

## **The Inevitables of Cross-Cultural Living**

As we approach cultural differences, there is likely to be dissonance, and sometimes even conflict. Thinking about **The Inevitables** will help us be better prepared to **respond** appropriately, which will produce better **results**. Please use the brief summaries below to ponder on the potential dissonance, and then begin to consider your appropriate response. More on the response and results will come in future GIA newsletters.

**Frustration:** As mentioned earlier, language used by different cultures can produce frustration. In addition, there are other areas where encounters might easily create levels of frustration in a cross-cultural exchange. Worship styles often create frustration among worshippers in congregations. Plan ahead for potential dissonance around worship styles. Be proactive!

**Misunderstanding:** How many cross-cultural issues exist, simply due to misunderstandings? After a great play in a basketball game, I often slapped a friend on the back side and yelled, "Great play!!!" This is a common celebration in sports. Now imagine if one of my teammates was not familiar with this celebratory gesture! For me, it was a common celebration, but for a teammate who is unfamiliar with this celebration, this could be viewed as inappropriate. Simply a misunderstanding!

**Confusion:** I don't understand why they dress like that. Why would anybody live like this? Why would they come here? I can't understand why they don't want to worship here? Every cross-cultural experience will create some confusion on why these cultural differences exist. Our lack of understanding of other cultural heritages might cause us to ask questions that don't truly support true cultural understanding.

**Tension:** Think about our own country, how often is tension over cultural, eternally insignificant differences like voting parties, dress styles, protests, neighborhoods, etc. Division will create tension. Unfortunately, people will think that they must take a stand on one side or the other. This type of thought creates division, which leads us to the tension that can exist between cultural groups and impact cross-cultural living.

**Embarrassment:** How many tattoos have you seen with Chinese lettering? What if those Chinese letters don't mean what you thought? I bet that would be embarrassing! In all seriousness, moments of cultural appropriation can create a level of embarrassment when corrected or pointed out, especially when the correction is public.

**Aggression:** How easily can embarrassment or tension turn to aggression? How quickly can that aggression turn to violence? Discontent breeds anger and aggression. Cross-cultural living can expose prejudices and discriminatory thinking that is rooted in our upbringings. Imagine being confronted with a truth that conflicts with your belief system. That would make anyone angry and upset, which is how this inevitable dissonance can show.

**And consider this:** Cross-Cultural living, communication, and relationship-building can be difficult and often slow, especially in ministry. Angry parishioners, alienated students, confused parents, and a lack of the feeling of success from staff and team members can be common when cross-cultural ministry strategies and opportunities fail, sometimes miserably.

Do not become despondent and don't quit. Don't lose heart! Dissonance is a fact of Cross-Cultural living and interactions. These moments are inevitable and should often be expected. Will there be success along the way? Of course, there will be. However, when success doesn't seem forthcoming or imminent, your **Response to The Inevitables** will play a vital role. In GIA's next newsletter on Approaching Differences, your **Response** will be discussed in detail.