



## SESSION TWO: THE GOSPEL GOES TO FOREIGN CULTURES

*Learning to Create a Bridge to Different Worldviews*

### In the City of Philippi

#### RELATING TO THE WORLD'S STORY

Places that are different from “home” often put us out of our comfort zone. How do we react?

Describe what it was like for you to visit another country or culture. What was hardest for you? *(If you haven't had that experience, discuss where it might be hardest for you to live. Why?)*

*“Onward Christian Soldiers”*  
CW 537

**Read Acts 16:11-12 (*Entering the city of Philippi*)**

**Watch “*To the Ends of the Earth*” – segment 2 (02:11-13:31)**

- *Express what most stood out for you about Paul's experience walking into Philippi.*
- *What questions does it raise? (Save those for later discussion)*

#### LEARNING FROM PAUL'S STORY

Paul wasn't by himself. He had a team with him. One of them was young Timothy. Walking into Philippi might have been out of Timothy's comfort zone. This wasn't like his hometown. It may have been sensory overload and a real culture shock. Philippi was filled with people with practices that probably irritated or confused him. He must have seen the spiritual darkness, the social cruelties, and the greed of this active city. He probably didn't feel he fit in. But this is where God led them. Now what?

##### A. Understanding Different Worldviews

Before Paul became a Christian, he had an air of superiority. He despised and persecuted those who believed or lived differently from him. They were a threat to his worldview and way of living. All of that changed when God came to him and worked on him, so he could see things from God's point of view.

1. Examine what Paul realized about the viewpoints of the world around him. How does that change what we might expect from perspectives and behaviors of those who do not know God?

📖 Romans 1:18-25

📖 2 Corinthians 4:1-7

📖 Ephesians 2:1-5; 4:17-24

📖 Colossians 2:8, 16-23

There is only one way to survive the judgment and condemnation of God—and that is through Jesus. Only Jesus can give us entrance to God’s kingdom. God restores his glory and ours.

2. Evaluate what gave Paul boldness and a sense of urgency to his mission.

 Roman 1:13-17

 Romans 10:6-17

 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-10

 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

Estimates show about one third of the world (2.5 billion) have no access to the gospel and of those, 50,000 dies daily without ever hearing about Jesus. Paul says that our Savior “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Timothy 2:4-6). Among all the spiritual and moral ideas in the world, there is only one gospel. (See Acts 4:12; Galatians 1:6-8.) It centers on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that saved us from the world of darkness.

## B. Adjusting to Reach Different Types of People

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

1. Put in your own words and context what Peter discovered after he entered the house of someone culturally different from him, but saw the Holy Spirit work through his message:

“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.... I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fear 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.

2. 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

### Want to learn more?

*Retell Peter’s Story—how he learned to accept and reach out to others:*

**Acts 10**

### Motivation from Isaiah

Isaiah 40:1-11, 27-31

Isaiah 43:1-13.25

Isaiah 44:1-23

Isaiah 46:1-23

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).

3. Where the words are underlined above, substitute different types of people or various ethnic groups in our context today. Then discuss adjustments you might have to make to reach them where they are at.

Every society is a bit ethnocentric—judging other cultures through their own values and the violations of those values. But globally people often think in different patterns from each other and experience life in many different ways. That causes difficulty. Some sociologists and missiologists have categorized all cultures as fitting into three different main groups:

- **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.

**Want to learn more?**

*Compare three different approaches of Paul:*

**Acts 13:14-39** (P- Antioch)

**Acts 14:8-18** (Lystra)

**Acts 17:16-34** (Athens)

**Want to learn more?**

*Discover how Jesus drew the Samaritan women into a life-giving conversation:*

**John 4**

4. Briefly compare the three types of cultures. Explain how they might affect the approach in telling the Biblical story and its teachings.
5. Paul told Timothy we were not given a spirit of timidity but of power. (See 2 Timothy 1:7.) How can the following give us confidence and direction to develop an opening to the message of Jesus?

 1 John 4:9-12, 19

 Ephesians 4:22-32

 1 Peter 2:9-12, 3:13-16

What used to be another part of the world has moved nearby. Uncomfortable differences test our perspectives, prejudices, and spiritual priorities. How can you let your life be light and salt to bring them to Jesus who is the Light? Sow the seeds? (See Matthew 13:1-23.) Let God water and make it grow?

Ultimately it is about **TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS**, the only Mediator between God and humanity.

## TELLING YOUR STORY

1. Discuss the blind spots in our own culture that may offend others. Examine where you as a Christian or as a church reflect worldly culture in a way that causes obstacles to the gospel.
2. 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 build bridges to the gospel.

## LIVING THE STORY – PROJECTS

1. Learn this Bible Story to share: *Jonah going to the city of Nineveh* (Jonah 1–4).
2. Communicate with a missionary who has served in a different country. Ask what it was like to adjust to the new culture. What was hard? What has he learned to appreciate?
3. Do a demographic study of the ethnic make-up of your community. What does it suggest?
4. Look into opportunities to experience life in a mission field with a short-term mission trip by contacting Mission Journeys, <http://missionjourneys.org/>; Urban ministries, <https://urbanministries.com/>; Kingdom Workers, <http://www.kingdomworkers.com/>; or other similar groups.

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