

Intercultural Marketplace Discipleship

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This course arises from the need expressed by African leaders for a revision of *Working Your Way to the Nations: A Guide to Effective Tentmaking*, edited by Jonathan Lewis and published by William Carey Library (1993) and Intervarsity Press (1997). The revision project has turned into an entirely new course informed by the comments and suggestions of these African leaders. The course is based on the theme of being and making disciples in the marketplaces of the world.

The African leaders named above as contributors have significantly engaged in mobilizing and training marketplace disciple makers. Without their initiative and contributions, this work would not exist. The editor is immensely grateful to the Lord for the privilege of working with these noted leaders. Together, we believe that this series of lessons can be used to help mobilize thousands of followers of Jesus as marketplace disciple makers to the ends of the earth.

This course is process driven. That means that there are many personal questions to be answered by the student, reflective activities with other students, and personal projects to engage in. All are intended to help the students grow in understanding and commitment to being disciples of Jesus, and to being equipped as effective intercultural marketplace disciple makers.

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Preface

In 1992, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Missions Commission conducted research on the requirements for missionaries planning to enter fields with “secular” professions. From this research, a training manual entitled *Working Your Way to the Nations* was published to help guide these kinds of missionaries into service. Unfortunately, the practice of “tentmaking” sometimes led to people doing “fake work” to enter countries under false pretenses, while others became overwhelmed with duties that left them little time to achieve their “missionary” goals. This experience revealed deep flaws in both the conceptual framework as well as the practical aspects of attempting to have a secular identity while pursuing religious goals.

Since that writing, the Lord of the Harvest has been showing the missions world that spreading the Gospel is less about church planting, than it is about making disciples of Jesus. When discipleship occurs and is allowed to flow through natural relational networks as intended by the Holy Spirit, it has generated vast movements of people to Jesus among those classified as most resistant to Christianity. We praise God for these breakthroughs!

The terms “tentmaker” or “bi-vocational” are often used to refer to someone who works a “secular” job in order to be able to exercise a “sacred” role such as pastor or missionary. But these terms may imply that what a believer does in the world is “secular” while what is done in the church is “sacred.” We are uncomfortable with this distinction.

A disciple’s primary “vocation” or “calling” is to love and serve God (Ephesians 4:1). Discipleship begins with a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, an act which glorifies God (Philippians 2:9-11). With this decision, every activity and occupation is submitted to Jesus and made available to him to use in advancing his spiritual Kingdom. With this attitude, all of our occupations are ministries. It is the attitude of submission to Jesus and his will that makes us his disciples, and sanctifies our daily activities.

Genuine disciples of Jesus take very seriously the role God has assigned to them as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). They are mediators of God’s grace. As spiritually alive persons, they exert Kingdom influence wherever they live and work. They live to bless others. They intercede for them. They provide God’s counsel. They are salt and light. They blossom wherever they are planted—or wherever the Spirit of God sends them.

Marketplace disciple makers who are willing and able to work interculturally are urgently needed because most of the “least reached people groups”—those who have never had the opportunity to know a genuine Christ follower or the Gospel—live in countries or regions that prohibit the entry of professional Christian missionaries. Intercultural marketplace disciple makers are essential for the Gospel to be shared with those peoples.

Thus, this is a course for those persons who willing to serve wherever God sends them. They are “missionaries” in the marketplaces of the world. They go about their witness as disciples of Jesus Christ, not as religious clergy. They have a clear understanding of what it means to be both a “disciple” and a “disciple maker.” They fulfill Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18).

Jonathan P. Lewis
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Lesson 1

Getting Perspective

Christian missions are in crisis. Declining church membership in the post-Christian West has made it more difficult to recruit missionaries and support them. There is a global intolerance of Christian proselytism. Massive urbanization and staggering costs of church buildings make it difficult to “plant churches” even where this is allowed. And the increasingly unstable economies in the global South have left missionaries struggling to continue on the field.

There is an overwhelming number of refugees and migrants on the move, and we are faced with the continuing challenge of reaching tens of millions of people in “unreached” socio/linguistic/religious groups. Religious fanaticism expressed in nationalism has effectively barred missionaries from entering and residing in countries with the largest populations of unreached peoples.

Into this mix has been added a global pandemic (COVID 19) whose impact on traditional missionary methods has been devastating. These factors significantly impact the ability of Christians to undertake mission efforts with traditional goals by fully supported, professional missionaries.

Today, there is an urgent need to rethink how we approach the work of making disciples of all nations. This is what this course is about. It proposes a return to our roots and an approach which is as old as the Bible itself and consistent with God’s methods and plan for this world—that of being and making disciples of Jesus.

Tentmaking

The term “tentmaking” comes from the book of ACTS in the Bible in which the Apostle Paul worked with two believers, Aquila and Pricilla, in their business of making tents. He seems to have done so primarily to meet his own financial needs and those of his missionary team (Acts 18:1-4). For this reason, we also derive our primary understanding of this self-supporting missionary model from what Paul did and taught regarding working with his hands. He not only earned his living but modeled the value of work for new believers.

Thus, the term “tentmaking” has been adopted to describe a kind of “missionary” that has emerged in recent times to address the need of an increasingly hostile environment for traditional missionaries sent to propagate Christianity.

The Lausanne II, 1989 Congress held in Manila defined Tentmakers as: *Believers in all people groups who have a “secular” identity and who, in response to God’s call, proclaim Christ cross-culturally. Tentmakers witness with their whole lives and their jobs are integral to their work for the Kingdom of God.*

We appreciate the Lausanne II definition because it includes believers everywhere. It is not just a strategy for western mission agencies trying to solve a problem. It also identifies a deeper theological issue by qualifying the term “secular” with quotes as a label that requires special definition and clarification. It thus recognizes the need to address the perceived dichotomy between “sacred” and “secular” work and something we will want to deal with in depth. Yet it also affirms the idea that “tentmakers” may have a specific calling to cross-cultural disciple making.

So, while every disciple of Jesus should be a marketplace disciple maker, we are using the term “tentmaker” specifically for those who are willing and able to go to the “nations.” If you are still working through that commitment, this course will also help you understand your sacred role as a disciple maker right where you are, and be able to assist those who are being sent out specifically to be tentmakers elsewhere.

The Problem of “Closed” Countries

Originally, the term “tentmaking” was coined to address the need of getting “missionaries” into countries “closed” to those sent to propagate Christianity. This led in some cases to the unhealthy practice of missionaries assuming false work roles. Time has proven that using “fake work” as an entry strategy is not fruitful. Those missionaries seem suspicious and untrustworthy. To enjoy fruit, tentmakers must use legitimate work as God’s provision for going to other nations with the Good News of Jesus.

Tentmaking also affirms the dignity of work as a blessing, not a curse. It requires integrity as sons of God and pursuing excellence in all that we do. It is about discovering our true identity and gifting as human beings. It challenges us to serve others in a way that brings us joy, generates glory to God, and advances his Kingdom. To the emphasis in tentmaking on discipleship and work, we add the dimension of a sense of calling to serve among those of another culture or in another nation.

Some people have stopped using the term “tentmaker” altogether. They prefer “marketplace disciple makers” to describe their lifestyle. When they sense a special call to do so in another country or society, they become “intercultural” marketplace disciple makers. The term “univocational” has even been coined to counter the duality of terms like “bi-vocational.” It emphasizes the *holistic, unified and unique nature* of each believer’s calling to serve God. This approach highlights our identity as God’s creation. Each of us is uniquely designed and gifted by him. Growing into who he has designed us to be is important to fulfilling his purposes. We are also anointed to be his priests. We work as unto the Lord. Our witness is a holistic, seven day a week lifestyle.

Strategic Reasons for Tentmaking

There are many good reasons to promote tentmaking as a means of intercultural disciple making. Here are some of the major ones:

First, it can be used to mobilize tens of thousands of new workers for the spread of the Gospel to other regions and nations. Any church in the whole world can help equip and send intercultural disciple makers. No church is too new, too small, too poor, too remote, or too insignificant! Many of these new workers won’t even have to cross national boundaries to serve cross-culturally. It is undoubtedly the best way of fostering multiplying movements of disciple makers throughout the nations.

Second, it addresses the western dualistic divide so embedded in our Christian culture, between “sacred” and “secular” work. Addressing this issue is essential. To finish the work entrusted to Jesus’ disciples, the whole church must be mobilized into ministry just as Christ intended (Ephesians 4). When believers understand their fundamental identity as “children of God,” their work is “ministry.” The power and authority he gives them as a “holy priesthood” will transform the places they live and work. The primary work of church leadership is to equip all members for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4) not just a few professional ministers.

Third, it builds up people by elevating the value of their “ordinary work.” People express God’s design, gifting, and abilities through their work and other interests. Work is God-ordained. It dignifies and sustains. Followers of Jesus are created for good works (Ephesians 2:10), and our occupations should allow us to fulfill that vocational calling. When done well and with the right attitude, work is a blessing, not a curse.

Fourth, it is a way to finance missionaries. There are many ways God supplies for our needs. Work is the way most people make a living. Yet, we also recognize that tentmakers could be blessed with a combination of self-support along with financial support from their local church, particularly

to meet extra expenses involved in being sent as tentmakers. The important thing to remember is that tentmakers depend on God to sustain them, and God can use a number of means to do that.

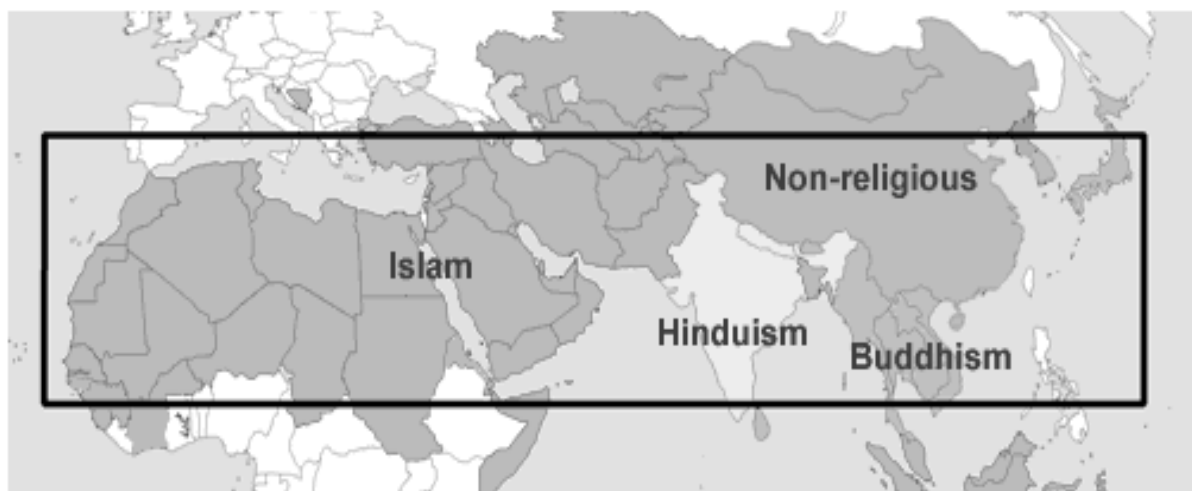
Multiplying the Task Force

Tentmaking, with its great flexibility, has the possibility of rapidly mobilizing and deploying tens of thousands of believers. The natural flow of international business and labor is being proposed as the way forward for advancing the Kingdom in the 21st century.

Thus, for many mission agencies, tentmaking forms an integral part of strategic deployment. Today, cross-cultural missions are actively looking for ways to place missionaries among the least reached. Much of this revolves around starting business as missions (BAM) or non-government organizations (NGOs) that can channel personnel. But there are many other means of doing this.

We must increasingly think of tentmaking as a Spirit-filled “movement” from every nation to every nation. It is not just an organizational strategy to place professional missionaries in so-called “closed” countries. It is a move of the Spirit that takes us back to the first centuries of the church. It is a journey into a rediscovery of our own identities in Christ as sons of God, our role as priests, and the total mobilization of his followers to discipleship. It all starts with discipleship.

Today, there are more than two billion people who have never met or known a disciple of Jesus. Figure 1-1 shows the “10/40 Window,” the regions of the world with the lowest percentage of Christians of any kind. There is a great need for tentmakers in North Africa, some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Numerically, the greatest populations of unreached peoples are found in Central, East, and South Asia.



Because these countries have deeply rooted socio/religious traditions—Islam, Hinduism, Non-Religious, and Buddhism—they are highly resistant to attempts to convert their peoples to the Christian religion. Many, however, are open to Christians working in the service professions (teachers, social workers, medical professionals, etc.) or contributing to their economic well-being as business employees or starting businesses. If these Christians are also disciples of Jesus, they can introduce Jesus to those they relate to in their occupations and engage in disciple making. This requires developing some simple ways of helping people of other religious traditions to meet Jesus and know his transforming power. Even introducing one person to Jesus has the potential to spark an explosive movement towards Jesus in that context.

Mission agencies describe these countries as creative-access countries because missionaries aren’t allowed to enter and propagate Christianity, so creative entry strategies must be used. More

than 60 countries world-wide are in this category. However these countries often grant visas for contract workers of all kinds: skilled technicians, relief and development workers, employees of foreign companies, embassy staff, medical professionals, foreign language teachers, university professors, doctors, physiotherapists, sports trainers, sports coaches, dieticians, computer specialists, mechanics, translators, students, tourists, business people, etc. The “crisis” of denying missionary visas has turned into a marvelous opportunity to introduce disciple making disciples of Jesus into every sphere of work and society in most of these creative access nations.

Going to All the Nations

Jesus' “commission” is to DISCIPLE ALL NATIONS. The “scope” of the commission is ALL THE NATIONS. There is no tribe or tongue, or people or nation excluded. Through tentmaking, disciples of Jesus can flow into every nation and sphere of society. This will require multiplying movements of thousands of tentmaking disciple makers who make disciple makers.

The biblical idea of “nations” is not the equivalent of modern-day “countries.” It refers to families, clans and tribes with unique socio/linguistic and cultural characteristics such as dress, customs, language and religion. Many biblically defined “nations” spread across two or more country boundaries and many of these “nations” or “people groups” are scattered in communities around the globe, often because our troubled world creates massive movements of economic and political immigrants or refugees. You may not have to leave your own country or travel very far to find people from unreached nations.

- 1) **Question:** How many biblically defined “nations” live in your country?
- 2) **Activity:** Together with the other students make a list of “tribes, tongues, peoples and nations” in your own country. How many of those need intentional disciple makers? How could tentmakers help reach them?

Mitigating the Barriers and Burdens of Missionary Support

There is a great demand for good, honest laborers in the world. Even when a country or region of your own country may not want religious workers, they often need manual laborers, technicians, and professionals such as medics, engineers, teachers, etc. Disciples, with the skills and understanding to make disciples, can go and work. Christian business people should also be encouraged to use their business know-how, to propagate the gospel among other peoples and in other lands.

The idea that missionaries are to be entirely supported by churches is a rather new scheme in the spread of the Gospel – one that developed largely in Europe and North America during the last 200 years. It worked well for the western colonial powers, particularly when the aim was to establish Christian denominations in other lands. The fruit of this effort is evident, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas and a few Asian countries. But this approach to recruiting and sending missionaries has not worked very well in other parts of the world.

The modern mission enterprise with its emphasis on lengthy theological training and support raising has proven both cumbersome and increasingly difficult. We need a fresh tide of missionary activity that can address the many challenges of our postmodern world.

Mobilizing tens of thousands of intercultural witnesses is the only way the Church will be able to reach the ends of the earth with the Good News. This “Great Commission army”, God’s people on the move, will be raised up by the Holy Spirit from the towns, villages, and urban centers of the earth. They will go forth in the shape of teachers, healers, employees, businessmen, traders, and laborers. Some will travel overseas. Some may go to nearby peoples in their own countries. Some will respond to the refugee crisis in their own backyard or attend to immigrants. They are disciples of

Jesus and have cultivated their calling to “go and make disciples of all nations.” The Holy Spirit is the only one that can orchestrate this massive mobilization for the glory of God.

- 3) **Question:** Read 1 Samuel 17:32-40. What are the “Goliaths” that tentmaking “Davids” will confront when they enter their intercultural work?
- 4) **Activity:** Discuss with your fellow students the idea of Saul's armour in contrast to the five-smooth stones David chose to confront Goliath. What can be considered “Saul’s armour?” What are the “stones” that are essential to bring down the giants?

Lesson 2

A Clear Sense of Calling

Fulfilling the Great Commission goal of making disciples of all nations is not an option for followers of Jesus: it is a command. Only with an intentional and massive mobilization of what some may refer to as “lay missionaries,” will the task of global discipleship be accomplished. The Holy Spirit is behind this kind of mobilization. Thankfully, we are beginning to see a change in missions thinking from “church planting” with its institutional overtones, to “disciple making movements towards Jesus.” These movements parallel what happened during the first centuries of the Christian faith. Tens of thousands are coming to faith through this approach today.

The reality is that conventional “modern” missionary methods may have worked well during the 19th and 20th Centuries. Everywhere missionaries went they accomplished much to build up social structures like schools and hospitals. They also succeeded in starting Christian churches in every country in the world. But these professional missionary sending structures and approaches aren’t proving adequate to the remaining work of global evangelization. Most of the millions of people beyond the reach of gospel witness live in countries where traditional missionary approaches have not succeeded or can no longer be used.

If we are to make disciples among them, how will they hear of Jesus and God’s gift of eternal life? How will they be sent? The Holy Spirit is the one who calls and sends. He calls ordinary tentmaking disciples of Jesus to go with his Holy Spirit “fire” in them. It truly only takes a spark to start a wildfire. This is the way movements towards Christ have begun. They can usually be traced to one believer or couple who “lit” the fire in an “insider”—someone from one of these unreached groups. The Gospel then spreads through natural family relationships. This is the “missions” scheme the Holy Spirit used during the first centuries of the faith and is still using today.

Being Willing to Go

Disciples of Jesus first obey Jesus’ mandate to “make disciples” right where they live. But they are also willing to go wherever the Holy Spirit should lead them. The *commandment* in Matthew 28:18 is to “make disciples,” and to do so while “going.” Discipling “all nations” is the *scope* of the work. All disciples will “make disciples” in “going” about their occupations, but not all will go to other nations. Many will stay in their own communities carrying out the mandate to “make disciples,” right where they live and work.

Potential tentmakers are disciples that develop a growing conviction and desire to serve God elsewhere. They may be feeling a “call” to those who have never known a disciple of Jesus personally nor heard about God’s mercy through his saving work. This is an exciting idea—to be the first follower of Jesus that these “unreached” people will know. Through you, they might hear Jesus’ teachings and experience God’s grace and forgiveness.

Exciting as the idea may be, how can a potential tentmaker know for sure that God is asking him or her to leave their place and people to serve elsewhere?

Ultimately, God’s “call” for service expresses itself through an inner conviction that this is what God is asking of you. This conviction is not necessarily a specific calling to a certain people, country, or region. This may come later. The editor has encountered many young people who declare that God has called them to Morocco, or Japan, or Russia, etc. as if the place was the most important aspect of a call. The most important aspect of a calling is one’s willingness to go *wherever* God leads. When a country goes to war, it may issue a call for volunteers. Those who volunteer will go where they are needed and sent, not where they feel called. Their calling is to serve their country.

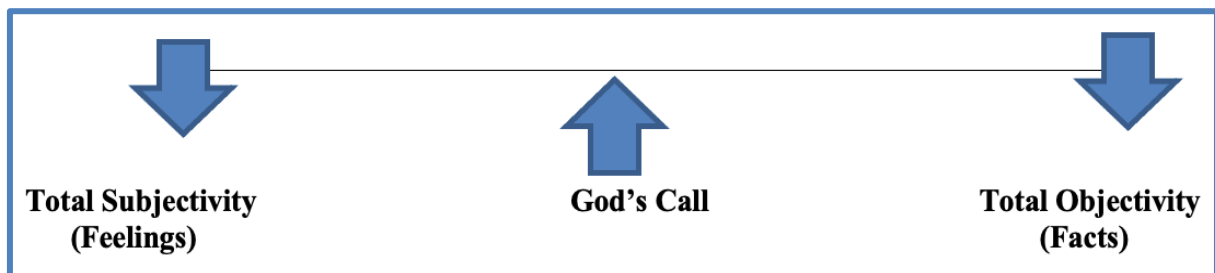
The truth is that many, if not most, missionaries end up serving in countries or regions they didn't have in mind when they first responded to a call. A heartfelt response to a need or an unreached group may well be the catalyst to making the commitment before the Lord, but rarely is the place of service well spelled out at the beginning of the process. This does not discount the possibility that you will end up serving where you are motivated to serve, perhaps among an unreached people group that you are praying for each day. However, the initial process of God's calling focuses on heart and character issues related to your surrender to his will, not on a place of service.

Once the willingness is there, the conviction to serve interculturally and/or internationally grows in different ways. The development of each person's calling is as unique as their personalities and circumstances. The sense of calling is usually a mix of subjective interpretation and objective realities. The "subjective" aspect may weigh in because a preacher called it forth by an inspired message, or because a missionary presented a need. Others sense God's calling from reading a Scripture passage or by praying for the unreached. Others have a consistent nudging from the Holy Spirit or hear an "audible" voice. Others simply find themselves in an intercultural context circumstantially. Some have even been "called" against their will. If in doubt about unwilling "sent ones," study God's call to Moses, Joseph, Jonah, Esther, Ruth, etc.... Their circumstances played a big part in fulfilling God's purposes.

On the other hand, a more objective reason might be a good work opportunity that presents itself unexpectedly. Or you may have been raised in an intercultural environment. You may be bi-lingual and bi-cultural and may find it attractive to live and disciple those of other cultures. Some might consider this a gift that should not be wasted. Or you may have the conviction that "making disciples" interculturally lines up with your "adventuresome" personality and what you want to do. In God's hands, even your sense of adventure could be productive.

A pastor in Argentina with a strong missions program helps people process their sense of calling by having them trace their own personal timeline. On that timeline, they are to place events, achievements, life circumstances, marketable skills, and other "evidence" both subjective and objective that God has been preparing them for intercultural ministry. He also has them evaluate their character traits such as flexibility, adaptability, persistence, language learning ability, etc. His supposition is that since God has known each of us from before we were born, that he will have been at work during our entire lives to shape us for our best place of service. This has helped many in his congregation sort through their sense of calling.

Your sense of calling should have both subjective and objective elements that give clarity of vision. In whatever way this conviction is formed, you will come to rely on it later when doubts and problems arise. And they surely will! It is harder to doubt in the darkness what you have clearly seen in the light. So, develop a conviction that is both deep and strong.



- 1) **Question:** In Acts 26:15-18, to what end did Jesus call Paul? Why is God still calling his disciples to go into other lands and to other peoples with the Gospel?
- 2) **Activity:** Write out your own reasons why you believe that the call to “all nations” is still active and applicable today. Be prepared to share these reasons with others.

Confirming your Calling

Whatever its nature, the evidence of “calling” should be confirmed by others. The decision to uproot oneself (and perhaps a spouse and family) and go elsewhere to make disciples is a big one and has consequences. This is particularly true when it means traveling internationally and plunging into a totally different language and culture.

Look for objective sources and find ways to gain confirmation. Close family and friends are more likely to try to talk you out of the notion than affirm it! If they are Christians, you might ask them to pray with you about this decision rather than ask for their opinion at the outset. Ask spiritually mature people in your church to pray with you about it. Although church leaders are not always as supportive of the missionary enterprise as we would like, it’s important to inform them and get their input. When led by the Spirit and seeking wisdom, their counsel can be invaluable. And of course, you also want their blessing if they are able to give it.

If you are married, it is extremely important that your spouse also share the conviction that God is calling you, particularly if it means separating you from your family for long periods of time. Or if you go as a couple or family, how you live out your relationship in the new culture is often the most remarkable and differentiating part of your Christian witness.

A frequent testimony of Muslims coming to faith has been observing how a Christian man treats his wife with gentleness and respect. The quality of their loving relationship is what makes them unique and attractive. If husband and wife are not in agreement and don’t share this sense of calling, it can generate ongoing friction, lack of harmony, and render much of their witness null and void. Make sure you are of one mind and heart in these matters. Likewise, teenage children should be brought into this process as they are to suffer much more the absence of friends and family.

Growing in Conviction

If you have a sense of calling, there are ways that you can test, nurture, and strengthen that conviction.

1. Create a lifeline and identify evidence that God has prepared you for a disciple making environment that is intercultural. This will show up in life circumstances as well as in your character traits. Intercultural service requires adaptability, perhaps to learn another language. If you are rigid and have a hard time adapting to change, you will need to either change your character or reconsider your calling.
2. Prayerfully read the Scriptures. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Personalize and apply what you are hearing in obedience. Keep a journal of what you hear. This is a good habit to get into.
3. Make disciples now—before you head out! Disciples make disciples. It starts with those who don’t follow Jesus. Learn to lead others to Jesus and walk with them in this process. That’s the heart of discipleship.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as you open your mind and heart to intercultural service. Seek out opportunities to make disciples of those in your own context that are of another culture. This will teach you much about intercultural communications.
5. Nurture your interest in unreached peoples. Consult the [Joshua Project](#) website or other sources. Pray for them daily. Allow God’s burden for the lost to grow in you.

6. Read inspirational missionary biographies. You can learn much about missionary life and service through them.
7. Learn about the countries and peoples of your interest. The Internet has a plethora of information on every country and nearly every people. Become an expert. Know what is happening. Pray for their leaders. [Wikipedia](#) can be a good starting point, and usually has references for follow-up.
8. Pray specifically for clarity, unity, and depth of conviction regarding God's call to intercultural service, particularly if you are married and have children in their teens. Talk with them and include them in the decision to go. Uprooting may lead to much resentment and unhappiness if not dealt with beforehand. Have others join you in these prayers.

If as you nurture your calling you continue to feel that the Lord is calling you into cross-cultural ministry, then pray, "Here I am. I am willing to take a step forward. Show me the way!"

- 3) **Question:** If you have a sense of calling, is it well developed? What "evidence" can you find that God has been preparing you for intercultural ministry service? What experiences, abilities, and character qualities do you possess that will help you fulfill that calling?
- 4) **Activity:** Articulate your sense of calling. Use the above list to analyze your calling. Work this activity with other students. Talk about its subjective and objective aspects. Be prepared to share this with friends, relatives, and church leaders.

Lesson 3

Being a Disciple

Discipleship is a walk towards spiritual maturity. It is a lifelong process. The beginning of this journey starts with a “new birth” (John 3). This newborn baby is nurtured and grows through childhood and teen years into adulthood. The Apostle Peter exhorts new believers in the following passage:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Peter 2:1-3).

Desire the Word

It is apparent that growing as disciples requires the nourishment of the Word of God. That Word can provide both milk and meat (1 Corinthians 3:2). That is why its repeated reading always brings new insights. Every reading allows us to go deeper in our understanding of the nature of God, his purposes, his work, and his will for us.

Bible reading can seem like an intellectual process when it is read simply to “know” more. This is a legitimate pursuit, but if the words don’t get into the heart, they are of no effect (James 1:22-25).

Reading or hearing the words of the Bible is *nourishment for the soul*. When we read the Bible or hear it read, we must discipline ourselves to “hear from the Lord.” When read with this attitude, the reading of the word instructs us and sheds light on our path (Psalm 119:105). Sometimes when we listen, the word that comes to us may even seem unrelated to the passage. But the Spirit who inspired the Bible also inspires his thoughts in us as we read or hear the spoken Word. This should generate a hunger in us to be constantly in the Word as we deal with the many issues of life.

The Word is rich, with many subtleties and nuanced meanings. It was written in ancient languages over the span of hundreds of years by thirty-five authors in far-away places. Its consistency and coherence reflect the miracle of its inspiration! But in order to understand what it “means,” it is often necessary to know the context in and for which the text was written. Even then, some passages are very difficult to interpret. Because of this difficulty, some new readers become confused, give up their reading, and wait passively to be taught what to believe. This might be appropriate for some, but not for those of us given the responsibility of going to the nations.

Disciples are exhorted to “search” and “study” Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15). If you are new to Bible reading and are having difficulties with any passage, be patient. There are Bible dictionaries and commentaries to help you work through them. Discussing it with a more mature disciple you meet with to study the Bible, will also bring greater clarity. There are many resources available online to help you work through the Bible with greater understanding. But dig for these golden nuggets yourself! It’s the Holy Spirit’s job to lead you into all truth, so ask for “ears to hear” from him every time you read (Luke 8:8).

Be in the Word daily. We can’t imagine eating once a week. But some believers expect to be fed once a week at a church service. If you are ever to mature and be an effective servant for the Lord, being in his Word daily is the only way to grow. There are many Bible reading plans offered online to help you mark your pace. But don’t just read. Listen and obey! Obedience is the ultimate goal of reading or hearing the Word (James 1:22-25).

Memorizing verses and passages also is an essential practice as the Lord often brings these to mind in making decisions, strengthening our resolution to resist temptation (Psalm 119:19), or when testifying to others (Luke 12:12). Memorization has become a lost discipline with the advent of modern technologies, but there is nothing like having Scriptures stored in your memory when you

need them most! Find a good memorization method that suits you. Then store the Word away in your mind and heart.

- 1) **Question:** What are your Bible reading and listening habits? Are you daily in the Word, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts and decisions?
- 2) **Activity:** With the other students, discuss the difficulties of reading and understanding the Bible. Find out how each person deals with difficult passages. Encourage each other to regular reading through the Bible systematically. There are many plans available. Find one that suits you.

Commitment

A disciple of Jesus must be “all in.” Jesus himself made that clear:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

This is a commitment that some Christians are unwilling to make, but it is essential if you want to be an effective tentmaker. Someone has said that the “cross” is where my will meets God’s will. It’s an attitude of submission.

A testimony: I received Jesus into my heart as a child, but as a young man I became an agnostic and drifted very far from the Lord. I made a mess of my life and was dealing with drug addiction and depression. But one day while reading in the Gospel of John, I decided that Jesus was who he claimed to be. However, my problems persisted. So I went to a solitary place, read the Bible and meditated on it. On the third day I prayed: “God, you know I believe in Jesus. But I still have addictions and problems. If you take these away, I promise to be a good man. I’ll marry a good woman. We’ll go to church. We’ll raise our children in the faith.” To my surprise, I heard God say to me: “No deal. I don’t want your problems. Everyone wants to give me their problems in exchange for the good life.” In desperation I cried: “What then can I do?” He said: “You must give me your WHOLE life and you must allow me to do what I want to with it...” I was desperate and responded without hesitation: “It’s a deal!”

Now, as an old man, I can say that God did his part. He released me from my addiction and depression. He gave me a good wife and family. He gave me loving brothers and sisters around the world. He gave me an abundant life and has fulfilled his promise in marvelous ways (Matthew 6:33). To tell this story in detail would fill another book!

Transformation

Transformation is what God desires in our lives and in that of all of Jesus’ disciples.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12:1-3).

When we are “all in,” we can live transformed lives. We witness his power in us to save us from ourselves, to heal our wounds, and overcome whatever the world throws at us. But we must be totally committed to him and his purposes if we are to be his disciples, live under his blessing, and in

his power. We must let the Word of God change the way we think. *For as a man thinks, so is he* (Proverbs 23:7).

- 3) **Question:** Are you all in? Are you fully committed to be a genuine disciple of Jesus? Have you given every area of your life to Jesus to do with as he wills?
- 4) **Activity:** With a small group of fellow students, read and discuss the following texts. By each one, note what is to be expected if we truly want to be a disciple of Jesus.
 - a. Luke 9:23-24
 - b. Luke 10:3
 - c. Luke 14:27
 - d. John 15:18-20
 - e. Acts 14:22
 - f. Romans 8:16-17
 - g. 2 Timothy 3:12
 - h. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9
 - i. Philippians 1:29
 - j. Philippians 3:10
 - k. 2 Timothy 2:2-3
 - l. 1 Peter 4:12-13

The Spirit

At the new birth, believers enter into a relationship with the Holy Spirit which continues forever (Ephesians 1:1). Believers are “sanctified” through the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This is not a matter of personal achievement; it is a dynamic state of grace granted by God when we are “born again.” This saving grace continues its work of “perfecting” us during our lifetime and beyond. When we say “yes” to God and obey him, we allow his Spirit to do his work in us and through us. When we say “no” to God and disobey him, this “quenches” the relationship and “grieves” the Spirit. This relationship, like any other, must be nurtured and cared for. We thank him continually for all he does for us. We ask his forgiveness when we are rude to him and disobedient. His love is the constant in this relationship, not our performance. He loves us in spite of our stumbling, bumbling ways and even in our unfaithfulness.

As we walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26,) he transforms our character. That means we are continuously becoming a better version of ourselves and more useful to the Kingdom of God. Those old sinful values and pursuits are traded in for pursuing God and his goodness.

...whatsoever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:6).

The “old things” the flesh and the world offer us are no longer important. All is seen from a new perspective (2 Corinthians 5:17)—that of serving God and others. At times we fail to live this out, but the Spirit is ALWAYS there to encourage, lift up and lead us forward.

Our Relationship with the Spirit

Much has been written and debated about the gift of the Spirit and experiences related to this gift. Terms like “baptism in the Spirit,” “infilling of the Spirit,” and “walking in the Spirit” all have their various interpretations. No matter how this gift is received and manifested, God’s intention is to use it to further his Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit wants to use you and will do so to the measure that you are willing and able to receive his grace (Romans 12:3). Be open to asking for more of that grace as you walk in faith (Luke 11:11-13). The Spirit enables us to respond to all of life's challenges and opportunities in a gracious way. He does that through his personal guidance but also through the gifts he manifests through us. He gives these as he wills and to his own ends, which is the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4).

Theologians tell us that the Spirit is a person—not an impersonal force. We agree. You can't have a personal relationship with a "force." On the other hand, we know that the Holy Spirit is always present with all believers everywhere, giving him the attributes of God's pervasive all-knowing presence and power. Being in communion with this eternal, supernatural Being is a hard concept to grasp but essential to our walk.

"Walking in the Spirit" means conversing with the Spirit. We talk to him as if he were right next to us or in our minds. We can ask him to guide our decisions. We can ask him for his power to overcome circumstances. We learn to recognize the Spirit's response as well. Although his answers aren't always instantaneous, his timing is perfect. We may want a "yes" right away but "wait" is as often the answer, and even a "no." This is part of learning to trust him to know what is best.

All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28)

Even beyond this level of dialogue, walking "in" the Spirit means we learn to recognize his nudging, even when what we are "hearing" may be outside our comfort zone. This can take the form of going out of one's way to speak a word of encouragement to some unknown person, without even knowing their circumstances. It may be offering a prayer for a stranger who shares a burden with you. It may be an act of generosity towards a brother or sister whose circumstances you are not aware of.

A testimony: As a young missionary, I was invited to go to a conference in Mexico to personally meet a colleague with whom I had corresponded regarding a missions course I was developing. I wanted to do so but could not afford the airfare. About a week before the event, an acquaintance knocked on the door and said: "I believe the Lord is telling me to give you some money. But if you don't have a specific need, please let me know as I don't have much to spare." It was the exact amount I needed to travel! I graciously accepted the money, knowing that the Lord would bless his obedience. During that trip, not only did I meet my colleague with whom I would work for years, but I also had an unplanned meeting with a global missions leader, which unexpectedly led to my project being used to mobilize missions throughout Latin America.

What the Spirit Does

The Spirit guides us into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit is also "the Comforter" (John 14:15-18). Thankfully the Spirit, not us, has the role of convicting men of "sin, righteousness, and the coming judgment" (John 16:8). The Spirit of God also works in believers "both to will and to do His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13) as we carry out the "good works" God has prepared for us to do since before the foundations of the world (Ephesians 2:10). His primary role is to help us do the will of God.

Some of us believers have had a bit of struggle "feeling" the Spirit. We are shy about being expressive. But we know when we've responded well to his prompting and done the right thing. His Spirit communes with our spirit and confirms that we are the sons of God (Romans 8:16). Note that this is intimate communication, not just something we believe intellectually. Neither is it something we only experience when we get the urge to sing and dance. Cultivating that sense of his work in us and through us is an important part of maturing as a disciple of Jesus.

- 5) **Question:** How does the Spirit move and work in your life? How do you hear his voice?
- 6) **Activity:** Share your experiences with other students regarding how you feel, hear and experience the Holy Spirit in your life. Make a mutual commitment to cultivate a listening attitude.

Lesson 4

Discipleship Roles

In the New Testament, every believer is called “a saint” and called to live a holy life (I Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:22; I Peter 1:15-16). Our sanctification (not our titles, training and degrees) forms the basis of our ability to minister to others. Sanctification is a lifelong process and is our first calling. That is why admitting we are sinners, confessing our sins and holding each other accountable is so important to our own sanctification. “Sin” is defined as missing the mark. It includes our thought life, open or hidden attitudes, and behaviours that are not pleasing to God.

For example, Satan has strongholds over many Christian men today in the area of pornography. This addiction is endemic and affects single and married men alike. It generates havoc within marriages and destroys the witness of many church leaders. One mission leader known by the editor starts every candidate orientation session convening all the men. The first thing he asks them is to describe their relationship with pornography. Without exception, everyone struggles, and some admit to addictive behaviour. This leads to mutual confession and they experience liberating and healing freedom as the light of God’s grace penetrates this dark place in each of their lives. This is the power of confession (James 5:16) and the starting point of healing and sanctification.

When darkness is exposed to God’s light in a spirit of confession and mutual humility, God’s grace-filled power is released. Confession is truly good for the soul. It is essential for us to regularly check up with each other in the three main areas of human weakness: *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life* (1 John 2:16). Great Christian leaders like Billy Graham have practiced regular times of open confession with a trusted group of colleagues not only in this area, but in finances and prideful attitudes. It was one reason God blessed his ministry and preserved him as “above reproach” throughout his long life. We won’t be able to release others who are in bondage until we ourselves have been released by confessing our sins to one another.

Note that this is not just a secret confession to God. We are to confess to one another (James 5:16). The Methodists in their early years as a Spirit-filled, international revival movement, started their home meetings with a time of mutual confession. When this practice ceased, Methodism started a slow decline into institutionalism. Sanctification is not about appearances, it is about honesty, humility, and integrity. We are called to be holy, and without this process of sanctification, we cannot see God (Hebrews 12:14) because sin generates a veil.

Much more can be said about the process of sanctification, but it all starts with confession.

- 1) Question:** How are you doing in your process of sanctification? Are there hidden sins in your life that have power over you? Do you want to be released from these? Confessing these to others is the way forward. It allows for God’s healing presence to enter in and release you from bondage.
- 2) Activity:** Prayerfully meditate on James 5:16. Make a list of those areas of sin with which you are most tempted. If you are a man, find two trusted brothers or if you are woman, two trusted sisters, to form an accountability group. Confess your weaknesses and failings to each other. What is shared in your group stays in your group! Pray with and for each other on a regular basis. Encourage each other and celebrate your victories.

Spiritual Gifting

Everyone who is born again, is “sealed” with the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). His presence in the life of each believer is manifold in its manifestation. How the Holy Spirit is received is a subject of much discussion and debate into which we will not enter. Let every person be convinced in his or her own mind and be proof of their point of view by daily demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 6). What we desire to highlight is the working out of the gifts for the edification of the body of Christ.

After our call for sanctification, we are called to build up the Body of Christ with spiritual gifting (Ephesians 4:11-16). To do this, the Spirit distributes “grace” as he wills. The Bible provides us with lists of these graces or “gifts” in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12.

Those who are newcomers to one of our churches might get the impression that there are only a few gifted and anointed ones that God speaks to and through, and the rest of us are there to sit and listen, attend faithfully, give money to meet the church budget, and volunteer to work in established programs. But this is not a Biblical picture of the church. The church is all of its members working together in the exercise of their spiritual gifting as Ephesians 4 describes. This is true “body life.” And the application of the gifting is not just to maintain the programs of the church. It is for the building up of the body of Christ and that means making new disciples where we live and work. When you build a “living” building, you are always adding new bricks to it! (1Peter 2:5)

Quite recently, the small congregation the author belongs to, offered a “motivational gift mix inventory” (MGM) based on the list of gifting in Romans 12. This was to help people understand what motivated them to service and be able to discuss this in small groups. The ultimate goal was to awaken their interest to work together on a Spirit-inspired missional project of their choosing. Interestingly, most members thought these gifts were only exercised in service to what we call, “the local church.” It hadn’t occurred to them that the “church” is its people, not its programs. Their gifting also relates to how we might serve those who are not members of the church! Out of this experiment came several wonderful outreach projects.

- 3) **Question:** What is your concept of Spirit-given gifting? Who are the gifted ones in the church? How do we know when the gifts are being released in each believer and being used effectively?
- 4) **Activity:** Take the MGM assessment or study the list of gifts in Romans 12 with other students. Which one or two inspire you? Which one is linked to what you do well? Share your findings with other students. Discovering our gifting is an important first step in being released for joyous service to those around us. Remember that these gifts are always complementary and work together to build up the body of Christ, not to exalt the individual.

Our Sacred Role in the World

When God set apart Israel for himself, they were to be *a royal priesthood* (Exodus 19:6). God reaffirms this intention for the church in I Peter 2:5: *you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

The priest's role is to bring the needs of the people before God and represent God's will to the people. We use prayer to intercede for others. We use our lives and words to teach others about God's will.

We may earn our living through employment or business or through working in or with the organized church, but all disciples are called into this holy priesthood. This has nothing to do with the ordinances of the institutional church, important as these may be. It is a matter of free access of every disciple to the throne of God through the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. When he

finished that work, the veil to the holy of holies was torn asunder (Mat 27:51) giving every disciple free access to the throne of God in prayer.

Our essential identity is not in our various occupations, roles, and titles. It lies in our relationship to God as his child. *As his child*, we know his love and are welcomed into his presence whenever we choose to come to him. We can address him as “father” or even “daddy” (Romans 8:15). His Spirit is never far from us. If we cultivate our senses to see and hear him, we begin to live in his presence. We can talk with him conversationally. We never need to fear his condemnation for there is “now no condemnation for those who are his children” (Rom 8:1). He is there to hear us, to forgive us, to help us, and to help us help others. This is what it means to walk in the Spirit.

- 5) **Question:** How does your relationship with God play out in daily life? Are you often aware of his presence? Do you recognize his work when you see it? Can you discern when he is speaking to you?
- 6) **Activity:** Discuss with other students how they experience God. There is no precise formula to follow, but the relationship must be cultivated if it is going to be real to each of us.

The Apostolic Calling

A third aspect of calling has to do with the place of service God calls each disciple into. This is a matter of personal guidance, whether we serve in our hometown or in a foreign country.

In Ephesians 4, the *apostolic ministry* is listed along with four others (*evangelism, prophesying, pastoring, teaching*). These are not status-laden titles. They are functional phases in extending the Kingdom. To use them as titles of status is antithetical to Jesus’ teaching (Matt 23:9). The list refers to the essential phases and ongoing functions in the extension of the Kingdom of God. Initially, apostles go forth; evangelists win over followers of Jesus; prophets speak forth the Word of God; pastors care for the people’s well-being; teachers teach the Word. These ministries are both sequential and simultaneous. Each is needed for the building up of the body of Christ. But it all starts with the apostolic ministry of going into all the world.

The idea of going everywhere with the Gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ is clearly set forth in Scriptures:

Matthew 28:18-20 – *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. 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.*

Mark 16:15 – *Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.*

Luke 24:47-48 – *and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*

John 20:21 – *Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*

Acts 1:8 – *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

It is through this apostolic ministry that “missionaries” have been called and sent throughout church history. How they were sent and supported is as varied as the history of the church itself. Although “orders” were organized in the Catholic Church to carry out missionary work, the gospel spread largely through traders, migrations, itinerant workers, and even through invasion, captivity, and slavery. Not until the early 19th Century did Protestants organize “societies” (what we know as *mission agencies*) to send missionaries.

What we do know is that however they GO, Jesus’ witnesses live an open and consistent life. They honor God through their work and through their lifestyle of faith. They witness through both their words and deeds.

Colossians 3:17 – *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Biblical Examples of Tentmakers

The idea that God uses people in different kinds of circumstances and in all kinds of roles and occupations to do his work is not new. God used ordinary people to represent him and do his bidding, both before and after the nation of Israel organized its religious workers. He still does.

- **Abraham** – Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. Although despised by some as a herdsman, Abraham found grace where he wandered and represented God's blessing to them (Genesis 12-25).
- **Joseph** – Joseph was a slave, a steward, a prisoner, and a governor in Egypt. He used his spiritual gifting and godly character in each situation and was a witness of God's favor and providence to the Egyptians during his long life (Genesis 39-50).
- **The Young Israelite Maidservant in Naaman's House** – This young slave girl testified to her mistress about the power of God for healing (2 Kings 5) and it resulted in the conversion of a Syrian general.
- **Nehemiah** – Nehemiah held an important position as a servant and cupbearer to the King of Persia. He found favor with the king and was allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it as God instructed him to do (Nehemiah 1-13).
- **Daniel** – Daniel worked as a high-valued government official in Babylon and became a living witness to the miraculous power of God (Daniel 1-12).
- **David** – David served the country of Israel as a warrior and as their king. He was far from perfect but wrote many Psalms attesting to the glory of God. Psalm 23 has undoubtedly blessed millions as the most well-known and quoted chapter in the Bible.
- **Esther** – Esther was a concubine who because of her beauty and grace became the queen of Persia. Through her position, she was able to save her people from destruction (Esther 1-10).

The Example of Paul

As mentioned earlier, Paul provides us with a good model for tentmaking. His enormous work and responsibilities in propagating the Gospel and organizing the newly formed church did not keep him from being an example to others by working with his hands. He was a great teacher and theologian, but he chose to sustain himself and others with his manual labors. He also received support from churches. But tentmaking was his profession and a means of financial provision. How did this work?

- Paul knew how to distribute his time between his various occupations – making tents during the week and teaching on the Sabbath. This is something thousands of pastors worldwide understand.

Acts 18:1-4 – *After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*

- Paul worked to supply not only his own needs, but that of his companions and others. This spirit of generosity is a mark of discipleship.

Acts 20:34-35 – You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

- Paul acknowledged that it is right and proper to receive offerings for ministry. But he did not claim this right in order to avoid the criticism that he was being paid to spread the Gospel. This has been a barrier to traditional missionaries.

1 Corinthians 9:11-12 – If we have sown a spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

- Paul didn't want to be a burden to others. By working with his hands, he could both support himself and also fulfill his calling of taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 – Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

- Paul wanted to be an example of a tireless worker. He was a model for new believers. Unfortunately, some new believers feel that missionaries live an easy life without having to struggle to make a living. This is counterproductive.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-10 – For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

A follower of Jesus who loves the Lord will get involved in being a good witness no matter where he lives or what he is doing. Living a faith-filled life will make an impact. The true disciple will find a way of blessing others and making Jesus known.

The Example of Aquila and Priscilla

Aquila and Priscilla are used as a model of tentmaking (Acts 18:2-3, Acts 18:24, 26, Romans 16:3-5a, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19).

- Aquila and Priscilla moved around to various places in their tentmaking ministry. They had an open home that was used for meetings.
- They worked at networking, discipleship, teaching, and building relationships with people from various cultures.
- They were part of a team. They engaged in evangelism, making disciples of new believers and building up the emerging church.

When we study the lives of Aquila and Priscilla, several qualities become obvious which are typical of effective tentmakers. Among these are:

- marketable skills

- mobility and flexibility
- hospitable
- able to establish relationships
- engaged with an informal fellowship of believers
- self-starters, self-motivated
- team players
- networkers
- engaged in strategic planning
- wise, and accountable

It is also significant that in four out of the six references to the couple, Aquila's wife Priscilla is named first. This provides evidence for Priscilla's leadership in the business and the ministry. In addition, we find the remarkable comment in Romans 16:4 that Aquila and Priscilla had risked their lives for Paul. We do not know whether this comment refers to the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41) or to another event. But all the churches were grateful to them. They subordinated everything to their overall goal and were ready to make big sacrifices.

- 7) **Question:** Are you sensing a calling to be part of the apostolic ministry?
- 8) **Activity:** Describe why you feel God may be calling you to serve in going forth to take the Gospel to another land or people.

Lesson 5

Ideal Qualities of a Tentmaker

To hit a target, one must know what to aim for. If tentmaking is for you, these are five areas a potential tentmaker needs to develop in order to hit the target:

1. **A Clear Sense of Calling:** a compelling sense of calling supported by subjective and objective evidence
2. **Being a Disciple:** growing through the disciplines of the Word, prayer and walking in the Spirit.
3. **Making Disciples:** leading others to Jesus and walking with them after they are “born from above,” together in fellowship with other disciples.
4. **Occupational Competence:** demonstrated competency, experience, and credentials in a marketable occupation.
5. **Adaptability:** Acquire the attitudes and skills needed to adapt to and function adequately in a host culture.

This course will address all of these areas and help you work through a process of developing the character and skill sets a tentmaker needs to be effective.

Using Our Unique Gifting

Everyone is special with a unique genetic design. We are unique in our personality, preferences and vocational calling as well. Sociologists and psychologists have studied this phenomenon and created categories for temperaments, personalities, and intelligences. But these fall far short of describing or predicting who each person will become over time. Circumstances influence us heavily in developing our gifts, but by the grace of God, we are all able to grow into who he has designed us to be. This is an important part of being disciples of Jesus.

God created us in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26), and that means that there is something in us that is intended to reflect his divine character and nature through our human genetic and personality makeup. Much of this image will be reflected in our character as we mature in Christlikeness. But it is also reflected in our personal development through our work, our creativity, our motivations, and ambitions. It plays out in the ways we go about our daily occupations. This is an amazing idea. Our “calling” is to fulfill a unique design God has given us, reflect his image, and glorify him through it!

When we pursue our gifting with excellence in our service and do so humbly as unto the Lord, we sanctify what we do through our attitude. This is true no matter how noteworthy or mundane the activity. God uses our achievements, our suffering, our struggles, and our sacrifices to glorify his Name and extend his Kingdom. When we do everything as unto the Lord, He orders our steps and allows us to become who we are meant to be. *Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up* (James 4:10).

Being Genuine

Even though we continue to use the term tentmaker, we question the practice of using false occupational identities as a cover to conduct unsanctioned religious proselytism in lands that have closed their doors to Christian missionaries. Let us seek legitimate and God-honoring ways to be disciple makers in these contexts.

We also want to eliminate the idea that this is simply about getting a job overseas. Millions of Christians around the world voluntarily seek work in foreign settings, for a variety of reasons. Others are sent overseas by their companies. Most of these Christians have little or no concept of being a witness for Christ because they believe that making disciples is the work of religious professionals. They are accustomed to being passive, Sunday morning Christians. They believe that being a good disciple means going to church faithfully. When they are not near a church, they don't know what to do because they have not understood the nature of discipleship.

God is raising up a great prayer movement for the unreached people today with the result that many ordinary believers are burdened for them, and many are willing to go. But what will it take to grow these potential volunteers into occupationally competent and qualified disciples of Jesus who are ready to live as disciple makers among the unreached? It may take a fundamental change thinking about who qualifies to be a "sent one."

A Change of Attitude

Someone has said that the Reformation was incomplete in its work. It put the Bible back in its central position of authority and returned grace (not works and indulgences) as the means by which women and men are made right with God. But it left professional clergy to administer the church and its sacraments rather than affirming the priesthood of all believers (Exodus 19:6, I Peter 2:5-9, Isaiah 61:6, Revelations 1:6). The idea that all believers share in the priesthood is a key concept in releasing the Gospel in a way that it flows spontaneously through families, clans, and tribes. It's the only way to experience mission advance today.

Another needed change is the attitude towards ordinary work. We have pointed out the false dichotomy between secular work and sacred work, yet an attitude persists towards work that needs to be addressed. Some mistakenly believe it to be a curse. Others believe it is a necessary evil. Yet God created man and blessed him with productive work to keep him meaningfully occupied (Genesis 1:28-29; 2:15,19).

Eric Liddle, the famous Scottish Olympic champion was quoted as saying: "God made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure." He was passionate about his athletic gifting and worked hard to be one of the best runners in the world. When he went to the 1924 Olympics, he honored the Lord by refusing to race his best distance because it was scheduled on the Sabbath. God honored that decision by allowing him to win the gold medal the next day in a race that he had not trained for and a bronze medal in another race. He also worked tirelessly for his Lord. His greatness as a runner allowed him to draw crowds of passive churchgoers wherever he went and challenge them to live their lives fully for God. In spite of his fame, he chose to be a missionary teacher in China. He could have fled the Japanese occupation during World War II but chose to stay with his students. As a result, he died a martyr's death in a Japanese concentration camp. His life has inspired thousands to sacrificial service for the Lord.

Doing meaningful and productive work is still God's desire for each of us. He's created each of us with unique motivations, gifting and potential for vocational growth and excellence. When we are content and fulfilled in our work, it means we have found a way of expressing who God has designed us to be and allow us to make a good contribution to our family and society. When we are thankful for our work it sends a clear message to the world that we are blessed by God.

A Sacred Calling

One of the deeper issues is the widely held belief that there is a dichotomy between sacred and secular callings. This idea is transmitted by the church and its clergy. Another is a failure to understand who a disciple of Jesus is and what he or she is empowered to do. A third is the church's failure to make disciples of Jesus and equip them to perform Jesus' mandate.

Being a disciple is at the core of our identity—of who we really are and our standing before God. Disciples are sons of God. They are chosen to be his ambassadors and his priests in this world. Through this identity and function, they are to disciple the nations. It is the first duty of the church to make disciples of Jesus and equip all believers to be disciple makers where they live and work.

If we are disciples, we must all respond to Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:18-20). Literally, this text says that "in your going" you will make disciples! Disciples are always making disciples. Tentmakers have a unique calling to be disciple makers in an international or cross-cultural situation. Their occupation is an authentic, God-given part of their missionary call, not a pretext for getting a visa.

A friend, who is a brilliant physicist, went as a tentmaker to a "creative access" Middle East country as a contract worker. He shared with me that he saw about 180 people give their lives to Jesus at his kitchen table. He walked and served with them during his work-term in that country and helped them become disciples. Disciple making is the heart of tentmaking.

If we are his disciples, making disciples of Jesus is the business he gave all of us, no matter what else we do. This is his supreme calling on our lives. If you aren't doing that already, it's never too late to start. Think of using your life experience, your skills, your connections, your testimony and what you know about the Lord as an integral part of what he has given you to use in making disciples. This is your disciple making base and context—the stuff of real life. We should learn from all of our experiences. Nothing is wasted in God's hands and even our failures can be used to encourage others.

Unless God is demanding it of you, don't give up all that he has allowed you to become professionally for the false idea that being a clergyman or religious professional is a higher calling. There is good Biblical evidence that we are to remain where the Lord has placed us unless there is good reason to switch occupations (1 Corinthians 7:20-24).

The editor met a middle-aged man in Chile who came to Christ as a highly placed member of the government. His conversion was radical, and he wanted to serve God with all his heart. An older Christian suggested that in order to pursue service to God, he must renounce his position in the national government and go to seminary. He did so, uprooting his family and moving to another city. He then completed his studies over the course of several years. When he graduated, he was required to do an internship as a youth pastor for several more years in order to become a pastor. When I met this now aging man, he was hoping to complete his internship soon, and receive a small pastorate from the denomination when one became available.

Was the assignment to pastor a church after years of study the best and highest calling for this man? How do we arrive so quickly at the idea that service to God means service to the institutional church? How could God have used this man to bless the people of Chile if he had remained in his governmental position of influence as an authentic follower of Jesus? Could he have been like Joseph, Daniel or Esther, a person for "such a time?" Perhaps he had good reasons for renouncing his government position. The editor didn't ask, but sensed that this brother felt somewhat discouraged with the whole process.

We are first called to be disciples of Jesus, wherever God finds us (1 Corinthians 7:20-24). As we grow into mature disciples, we are mandated to make more disciples. This is a daily, life on life activity and our occupations provide the relational base for discipleship to occur. If over time, God calls you to take up a paid occupation in the institutional church, that is another matter. But even then, we should never stop being a disciple of Jesus or let our focus drift away from making disciples.

- 1) **Question:** Is there a difference between a disciple of Jesus and a member of a church? Are you a disciple of Jesus? What makes you a disciple? Are you engaged in making disciples? If so, how?
- 2) **Activity:** Prayerfully create an inventory of who you are and what you have in your hands to offer God in furthering his Kingdom. How can he use what is in your hands as a platform for disciple making?

Being an International Witness

Tentmaking involves some ethical challenges in our witness. How do you comply with national laws that prohibit proselytism? What if a worker has agreed to the condition on their work visa that they will not attempt to convert others to Christianity? In order to answer these important questions, we must answer deeper questions relating to our identity, our service, and the nature of Jesus' commission.

Jesus said: "you shall be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8). Being a witness is testifying to what one has seen, heard, or personally experienced. It is not primarily about trying to convert people even when the power of that witness may interest or even persuade others to follow Jesus. This witness comes from our identity as sons of God and disciples of Jesus, who are guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Wikipedia defines proselytism as: *the policy of attempting to convert people's religious or political beliefs. It has come to be seen as a form of involuntary forced conversion through bribery, coercion, or violence. As such, proselytism is illegal in some countries.*

In countries that prohibit proselytism, we cannot legally or ethically attempt to forcefully convert persons from their religion by any means. However, the laws against proselytism or our agreement not to engage in this activity doesn't prohibit us from telling others about our Christian walk or explaining our faith, particularly if they ask us about the hope and joy that they see in us. These laws don't prohibit us from blessing our hosts with our prayers, our gracious words, and charitable deeds.

People are curious. They want to know. Genuine faith is contagious. If our testimony is vibrant, they want to know why we have a positive outlook on life. If they hear us pray, they want to know why we can go directly to God with our petitions. They also want to know who we are, why we are living among them, and quite often, why we are willing to give up so much to do so. These opportunities allow us to introduce them to Jesus' teachings. We can tell them about the power of having the Holy Spirit in our own lives. It may allow us to minister to them directly through prayer and have them experience that power themselves.

Praying for People

When people say "yes" to an offer to pray for them, they are saying "yes" to the Holy Spirit (Revelations 3:20). This releases the power of the Holy Spirit into their lives and it's his job to convict people of their need for Jesus (John 16:8). What happens after that is up to Him. We need not insist that they become Christians just like the Apostle Paul did not insist that the Gentiles who believed in Jesus needed to become Jews when followers of Jesus were still considered to be members of a Jewish sect (Acts 15). He allowed them to keep their old social identity. As they come to faith, we walk with them, study the Word, pray, and get to know God together. The Greek term for the power

of the Holy Spirit is “Dunamis” from whence we derive our word for “dynamite.” When people accept our offer to pray for them, they invite the Holy Spirit’s dynamite into their lives.

Jesus, not Christianity

It is hard to not think of Jesus in the context of Christianity with all its trappings. We tend to love our churches – our theology, our preaching, our music, and our style of praise. But Jesus isn’t a religion. He’s a person, and our focus is to have people everywhere know him, his teachings, his transforming power, and to obey his commandments. Discipleship is all about life-on-life experience, not just indoctrination or going to church. We learn about God by taking time to reflect on his Word daily and experience him together in our daily walk. Let the Holy Spirit do his work of shaping new disciples.

Given time, these new believers will create a structure around their belief shaped by their reading of Scriptures, their context, and experience of God (I John 2:27). They will likely organize into some kind of “church”, for to be human is to organize and institutionalize. For many, that will mean leaving their traditional socio/cultural religious roots and creating their own *Jesus follower* identity (just as the Gentile believers did in Antioch when they were first labeled as “Christians” by the community). This is evident in India where thousands of new believers are banding together in fellowships of “Jesus followers” that don’t identify with the traditional Christian churches in that country. It is not our job to impose our religious practices on our Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist friends who come to faith in Jesus. Their trust is in Jesus, not in a religion.

Before leaving this subject, we must emphasize the role of the Bible, the Word of God, in assuring that new believers can know God in a genuine way and not get caught up in human cultic practice supported by false human teaching. The Bible is the baseline for all doctrine, and “rightly dividing” the Word is essential. Tentmakers must know how to help others read the Bible and hear from the Spirit regarding all matters of life and practice. They are often called to “walk alongside” new believers as they struggle to apply Biblical teaching.

We must understand these things if we are to deal with ethical questions related to proselytism and be open about who we are and what we do. Being transparent doesn’t mean we will not suffer rejection and perhaps expulsion for being open about our faith. The Kingdom of God always presents a threat to human kingdoms. But it is the best chance we have of being used by God to spark a Jesus movement.

- 3) **Question:** Can people follow Jesus if they do not take on the religious identity of Christianity? If so, what is needed to assure that they will grow in their faith?
- 4) **Activity:** Discuss with others the core of the Gospel. What does it look like without any cultural or religious trappings? What are its essential components?

Lesson 6

Preparing to Go

Although we are all witnesses, we use the term tentmaker to refer to those who will intentionally go out from us to make disciples in cross-cultural and/or international situations. The hope is that many will go where there are few or perhaps no disciples of Jesus.

This is much more than finding a good job overseas. There is an intentionality to it that goes beyond the opportunity to see another part of the world or to work internationally. It is too easy to mix economic necessity and/or an adventurous spirit with a “calling.” We must be clear in our commitment to intercultural discipleship and be careful of mixed motives.

An effective intentional cross-cultural witness should be trained and equipped for the cultural aspects of the work. It is not always best to think you will “learn as you go.” Many missionaries have made mistakes early on that have cost them many years to rectify because they lacked the tools or discipline, to engage in understanding the culture they live in. Some have even become resigned to a fruitless experience, believing that the field is too hard and resistant when it is they who have lacked the skills or insight needed to minister effectively. These people are easy to identify by their us/them thinking and demeaning attitudes towards the people and their culture.

Pre-field, cross-cultural training is offered by dedicated missionary training centers. Sometimes it is provided by a mission agency though most agencies don’t have the time or staff to do much more than provide a general orientation. In either case, the goal of pre-field training is to provide the necessary initial skills and attitudes needed for adjusting well and communicating the gospel effectively in a cross-cultural context. Rather than thinking you will learn all this from other field missionaries, you may be wise to focus on spending time with the locals. They know the cultural codes and can help you greatly in your adaptation and communications challenges.

In today’s fast paced international work environment, jobs often come up that need an immediate decision. Tentmakers seldom have time to go through an extensive residential pre-field training program. We are thankful that today’s trainers can provide much of the content of cross-cultural training through the Internet. This makes training available to tentmakers even when they have had to leave for the field before receiving adequate training. Some missionary training centers are beginning to develop online programs to meet this expanding need, but much more needs to be done.

- 1) **Question:** What kind of skills does a tentmaker need when serving in another country and culture? What training certifications may you need to validate and improve your own occupation? Where is this kind of training available? Do you have a plan to develop these skills?
- 2) **Activity:** Envision your future (perhaps even your present situation if you are already deployed). Describe in writing what you would like to be able to do with the people you serve. How well do you want to be able to communicate with them? What would you like to be able to do for them? What competencies will you need to develop? Make a plan to develop these competencies and earn the certifications you need. Share this with your fellow students.

Trusting God for Finances

Although Paul worked to supply his needs and that of others, he had the liberty to receive support from the churches. It is interesting that he accepted financial support from the church in

Philippi (2 Cor. 11:9; Phil. 4:10) but not from the church he was currently serving. He did this for reasons already mentioned in this manual.

Some churches help tentmakers with outgoing expenses and occasional projects as they come up. This is the kind of “partnership” that describes Paul’s relationship with the churches in Antioch and Philippi.

We all need an income to live on these days, and “earning money” is the usual way of meeting this need. However, God may use the offerings given by God’s people as another means of supplying the needs of tentmakers. He may also supply through “in kind” gifts and provision of food, clothing, scholarships, etc. His provision may appear in the form of free or inexpensive housing. The point is that we rely on God’s faithfulness to meet our needs and that is often a mix of all of the above. We put our trust in him. If we seek first his Kingdom and righteousness, he promises that “all these things will be added unto you.” (Matt 6:33).

Getting a Credible Visa

Some missionaries claim an occupation as a pretense to get a visa. Sometimes they are students who do not study; sometimes they are uncertified teachers who are incompetent and poorly prepared; sometimes they are underqualified technicians who do substandard work; sometimes they are employees who have no interest in their jobs or the people they work with; sometimes they are businessmen who market inferior products; and sometimes they own companies that are nothing but a mailbox number.

For these missionaries, their work identity is simply an excuse or a means to live in the country of interest. However, it is often evident to their neighbors that they live a double life. This destroys any possibility of building trust. It also puts them under unhealthy stress and will ultimately ruin their ministry because they are not trustworthy or credible. Their careless work or lack of transparency contradicts any witness for Jesus Christ.

Credibility and trust are established when we have nothing to hide. Trust forms the basis for our Christian witness. One tentmaker responds to anyone that asks why he is working in their country that he is there as a response to Allah's will for him. Another explains that Jesus told him to come and serve among them. We need not lie about these things. They allow us to identify ourselves as spiritually-minded people and will open conversations on important topics.

A professional missionary and his family lived for years in a Muslim context. He claimed to be a student doing “research” for a doctorate. He indeed was enrolled in a program, but seldom studied. He also never finished his degree. When people asked him how he supported his family year after year, how he could afford a car, and how he bought a house with no apparent means of support, he told them his “father” supported him. This was a clever answer but misleading. No one really believed he was a student. He was taken in by local authorities more than once and questioned. They thought he was either a spy or a drug dealer.

Tentmakers strive to earn trust and having a believable occupation makes a positive difference. In their work, they are the best and most successful people they can be. They seek God’s blessing in their work or business endeavors. They do everything as unto the Lord and are witnesses to his grace and power. Therefore, conversations about spiritual things will arise naturally. But without trust, none of this happens.

- 3) **Question:** How important is a legitimate occupation and a good attitude towards employers and fellow workers to our effective witness? Is living a lie better than no witness for Jesus at all?
- 4) **Activity:** Create a narrative where you must answer the question made to a tentmaker: Why are you living and working here?

Viewing Work Positively

Work is ordained by God. From the beginning, man was made to steward the earth through his labors.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” (Genesis 2:15-16).

God was saying to Adam: Now you can enjoy the fruit in this garden; but to get it, you have to earn it. Tend to it and then you can have the reward of the fruit it produces. That is the way God's plan has always been: *work and reward*. God's system says, “First, you work; then you get the reward.” God never intended for it to be the other way around.

Our society should always be built upon work and people being rewarded for it. That is how societies build themselves up. When people work together for a common good, they achieve important things. Work is valued and there is order.

When a society is not based on productive activity, its men and women deteriorate in every way—morally, physically, and economically. Our work affirms our dignity and glorifies the Creator who not only gave us the work, but the gifts, aptitudes, and the strength to accomplish it. As the apostle Paul stated, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). And we should do it with thankfulness.

The Bible brings the whole of our working life within the sphere of ministry as we serve God in different occupations. But as noted before, a false division between sacred and secular has permeated the Church's thinking. According to the [Lausanne Cape Town Commitment](#), all believers are to accept and affirm their own mission and daily ministry as being whatever God has for them to do. The Commitment further emphasizes that there must be an intentional effort to train all God's people in whole life discipleship. This means to live, think, work and speak from a holistic, biblical worldview that fully integrates life and faith. Missional effectiveness is thus realized throughout our societies as we pursue Jesus' mandate to disciple the nations. In every place or circumstance of daily life and work, God's will is done in and through his people.

- 5) **Question:** All legitimate work is good. But what kinds of occupations allow the most contact with people? Which provide the greatest environment for personal service?
- 6) **Activity:** Describe your current work occupation in terms of how it allows you to engage with others and bless them with your words, prayers, and service.

Living Missionally

Work is one of the most profound ways to identify with people because work is central to human life. It is central to our humanity and to our being created in the image of God. In making us like Himself, God made us able to work as he did in the creation. He gave us talent, intelligence, and energy. He made us able to be productive like Him—to manage, to improve, and to create. And we are to do all of this in an attitude of honest service to God and others. This creates trust.

Lack of trust undermines productivity in many nations. As an example, a brother recounts how it took him ten times longer than needed to buy some hardware. The hardware was kept in a place where customers couldn't steal it. But it required three clerks to get it to make sure that none of them stole something from the cabinet when the merchandise was taken from it. It is impossible to build a productive economy with such distrust.

The Faith-Work Mix

There is a need to properly understand the faith-work mix. Today, the marketplace represents a secular and unspiritual place in our consciousness. That is why businessmen are not seen as spiritual—certainly not the same way we rate our prayer warriors, evangelists and other church workers. This has had the following effects:

1. We see Church as a spiritual haven while business is secular and contaminated.
2. We are afraid to take our profession of faith to the marketplace because we have a bad testimony.
3. The major spiritual activity we engage in with respect to our business is praying for breakthrough and profit.
4. We have lots of Christians in the marketplace, but integrity and trust are very scarce, even among each other.
5. We use common sense and worldly means to run our businesses with little regard to God's leading and Kingdom values.

Sometimes it seems that the only thing that relates our businesses to the Church is the provision of some of its financial needs. That is a good thing, but obviously is not all there is. Couldn't we affect how business is done in our context by providing a moral and ethical example? This is a complex question, but one worth discussing with other businesspeople. There are also some excellent resources for making business a place that honors God and develops the character of employees. Consider what it takes to build a "[Kingdom business](#)."

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering (Romans 12: 1, The Message).

Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work (Colossians 3:22-25 The Message).

Facing the Ethical Issues

As we have said earlier, a legitimate tentmakers' occupation is not simply fabricated as a cover. It is not a means to an end; rather, it **IS** his ministry. If a teacher does a good job, he is serving others well. That service is ministry! When he offers advice and prayer to his students, he is not using teaching as a cover for witnessing. He is carrying out his sacred function as a disciple of Jesus who is also a teacher. Doing what a disciple of Jesus does is integral to his life, and enters into his vocation as a teacher. He fulfills his spiritual role both when he teaches and when he prays. As a teacher, he has nothing to hide. He is a teacher following his true identity as a disciple of Jesus and his main calling: to serve God and others.

Witnessing is not proselytizing. What we have seen and heard and felt and understood about the grace of God in Christ—we are witnesses to these things (Acts 5:32). As guest workers, host countries don't ask us to renounce our faith. They know we are Christians. They expect us to be, and to behave like Christians. And their laws aren't opposed to us identifying with our faith. What they object to is someone from outside trying to convert people from their traditional religion and culture to our foreign religion and culture. When it happens, it can cause a lot of social unrest. Converts are often ostracized, persecuted, and even put to death. This disturbs the peace. Governments and

social leaders don't want that and neither do we. Our mission is to bring a blessing on families, not a curse.

If we have a legitimate reason to be in the country, we can be followers of Jesus and share our faith as the Holy Spirit gives opportunity without needing to try to convert people to Christianity. As some see Jesus in us and experience him through us, they will come to faith. But we must allow the Holy Spirit to show them when, where and how to express their faith in Jesus in His time and way. This expression will take many forms. This has been a hotly debated topic in missions literature and you may want to read further about levels of *contextualization* (labeled in missions literature as C0-C5) and how they have been expressed or observed. **Contextualization** means to communicate the Gospel using cultural elements in ways that will clearly convey it to people with meaning. The danger is to do this without compromising the essentials of the Gospel" (Stan Guthrie, Editor, Pulse). We must learn to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16) as we try to listen to and discern how the faith must express itself in different cultures.

- 7) **Question:** What is the difference between being a witness for Jesus and trying to convert people to Christianity? Can the two be separated?
- 8) **Activity:** Write out what you consider to be the bare minimum needed for a fellowship of Jesus followers to exist and grow.

Lesson 7

Biblical and Doctrinal Foundations

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2Timothy 3:16).

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2Peter 1:21).

The Bible Speaks Today

The Bible is an “inspired” book written by men. It means that the Holy Spirit is behind the words that were written and if we listen carefully, we can hear his voice speaking to us today. Its truths and instructions are reliable and applicable for all mankind throughout the ages. That is why Christians are so eager to see it translated into the world’s 2,000+ languages. They want God to speak directly to people in their own language.

Through its stories and instructions, the Bible provides mankind with all the guidance we need to be successful human beings – people who honor our Creator and get along well with each other. It basically commands us to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. If we all did this, we would bring heaven to earth. But there is a “sin problem” that gets in the way.

The Bible also addresses this sin problem. The main difficulty is that people are essentially self-centered, rebellious, and indifferent to God and his precepts. They are prone to treat each other badly in pursuit of their own self-interests. So the Bible explains how God has provided a way to get right with God by confessing our sins and receiving God’s forgiveness through what Jesus did for us on the cross. He paid the penalty for our selfish disobedience. It gives us the hope that as disciples of Jesus, we can live righteous, fulfilled lives in this present age, and be joyfully received into God’s presence when we pass on to our eternal reward.

The Bible tells us that this salvation is meant for all mankind, and Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18). Disciples are made when a person believes in Jesus as their Savior and appropriate his act of redemption on the cross for themselves. They learn to love Jesus and keep his commandments.

When a person accepts Jesus as Savior, they also accept him as Lord. They learn to walk in obedience to his will by listening to the Holy Spirit who Jesus sent to walk with those who believe. In their “going” they are to make new disciples by being living testimonies to the power of God in their lives and helping others choose the path that leads to God. Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). It all starts by believing in him and what he’s accomplished for us.

The Bible is also comprehensive. It tells the story of the world from its beginning to its end. It starts in an earthly garden (Genesis 2) and ends in an eternal city (Revelations 21). It explains how mankind’s faith in the Creator God developed and how the Holy Spirit has guided the process from the beginning, through its historical culmination in Christ, and how God will see it through, to the end. It is a fascinating book and well worth studying. Its truth is everlasting and speaks to us today of God, of his will, and of his purposes for mankind. It is because of the Bible that we believe and obey Jesus’ mandate to go to all the peoples of the earth with the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

- 1) Question:** Do you believe the Bible speaks to us today? How do you hear God speaking to you when you read or hear his Word? Become a life-long student of the Bible. Prepare your heart to hear the Spirit speaking through its stories, psalms, prophecies, and teachings. Above all, study the teachings of Jesus.

- 2) **Activity:** Write your own story of how you came to believe in Jesus and what that has done for you. This is your personal testimony and very valuable when sharing the Good News with others. Practice telling it in a short but powerful way that will encourage the hearer to want to know Jesus as well.

Know the Bible

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2Tim. 3:14-15).

Why should we be diligent to know the Bible? First, the Bible speaks to God's Glory and his everlasting Kingdom. It is a witness to his enduring purposes for mankind. God and his Kingdom are the focal point of the entire Bible. Everything in the Bible supports his sovereignty and rightful rule. It also tells of man's rebellion and need of salvation. It points to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the central event of history, and his appointment as everlasting Lord over every principality and power. Without knowing God in his sovereignty, understanding his Kingdom purposes, and appropriating his saving grace through Jesus Christ, we cannot effectively share with people how they may come into a personal relationship with God.

Second, the Bible provides instructions for how all men should live. This is an important area of missionary service. We should always be able to tell others why we live as we live and why we respond to situations as we do. We should also be able to use biblical texts to inform people of God's moral and ethical will as regards to important life matters. We should be able to provide instruction to those who have come to trust in Jesus Christ, so that they may know how to live good and useful lives that will please God and advance His Kingdom. This is why it is important to become a life-long student of the Bible. We must know what the Bible says and what it does not say.

Thirdly, the Bible gives us the missionary mandate. Both the Old and New Testament reveal this global mandate. Disciples make disciples. The Word tells us how to become disciples by being born spiritually as sons of God. Then it instructs disciples on how to live. As they walk in obedience, they grow in maturity and wisdom. They become more loving, gracious, and Spirit-filled people. This allows them to help others know God. In their day to day lives, they are continually making disciples.

Disciples go forth to live among people who do not know the ways of God or how to live in His grace. They minister out of what they have received and who they are as God's priests, not just what they "know" or believe to be true. Jesus said that a person is known by the fruit they bear (Mathew 7:16-20). The Gospel must transform us before we can help others know its transforming power.

The Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is the missionary Spirit. He sends us where he wills. That becomes clearer as we take steps of obedience. He also provides us with the power to do what he asks of us. Jesus gives us the authority but it is the Spirit who gives us the power to achieve God's purposes.

The bottom line is that making disciples is not an optional activity. It is a mandate given by Jesus to his disciples. But he doesn't leave us to our own human resources to accomplish this mission. He gives us his Word, the authority, and importantly, the Holy Spirit who leads and empowers us to go and make disciples of all nations (Acts 1:8).

*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty (Zach. 4:6).
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)*

Listen to the Holy Spirit

The Bible was produced by the Holy Spirit – He *inspired* it and he is our teacher. He uses the Bible to provide instruction and guidance. Without the Holy Spirit, the Bible would be just another book.

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words (1Cor. 2:12-13).

Obedience is key to understanding the heart of Scriptures. The Holy Spirit instructs us, not so we might know more, but in order that we might obey and be used by God to do his will and advance his spiritual Kingdom on earth. We must learn to listen, hear and obey his voice if we are to fulfill our purpose as Jesus' disciples.

How do we cultivate our dependence on the Holy Spirit? First, we must be rightly related to Him. This starts with a new birth.

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (John 3:5-8).

Being "born again" is a completely new birth that we experience within us. This is often described as a "conversion" experience because it marks a huge "before and after" in our lives. There is no middle of the road if we are to be disciples of Jesus.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matt 16:24-25).

The Mandate to Bless

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3).

Note that the blessing is intended to bless the nations. We are to bless others with the love of Jesus and do "good works" in his name. It is particularly important to understand that people who are without the Lord live under the curse of sin. The bondage of the curse is on all mankind because of the sin problem (Rom 3:23; 5-12). Jesus came to save the world from this condemnation (John 3:16-17).

This bondage is manifested in all sorts of spiritual, social, and physical ways. When we bless, we also work towards breaking the curse in people's lives. It is not only a spoken blessing. It requires hard work and discipline. It can be a very messy and even dangerous business to get involved in breaking the curse in people's lives.

Authority to Make Disciples

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 (Matthew 28:18-20).

We know we cannot carry out the Great Commission by simply using human resources. We work with the Holy Spirit. The name of Jesus is powerful. When we “walk the talk”, we impact others and release God’s power into their lives through our godly counsel, our prayers, our sincere love, our sacrificial work, and the miraculous expression of God’s grace in healing and the release from demonic powers. We do all this in the name of Jesus, not in our own powers.

It is the Holy Spirit’s infilling that empowers us to be able to do this work. Without him, we can do nothing significant in the spiritual realm.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Walking in the Spirit

The Bible commands us to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Paul dedicates several passages to what walking in the Spirit means in his epistles. Opinions vary regarding the filling and experience of the Spirit, but whatever your stance, we beg you for the sake of Christ and his testimony among the lost, to be gracious with each other and respect different viewpoints on how, when and in what manner the Spirit comes into the believer’s life. In this section, we will focus on what happens once the Spirit is active in a person’s life.

To walk in the Spirit is to be in communion with Him. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that being filled with the Spirit is a walk characterized by words of grace, wisdom, and thankfulness accompanied by joyful, inner praise. This inner joy is what many note in followers of Jesus.

A few years ago, a survey was conducted among 104 imams in Indonesia who had put their faith in Jesus. The question was posed to them of why they decided to embrace Jesus as Lord. The questionnaire included four options: a) seeing a miracle in Jesus’ name, b) having a dream of Jesus, c) being convinced through theological arguments, and d) observing how Jesus’ disciples lived. The vast majority (72%) decided to follow Jesus because they *observed the life* of believers. When Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses, he meant that who we are and how we come across to others is our witness. We preach wordless sermons every day!

Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ... (Eph. 5:17-20).

The Fruit of the Spirit

When we walk in the Spirit, we experience the abundant, grace-filled life that Jesus intended his disciples to have. This life is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit: love, hope, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

- 3) Question:** Do you walk the talk? Is your life characterized by the inner joy of the Spirit? Are you being and effective witness?
- 4) Activity:** Discuss with other students how to enhance your walk in the Spirit. Find practices that are helpful to sense both the Spirit's presence and his guidance in day-to-day interactions with people.

Breaking Communion with the Spirit

We break communion and grieve the Holy Spirit through willful sin. We do this through disobedience to God's express will – doing what we know is wrong and not taking care of the problem.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Gal. 5:16).

When we break communion with the Spirit, we know it immediately. We lose our joy and power in witness.

The solution is to recognize our sin, repent of it, confess it, and get back into our walk. That sounds easy, but it is very hard and Satan has many Christians living joyless, powerless lives because this simple but difficult process is not followed.

First, many Christians live in denial. We rationalize or justify our sins and are unwilling to repent of them. This harms the cause of Christ because we give the church the reputation of hypocrisy.

In addition, those who do repent, often don't find victory over sin because we don't confess our sins to each other. We believe (based on I John 1:9) that all we have to do is to feel badly about sinning, confess the sin secretly to God and ask him for forgiveness. We think that is enough, and admittedly, it feels pretty good. But too often, nothing changes. We fall back into sin.

Confessing our sins includes asking forgiveness of those who are most impacted by our sin (Matt 5:23-24). When we don't follow through with these steps, we are left on our own to struggle with our issues. We are not healed. What is done in darkness can only be displaced by the light. Confession and asking for forgiveness is necessary to the process of healing and restoration (James 5:16). This is part of our daily human experience.

- 5) Question:** How quick are you to settle accounts with the Lord when you willfully sin against him? Are you quick to apologize and ask for forgiveness? Do you also try to rectify any damage you may have done with your words or deeds?
- 6) Activity:** Discuss with other students how they deal with sin in their lives.

Lesson 8

Doctrinal Stability

Christian mission begins with a firm belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Our shared convictions and experiences in the Spirit must be based on this testament. But it is not an exercise in blind faith. There is much evidence to support the reliability of the Scriptures and the assertions it makes. This is a unique book that has held its own in spite of the enemy's best efforts to discredit it. If you are interested in this topic, there are many books written about the credibility of the Bible, starting with Josh McDowell's classic, [*Evidence that Demands a Verdict*](#).

Today, religious pluralism is promoted as a laudable end by all progressive societies. This contrasts with religious fanaticism which insists that all people remain in their birth religion, often enforced by laws prohibiting conversion to any religion but their own. We agree with freedom of religion which allows people to determine which religion to follow and allows Christians and those of other persuasions to live out their faith without repression and persecution. Everyone should have the freedom to follow their conscience in matters of faith.

Religious fanaticism is another matter. We must stay clear of being labeled as such. The idea that we need to conquer the world with our religion is a carryover from the distant era of Christendom when Christian armies marched out to conquer lands in the name of a Roman Pope. Other religions still operate under the thesis of world conquest, but these are primarily politically driven ambitions. Followers of Jesus must be known by their love, not by their religious or political opinions.

Jesus is already the LORD of all creation and of all the nations (Philippians 2:9-11). His Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, not the systems built by human beings even when they are labeled Christian (John: 18:36). When people turn to Jesus, the Holy Spirit will be the one to instruct them where to place their loyalties. The beauty of the work of the Spirit is that it's from the inside out, not through forced external manifestations of religious identity.

Religion as Identity

Some might believe that to be a faithful witness, we must first attack false doctrine. The fact is that most people inherit their religion from their parents and are loyal to their birth religion. This isn't a reasoned loyalty. It is a loyalty to family, society and very often, to their country. They hold to what their family and culture hold to, even if they don't understand or place much faith in their religion's tenets. What's more, in many countries, religion and birth identity are inseparable. You are registered for life as a member of your birth religion. This identity has little to do with what these people believe or even how they practice their religion. They are loyal to their religion because they were born into that religion.

Missionary sensitivity to people requires first a strong "yes" to their *birth identity*. It seeks to understand and affirm what John Ridgeway calls their *first birth* (John Ridgeway, [*Thy Kingdom Come*](#), 2019). What Jesus calls for is a *second birth*, and that is what disciple makers seek.

To be effective witnesses, we must be willing to understand this relationship between religion, culture, and identity (even our own). Quite often when we attack a religion as "false," we attack the person's cultural identity. It is no wonder that we generate defensiveness and are often viewed as a nuisance by governments, if not worse. If we really love others, we must first recognize their first birth and cultural birthright. If we are to witness in love, we must acknowledge each person and learn to honor them and their traditions because they are valuable to God as well. Many cultures have strong Biblical values that we can affirm and learn from. Let's first be learners before we begin to teach.

Let's also examine our approach to so-called "Christian" cults. Christian science, Kimbanguism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Iglesia ni Cristo, Mormonism, the Unification Church, and others – all make their claims about Christ. But the founders of these religions also claim new revelations that are often in conflict with what the Bible says about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or with the spirit of Jesus' teaching. They often mix orthodox doctrines with new beliefs and practices that appeal to the flesh. Many are built on the promise of prosperity or promote practices related to the Old Testament covenant of law, denying practices based on the New Testament covenant of grace. A student of the Bible doesn't find it difficult to spot these errors. The indwelling Spirit leads us into all truth (John 16:13). We are to reprove our brethren with grace and the Word if we are to save them from their error (James 5:20).

In both cases, attacking doctrine is rarely the way forward in presenting Jesus as the way the truth and the life. However, to understand our faith and be able to defend it adequately, it is essential to know the Bible well and its basic teachings, or we will find ourselves defeated in a skirmish with those of other religions who can pick on Christian teachings that are difficult to explain such as the immaculate conception and the trinity. Knowing the Scriptures thoroughly gives us the ability to express the hope that is within us, without getting bogged down in doctrinal disputes.

Creeds and Doctrinal Affirmations

The task of identifying essential doctrines and defining them to everyone's satisfaction is not easy, even within the mainstream Christian community. We differ in some of our teachings and Christian practice. One of the earliest attempts to come up with an "orthodox" statement was the [Nicene Creed](#). It was an attempt to clear up a raging debate on the exact nature of Christ and his relationship to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, it became the standard by which to judge orthodoxy and resulted in the expulsion of some Christian leaders and the execution of others. Another widely known creed is the [Apostle's Creed](#). It is largely used by the Catholic church in its rites.

Other statements of faith are less rigid, more comprehensive and focus on making the essentials of our faith understandable to non-theologians and those from other religious backgrounds, such as one that was forged in 1959 by Evangelical leaders in the newly formed [United Church of Christ](#).

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit,
 Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father,
 and to his deeds we testify:
 He calls the worlds into being,
 creates man in his own image
 and sets before him the ways of life and death.
 He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.
 He judges men and nations by his righteous will
 declared through prophets and apostles.
 In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord,
 he has come to us
 and shared our common lot,
 conquering sin and death
 and reconciling the world to himself.
 He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit,
 creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
 binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.
 He calls us into his church
 to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
 to be his servants in the service of men,

to proclaim the gospel to all the world
 and resist the powers of evil,
 to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
 to join him in his passion and victory.
 He promises to all who trust him
 forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
 courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
 his presence in trial and rejoicing,
 and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.
 Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him.
 Amen.

Many other creeds and affirmations have been written regarding our faith and they are helpful when sharing what we believe with new believers or those unacquainted with Christianity. Choose one that you are comfortable with and become well acquainted with it.

The [World Evangelical Alliance](#) is a global organization that attempts to represent all Evangelical Christians around the globe. This is their statement of belief:

World Evangelical Alliance Statement of Faith

We believe in:

The Holy Scripture as originally given by God, is divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediating work, and his personal return in power and glory.

The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

This, of course, is not a comprehensive list of Christian doctrine. It simply attempts to list what unifies Evangelicals and exclude statements that might prove divisive. Neither do these statements attempt to present the evidence of Scripture for each belief. That is something we must do by becoming students of the Bible. Because you are likely to be a member of a church or denomination that has its own statement of faith, it is also important that you study these in the light of Scripture. Be convinced in your own heart and mind rather than simply holding to a statement.

While knowing our doctrines is important, we should understand that most of the followers of the world's religions do so out of loyalty. Few understand their birth religion rather or its theological underpinnings. Religious loyalty is loyalty to family and culture. That is why so many western missionaries attest to the fact that even after they seem to have won a theological debate, the person they are arguing with usually shrugs it off as inconsequential. Perhaps that is why after confronting Nicodemus with "truth," Jesus went on to say: *I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father but by me* (John 14:6).

Jesus is the truth. Truth is found in a relationship. We know the truth by knowing and following him.

Doing Theology with those of other Faiths

Instead of attacking other religious belief systems, let us understand how to do theology WITH those we are influencing. The gospel can often be shared using their traditions. Let us show our interest in what they believe. Studying comparative religions is a stimulating exercise and it can be useful in providing a framework, but many people (including Christians) don't know their religious tenets well and simply practice a "folk" version of their religion. Their religious practices and traditions fulfill social norms. Their worldview may be more defined by traditional beliefs and superstitions than orthodox religious teaching. So, as we work with them to create understanding, let's start with what we can agree on:

- All religions (except atheism) start with a belief in a Creator God. The Bible starts here, and it is advisable to read Genesis 1 as a starting point in an interfaith dialogue. Even an atheist must admit to an unknowable "first cause." Don't try to use Genesis 1 as a scientific account of creation. Focus on what we learn about God, and man's place in creation. This is the rule of thumb for all inductive Scripture study: what does it say about God and man?
- Almost anyone will agree that there is a problem of sin in this world. The Bible addresses this by the third chapter of Genesis. It isn't hard to get people to admit that they sin from time to time, even though they may think they are good compared to others. Raise the question of how people can be saved from their sin.
- People want divine power to meet daily problems, particularly those related to health, finances, and relationships. The Bible has much teaching on these matters. Share Bible stories, teachings, and your testimony, particularly in the context of dealing with God's provision and real conflicts you have overcome. This might be a good opportunity to begin studying the Bible together using a "Discovery Bible Study" method.
- All are concerned with the origin of man and his eternal destiny. For followers of Jesus, this begins in Genesis and ends in Revelations. Share the whole story, not just Jesus' death and resurrection (see The Five-Minute Story in the appendix).
- All are concerned with earning forgiveness or merit with God both for the present life and the hereafter. The Bible clearly deals with this topic through the promise of the Messiah and its fulfillment in Jesus—how the death of Jesus was God's ultimate act of mercy on mankind. Share this Good News—God has provided a way back to himself through Jesus whom he raised from the dead and has seated at his right hand.
- Many are concerned with the end times. The Bible presents a picture that will get clearer with the passing of time. Jesus is coming again. Even Muslims believe this. Listen and express your trust in God through world-threatening events and circumstances. Affirm the return of Jesus and what the Bible says will happen when he comes.

This kind of dialogue is more effective than trying to persuade others by winning arguments. Most religions are not merely religious assertions and truth statements. They are all-inclusive systems of culture, society, and government. They are a way of life, and their primary power is in the loyalty of their adherents to their families and society. Our mandate as disciple makers is to teach them to observe all the things that Jesus commanded. We do this through our words and example. That is very different than attempting to make religious converts.

- 1) **Question:** How well do you know what you believe? Do you depend on others to tell you what to believe? Or do you study the Bible together with others in order to understand God's purpose and plan?

- 2) **Activity:** Using the bullet points above, write out your theological position on each of those common points of religious interest. You may do this together with other students and discuss each point before writing down your own answers.

The Uniqueness of Christ

The uniqueness of Christ contains within itself a strong “no” to all other claims of lordship. Those who come to Jesus as Saviour, need to put him in first place—before any other allegiances in their lives. This means, first of all, giving up the idea that someone is lord of his or her own life. If we accept Christ’s salvation, we have been bought with a price and we are his subjects. For those of other religions, it will mean taking on a new life in the Spirit in the midst of former loyalties. Much is likely to change. However, their newfound loyalty to Jesus and his teachings should make them better persons in every way. It is a changed life that gives validity to a new allegiance.

The Potential for Syncretism

When the lordship of Jesus isn’t central to the message, new believers may continue to practice social or religious customs which do not honor Christ. This can lead to syncretism.

When Roman Catholic priests accompanied the Spanish Conquistadores to South America, they replaced the names of the native’s pagan gods with those of Catholic Saints. Thus, the natives kept their idols but with Christian names. Their worldview did not change. This is an example of how religious syncretism occurs. Deeper belief systems must be displaced by a Biblical worldview that includes the Lordship of Jesus and obedience to his commandments.

There is a thin line between cultural adaptation of Christian practice in following Jesus, and syncretistic practice. As a rule of thumb, anything that doesn’t align with the commands of Christ is a form of syncretism; whereas anything that helps persons in another culture worship and obey Jesus in a way that is relevant, is not syncretism but adaptation or contextualization.

A missionary visiting northern Argentina was present at a tribal worship service with dancing—a culturally appropriate form of worship for these people. As he watched, a native brother commented to him: “See that man over there; he is not dancing as unto the Lord.” The missionary could not tell the difference, but the native brother could. When asked how he knew, he simply replied, “We know.” To the missionary, it could have all been a syncretistic pagan practice and he might have condemned it outright. But he wisely left that decision of whether or not to allow dancing to the native leaders of the church.

We should be careful to allow the Holy Spirit to guide new believers into all truth rather than set our own culturally defined Christian forms and norms as the standard to be met.

Let us remember that syncretism may take place even among so-called Christians when they cease to live under the authority of the Word and the Lordship of Christ. Some have claimed that ornate temples, elaborate choirs, seminary degrees, and the focus on famous personalities are syncretistic as they can get in the way of worshiping the Lord. It is true that emphasis on these things can lead us away from Jesus’ desire for his followers to worship him simply, in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Defend your Beliefs

As we have emphasized, tentmakers must know their Bible. Muslims are trained to attack Christian doctrines, especially that of the Trinity and the term “son of God.” Hindu Pantheism can readily absorb a naïve presentation of Jesus into its “many gods” worldview. Buddhist indifference to Christian presuppositions is a challenge that has defeated the best attempts of missionary theologians. Tribal spirit worshipers may understand spiritual realities better than most Christians, and encounters with demons in this context have left some missionaries confused and frightened. Seeking truth in the Bible and God’s guidance can help us confront these situations.

Knowing the Word thoroughly helps us to recognize instantly when someone gets off on an extra-biblical tangent. It helps us to defend Christian practice and beliefs when we need to. When we know the Bible, the Holy Spirit easily brings to mind applicable passages that address issues being faced. Knowing the Bible also gives us confidence to enter into any dialogue on spiritual matters. Knowing the Bible is a lifelong process that builds on its daily reading and study. Good books and lectures help, but there is no substitution for knowing the Word.

As with culture, understanding people’s religious beliefs involves first a thorough knowledge of one’s own faith. What is false is known by comparing it to what is genuine. But let us not go on the attack unless we are denouncing evil or addressing demons. People are never the enemy. Jesus chose dialogue to win people to him. So should we.

Conclusions

Regarding sound doctrine, take special note of Paul's exhortations to Timothy:

“Till I come, give attention to reading [the Scriptures], to exhortation, to doctrine” and “take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1Timothy 4:13,16). (For further study, read John 7:16,17; Acts 2:42; Romans 6:17,18; 1Timothy 1:3-11; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; 4:2-4; Titus 2:6-10.)

The term “doctrine” means “teaching.” For two thousand years, Christians have taught others about Christ and what it means to follow him. At first, there were no doctrinal statements, but over time, church leaders came together to solidify their teaching into written statements. This process has generated quite a bit of discussion and often disagreement. Over time, the church found itself divided over several important questions such as Jesus’ divine nature. Despite these differences, the message of Jesus as Savior and Lord has gone throughout the world. What we may learn from our experience in defining doctrines is that we will disagree. But we must love, honor, and respect one another in spite of our differences, for we have but one Lord and Judge, and we will all report to him someday.

- 3) **Question:** How well do you know your Bible? Have you read through it at least once? Do you have the discipline of studying it with others?
- 4) **Activity:** With the other students, create an inventory of Christian teachings that are important to follow in obedience to him. Plan to study the Scriptural basis for each one and be prepared to defend your beliefs. A comprehensive list of doctrines is provided in the appendix to help you with this exercise.

Lesson 9

Making Disciples

Spiritual growth is not a solitary enterprise. Simply stated, we need each other. It is nurtured in relationship with other followers of Jesus. For the first three centuries after Jesus rose from the dead, his church gathered in homes and hidden meeting places. When in 360 A.D. Christianity became the official religion of Rome, the Christians were given the temples that had been abandoned by the former “official” pagan religion. Later, the church was further linked to political powers and became a powerful and often corrupt human institution. In time, reformers came along that challenged that corruption. But the gathering of the saints never regained its spontaneous and vibrant discipleship nature except under severe persecution such as that seen in China in 1949, when it closed the churches and expelled missionaries. The official church was disbanded, and believers were forced into “underground” home churches. The explosive growth of the Chinese underground church during the ensuing 30 years is a phenomenon much written about. It was essentially a replica of what happened during the first century, and we believe it is happening today.

Where Christianity predominates, many churches have missed the mark when it comes to making disciples. They may draw thousands but fail to make disciples of Jesus. This may seem a harsh view of the church we love and are a part of, but it is not said to be critical. It is said to emphasize the need for tentmakers to understand that the objective of “church” is genuine “body life” with mutual accountability and real discipleship.

Focus on Body Life

Body life happens in relationships that go beyond the superficial greetings, joyful singing, and the after-service buzz at church on Sundays. It is people being in each other’s lives, wrestling with hard questions, walking with each other in trials, picking each other up when we fall, and ministering to each other in prayer, word, and deed. It’s the operational spiritual gifts being manifest through each member as we engage with others. That can only happen in relatively small groups.

Discipleship is done where people live, work, and play. Jesus spent most of his time sharing his life with twelve men. This was his primary investment of time. He often commented that in his public ministry, people “saw” without “seeing” and “heard” without “hearing.” He understood the finicky nature of crowds. He intended for his disciples to turn the world upside down, and they did (Acts 17:6). If we want to change the world, it will be by following Jesus’ methods and investing in disciple making.

When it comes to the church as the congregation of believers, the Apostle Paul’s teachings have shaped what is thought of as the “biblical church.” His teaching focused heavily on exercising the gifts of the Spirit and body life. He did not emphasize structure. He suggested an “open” format for services (I Corinthians 14:26). He speaks often to the acts of mutual edification in the many “one another passages.” Church leaders were appointed primarily to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Tentmaker must understand body life because they are likely to find themselves in a situation where they must *be* the church, not just attend one. Understanding what Jesus and Paul taught about the church is fundamental, particularly if followers of Jesus aren’t allowed to hold public meetings. Their church meetings might be held in homes or perhaps under a tree in some secret place.

The editor visited a missionary in Spain and was invited to visit his church plant. On arrival, it was evident that he had rented a tiny storefront, positioned a couple of benches, set up his electric guitar, loud speakers and a pulpit, and went to work singing and preaching. Unsurprisingly, we were among the very few present at his meeting. Church is essentially body life, not meetings, and until we recognize the dynamic behind that, we may severely miss the mark.

Marketplace disciple makers are the hands and feet of Jesus. When they witness, they are also his voice. While many professional missionaries are often absorbed by institutional demands and/or “church” work, tentmakers are front line Kingdom witnesses. Their primary approach is a coherent life that points to Jesus.

Marketplace disciple makers attract people by their selfless attitude, excellence in their work, loving relationships, and God’s evident blessing on them. They will be sought out because of the quality of their lives. They point these seekers to Jesus by speaking the Truth in love, healing prayer, and spiritual confrontation with the powers that enslave men’s souls. They walk with those who believe in God, teaching them to observe what Jesus has commanded. They lead by example, showing them how to pray, to feed on the Word, and to walk in the Spirit with others of like mind and heart.

For people living in creative access countries, they may be the only followers of Jesus that they know. Disciples are literally the bearers of the Holy Spirit who dwells with them and who does his work through them. God is always present, working in that situation, preparing hearts. But he does his work through Spirit-filled individuals whose lives and testimonies are witness to his power.

- 1) **Question:** What marks the difference between church attendance and disciple making?
- 2) **Activity:** Discuss with other students why it is important to distinguish between “starting a church” like the one we may attend, and forming groups of disciples?

Relationships

Relationships are the key to a tentmaker’s success. This begins with daily prayer for those we relate to and with whom we are cultivating a redemptive relationship. It begins with our inner circle. That may include parents, siblings, a spouse, and children. It extends out to our friends and colleagues. This includes not only those we love, but also to those with whom we have difficulties.

When our prayers include not only our family and friends but those who are difficult to relate to in our work or social interactions, we will be more alert to redemptive opportunities. We are empowered to respond to them with the love and wisdom the Spirit gives us (James 1:5-6).

Turning a critic or competitor into a friend is not unusual when the Spirit gets involved. Harboring hatred or dislike is never appropriate. Jesus’ way is hard and narrow, but it is what he expects. In him, we have the power to overcome the world (John 16:33).

- 3) **Question:** Are you praying daily for your family members and others that God places on your heart? If you are married, it is important to do this with your spouse.
- 4) **Activity:** On a piece of paper, draw a circle that includes your “inner circle” of relationships—parents, spouse, children, relatives, intimate friends. Then draw a second circle with people with whom you interact on a daily or routine basis. Determine to pray for each of these daily. If they are unbelievers, ask them what you can be praying for them. This provides you a good way to exercise your faith and an excellent reason for asking them how they are doing. Acknowledge God when your prayers are answered and invite them to pray with you and come to know Jesus personally too.

Essential Skills

Tentmakers' effectiveness depends on their ability to exercise two essentially relational skill sets—leading people to say “yes” to Jesus and gathering them together for mutual discipleship. These two skills are especially crucial for tentmakers in creative access countries where overt proclamation of the gospel and public Christian meetings are prohibited. Under these circumstances, this will often begin with one-on-one conversations.

Evangelism

Communicating the gospel in another culture is more than a matter of preaching a new doctrine. The message must be contextualized and presented in ways that make sense. God has often provided bridges to understanding if we look for them. The concept of “redemptive analogies” first introduced by [Donald McGavran in *Bridges of God*](#) and popularized by [Don Richardson in *Peace Child*](#), have been discussed and applied widely. Essentially, we are to look for personal or cultural bridges that will help individuals in another culture understand God's gift to them of salvation and blessing. This can be as simple as appealing to a mother's love for a child or as complex as using their mythology and worldview to show how Jesus addresses our existential realities.

Become a student of those you want to evangelize. Understand their fears and concerns. Intercede for them and then take opportunities to pray with them. The Gospel must be practical, and it must work! This work need not be some great sign. It is often the sensation of God's peace after a listening session and Spirit-led intercession. The Apostle Paul recognized that for change to take place, mere words are not enough. He wrote to the Thessalonians: *our gospel came to you not simply with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction* (1Thess 1:5-6).

Friendship

Much can be said about friendship. If we have close friends, we know what they mean to us. A proverb says: *A man to have friends must show himself friendly*. Unfortunately, we are not all outgoing and friendly. It takes effort and some of us simply feel awkward in attempting it.

The author recently picked up a book called *How to Be Interesting*. Ironically, the book suggested that to be interesting, one must be interested in the world around them and most of all, in other people! The book presented creative ways to engage others.

Everyone is interesting. Everyone has a story to tell. Being friendly is often a matter of showing interest and asking questions. One question this editor uses is: “Tell me about yourself...” Amazingly, it works. It usually isn't threatening and engages them in a conversation that helps you find out what interests and what is important to them. Continue to ask questions and the person will soon begin sharing their life story.

Another approach to engage a person is to take notice of or pay a genuine compliment on something they have said or done, on their clothing, their child, their house, vehicle, etc. Be curious. Ask questions. The point is that if we make an effort, we can be friendly by being genuinely interested in others. And if we are spending time with this person at work, it can lead to deeper conversations and moments when we can pray for them and introduce God's power into their lives.

The proverb says: “A friend in need is a friend in deed.” Acting friendly and showing friendship are different. One should lead to the other. At the heart of friendship is a genuine concern for the person and their family. People should never feel that they are our “project.”

Giving testimony

It's interesting that Jesus said, “you shall be my witnesses” as a precursor to his mandate to “go and make disciples.” A witness is someone who has seen or experienced something personally. We

can talk about other people's experiences but when we share what the Lord has done in and for us, it is a very different story. Giving testimony isn't boasting. It is crediting God for his work and grace in our lives. Just saying: *I'm thankful to God for this job or thank you, Jesus, for giving me a solution to this problem* in front of a friend or fellow employee is a witness.

More importantly, whenever we consistently exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, we are witnesses of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives: "... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

One of the greatest travesties "sold" to us by post-modernism is that our spirituality is a private matter. Sometimes it takes years to discover that a co-worker or neighbour is a follower of Jesus. Let others know you are a believer without being "preachy". Let them know you are a spiritual person in relationship with God. Most people want this relationship, and it does not bring the condemnation associated with most preachiness.

Presenting the Gospel

There was a time when simple Gospel presentations like "The Four Spiritual Laws," and "The Roman Road," were the standard way to present the Gospel. But your own personal testimony of finding Christ is still one of the most useful tools to present the Gospel. This is particularly true where there isn't an inbred hostility to Christianity.

In whatever manner you choose to share the Gospel message, it isn't likely to work with those from other religious backgrounds unless they have been softened by the work of the Spirit. The New Testament makes it clear that there is a moment of "conversion." There is a "new birth." There is a "before and after." Helping people come to that point of decision is important. Making a heart-felt commitment to follow Jesus is the door that leads to eternal life.

Even if you don't intend to argue about Scriptures or your faith, others may bring the fight to you. Apologetics involves the art of debate and attempts to argue the merits and validity of one's own position or the fallacy of another's position. Apologetics have seldom proven to be the way to the heart of one's opponent, but it can be useful in maintaining your stance as a follower of Jesus. Again, the best defence is to know the Bible thoroughly.

A new missionary arrived in a North African country and became engaged in a conversation with a Muslim student training to be an Imam. During the conversation, one of the Old Testament prophets was cited. Since the missionary knew the text, he challenged the point the student was making. This led to a debate, and when the student couldn't come up with a good answer, it led to an invitation to meet with one of the Islamic scholars at his school. The day came and several of the instructors were brought in to pour over the text in question. The new missionary's comments were vindicated, and he felt uniquely used by the Lord.

Not all stories end this way. Muslims are trained to enter into debates and confront Christian beliefs and practices. Understanding the religious position of others and their views towards ours is important to surviving these assaults. Knowing the tenets and belief system of those we live and work with will also allow us to be more incisive in our witness. It is wise for those heading into Muslim territory to be aware of these tactics and *be prepared to defend the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3:15).

- 5) Question:** How many disciples have you made (family, friends, co-workers, etc.)? Have you ever had the privilege of leading someone outside your immediate family circle to faith and walking with them during their "baby" stage? If you haven't, why not? If you have, ask the Lord to multiply your discipleship through disciples who also make disciples.

- 6) **Activity:** Make a list of those people within your circle of influence that have not made a commitment to follow Jesus. Begin to pray for them and use opportunities to minister to them. Help them to come to faith through your example, words and acts of faith on their behalf.

Healing

Knowing God should bring healing into a disciple's life. Most people have been beaten up in some way by life's circumstances. They may have lacked nurture as a child or even been abused or abandoned. This is common in today's world. Inner healing and peace are necessary to be effective in the long run. Discipleship is not only about going to heaven when we die, but about walking in gracious deliverance in this present life. Jesus wants us to experience the abundant life and that starts with healing our innermost being.

There are ways to achieve this through a process of exposing our wounding to a trusted person and recognizing Jesus' presence and empathy in every hurting moment—even when we weren't consciously following him. It also involves revoking the lies that have been programmed into us by abusive parents, siblings, or others and replacing them with God's loving view of us. If you suffer from the trauma of childhood abuse, it is important to go through a process of inner healing. Much has been done to make this available to the church through seminars and trained brothers and sisters who can walk you through this journey to release and healing. Once you've experienced this process personally, you can lead others through it as well.

- 7) **Question:** How healthy are you in your inner being? Are you carrying scars and wounding that manifest themselves in a lot of negative emotions such as anger or depression?
- 8) **Activity:** Find a trusted believer with whom you can share unresolved trauma. Study an approach to this process such as that offered by Novo in the manual entitled [Facilitating Inner Healing](#). Have this friend facilitate the process with you. Then help someone else who needs it by facilitating the same process.

Leading a Discovery Bible Study

Our witness should lead others to desire discovering God for themselves. This is a process. It can't be hurried. Sometimes it takes a crisis to bring this desire to the forefront. Or perhaps your prayers for them have been answered in a miraculous way and they want to know more.

One of the ways God is using to usher in thousands of new believers from other socio/religious backgrounds is the simple "discovery" approach to studying the Bible (Discovery Bible Study or DBS). Select passages are used to go through the Bible narrative in an open style. The key is that there is no designated teacher, just a facilitator of the study.

Discovery Bible Study Method

1. First, a short prayer is made to invite the Spirit of God to open the eyes of understanding.
2. Next the selected text is read through once, allowing individuals to take turns reading portions aloud, and then read a second time with one person reading the entire text while the others listen.
3. Then someone is asked to say what it says in their own words (paraphrase). Others chime in to make sure nothing is left out.
4. The next step is to open up the text for understanding or interpretation: what does it mean?
5. As a final step, the question is asked: what steps of obedience or faith should we take in light of what the Spirit is saying through the text?

6. Pray to the Father that he might provide the strength and determination to obey what each one has heard. Pray for each other.

There are several versions of this approach that have been created for different contexts. They are all effective in helping others understand our faith and hear from the Spirit. Leading this kind of a Bible study takes the pressure off the tentmaker to be a Bible expert. It depends on the Spirit of God to teach. It is advisable to practice this approach in your home before leaving on assignment. This is one way of discipling children as they learn to listen to what the Spirit says and obey.

- 9) **Question:** How often do you get together with others to read and discuss passages of Scripture? What has your experience been when you've done that?
- 10) **Activity:** To get everyone acquainted with the method, hold a Discovery Bible Study with your group of students. Choose one of Jesus' parables, or a Psalm. Follow the instructions above. Determine to practice this method with your household. It is an excellent venue for inviting in those seeking to know God.

Lesson 10

Occupational Competence

As a tentmaker, your work *is* “service”, and your service *is* your “ministry.” Therefore, to honor God, you need to pour yourself into your work and seek excellence in all that you do. This is your “reasonable service of worship” (Romans 12:1-3).

Your work is not just a platform for witnessing, *it is your witness*. If you want to be an *excellent witness*, then you must pursue excellence in your work. The better your performance in the *work you do*, the more likely you will win genuine respect and acceptance for *who you are* and *what you have to say*. Your work must be done with personal integrity. You must always be honest, show genuine interest in your work, honor your employer and/or employees, and appreciate your co-workers.

If you are businessperson, you must treat your employees fairly and value your clients. I include the following testimony to encourage businesspeople to make their businesses their “parish” (place of ministry).

Argentina experienced a revival in the 1990s. One of the principal leaders of this revival was the owner of a factory who came to Jesus. Jesus radically transformed his life. He now saw his business as his parish. He began to care for his employees and their families. He spoke earnestly to them about the Savior, and many came to Christ. His factory was transformed. The word got around and many came to hear him speak. Many accepted Jesus. He felt led to set up some big speakers in a nearby field and began preaching. Crowds of up to 50,000 people would gather to hear his simple message every evening. Tens of thousands came to Jesus over the ensuing years of his ministry.

Walking the Talk at Work

Our work role in society is the most obvious and public display of our lives. However, pursuing excellence and diligence in the workplace is often difficult. It isn’t easy to be honest and hardworking when the work or business environment is otherwise. Quite often, we must make very difficult choices and go against the grain. “What would Jesus do?” is a good guide when in doubt. Showing Christian character is the way we demonstrate genuine integrity and show others a consistency between what we say we believe and what we do.

When we “walk the talk” people will notice the difference in us, and our witness will be both credible and effective in pointing people to Jesus. You can’t divorce spirituality from character. Show me a person with godly character and I will show you a spiritual person.

Tentmaking starts with a mindset where Jesus is Lord over everything we do, including our work. Serving Jesus as our Lord is a way of life, a mindset, and a calling.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).

Is this striving for excellence in service justified? Yes! It is not only justified but an essential quality of being a disciple of Jesus. Pursuing the highest levels of performance in our work says to the Lord and to others that we value what he has given to us to do, and that we will honor him with our performance. When we gain recognition by others for our work, we give God both the credit and the glory.

The Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:12-14 expressed his holy drive for excellence in this way:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Blessing Way

There is a greater, all-compelling reason to seek excellence in what we do, and seek the well-being of the communities around us, particularly those of other religious traditions. It is the “blessing way” whose roots go back to Genesis 12:1-3. God promises Abraham prosperity, protection, and progeny in exchange for being a blessing to *all nations*. This concept is carried throughout the entire Bible. During the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah was instructed to tell the Jews that they were to seek the wellbeing of the city of their captors and that that blessing would return to them.

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:7).

When we seek the welfare of our employer, employees, customers, suppliers, etc. it generates blessing that returns to us. This concept of blessing through serving those of other nationalities and religious groups for whom we hold no natural loyalties, and who in principle disdain Christians, transcends all other religious teaching. It is at the heart of discipling the nations and it is what distinguishes our faith from all others.

- 1) **Question:** Do you pursue excellence in your work? Have you thought of how your work reflects on your testimony as a believer?
- 2) **Activity:** With other students, recount times at work that drew a positive response from your employer and/or fellow employees. If that hasn't happened with you, think of how to improve your service to honor the Lord and open opportunities to generate Kingdom influence where you work.

Credentialing

Degrees and certifications are often a requirement to practice an occupation or profession. Quite often, employers are seeking specific degrees that demonstrate a knowledge of the field, even if a person has no experience in the work. With the right credentials, they are often willing to provide training and guidance in developing skills required to do the work competently. Without the right credentials, your desire to be a tentmaker may easily be frustrated.

A young woman from Ecuador was sent by the Lord to a country in Southeast Asia. She was a vibrant witness but was barely able to survive on a low paying job teaching Spanish. If she had had a certificate from a recognized entity, she could have earned five times what they were paying her and lived relatively well. Eventually, she returned to her country to work on adequate certification.

Don't be fooled into thinking that any degree will do. Most countries protect their professionals. Doctors aren't generally allowed to practice in other countries unless they validate their degree in that country through rigorous testing. This may also be true of many other medical professionals. Educators may also need internationally recognized certifications. Engineers and technicians will need certifications, but these are often international in scope. If you are to serve beyond the borders of your own country, be sure you know what certifications you need to be able

to work in an international environment. Many certifications are now offered online but confirm their validity for the country you hope to work in.

Business as Mission

There is much talk of “business as mission” today. While personal certifications are seldom needed to own and operate a business in a foreign country, licenses are almost always required, and often the laws require national “partners.” These “partners” can become a nemesis if it requires being “unequally yoked” with unbelievers who are happy to take advantage of the situation. Be sure you understand the requirements and complexities of doing business in a foreign country before you attempt it. Even for those who have business experience in their own context, doing business in a foreign country can become a nightmare.

A brother called to tentmaking was an excellent, internationally certified, award-winning chef. Instead of easily getting a job in the target country’s tourism industry, he was strongly encouraged to start a restaurant. He had very little business experience but there was a willing investor with cash in hand, so he took that route. With a remarkable amount of effort, he put together a successful restaurant, but it was tremendously stressful to deal with employment laws, lazy and dishonest employees, and the 24 hour-a-day demands of a business in a foreign country. Sadly, he had to leave within a couple of years due to health and family issues with little fruit to show for his efforts.

While there are some brilliant examples of successful Kingdom venture by Christians in foreign lands, most people are not good at doing business. Having business acumen and experience is essential. Be sure you have what it takes to start and run a business without it “running you.”

One viable opportunity with BAM that is seldom discussed is provided by the “informal economy.” These services that are provided without formally declaring them businesses. They won’t help you obtain a visa into another country, but many tentmakers can work within their own country or neighboring countries, where residence status may not be as strictly controlled or cross-border trading is a way of life.

One of the tentmakers this author knows is a barber by trade. He is doing excellent pioneer work. He supplements his income cutting hair and has a “captive” audience while doing it. Another brother is a chiropractor. His healing hands provide pain relief that is often generously remunerated. His Muslim patients have asked him to share his faith in Jesus with them. Another sister makes her living by buying clothes from wholesalers in the capital and selling them in remote areas. Her ambulatory sales provide her contact with many people as well as her support. There are many opportunities to serve in the “informal marketplace” and this should not be disregarded as a viable option for some.

- 3) **Question:** Do you have a marketable skill and the credentials to back it up? What will it take to get to become highly skilled at what you do? How can you be a high achiever with integrity?
- 4) **Activity:** Assess your occupation with a career counselor. This can be a work or ministry supervisor or a professional who is dedicated to vocational development. You may do something well, but credentials are very important when seeking work. Don’t feel discouraged if this means significant time and resources in study and preparation. Being well equipped will pay off in the end.

Adaptability

We have suggested earlier the concept that God has known you from your mother's womb. He has prepared you for good works before you existed. He has placed you in a family, given you a cultural identity, provided you with gifts, and allowed the circumstances in your life that have shaped you uniquely. This all has gone into determining who you are today, your roles and your occupations.

With a careful examination of your life, you should be able to begin to discern whether you have what it takes to be an effective tentmaker in a cross-cultural and/or international environment. Some of the evidence will show up in your character. Do you like new experiences? Do you enjoy trying new foods and tastes? Are you comfortable meeting strangers? Do you engage readily with foreigners? Are you open minded to other ways of doing things? Do you remain calm when confronted with ambiguity or stressful situations?

If this does not describe you, all is not lost. Character is a growth process. It starts with knowing what is desired or expected. It begins with a determination or attitude that moves you, experience by experience, towards the character trait you want to acquire. This is very much a growth process. It does not come all at once.

The skills needed to thrive in a cross-cultural context is the topic of another chapter. Suffice it to say that if God has been preparing you for this task, the following characteristics should be evident or at least desired:

1. **Sociable:** Taking initiative in moving towards others. Being able to respond spontaneously in social situations. Being a good listener. Assertive when called for and energetic in your response to others.
2. **Emotional stability:** The ability to remain calm and think clearly in stressful situations. Balanced, not given to anger, depression or emotional agitation.
3. **Agreeableness:** Being helpful and friendly, likable and diplomatic. Willing to work with others' opinions or plans.
4. **Conscientiousness:** Acceptance of responsibility. Persistent, dependable, interested in your work. Desiring to achieve and pursue excellence.
5. **Openness to new experiences:** An interest and drive to learn about and gain new experiences.

These qualities may not come naturally, but they can be learned. It is important to shape our attitudes and follow the guidance of the Spirit, not our natural inclinations.

- 5) **Question:** What character traits do you demonstrate that could provide evidence that God has been shaping you for the intercultural task of living with those of other ethnicities or nationalities and making disciples?
- 6) **Activity:** Talk with your spouse or a close friend about the five characteristics needed to thrive in a cross-cultural context. Be open to constructive criticism. Determine to work on developing the character qualities that will make you effective as a cross-cultural disciple maker.

Lesson 11

Spiritual Warfare

“We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil who are seeking to overthrow the Church and to frustrate its task of world evangelization. We know our need to equip ourselves with God’s armor and to fight this battle with the spiritual weapons of truth and prayer.”
(The Lausanne Covenant, 1974 Congress for World Evangelization)

We are in a holy war for the souls of men and women. We are wrestling against powers in heavenly places, against an enemy who is ruthless in his desire to steal, kill and destroy. His principal weapon is to keep men and women ignorant of the grace of God. Because of what Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection, women and men no longer need to live in bondage to Satan. But they must know about his salvation and believe. Therein lies our challenge.

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14-15). There are still too many places in the world where this Good News has not yet arrived!

Even when the Gospel is preached, we face the challenge of unbelief. “They do not believe, because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God” (I Corinthians 4:4 - GNB). Because they live in unbelief, Satan continues to do his work with a free rein.

It is not hard to see the devil’s handiwork in society. He is the destroyer of souls and there are some major ways he goes about this: drug and alcohol addictions, the sex trade, corruption, human exploitation, terrorism, and warfare. Satan and his minions are very real spiritual entities and they work behind the scenes in the death industries that ravage mankind. Much of this work is done by evil persons who exploit others for pleasure, power or money and serve Satan’s purposes. They too shall be thrown into the Lake of Fire with Satan and his demons at the end of time (Revelation 21:8). Although people are never our real enemies, Satan is, and we must do what we can to battle his influence in the world.

We cannot afford to be ignorant, passive, or defeatist about Satan and how he works. We are to personally “resist the devil” (I Peter 5:9). And we are tasked with delivering women and men from Satan’s evil power: “I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me...” (Acts 26:17-18). God is not willing that any should perish and neither are we. Persuading them to enter the Kingdom of God is our work.

Warring Against the Flesh

There is a very human side of evil which Satan exploits. These “works of the flesh” are described in Galatians 5:19-21: “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

This propensity for evil comes from our “carnal” or “sin” nature. Everyone is born with this tendency to violate God’s law. Satan understands this weakness and uses it against us as he did with humankind’s forefathers, Adam and Eve. Without God’s grace, most people are powerless to resist his lies and temptations and manifest the above-described works of the flesh. Many become entrapped in addictions. Others are enslaved to their bad character, cynicism, and depressions. Others give themselves fully to the gods of power, lust and pleasure and become Satan’s minions. The only way they can be delivered is to come into the glorious light of the kingdom of God through the grace extended to them in Jesus. It is this grace that works in believers to deliver them from these carnal tendencies and transform their lives and character.

We must wage war against this work of the devil in our own lives before we can deliver others through Jesus. That is why Paul pleads with us in Romans 12:1-3 to give ourselves wholly to God as a “living sacrifice,” and to “renew our minds” in order to be holy and to know and understand God’s perfect will.

- 1) **Question:** How willing and ready are you to make your life a living sacrifice for God? Only when you are fully his can he deliver you from your own tendencies to sin and eliminate areas of bondage in your life.
- 2) **Activity:** If you have an accountability group, meet with them to discuss Romans 12:1-3. Encourage each other to deal with whatever may keep you from a victorious life and ministry. Renew your commitment to be “all in” for Jesus.

Demonization

There is a sense in which every troubled soul has their own demons. The Bible sometimes refers to the person as “demonized,” rather than “possessed.” Demon possession is generally defined as a total control of an individual and his will. In turn, demonization indicates demon influence to a greater or lesser degree. So, while demon possession may be somewhat rare, demonization may be much more prevalent than we are aware of. Alcohol, drug, and sex addictions along with uncontrollable tempers and depression, all reflect demonic influence.

Nearly every addict hears inner voices egging them on in their vice. Every depressed person hears inner voices telling them of their worthlessness or impotence. Sometimes these voices come from parents, teachers or others that criticized or persecuted them with insults and taunts. Demons use these to enslave people to these false messages. This is important to understand if we are to pray in power against those demons and destroy their influence.

Even believers may occasionally be demonized. These Christians trust in Jesus for their eternal salvation, but have not given over their lives to him. They have vices and illicit practices that they keep hidden from others. These areas are open to demonic influence and may eventually manifest themselves as open rebellion, addictions, broken health, or gross immorality. When believers leave the door open for demons, they are certain to be attacked and taken out of the battle. This happens much too often in our Christian churches and it is particularly tragic when it happens with prominent leaders.

Others have left the “door open” through previous engagement on their own part or on the part of their parents or grandparents in demonic activities such as fortune telling, or soliciting cures or curses from witch doctors. These spiritualist activities engage in contracting with demons for their power—contracts that give them influence over those who have used their powers. Even when done playfully by casting fortunes or playing games that invoke spiritual powers, they may leave the door open for future demonic influence. Or believers may have been bound by having participated in cultic practices before coming to the Lord, or listening to music that claims demonic inspiration.

Leaving an open door for demons means big trouble for believers. Because these doors are secret or hidden by ignorance, their effect may not show up immediately, but they will eventually produce defeat in the life of the believer. And this defeat often comes with severe consequences.

We must deal with these areas firmly before they fester into a huge problem. We do so by confessing our sin and giving over every area of our life to the Lordship of Christ and his rule. We must renounce all former demonic practices and covenants. We drive these demons away by proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of our life and household, and telling them to leave us alone. It's legitimate to get angry at them and shout out loud and clear that Jesus is your Lord. They know that Jesus is the rightful Lord of the universe, and that he has the power to send them immediately to their eternal exile in the Lake of Fire (Revelations 20:12-15).

Jesus' name is the most powerful in this spiritual realm and if you are truly under his Lordship, you can use it. But don't try doing all of this on your own. Confide in one or more believers who can do battle with you. When you agree together to "bind" or "loose" on earth, it is confirmed in heavenly places (Matthew 18:18-19).

Demons will also try a frontal attack even on strong believers, when they feel threatened. Paul warns believers in Galatians 6 to put on the full armor of God in order to withstand the fiery darts of the devil. He also tells us that we have a powerful offensive weapon in the Word of God and in prayer. When the Word of God is preached and his Kingdom influence is exerted through preaching and prayer, we step on the devil's tail. He will try to strike back. How often has a spiritual victory been followed by a spiritual attack in your life? Spiritual warfare is not for those who are not fitted with the armor of God and prepared for battle with the Sword of the Spirit.

The devil is not hard to identify in these attacks. Quite often, he will attack our weaknesses through temptation (1 Thessalonians 3:5). He will try to deceive us (2 Cor.11:3). Or he may use those under his control to afflict us. This may come in the form of curses or attempts to stymie our witness or bring harm on us. But there is no power in heaven or on earth that can keep us from the love of God. If we put on God's armor, we need not live in fear of demonic powers for Jesus has defeated sin, death and Satan once and for all (Hebrews 2:13-14). His kingdom is conquering this realm as it advances on this earth.

- 3) **Question:** Do you have any "open doors" in your life that can allow demons to influence you?
- 4) **Activity:** Look into your personal life to see if you are engaged in something that is not pleasing to God or have previously engaged in activities that have permitted demons to influence you. Also look into your family history to see if your parents or grandparents have used sorcery or witchcraft with you. Confess these to your accountability group and pray for release from your secret sins and break any association with demonic powers in your past.

Demon Possession

It is important to be aware that Satan and demons are not passive agents. They are actively involved in seeking to gain influence over people, and they employ a variety of strategies toward this end. Among Satan's ploys are temptation, accusation, deception, harassment, bodily harm of all kinds, and in some cases, total possession of unbelievers.

In Mark 3:12-13, Jesus appointed his disciples "that he might send them out to preach *and to have authority to drive out demons.*" Indeed, a number of times Jesus' ministry involved driving out demons that had taken full possession of a human being. In one case, he drove out thousands of demons that had possessed a single man and sent them into a herd of pigs (Mark 5:1-20).

How possession happens is a matter of study and debate. We do know that the people that Jesus and the Apostles cast demons from manifested clear signs of possession. These signs included:

- Inability to hear or speak
- Seizures
- Blindness
- A strange voice speaking

- A strange personality
- Bizarre behaviours
- Going naked
- Self-destructive behaviours
- A sense of overpowering evil
- Awareness of demons or their activities
- Extrasensory knowledge
- Supernatural strength

The editor has encountered several cases of demon possession and can attest to some of these manifestations. During an evangelistic campaign, a witch doctor who wished to be saved was taken to the counseling room. As soon as someone started talking with him, he stretched out on his chair and became stiff as a board and was unable to speak. Although elderly and decrepit, he maintained that position for over an hour, something that would be impossible without supernatural intervention. The counselors tried to cast out the demon but to no effect. The following day, I met with the man while my companions prayed in the front room of his home. I asked him if he wanted to be delivered and he said yes. I read to him Philippians 2:9-11 about Jesus' authority over all principalities and powers. Then I asked him to say in his own voice, "Jesus is my Lord." He said the words, and immediately his whole face lighted up. The two things I noted about this deliverance was the person's willingness to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and his ability to boldly declare that Jesus indeed was his Lord.

Although the manifestations of possession are physical in nature, Satan's main strategy is to enslave minds. That is why cases of demon possession today are often classified as mental illness. Some mental illnesses can be diagnosed as a chemical imbalance, while other mental illnesses may arise from extreme stress, anxiety, abuse and mistreatment. Believers are called to join Jesus in destroying the works of the devil. It is the psychiatrist's work to control symptoms through administering drugs, but we deal with the source of the illness through prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29).

- 5) **Question:** Have you had experience with people who are demon possessed?
- 6) **Activity:** Share case studies of demon possession from personal experience and/or the Bible with other students. List principles can you derive from these case studies.

The Culture War

"... I tell you that you are Peter. And I'll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won't be able to stand against it..." (Matthew 16:18 - CBE).

Satan is the father of lies and one way he controls the minds of people is by propagating lies. The size of the lie makes no difference. Hitler built his power on the lie that the Jewish people were the source of all evil in society. Millions of Germans believed it and help him exterminate six million Jews. Today, most of the big lies being foisted on our societies by the press and other powerful forces from the West revolve around sexual identity and abortion. This is cultural warfare that puts pressure on nations around the globe to lower their standards of sexual behavior. When they do, they undermine society—particularly families, which are society's building blocks.

In his study of American Evangelism, Darius Salter concludes that "evangelism at its best is not defined as an activity but as a force for good, invading and beating back the powers of evil," or as Charles E. Lawless, an Associate Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary puts it: "Evangelism is more than just a strategy, technique, or program;

rather, it is taking the gospel into the kingdom of darkness. To evangelize is to march into a spiritual battle." We must do what we can to resist the destructive lies that Satan tries to propagate in societies.

Satan's Strategic Agenda

When Jesus came to earth, Satan was the Prince of this World. That changed at the cross. When Jesus rose from the dead, God appointed him the supreme authority on earth (Philippians 2:9-11). This ushered in Christ's campaign to destroy the works of Satan and reconcile and restore the world and its people to God. We are a big part of that redemptive work. He has made us his ambassadors and given us what we need to go about his work. But the devil had done his work well, and he continues to hold people in his grasp through sin, false teaching, and oppressive systems that keep men, women and children under the bondage of fear, shame and guilt. Freeing them means persuading them to believe that Jesus can save them. This is not an easy task because they are blinded to this truth. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The human mind holds a high priority in the enemy's strategy, and this is his main battleground (2 Cor.10:3-5). In order to blind people's minds to the reality of the Gospel, Satan seeks to control strategic points in the community and propagate his lies:

- Political/legislative institutions
- The educational system
- The media
- The press
- False religious institutions
- Financial institutions
- Atheistic science and philosophy

Satan's desire is to mold community values into creating more rebels like himself - "alienated from God and... enemies in (their) minds because of (their) evil behavior" (Col. 1:21). Satan blinds people through:

- Cult groups
- Idol worship, amulets, and shrines
- Some cultural traditions
- False religions (including false churches)
- Atheistic Progressive Humanism

He binds whole communities through:

- Unrepented sin of every kind—Leviticus 18:24-28
- Idolatry – Psalms 106:36-39; Jeremiah 16:17-18, 44:5-8
- Bloodshed—Numbers 35:33
- Unrighteous covenants – 1 Samuel 28:2, 14-15
- Generational sins—2 Samuel 21:1-9
- Collective rebellion against the entrance of the Gospel (Acts 7:51-53)
- Wickedness – Jeremiah 44:9

The enemy has such peoples and communities in a stronghold. For evangelism to be effective, there will be a need to bind the "strongman" first in order to "plunder his goods" (Ps. 2:8; Matt. 12:29). Only Jesus has the authority to bind the strongman. It is in his name that we must do battle

for the souls of those who are in bondage. Cover your efforts with intercessory prayer. It is the only way to win this kind of battle (Matthew 17:21).

Many of the peoples in bondage are those found in the 10/40 window (see lesson 1). This area of the world includes parts of West Africa, North Africa, Middle East and much of Asia. It includes most of the world's most oppressed peoples and areas of greatest physical and spiritual need. Most of the world's least-reached peoples are in this area and most of the governments that oppose Christianity. Jesus must be made known among these nations.

- 7) **Question:** What are the main culture wars going on in your city or nation?
- 8) **Activity:** Pick two or three major social issues your nation is facing and research what is happening. Discuss these with other students who have also done some research. How does our Biblical faith call us to address these issues?

Equipping Ourselves for Warfare

Ephesians 6:10-20 lists the armour we are to put on and the weapons of our warfare. These are to be used in the power of the Spirit which is our source of strength. The Living Bible describes our enemy as "those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and... huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world". It is with these "wicked spirits" that we are engaged in spiritual warfare daily" (Ephesians 6:12).

Lewis Sperry Chafer, a faithful saint, helped us understand one of Satan's purposes in attacking believers when he said: "The believer is also the object of satanic attack because of the fact that unto the child of God is committed the great ministry of reconciliation; that by his testimony both in life and word, and by his prayers, the facts of redemption may be given to the world. If Satan can cripple the believer's service, he accomplishes much in resisting the present purpose of God."

Jesus says that apart from Him we can "do nothing". We must live "in Him." When Jesus called the disciples, it was first to be with him. If we are living "in the Lord" then the Lord, whose strength is infinite and eternal, will strengthen us. His is the battle and he has provided us with adequate armor for our defense. Ephesians 6 instructs us to put on the whole armour of God so that we might stand up to the schemes of the Devil. That means all the armor, not just some of it. The armour includes:

- The belt of truth buckled around your waist. Truth is essential in the battle against Satan, for he is the father of lies. Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life. His truth protects us from attacks to the most vulnerable areas of our lives—our relationships.
- The breastplate of righteousness in place. Righteousness is doing the right thing. It is trusting God even when it is not convenient to do so. It is living with the conviction that you are walking uprightly. The breastplate of righteousness protects our heart.
- Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. God's intent for this earth is his Shalom, his peace. His Gospel is peace. "Beautiful are the feet of them that bring good news" (Isaiah 52:7).
- The shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Faith is the God-given component that protects us in the battle. It is what extinguishes every temptation and doubt that Satan can throw at us from any angle. The shield of faith protects our whole body.
- The helmet of salvation. Satan's main tactic is to attack our minds with accusations and lies. But no matter what he says, our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Our helmet protects us from the accuser and assures us of our salvation.
- The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The Word of God parries the thrust of the enemy. It slices through his arguments and stratagems. It is our best protection against the enemy's urgings.

In this battle, we must use our defensive gear to resist the wiles (tricks, deception and temptations) of the devil. But we must also go on the offensive with the sword of the Spirit, prayer, and worship, which are our offensive weapons. We use these at times when we need to engage in deliverance and counterattack against the activities of witchcraft, occultism and all kinds of wickedness (2Cor. 2:11, 11:3).

Satan has a well-organized hierarchy of demons. You may simultaneously be battling against a demon tormenting an individual, the gods of the land that hold back the progress of the inhabitants, and the spirits who are hindering the acceptance of the Gospel in that land. Recognize that these battles must be fought with the spiritual weapons of the Word of God and prayer. These must be directed against spiritual powers. We cannot win spiritual battles by earthly means.

God's kingdom is advancing. It is measured by the sum of the impact of each Christian's combat on the tactical plane. Each one of us is constantly engaging the enemy in his attempt to control our lives and that of individuals around us. An in-depth study of the use of the Scripture and prayer as spiritual weapons will show that they need to be a part of the lifestyle of the believer. The battle is an ongoing one and not just relegated to occasional skirmishes (1 Peter 5:8). Be prepared! Be practiced! Be effective!

- 9) Question:** How aware are you of the spiritual war that we are engaged in as followers of Jesus? How prepared do you feel for engaging in battles for the souls of people?
- 10) Activity:** Discuss with your fellow students, elements of spiritual warfare that you are seeing or experiencing in your context. Practice using the Word, worship and prayer to combat these influences.

Lesson 12

Adapting to Another Culture

One of the greatest challenges a tentmaker faces is adaptation to the place of service and its culture. Tentmakers typically must use the immersion approach for this acculturation. They may not have the advantage of pre-field training programs or previous exposure to the host culture. Their decision to take a job may leave them with little time to familiarize themselves with another city or region of the world. If the assignment implies a long-term stay, survival depends on this adaptation, and eventually to thriving in the host culture.

Successful adaptation means learning how to get along societal in your new circumstances and achieve acceptance by the people. If this happens, relationships will be built and disciple making can occur. We might sum up the immersion goals for missionary candidates by telling them to learn to “love the people and to make yourselves lovable.”

Adaptation may require language learning if you don’t already have a working knowledge of the language. It will certainly require learning the non-verbal “codes” that are a part of every culture and society’s means of communication with those who are “insiders.” Communication is not just words -- gestures, body language, cultural expectations, and underlying frameworks are all important to communication. It usually takes a long time to gain complete mastery of these codes. The rule of thumb is: “observe and imitate.” Trying to understand why things are done in the way they are done before you adopt local customs can be counterproductive. Too often there is no logical explanation and not even members of the society are able to explain.

One of the biggest barriers to learning another culture is ethnocentrism, the feeling that one’s own ways are superior to those of the host culture. This is natural and normal and the starting point for everyone in every culture. So don’t dismiss the idea too quickly that you aren’t ethnocentric. If unrecognized, it will contribute to potential conflict and stress. So, to be able to adapt successfully, one must take the posture of a culture learner. Develop both a respect for your hosts and an appreciation for their culture. Begin with the idea of accepting it as “different” rather than “strange” or “worse” than your own. Keep an open mind and you will find the best ways to function in your host culture.

When this attitude of becoming a learner and letting go of your own cultural norms and practices is not present, it can defeat the whole purpose of the mission—that of making disciples. Jesus provides us with a good example of the kind of attitude we need. Philippians 2 tells us that he was willing to give up his equality with God and humble himself, taking on the form of a man, with all of our limitations and sufferings. We refer to this as the “incarnational” model. We too, to some degree, will need to follow this incarnational model.

Of course, there is nothing sacred about culture and all cultures have their own marks of sin and corruption. We should be discriminating in these matters, and when in doubt, rely on the Spirit to instruct us. Some things may be a matter of conscience. The Scriptures teach us to follow our conscience in these matters but not at the expense of another (Romans 14:12; I Corinthians 10:30-32). So, we should be careful not to offend without cause, while also excusing ourselves from participating in activities that clearly do not honor God.

The story is told of a tentmaker who went to China. He learned that when a Chinese man wanted your friendship, he would invite you to smoke a cigarette with him. If you did not accept the proffered smoke, it would signal that you were not interested in the friendship. Although this was taboo in this tentmaker’s Christian culture, he decided to accept the cigarette from those who desired his friendship. He did so in order to develop relationships that could lead to disciple making. And he did so successfully.

- 1) **Question:** What codes do you use when you want to invite someone to be your friend? What might have been your response to the cultural code for friendship in China if you didn't know it was an invitation to friendship? Would you have accepted the cigarette or looked for another way to make the connection? At what point do you compromise your witness by accepting food, drink or practices that goes against your personal convictions?
- 2) **Activity:** Do a study of Romans 14:12; I Corinthians 10:30-32, with other students. Then make a list of the kinds of things that violate your Christian customs but may not disobey God's express will. Then list those kinds of practices that a believer should not engage in no matter what the cultural circumstances dictate. Expect a good discussion but respect each other and allow for differences of opinion and conviction.

Culture Shock

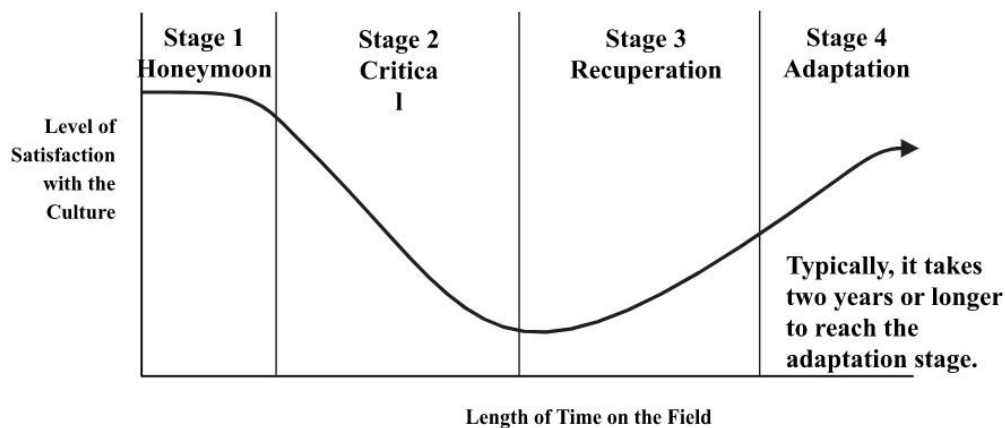
When we first arrive at our destination, our level of personal anticipation is high; our dreams have come true. We are excited by the novelty of our new home and its ways. Even if we are "shocked" by some of what we see, these feelings aren't considered "culture shock," which is the label for a psychological condition that sets in later.

Too soon after our arrival, the "honeymoon" is over when we discover that we cannot communicate very well; we can't get around very well; we don't really like the food; we get sick easily; we are afraid to go to a local doctor. We begin to feel like we want to go home. We miss our own food, our own people, and our ways of life. We may begin to spend hours talking to friends back home who are all too ready to commiserate with us. We go out only when necessary and avoid the challenges of trying to navigate the culture and its strange ways.

These are all symptoms of *culture shock*. This psychological disorientation sets in when our learned cultural maps, its codes, and its guidelines no longer function. A person may not even be aware of sliding into a state of psychological shock and emotional weariness. But they know that something has gone wrong. They become moody as disillusionment sets in and many abandon their mission because of its impact.

Let's take a look at the four stages of this process:

- The first is the *honeymoon* stage, during which everything is new, interesting and even exciting. This stage can last a few months.
- The second is the *critical* stage, when we begin to feel critical of everything around us. The food is unappetizing. The people can't be trusted. We feel stupid and incompetent. Nothing works like it did back home. We are very tempted to give up and go back to where everything makes more sense. The lowest point often falls around the 12-18-month mark.
- The third is the initial *recuperation* stage, which starts when we have learned to get around a bit and to communicate somewhat. We begin to make friends. We learn how things work and become more proficient at the strange ways of doing things. Our emotions start to normalize. We don't feel quite so dumb. We are enjoying our friends, found our favorite foods, and feel more competent. It takes most people 2 years to arrive at this stage.
- The fourth stage is the full *adaptation* stage when we feel at home in the new culture and our ministry begins to show fruit. Genuine friendships have grown and developed. We are liked and respected by those we came to serve. We are still learning but we can function well. We have adapted!



Although everyone goes through some degree of culture shock, it not need be severe. It is very important not to give up when things seem darkest. "Don't doubt in the darkness what you heard in the light."

The first step in the right direction is to recognize that culture shock is something everyone goes through. It is not something to be ashamed of. It is a rite of passage. With perseverance, you can minimize culture shock. Keeping a positive attitude as a learner, learning to love the people, and making genuine friendships is the secret to keeping the effects of culture shock to a minimum.

There is a natural progression from "learner" to "story teller" to "teacher." At first, we are overwhelmed by all we are learning and need to learn. But the time comes when we can begin to share our own stories which includes giving witness to what God has done for us. Eventually, we may be in a position to instruct others in the ways of God. Too often, we are eager to see fruit and want to share the Gospel as we know it right away. But to be effective disciple makers, we must learn who the people really are and how to communicate best in word and deed. They must also learn to trust us, and that takes time.

Language and culture learning cannot happen without investing time and energy. We have heard of students who think they will learn all they need through "osmosis", just by living in their host situation. If you are super-extroverted and have high risk tolerance, it might work. But for most of us, it will require a lot of intentional exposure to the culture and practice to learn to fit in. If you are not intentional, it will limit your effectiveness as a disciple maker. Practice makes perfect!

The Person of Peace

When Jesus sent out his disciples (Luke 10-11; John 22-42), he instructed them to find the "person of peace." This was a member of the village where they were being sent who would invite the disciples into their home and show them hospitality. It was as if Jesus was saying, "In each place I send you I have prepared the heart of someone to receive you." This is true. These friends are waiting for you but you must connect. Pray for them and for that connection before you leave home. Whether you find them or they find you, be receptive to their kindness, hospitality and friendship. God has prepared these hearts to receive you.

If you do connect with a family, they can provide excellent support and opportunities for learning, even by simple observation and imitation. It is best if you can communicate either in your language or theirs, so work on that. They can help you understand the cultural codes and perhaps make your adaptation process easier by giving you good tips, helping you shop, or referring you to trusted people or resources.

Many missionaries count on the support of more experienced workers from their own countries and/or organizations to get them through this initial stage. When these workers are present, we may learn to depend on them rather than seeking to bond with people from the host culture. It's too

easy to hide out in each other's homes and avoid contact with the nationals. Avoid this as much as possible, as it will never get you beyond the critical stage of culture shock and will defeat your desire to make disciples. Unfortunately, too many missionaries do just that! It is best to plunge into the deep end, and limit time with others from your own country. You may even want to pray for the opportunity to live with a family from the host culture. A very useful booklet on this topic is called "[Bonding and the Missionary Task](#)" by Tom and Betty Brewster.

If you are careful to engage with the nationals, participate in their activities, and work at learning their language, little by little you will begin to feel comfortable in the new culture and will be able to function effectively. This will reduce your anxiety and permit you to move through culture shock with less stress. Eventually, you will not only accept the local food and customs, but you may grow a genuine liking for these. Many tastes are "acquired." So, keep trying...

Warning: In today's connected environment, it is too easy to seek emotional support from friends back home. Try to wean yourself from family and friends on social media. The longer you depend on them for that support, the longer it will take for you to adapt to the new culture. Students beginning their immersion studies from a training center in Argentina are required to "fast" from social media for a month after arriving at their destination. This has been critical to their engagement with the new culture and its people.

The secret to passing through culture shock without suffering too greatly is to make genuine friends among the people you have come to serve. Our need for friendship and companionship will begin to find fulfillment in these new friends and not just in other expatriate families, or our families back home. We will continue loving our own country and people, but will grow to love our new country and new friends to the point that we will miss them when we return home. When this happens, we have become bicultural—*belongers* in two cultures.

- 3) **Question:** Since culture shock is a psychological process that everyone goes through when settling into a new cultural context, how susceptible do you think you are to the negative effects of culture shock?
- 4) **Activity:** Discuss with your fellow students the kinds of friendship you expect to be able to develop when you arrive at your destination. Pray for the persons of peace that the Lord is preparing to be your friend.

Culture and Sharing Jesus

We speak a lot about culture, but what is it? *It is an all-encompassing system of loyalties, beliefs, customs, and behaviors that promote a specific identity and allow people to function together for their mutual benefit.* Culture provides answers to these interrelated questions:

- Where do my loyalties lie? Who do I belong to and who belongs to me?
- How do I relate to others in ways that will allow me and mine to survive and thrive?
- What do I believe to be true and right? What are my assumptions about God, man, the universe and the purpose of life?

There are many thousands of cultures around the world and each has its distinctive way of answering these questions. They also have a distinctive combination of geography, language, religion, and social norms, often referred to as ethnicity. Let us look at these features.

- **Race:** Black, Brown, Yellow, White, and everything in between... Most cultures have a strong racial identity.
- **Geography:** Every ethnic group has its homeland or "motherland." Migration or displacement may mean they live elsewhere, but all identify with certain geography.
- **Language:** Every ethnic group speaks its own language or dialect. Many also speak a national or trade language, but all have a language spoken in the home – their "heart language."

- **Religion:** Every ethnic group has a major, dominant religious system that is often closely associated with its government. Allegiance to this religion is expected and sometimes enforced by the society through laws or social pressures.
- **Social norms:** Every ethnicity has a way of mapping social relationships and creates overt and hidden codes of how these relationships are to function and be maintained. Many of these codes are subconscious.

Understanding any culture, even our own, is challenging. It is often much easier to express our loyalties than to understand our beliefs. We demonstrate this when we identify with a musical group or football team. We often can't quite explain why we are such loyal fans. On another level, our loyalties are defined by our allegiance to political parties or religious institutions. In most cases, our strongest loyalties are to our own families. In the case of disciples of Jesus, our ultimate loyalty is to him and that supersedes all other loyalties.

It is very easy to mix up loyalty with beliefs. Most people in the world adhere to a religion out of loyalty, not because they understand it or buy into its belief systems. It is an integral part of their culture. This is important to understand because ultimately, followers of Jesus are called to help people love God and love each other. Our goal is not to have them embrace a foreign religion (Matthew 22:37-39; 28:18-19). The radical teaching by Jesus on love as the first and greatest commandment, can only be lived out and witnessed to if we have a synergetic relationship with him (John 15). We must abide in him and he in us. Introducing people to this relationship is what we have to offer. We may argue the merits of our religion if called into that debate, but mostly, we need to focus on introducing people to Jesus.

Attempts to evangelize in another culture often fail because missionaries, particularly those from the west, believe their mission is to challenge a religious belief system and try to sell Christianity as a religious alternative. They try to persuade people that Christianity is right and true, but they don't understand that what is at stake is the people's sense of loyalty. To become a Christian is to betray their family and their people.

Even if a person is willing to change their religion, it won't change them. Missionaries know that some people will choose to become Christians for a number of ulterior motives. They may want to declare their rebellion against their family. They may believe it might provide a way to get to a Western nation. They may even just want to eliminate religious dietary restrictions or feel less guilt about their lifestyle!

Conversion from another religion to Christianity in most circumstances is interpreted as a cultural statement. The Gospel, however, is the power of God unto salvation. It transforms individuals and cultures from within. What changes people is their relationship to Jesus. If they learn from us how to know Jesus, abide in him, and do God's will, they will want to bless their family and community through their existing relationships. For this reason, it's important that in our zeal to show "fruit," we don't cast aside discernment. Nor should we intentionally uproot a person from their family by requiring them to become a "cultural Christian" in order to be saved. This is coercive and we lose the potential to influence the whole family for the Kingdom of God. Maintaining family relationships is of tremendous importance, and we must do all we can to bless these relationships (1 Corinthians 7:14-16; 1 Peter 3:1-6). This topic is addressed in John Ridgway's excellent booklet, [Your Kingdom Come](#).

- 5) Question: If you are a convert to Christianity (or from Catholicism to Protestantism), what is the price you have had to pay to make this cultural declaration? Do you believe God requires it? If you were raised in a Christian family or culture, was there a cultural or relational cost to your decision to become a genuine disciple of Jesus?
- 6) Activity: Discuss with other students when or in what manner new believers should declare their loyalty to following Jesus, and when being a "secret" but genuine follower Jesus may be justified.

Language Learning

Language and culture go hand in hand. They are two sides of the same coin. If the culture is to be learned, the language also must be learned.

Language learning is a daunting task for most adults. Many expatriates will sacrifice the potential for a richer experience and deeper relationships because they don't believe they can learn a new language... or it takes too much work... or they don't find the time to do it. So, the first step in language learning is to have a positive attitude and make a commitment to spending the time and effort it requires.

You can indeed learn a new language! Yes, it will take hard work, but it is possible. And it is also essential to your mission. Language learning is ministry, as it will require you to spend time with people in your host culture and enable you to grow relationships. Even if you are not going to be in the country for long, it is worth spending the time to begin learning a language. It will enrich your understanding and exercise your brain.

Language learning can be approached systematically. This means you can set goals for yourself. The higher the level, the more time it will take. However, levels 1 and 2 are achievable within a fairly short time frame. Detailed below are the language proficiency levels based on the Inter-agency Language Round-table ([ILR](#)) scale that is set by the U.S. Foreign Service Institute.

0 – No Proficiency

At this lowest level, there is basically no knowledge of the language. The person may know a few words, but can't form sentences or carry on any type of conversation.

1 – Elementary Proficiency (3-6 months)

A person at this level is described as follows:

- can fulfill traveling needs and conduct themselves in a polite manner
- able to use questions and answers for simple topics within a limited level of experience even though the native speaker must strain and leverage contextual knowledge to understand what is said
- able to understand basic questions and speech, which allows for guides, such as slower speech or repetition, to aid understanding
- has a vocabulary only large enough to communicate the most basic of needs
- writes in simple sentences or sentence fragments with spelling and grammar errors

2 – Limited Working Proficiency (1-2 years)

A person at this level is described as follows:

- able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
- can handle with confidence most basic social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, work, family, and autobiographical information
- can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge), and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some circumlocutions
- has an accent which, though often quite faulty, is intelligible
- can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar

3 – Professional Working Proficiency (3-4 years)

A person at this level is described as follows:

- able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most conversations on practical, social, and professional topics
- can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease
- has comprehension which is quite complete for a normal rate of speech
- has a general vocabulary which is broad enough that he or she rarely has to search for a word
- has an accent which may be obviously foreign; has a good control of grammar; and whose errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker

4 – Full Professional Proficiency (5-6 years)

A person at this level is described as follows:

Full professional fluency is desired by most employers. Someone at this level can have advanced discussions on a wide range of topics about personal life, current events, and technical topics such as business and finance. People at this level may still have a minor accent and may occasionally misspeak or make minor mistakes. Their vocabulary is extensive and they can carry on conversations with ease.

5 – Native / Bilingual Proficiency (6+ years)

Someone at this language proficiency level was either raised speaking the language as their native tongue or has been speaking it so long that they are completely fluent. They have little or no accent.

Level 1 in a new language is very achievable. It is “survival” language and is essential to adaptation to your new situation. This level can actually be mastered in terms of weeks. So, if you can arrange to spend your first weeks in your new country focused on learning language, that time can give you an excellent boost to adaptation. You can even ramp up with a language before you leave. There are free online programs such as [Duolingo](#) that teach all of the major languages. Just a few minutes of practice each day can help you develop basic abilities in a language.

Many people study languages in school but can't use it. Your objective is to *acquire* a language in a practical way that meets your needs and learning style. The official language of your host country will be taught formally in schools and academies as courses. If you can afford these courses and they are accessible, receiving the rigorous instruction and accountability they offer can help you stay on track. But languages can also be learned informally. Since much of language acquisition is gained through practice, these informal methods rely on practice with the assistance of language helpers. Since most of the 7,000+ languages and dialects in the world aren't offered in courses, you will need to use an informal method if you live among a people who speak one of these languages that are not taught. There are several of these methods but one widely used method is called the [GPA](#) approach.

The best informal courses are self-directed. The learner takes control of the learning, sets objectives that address their language learning needs, and follow the course they set for themselves. They often rely on a bilingual *helper* who is typically not a teacher, because a teacher will want to take control of the learning. Although there may be a cost to hiring a language helper, it is seldom as expensive as formal language courses. It is also helpful to learn with others, so find fellow language learners for practice and encouragement. Some people do very well with informal courses but others need the accountability and structure that formal courses offer. Others combine the two. Find an approach that suits you and stick with it!

Culture Learning

People entering a new cultural context often feel very inadequate. Their own cultural codes don't seem to work and even when they ask about how or why things are done, they might get a nebulous reason or a simple "I don't know." That is because much of this coding is subconscious, having been learned in an informal context from parents, family and their community. So, much must be learned by observation and imitation.

Sociologists and anthropologists have attempted to classify and analyze sociological data in ways that can give us a general framework as we try to navigate a new culture and learn its ways. This, like language acquisition, takes practice. Trial and error may expose us to some embarrassing moments, but it's part of the learning curve. Understanding the general cultural framework may give our intuitive efforts a boost.

Some of the cultural values have been mapped in a way that expresses a continuum between two polar values. Our ability to understand and navigate a new culture may be helped by understanding the underlying values that are reflected in behaviors. The following list is offered as a tool to help you map the cultural framework. From: [*Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*](#), By Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers.

Time v. Event

Time Orientation	Event Orientation
1. Concern for punctuality and amount of time expended	1. Concern for details of the event, regardless of time required
2. Careful allocation of time to achieve the maximum within set limits	2. Exhaustive consideration of a problem until resolved
3. Tightly scheduled, goal-directed activities	3. A "let come what may" outlook not tied to any precise schedule
4. Rewards offered as incentives for efficient use of time	4. Stress on completing the event as a reward in itself
5. Emphasis on dates and history	5. Emphasis on present experience rather than the past or future

We cannot plot God's priorities on the matrix, since God's priorities are not bound by space and time and God's priorities for us meet us at our points of weakness and need.

An important key to effective cross-cultural ministry is an incarnational attitude toward time and event—we must adapt to the time and event priorities of the people with whom we work.

Dichotomist v. Holistic

Dichotomistic Thinking	Holistic Thinking
1. Judgments are black/white, right/wrong—specific criteria are uniformly applied in evaluating others	1. Judgments are open-ended—the whole person and all circumstances are taken into consideration
2. Security comes from the feeling that one is right and fits into a particular role or category in society	2. Security comes from multiple interactions within the whole of society—one is insecure if confined to particular roles or categories
3. Information and experiences are systematically organized; details are sorted and ordered to form a clear pattern	3. Information and experiences are seemingly disorganized; details (narratives, events, portraits) stand as independent points complete in themselves

A missionary entering another culture must realize that people evaluate others in different ways.

The way we think predisposes how we will judge others. Dichotomistic thinkers will reject the muddy ambiguity of their holist peers, accusing them of softness, lack of principle, and inconsistency. Holistic thinkers will reject the rigidity of the dichotomist peers, accusing them of legalist and callous inhumanity toward others. Such personal rejections, however, come only from limited perspectives.

Crisis v. Noncrisis

Crisis Orientation	Noncrisis Orientation
1. Anticipates crisis	1. Downplays possibility of crisis
2. Emphasizes planning	2. Focuses on actual experience
3. Seeks quick resolution to avoid ambiguity	3. Avoids taking action; delays decisions
4. Repeatedly follows a single authoritative, preplanned procedure	4. Seeks ad hoc solutions from multiple available options
5. Seeks expert advice	5. Distrusts expert advice

If some people think in ways different from ours, we must learn to think as they think. If some people respond to crises and make decisions in ways different from ours, we must learn their crisis-management style.

Our goal must be to build up the unity and fellowship of the body of Christ...Our role is to be that of a servant.

Task v. Person

Task Orientation	Person Orientation
1. Focuses on tasks and principles	1. Focuses on persons and relationships
2. Finds satisfaction in the achievement of goals	2. Finds satisfaction in interaction
3. Seeks friends with similar goals	3. Seeks friends who are group oriented
4. Accepts loneliness and social deprivation for the sake of personal achievements	4. Deplores loneliness; sacrifices personal achievements for group interaction

All of us who aspire to Christian ministry and service must seek to increase our concern for and interaction with others, or, in Paul's words, we must seek to share our lives.

Clearly, the evidence from the life of Jesus shows us that people should take priority over task in ministry.

Status v. Achievement

Status Focus (Prestige is Ascribed)	Achievement Focus (Prestige is Attained)
1. Personal identity is determined by formal credentials of birth and rank	1. Personal identity is determined by one's achievements
2. The amount of respect one receives is permanently fixed; attention focuses on those with high social status in spite of any personal failings they have	2. The amount of respect one receives varies with one's accomplishments and failures, attention focuses on personal performance
3. An individual is expected to play his or her role and to sacrifice to attain higher rank	3. An individual is extremely self-critical and makes sacrifices in order to accomplish ever greater deeds.
4. People associate only with their social equals	4. People associate with those of equal accomplishments regardless of background

This pursuit of prestige stands in opposition to the career of servanthood that God has for missionaries and for all believers.

God finds worth in us.

The missionary, then, has to recognize that self-worth comes through neither ascribed nor achieved prestige and that one must be a servant in the pattern set by Christ.

All of us who aspire to Christian ministry and service must seek to increase our concern for and interaction with others, or, in Paul's words, we must seek to share our lives.

Concealment of Vulnerability v. Willingness to expose Vulnerability

Concealment of Vulnerability	Willingness to Expose Vulnerability
1. Protection of self-image at all cost; avoidance of error and failure	1. Relative unconcern about error and failure
2. Emphasis on the quality of performance	2. Emphasis on completion of event
3. Reluctance to go beyond one's recognize limits or to enter the unknown	3. Willingness to push beyond one's limits and enter the unknown
4. Denial of culpability; withdrawal from activities in order to hide weaknesses and shortcomings	4. Ready admission of culpability, weakness, and shortcomings
5. Refusal to entertain alternative views or accept criticism	5. Openness to alternative views and criticism
6. Vagueness regarding personal life	6. Willingness to talk freely about personal life

Christian workers, then, must be aware of their perspective with regard to vulnerability, the predominant values of the culture in which they work, and the orientation of each individual to whom they must relate. They must be keenly aware of the potential of each orientation for building up or tearing down the body of Christ.

- 7) Question: Can you identify culturally determined characteristics in others?
- 8) Activity: Using the above descriptors, rate yourself in each category. Contrast and compare these social values with other students.

This concludes the orientation course for tentmakers. There is much to be learned. If you have not had the time or opportunity to consider the questions for reflection, make the time. If you have not done the suggested activities, find a group to study the lessons together. These activities are linked to processes essential to your understanding of discipleship and the tentmaker's calling and responsibilities. God bless you as you pursue his calling on your life.