



Transcriptions

Intercultural Skills

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Annotation: *Staley Lecture Series, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA, February 17, 1984.* Commenting on the uniqueness of Christianity among world religions, Ted Ward then broadens the theme to include God's embrace of the whole of humanity. Speaking to students, Ted Ward seeks to encourage them to become more interculturally aware.



We have been talking this week about the whole matter of a global mindedness, a consciousness, a concern, an outlook, a kind of sanctified perspective. Sanctified, made holy, made whole and there is in the history of words and language a relationship between the word *holy* and the word *holistic*. They come from the same word root which in the Greek means *one whole*. God is holy, God is one. We worship God in holiness because of his oneness with his universe. We worship God as holy people because of our wholly made oneness with God and Jesus Christ. And we should be holistic people in the sense that we are whole not compartmentalized, not feeding on the one hand our intellect and neglecting our social concerns. Not activist on the one hand and ignorant on the other. A balance, a set of relationships brought together.

I have tried to make it very clear that I wasn't here to recruit you to anything except what God is recruiting you to. And I am not speaking for God or telling you what God would have you to hear, I am as it were in the prophet of old saying, thus saith the Lord about his relationship with you. His relationship with you is one in which he shares with you his vision of a world of need. And

none of us, as Christians, can escape this. Those of you who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, those of you who are not in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ are not able to comprehend what we're talking about. And for you we can have a great deal of patience and a great deal of hope. But we do not expect you to understand. Because only those who are bought by the blood of Jesus Christ are able to understand what we are driving at in terms of a commitment to the reality of the world in which we live. A commitment that does not begin after graduation. God spare us from the word *commencement*. A poor choice of language. There is virtually nothing that commences when you get done with your college experience except the great delusion of discovering that nothing is beginning. It simply goes on. What you build as habits now will be habits for the future and I want to talk with you about some of those habits today. You say, I didn't think that was what we were talking about. I thought it was intercultural skills. Yes, intercultural skills brought to the level of habit.

There are some things about working with people who are different that help to make us knowledgeable about how to work with people. And, as a matter of fact, one of the great values in working with people who are obviously culturally different is that it sensitizes us to the reality that people are different. I would invite you to look to your left right now. Who do you see? Look to your right. Who do you see? You have seen two very different people. And the oddest thing of all is that between those two very different people is an even stranger individual. And the unfortunate thing about that strange individual in between those two people is that that strange individual in between is strange because that individual believes himself or herself to be the center of the universe, and everybody else is different from her or from him. You think about it. We use ourselves as a kind of a starting place to think. Nothing wrong with that. Its just a good thing to be aware of because it can get you into all kinds of trouble. There's nothing wrong with being an individual, being a person, being unique, being self-respecting. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that, but there is quite a bit wrong in presuming yourself to be the norm by which all others are measured. None of us is the norm by which all others are measured. None of us, as Christians, are the norm of anything. We are all instructed by Paul to be followers after the pattern laid down in our Lord Jesus Christ and we are all different from him in significant ways.

But I would call your attention to several characteristics of our Lord and, consequently, of Paul because Paul was very deeply into this whole matter of modeling. And as we think about what it means to get cross-cultural experience and get cross-cultural perspective and awareness I think we can understand more of what Jesus was up against and what Paul was up against and we can observe, for example, our Lord operating in ways perhaps that we had never noticed. Some of us read the stories in the gospels and we say, wouldn't it be wonderful to be that kind of superman that Jesus Christ was. That sort of God/man figure who has all the good things about being God and all the good things about being man all at the same time. Boy, wouldn't that be great. Better than superman because X-ray vision is nothing compared with being able to jump over whole cities with a single bound. And that is a very limited view of our Lord Jesus Christ. But on the other hand its a very distorted view because we understand the incarnation when Jesus Christ became flesh and lived and dwelled among men as being a time when he deliberately left back his God characteristics in particulars: he bled, he hurt, he died. And whenever you read about an event when our Lord Jesus Christ seemed to be demonstrating remarkable insight into people, say to yourself, I wish I could do that. And then say to yourself: I am going to keep trying until I can. Our Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, demonstrates skills which you and I can develop.

And let me tell you what I believe to be the key one. In his mortal flesh, in his incarnate person, Jesus, our Lord was one of the most observant, carefully reflective, analytic listeners that world has ever known. He was just good at it. If you take a look at any of the Gospels and make a systematic study, some of you read the Bible occasionally; let me encourage it on the rest of you. There's a Gospel in the New Testament that's relatively short and not too terribly demanding because it was written by a journalist. His name was Mark and I would encourage you to go through the Gospel of Mark and pay attention to all the encounters that Jesus Christ had with other people. And I want you to notice, as you go through, how each of those interactions or conversations or encounters took place. They took place largely out of initiatives that other people brought to him. You can actually block off the Gospel of Mark into chunks and say, here's an episode, here's an episode; and you just literally mark it off and you can find that in each of those encounters there was some kind of a starting place, some kind of initiative. And you will discover if you study that systematically, that many, if not most, of those encounters were started by other people not Jesus. And what happened was that Jesus was just a terribly good respondent to other people. This is Intercultural Skill #1: Being an effective dedicated, active, observer, and listener so that you can get quickly on the other person's frame of reference and point of view.

I will draw attention this morning in the limited time that we have to just one such encounter. You probably remember the point in John 4 where Jesus encountered the woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria. And his disciples had gone on into the village to attend for some shopping and he had stayed at the well side and I think he was tired and I know how he felt because occasionally after days and days of people talking with you and trying to respond and trying to responsive to them you do get awfully weary and you are kind of glad for somebody else to go do the shopping, and he had them doing that. And all of a sudden this woman came up all by herself at the wrong time of day. We know that because women in that part of the world then and now didn't go to the well just any old random time of the day; they went when the other women were going and she was all by herself. So he knew instantly—here's a woman who is an outcast. And you say, oh, I never thought of that. Well, that's the point; that's the point. We're not observant enough. If you were sitting on that well in Sychar and you understood the ways of people—and these people in the Samaria were culturally different but Jesus understood their ways, too. And he says, here comes a woman all by herself at the wrong time of day to get water. I say wrong time of day simply because the other women weren't there. It was obvious that she and Jesus were the only two figures at that well. Because of her reaction, you could tell that. It was the wrong time of the day to get water and a woman wouldn't do that because people do things as communities in many parts of the world and they do things at the same time and in the same way and the same place and they have fellowship while they're doing it. So it didn't take any divine knowledge for him to say, here's a woman who is an outcast. See it? And you read that story and say, oh, wouldn't it be great to be Jesus because you're like God, you know, you have all this super vision. No, no, no. See him as an extremely elegant person who is quite capable of putting it all together by observation and by listening.

If you look at the nature of that encounter, you'll discover that Jesus started it out in the most natural sort of a way and her response was a kind of a reactive belligerent response. He said, Would you get me a drink? She says: You're not even a Samaritan; you're a Jew. I can tell by the way you're dressed. I can tell by the way you talk. You're a Jew. What do you what do you mean a Jewish man asking a Samaritan woman for a drink? Don't you know that that's virtually immoral? And that's what she was saying: You're really in a kind of immoral posture there, fellow, and I'm not going to put up with it. And that kind of switching the thing into the whole realm of morality, Jesus

quickly processes and says: Boy, is she sensitive on moral issues. Uh-huh. Okay, put that one in the formula. And then as the conversation went on, she tried to react to him in basically resisting belligerent ways that Jesus was able to put together after he heard her react about religious argument. That's always an interesting clue to what people are thinking, you know. She says: While we're at it, do you realize that your people are different from our people because you people believe it's correct to worship down in Jerusalem and we think it's here in the mountain. And Jesus put all this together and he said: Woman, you've got problems.

And pretty soon it was his perceptive observation and reactions to her leads that caused him to say: I understand you as a person who is still drawing your own water in the moral realm of life, just like you are right here. You're still coming and drawing your own water; you don't have anybody to draw water for you. Because you haven't recognized the authority of who I am, you're stuck right there. Because if you recognized who it is who asks of you, give me a drink, you would have said to me: Oh, give me a drink that I might drink of the water that you could give for me. And, lady, if you had done that, you would discover that the water that I would give you is a water that is capable of becoming within you a fountain springing up. She said: Oh, give me that water so that I don't have to come and get water every day.

And then she began to realize that he's talking about the spiritual life. He's talking about the moral condition of my heart. I'm still my own moral judge; I'm not referencing myself to anything external. I'm not interested in law. I'm not interested in God's righteousness. I'm not interested in anything else except what pleases me, and it's making a very bitter life for me. And she says to his question, I have no husband. Jesus says, Yes, I know. You've had many and the man you are living with now isn't your husband. How did you know that? How did you know that? And then she recognized him to be a prophet. But I tell you, that what Jesus was operating on was something that you and I have available to us and it isn't some kind of divine imagination. It is the capacity to listen and observe and deal with people on their terms so closely and so thoroughly that when we respond, they'll say, how did you know that? And the answer in the final analysis is, you told me.

Have you found the beauty of being able to relate to another human being so well that the other human being can say, how did you know that? And you simply say, you told me. And that is human relationship at its finest. And it is that skill that can be developed as you have encounters with people who are increasingly different from you. The good Lord knew what he was doing when he put us in families to start lives. Families are people that are a lot like us. But the good Lord also knew what he was doing when he said, there comes a time when people become a new couple, a new relationship is established; and they leave that safety of being among people that are exactly like them and they encounter, through marriage, one of the most difficult accommodational relationships of life. You see marriage itself is a kind of cross-cultural experience. Did you ever think about that? Because when you marry, you marry someone who is almost as weird as you are. And then comes the big task of trying to learn to communicate. You see the unfortunate thing is we don't have to learn that before we get married because we can go on a kind of a glandular emotional reaction up to that point. And then it's after you get married that you have to learn to communicate, unless you have been using your learning experiences in college to get those skills of coping with people who are different. And that's one reason that I so strongly advocate getting out and getting among people who are different, even so different that you're not comfortable with them, and learning to communicate.

Now how do you learn to communicate? Intercultural communication is different from communication, in general, because if you look at the nature of communication, in general, as it's taught in courses, the issue is how do you organize messages and pick media? I say, well, that's all neat, but it's not very relevant to everyday life. The issue in effective communication is not organizing your message and picking your medium. The big issue is how do you learn to hear? How do you learn to listen? How do you learn to observe? And on the basis of those observations, how do you learn to build a reciprocal relationship with another person or another group? When you're moving into a strange culture, the big problem is you're from here, they're from here; and they presume some things about you and you presume some things about them, and many of those things are half true.

Which brings us into the realm of the second great area of concern in intercultural competency which is the matter of trust. If you are like most of us, there is an instinctive reaction of mistrust or distrust when we are among people who are very different from us. Now again I'd ask you to look to your left and look to your right. This time, look at least two people but don't let the two know who you're looking at. Look down the row to your left first, if you would. Look at least two people down and see if you can spot somebody that you just kind of instinctively don't trust. Now if you couldn't find one there, and I suspect many of us could, turn to the right and try it there and I'm sure you'll find one down there. There's just something about the way he's dressed. Did you notice that? There's just something about her and I'm not quite sure what she's trying to say with that particular get-up, but I'm a little bit suspicious. Did you notice that? And there are some other folks on the same row and you say, I'm having a hard time deciding which one to think about because that person down there has this kind of studied affectation that just turns me off. Or did you notice that person? Look again. He's down there.

It's natural, it's normal, it's human, and don't tell me it doesn't occur at SPU. There is about difference that which tells us don't trust, don't trust, keep your guard up, don't get taken. And that's how you know that you're sophisticated and cool. Our Lord Jesus Christ made himself vulnerable over and over and over again, and they said to him, who do you mean hanging around with that crowd. Don't you know what it does to your representation? And he says, I know. I know, but that's why I'm here. Now don't just use that as a license to hang out with a bum crowd. I'm not talking about that. But what we have to do in order to effectively communicate, as Christians, is exactly the same thing we learn in intercultural communication encounters and that is that there are things about people that are different that cause us not to trust them and we have to somehow fight through that in order to trust them. And we have to say, it doesn't necessarily make sense, but unless I am willing to trust I'll never have a relationship with that person.

You will get burned! You will find some people taking advantage of your trust. You've found it already and you thought that it was because you trusted too much. I'm here to tell you that it is not related to trusting too many or too much; it's just a matter of the reality of life. There are no ways that you go through life encountering people, whether or not you trust them, that you don't get burned. It's a fallen world we live in. You will get burned in your interaction with other people. How many of you say, yeah, I have been. Let me see your hands. And the rest of you aren't paying attention. Now, I'm not telling you that if you trust more people and trust more easily that you will avoid being burned. I'm suggesting that it won't make much difference one way or the other; that's the good news. But the other even better news is that through a capacity to trust human beings you will learn something of your value and you will feel better about yourself, even when you get burned

because there is something about being burned that reaffirms who you are. And it builds dignity. And that's great. The hermit never learns dignity. Think of it.

Which brings us to the third big skill area, and there are only three: empathy—that capacity to feel from another person's point of view. Now you don't do that as some kind of a maudlin reaction to, you know, a kind of warm fuzzy bear kind of thing. It's all, you know, I just want to be so close to you because I know how you hurt. People quite often would like to spit in your left ear about that point. It's this gutsy kind of capacity to stand side-by-side. And there is no place to learn that more dramatically and excitingly than in an intercultural encounter. But you need it every day.

Now I want you to try something really hard. Instead of looking to the left or to the right, I want you to look back. And I want you to do all this at the same time so you're all looking back at the same time. I want you to find somebody and you may have to even kind of take a minute to do it. Find somebody that you have some sense already of how they're feeling about life right now. Okay? Just try it. Just look right straight behind you and look around. By the way, this was not particularly couched in terms of trying to find the person standing at the rear door. But the people in the rear of the auditorium are doing a great job of looking back at you which is the proper thing for them to do because you're in here. How many of you have found a person and you say, I think I know how that person feels and you won't put many hands up on this; I'm not going to embarrass anybody, but let's put your hand up. Did you spot anybody that you say, yeah, I think I know how that person's feeling right now. How many of you are aware of a person at SPU who is hurting right now? Can I see your hands? You are aware of a person who is hurting. Now the tough question is how many of you are hurting because that person is hurting? Can I see those hands? That's what we're talking about. That's what we're talking about.

You see, the shortest verse in the Bible is memorable and we all remember it as children, you know. They say, you know, what is the longest verse in the Bible, what's the longest name in the Bible, what's the shortest verse in the Bible; you know, as if somehow the Bible was a book of Guinness Records. I would like you all to recite together the shortest verse in the Bible and the first word is Jesus. May I hear you together? "Jesus wept." Now some didn't know that and they're having to learn it the hard way so we'll give them a second chance. Try it again. "Jesus wept." Why? Because he looked at the city of Jerusalem, probably from the Mount of Olives, at least from one of the surrounding hillsides, and he thought about not the buildings, not the geography, not the history, he thought about the reality of those people and he had encountered them and he knew them and he had a feeling for them. How many of us have ever looked at a situation and wept because of our compassion for the people involved? This is not a generalized thing like somehow going up on top of the—what is it here in town that you got this thing that sticks up in the air—and looking around and taking turns crying and hanging a handkerchief around because so many people in Seattle are lost. I think that'd be a little corny. But how many of you have, in your own quiet private moment, felt with hurts in Seattle? How many of you, in your own quiet moment, have felt with the hurts of a person in your own dorm floor? How many of you have ever sat back and hurt with another person who is hurting? It is this capacity to put yourself in the frame of reference of people that are hurting that is really a learned skill. It's not just an emotional attitude; it is a learned skill. You have to learn to feel with other people because it doesn't come naturally. What comes naturally unfortunately is to isolate yourself and say well, I'm glad I don't have her problems. I'm glad I don't have his problems. I've got enough problems of my own. Have you ever said anything like that? Hard to get past that because it's a natural human barrier. I think one of the finest examples of a person who has studied

Jesus and copied this out was the apostle Paul. He was the one who said, look, I can take any kind of cultural situation. It's in your Word. I can go into any kind of cultural situation and I can sort it out and I can function with those people. "I can be all things to all men." I can function in any culture because I'm alert and I'm competent. And when you hear a person talking like that in self-assessment, you have to watch how he behaves.

Now I want to take you on one little moment with the apostle Paul when he realized that in the middle of Athens he finally had the ear of a lot of philosophers and he had the great opportunity to tell them about Jesus. It was at the Areopagus—a place where people loved to get together to talk ideas. But getting up there he'd had to go past this rather abhorrent array of gods and monuments and objects of worship, and it was abhorrent to him. A Jew with a monotheistic view, there is but one God, and he must have been again, angry, and Paul was capable of being very angry. And he got to the place where they were going to listen to him and he started in on them. And he said, let me tell you how angry I am at what you have going for you. You are wrong! Remember that passage in Scripture? You might want to hunt for it this afternoon, but I urge you to take the whole afternoon because you're going to have a long afternoon of search. It ain't there. What does it say he did? With great sensitivity and empathy he said, I identify with your quest. I detect you to be people very concerned about deity. I am, too. I see evidences of your fervent search for realities in the god world. I, too, am engaged in that process. And he identified himself with them and then he says, men of Athens, if I would make any criticism of you at all it is that you are too fervent in this search because on my way up here this afternoon I even passed one monument, as a matter of fact, that I could identify with because of my background and experience and I was delighted to see it.

And you say, well, Ward, you're paraphrasing. Well, if Ken Taylor can do it and call it *Living Bible*, I ought to be able to do it, too, so pardon me. Because I think Bible does live and I think that we have to understand that these were flesh and blood encounters and Paul identified with that and he said, I saw one statue to a God that I could really warmly identify with and I want to talk about it. You see, he did not attack them. He did not throw them down and put himself up; he simply identified with them. And he was so observant, so observant that he spotted that monument to the unknown God and then he was so willing to trust them that he felt he didn't have to change them in order to get them to relate to him and for him to relate to them. And then with empathy he said, I identify with your quest. I want to fulfill for you your quest. That's intercultural skill at its finest. And he went on and said I am here to tell you about that unknown God. Terrific! Terrific! And look how he did it. As a matter of fact, he told them about Jesus without even naming Jesus. Very interesting. Because he knew in their relationship they would have turned off the instant he would have named Jesus but, instead, he talked about the unknown God and what that God had to do to get down to rescue mankind.

Are you able to do that? Are you able to listen and relate so effectively? Are you able to trust other people and trust yourself? Are you able to feel with other peoples' concerns and quests and hurts? Those are the three key intercultural skills. Where do you learn that? You will not learn that sitting under a tree on the campus at Seattle Pacific University, unless it's with another person. You will learn that more quickly if that other person is different enough that you have to stretch yourself to relate to that person. And I submit that you learn it even more quickly and more effectively if you're away from the campus in some kind of encounter with people who are different.

Let it be said this week that our emphasis was not upon what can happen to you if you cross water or take a long trip. Let it be said that what we looked at this week is how you turn your world upside down beginning exactly where Jesus stood when he gave the Great Commission, and this is very significant: standing in a point close to the city of Jerusalem, he said to a group of people who were from the North country, Galilee). And they were, in fact, strangers to Jerusalem. He said: Go into all the world but start in Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem, then Judea, a circle out, then Samaria, another circle out, and then into the uttermost parts. We sometimes short circuit that process and ask people to go to the uttermost parts before they have begun in Jerusalem. I would like you right now to repeat after me the three syllables of the name of Je-ru-sa-lem today for us here. Our Lord says: Go into all the world. Go first into Je-ru-sa-lem. Four syllables; it doesn't come out. Three syllables. Go first into . . . *Seattle*. Try it again. Go first into . . . *Seattle*. Again! *Seattle!*

Were our Lord here today, he would again remind us that outreach begins from where you are now standing; not from home, but from where you are now. One of the beautiful things about what Jesus wants to do with us in our lives is he picks us up from wherever we are regardless of what our past has been, regardless of the mistakes that have been made, regardless . . . He never asks us to go back and start over. You pick it up from Seattle.

God Bless You.

Thanks.