



Introduction



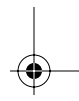
As humans we have a great deal in common with each other. We all need to eat, to sleep, to love and be loved. Yet our commonalities are sometimes hard to see, because from the time of our birth we are cultural beings. A simple definition of culture is “a system of meanings and values that shape one’s behavior.”¹ Geert Hofstede, a noted cultural researcher, defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.”²



Our culture shapes who we are, what we believe and how we behave. At no point in our human interactions do we take off our culture and set it aside. It is always with us in all of our relationships, in all of our thinking and our processing of the world around us.

Our world is changing rapidly, calling for new skills and knowledge in order for us to survive and prosper. Because of the interactions between nations and ethnic groups, our skills in forming and maintaining relationships with those who are culturally different from us will be critical for our success in the new millennium.

This book is a skill-building journey into crosscultural relation-





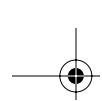
ships—working with persons of more than one cultural background—learning the connections we must make in order for our interactions to be healthy and meaningful. The approach is simple: connecting our heads (cognitive process), hearts (emotional process) and hands (application process) in each chapter. This is not a new process for learning, but rather one that dates back to the earliest of recorded history. In this regard, Deuteronomy 6 is a pivotal passage for both Jews and Christians. The fourth verse, the Shema, states “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (RSV).

From the beginning God knew we needed to connect what we know with what we feel and what we do. Piaget and others in the field of educational psychology have explained the benefit of connecting these three elements in order for true learning to take place.³ While their research was within a European and U.S. American context, I believe the principle is universal and appropriate for all cultures.⁴

This book's perspective is quite specific. Most books written on crosscultural understanding and communication focus on the U.S. American living abroad or the international residing temporarily in the United States. This book, however, looks specifically at the peculiarities of the United States' multicultural environment (U.S. born and foreign born) and will be a useful tool for persons of any culture who find themselves in a relationship with someone of another culture.

The purpose is practical. The discipline of cultural anthropology guides and informs our study, but the focus is on the application of that discipline to crosscultural relationships. At the end of each chapter you will find specific exercises to reinforce the application. The appendices include materials for further individual and group learning. The emphasis is on connecting knowledge with feelings and using this connection to make a difference in your life and in the world.





The questions that will be answered in this book reflect the basic struggles confronting individuals who function within a multicultural environment.

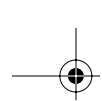
- How does my culture affect my behavior, my beliefs and even my understanding of what it means to be a Christian?
- What are the keys to understanding culture and its impact on relationships?
- How can I become better able to establish and nurture friendships with persons of another culture?
- What is God's purpose in diversity of culture?
- How does God want his children to respond to a multicultural world?

As your assumptions are challenged, your own questions, unique to you and your context, will surface. This is a good thing and can be the catalyst to seeking new relationships and resources that will provide the additional answers you need.

This book's context is Christian. Biblical principles are woven into the cultural insights, informing and motivating new attitudes and actions. In the past many Christians have been silent regarding social issues confronting society, such as slavery and integration. We stand at another social crossroads created by our country's rapidly changing demographics. Who would be better than the Christian community to lead society in the development of successful, healthy crosscultural relationships?

Several years ago I was leading a conference at the annual international meeting of SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research) in Washington, D.C. As part of my presentation on crosscultural conflict resolution, I explained that while I had years of experience dealing with conflicts between culture groups, I had not had formal training in this area. A young man came up to speak with me afterwards. He commented, "Your conference was very helpful and unique. I am a graduate student in intercultural studies and I have never heard anyone give such practical and helpful information. I know you said you did not have





formal training, but you must be reading someone. Who and what have you been studying?”

I appreciated his compliment, but had never thought about what I was reading or whom I was studying. I just blurted out, “The Bible and the life of Jesus.” I wondered how this intellectual young man would react. He looked amazed and stood there in silence as others came by to talk and ask questions. Soon he was the only one left. As he walked away, he said softly, “Well, you have given me a reason to read one [a Bible].”

I have never spoken to him again, but the incident both changed and challenged me. People throughout the world are searching for successful ways to live and work together. As Christians, we have the solution. When we make the connections between our heads, our hearts and our hands, we will be able to create healthy environments for multicultural relationships and reflect the light of Jesus in our world.

Note. The illustrations used have had the names changed to protect confidentiality, and on some occasions, represent a composite of situations.

The term “U.S. American” is used instead of “American” because it is limited to those in the United States and does not include North and Central America.

The dominant culture refers to the culture having the most influence in a specific area, not the largest population group.

