

**TUTORIAL**  
**4.19**

# Becoming a Communicator 2

This tutorial further discusses the concept that communication involves the whole person - that it is not just what we *say*, but who we *are*. Learning to communicate is not just learning language and culture, but involves an inward change so that we become suitable vessels of the mysteries of God and servants of Christ in a new setting.

## Introduction

Effective cross-cultural learning is a process of *becoming someone who we currently are not* in order to be useful servants of the Lord in a new context. We have touched on some areas already where you may have been confronted by the fact that in order for you to be an effective cross-cultural learner, there may be a need for some personal changes - changes of habit, changes of automatic behaviour or changes in thinking. It may involve becoming a better listener, a more indirect communicator or a better observer. It will involve stepping out of your 'comfort zone' at some point.

This kind of change requires a *willingness to change*. We are probably comfortable with who we already are, but for the sake of somebody or something else we are willing to go through the discomfort of personal change. Change is never an easy decision to make or a simple process to go through. It is helpful to think about *why* we should be willing to go through that process of change, and to understand what will motivate us along the way.

So some things about you as a person will need to change, but it is also important to remember to value the gifts that the Lord has given *you* - your personality, your experience, your background, your likes and dislikes, your skills - who you are in your uniqueness. Because being the person that God has uniquely prepared for the work He has given us is the best way to provide access to His message to the people we come in contact with.

Culture and language learning requires a process of deep change in our lives - the journey of becoming relevant and useful instruments in God's hands in a

new context, and it is also a personal journey, one in which we will need to be wholly involved.

## Examples from God's Word

Culture and language learning is primarily a time of learning and of gradually coming to a point of *knowing and understanding* the language and culture of the people. But the greater test will be going beyond knowing and understanding to *becoming and being*; becoming and being someone that you are not now; changing some things about yourself for the purpose of reaching the people God loves. Christ Himself is the foremost example of this and is a pattern for us.

Let's think of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ: through His incarnation, He so identified Himself with man, that it was later said of Him that He could actually "...*sympathise with our weaknesses...*"! He became a man, He gave up all the privileges associated with His higher status, and took on the nature and characteristics of humans.

Think about the life of the Lord in more detail, and how He actually lived among people:

- How did Christ relate to those among whom He lived?
- How did He love them?
- Which culture was He acculturated into?
- What kind of food did He eat?
- How did He dress?
- How did He travel?
- Was He part of the community?
- Where did He live?
- How removed was He from the normal life of the society?
- Did He escape? How? What for?
- What kind of privacy did He have?
- How did He relate to leaders of different types?
- How did He respond to the philosophies and worldview of others?
- How did He communicate?
- What language?
- What body language?
- Did He know the culture? As an insider?

Jesus came to initiate change and rebirth, so He did not become like us in every way. His life exhibited a perfect balance of Grace and Truth - He made every effort to become like us in every way He could, but that did not stop Him from confronting the things He needed to, in order to bring Truth.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul gives a description of his own willingness to give up his rights in order to bring people to Christ:

*<sup>19</sup> Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. <sup>20</sup> When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup> When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. <sup>22</sup> When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. <sup>23</sup> I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.*

## **A lifestyle, not a series of tasks**

As we have said, culture and language learning is much more than learning how to say something, we are actually learning how to *be* something. We could also say that effective cross-cultural learning is more a *lifestyle* that we grow into, than a check-list that we accomplish. It is a process of becoming a relevant participant and communicator in a new context.

There are certain activities and ways of living that will help you to grow and learn, and you will need to be pro-active in including those and keeping them balanced with other activities in your new setting. Here are some of the most important aspects that should be included in a healthy *lifestyle* of learning during the time of culture and language acquisition:

### **Spend time with people**

Continually evaluate your schedule and activities to see if you are pursuing people rather than avoiding them:

- Find ways to be involved in regular activities in the community that local people also do regularly.
- Join a sporting group or activity where you are regularly with a group of people and the focus is on something other than you.
- Take a class at a college or university level in a topic that interests you.
- Do part-time volunteer work in an old-people's home, hospital, school, orphanage - where you will regularly be with the same group of people.
- Have goals of meeting a certain number of new people each week, specific and measurable goals.
- Maintain existing relationships and evaluate how they are developing.
- Note when local people visit and meet to talk and try to join them.

**Listen to people talk**

This will happen naturally if you are spending time with people. The most effective way to boost your learning is to expose yourself to massive comprehensible input. That is, expose yourself to massive doses of speech (and perhaps writing) that you can understand, while gradually increasing the difficulty level.

**Talk to people**

This will also begin to happen naturally if you are spending time with people. You have to practice if you want to continue to learn, so you need to engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking. That is, engage in extensive two-way conversational interaction, and other speaking and writing activities.

**Learn about people**

Learn to know the people whose language you are learning. That is, learn all you can about their lives, experiences, and beliefs. Do this in and through the language as you spend time with them, and as you carefully observe them and ask questions. Have some broader learning goals as well, such as:

- gaining an appreciation and understanding of history, culture and community - both on a wider and a local level through individual contacts and relationships. In time this will help you to develop an overall understanding of cultural themes and worldviews.
- have an interest in national politics, entertainment, arts, religion, travel, and develop understandings about what is important to people.
- have an understanding of what friendship means in this culture, ideally through development of relationships personally.
- find out how the church (if it exists) looks and functions in this setting, and how it relates to other religious groups.

**Get the most out of every situation**

Use the principle that every situation has a multiple purpose - building deeper relationships as well as increasing linguistic ability and cultural understanding. Once you gain a degree of fluency through structured activities you will be more comfortable with unstructured social visiting as a means of getting conversational practice. You can use your formal language sessions to prepare for your general social visiting. For example, when you learn to discuss some topic in your language sessions, you can then make a point of discussing that same topic during informal social visits. You can even tell your friends, "This is what I have been learning to talk about with so-and-so", and then go on to talk about the topic with your friends.

If you have a job or study schedule in your new culture, it is particularly important to continue to prioritize language and culture learning activities as a part of your regular activities.

### **Balance your learning activities**

One of the most difficult things to do when learning cross-culturally is to balance your time in various learning activities. So no matter what language program you end up following, you should personally make sure that your schedule includes all of these types of activities:

- *Formal language sessions* with someone who is providing comprehensible input and opportunities for extemporaneous speaking. During this time you have a safe environment to practice, ask questions and focus on particular things.
- *Personal study activities* in which you listen to recordings, read, write, and plan. Listening to a lot of recorded comprehensible material is very valuable as it prepares you for speaking with people. You can use this time to plan well for language sessions or to think about opportunities for social activities.
- *Social, work or community activities* in which you use the language, either in understanding messages, in uttering messages, or both. Purposefully identify situations - social/cultural - that you have not taken part in or do not know how to function in yet and learn how to do that. Participate in that situation, learn by observation what people say and what they do, evaluate what you need to learn, practice being in that situation until you know how to function. Your goal is to be able to *function* in this new context - to communicate to a level where people in this setting understand who you are and what you are saying to them at the deepest level. Also, make sure that you take time to just relax and enjoy other people's company, and for them to relax and get to know you.

### **Balance your family life**

Finding God's direction for including your home and family life as an integral part of learning is a key to sustaining a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle of learning. This is possible, and can be a wonderful time as wives and husbands engage together in the challenge of becoming relevant and useful communicators and support each other in the learning process. Also, parents can find ways to help their children identify with their long-term goals, and help their children to be moving forward also in becoming more "insiders" in this new context. Children are a valuable part of the picture and should be included as much as possible in the deeper aspects of why you are there. Language and culture learning activities can be entertaining and satisfying for children as they grow and learn. Strong and healthy family relationships are an important way to honor God and communicate His character to those around you.

## **Who are we becoming?**

We need to go beyond just knowing and understanding to *becoming* and *being*, in order to communicate fully what God wants us to. So who are we becoming?

BECOMING...

- ...a true friend
- ...someone they want to be with
- ...someone they trust
- ...a part of their lives
- ...someone they can talk to (because we *understand*)
- ...someone they can listen to
- ...someone they want to listen to
- ...someone who can do things in the culture/language
- ...someone who communicates at the deepest levels
- ...someone who never stops growing

This process of becoming someone different is not simply a matter of learning language and culture so that you can accomplish a series of tasks...it's about undergoing inward change into a suitable vessel/steward of the mysteries of God - a servant of Christ.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

### *Becoming a Communicator 2*

1. Someone has said that “cross-cultural learning for ministry is not merely learning how to act but becoming what we want them to become - modelling Christ in their culture. To help them to become, not like us, but uniquely like Christ.” Discuss this statement, do you agree with it, does it seem possible, is it too extreme, does it ignore other influences on their growth?



## ACTIVITIES

### *Becoming a Communicator 2*

1. The following is an outline for a simple “ethnographic interview” that is used in a language school in Russia. It is used by people who are learning Russian and are already fairly fluent. Use the outline to interview someone you

know very well - someone who comes from a different culture would be ideal. You can record their answers if you wish, but you do not have to submit the answers as part of the assignment.

### **Project “The Story of My Life”**

Here are subjects you may ask about to learn the story of someone’s life as an exercise in learning about the culture and the language at the same time. Be sure to tape the interview to listen to later for in depth language and culture learning. It is important to interview people from different age groups and social groups to get a better overview of the culture.

- a. Their country
  - b. Their city or village
  - c. Life in their country
  - d. The different kinds of people in their country
  - e. A typical day in their life
  - f. An overview of their schooling (what their schools were like, etc.)
  - g. A very happy day in their life (tell the story)
  - h. A very sad day in their life (tell the story)
  - i. Important events in their life
  - j. Things they liked to do as a child
  - k. Things they like to do now in their free time
  - l. People who have had a significant influence in their life
  - m. Their hopes for the future
  - n. Stories they enjoyed as a child (or now)
  - o. Differences between their culture and yours
  - p. Their religion and how it is (or is not) important to them
  - q. What in their opinion is the noble life? (You'll have to translate the concept into their worldview.)
  - r. Major aspects of their religion (if the person is religious)
  - s. Specific questions about specific aspects of their culture and religion (Get them to talk about things that are ultimately important to them and their community.)
2. Now imagine walking up to someone you only know slightly, and asking them the same set of questions. How would the interview situation change? How would you feel and how might they possibly feel? What does this show you about language, culture and relationships?

3. Look back again in the tutorial at the list of headings under the title: A lifestyle, not a series of tasks. Think about your current activities and engagement with people in your community, and brainstorm some ways you could put more of these into practice in your current situation.