



Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility

By Duane Elmer

Our goal as Christians is to display Christ to the people we minister to. We are called to serve others. But how can we best do this cross culturally? There are often obstacles that we unknowingly carry with us that hinder us from effectively serving and loving others. If our life is not communicating love in a way that others understand, then our message of Christ is clouded because our lives are a daily testimony of Christ.

Serving: “You can't serve someone you don't understand. At best you can only be a benevolent oppressor-like forcing someone to say "I'm sorry" when that is an unnatural way to apologize.”

Like a monkey who takes a fish and puts him on the beach in the shade to show the fish love, we need to understand someone before we can truly love them. We must serve according to their needs.

Understanding: “You can't understand another person until you have learned from them and, eventually, with them. A learning attitude signals humility and a willingness to identify with the people.” People won't listen to you if they don't feel understood.

Learning: “You can't learn from another person until you have built trust with them. People won't share important information with someone they don't trust, especially cross-culturally.” Be relational with others.

Trust: “You can't build trust with another person until they feel like they have been accepted by you-until they feel that you value them as human beings.” We

must connect with people, they are not merely tools or stepping stones to accomplish our goals.

Acceptance: “You can't communicate value and esteem to others unless they feel welcomed into your presence and find themselves feeling safe-openness.” We need an open, non-judgmental, non-critical attitude of people and their culture.

Openness: “Openness with people of another culture requires that you are willing to step out of your comfort zone to initiate and sustain relationships in a context of cultural differences. While requiring some risk, it launches you on the wonderful and fruitful pilgrimage to servanthood. Openness is rooted deeply in our view of the God who welcomes sinners and accepts them as bearers of his image; thus each person possesses a sacred dignity-the kind of dignity that compels us to also welcome others into our lives.”

Each culture is like its own jigsaw puzzle. Don't judge a piece of another culture just because it doesn't fit in your cultural puzzle. It probably fits into their cultural puzzle.