

Missional Hearts/Part #1

Long Beach Alliance Church • June 17th, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change... The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

~Psalm 46:1-2a, 7 (NASB)

1) Exponential Change

- A) In my lifetime (1967-present), the average cost of a home in Southern California has risen from \$25,000 to \$340,000! In 1970, the average cost of a gallon of gas was 36 cents! A loaf of bread averaged 50 cents in 1980, but is now hard to find for less than \$3.00! These simple numbers represent extraordinary changes in the cost of living in America.
- B) More impacting, the world (led by the USA) changed dramatically after 1945 (WW II) from being a more rural and agrarian society (heartland-centered) to be an industrial juggernaut (city-centered). This change moved the cultural center of the world from the heartland (conservative relationship-centered) to the coasts (more liberal individualistic-centered)
- C) Most significantly, there was a radical shift in our culture from modernity (marked by values of absolute truth, nationalism, racial homogeneity, moral norms, rational facts/propositions, propositional apologetics) to postmodernity (marked by values of relativism, rationalization, global community, racial diversity, relationally centered ethics, individualistic belief systems).

D) Our new world is also fueled by technology – microchips, satellites, television, personal computers, the Internet explosion, GPS locating, Wifi, iPod's, and Facebook. Is it any surprise that many teens have best friends they have only met online? Is it any surprise that many married couples meet through Internet connections? Is it any surprise that people look to Google or Wikipedia for authoritative information, no longer relying on friends, family, or church?

2) The Beginning Of Missionary Efforts

A) The cultural center of the New Testament was centered in the Jerusalem temple, which defined the cultural world of Israel. Within Israel, there was strong Jewish cultural homogeneity, which made the establishment of the church consistent throughout Israel in both context and culture.



- B) The first eleven chapters of Acts is about the establishment of the church through the Apostles (eye-witnesses of Jesus Christ's ministry). These chapters are filled with amazing Holy Spirit miracles, and the beginning of the church among exclusively Jewish converts.
- C) However, beginning in Acts 11, everything changes. The church is no longer focused on its establishment in Israel, but on the expansion of the church in foreign cities and very diverse cultures. Led by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2), Barnabas and Paul begin a missionary movement in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Acts 1:8).
- D) For the first time in the church's young history, the message about Jesus Christ and the call to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20) shifted from the "home culture and context" to a "foreign culture and context."
- E) This new missionary effort of the church had significant growing pains (Acts 14:11ff). But through these hiccups, missionaries learned how to develop as much expertise at understanding "new cultures and contexts" as they were at understanding God's Word. This leads Paul to write the young church in Corinth, noting he became "all things to all men for the sake of the Gospel" (1st Corinthians 9:19-23).
- F) Paul's profound statement is one of contextualization. In order for the Gospel to change the lives of those who hear it, the Message must be contextualized for the culture and the context of the pre-Christian person.
- G) Why is contextualization important for missionaries? The answers are probably as obvious to you as it would be to anyone who has visited a foreign culture or context. Contextualization helps to overcome barriers in:
- Language
 - Spiritual background
 - Morals
 - Emotional background
 - Religion/Cults
 - Generational differences
 - Economics
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender
 - Politics

3) The Culture & Context We Know Best

- A) There is a difference between a missionary (serving in a foreign field) and a missional person (the universal calling to “make disciples” for all Christians). Missional people (like missionaries) have to keep three different “cultures and contexts” in mind: The Message (God’s Word); The Messenger (that’s us); and The Pre-Christian (that was us).
- B) Naturally, most Christians would say that the most important context/culture to learn is that of The Message. These are the cultures/contexts of Scripture, providing understanding for the Word of God through the lens of the Ancient Near East (observable from 2150 B.C. to 90 A.D.)
- C) Naturally, most Christians would say that the second-most important context/culture to learn is that of the Pre-Christian. These are the cultures/contexts of people who do not have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, providing understanding of the recipients of the Gospel.
- D) Finally, most Christians would say that the final context to understand is The Messenger, one’s own culture/context. However, this is the easiest culture/context to understand, since it is one in which we live. Since we already know this culture/context, there is much less to learn and understand.
- E) However, I do not believe this approach is correct or effective. While there is no doubt that one must have a minimum level of competency in God’s Word (The Message), and I believe knowing the context & culture of the Pre-Christian is crucial, the most difficult culture/context for Christians to learn is their own. Traditionally, this is where the Gospel fails, in the hands of The Messenger.
- F) This is why new Christians are often the best at communicating The Message. They haven’t learned so much that they are confused (yet), they already know the pre-Christian culture (they just came out of it), and they haven’t (yet) been immersed in the church, a different culture entirely from Pre-Christian culture/context.