



## **Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships**

*Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, Marvin K. Mayers (Contributor)*

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In Ministering Cross-Culturally, the authors demonstrate that Jesus needed to learn and understand the culture in which he lived before he could undertake his public ministry. The authors examine how this can help us better understand what it means to establish relationships of grace with those from different cultural and social backgrounds.

With more than 70,000 copies of the first edition in print, this incarnational model of ministry has proven successful for many people. Several sections in this second edition have been rewritten, and the entire book has been updated to reflect development in the authors' thinking. Drawing from the authors' rich experience on the mission field, this book will benefit anyone who wants to be salt and light in a multicultural and multiethnic world.

## **Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships Details**

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# From Reader Review Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships for online ebook

## **Elysha says**

I read this book for an upcoming mission trip and combined with my other readings for this trip, this book gave me insights for both my daily life and my upcoming trip. In this book, you complete an inventory and measure where you fall within certain spectrums. The book then goes on to explain differing cultural models/examples in relation to time, crises, relationships, etc. Although this was not the book's intent, I gleaned why I have such a problem with American business models/education systems that stress completion of tasks over people/humanity. This small book helped me feel much more comfortable about my own strengths in potential cross cultural encounters. Overall, the biggest idea for me from this book was: meet people where they are in their journey... we walk together.

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## **Katie Sargent says**

In "Ministering Cross-Culturally," Sherwood Lingenfelter deals with the tension and conflict that is experienced in cross-cultural ministry by using the incarnation as a model. He points out how Jesus came as an infant and a learner suggesting that this too is how believers ought to approach culture. Lingenfelter defines incarnational ministry as a willingness to learn as if we were helpless infants, and claims that the essence of the incarnation is "entering the cultural prison of others and submitting to it for the sake of the gospel."

In each of the chapters an explanation of the related but differing orientations of culture is given, followed by a section about the Biblical perspective, and in several of the chapters Lingenfelter also discusses the implications for not only cross-cultural ministry but the implications for our interactions with fellow workers within ministry. Ultimately Lingenfelter would have believers accept their own culture, believing that God has been good in how he has made them, only then, he argues, can they move to accept other cultures as a valid way of life and begin to participate in them.

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## **Vitaly Osipov says**

Christian missionaries are the world authorities on foreign cultures, plus their books are a much more lively read than anthropologists'. Of course one might want to ignore the purely religious parts of a book written by and for mission workers, but this is a quite small inconvenience in comparison to the depth of the insights. Besides, practically all books have, so to speak, filler in addition to the meat.

This particular book juxtaposes Western (rather USA) culture with a Pacific one (Yap) on dimensions of time/even orientation, task/person focus, dichotomy/holistic thinking, status/achievement, crisis/noncrisis and concealment vs willingness to expose vulnerability. When I was reading it, a lightbulb went off in my head several times - I understood a number of cultural differences that have been puzzling me. I realised quite a few things about myself (btw this is not a self-help book!) and about "Western" culture.

I'm really glad I discovered this book in a second-hand bookshop a few weeks ago.

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## **Paul, says**

I give this book three stars for chapter 1, which is about God's humility and love in becoming a human, and what that means for those of us who strive to follow Jesus. The rest of the chapters all had valid foundations (especially time, self-worth, and vulnerability!), but often came to conclusions that I didn't necessarily agree with. The main disagreement that I have with this book is its comparison of culture to language as an imperfect, but neutral tool. I pretty strongly believe that all cultures, as all people, are mixtures of good and bad elements. They are not merely imperfect tools that can be used for evil. In some senses, all cultures promote evil (and promote good) in some ways. Walter Wink has some worthwhile things to say on the subject. All in all, a nice introduction to some of the difficulties involved in living in a different culture.

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## **Tom Law says**

Each of us live in and are part of a culture in which we have been raised and which we think as normative. Mayers postulated that culture is made up of six different continuums: time/event; dichotomistic/holistic; crisis/noncrisis; task/person; and status/achievement. It is the collection of these continuums and their interactions that we understand to be culture. As groups of people coalesce around commonalities in these continuums we identify them as separate cultures. Since each of us is unique, not everyone will ascribe totally to all the same area of the continuum, but in each grouping, there is enough in common where they can identify themselves with others who are alike. This same uniqueness creates outliers who differ from the norm, but even these individuals resemble normative cultural patterns for the group in general.

In a world which is increasingly mixing and mingling due to wars, migration, immigration, and cross-cultural conflict, understanding these difference and how they relate to each other will be essential. If we are to relate and get along we need to understand each other. More importantly, from the perspective of Lingenfelter, if we are to be effective in sharing the love of Jesus we need to know how that message is most adequately understood and communicated with those who have a different cultural background from our own.

Lingenfelter repeatedly states that we will need to become as children when we begin to delve into other cultural groupings. Although language is where most people start he points out that there is much more to people than understanding them when they speak. Understanding their culture gives us a means of becoming real to them so that when we speak their language they are hearing what we are saying and have not gotten lost in the cultural "gaffs" we often commit which close off all further communications and relationships.

This book is essential to anyone who aspires to work with people who have grown up in other cultures. This obviously means those going overseas will find the book the indispensable. But even those who never plan on crossing the borders of their country will find this book to be helpful as they develop ministries to those newcomers in their community or even to those who live "across the tracks".

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## **John (JP) says**

This book invites you to examine yourself from the viewpoint of being an alien in a new culture. The subject

of the books the tensioning conflicts people experience when they try to work with people from a different cultural and social backgrounds. While the intended audience of this book is for those doing Christian missionary work in foreign countries, the principles discussed can be universally applied by anyone assigned to work abroad. The authors Lingenfelter and Mayers use a model of basic values that explores and points to personal and cross cultural roots of tension in interpersonal relationships and helps the person master and resolve those tensions by gaining personal insight into their behavior. There are 48 statements that are used to develop a personal profile. Then elements of that profile are charted. The rest of the book explores those profiles for someone doing business in a far east asian cultural context. The chapters follow a pattern. The chapter discusses the cultural tension regarding time. The contrasting views are highlighted, followed by how those tensions manifest themselves in a real world issue. Then a proposed biblical response to that situation is examined. Finally the cultural implications of that solution is dissected. I found this systematic approach helpful. I gained insights into my own behaviors that both encouraged and challenged me. This is a book I would recommend for anyone traveling abroad for either secular or religious work purposes.

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### **Allen Jr. says**

Lingenfelter presents a helpful, yet simple paradigm for considering various aspects of personal and cultural differences which I have found useful in my own experiences of living and working with teams around the world. I appreciate that his exploration is not at all technical, making this book an easy read and very approachable by a wide audience.

The brief sections on biblical perspective and reflections from the life of Jesus are okay, but not superb. The suggested applications to those working in cross-cultural situations are adequate but not revolutionary.

Perhaps my strongest criticism is that the book is very American-centric. Much of the exploration within the book comes about as a contrasting of the cultures present in the USA and on the Pacific Island of Yap, where Lingenfelter lived for a while. Although this contrast helps to make the various facets of the paradigm nice and clear, I wonder if non-American readers will be able to see as clearly the points that the author is trying to make. Perhaps at least including a few references to other cultures--both Western and non-Western--would make this book even more accessible to a broader global audience.

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### **Andrew Husen says**

This is a great book. And it is short which is nice. I recommend it to any Christian living in a city and any person living as an expat.

Lingenfelter takes Marvin Mayers's 6 pairs of contrasting priorities in culture and fleshes those concepts out with stories of real life cultural clashes, mistakes, and misunderstandings in the Yape (in Micronesia), Chadian, and Mexican cultures. Lingenfelter doesn't get much into quantitative side of the research, and that is on purpose. Instead the thrust of the book is to give real life examples of these cultural differences getting managed well or getting managed poorly. Though this book is about culture in the context of Christian ministry, I think a non-Christian would greatly benefit from this book as well. In my opinion, Christian ministry is a very holistic and deep level of cross-cultural interaction compared to what someone encounters when working in or vacationing to a different country.

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## Mike says

The author argues that we should model our missions work on the incarnational ministry of Jesus (who was the "200% man" -- fully man and fully God). He argues that we are unable to achieve this level of integration into a host culture, but we should seek to be "150% men," sacrificing some of our own culture and adapting to the host culture.

He argues that without the redemptive power of Christ, all cultures naturally lead us to judge, exclude, and reject and are a prison which we must break free of by recognizing our own cultural influences (our own personal cultural heritage, our broader enculturation and social feedback, and our acceptance and rejection of these various forces). He argues that cultural differences will often actually drive us to reject those Christ is sending us to serve. We need to accept that others have a viewpoint which is as worthy of consideration as our own, and that we must create inclusive and embracing communities, in contrast to judging, excluding, and rejecting.

In order to assess and understand cultural differences he makes use of Marvin Meyer's model of basic cultural values: Time Orientation versus Event Orientation; Task Orientation versus Person Orientation; Dichotomistic Thinking versus Holistic Thinking; Status Focus versus Achievement Focus; Crises Orientation versus Non-crises Orientation; and Concealment of Vulnerability versus Willingness to Expose Vulnerability.

I enjoyed the book: it was short, it was well written, it contained good anecdotes and examples, and it was a good for refreshing and reinforcing what I have already learned. However I gave the book only two stars because I didn't find the book held any ground-breaking insights or was the definitive book on cross cultural missions. It was good, and I certainly didn't find anything that I disagreed with, but it probably isn't the book I would recommend to someone looking to dive into learning about culture and cross cultural ministry.

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## Adam says

This was the second or third time I read this book (first time over 12 years ago). It wasn't quite as fascinating or great as the first time I read it or the times I've referenced it since then, but it's still an excellent and very valuable introductory book on understanding different cultures and how to minister across/through cultural barriers.

The basic premise is that different cultures can be understood as promoting different values, and those values can be contrasted to our own cultural (or personal) values on a continuum... helping to understand our differences and helping us learn how to relate to the other culture and overcome those differences. While the cultural value dichotomies he presents aren't the most applicable for everywhere in the world, and even the placing of "American" culture within the book's examples is already showing its age (and showing how American culture has had some significant changes in just a few decades), yet the basic concept of cultural values and familiarizing oneself with cultural value dichotomies can be an eye-opening practice, and one that leads to better observation and deeper understanding of any host culture that a missionary goes to. On top of that, the author shows a consistent and helpful dedication to the theological concept of the "Incarnation" - helping us recognize Jesus's biblical model and thus the most positive response to those of different cultures.

So, for new missionaries or other new cross-cultural workers, I can't think of a better introductory book. While much can be built on this (either through further academic research or personal experience and observation), this book itself is enough to get a cross-cultural worker going in the right direction and with the right frame of mind. It's been invaluable in forming the thought and action of my own team of new missionaries that I've led through this book. I'm sure I'll still use it again and refer to it again in the future.

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### **Sarah says**

I actually read this book twice, and the first time I was blown away. The second time it seemed a bit repetitive (overall message: "be more culturally sensitive"), but maybe that's what naturally happens when reading a book a second time. I think I was also turned off the second time because it seemed to oversimplify cross-cultural problems that you'll undoubtedly face. It really was general and actually didn't help you in the practical matters. The first time I read it I was blown away because it submerged me in the mindset that I needed to have when going into another country, but it didn't prepare me for all the things I'd have to face (in specific matters, like etiquette; how to "right" a "wrong" that I've done, etc.).

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### **Erin Grasse says**

I really appreciated Lingenfelter's explanations and examples for each of the basic value pairs, and I had several "Aha!" moments while reading that I hope will come in handy in my future ministry work! My main issue is that this book was clearly written for the purposes of evangelism, which didn't sit well with my own rather anti-evangelistic, more pluralistic stance.

I wholeheartedly agree that becoming culturally competent is a wonderful way of learning how to express God's love in a variety of ways that honor the unique needs and identity of each individual, and I think that Lingenfelter does a great job of emphasizing this. I personally draw the line when acquiring this knowledge has conversion as its ultimate goal.

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### **WH says**

The good: The book gave me a few new categories for understanding cultural differences. It was short and to the point.

The bad: The discussion was fairly shallow. So while the author helps readers UNDERSTAND some of the major differences in cultures, he doesn't really go into enough depth to help his readers CROSS these differences and to work more effectively within them.

I also didn't agree with some of the author's biblical and theological reasoning. For example, he argues that the OT prophets communicated using images because Hebrew culture valued holistic thinking, whereas the apostle Paul used "verbal, abstract, and rational thinking" because Greek culture valued dichotomistic thinking. Even if these cultural differences are valid (I'm not very persuaded on this point: Paul was still very much influenced by Hebrew culture), are these differences REALLY the reason the OT prophets and Paul write so differently? I can think of other reasons that are probably more relevant as to why these differences would exist.

Overall, my concerns aren't serious enough to dissuade people from reading the book. But I wouldn't necessarily recommend it either. It's just okay. At least it's short.

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### **Megan Knippenberg says**

I really appreciated this book. It helped to highlight cultural variations that I knew existed but didn't know how to explain. If you ever go on a short or long-term missions trip or move to another country, this book is a must-read. It helped me understand a little bit more about American culture and my orientation in different areas. Also, loved Liggenfelter's idea about becoming a "150 percent" person. (We can adapt ourselves to fit two different cultures, but he theorized that it is impossible to become a complete part of multiple cultures.) Comparing Jesus' incarnation as a human to the process we must go through when ministering in a different culture is a very compelling viewpoint. I would definitely recommend this!!!

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