

CROSSING CULTURES

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Preparing Strangers for Ministry
in Strange Places

STEPHEN M. DAVIS

*Foreword by
John P. Davis*

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CONTENTS

Foreword by John P. Davis / vii

Preface / ix

Introduction / xiii

Chapter 1 Theological Considerations / 1

Training of the Twelve and Pauline Mission / 2

Ministry Qualifications / 6

Identity and Work of the New Testament Missionary / 7

Twenty-First-Century Mission / 13

Chapter 2 Missiological Considerations / 17

Limitations of Cross-Cultural Training / 19

Cross-Cultural Ministry Preparation / 20

Partnership in Pre-field Preparation / 25

Modes of Cross-Cultural Training / 31

Place of Social Sciences / 37

Chapter 3 Cross-Cultural Competencies / 41

Contextualization / 42

Competencies Defined / 43

Priority of Spiritual Maturity / 47

Necessity of Experience / 48

Chapter 4 **Cross-Cultural Challenges** / 51

On Being American / 53

Religious Commitments / 55

Language Acquisition / 58

Acquiring Cultural Competency / 62

Conscience and Culture / 66

Importance of the Family / 69

Chapter 5 **Recommendations** / 71

Local Church Recommendations / 74

Mission Agency Recommendations / 75

Missionary Candidate Recommendations / 80

Conclusion / 83

Bibliography / 87

FOREWORD

IN 1973 I HAD the joy of seeing my brother Steve come to Christ. The gospel immediately began a lifelong work of compelling him to love and to serve his Lord and Savior. Together we have had the joy of growing in the gospel and partnering in church planting for over forty years. As a seminary student Steve and his wife, Kathy, assisted and served in our church plant in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. In the early 1980s our new church gladly partnered with his church plant in the Roxborough section of Philadelphia. Later we had the privilege of supporting him when he was called to church planting in France and Romania. Since 2009 we have had the opportunity to work together in planting a multiethnic church in Philadelphia.

When it comes to writing on missiological issues, we often find various extremes. We have those who have theological and missiological training but have no “on the ground” experience. We also have those who have practical experience in missions but have no strong theological or missiological underpinnings to guide them through the complexities of missions. Steve is neither of these. With two masters degrees in biblical and theological studies, and two doctorates, a DMin in missiology and a PhD in intercultural studies, he has the missiological and theological tools to evaluate the changing and challenging complexities in missions. Furthermore, as one who has been involved in urban church planting in Philadelphia, church planting and training in the postmodern, post-Christian climate of France, church planting and training in Romania, and theological training of pastors in many countries of the world, Steve is consummately prepared to write as one who has been on the ground and still has his feet on

FOREWORD

the ground planting and pastoring a multiethnic urban church in Philadelphia.

I would listen to what he has to say, not simply because he is my brother, but because I respect his training, his experience, his wisdom, and his commitment to seeing gospel-centered churches planted throughout the world.

JOHN P. DAVIS, DMIN

Lead Pastor, Grace Church Philly

PREFACE

GOD HAS GIVEN ME the immense privilege to serve him for over thirty-five years alongside my wife, Kathy. I continue to stand in awe at his grace toward me. I was raised in a Christian home, rebelled at an early age, dropped out of high school, entered a world of drugs and crime, and was no stranger to the police in my neighborhood in North Philadelphia. I was probably one of the least likely candidates to ever become a missionary. The joke was that my dad was a prison guard and we spent time on different sides of the bars. Yet God works in mysterious ways.

After my conversion in 1973, I went to Bob Jones University for four years with a GED high school diploma and on academic probation, and by God's grace graduated with honors. It was there I met my wife, to whom I've now been married over forty years. From Bob Jones I went to seminary for four years. My wife and I planted our first church in Philadelphia after graduation in 1982. The church called a new pastor in 1987 when we announced our decision to go to France. We left for France in 1988 with our two small children in tow to plant churches. Of course I knew nothing about church planting in France, knew little of French history, and could not yet speak French. Thankfully I had enough sense to work with a French church planter and eventually was able to function with some measure of effectiveness.

In 1994 my family left France for Romania—another ministry, another culture, another language. My wife cried when I announced to our church in France that we would be going to Romania. When I asked her later why, she told me it was because it meant learning another language. We went there with six-month visas. Six months later our youngest son overheard my wife and me

PREFACE

talking about renewing our visas. His response, “You mean we’re not going back to France?” In time Romania became home for our children, our French Yorkie, and the two German shepherds we bought after a couple of burglaries while we were at church. We sent the dogs and our sons to obedience school. I’m not sure how much they learned, the dogs or our sons. After five years in Romania, we returned to the United States, where I studied under Paul Hiebert, Tite Tiénou, and others at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and received a DMin in missiology in 2004, with David Hesselgrave as my advisor. As I studied under missiologists, I had one regret. I regretted that I had not had this training earlier in my church-planting ministry and realized that I had not been as prepared as I thought for cross-cultural ministry. I am not an expert but I have learned from the experts. I have also had broad experience to share which might help others avoid some of the pitfalls I faced and mistakes I made. I suppose I could’ve entitled this book, *What I Wish I Had Known Before Engaging in Cross-Cultural Ministry*. I’ve written this with the hope that others might be better prepared than I was for cross-cultural ministry. Thankfully God uses us in our weakness and even in our ignorance. The pre-field and on-field aspects of preparation will not be the same for everyone due to differing gifts, calling, and places of ministry. Yet, I am persuaded that the call of God upon our lives requires the best preparation possible.

The changing face of world missions presents unique challenges, among which is the preparation of missionaries for effective cross-cultural witness and church planting. In an earlier ministry as missions director of a large church I was responsible for recommending missionary candidates to our church. It became obvious that mission boards and local churches often have different criteria for missionary candidates. In this book I draw widely from leading missiologists and practitioners. I also share many of my personal ministry experiences, successes, and failures. I want to try to formulate clearer thinking in preparing cross-cultural workers so that churches and mission agencies can better understand their role in world missions and their involvement in the lives of

PREFACE

those sent. In doing so we must answer the following question: How can we communicate the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers in the midst of a changing world? This is one of the great missiological questions of our day. Gone are the days when the isolated West sent missionaries to unknown lands and people. Apart from isolated ethnic peoples in yet unreached regions, the world has taken on more of a global character. Contact between ethnic groups, whether resulting from immigration, warfare and displacement or tourism, is unprecedented. Times have changed. We have more opportunities, more resources and are the benefactors of more past experience and research than any previous generation.

When I think of competencies for cross-cultural ministry, I have in mind specifically those who are called to plant churches, whether as a lead church planter, part of a team planting churches, or working alongside nationals to provide training and plant churches with them. No two places of cross-cultural ministry will be the same. The application, however, is for anyone considering or already engaged in cross-cultural missions since mission without church can scarcely be called mission. Anything called missions that does not involve gospel proclamation and discipleship with the goal of planting churches should be called something else. What that looks like in different cultures and how that is accomplished may vary. My prayer is that this book will help churches, prospective candidates, and mission agencies to more effectively partner in ministry preparation and gospel proclamation in making Christ known to the nations.

