**INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY**

**ACROSS CULTURES**

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*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20)*

**Make Disciples of all Nations –   
Jesus Commands Cross-Cultural Ministry**

When the gospel is preached, people believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. We baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit as their public confession of faith in Jesus. After that we are to teach them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us. Jesus’ death on the cross was for all people of all nations. To obey Jesus’ command, we intentionally share the good news of the gospel to the people of all cultures of the earth. Obeying this command of Jesus is not optional, but mandatory. This introduces unique barriers, such as language and cultural barriers, that need to be understood and overcome in order to help individual people become Jesus’ disciples. A gospel worker’s job is not primarily to change systems or culture, but to evangelize the lost people on the mission field and make them Jesus’ disciples. Understanding native culture is essential to effective communication of the gospel, teaching obedience, and working together to make more disciples. But some think that we don’t need to understand culture, only teach the Bible. Such an approach may increase Bible knowledge, but does not touch the native person’s real issues and heart matters. Native people naturally feel some “distance.” Relationships remain shallow and superficial. When complex issues arise, communication problems keep us from really understanding one another and working together for a solution. Therefore, in order to understand and help people to grow as Jesus’ disciples practically, we need to understand their native culture. This is also important for our own growth in Jesus’ image. As we allow gospel truth to judge our own cultural values and traditions (both regional and ministerial) we grow as better disciples of Jesus.

**Definition of Culture and Gospel Truth**

What is culture? There are various definitions. Here is a simple summary: culture expresses people’s living habits, rules of conduct, beliefs, values and identity. Therefore, in order to understand the people of a nation, it is essential to look into each of these characteristics of the target culture[[1]](#footnote-0). We do so by first learning the language to communicate. We should also study the history of the nation as well as its current events and popular media to learn its mores and values.

Every human being is born into a culture, and adopts that culture to some degree subconsciously, as a fish adapts and grows in water. If the water is changed, the fish will suffer and likely die. It is therefore important to acknowledge the influence of culture on individuals we are ministering to, as well as our own cultural influences. When we enter another nation, we bring our own culture with us, whether we want to or not. There will be points where the two cultures are compatible, and points where they conflict. There is a tendency to side with our own culture as superior to the native culture, and to therefore condemn the native culture and justify our own. This leads to cultural imperialism rather than gospel ministry.[[2]](#footnote-1) For example a person might begin to believe that his own culture’s way of practicing Christianity is the only way to practice Christianity. Should such a person begin to minister to a different culture, he will inadvertently share not only the gospel but also his cultural traditions. This action would be unhelpful; it would try to force a distance culture on potential converts.

In addition to our native culture, we may also have a ministry culture. Since we accepted the gospel and learned to live it out in a Christian community, a subculture is formed with its own values. It is easy to assume this is a “gospel culture” based on “gospel values,” which is superior to all other cultures. Again, when exposed to different cultures and conflicts arise, we naturally condemn the native culture, and insist on conformity to our own assumed “gospel culture.” So the native person is forced to change to accommodate our cultural understanding of the gospel, rather than learning how to apply and live by gospel truth in their own cultural context. Our primary task as gospel workers is to teach how to apply and live by gospel truth, not to change native culture to be compatible with our own.

Then what is gospel truth? Being truth, it is something that does not change subjectively, but is absolute for each person in every generation and culture. The gospel is the good news of God’s salvation plan. We can understand gospel truth in three ways that impact every disciple of Jesus: Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification.

**Justification**

The truth of the gospel begins by acknowledging that we are sinners: We have failed to live up to God’s image and standard, as declared in his law. We are justified only when we believe in Jesus who died for our sins and who rose again from the dead. Through faith in this gospel, we enter into a right relationship with God. This gospel truth cannot be amended by any cultural custom, whether national or religious. Galatians 2:14-16 reads, *“When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.’”*

**Sanctification**

In view of our new relationship with God as his children, the truth of the gospel leads to a holy life. 1 Peter 1:14-16 reads, *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”* This directly impacts our practical life, regardless of cultural background. But this requires careful understanding of the gospel and observance of native culture to discern what is right or wrong based on the word of God. An example is how Paul commanded the Thessalonian believers to deal with the “passionate lust” of pagan culture. Their culture did not deem sexual immorality as evil, but just an acceptable religious practice. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 reads, *“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God... For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”*

Two important things we need to understand regarding sanctification are: 1) The gospel is the way of sanctification. Galatians 2:20 reads, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* 2) The pattern for this new way of life for God’s children is to “Walk by the Spirit.” Galatians 5:16-18 reads, *“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*

**Glorification**

Through the gospel, dead, earthly hopes that perish, spoil and fade are being replaced by a living hope. 1 Peter 1:3-4 reads, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”* This living hope of future glory in heaven enables us to endure all kinds of hardships, to purify our motives, and grow in the image of Christ. National and religious identity fuels conflict through pride. But gospel truth replaces this with a new identity as citizens of heaven, based on this living hope. Philippians 3:20-21 reads, *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”*

This is the gospel truth, which is timeless and absolute in its application and relevance. Yet all of us live out this gospel truth in the context of a culture; whether religious, national, generational, or otherwise. Each culture has its unique mores, values, methods, and rituals that instruct and guide people how to live, act, worship, pray, etc… These may enhance or hinder this gospel truth’s practical application. Naturally then there is a tension between gospel truth and culture. Cultural matters must be considered as secondary to gospel truth, and conformity to it and its application is to be done in a flexible and graceful way. The Lausanne Covenant aptly describes this tension and how to discern rightly (J.D. Douglas, ed. 1975:6-7):

Culture should be checked by the Bible and judged by the Bible (Mk 7:8-9, 13). It is because man is God’s creature and some part of man’s culture is good and full of beauty (Mt 7:11; Ge 4:21-22), but other parts can be evil because men fell and everything fell into sin. The gospel does not judge that one culture is better than another culture. It judges all culture based on God’s righteousness and truth, and it claims there is moral absoluteness in every culture.

Therefore understanding and presenting this gospel truth effectively to the native culture, without prejudice and judgment, requires deep understanding of the Bible, our own culture, and the native culture.

**Effective Communication through Understanding Native Culture**

In order to communicate the gospel effectively, understanding native culture is essential. David Hesselgrave[[3]](#footnote-2) says in his book *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* that the cultural barrier is the greatest barrier in preaching Christ to native people in different cultures. Effective communication with native people depends on how much Christians understand the native culture. Mission work is basically a communication process. Even between a sender and receiver in the same culture the effective rate of communication is only 80%. How many more barriers are there for communication from people of different cultures[[4]](#footnote-3)?

Communication is closely related to culture, so understanding culture is essential to communication. Communication between different cultures is complicated, like the sum of all the differences of individuals in different cultures. There are 3,500 tribes on earth and they all have different cultures[[5]](#footnote-4). If we look at a cultural sect studied by G. Linwood Barney, we can understand the reason communication between different cultures is complicated and difficult (Figure 1).

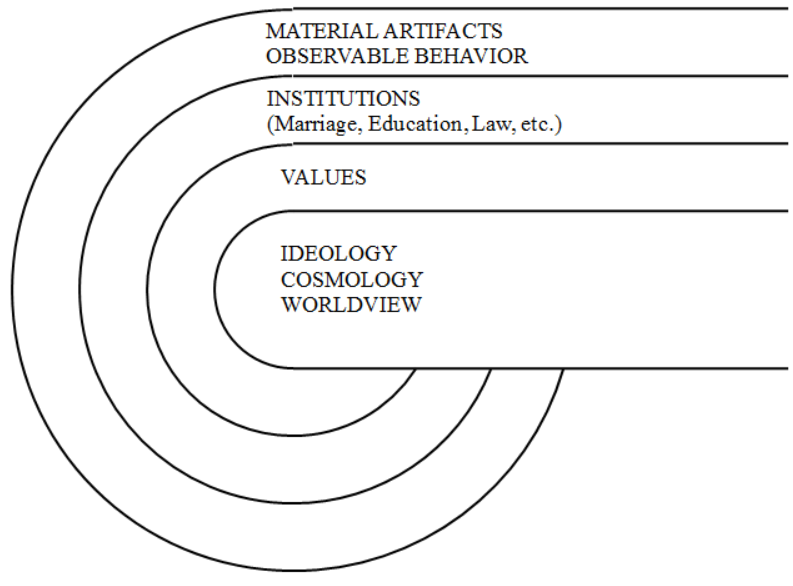


FIGURE 1: Layers of Culture

Cultural influence flows from the deep parts of worldview and values, which create, maintain and shape institutions, material artifacts and observable behavior. When encountering a native culture, the first two layers are easily observed and understood to a degree, but this is only a shallow understanding. The danger is in assuming that knowing these things is the same as fully understanding a culture. This assumption causes the loss of a learning mind, and insisting our own way, judging without understanding the underlying worldview and values that formed and influenced native cultural institutions, artifacts and behavior. This creates distance between missionary and native, and will result in dysfunctional and eventually broken relationships.

In order to avoid this we need to go from a shallow understanding of the culture to know the deeper elements of worldview and values, which influence artifacts, behavior and institutions. Missionaries should give their whole hearts to understanding the worldview of native people. If they do not understand their view of the world, they cannot understand their value system or avoid conflicts. When conflicts arise, we should try to discover the reason for the conflict not from visible but from invisible things, and more fundamentally, from the differences in worldview. When missionaries appreciate this, they will try to understand deeper things about native people. Even if missionaries may not understand native people’s worldview fully, their efforts to understand will be a clue for effective communication[[6]](#footnote-5).

**Contextualization:   
Applying Gospel Truth to Making Disciples in Native Culture**

Contextualization[[7]](#footnote-6) is the process of applying gospel truth (learned in part 2) to native culture (learned in part 3). In other words, it is to present the gospel truth in a way that is culturally relevant. There are two basic premises in contextualization. One is that gospel truth must be preserved in any case. Gospel truth must be effectively communicated in the native culture but it should not be compromised by the native culture. The other premise is that gospel workers should not impose cultural values or traditions in the name of gospel truth. Cultural values are not gospel truth. Human cultures have both positive and negative elements as we human beings carry both God’s image and a sinful nature. Gospel workers need discernment to distinguish between gospel truths and cultural valves. As they teach and live gospel truth, they need to understand and respect native culture instead of casting shallow judgments on it.

Paul Hiebert[[8]](#footnote-7) suggested that there are four approaches of contextualization: (1) no contextualization, (2) minimal contextualization, (3) uncritical contextualization, and (4) critical contextualization. The no contextualization approach understands the Christian faith as something that has nothing to do human culture; it rejects the notion that culture shapes how one receives and practices Christianity. As a result, they don’t pay attention to human culture as they present the gospel. This leaves the gospel irrelevant to people in their cultural experience, and cannot give clear application of gospel truths to daily life. The minimal contextualization approach acknowledges that differences exist between cultures, but it tries to limit cultural adaptation as much as possible. Under this model, missionaries will likely arrange new church plants in a fashion similar to the churches in their home country. Uncritical contextualization tends to prioritize culture over the gospel. It minimizes the eternal truths found in Scripture in order to emphasize cultural convictions and practices. Critical contextualization seeks a balanced approach. In this view, the Bible is seen as divine revelation, not simply as humanly constructed beliefs. The gospel truth must be kept as it is encoded in forms that are understood by the native people, without making the gospel captive to the contexts in which it is being applied. This is an ongoing process of embodying the eternal gospel in an ever-changing world. Here cultures are seen as both good and evil. No culture is absolute or privileged. We are all relativized by the gospel.[[9]](#footnote-8)

We gospel workers should pursue critical contextualization. As the Lausanne Covenant described: “*Culture should be checked by the Bible and judged by the Bible*.” and *“The gospel does not judge that one culture is better than another culture. It judges all culture based on God’s righteousness and truth, and it claims there is moral absoluteness in every culture.”* However, critical contextualization is not easy. It requires discernment to distinguish between Gospel truth and cultural values, and wisdom to present gospel truths to the people of different cultures. During this process, gospel workers must seek to understand native culture deeply and learn to respect the positive elements. They must remember that no culture is absolute or privileged. We are all relativized by the gospel.

Let’s take North American UBF churches as an example. Most of these churches have been pioneered by Korean missionaries who were born and raised in Korean culture. When these Korean missionaries communicate gospel truths and serve gospel work with American natives, they can misunderstand the intentions of American natives if they do not understand American culture deeply (Refer to the table in the next page that compares the two cultures and relevant Gospel truth). For instance, Korean culture emphasizes *together* mindset (collectivism) and puts a priority to a group instead of individuals. When Korean missionaries face American individualism they may immediately judge it as self-centeredness. But American individualism that is rooted in the history of immigration and pioneering of the Wild West has lots of positive elements such as individual dignity and independence spirit. Korean missionaries must respect these positive elements and learn from them instead of making a shallow judgment. But more importantly both Korean missionaries and American natives must acknowledge that human cultures are all imperfect and that we must rather live by gospel truth. The Bible teaches us to live a Jesus-centered life rather than individual-centered or group-centered (Galatians 2:20). Our identity is forgiven sinners, children of God, and citizens of God’s Kingdom. We are in this world but not of this world. As God’s children we must first seek His Kingdom and honor Him in and through our lives.

Another example is that at church meetings American natives actively participate in the discussion and decision-making process but Korean missionaries usually remain silent. When a leader solicits inputs and volunteers for events, usually Americans raise their hands. Then Americans may think that Korean missionaries do not have desire to serve voluntarily. In the meantime Korean missionaries think that Americans are self-promoting and like to show off. The truth is that Korean missionaries *do* want to serve but they like to be asked rather than volunteering. They also don’t say much during a meeting partly because they think letting others talk is a sign of humility. On the other hand, Americans do not mean to show off when they raise their hands. They simply think it’s good to volunteer to serve and actively participate in discussion. If we do not understand these differences of the two cultures, misunderstandings and conflicts can arise easily. Instead of criticizing each other, we need to understand each other’s intention (which has been expressed in different ways influenced by their cultural values) and find a way to work together with God’s wisdom. Ultimately, we must remember that Jesus is our Lord and we are all fellow servants of the Lord. That’s the two-way relationship (vertical and horizontal) we all have. When we deeply acknowledge the gospel truth, we would have absolute obedience to Jesus, and love and respect to one another.

In Korean culture, formality is emphasized. People expect to be respected according to their seniority and title. But American culture is deeply rooted in pragmatism. Formality is not as important as content. One Korean missionary saw an American leader praying with their hands in their pockets and got upset because it was a rude thing to do. In their minds, prayer should be done in a certain way (with hands gathered in front of the body and with the head bowing down). Such a posture is an indication of solemnness to them. But Americans do not care where their hands are while they are praying. As long as their hearts are focused on God and worshipping Him sincerely, it doesn’t matter whether they put their hands in their pocket or not. Again, we should not become judgmental toward each other when we face these differences. We must respect each other’s culture and try to see their heart motive. Our God sees our heart. We must live before God by faith, not by sight. True discipleship is not in formality but in whether we obey his command to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.

Another thing to think about is a ministry culture. UBF has developed certain methods of evangelism and disciple making throughout its history (e.g. fishing, 1:1, testimony writing, common life, etc...). Whether we wanted to or not, we have created a certain ministry culture within us. These traditions have many positive elements and they have made significant contributions to our ministry. However, we must also understand that this ministry culture, with its values and traditions, also have negative elements. When overly emphasized and forcefully imposed to the members, a competitive atmosphere and work-based righteousness can be developed in the church. Those who are over-performing may feel self-righteous and those who are under-performing may feel guilty and self-condemning. Apostle Paul called it as alienating ourselves from the gospel truth (Gal 5:4). Our righteousness is only in Jesus Christ. Work-based righteousness should never be allowed in our church. Gospel-centered life, gospel-centered community must be promoted among us. We must appreciate that people have different gifts and that the gospel can be communicated in many different ways. We should not insist on ministry traditions in the name of gospel truth. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between Gospel truth and cultural values. Sometimes it is challenging to present the gospel truths. May God give us his discernment and wisdom so we can effectively contextualize the gospel truth to North American culture.

**Cultural Values and Gospel Values**

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| **Cultural Value** | | **Gospel Value** |
| **North America** | **Korea** |
| **Individualism**  · Dignity, privacy  · Independence  · Personal happiness  · Family-oriented  · Can become self-centered | **Collectivism**  · *Together* mindset, We-our-us rather than I-my-me  · Group-centered  · Confucian tradition  · Can emphasize involuntary sacrifice | **Jesus-centered**  · Identity as a saved sinner, a child of God, a servant of God, a citizen of God’s kingdom  · Jesus-centered, Gospel-centered (Gal 2:20)  · Identity as the Church  · Voluntary sacrifice  · Seek God’s kingdom first |
| **Horizontal relationship**  · Equal rights  · Entrepenuerial spirit; taking initiative; self-promotion  · Active participation and discussion for decision making  · Consensus-seeking leadership | **Vertical relationship**  · Seniority, title  · Humility, obedience  · Passive attitude, hesitation to volunteer, waiting to be told to do something  · Authoritarian leadership | **The cross (two ways)**  · Vertical relationship with God, Jesus the Lord  · Horizontal relationship with others  · Obey God’s word  · Christ’s mindset  · Humble, servant leadership |
| **Pragmatism**  · Little formality  · Content is important  · Need-driven  · Seek practical benefit  · Performance emphasized  · Constitutionalism. We live not under men’s authority, but under the law | **Moral obligation**  · Formality emphasized  · Appearance is important  · Reputation, duty-driven, fear of losing face  · Commitment emphasized  · Men’s authority  · Cronyism based on personal relationship | **True discipleship**  · Heart (spirit) emphasized  · Grace-driven, God-glorifying  · Righteousness through faith in Jesus, live before God, fear God, not people  · Deny oneself, take up his cross, and follow him  · Live by the Spirit  · Voluntary commitment  · God’s word is ultimate authority |
| **Multiculturalism**  · Diversity, equality  · Respect and open mindedness to different cultures and people | **Monoculturalism**  · Unfamiliar with diversity  · Prejudice/closedness to different cultures | **The Church is the body of Christ**  · Respect the differences God has created  · Love your neighbor  · Unity but not uniformity |

**Incarnational Mindset:   
Principles of Effective Disciple Making in Native Culture**

As emphasized, practicing critical contextualization is not easy, and requires wisdom and discernment, in addition to sound Biblical doctrine and deep cultural understanding. But more important than knowledge or experience is mindset. With the right mindset, successes can be built upon without the error of hubris, and failures can be learned from to grow our character. We really need deep humility, compassion, understanding and self-denial: In other words, an incarnational mindset. This is the mindset of Christ.

What was Jesus’ mindset? Philippians 2:6-7 reads, *“Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* Jesus gave up being served in order to serve sinners. The most honorable man became the lowest, and the richest man became the poorest. The almighty God was made in human likeness and the eternal God submitted to the limitations of time. He served in obedience to the point he suffered and died on the cross. With this mindset we are able to humble ourselves and value others above ourselves, looking not to our own interests but to the interests of others (Php 2:3-4).

Paul adapted Jesus’ incarnational mindset in his gospel ministry. Paul was charged with bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, although a Jewish man well familiarized with the law. He summarizes his principle clearly in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; *“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made 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 people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”*

In his book *Culture in Mission and Incarnational Ministry*, Hiebert emphasizes the importance of incarnational ministry. He states that missionaries should learn the local culture and live like native people in order to communicate effectively and share the gospel properly. In other words missionaries should be “incarnated.”

From this mindset the following principles are recommended.

1. Social Contextualization: Missionaries should seek to identify with local people whom they serve: live with them, learn their language, adjust to their culture and work together with them. In doing so, they can earn their trust, and then the local people will listen to the missionaries’ message. The point of this is to remove as many barriers as possible to the message of the gospel by getting access to people, have a message that matches her lifestyle, and to make the listener comfortable, at the expense of the missionary. Missionary Sarah Barry is a good example of this. In 1955 she went to South Korea as a missionary from the United States. At that time South Korean people were suffering after the devastation of the Korean War (1950-1953). The land was stripped of vegetation, causing severe food shortages leading to nearly universal hunger and starvation. People were desperately poor, suffering from many diseases. In comparison, the wealth and prosperity of the United States looked like heaven. Most western missionaries lived in compounds, for safety. In order to understand and minister to Korean people, Sarah Barry left the missionary compound to live among ordinary Korean people. She rented a tiny room without a private bathroom. She used the public bath houses, like her neighbors. She used dangerous charcoal heating, and ate local food. She welcomed people to her rented home, small as it was, and made them coffee and a kimchi sandwich, listening intently to their stories. Her sacrificial life had a great impact. Students learned that she had given up a comfortable and privileged life in Mississippi to live and serve in a poor country, Korea. She even had forsaken opportunities to marry in order to serve Korean college students. Choosing to live this way gave her message and love for Jesus great credibility. Her humility, gentleness and sacrificial life stunned and reached deep into the hearts of many students from prestigious universities in Korea.
2. Cultural Contextualization: adapting methods/forms of worship, teaching, religious practices to the culture you are reaching. For example, when western missionaries first began to reach to societies founded on the teaching of Confucius, rather than insisting people conform to western culture, they adapted the meeting to be comfortable to that society by separating men and women in the meeting, using a curtain that ran the length of the hall. Only the preacher could see both. Methods and forms need to adapt to the change of culture, generation and society. Other examples: For When conservative Korean missionaries from UBF went to Africa, they found a people not accustomed to sitting and listening to lectures. Instead of forcing African people to adopt the culturally comfortable methods of worship used in Korea, UBF worship services include long times of dancing and singing in worship of God. Sometimes the worship period would extend beyond half an hour. Those unaccustomed to this become exhausted after 10 minutes.   
     
   In Venezuela Juan Seo began to raise disciples of Jesus. Usually missionaries focus on the students, and not welcome their families. Juan Seo came to understand the deep family bonds in the worldview of Latin American culture. He realized that without helping the family members, he would not be able to make disciples of Venezuelan college students effectively. Instead, he began to welcome students’ families as prayer partners and ministry partners. In addition to their own children, parents in the ministry reach out to extended family and bring them to Bible study, such as nieces and nephews and cousins. Parents and children together are raised as disciples, and fruitful ministry has continued to this day.
3. Establishing intimate, trusting relationships. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus called the Twelve to be with him, adopting them as his family, saying, “Here are my mother and my brothers (Mt 12:48-50).” Though Jesus is the master, he made them his friends, and shared with them his Father’s business (Jn 15:15). Loving friendship is characterized by self-sacrifice (Jn 15:13). Jesus entrusted to them the ministry of the kingdom of God, even though some doubted (Mt 28:16-17). Paul had been an enemy of the gospel. Yet Jesus met him, changed him, and entrusted him with the gospel ministry to the Gentiles (1Ti 1:12-14). Paul learned from Jesus and built trusting relationships with Timothy, Titus, and several others, to whom he entrusted his ministry, including them in his letters as co-authors at times.

## **Conclusion**

**Summary Definition of Culture:**

Kroeber and Kluckhohn summarize the definition of culture as follows:

*Culture is transmitted by types of explicit and implicit symbols and is composed of learned behaviors. Culture is composed of special achievements and cultural relics. The core of culture includes traditional values and ideas. On the one hand, cultural systems produce actions and on the other hand there are factors that determine behavior (1952:357).*

Kim, Hyung In studies the definitions of many cultures and defines culture as follows:

*Culture is a phenomenon of sharing [a group] understanding about things and events and ways to cope with them in a particular region and time. Culture is formed during the time when members of a community transmit their living habits, norms of conduct, standards of judging, feeling, intuition, beliefs, values, and identity from generation to generation (2008:84).*

According to the two definitions above, we know that as a whole, a culture expresses people’s living habits, rules of conduct, beliefs, values and identity. Therefore, in order to understand the people of a nation, it is essential to look into each of these characteristics of the target culture.

Edward Hall understands various cultures by juxtaposing between high-context culture and low-context culture (1976; Kang, Gil Ho and Kim, Hyun Ju 2008:289-290.Re-quote). Korea and Japan have high-context culture where there is a clear distinction between internal groups and external groups, and each person is connected by norms such as grace and loyalty. Knowledge, common sense and experiences are widely shared so that verbal communication becomes less important. Instead, linguistic external information during communication (nonverbal content) is important.

On the other hand, American culture, as the model of low-context culture, emphasizes personal freedom, and relationships between individuals is not tight, and it is relatively easy to break away from a community. Since common knowledge among people is relatively rare, it is important to communicate with linguistic messages. When everything is said clearly, misunderstandings can be avoided. Likewise, communication between high context culture and low context culture is not easy because of the differences in human relationships, methods of communication without mutual understanding about another’s culture.

1. Taken from “A Study on Effective Communication for Conflict Resolution Between Korean UBF Missionaries and Leaders of UBF America”, Dr. Mark Yang. See Endnotes. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. For a classic study of this see the book “Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?” Roland Allen (1927, USA). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. David Hesselgrave received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and the University of Minnesota. He was a missionary for 12 years in Japan, sent by the Evangelical Free Church of America, where he pioneered a church and raised disciples. He was a professor and dean of the Department of Evangelism at Trinity Seminary from 1965–1991, and at present he is a professor emeritus. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Hesselgrave, David, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House 1991), p 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Ibid p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Taken from “A Study on Effective Communication for Conflict Resolution Between Korean UBF Missionaries and Leaders of UBF America”, Dr. Mark Yang. For more information on Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Communication please see Chapter 4: Missiological Principles of Communication for Conflict Resolution, particularly the David J. Hesselgrave part. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Contextualization is a huge subject written about for centuries by many great missionaries and scholars. Some recommended references: Hiebert, Paul, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Baker Academic, 1986). Hiebert, Paul, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Baker Academic, 1994). Hiebert, Paul, Meneses, Eloise, *Incarnational Ministry* (Baker Academic, 1996). For a summary of the content of these books see “A Study on Effective Communication for Conflict Resolution Between Korean UBF Missionaries and Leaders of UBF America”, Dr. Mark Yang, in the section on Paul G. Hiebert, pp. 87-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Paul Hiebert (1932-2007) was born as the son of a missionary to India, and he himself became a missionary in India for six years. He earned a doctoral degree in cultural anthropology from the University of Minnesota, and he taught anthropology and Southern Asian culture at the University of Washington and Fuller Seminary (1977-1990). He was a professor and a dean of the Department of Evangelism at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for 17 years. Along with David Hesselgrave, he is famous for the study of God’s word and culture in evangelical situations. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Paul Hiebert, “The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization,” Broadman & Holman, 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)