

# Training Nurses and Other Healthcare Workers to Serve Cross-Culturally on Short- Term Missions

GMHC, November 9-11, 2023

Rebecca Meyer PhD, MSNed, BSN, FCN, RN



# Prayer



I will look up to the mountains,  
Does my help come from there?  
My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth!

Psalm 121:1-2



# My Experience

- PICU, CVICU, ECMO, Transport, Manager
- Community Development with Vulnerable Populations
- Community Health Evangelism (CHE)
- Faith Community Nursing
- Academic Service Learning



# Informal Poll

---

- How many have traveled outside the US?
- How many have lived a year overseas?
- How many have lived longer than 2 years overseas?

# Objectives

This session will focus on best practices for serving on missions, ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus, and strategies for approaching other cultures with compassion and His love.

1. Explore the biblical basis for serving others in humility and with a servant's heart.
2. Evaluate effective cross-cultural short-term mission strategies.



# Introduction

- Cultures have different worldviews, practices, and behaviors related to health, disease, suffering, and dying.
- Cultural humility allows believers to approach another person with openness, compassion, and the love of Jesus.
- When believers take the time to appreciate other cultures bridges to the gospel will be built.
- It begins with *shalom* and ends with *shalom*.



# Shalom

**“*Shalom* means just relationships (living justly and experiencing justice), harmonious relationships, and enjoyable relationships. *Shalom* means belonging to an authentic and nurturing community in which one can be one’s true self and give oneself away without becoming poor. Justice, harmony, and enjoyment of God, self, others, and nature; this is the *shalom* that Jesus brings, the peace that passes all understanding.”**  
(Wolterstorff, 1983, 69-72).





What Do You See?



# Why Go Serve Overseas?

TIME



**WELCOME TO**  
CHIANGMAI  
THAILAND

*SAY HI!*  
*SAWASDEE JAO*

เจียงใหม่ ยินดีต้อนรับจ้า



# Biblical Basis for Serving

- Imago Dei – people are created in His image and have inherent dignity and worth.
- God created everything and desired that all people experience genuine peace (*shalom*).
- Jesus came that all people may have life and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10).
- Missio Dei – Christians are invited to participate in God's healing work by proclaiming and witnessing to the Good News in both word and deed.
- Good Samaritan– *Go and do likewise* (Luke 10:37).



# The Lord is a Missionary God

- The Lord has said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you."
- I will make you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" Genesis 12:1-3



# *PANTA TA ETHNE*

(MATT. 28:18-20)

- God promised Abraham an offspring or “seed” through whom He would bless all the nations and families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:17).
- The redemption of all people would be provided through the line of David, to Jesus and is meant to touch every **nation, and all peoples of the earth** (Elwell, 1998)





# Good Training Includes

---

- Prayer
- Discipleship
- Culture
- Culture Shock
- Safety and Security
- Academic – discipline
- Task – on-site engagement
- Re-entry

We have talked about why we go, now let's talk about how to prepare before we go.

# Prayer – Spiritual Warfare

- Spiritual warfare is real, and believers have the tools they need for the battle.
- *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can **take your stand** against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*
- *(Eph. 6: 11-12).*





# Reflection

---

Why do you think stories are so effective in communicating health information?

# Discipleship





# Our Purpose: Glorify Him

- **God created people to glorify Him, so believers are to present their bodies as a living sacrifice and life of worship (Rom. 12:1).**
- **We can use the gifts and talents we have been given, as well as training, to come alongside the vulnerable, lost, and broken in the same way Jesus did.**



A photograph showing a group of people from various backgrounds with their hands raised in a gesture of prayer or agreement. The image is slightly blurred, focusing on the hands in the foreground. A black rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

# What Does Culture Mean?

We have talked about prayer and discipleship, now let's talk about cultural training.



## **Why is it Important to Study Culture?**

---

If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish.

# Culture is.....

- **Learned**
- **Transmitted**
- **Spoken and Unspoken**
- **Visible and Invisible**
- **Dynamic**
- **Ever-changing**
- **Governs actions and or decisions**



# Every Patient Encounter



- *Every* encounter is a cross-cultural encounter in healthcare.
- Never assume that patients who look like you share your beliefs and practices.
- Principles of patient-centered care should be applied to all patients to encourage individuals to become an active partner in their own health care.

# Culture

- Culture influences everything!

*All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, because “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble” (1 Peter. 5.5)*



# Self-Assessment

- **Cultural self-assessment** enables you to use personal life experiences to gain **insights** into your own health-related:
  - **Attitudes**
  - **Values**
  - **Beliefs**
  - **Practices**
- A personal and professional journey



# Culturally Determined Factors



- What are these?



# Aspects of Cultural Communication



**Time**  
**Space**  
**Gestures**  
**Posture**  
**Greetings**  
**Silence**  
**Eye contact**  
**Facial expressions**



# Cultural Influences on Healthcare Decision Making

- Fatalism
- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Linear vs. Circular Thinking
- “Normal” vs. “Abnormal” Health

# Living in the Balance

- **The people in the world live balancing guilt-innocence, shame-honor, or fear-power.**
- **Western cultures often view people as either guilty or innocent.**
- **Asian cultures and most cultures embracing Islam have a high value of honor and avoid shame at all costs.**
- **Animistic cultures are constantly aware of evils spirits, ancestors' influences, magic, curses, and sorcery and live in fear of these or anyone who has the skill to manipulate their power.**

(Pratt, Sills, & Walter, 2014, p. 141)



# UNDERSTANDING

- **Understanding guilt, shame, and fear are a helpful starting point.**
- **Understanding these concepts may help explain why people engage in certain practices.**
- **Understanding differences may help the believer find a redemptive analogy to build bridges to the gospel**
- (Richardson, 2005).



# Question



Is the following statement true or false?

Methods, rules, guidelines, and patterns of behavior about food practices can be described as culture-specific.



# Answer

- **True**
- **Rationale: The need for food is a culture-universal.**
- **Culture-specific determines methods, rules, guidelines, and patterns of behavior.**
- **For example, items that are considered to be edible; acceptable methods used to prepare and eat meals; rules concerning who eats with whom, the frequency of meals, etc.**

# Cultural Meaning and Food

- Relief of hunger
- Promotion of health
- Prevention of illness
- Expression of caring for another
- Promotion of closeness, kinship, family
- Celebration of life events
- Facilitation of business negotiations
- Culture determines which foods are served, when, the number and frequency of meals, who eats with whom, who is given the choicest portions, and how they are eaten.



# Prohibited Food of Selected Cultural/Religious Groups

## Hinduism

- All meats
- Animal shortenings

## Islam

- Pork
- Alcoholic products (including lemon and vanilla)
- Gelatin (marshmallow, Jello, gummy bears, fruit snacks)

## Seventh-Day Adventism

- Pork
- Certain shellfish
- Fermented beverages

## Judaism

- Pork
- Predatory fowl
- Shellfish and scavenger fish (crab, shrimp, lobster, escargot, catfish)
- Mixing milk and meat at the same meal
- Blood by ingestion

## Mormonism

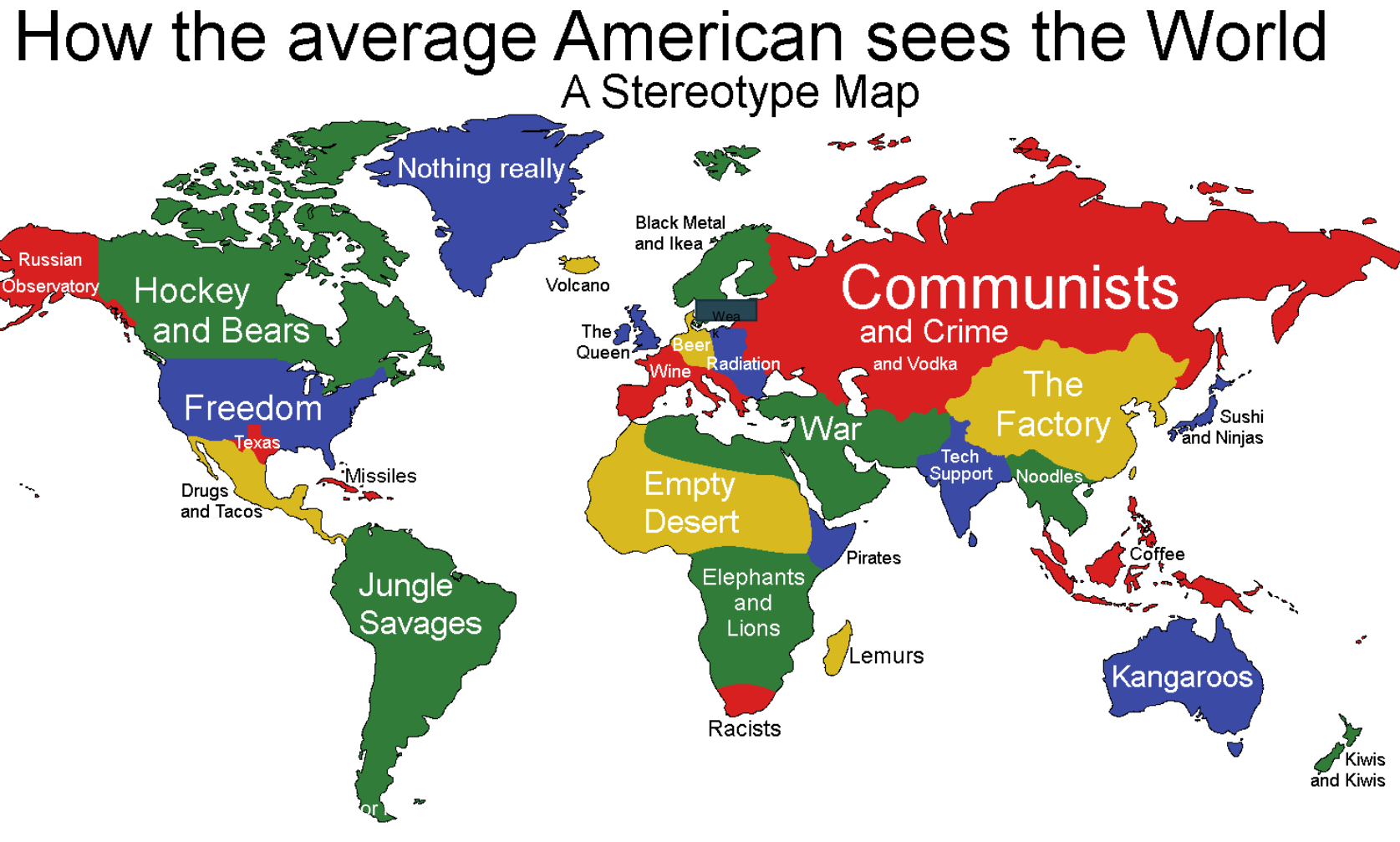
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Beverages containing caffeine



# Are Short-Term Missions Good or Bad?



# Ethnocentrism



# Cultural Humility

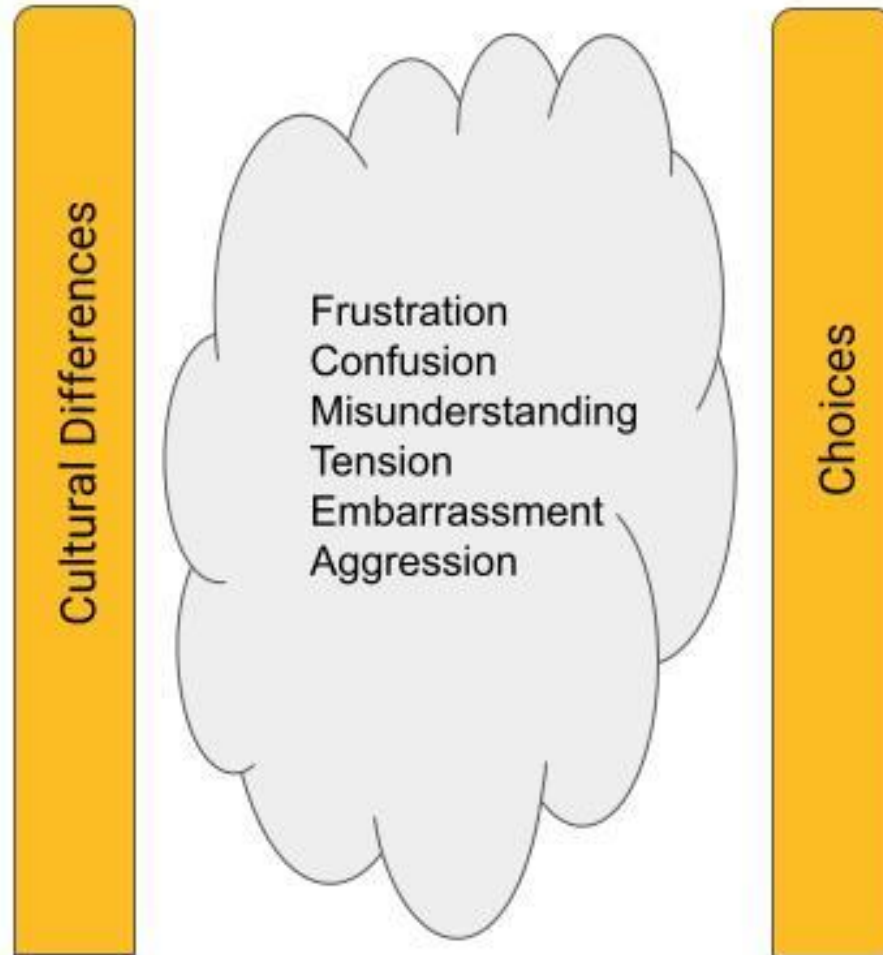
- Humility seeks to understand, shows honor and respect to others, looks for opportunities to serve others, and begins with knowing who you are.
- It is a process of self-reflection to gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences to improve the way vulnerable groups are treated.
- The personal reflection is followed by an appreciation of the patient's perspective.



## Your approach



## Cross Cultural Inevitables



## Your response



## Your results

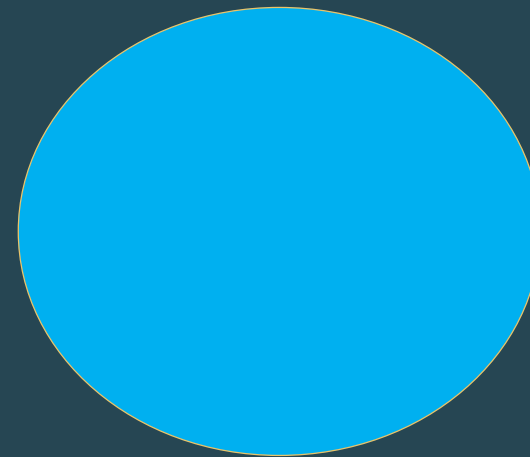
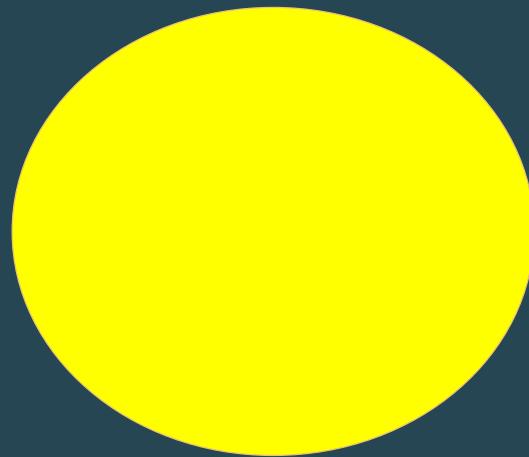
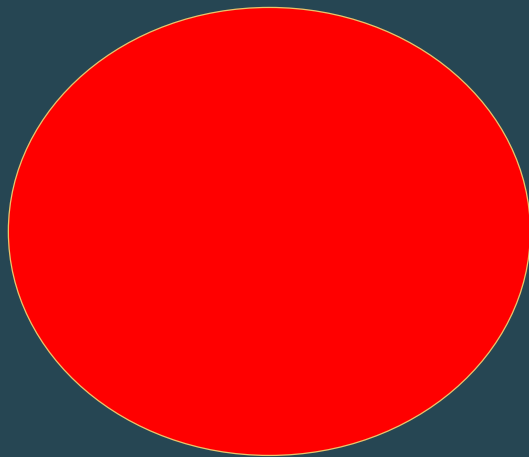


# BPS

- Bias – the tendency, outlook, or inclination that results in an unreasoned judgement.
- Prejudice – inaccurate *perceptions of others* or preconceived judgements about people based on ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, social class, size, disability, religion, politics, etc.
- Stereotype – a preconceived or fixed perception of someone from a particular group.
- Different from discrimination which is the *act or behavior* of setting one individual or group apart from another, thereby treating one person or group differently (Andrews, Boyle, & Collins, 2020).

# Implicit Bias

- The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.



# Fill in the Gaps

Young \_\_\_\_\_

Black \_\_\_\_\_

Night \_\_\_\_\_

# Read This Paragraph

**“If you can read this paragraph, it’s because our minds are very good at putting together pieces of information in a way that is easy for us to make sense of. Our minds do this automatically, without our conscious control.”**

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>





# Cultural Awareness vs Cultural Sensitivity

- Cultural Awareness: Having an appreciation of a diverse cultural group primarily in terms of arts, dress, music, foods, etc.
- Cultural Sensitivity: Having more to do with politically correct language and not saying things that may be seen as offensive to someone.



# Find Out About the Ethnic Groups

- Thai
- Khmer
- Karen
- Malays
- Chinese
- Hmong (Meo)
- Lahu
- Mien
- Akha
- Lisu
- Padaung



# Religions

Buddhism  
Muslim  
Christian  
Brahmin  
Taoism  
Animism



# Example: Thai Etiquette



## Do this:

- **Do** show respect to all images of Buddha as well as symbols of Thai royalty.
- **Do** remove your shoes before you enter a temple or mosque.
- **Do** use your entire right hand only to summon a person. Keep your palm down and wave downward.

## Do NOT do this:

- **Do not** touch a Thai person on the head under any circumstances.
- **Do not** touch a Thai person casually; it is a violation of personal space.
- **Do not** point your foot or the sole of your foot at anyone.
- **Do not** deface money, throw it down, or step on it.

# Worldview

- A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our part in it.
- It is the deepest level of culture and affects every aspect of health, including the choices people make about suffering, death, and dying.



# Definitions

“Worldviews are like operating systems on a computer except that they are in our minds... determining the range of thoughts we will entertain” (Poplin, 2014, p. 28)



A 2-year-old believes he's the center of his world, a Secular Humanist believes that the material world is all that exists, and a Buddhist believes he can be liberated from suffering by self-purification.



**How Is Our Worldview  
Like a Pair of Glasses?**

**What Do You  
See Here?**





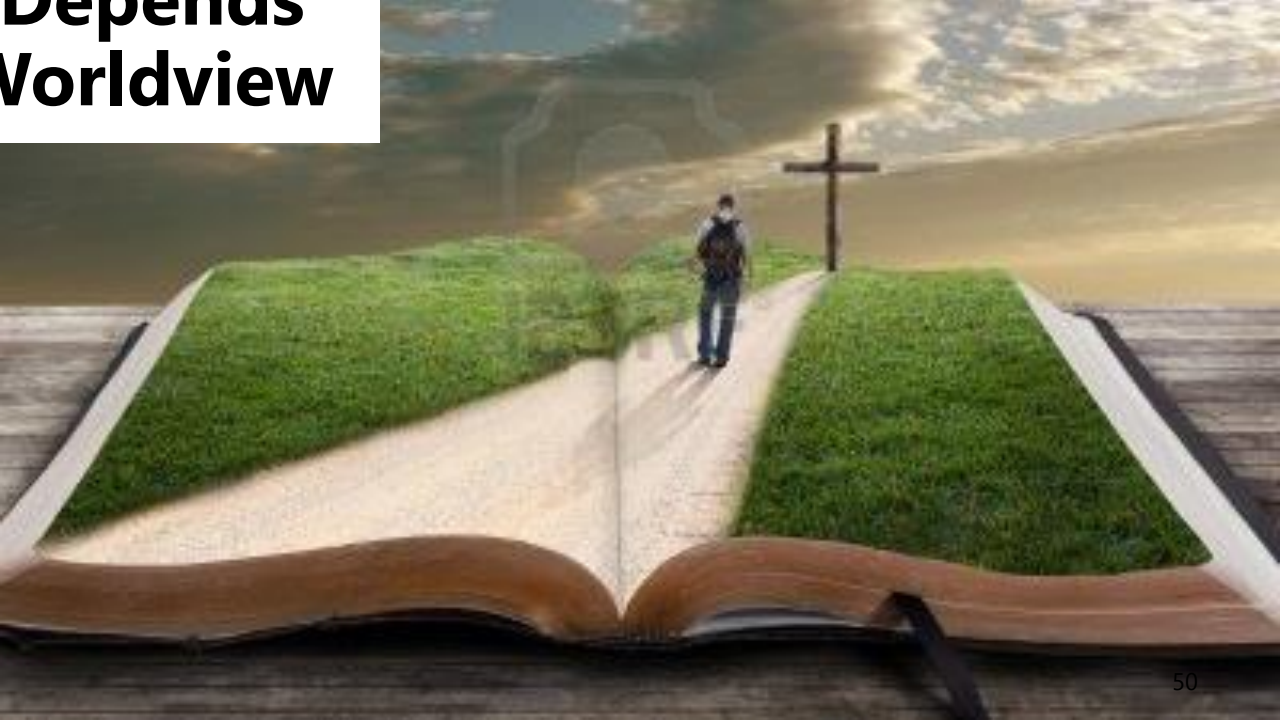


**WHERE DO YOU SEE  
YOURSELF?**

WHERE DO YOU SEE GOD?  
WHERE DO YOU SEE THE WORLD?



**Where You See Yourself Depends on Your Worldview**



# Characteristics of Worldviews

All worldviews begin with a faith commitment – belief in something.

Every non-Christian worldview has some principles of the Judeo-Christian worldview.

There are values held by other worldviews that lie outside the Judeo-Christian worldview.

All worldviews have existed since recorded history.



# Question #1

Is the following statement true or false?



All patients refer to illness and disease in the same context.

# Answer

- **False**
- Rationale: Not all patients relate to health and illness in the same context. A patient's **worldview** influences his or her **cultural belief system**.
- These are often the reasons why healthcare workers may encounter challenges when communicating with those who have a different worldview than theirs.



# Worldview Answers These Questions:

Worldview  
(based on  
Sire, 2004)

Does God  
exist in this  
worldview?  
Yes or no? If  
yes, one or  
many?

What is a  
human being?  
Cells and  
chemicals?  
Created being?  
Other?

What happens to  
a person at  
death? Is there a  
heaven?  
Reincarnation?

How do  
people know  
what is right  
and wrong  
(ethics)? Are  
there  
guidelines?

What  
potential  
barriers to  
nursing care  
may occur  
with this  
worldview?



# Culture and Worldview R/T Death Rituals

---

- Cremation vs burial
- Burial within 24 hours
- Ceremonial washing
- Crying or wailing
- Dios de los Muertos
  
- *In many places,  
doctors replaced clergy*

# Promoting Health and Bridging the Gap

- Knowing that people are often resistant to change, it is important to identify the ways they see themselves first (Fountain, 1989).
- Second, it is important to identify potential barriers to caring for people with these different worldviews.
- Third, the obstacles need to be discussed while searching for ways to bridge those gaps without alienating the person.
- Are there approaches to use as a bridge to the gospel?





# Case Studies





# **Safety and Security Training**

**Patient Safety - first do no harm!**

## **Personal Safety**

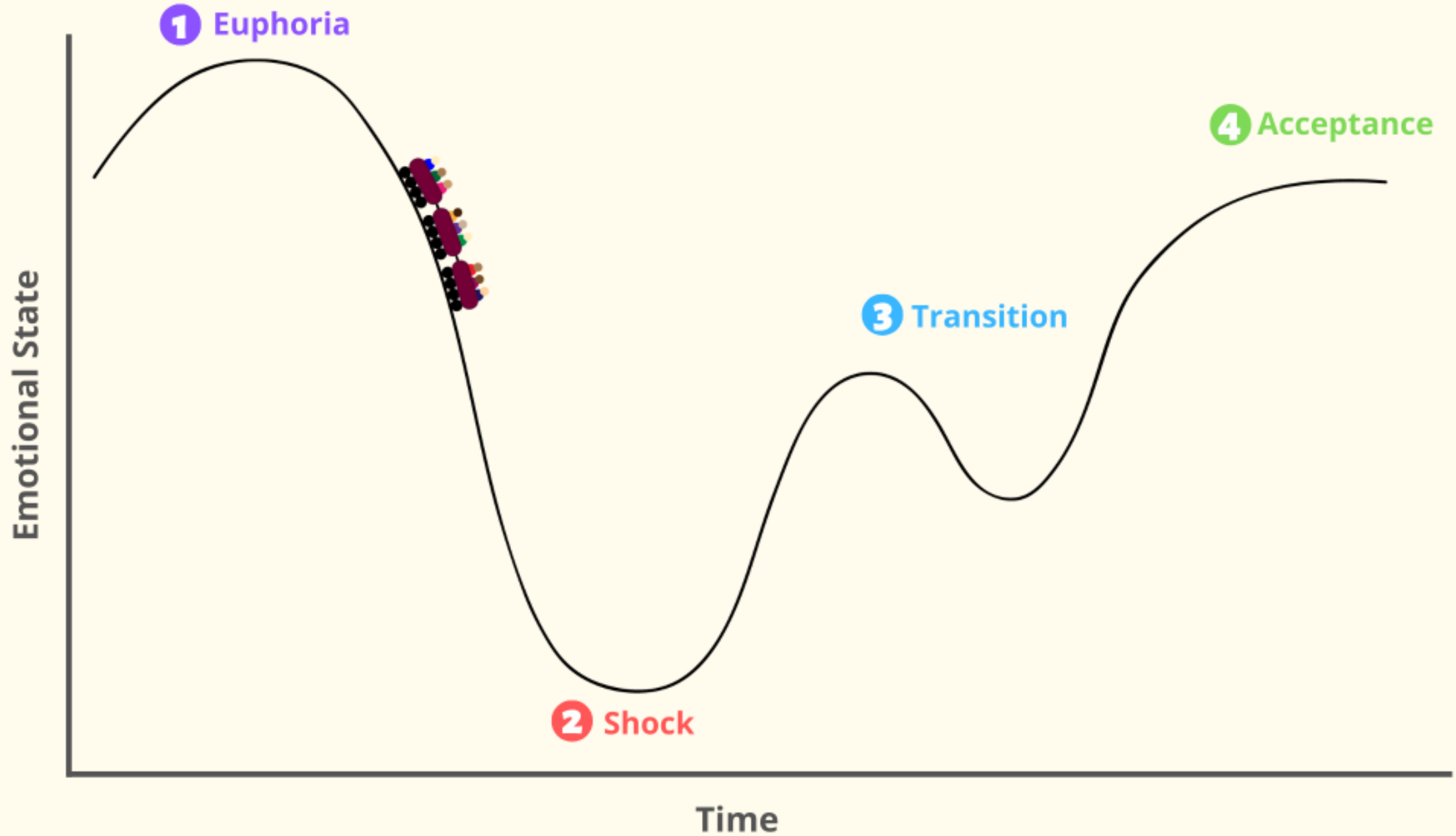
- **Infectious diseases – immunizations**
- **Snakes, scorpions, and...**
- **Buddy system – always**
- **Rally point – in case of disaster**

# On-Site Engagement

- **Pray before every outing.**
- **When invited, go into people's homes and pray with them.**
- **Learn the language.**
- **Learn to cook the food.**
- **Ask questions – do not make negative comments about the culture.**
- **Serve alongside the national team.**
- **Debrief at the end of every day.**
- **Participate in cultural and fun activities before coming home.**
- **Debrief at the end of the trip.**



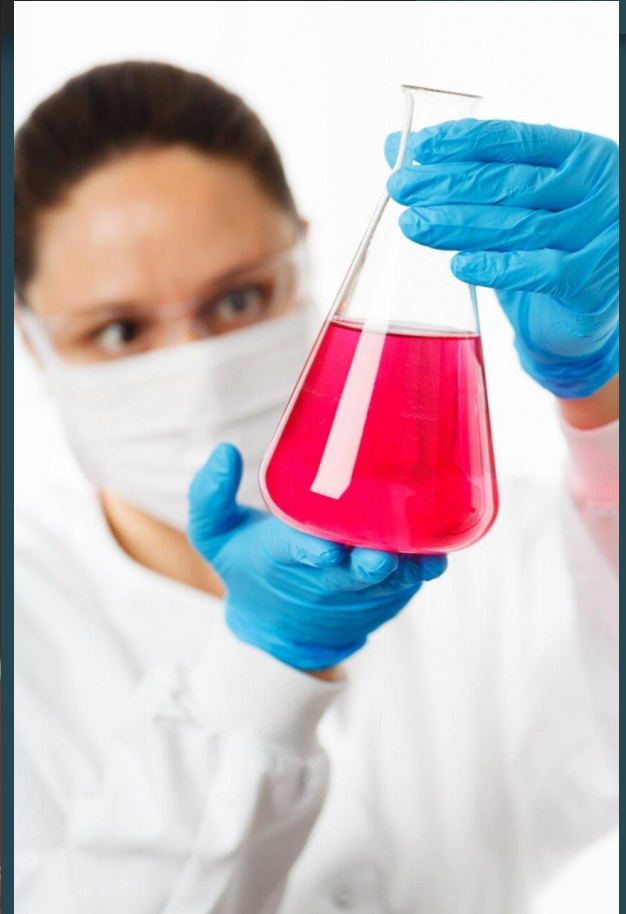
# Stages Culture Shock



**Head  
Heart  
Hands**



# Science Based Training



# Global Health Work – Knowledge

- **Need to understand how to maintain patient safety, and not cause harm.**
- **Be wise about developing intentional partnerships.**
- **Avoid paternalism and understand the needs of the culture.**
- **Do not cause economic harm.**
- **Focus on the recipients of care – it isn't about you.**
- Seager, 2021, p. 19



# Head Knowledge

**Prayer**

**Read the Word**

**Discipleship/Mentoring**

**Academic Preparation**

**Cross-Cultural Training**

**Read Missionary's Stories**





# The Right Heart

- **Stop being indifferent to the lost, broken, and shattered people – show His compassion.**
- **Be willing to get hot and dirty**
- **Servant leadership**
  - **Out of comfort zone**
  - **Don't complain**
  - **Count the cost**



# Willing Hands

- Touch the untouchable.
- Use gifts and talents.
- Serve in any way that is needed, not your agenda.
- It might end up being different than you think.



## Micah 6:8

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*



# Words of Advice

---

## Do NOT Pack

- Ego and pride
- A savior complex
- Pity and paternalism

## Do Pack

- Teamwork mentality
- Spiritual life
- Cultural preparation

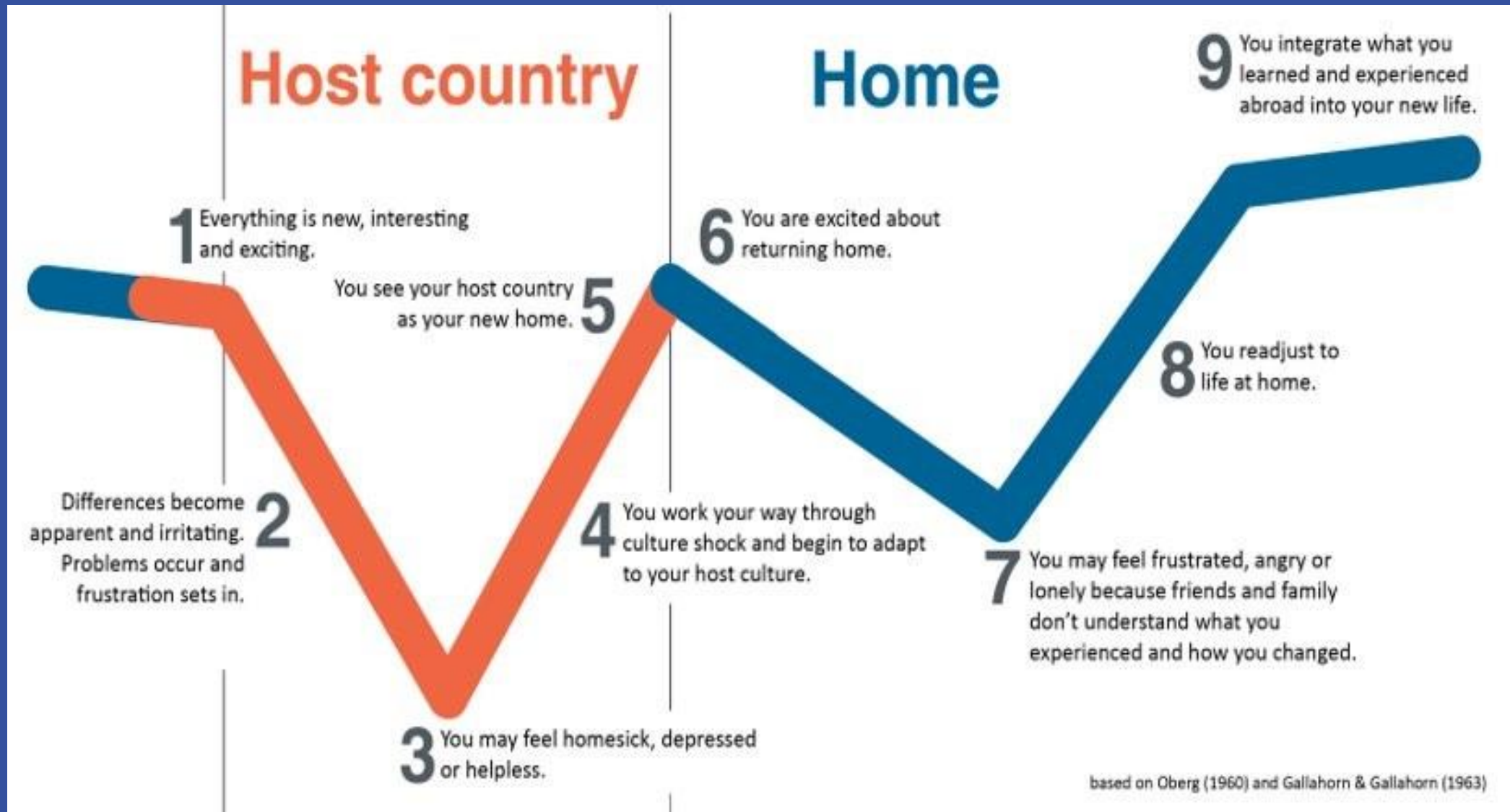


# Understanding Culture

- What are the behaviors and activities you see?
- What is the meaning attributed to the behavior?
- What values are important? What is good or beneficial?
- What beliefs are prevalent?
- What is the worldview? How do people respond to reality?
- A person's worldview is reflected in his or her values and behavior.



# Re-Entry Shock



A group of people are on a wooden boat on a river. A man in a red shirt is in the foreground, looking towards the camera. Behind him, three women are sitting and talking. One woman is wearing a green headscarf, another a pink one, and the third a white one. A man in a patterned shirt and striped dhoti is standing at the back of the boat, using a long wooden pole to navigate. In the background, there is a bridge with a red railing and some buildings on the riverbank. The sky is overcast.

**The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.**

Walt Disney

# ALL NATIONS, TRIBES, PEOPLE, AND LANGUAGE WORSHIPPING AT THE THRONE – REV 7:9

- Serving the poor “...shatters our indifference to God and humanity, critiques or privilege, and disturbs our comfort” (Poplin, 2008, p. 13).







2/17/20XX

# What Questions Do You Have?



73





# Thank you

Rebecca Meyer PhD, RN  
[rmeyer@calbaptist.edu](mailto:rmeyer@calbaptist.edu)

For More Information About the  
Biblical Basis for Missions, The  
History of Healthcare Missions,  
Cultural Considerations, and  
Strategies, Check Out This Course



CHRISTIAN GLOBAL HEALTH  
IN PERSPECTIVE





# References

- Elmer, D. (2006). *Cross cultural servanthood: Serving the world in Christlike Humility*. Intervarsity Press
- Fountain, D. (1989). *Health the Bible and the Church*. Billy Graham Center; Biblical Perspectives on Health and Heal edition
- Fielding, C. (2008). *Preach and heal: A Biblical Model for Missions*. Richmond, VA: International Mission Board.
- Hawthorne, S. (2009). *Perspectives on the world Christian movement: The study guide*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Hickman, C. (2008). *Live life on purpose: God's purpose, your life, one journey*. Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing.
- Mauk, K. & Hobus, M. (2021). *Nursing as ministry*. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Poplin, M. (2008). *Finding Calcutta: What Mother Teresa taught me about meaningful work and service*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Seager, G. (2012). *When healthcare hurts: An evidence-based guide for best practices in Global health initiatives*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.
- Sills, D. (2016). *Hearts, heads, and hands: A manual for teaching others to teach others*. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group.
- Sills, D. (2010). *Reaching and teaching: A call to Great Commission Obedience*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.
- TA20 (2002). *The great commandment and the great commission*. Medical Ambassadors International and Global CHE Network.