culture. In fact, culture in many ways is more owned and celebrated now than a few decades back. Locally grown food, locally made products, and local businesses are increasingly perceived as important.

Customs and languages are recorded and celebrated. Businesses talk equally of globalization and “localization” (tailoring a product or service for a local market and culture so that the product/service looks and feels as if developed locally). In an increasingly confusing and fast-paced world, culture and cultural values provide a sense of identity and security. Professor of missions Dr. James Plueddemann states in his book *Leading across Cultures*:

While the externals of clothing, food, music, transportation and the internet are changing and making the world more homogeneous, deep cultural values seem to be ever more stable and enduring. Globalization might make us look more alike on the outside, but localization reinforces the deepest inner being of our identities . . . The more we interact with each other, the more we need to understand each other’s underlying cultural values.<sup>3</sup>

## What is Culture?

So, what exactly do we mean by the word “culture”? Culture is the distinctive characteristics—including values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors—shared by a group (region, nation, people group, social group, or organization). I like Across Cultures, Inc. founder and president Brooks Peterson’s definition in his book *Cultural Intelligence*:

Culture is the relatively stable set of inner values and beliefs generally held by groups of people in countries or regions and the noticeable impact those values and beliefs have on the peoples’ outward behaviors and environment.<sup>4</sup>

Let’s look a little more closely at these definitions:

- Culture is what makes different groups distinctive.
- Culture starts at the internal level of attitudes, values, and beliefs, which then shape externally noticeable behaviors and customs.
- Many types of groups can be said to have a “culture”. We can talk about national culture, regional culture, a church’s culture, or organizational culture.

That last point is particularly important. The concept of culture does not just apply to nations or people groups, but also to organizations, denominations, corporations, and churches. Learning about culture can be helpful to us as we cross

<sup>3</sup> James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 73.

<sup>4</sup> Brooks Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence: A Guide to Working with People from Other Cultures*, (Boston, MA: Intercultural Press, 2004), 17.

religious and generational boundaries. Understanding the concept of culture and gaining familiarity with cultural values will serve us well if we move from one region of our own country to another region. Or if a ministry takes us to a variety of different churches or back and forth between denominations. Perhaps you are an executive coach who coaches leaders from several corporations or an organizational coach who works with a range of NGOs. Or perhaps like me you are a missions coach who serves leaders from many different sending and aid organizations. In any of these situations, the understandings of culture we gain now will apply and help us to better serve our coaching clients.



### ***Take a Minute***

- *Think back to the first time you entered a particular culture. What do you remember about that initial encounter?*
  - *Take a minute to re-immerseself in that situation. What did you notice? What caught your attention in the first minutes or hours?*
- 

I remember the first time I exited the airport in India. After a flight of more than eighteen hours, I emerged bleary-eyed from a surprisingly easy walk through security. Clutching our luggage tightly to our sides, my companions and I followed the flow of passengers towards the outside doors and the night sky. Our friends would be meeting us in the parking area for the three-hour drive to their flat in a neighboring city.

Nothing prepared me for the mass of people jostling and pressing against the barricades as we exited those doors. The outside lights hurt my tired, jet-lagged eyes, and I squinted to try to see our friends amidst the crush. People were shouting in what sounded like a variety of languages. I could not tease out any meaning; it was just a wall of sound. The heat and humidity hit me. Smells of sewage, sweat, curry, and exhaust fumes swept over me.

I could not see our friends, and the momentum of those behind us was carrying us right into the crowd. I tried to draw back as hands reached out to us, but we were surrounded. Then our friends, who had waited from behind the crowd, extracted us with confident ease, greeting us with “Namaste!” (a common Hindi

greeting), warm smiles, and water bottles as they led us to their car and driver. Ah! Welcome to India!

Often what stands out when we arrive in a new region or encounter a new culture through a new client are the external behaviors and customs. We notice that people maintain a foot or so of personal space in public places—or not. They eat plain, non-spicy food—or not. They employ drivers and maids—or not. Different ways of dressing. Different rules about personal space. Different food. Different art and music. Different pace. Different smells and sights. Different greeting rituals. These evidences of a different culture that we encounter with our five senses are what we will generally notice first.

*The most crucial characteristic of culture to understand here is that the internal level of cultural values, beliefs, and norms powers the external customs, manners, and behaviors that we see and experience.*

However, the most crucial characteristic of culture to understand here is that the *internal* level of cultural values, beliefs, and norms powers the *external* customs, manners, and behaviors that we see and experience. Some of you might be thinking at this point: “Okay, enough. This is sounding way too complicated, and I’ve got lots of tools in my coaching toolbox already. Frankly, reminding me of how it feels to enter or experience a new culture is uncomfortable and provokes anxiety. I think I’ll just stick with ‘my own kind’.”

It is a common human drive/behavior to want to hang out with like-minded friends and colleagues. But in this era of globalization, new and unfamiliar cultures are hard to get away from. As coaches, we know that growth and change are uncomfortable. This is equally true with growing in cultural intelligence, so expect to experience some discomfort.

Others of you might be thinking instead: “Blah, blah, blah. I know this stuff already. I’ve traveled a lot, and I know how cultures are different.”

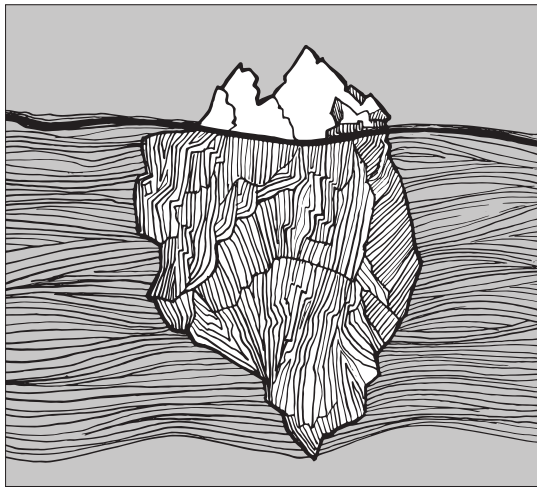
But do you? As I’ve talked with those who’ve traveled extensively and even lived in other countries for years, it’s surprising how often they do not understand the deeper internal issues of culture. Or they have learned through trial and error about the hidden values of the country they have lived in for a decade, but they still don’t know the principles behind those values. Understanding those principles would enable them to quickly identify deep cultural differences, thereby allowing them to enter (or coach!) a brand-new culture with relative ease.

For instance, an expat may understand that in Uzbekistan leaders are not openly challenged and subordinates are expected to follow instructions. The expat may have adapted well to this. When leading, he/she does not delegate easily and expects subordinates to follow through on given instructions. When following, this expat does not take initiative or challenge the group leader in public.

But what this expat does not understand is that these ways of leading and following are powered by a value for hierarchical relationships rather than flat or equal relationships. They reflect a deep belief in the principle that hierarchy brings stability and security at all levels of society. The expat may not realize that national cultures as diverse as France and China hold this value. Or that a whole set of identifiable beliefs that power behaviors is associated consistently across cultures with this particular value.

### **Beneath the Waterline**

So, how can we get to those crucial internal realities that power the external differences we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell every time we enter a new culture? One helpful way to visualize this is to think of an iceberg.



Generally, only one-tenth of an iceberg is visible above the waterline. This makes it difficult to judge accurately the shape of the remaining ninety percent that is underwater simply by looking at the part of the iceberg that is visible. Ships are often sunk, not because of that part of the iceberg sailors can see, but the part they can't see.

When it comes to culture, the underlying, internal factors like beliefs, values, and unspoken expectations determine the external behaviors and customs. In the coaching relationship, we are more likely to run aground or sink the relationship when we ignore the part of the iceberg that is below the waterline. We must intentionally bring what is normally unconscious and below the waterline into our awareness.

So, what's down there under the water? Many psychologists visualize personality as being a "below the waterline" construct. Personality preferences measured with standardized tests or structured interviews such as the Myers Briggs Temperament Indicator (MBTI), the Big Five, the DISC, or even the motivational gifts list from Romans 12 help us understand ourselves and others as individuals.

Cultural values are the other main "below the waterline" component. Culture is learned from the external world. It is picked up from an individual's environment, family, experiences, even the structure of one's first language. The aggregate sum of this learning becomes a largely unconscious set of values that operate internally. We'll delve deeply into cultural values in Section Two of this book. As with personality, it is critical that we understand our *own* cultural preferences as well as those of our clients.

The influence of these hidden components of the iceberg cannot be underestimated. Culture shapes how we relate to each other, how we express emotion, how we deal with conflict, how our teams function, how our homes and cities are laid out, how people are governed and participate in that government. Culture touches every aspect of our lives and relationships.

## The Culture Box

One of the clients I coach regularly is a highly-motivated planner who always shows up to his appointments on time and nearly always has his action steps completed. He is prepared for the appointment and generally has already taken time to reflect on what he has learned in the last month leading up to our session. This client is from an Event oriented, Non-Crisis culture which values flexibility over punctuality and spontaneity over planning. However, my client is by personality a highly organized, attention-to-detail STJ on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. In other words, he is a thinker who is concrete and lives in the present; who thrives in a controlled and organized work environment.

In this case, understanding the client's personality style was more helpful than understanding the cultural values in his environment. It is important to pay at-



tention to cultural patterns, but also to pay attention to the gifts, personality, and experiences that motivate and shape our individual cross-cultural clients.

As we discover more about the power of culture in following chapters, the temptation may be to fit everything into the “culture box”—i.e., to consider all issues the client faces as being derived from cultural issues. Don’t do it! God in his infinite creative ability made all of us human and yet all of us unique. We are each someone who brings particular value to his family. We are layers of personality, gifting, and culture with a dose of common humanity, salted with the image of God and overlaid with the development of skills and gaining of experience throughout our lifetimes. As you work with your clients, don’t lay down your other coaching tools. Coaching expert Dr. Keith Webb, founder of Creative Results Management, states:

It’s critical for coaches working with culturally diverse clients to understand basic differences in culture. However, it is not necessary to be a cultural expert. The more important thing is to embrace two contrasting mindsets: a) each person is unique, with his own values, personality, and motivations; and b) there are broad cultural similarities that make people similar.<sup>5</sup>

Remember too that cultural values are what make groups distinctive. Simply because an individual belongs to a particular people group or organization does not mean that individual will share the values of that group. I recently took the CQ Self-Assessment survey, which is a self-inventory of cultural intelligence capabilities and cultural value orientations available from the Cultural Intelligence Center.<sup>6</sup> Though I am an American from one of the most highly individualistic cultures in the world, I had an extremely high score in “collectivism” (or Community orientation), the opposite of individualism. Because I believe passionately in gift-based ministry, I place a high value on working in teams and making decisions that draw on the gifts and perspective of each member. My values about community are more typically in agreement with my Asian clients than my neighbors in Indiana.

So, while we can state, for example, that the American culture is highly individualistic, we cannot assume that every individual in the United States shares this value or shares it to the same degree. Dr. David B. Peterson, Director of

---

5 Dr. Keith E. Webb, “Cross Cultural Coaching,” In *Coaching in Asia: The First Decade*, edited by Denise Wright, Anna Leong, Keith E. Webb, and Sam Chia. (Singapore: Candid Creation Publishing, 2010), 21.

6 Self-Assessments provide feedback on how individuals view their own CQ capabilities. Participants complete online surveys and receive a feedback report on their CQ capabilities.

Executive Coaching and Leadership at Google, writes in his article “Executive Coaching in a Cross-cultural Context”:

An understanding of a culture may tell you a lot about a given group, (but) it does not necessarily tell you much about any given individual.<sup>7</sup>

Learning about culture gives you new tools for your coach’s toolkit. But the tools are there to help you find out more about your individual client, not to rigidly stereotype according to culture.

For example, n-Culture, a network of practitioners offering training in faith-based inter-cultural intelligence, in its *Faith & Culture* curriculum, describes the importance of recognizing that for certain populations such as expatriates, Third Culture Kids (TCKs), and internationals (those who have spent much of their life moving between cultures) “you cannot describe people in terms of national culture when this is your audience. When you work with a client like this, you must identify individual worldviews and value dimensions.” n-Culture calls this concept “inter-cultural intelligence”.<sup>8</sup>

One interesting point to understand as we delve deeper into this book is that our cultural background itself will influence how valid we find concepts about cultural values and cultural intelligence. Those from individualistic (Autonomy) cultures will be more likely to link the roots of behavior to individual factors like personality or character. If we come from an individualistic culture, which many Western cultures are, we may resist the idea that some of our behaviors are culture based and not solely determined by our uniqueness or our own conscious choices. On the other hand, if we come from group cultures, we need to keep in mind that individual attributes such as personal experience, values, and personality can significantly influence cultural norms and behaviors.

As we read, learn, and apply new knowledge, we need to remember that culture is only one way to understand ourselves and our clients. All of us are multi-layered, and all of us are more than our culture.

## Becoming Self-Aware

When I trained as a coach, I spent a whole semester focusing on life purpose coaching. The process went beyond knowledge to personal application. That semester I wrote my own mission statement and identified my own core values.

---

<sup>7</sup> David B. Peterson, “Executive Coaching in a Cross Cultural Context,” *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* (December 2007), 262.

<sup>8</sup> [www.n-culture.com](http://www.n-culture.com)

Many of us have gone through a similar process in coach training. My mission statement, retooled a couple times, still hangs over my desk, and I refer to my ten core values frequently. For instance, I have a strong value for gift-based teams, and that has shaped the organization I founded in significant ways. I continue to choose ministry opportunities based on the possibility of working with a team. I feel naked without teammates around me.



### *Take a Minute*

- *Identify a core value of your own and take a few minutes to think about how that core value powers your behavior.*
- 

Clinical psychologist and coach Gary Collins writes in his book *Christian Coaching*:

Effective coaches know themselves . . . Good coaches are aware of their own core values and beliefs long before they get involved with clients who may have different values.<sup>9</sup>

All of us who have gone through a thorough process of coach training know how crucial it is for coaches to be growing in self-awareness, to continue to learn, and to be aware of their own values. Coaching is built on relationships, and the person of the coach is key in the coaching process. Understanding and owning our own sense of mission as well as identifying our core values are both important because these shape who we are and how we respond to the world. But what I did not learn in coach training was that my values, for instance my value for gift-based teams, were not only shaped by my personality, gift set, experience, and understanding of Scripture, but by deep-level cultural values.

In fact, I've come to recognize that even how I understand Scripture itself is shaped by my cultural heritage and milieu. My understanding of what it means to function as a team is rooted at a deep level in my culture. For instance, I like to work in teams of equals, therefore I prefer collaborative decision-making. To me such collaboration seems inherent in the very concept of gift-based teams. Colleagues from other cultures also share a value for gift-based teams. But their

<sup>9</sup> Gary Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality*. 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, Nav Press, 2002), 34.

cultural background influences their expectations about what this will look like. For them, hierarchy within the team is assumed. Since I am the director, they look to me as the person who will make decisions and wield influence. For them, hierarchy is inherent in the concept of gift-based teams.

My own original coach training included no mention of culture and the deep and profound impact this has on my own expectations and behaviors. However, as we delve into coaching relationships with those from other cultures, it is absolutely crucial that we develop self-awareness about our own cultural background and values as well as a basic understanding about how that background and those values shaped us. What assumptions, motivations, values, and beliefs power our own behaviors? If we are not aware of these, we cannot adapt to the needs of our clients or learn to leverage our own and our clients' values for growth and transformation. As professor of anthropology Sherwood Lingenfelter writes in his book *Ministering Cross-Culturally*:

For the Christian who seeks to serve . . . another culture, knowing one's cultural bias is essential to effective ministry. Once we have understood the power of our cultural habits over us, we are more ready to call on the spiritual power and freedom we enjoy in Christ to break the habits of our culture, to let go of them, and to enter into another culture to help those people encounter Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Remember Usha, the first South Asian client I coached? I failed to effectively help her because not only did I not understand *her* cultural context, I did not understand *my own*! I had not examined my own cultural assumptions and beliefs, so I did not see how they influenced my coaching style and even the questions I posed to her. As you continue this journey towards cultural understanding, please do not focus only on your clients. Take the time to think through your own cultural values. Become aware of the ways those values shape your behavior, attitudes, and beliefs, even the way you approach Scripture. Learn to know *yourself* in a deeper and more profound way, so that you will be a more effective instrument of God as you serve others through coaching.

---

<sup>10</sup> Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 12.

# Faith and Culture

Romans 1:20: For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

Ephesians 5:2, *The Message*: Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

My dad was a biologist. One of the things he loved to do as a family was share his curiosity about the natural world. In the spring, he'd gather up all five of his children, bundle us into his old tan-and-brown station wagon, and head for the mountains to find and identify wildflowers. Once we arrived, we would trail through the forested hillsides, Dad out in front scouting for the good finds. Picture five children under the age of nine, all kitted out in jackets and boots, grubby and rambunctious, paper bags in hand for collecting our treasures. Dad would turn over musty, decayed logs to show us insects. He'd spot the least obvious of tiny flowers. I believe his satisfaction was simply in loving and enjoying creation and sharing it with us.

This is the kind of joyful curiosity and delight I believe God, our heavenly parent, has in the diversity of creation and the diversity of his people. Becoming a culturally intelligent coach is one of the most fun and rewarding journeys around. There is always something new to learn—and coaches love that, right? But what motivates me most is joining God in his great love for his people around the world. Becoming a culturally intelligent Christian coach means learning to not just accept, but love and delight in the diversity of culture expressed in God's people.

*Love  
is the  
foundation stone  
for culturally  
intelligent  
relationships.*

One of my South African friends, Carl, works in the Middle East. He is passionate about his work, but even more passionate about the people—now his people—whom he coaches and works with. Carl loves his people and finds great joy and care in coaching them. Here is his account of being adopted by the Middle East:

My previous experience was in Africa, and I had very little appreciation and understanding of Arab culture.

Twenty years ago, I went to Jerusalem and met a ministry leader I knew there. We traveled into the old city of Jerusalem. The noises, the people, the smells all hit me. I was really impacted by watching how this guy interacted with the people. I decided to stay for a while and moved in with a local family. I remember I had a lot of trouble adjusting, especially to the food. It was so weird! And I hate olives. There were no sweets except this sweet cheese mixture, fried with roasted stuff in it. Oh, it was disgusting. It made me feel sick. The first year was really difficult. I thought, “I won’t be here long. This is just a transitional place.” I thought I would end up in China, but everything closed up and I went home. While there, I received a word from a friend that the Arab people would become my people, my family. That even the food would become part of me. When I came back, there was something different in my heart. The olives became my passion. Even the sweet cheese was good. I came alive. There was a difference in my heart. I knew this was my inheritance, the people God had called me to. I looked at the individuals in the context differently. There was a tremendous change inside me.<sup>11</sup>

Carl had a heart change that enabled him to embrace the Arab culture with the kind of passionate love God has. Love is the foundation stone for culturally intelligent relationships.<sup>12</sup> Loving as God does makes the learning and discovery process inherent in working cross-culturally not just possible, but joyful. The Bible is chock-full of examples of God’s great love for all of creation. Let’s take a closer look at what Scripture has to say about culture and faith.

## The Old Testament

In the creation story, which we find in the first chapter of Genesis, God started it all off by taking a dark and unformed earth and separating day and night. From

<sup>11</sup> Carl, Personal Communication, Permission granted on August 2, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 19.

the start, he began creating diversity and called it good. Just think about how many species there are of plants and animals. The vast number of stars in the sky and grains of sand on a beach. The diverse molecules, muscles, and neurons that make up our complex and extraordinary bodies.

The sheer inventiveness of our Creator is amazing to consider. He seems to have delighted in imagining crazy things like anteaters and giraffes, black holes and galaxies, colors and birdsong. Just how much God loves the earth and those who live on it is expressed through the natural world. God expects us to steward nature and care for it.

The Bible's record of diversity and culture doesn't end with the creation story. Certainly, the Old Testament is filled with cross-cultural conflict, exhortations to Israel to remain separate from other cultures, and some blatant intolerance. There are plenty of cross-cultural horror stories, but the Old Testament also includes the thread of redemption for all: God choosing to reveal himself in/through one people group (the Israelites) in order to welcome and bless the nations. Rev. Dr. Isaac Canales in his book *Multi-Ethnicity* calls this "a theology of welcome".<sup>13</sup> Beginning in Genesis, we find a hint of this trajectory: "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). This thread appears again in the book of Isaiah, chapter 56, where the Lord explicitly welcomes the foreigner who chooses to serve Him and declares: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7b).

The Israelites were God's chosen people, and his primary focus throughout the Old Testament was on them. But God also reminded Israel that he loved the aliens among them. Yahweh expected his people to also love strangers and aliens, bearing in mind their own experience as foreigners in Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). As God welcomed his chosen people repeatedly despite their repeated sin and disconnection with God, so Israel was to welcome those who were "other".<sup>14</sup>

God's long-term objective was a cross-cultural mission that would bring all people together to worship him. Jonah was sent out to proclaim God's message to another people group, the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Abraham was told that all nations will be blessed through him. In Isaiah 66:19, God told the prophet his plans for the nations:

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Canales, *Multi-Ethnicity, Global Issues Bible Studies*. Edited by Stephen Hayner and Gordon Aeschliman (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and the Lydians, to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.

When you think of creating a culture of welcome, what comes to mind? What comes to my mind is my daughter Rosie. Throughout her entire life, she has welcomed into her heart others who are different. When she was a child, we marveled at her ability to move among friend groups. Rosie was friends with extroverts and introverts, band geeks and science nerds. She had close friends among both boys and girls. The collections of people she brought together were so disparate that at times it created friction. When she was a college student at a Christian school, one of her best friends was an Iranian Muslim, despite ongoing tensions between Rosie’s own birth culture (USA) and Iran.

Being a person who embraces an attitude of welcome means embracing discomfort at times, being challenged in one’s assumptions, and going way outside of one’s comfort zone. Jonah wasn’t pleased at being sent to Nineveh, and sometimes we are not so happy about leaving the comfort and security of hanging out with those just like us. Remember my friend Carl’s discomfort during his first sojourn in the Middle East? Despite our discomfort, God invites us to create with him a culture of welcoming others who are on the outside, a mindset that sees diversity—and leans in.

As we look back at the Old Testament, we can see throughout the thread of a God who created and enjoys diversity. We learn of a God whose welcoming love for Israel models the love he has for all. Yahweh exhorted his chosen people to welcome the alien and the stranger, a foreshadowing of his ultimate intent to gather all nations and people to worship and enjoy him together.

## The Example of Jesus

And then there is Jesus. God’s purposes, character, and love for us are made clear to us through who Jesus is. The meaning of “incarnation” is a person who embodies (expresses or gives visual form to) another person, quality, or concept. Jesus embodies/incarnates who God is and what his purposes are. We understand God and his purposes by looking at Jesus. I’ve been captured by Dr. David Livermore’s phrase expressing this concept: “God speaks in Son”.<sup>15</sup>

What do we see when we look at Jesus? What can we learn from him? Sherwood Lingenfelter in *Ministering Cross-Culturally* writes:

---

<sup>15</sup> David A. Livermore and Julie Slagter, *CQ Ministry Kit*, (Cultural Intelligence Center, 2013), 22.



Jesus was a learner. He was not born with knowledge of language or culture. In this respect, he was an ordinary child. He learned the language from his parents. He learned how to play from his peers. He learned the trade of a carpenter from Joseph . . . The implications of Jesus' 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 30 years before he began his ministry.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus' divine stature as God's son is clear, yet Jesus chose to come to Earth as an ordinary, peasant-class human baby. This truly was a sacrifice made from love. One of the most important things we can learn from Jesus' example is humility: taking the posture of a learner as we enter cross-cultural relationships. We'll explore this more deeply in the chapter on Virtues of the Culturally Intelligent Christian Coach.

Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He came from heaven, but made his home on earth in first century Palestine. He was thoroughly immersed in Jewish culture and acutely aware of that culture's intersection with the Roman occupation (turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, giving to Caesar what is Caesar's). He moved between village culture and the cosmopolitan culture of urban centers like Jerusalem, whose elite had been strongly impacted by Greek values and customs.

But while Jesus constantly made reference to local culture, using examples, metaphors, and values from first century Palestine as he taught, ate, and walked with his followers, he also spoke constantly of the heavenly kingdom to which he belonged. In his well-known Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus refers to the kingdom of heaven or to heaven sixteen times in one long teaching session. But even those stories centered around his heavenly kingdom are filled with familiar cultural articles and activities—bread making, lighting a lamp, being forced to march with a soldier, tax collectors, familiar birds and wildflowers. Jesus was a master at dancing between cultures.

Jesus was tuned in both to kingdom values and to the values of the culture around him. He could function fully on earth while keeping his citizenship in heaven. He affirmed his listener's culture through his own full immersion into that culture. He honored his listeners by drawing examples from their own everyday lives. He shared life with them.

He also gave up some significant perks to become part of his listener's world. He gave up heaven! Yet Jesus also kept one foot in the heavenly realms. His ears

---

<sup>16</sup> Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 16.

and heart were tuned to his Father's voice, and he only did what he saw his Father doing. His ministry was to call his listeners to recognize the heavenly kingdom from which he came and to join fully in God's family.

Jesus' sacrifice did not end with giving up heaven. He also gave up his life to establish full and sweet communication between us and our heavenly Father. Jesus with his own body became a bridge from our earthly culture to our heavenly inheritance, the ultimate act of love for us.

What can we learn from this? We can never fully live up to Jesus' example because we don't have the capacity to be perfect as he is. But to the best of our ability, we can honor the cultures we work with and minister to. Becoming a culturally intelligent coach has a lot to do with finding ways to appreciate and even love other cultures. But being a cultural bridge—a "world Christian", as some authors term it—sometimes means laying down our own comfort, our own desires and values, our own preferences. It involves sacrificial love.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, although Jesus was immersed in the culture of first century Palestine, his first allegiance was to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was willing to challenge culture and cultural values when they clashed with kingdom values. There are times when he certainly did not hold back. Think about the culture in the temple at the time with money changers and animal sacrifices. Jesus' declaration to those doing commerce in his Father's house (Matthew 21:12-13) as he drove them out of the temple, overturning their tables and benches, was definitely not politically correct. In fact, I'd say it was politically disastrous!

Often the values that came through in Jesus' teaching felt foreign to those who listened. They continue to feel foreign to us today. This is because Jesus was living the values of another kingdom, and he was calling his listeners to be part of that kingdom while continuing to be a part of daily local culture on earth.<sup>18</sup>

As we encounter culture in our coaching work and ministry, we will discover God reflected in new and beautiful ways in other cultures. We will also encounter distortion of that beauty. As missions professor Dr. James Plueddemann says in his book *Leading Across Cultures*: "God is at work in every culture, but Satan is too."<sup>19</sup> Jesus' example shows us that our first allegiance is not to our own culture or our client's culture, but to God's values and purposes.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>18</sup> Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 36-7.

<sup>19</sup> James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 65.

## Culture in the New Testament

Culture is a pretty big theme in the new Christian church, formed after Jesus' death. Reading through the book of Acts is like going on a cultural odyssey. In chapter two of Acts, the joyous event of Pentecost kicks off that journey (Acts 2:6b-11):

A crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the part of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arab—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Peter addresses the bewildered cross-cultural crowd with a quote from the Old Testament prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32), announcing that God's spirit will be poured out on all people. The redemptive thread of welcome to all that runs through the Old Testament now comes to fruition, mediated by Jesus' blood and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

But cultural tensions very quickly engender conflict within the new church and persecution from the prevailing culture. Peter and John are hauled before the Sanhedrin. Stephen is martyred. Peter receives a vision about what is clean and unclean. He begins eating with uncircumcised believers who have received the Holy Spirit and is in turn both welcomed and criticized. At one point, the Jews in Philippi bring the apostle Paul and his preaching companion Silas to the magistrates, claiming:

These men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice (Acts 16:20b-21).

In Acts 15, "sharp dispute and debate" also ensues in the young church over who can be saved and what customs and cultural practices are necessary. As the believers begin to embrace the reality of welcoming the stranger and living out of the new covenant, the church opens its arms to new believers from non-Jewish (Gentile) backgrounds. The hard work of sorting out what is essential to Christianity and what is simply cultural preference begins to take place.

The apostle Paul, missionary to non-Jewish people groups throughout the New Testament, is a figure of great cultural intelligence. In his New Testament

writings and sermons, Paul brings light to cultural discussions and navigates constantly between cultures. His own example of sacrificial love for those from other cultures is inspiring. After his conversion, Paul travels to Arabia, Greece, Macedonia (Eastern Europe), Syria, Turkey, Judea, Samaria, Cyprus, Italy, and Crete. Paul wields his Roman citizenship masterfully when necessary (Acts 22:25-29). Similarly, he uses his Jewish heritage to gain audience with the people in Jerusalem after he is arrested (Acts 21:39). Paul's attitude towards those from other backgrounds and cultures is loving, powerful, and sacrificial (1 Corinthians 9:19-23):

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

The example of Paul inspires me. It's a high bar. In and of myself, I don't think I could live out this kind of sacrificial love. But as Christians, it is Jesus' resurrection power in us that enables us to incarnate this kind of radical cultural intelligence.



### ***Take a Minute***

- *How have you welcomed or not welcomed others who are culturally different from you or your family? If God's purpose was that our homes, families, churches, businesses, and organizations reflect a culture of welcome, what would need to change in your sphere of influence? What is one thing you can do about that?*
- *What is the most humbling thing for you about being a learner in a new cultural setting or relationship? What will you have to give up to learn deeply and well?*
- *Think about a cross-cultural client you are coaching right now. Flesh out how you could apply Paul's formula (becoming "like" your client) to your coaching of that client.*

The full copy of *Dancing between Cultures* can be purchased here:

[Kindle Version](#)

[Paperback](#)