



LESSON FOUR: THE GOSPEL REACHES ACROSS CULTURES

*Lamb of God Lutheran Church, Columbus, OH
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RELATING TO THE WORLD'S STORY

When we look around us, we might be tempted to say, "What can we say to people like this? They will never listen!"

- 1) List examples of those with whom you have been tempted not to share the gospel because you think they will never listen. Then repent of the times you have given in to those temptations, short-changing God's power or his love.

LEARNING FROM THE BIBLICAL STORY

The gospel is a multi-faceted jewel that addresses the need of all cultures and people. Jesus broke social and cultural barriers to talk with the Samaritan woman at the well. (See John 4.) Peter crossed the threshold to Gentiles when God led him to share the gospel in the house of Cornelius.

- 2) Scan the story of Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius, someone culturally different from him, in  Acts 10. Put in your own words what Peter discovered after he saw the Holy Spirit work through his message (see the passage below). Then apply Peter's discovery to your own context.
 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean"... Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." (Acts 10:28,34-35)

Paul's message didn't change to suit culture or personality. The foundation was always the same: the proclamation of the crucified and risen Jesus. But his approach was flexible to meet people where they were at.

3) Describe Paul's approach to different people and different cultures in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

📖 “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Want to learn more?

Compare three different approaches of Paul:

Acts 13:14-39

Acts 14:8-18

Acts 17:16-34

Every society is a bit ethnocentric—judging other cultures through their own values and the violations of those values. The way people think and experience life can vary greatly, and that causes difficulty. But there are also many similarities between certain cultures. Some sociologists and missiologists have categorized all cultures as fitting into three different main groups, to whom we might take different approaches in sharing the biblical story:

- **Guilt – Innocence:** Legality and Individuality (*mostly Western countries*): emphasizing individual rights, individual achievement, individual identity, timeliness, tasks, laws, justice, punishment.
- **Honor – Shame:** Loyalty and Community (*the rest of the world especially Asia...including ancient Greco-Roman culture in Philippi*): emphasizing group identity, social conformity, hierarchy relationships, roles, reputation, harmony, respect, saving or losing “face,” honor/disgrace to family
- **Fear – Power:** Curses and Blessings (*tribal areas*) emphasizing the spirit world's interaction with events and health; a respect for nature; fear of evil influences and desire for protection, freedom, or blessings.

4) As frightening as it can be to reach across cultures with the gospel, Paul told Timothy we were not given a spirit of timidity but of power. (See 2 Timothy 1:7.) How can the following passages give us confidence and direction to develop an opening to the message of Jesus?

📖 1 John 4:9-12, 19

📖 Ephesians 4:22-32

TELLING YOUR STORY

- 5) Look at the ethnic and international groups around you. What is similar in your lives and theirs, the common ground? What are the needs? List ways to follow Paul's example from 1 Corinthians 9 (see page 2) to build bridges to the gospel.
- 6) One aspect of many worldviews is pluralism, the idea there are many different valid views of God and ways to get to him. Explain the important counter-cultural truths that the following passages reveal and why they are vital for our Christian worldview.

 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24)

 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

THIS WEEK:

- *Learn this Bible Story to share: **Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well** (John 4).*
- *Read the stories of missionaries on the **WELS Missions Blog** (wels.net/news-media/blogs/missions-blogs) or the **One Africa Team Mission Blog** (welsfriendsof africa.com) to learn about the challenges of sharing Jesus across cultures and how God overcomes those challenges.*

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