

Cultural Compasses

by Don Richardson

God has prepared the gospel for every culture and has given us cultural compasses to help us understand and share the message of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 56:38

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 1:29, John 3:14-15, John 6:28-35

Topics: "Cultural"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus as the Messiah. He highlights the significance of John's metaphor of Jesus as the Lamb of God. The speaker then shifts to the challenges faced by missionaries, specifically focusing on Robert Morrison's mission to China in 1807. He mentions the difficulties of learning the tonal Chinese language and the presence of other religions in China. Despite these challenges, the speaker emphasizes the importance of spreading the gospel and encourages the audience to be open to learning and sharing the message of Jesus.

Transcript

Thank you Miles and all of you for this delightful privilege to be your guest. May God forgive him for his exaggerations. May he forgive me for enjoying them.

The most important introduction in the history of the world happened about 2,000 years ago when a man named John the Baptist had the privilege to introduce Jesus as the Messiah among the Jewish people. For the purpose of that introduction, John used what must surely be regarded as the most meaningful metaphor ever used in any language. Pointing to Jesus of Nazareth that day, John the Baptist said, Look, the Lamb of God, who does what? Say it with me.

Who takes away the sin of the world. That metaphor, Lamb of God, was so meaningful within the cultural context of the Jewish people at that time because for centuries they'd been offering animal sacrifice to illustrate the need of an atonement for human sin. An atonement that God could accept as a basis for forgiving the guilty.

And those who sacrificed oxen, goats, sheep, doves, down through the centuries, probably thought there was actually that animal blood that was atoning for their sin. Was it really? We learn in the epistle to the Hebrews that the blood of bulls and goats does not put away sin. But that does not mean that they sacrificed those animals in vain.

That practice of sacrificing animals kept alive, kept before the minds of the people the need for an atonement and served as a kind of cultural compass that was pointing forward in time to Jesus who would in time be revealed as the Lamb of God, the one foreshadowed by the sacrifice of animals. Just as physical compasses from anywhere on the earth point to just one place, magnetic north, so God has ordained cultural compasses designed by him to point not to one place but to one person and that one and only one person is Jesus. Well, I just gave you one example of an Old Testament cultural compass, Jesus as the Lamb of God, John chapter 1, verse 29.

But in the Gospel of John, you turn another page, you're in chapter 3, and there you find another example, Jesus conversing with a teacher of the Jewish law named Nicodemus made reference to something that Nicodemus knew about that had happened 1,400 years earlier during Israel's exodus from Egypt heading for the Promised Land. Jesus said, As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Thus our Lord identified that event from the Exodus account as foreshadowing him lifted up on the cross for us.

Turn another two pages in the Gospel of John, you're in chapter 6, begin reading in verse 28, and there Jesus made reference to the provision of the manna for the children of Israel during those same wilderness wanderings and on that basis said, Moses gave you not the true bread from heaven. He went on to explain the true bread from heaven is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And then Jesus made a statement that would cause us to regard him as either insane or speaking something unusually true.

He said that he is that bread of life. How could a man dare to make a claim like that and expect to be taken seriously unless it really is the truth. So, as you read on through the New Testament, you'll find many more examples of these cultural compasses, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer takes care to make sure you and I understand the features of the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness and later of the temple in Jerusalem, aspects of the priesthood and the sacrifice of themselves were all foreshadowing one aspect or another of redemption later to be provided for mankind in the person of God incarnate Jesus.

I'm sure you'll agree with me it was good of God to give the Jewish people all those foreshadowings of the Savior. But now I invite you to ponder a major question with me. And the question is, what about the rest of the human race? Did God take care to give only one small percentage of mankind foreshadowings of the Savior and leave the rest of mankind without that providence? Down through the centuries, those of us who have been trained to be frontier crossers with the gospel, encouraged to go out into regions of the world where the message had never been proclaimed, learn languages in which it had never been expressed, have not been encouraged by our instructors to expect to find what could be called Gentile cultural compasses waiting out there on the other side of those frontiers to help us fulfill our mission, enable us to make the meaning of the gospel poignantly meaningful, even to people hearing the message for the very first time.

Apparently our instructors just didn't think God went to that much trouble, so shouldn't encourage to look for things that are not there to be found. In spite of the fact our instructors apparently didn't think God took the time and care to give Gentile cultures around the world foreshadowings of the Savior, guess what we frontier crossers have been finding and using down through the centuries? Gentile cultural compasses. And we've been privileged to loose little arrows on their dials and see those arrows point men and women to Jesus in culturally relevant ways.

And lives have been transformed. The grace of God breaks through. And often when we frontier crossers came back home for a furlough, we didn't even bother to tell our instructors about the amazing things we found out there.

Guess we thought it might confuse them. Might not fit into their systematic theology, so we've tended to leave them in the dark. I ask you, would you like me to share some secrets with you from the other side of those frontiers? Would you like me to? I just love it when people really want me to tell them what I really want to tell them.

All right, you asked for it. I'm inviting you to travel back in time with me. Nadger, if you're willing to go back in time with me for a few minutes, you are.

You've got to fasten your seat belts. Let me hear the click. Okay, you're ready.

On the count of three. One, two, three. It's 1807.

Where are we? Look, we're standing by the docks in the port city of China. Here's a ship flying a British flag. It's docking.

Who's this one Britisher disembarking? Robert Morrison. Why is he setting foot in China in 1807? Oh, he's here to be a missionary. Doesn't he know there are already four other ancient religions in China? Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and in some areas of China, even Islam is already entrenched.

What chance does he think he has, one man, to establish a significant foothold for the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world's most populous nation? Look at the expression on Robert's face. I think he's tempted to feel discouraged about the chances of any success. He's just found out the Chinese language is tonal.

It's not enough to produce the right sound with your vocal cords. You have to produce the right sound with the right pitch or you're totally misunderstood. You may think you're saying grandmother.

People hear you saying pig because you pitched it wrong. And he's thinking, why does it have to be a tonal language? Why can't you just talk it? Why do you have to sing it? He has no choice. He's got to master the tones.

He's also found out the ancestors of the Chinese 4,000 years earlier did not sit down and invent a phonetic alphabet of 26 or so symbols like our A to Z. They wanted something more complex. They got it. They invented a writing system that utilizes more than 200 little pictures called radicals that get combined in complex ways to make Chinese words.

Look at Robert Morrison. He's looking at a sample of Chinese writing, shaking his head in dismay, saying, this reminds me of chicken tracks in the mud. How can I possibly learn to master something so complex? He may have been tempted to complain just a little bit to God, saying, where were you, Lord, when they invented this? Couldn't you have exercised a little more of your marvelous capacity for sovereignty to cause them to come up with something simpler? But he has no choice.

He has to master it. Robert has found a Chinese man with some knowledge of English who is willing to use his rather minimal knowledge of English to help Robert Morrison crack the code of Chinese grammar and amass vocabulary. He's sitting down with his Chinese language instructor.

He's in for a surprise. One morning, Robert gave his pen to the man and said, please, I want you to explain to me which of these symbols you used to form the word that means righteous in your language. Chinese man said, yes, I can show you that.

He went swish, swish, swish, swish on a piece of paper and showed Robert Morrison that the Chinese use two symbols to form that word, drawing one over the other. The upper symbol is the Chinese symbol for a lamb. And there's a knife included, which shows it's a sacrificial lamb.

And underneath that is another symbol for first person singular pronoun. He realized when the Chinese write the word that means righteous, they're actually writing the lamb over me. Righteous.

Robert said to his Chinese language instructor, sir, do you know where is the lamb? Pointing to the upper part of what the man himself had just written. The man under whom you and I must be found in the sight of Shang Di, the Lord of Heaven. That's the Chinese name for God.

In order to be righteous in his sight. Chinese man said, no, I don't know where that lamb is. How about you, foreigner, do you know? Enabling Robert Morton to say, oh, do I have good news for you and for your people.

And Robert said to himself that there's one spiritually significant encoded message in this ancient writing system. There may be others and I'm going to find them. He pressed on and day after day began to discover dozens and eventually 120 Chinese words that have spiritually significant messages encoded according to how the ancestors of the people had chosen to use little pictures instead of words to, instead of phonetic symbols to make their words.

Robert found the Chinese symbol for a ship. Requires you to draw something resembling the shape of the hull of a ship. But it doesn't mean ship until you specify the precise number of people sailing in it.

Write any other number than the one I'm about to mention, you will lose one mark in a Chinese language exam. And the number is eight people sailing in a ship. Hmm, why did they think eight people was somehow a significant number? Why not one, two, three, four, five, seven, any other number? Has to be eight.

According to Genesis, what was the first ship that ever floated? How many people were delivered from the flood in the ark? Ocho personas, eight people in a ship. Chinese word for covet. Desiring something that doesn't belong to you.

Requires you to draw two trees and a woman standing between two trees making some kind of a choice between two trees. What could that possibly have to do with coveting? And the Chinese word for come. Just the verb come is more complex.

To begin you draw the symbol for a tree at the center and it's a tree shaped like a cross. The Chinese symbol for a man is like our letter Y upside down. Guess what is superimposed right over the center of the cross-shaped tree? An upside down Y. A man suspended on a tree.

Another part of it means mankind. And the meaning of this combination is the verb come. It reads like an encoded message.

Mankind come to the man who hung on a tree. And the Chinese people had no inkling of the way these symbols could be explained. But Robert Morrison did.

He had 120 uniquely Chinese cultural compasses waiting to have the little arrows loosen on their dials to point Chinese people to Jesus and to the revelation revealed in scripture. There were of course those who opposed him calling him a foreign devil. But more and more Chinese people listening to Robert Morrison began to say it's incredible.

He's showing that somehow our own ancestors anticipated the teaching he would one day bring to our nation. More and more Chinese people began to open their hearts to the Lord. Robert Morrison went on to translate the entire Bible into Chinese and he wrote letters to his supporters back in the British Isles.

Letters that took about six months to get there. Six months for an answer to come back. Email was not invented yet.

And as more and more of his letters are being read in front of more and more congregations of Christians more and more Christians began to say that's incredible what's happening out there in China. Who was that fellow we sent out there? Robert Morrison never heard of him. By the way, how many others did we send out there with him? And the elders who commissioned Robert Morrison to go to China rather sheepishly said actually we sent only him and we almost weren't persuaded it would be worth the cost to do that.

Apparently though it is working out. It's worthwhile. So Christians began to say we should feel ashamed of ourselves for sending only one man on so great a mission.

Are there others willing to follow the trail he's blazed out there? And there were others willing to go following Robert Morrison's example. Some of them became more famous than Robert Morrison. I mean, who did Pastor Miles mention? Hudson Taylor.

How many of you had heard of Hudson Taylor? How many had heard of Robert Morrison before I said his name this morning? Not very many. Well, it seems a little unfair, but that's alright. Robert Morrison has his reward anyway.

And so soon the number of witnesses for Jesus began to increase in China and more and more people were becoming Christians until by 1949 when the Communists took control of China. The number of Christians is believed to have risen to about one million. The Communists set to work to try to eradicate all religious belief and establish atheism in its place.

According to the U.S. State Department, they may have killed as many as 70 million Chinese people in the process. That included about 500,000 Christians. And they confiscated all the Christian churches and schools in China, changed the churches into warehouses, changed the Christian schools into schools to teach communist atheism, and warned the surviving Christians, unless you give up your Christian faith, you cannot be employed by the government, you cannot be a teacher in any school, and your children cannot receive public education, you'll have to teach them yourselves.

Furthermore, you Christians can only be grave diggers or garbage collectors or tillers of the fields in the communes. Unless you give up your Christian faith, you will not qualify for any kind of employment more meaningful than that. These restrictions caused an estimated 200,000 Christians to capitulate to the pressure they gave up.

That left about 300,000 who remained faithful and were determined to stay true to the Lord Jesus no matter what the Communists did to them. The Communists knew they were there. They appointed a committee I heard about decades ago to find some way to discourage their faith, weaken it without the expense of imprisoning them, without the messiness of killing them and having to bury them.

And one member of the committee in Beijing, the capital city, said, I've studied Christianity and I know where it is weak. He said, Christians depend upon meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings to keep their faith sustained. It's only as they meet together and share their scriptures together and pray together and sing their hymns together that their faith is strengthened by mutual encouragement.

So we have a simple solution. We'll send out an order. If a dozen Christians, for example, are found in any one commune, we'll require that just one Christian or one nuclear family of Christians be left there and the others be scattered to other communes where there are no Christians.

Thank you, said the other members of the committee. We have not a thought of an ingenious solution like that. So the order went out and the communist government of China completely at its own expense became the most efficient missionary sending organization in 2,000 years of church history.

The little dream, the people they were scattering throughout virtually the entire commune system were men and women whose faith they themselves had strengthened by means of persecuting them. These were people who radiated joy in spite of threats against their well-being by their own government, people who were noted for honesty, integrity, trustworthiness. People were drawn to them and drawn to the Lord Jesus through their witness.

Thus the number of Christians in China began to grow exponentially. It is now believed the number of Christians in China, the minimum postulate is 80 million. Some say it's 100 million.

Some say, no, we've done surveys and if those surveys are correct, if we extrapolate from then to the rest of the provinces and areas of the nations, it's 120 million. It is believed the number of Christians in China is growing at an average daily net gain of nearly 30,000 new believers per day. And even some secular scholars are beginning to take note of this and are writing their own academic papers about what they call the Christianization of communist China.

The communists, meanwhile, are scratching their noggins saying, somehow we made a mistake here. And there's so many Christians, we just have to show them a little bit of goodwill. So to show a little bit of grudging goodwill, the communists have begun to give some of the warehouses back to the Christians.

Christians gladly accept them back, refurbish them as the churches they originally were. And so many Christians and other curious people thronged to attend those reopened churches in cities of China. They've had to establish a rule for some of them, a rule that says, you are not permitted to attend this church two Sundays in a row.

If you do, you'll be stealing standing room only from other people that need to hear the word of God. Elsewhere in the world, pastors are frequently heard to say, I didn't see you in church last Sunday. In China, some pastors are more likely to say, wait, didn't I see you in church last Sunday? You shouldn't be here.

So did God prepare the gospel for China? And did he also, in an unexpected way, even prepare the Chinese people for the gospel? They had a name for God. Shangdi, the Lord of Heaven, defined as the

uncreated creator of the heavens. Yeah, they had their idols, Buddhist idols, but they also knew about him.

And they knew that he did not want to be represented by an idol. In India, the world's second most populous nation, 1792, William Carey, another Englishman, and his wife Dorothy arrived and set up housekeeping in the predominantly Hindu part of India, the northern part. There are some areas in the extreme south of India where there have been Christians since the first century.

They claimed that the Apostle Thomas came and planted churches. And those churches are called the Marthoma churches in honor of the Apostle Thomas. And in the extreme east of India, several million tribal people resisted the lure of Hinduism for many centuries.

And then when a handful of Christian missionaries came among them, enormous numbers of them became Christians in an amazingly short time. I wrote about that phenomenal response in a book called *Eternity in Their Hearts*. And there were cultural triggers there I don't have time to get into today.

But what about Hindus in India? It didn't seem likely to William Carey that in a culture totally given to idolatry. I mean, there are literally millions of gods in Hindu theology. More than any one worshiper could possibly worship in his entire lifetime.

You'd have to worship, I don't know, dozens a day to try to cover them all. Because in polytheism, there's a built-in inflation factor. Once you decide that the infinite god is not enough, you've got to add finite gods, take finite gods instead of him.

You soon find, Judas May, it takes an infinite number of finite deities to fill the infinite deity's sandals. So there's always a need for another god for this and another god for that. There were also some very horrifying things like sati.

Sati in Hinduism meant when a Hindu man died, his widow had to be burned alive on the same pile of firewood on which his body was cremated. And William Carey encountered that and was horrified to find the British East India Company, which had political control of India at the time, had done nothing to make that cruel custom illegal. So William Carey said, you should use your authority to make it illegal.

We should not allow people to burn women alive just because their husbands have died. And they said, don't bother us about things like that, William. It's not our concern.

Their concern was to sustain a steady cash flow of profits for the mother country. That's all that mattered. And they even threatened William Carey saying, if you preach against Hindu customs and anger the people so they refuse to work for us, that'll interrupt our cash flow and we will throw you in prison, sir.

Appalled at the callousness of his fellow Britishers who were there only for political commercial purposes, William shared his problem with some Danish friends of his in a Danish enclave on the coast of India called Serampore. And the Danes said, guess what, William, we can solve that problem for you. What? How can you Danes solve my problem with my fellow Britishers? They said, it's very simple.

Great Britain and Denmark have a treaty. So we're going to give you a Danish passport, William Carey. We're going to make you a citizen of Denmark.

You go ahead and preach whatever you think God wants you to preach. And if the Brits come to arrest you, wave your Danish passport in their faces. It'll be a perfect shield.

It worked. I hope God has somehow rewarded little Denmark for the encouragement its reps out there in India gave to a beleaguered William Carey back in the 1790s. And William was writing letters to supporters back in England.

When those letters were read in front of congregations of Christians, people were made aware of things like sati. And they began writing letters to the parliament saying, tell our representatives out there in India to make that cruel custom illegal right away. And they did.

So it was made illegal. Radical Hindus resented that. But lo and behold, when William Carey preached against Whittle-Burning, he found out there were some Hindu intellectuals who agreed with him.

But they were afraid to say anything until he, the bold foreigner, took the lead. So it was made illegal. And radical Hindus were saying, wait till we become independent from British rule.

We'll make sati illegal again. It's our right. India did become independent from British rule in the 1940s.

Radical Hindus have been pressuring the independent government ever since to make sati illegal. Thus far, they have not given in to the pressure. Pray they will not.

Whatever happens in the future, you can be sure tens of millions of women in the world's second most populous nation owe the extension of their lives beyond the death of their husbands to the goodness of God at last reaching India through William Carey in this special way. Something else in India is the world's most massive system of racist apartheid. When I said apartheid, which nation came to mind? South Africa.

But the world has a double standard justifiably opposing racist apartheid in South Africa till it was abolished a few years ago. But the world overlooks, appeases, condones a massively greater system of racist apartheid in Hindu North India. Why do I say it's racist apartheid? Because the original inhabitants of India were the Dravidian race.

Later, a different race, the Aryan race invaded from the north and it was the Aryan conquerors who set themselves up as high caste Hindus relegating the entire Dravidian population to be the low caste Hindus. And the lowest of the low are called Dalits, which means untouchables. Hindu priests of the Aryan race tell Dalits of the Dravidian race, you must be careful to assure that not even your shadow falls on the skin of a high caste Aryan person.

Just your shadow is contaminating, defiling. And so it didn't seem likely to William Carey and others that they could expect to find anything in that kind of a cultural context pointing to Jesus. But as William and others began to learn language after language of India, they eventually learned a language called Sanskrit.

Sanskrit is to India what Latin is to Western civilization, a language no longer spoken in the street, but it has a significant body of ancient literature preserved, which scholars study and are able to read. Well, William and others learned Sanskrit and began to find that the oldest writings in the Sanskrit language called the Vedas were written in some cases 4,000 years ago, before Hinduism had emerged. But these things are preserved in the Hindu context, even though Hinduism cannot claim them because they were there before Hinduism developed.

And some of those ancient writings read like biblical prophecies. One, for example, somewhere in the world there is an upside down tree. What can cause a tree to be upside down besides a hurricane Katrina,

a tornado, or a bulldozer? This is a tree that is upside down because it is rooted in heaven and it grows down toward the earth instead of up from the earth.

The upside down tree spreads its branches out above the earth in every possible direction, yielding fruit for all mankind. It goes on to say, the trunk of the upside down tree will be gashed, and the sap that bleeds from the wound in the side of the upside down tree is for the healing of mankind, nourishing fruit from the branches, nourishing sap from a wound in the side. Now that's a strange metaphor, don't you agree? In spite of its strangeness, does it remind you of someone you know and love? But Jesus can possibly offer to Hindus in India, Hindus in Nepal, or a Hindu in a 7-Eleven near you.

Jesus is the only one who can possibly be offered that corresponds in every detail. Well, more and more people in India are turning to the Lord in increasing numbers, and where do you suppose the greatest response to the gospel would be? Among the high-caste Aryan Hindus on their pedestal of privilege, or among the Dravidians, especially the Dalits, the lowest of the low? The Dravidians, especially the Dalits, are turning to the Lord in increasing numbers. It is estimated 200 new house churches are opening their doors for the first time every month in India.

And you can understand why. Here are people who are taught by Hindu priests that they are virtually subhuman, finding through the gospel of Jesus Christ that they are created in whose image? In the image of God. And who loved them enough to die to atone for their sin and reconcile them to God? God himself incarnate in the person of Jesus.

And they're invited by repentance from sin and faith in Jesus to enjoy not some demeaning kind of citizenship, but full citizenship in the most glorious kingdom that will ever be, the kingdom of God. Does that sound like good news? And every now and then a high-caste Aryan Hindu also believes in the Lord. When that happens, that high-caste Aryan forfeits the privilege of being considered a high-caste person.

That person tumbles down the social scale even lower than the Dalits, is regarded as an outcast with zero recognition. Well, China and India, the world's two most populous nations, ancient cultures. But what about Stone Age tribes hidden away in remote jungles, especially if they're cannibals that eat human flesh and headhunters that cut off human heads and save skulls as trophies? You couldn't expect to find anything in that sort of a cultural context that would be pointing men and women to Jesus, could you? Or could you? In 1962, my wife Carol Joy, who's been with the Lord now for six and a half years, sailed with me and our little baby son Stephen, our firstborn, across the Pacific Ocean to a huge island north of Australia called New Guinea.

It's easy to find on a map because it's big. It would reach from San Diego, California almost to New Orleans in Louisiana. 500 miles wide at the widest, shaped like a Tyrannosaurus rex.

The head is at the western end with open jaws. There's a narrow neck, a huge hulking body, and a tail several hundred miles long, tapering along the western edge of the Pacific Ocean. And New Guinea is the home of 1,000 tribes speaking 1,000 languages.

That means almost one out of every seven languages spoken on Earth is spoken in New Guinea. And we went there under a mission called World Team. Please, everyone say World Team.

Now please say worldteam.org. Look us up on the web. World Team began back in the 1870s, second oldest interdenominational faith mission, second to the one established by Hudson Taylor, and founded by

a man, Grattan Guinness, who was the Billy Graham of the British Isles back in those days. And we began working in the Congo and Africa and then across in India, later in Nepal, then in Peru, and now in Indonesia.

And so Carol and I joined World Team and arrived in New Guinea 1962 with little Stephen and found that the other young couples who had gotten there just a little ahead of us were all working in the mountains, the mountain tribes, especially a tribe called the Dani and another tribe called the Yali. And the Danis had already begun to respond to the gospel by that time. And so they said, welcome, Don and Carol.

You can join us in the work here in the mountains. There's lots to be done. But they said, we do need to let you know another tribe has been discovered, not here in the mountains, but in the swamps away to the south.

Swamps that extend over 30,000 square miles, drenched with seven meters of rainfall a year. That's like 22 feet of rain a year. With crocodiles in the rivers, poisonous snakes in the bush, blood-sucking leeches in the grass, and malaria mosquitoes.

Hey, in the mountains, you're a mile above sea level or more. And that means that it's cool. And you can grow vegetables that would not grow at sea level in the tropics.

And there was not even any malaria there yet. So they said, you don't have to go to that tribe in the swamps. We just need to let you know it's an option.

By mission agreement with other groups, that's our responsibility. But it doesn't have to be you. But as I was praying, saying, Lord, I want to serve where you want me to serve.

I want it to be your choice, not mine. And I love climbing mountains. And New Guinea has mountains that rise 2,000 feet higher than anything in the Rockies or the high Sierras.

Ice-capped, even though they're in the tropics. And so I thought, oh, I'd just love to take a vacation and go climb this one or that one. That would have been my personal preference.

And I think everybody thought, oh, Don is for sure going to say, God has called me to the mountain tribes. But the Lord was calling me to a swamp tribe. And I knew it.

It was just so clear. But I said to the Lord, my wife Carol is a pastor's daughter from Cincinnati, Ohio. She's been on a camping trip or two.

And it'd be so easy for her here with other missionaries that speak English, you know, up here in the mountains. Healthy, safe, cool. If you want us to go to the Sawi people, those headhunter cannibals that have never heard of judges, jails, or policemen, or law courts.

We don't even know if they'll invite us to dinner or... Please, Lord, give my wife Carol assurance from you that it is your call, not just her husband, wanting to go on a wild adventure and drag her along. So as I was praying that way, sure enough, God spoke to Carol. And she said, Don, ever since I heard the name of that tribe down in the south, the Sawi, I can't forget the name.

I keep thinking them. I'm trying to imagine what they look like and what their language might sound like. I'm curious, do you think God might want us to go to them? I said, yes, yes.

I'm glad to hear you say these things. So we felt the peace of God about this and said, send us to the Sawi. Everybody said two or three times, are you sure? Yeah, we're sure.

So we went down there and I left Carol and Stephen in a safe place and went in to test the attitudes of the Sawi people. I found out for a couple of years they'd been hearing positive reports about tall, pale, sickly-looking beings called Tuans. That means European types.

All the tribes of Eugenia are black-skinned. They're like the separated cousins of the Sub-Saharan black race. And they didn't know there were any people anywhere in the world of a different skin color.

But now they were hearing these reports and all the reports about these odd-looking beings were positive, thank God. Wherever Tuans go, they bring medicine, they bring salt, they bring steel tools to replace stone tools and nylon fish line and fishhooks and even something called soap. And they never heard anyone.

So the Sawi began to say, are there any spare Tuans around? We think we'd like to welcome one. Only to have other tribes that live a little closer to civilization say, a Tuan live among you. Who do you think you are? Don't you realize these strange beings are a scarce commodity? So it's not enough for every tribe to have one, let alone every village.

And they're choosy about where they live and who they live among. And you Sawi are the worst of all the tribes. You're wretched, awful people.

You know that, don't you? Don't get your hopes up. You'll never be favored by the presence of one of these rare beings. Hearing these all nasty comments from their enemies, the Sawi people were saying wistfully, perhaps they're right, I guess we can't claim to be anyone special.

But they also said, just in case someday, somewhere, there's a Tuan who finds out that we live here and decides he wants to come and reside among us. If he doesn't allow the anti-Sawi propoganda of our enemies to turn him away from us, when we find out that Tuan has chosen us, we'll let him know. And know on certain terms, we choose him.

He'll be our Tuan. We'll be his tribe. And guess what sort of a bloke you're looking at here? I'm a Tuan.

My wife, Carolyn Nyonya, a female Tuan, even had a little baby Tuan, little Stephen, by then almost a year old. And so when I made contact with them, they looked at me so strangely. And then, you know, I tried to act reassuringly.

And I gestured to indicate I wanted to help to build a little house on a little bit of high ground. It might not be flooded during the monsoon. And they got the message.

I handed out some steel wools. They went out in the jungle and cut poles and helped me build a little 20-foot by 20-foot, 400-square-foot jungle home under a thatched roof. No glass in the windows, just green plastic fly screen stapled in place.

No sawn timber anywhere, just split palm bark for a floor. And when it was finished, I looked at it. It looked like a little matchbox beneath the towering ironwood trees.

Because it looked like a little matchbox and had a thatched roof. I nicknamed it our thatchbox. And I thanked them for helping me build it and used gestures to indicate I was going to fetch my family and would return in three days' time to reside among them in that little house.

They seemed to understand. I left them and came back three days later, 10-hour journey in a wobbly dugout canoe. That's a 30-foot long tree trunk hollowed out in the shape of a canoe, three paddlers in the front, three in the back, Carol and Stephen and me in the middle.

And for 10 hours, they navigated that canoe like a needle through the waterways of the swamp, burst out into the headwaters of the Kronkill River and paddled downstream. Just as the sun was setting, we came around the last bend of the river and there were 400 Sawi men, women, and children massed on the riverbank, waiting to see if the Tuan would keep his promise and return. We got closer and I saw all the men had war paint on and were holding weapons.

And I thought, what's the meaning of the weapons and the war paint? I guess Carol was thinking they're like that all the time. But they weren't. I mean, they weren't wearing war paint, holding weapons when we're building a little house.

No thought of retreating. They're already within range of the weapons. Nothing to do but put on the boldest face we could imagine, climb up out of the canoe, a family of three, right into the midst of that armed host.

They closed in all around us tightly. We could hardly move. And their eyes were gleaming with excitement between the layers of war paint.

It seemed that they were waiting for a signal. They were indeed. Then someone shouted the signal, Issa! At that signal, they all began leaping in the air, brandishing their weapons and shouting for joy and pounding on their drums.

They began dancing around us, chanting. Edging us further and further away from the river, closer and closer to the little thatch box 80 yards from the shore. I thought, How's my wife, Carol, taking this? I glanced at her, and she was smiling at the people.

And little Stephen used to cry if the wind caused a door to slam anywhere nearby. Here he was, nearly jumping out of my arms, trying to grab white cockatoo feathers, golden bird of paradise blooms, dog-fang necklaces, and pig-tusk bracelets that the dancers had on. He'd never had so many interesting things within reach of his little hands.

As if we were standing at the eye of a human hurricane, milling around us, being baptized, not with water, but with sawy humanity and all its strangeness. And they, after several minutes, brought us right up to the front steps of the little thatch box. It's built six feet above the ground because everything's flooded part of the year.

We climbed the steps, crossed the porch, went in. When I closed the door behind us, they began pounding on the drums again and danced around the little thatch box all night. All the next day, all the second night, all the second day, and all the third night.

By then, we were persuaded we were welcome. And I had to learn their language as quickly as possible in case some kind of misunderstanding might change the whole attitude of the people. Do you suppose I could go to a bookstore and buy a published grammar and a published dictionary for sawy? No.

They spoke a language for which no one had ever put a single word in written form. No alphabet designed for it. And no bilingual language instructor.

How do you learn a language in a situation like that? You have to resort to the finger-pointing method, which means you stand among the people and start pointing at things, hoping they understand you, want them to give you a word in their language, whatever you point at. So I began by pointing at a man. They looked at me curiously.

One of them said, Didig. I wrote down, Didig means man. Then I pointed at a woman, and they said, Didig.

I thought, it probably means person without regard to genders. A crossed-out man wrote person. But then I pointed at a dog, and they said, Didig.

I pointed at a house, a tree, a canoe, a paddle, a river. No matter what I pointed at, they kept saying, Didig, Didig, Didig, Didig, Didig, Didig. But then I was saying, Lord, have you led me halfway around the world to learn a language that has only one word? Finally, I realized what Didig meant.

Finger. It is not solid by the language to point with a finger unless you're placing a curse on someone or something. Thank God they were giving their two on the benefit of the doubt that he wasn't placing curses on them.

If they'd gone to that conclusion, I wouldn't be here to tell you about it. They were probably muttering, This two-on is so dense, he keeps holding up his finger. We can tell him the word.

He just keeps asking us to repeat it. Do we have to stand here all day saying nothing but finger, finger, finger, finger? What's the point? Are all two-ons as dense as this one? Did we get the dumbest one that was left over? Later, I found I had to learn to point with my lips. In our culture, you know what that's asking for.

And this was just a minimal beginning of an increasingly surprising journey into cross-cultural understanding. Well, mimicking actions to get verbs and pointing with my lips to get nouns, combining them, I kept gaining more and more knowledge of Sawi. Till finally, after a few months, I was able to begin explaining to them about God and creation, mankind's fall into sin, the promise of a Redeemer, and Jesus, born among the Jewish people, to be God's means of reconciling mankind to himself.

It was not very easy to keep their attention. But one day, I told them the story of one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, turning against his friend and master and betraying him with a kiss to be led away and slain. That story grabbed their attention.

And when I described Judas' choice of a kiss as a means of consummating his treachery, they suddenly burst forth cheering for Judas, punching one another in the shoulder for glee and exclaiming, darn that man named Judas. He's the sort of man we call a tareduan, a master of treachery. Tell us more about Judas.

He's the sort of man any one of us would be proud to promise a daughter to in marriage. Someone else chimed in using a kiss that way, as what we call tui asanaiman, using gestures of friendship to fatten the victim for an unsuspected slaughter. And they began to tell me how they had enticed someone with friendship to come on successive visits only to finally be killed and eaten.

And we'd been so encouraged by the friendliness of the Sawi people to us. But I prayed for wisdom. You all know what the Bible says.

If any man lack wisdom, let him take a further course in seminary. What does it say? First and foremost, let him ask of God. And I was asking for wisdom.

But what sort of wisdom could God provide for a young missionary in his mid-twenties confronting a cultural firewall like the idealization of treachery among the Sawi? And to make the situation grim, three entire villages relocated, came out of the jungle, built new villages on three sides of our home. And that was great because it meant we had a total of 800 people. My wife, Carol, a registered nurse, was going to begin saving lives with nursing skills, combating malaria, dysentery, other tropical diseases, treating people gored by wild pigs or bitten by poisonous snakes.

She probably saved an average of one life a day for the 13 years we would reside because as many as a few hundred people a month, and one time 2,600 patients a month came. And so sometimes she might save two or three lives a month, other times dozens within a week. So she probably saved an average of a life a day.

For 13 years, we were to live among the Sawi people. They called her the woman who makes all the villages well. She's with the Lord.

Her name was Carol Joy. 17 months after the Lord took her home, I married another woman named Carol Joyce. So when I say Carol, you've got to think which one I'm talking about.

Carol Joyce is my new life partner in ministry. So warfare broke out between two of the three villages, and the warfare was raging. And I wanted to be a peacemaker, pleading with them to make peace.

And they kept saying, you ask us to make peace, you don't realize what you're asking. And I thought because of the treachery factor, they couldn't make peace because they couldn't trust each other. Making peace requires some basis for mutual trust.

But I was to find out they meant more than that. If a father in one of two warring Sawi communities genuinely, deeply wanted to bring bloodshed to an end and cause hatred to evaporate like the morning dew, he could do so only if he was willing to make a sacrifice so great that everyone would know. That's a sacrifice an insincere man could not find a resolve for.

If he had to be willing to take one of his own children, a little baby boy, and give his baby son as a peace child to an enemy father, the child that he and his wife brought into the world would be raised by that family in that other village. They might never see that son again except from a distance. If a man could bring himself to make a sacrifice that great, everyone knew he must be sincere.

That's something an insincere man could not possibly do. I was to find that by pleading with them to make peace during those months of ongoing violence, I was asking for a father to be willing to make a sacrifice I could not imagine myself as a father being willing to make. Eventually, I suggested, before I arrived, these villages that are fighting each other so frequently used to live miles apart, and the distance separating their communities was one kind of enforcer of some degree of peace.

But because of our presence here, that draws them together. But if I go away to another part of the Sawi tribe, they can go back where they were before and let the distance be another kind of policeman reducing the frequency of bloodshed. A father named Kayo couldn't bear to think that the senseless violence of his people might drive the Tuwan and the Nyonya away.

All the blessings that were coming to the people, he couldn't bear to see those blessings end. We had favored them, choosing them, and now Kayo had to preserve our staying there. So he decided if another father in his village didn't make the sacrifice, he would make the sacrifice.

He checked with the fathers blessed with several children each and saw a lack of resolve all the way down. So he said, it's up to me. He picked up his only son, the only child he and his wife would ever have.

A little baby boy about the same age as our own little Stephen embraced his little son one last time, ran out of his village in spite of the wailing, screaming protest of his wife. He knew he couldn't expect her to agree. Her maternal instinct was far too strong.

And his own heart was breaking, too, that it had to be done. He placed his only son in the arms of an enemy father, and that enemy father honored to be chosen as the adopted father of a peace child and filled with awe knowing he was holding another man's only son in his arms. In living Sawi memory, always if a peace child was given, it had been given by a father who had several children.

This was taking the level of sacrifice to a higher level. And that father said, Kayo, you've given an only son to us. We are reconciled.

It is enough. And he offered that little peace child, and all the people of the village gathered around, and one afternoon they touched the little baby boy on the chest and shouted these words of pledge. Any time Kayo and I are giving, I receive this child as a basis for peace.

And everyone touched the peace child. No one refused. And the peace was consummated.

The hatred was gone. These people were friends. They were acting like they were all one big extended family as long as the peace child remained alive, and that could be a problem.

Two out of every three babies born to Sawi mothers didn't even live to five years of age. I said, what is this? A father giving a son to his enemies for the purpose of reconciliation? Why is there something familiar about this? And suddenly it hit me, and I said, Oh my God, I prayed for a gift of wisdom. I couldn't say to the Sawi, Behold the Lamb of God.

They'd never heard of the sheep, never seen a lamb. They had pigs, but I could hardly say, Behold the Pig of God. But I realized I could say, Myakadonifidisi tarop nakadidyen, Behold the peace child whom God has provided.

The greater peace child given by the greater father to establish the greatest peace. So I began proclaiming the gospel in those terms, and they listened with increasing interest. And one day they responded with this question, Didn't you tell us that someone named Judas betrayed this fellow called Jesus with a kiss? I said, Yes, I did.

I was horrified you would claim the betrayer as the hero. They all grimaced and said, Don, you didn't tell us he betrayed a peace child with that kiss. If you told us that, no way would we have acclaimed him.

Judas' ratings plunged. Jesus was unveiled as the perfect personal fulfiller of their own uniquely Sawi peace child custom. And the day came when a one-eyed Sawi chief named Chatho, listening to me trace the parallels between Caio's gift of an only son and God's gift of his only son, suddenly stood up, gazed at me with his one good eye, and there with pierced this eye in a battle, no eye patch covered the hole, but

his one good eye was glowing like a lamp turned on.

He said, Don, Goni simpake guno havachatadonke, Don, your words make my liver quiver. Why, Chatho? Because I'm ready to lay my hand by faith on Jesus, God's peace child. I want the father again to know that this Sawi receives his peace child.

They understood. You receive God's peace child by his spirit dwelling within you. He prayed and brought his four wives and all his children for us to lead them in prayer, became the first family responding to the gospel.

And Chatho traveled with me and helped me explain the gospel to all 18 villages that speak that beautiful language of New Guinea. And now the number of Christians is growing. Seventy percent of the tribe profess faith in Jesus.

And so many amazing things happened in the process of the blossoming of the gospel. I don't have time to tell you a bit because your culture calls for this message to end a few minutes ago. So I have to honor your culture and stop talking.

But when I found out about the Sawi peace child and knew about what happened in China and in India, I said, what about other tribes here in New Guinea? And what about other cultures around the world? I was launched into what became decades of study, unearthing more and more examples of these things. And I wrote books about them, peace child in depth, what it was like to live a family in the midst of the Sawi and see how they became friends of God and how they began to show the love of Christ to other tribes. They used to raid for human flesh and human heads.

And I learned about a tribe up in the mountains that killed two of my fellow world team missionaries in 1968, riddled their bodies with arrows as thick as reeds in a swamp. Then we found out that tribe had places of refuge, reminiscent of Old Testament cities of refuge. Jesus became the true peace child for the Sawi.

We wanted to be the true place of refuge for them. We didn't find out. The right questions were not asked.

I found another tribe makes peace through a symbolic new birth. Yeah, they actually know, they can think in terms of new birth much better than Nicodemus could. Yeah, you know, Nicodemus responded with a naively literal, almost childish objection.

So these things are around the world. Cultures are rife with them. God has been working to seed the cultures of mankind in a preparatory way for the proclamation of the gospel by the church throughout the world.

So what is this thing we call missions? Millions of Christians think missions is something God invented to keep hyperactive believers occupied, out of everyone else's hair. It's only for those who are zealous, yes, but those who are not qualified to be good pastors or seminary professors at home. Send them off to faraway nations where people are perhaps less sophisticated and may not notice the shortcomings.

Others will say missions is only for Christians who are so holy they can read at night without bedlamps. The light of their halo suffices. What is it really? God-prepared messengers from fellowships like this one bringing the God-prepared message to guess which kind of people? God-prepared people.

Does that sound like a doable mission? A God-glorifying one? An eternally significant one?

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