



Learning Community

Five

Understanding Culture

**20-30
minutes**

Personal Check-in:

Facilitator Instructions: Read Acts 17:16-34 as a group and then discuss the sharing questions below. After the discussion and sharing, spend some time in pairs praying for one another.

Sharing Questions:

1. What stands out to you in this passage?
2. How are you provoked by what you see going on in our culture today?
3. What are some “missionary methods” or “principles” that we can still apply to today from this passage?
4. What are you personally challenged by in this passage? In what way can we pray for you regarding this challenge?



15-30
minutes

Homework Debrief:

Instructions: Below is a list of the homework assignments from the last meeting. Ask each pastor to update the group on how they responded to each of the items. After everyone has checked in regarding the homework, take some time to talk about lessons that are being learned so far. Capture the discussion on a whiteboard or a flipchart.

1. Come to the next Learning Community prepared to share:
 - a. Your plan, with dates and action steps, for launching the *Motivation for Mission* series.
 - b. When and how you anticipate launching 5 or more Interest Groups.

2. Read *Applebee's America* by Douglas Sosnik, Ron Fournier, and Matthew Dowd. Complete the Book Review Questions.



6. How did this book challenge you personally?

7. What intrigued you from the chapter on Religion (Ch. 3)?

8. Which aspects of the book's philosophic underpinnings are you concerned about?

9. What are your five most important take-away insights from the book?

10. How can you integrate these insights into reaching your community more effectively in the future?



45-60
minutes

Case Study Interaction:

Instructions: If a pastor is lined up for this meeting, give him 10-15 minutes to talk about his church. With the remaining time, ask the group to give feedback on the following questions and to spend time interacting with the pastor about the following:

- 1. Please share the prescriptions you received from the Weekend Consultation.**
- 2. What progress have you made toward implementing the prescriptions?**
- 3. What are the most significant challenges you are facing in implementing the prescriptions?**
- 4. Have you done your time study? What did you learn about your use of time? What are you doing to make changes in your use of time? How are you getting these changes rooted in your life for the long term?**
- 5. What leadership skills are you focused on developing? Share your sense of progress and your challenges.**
- 6. Have you built new bridges into the community? If not, why not? If so, how? What are the results so far? How can you improve your vision casting for reaching the community?**
- 7. What are you doing each week to create a sense of urgency? Are you seeing an increase in Sunday worship attendance?**
- 8. What are your plans for the next three months?**



20
minutes

Learning Activity: Personal Development

Facilitator Instructions: Point everyone to the article entitled “Personal Development.” Ask everyone to read the article slowly and to highlight ideas that seem important to them. After everyone has read break the group up into twos and threes to discuss the questions at the end of the article. If you have time, bring the whole group together at the end to discuss a few of the questions.

Personal Development

Understanding Culture

According to Reggie McNeal, a “missional church” not only risks involvement with the world but even develops strategies to engage the surrounding culture. This article is designed to increase your “Cultural IQ” in much the same way that a missionary would need to understand the culture that he is trying to reach. That being said, we can fool ourselves into thinking that we understand American culture because it is our home country. We have to guard against complacency so that we can be effective agents of the transformational message of the Gospel in the shifting seas of cultural change.

Whose language is used?

Imagine sending a cross-cultural worker into an unfamiliar region of the world to evangelize, develop leaders, and plant churches. An immediate and critical task is finding a way to communicate through an interpreter, by learning the language, or by using an understandable translation of God’s Word.

Few church leaders would question the need for a missionary to learn the language of the culture needing to be reached, he or she must use the language of the culture to communicate the Gospel. Yet a similar communication challenge may exist between your church and those in the surrounding culture, a culture that knows nothing of the “language of Yahweh.” To the unchurched, “church-speak” is like a foreign language.

Imagine a recent visitor to your church remarking frustratedly to you one Sunday: “I tried to find the book you mentioned last week, Pastor. None of the bookstores had heard of it.” “What book is that?” you might ask in return, not recalling any book you had recommended in your sermon. “The Book of Daniel,” states the visitor, who did not know that “The Book of Daniel” is a part of the Old Testament.



What language does your congregation use to communicate the Gospel to the surrounding culture? Evaluate your church's evangelism strategy for assumptions about language. Does the strategy assume that seekers are able to understand "church-speak" or does it lead your church to take responsibility for communicating so that an unchurched listener can understand? You might be surprised to realize that much of the language that you are using is actually getting in the way of people in the community from hearing you.

Who builds the bridges?

Some evangelism strategies are based on programs, buildings, or weekend services that communicate, "Come to us," leaving the seeker with the responsibility to build the bridge. Other evangelism strategies assume that bridges built decades ago are still effective in spite of the fact that the surrounding culture has changed dramatically.

On the mission field, a strategic component of the missions task is to find bridges over which people can come to Christ. The most common bridges are based on relationships, needs, and interests. Donald McGavran, missiologist and church growth expert, called these the "bridges of God." He believed that God is at work in every culture preparing potential bridges over which people can come to know Him.

What is true on the mission field is true on your church field – seekers likely need a bridge to move from where they are to a place where they can hear and receive the Gospel message.

Whose culture adapts?

Every church communicates a "culture" to the unchurched visitor how members dress, the accent of their speech, the age and gender of the ushers, how announcements are made, the style of music, the order of service, the way the sermon is communicated, the ethnicity and/or race that is most visible. A church's "culture" is not expressed through one single thing, but by a general impression the visitor forms based on a number of things. Without meaning to do so, a church does communicate a "culture" that is like walking into a whole different world for a visitor. A guest is constantly asking the questions, "Are there people here like me?" and "Do I feel like I can fit in?"

What fences need to be removed?

A fence is a perceived barrier that makes it more difficult for an unchurched person to feel like he or she can connect with you. In contrast to bridges that connect, fences get in the way emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and practically. Fences turn away seekers before they ever hear the claims of Jesus Christ.

Fences take on different appearances depending on the church, and are more visible to the seeker than to those inside the church. In fact, long-



timers at your church would probably be shocked to know what keeps people away from your church. A helpful exercise is to ask an unchurched person to visit your church and point out the “fences” you might overlook. Removing a fence may be as simple as changing the wording on your church sign or adjusting the way guests are welcomed in the service.

Culturally relevant and Biblically robust

Unfortunately, for some, a virtuous church is one that is culturally irrelevant. In their view, a mark of holiness is not just being disconnected from sin but also being disconnected from sinners and the culture they share with us every day.

However, preaching against culture is like preaching against someone’s house—it is just where they live. The house has good parts and bad parts. Overall, culture can be a mess—but (to mix metaphors) it is the water in which we swim and the lens through which we see the world. And the Gospel needs to come, inhabit, and change that and every culture (or house).

But, the Bible also clearly gives us a mandate to make the message understandable. We do more than just translate it into a language. We also have to translate it into a culture. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, “I have become all things to all men.” Why? Because the message needs to be contextualized. The “how” of ministry is, in many ways, determined by the “who, when, and where” of culture. That’s also essential.

We have to both contend and contextualize. This brings a balanced focus in our proclamation and practice. When we contend for the gospel, we remain biblically faithful. When we contextualize, we communicate the message effectively. When we contend and contextualize, our churches are biblically faithful, culturally relevant, counter culture communities.

But the biblical route is found in Paul’s activities in Acts 17. Wander through your Athens. Look at the cultural idols. Let this break your heart and burden your mind. Let godly passion drive you to say “Give me Athens or I die.” Then confidently take the gospel to those who’ll see its uncluttered message, trust its validity, and receive its Savior—Jesus Christ. (Ed Stetzer from his blog for Missional Churches)

Discussion Questions:

1. Which ideas from “Personal Development” stood out to you and why?
2. What principles from the article are you most challenged by and why?
3. What do you need to do in response to the article?



10-15
minutes

Learning Activity: Trends worth watching

Facilitator Instructions: Give each pairing 10-15 minutes to work through the Trends Worth Watching worksheet as a way to reinforce the article. After the allotted time, bring the whole group back together to share responses.

Trends worth watching

Instructions: Take time with a one or two other people and generate implications for the church regarding this list of cultural trends. Simply answer the questions, “How does the church need to respond to trends in each of these categories? What could we do differently or better to respond effectively to this trend?”

- a. Technology
- b. Family
- c. Movies
- d. Health
- e. Spiritual interest
- f. Youth
- g. Marketplace
- h. Leisure
- i. Real estate
- j. Politics
- k. Occupations
- l. Retirement

Our response



5
minutes

Homework and Wrap-Up

Facilitator Instructions: Close out the session by highlighting the homework assignment.

Homework Assignment:

1. Take your leadership team through this module before the next LC meeting. Come to the next LC ready to discuss the thoughts and reflections of your leadership team. Specifically come ready to discuss:

- What were some of the reactions of your leadership team to the ideas in this module?
- What might be some next steps for you as a church in reaching out and touching your community?

2. Read *Deep Change* by Robert Quinn and come prepared to discuss your major learnings and personal applications from the book.



Book Review Questions

Deep Change by Robert Quinn

1. What does “Walking Naked into the Land of Uncertainty” (Ch. 1) represent to you?

2. What would help you to take the hero’s journey more frequently? How would your taking the “hero’s journey” affect the relationships in your life?

3. Give a brief description of the remythologizing process and how you might make use of it (Ch. 7)?

4. In what part of your life can you apply the concept of building the bridge as you walk on it (Ch. 9)?

5. Elaborate on the statement, “Culture change starts with personal change” (Ch. 11).



6. What insights and reflections do you have regarding the diagram on pp. 148-149?

7. Which aspects of the book's philosophic underpinnings are you concerned about?

8. What are your five most important take-away insights from the book?

9. How can you integrate these insights into reaching your community more effectively in the future?



LC Evaluation:

Date:

Location:

Questions:

1. What did you like most about the homework from the last Learning Community?

2. What did you like least about the homework from the last Learning Community?

3. How could we improve today's Learning Community experience?

4. How can we give you additional support for developing leadership skills in your own life and helping your church turn outward?



Me and the Harvest

1. How committed have I been to praying for people who need Jesus?
2. What have I done in the past month to help someone move closer to Christ?
3. What changes do I need to make in the next month to find time to be more outreach focused?
4. How did I keep the fire burning for outreach in our church this past month?
5. What have I learned about the community needs in this past month that our church could be poised to meet?
6. What's the most important outreach oriented action step I can take in this next month?