

**SLIDE 1**            **Title**

**SLIDE 2**            **CONTEXTUAL FREEDOM IN APPLICATION**

**SLIDE 3**            ***1 Corinthians 9:19-23***

Be all things to all men (v22) but be different (e.g. you are the light of the world) – contradiction?

How can we be all things to all men to the fullest extent without dimming the bright light of God which is shining out from us into the world?

**SLIDES 4 – 7**        **Questions**

How can we contextualise our values into different contexts without compromising our values?

How can we contextualise ourselves into another context without losing our distinctiveness as Christians?

How can we contextualise our delivery of the Gospel message without compromising the Gospel?

How can we plant churches in other cultures without bringing our own cultural assumptions about church planting?

**SLIDE 8**            **Contextualisation**

- Ourselves
- Our delivery of the message of the Gospel (not the gospel)
- Our Church Planting

**SLIDE 9**            **The story of Daniel, Azariah, Hananiah and Mishael**

Daniel ch 1-3

A story of cultural adaptation and spiritual resilience

- Destruction of Jerusalem
- Captives chosen – intelligent, noble families, good-looking
- Babylonian brainwashing – the rest of the captives will follow their example

## **SLIDE 10            Babylon University**

3 year degree course

This three year course involves intensive study of the Aramaic language and study of all kinds of Babylonian literature, covering the history, culture and religions of Babylon. All students accepted for this course will receive a full scholarship inclusive of all tuition fees, luxury accommodation and gourmet food from the King's palace.

Sound good? If you've just fled a warzone, it sounds like heaven!

Threw themselves into it with such enthusiasm that they finished top of the class.

Viva interview by King himself – employed them straight from university

## **SLIDE 11      Cultural adaptation**

- Acquisition of knowledge & skill in Babylonian language & literature
- Daniel wrote chapter 2-6 in Aramaic and the second part + ch1 in Hebrew - intended audiences were different. Ch 2-6 written for Babylonians to understand about God's power. Ch1 was written afterwards to give context to Israelite readers later.
- (Before exile they spoke Hebrew – Aramaic became the spoken language of the region because of the Babylonian empire)
- Appearance: Clothing (Turbans Dan 3:21).
- Names: When Daniel was writing his introduction intended for the Israelites in ch1, he used their Hebrew names, but when writing to the Aramaic audience, he used their Babylonian names so that they knew who he was talking about, even though their Babylonian names were derived from Babylonian gods. (cf. Yesua or Isa for Jesus in Arabic?)

## **SLIDE 12      Opportunities**

- Their acquisition of knowledge & skill in Babylonian language & literature combined with their Spiritual gifts (Wisdom, Prophecy & Dream interpretations) was such a powerful combination that they clearly surpassed everyone else in Babylon.
- Daniel ended up being Prime Minister and Azariah, Hananiah and Mishael were made governors.

- Many of you have great skills & knowledge you've acquired through your education and there is clearly a wealth of spiritual gifts in this room. If we take these things into another culture and then immerse ourselves into learning language and culture, it can be a really powerful combination that God can use to change cities and nations.
- If we're committed for the long term, it's good to look to see what training a qualifications are needed so we can make a bigger impact

### **SLIDE 13 Challenges**

- Initial challenge -Brought food from the King's table – non-kosher?, sacrificed to Babylonian God's? Lots of laws in OT about how to slaughter animals and then how to prepare them to eat – why? God wanted them to be different from others around them who sacrificed animals to false Gods. Decided that was a line that shouldn't be crossed to they requested to only eat vegetables and drink water. Turned down a daily 5 star buffet but God blessed them with more health and strength than all the others. God will bless us for any sacrifice we make for His sake in order to keep our integrity and faith and he'll give us wisdom to know how to do it.
- Ordered to worship statue of Nebucadnezzar (fiery furnace) –their faith could not go unnoticed.
- Ordered to stop praying (lions den) – great works, wonders & wisdom will produce jealousy & opposition

### **SLIDE 14 Resilience**

How did Azariah, Hananiah, Mishael & Daniel manage to stay strong in their faith in the face of such opposition and not only retain their own faith but also demonstrate such a powerful display of God's power that the King proclaimed.... 'Truly, your God is the God of Gods'? Later he pronounced that anyone who spoke out against God would be cut to pieces.

1. God was with them and His power was clearly at the centre of this whole story, but He is also with us in all His power. He can still do the same things today as He did then.
2. Cultural adaptation increases resilience: They had adapted so well to Babylonian culture that they had enough resilience to be able to resist the attacks on their faith – without cultural adaptation our resilience to opposition will fail and we will gradually burn out and give up.

3. Integration, not assimilation: The Babylonians saw that they were both like them and yet different at the same time – that’s what makes our message more powerful – when we devote ourselves to adapting to another culture whilst retaining our Christlikeness

#### **SLIDE 15 Contextualisation**

- Yourself
- not the Gospel message but our delivery of the message
- CP

#### **SLIDE 16 Ourselves - Cultural adaptation process**

1. Honeymoon – early stages. Everything is an adventure. Like when you go on holiday
2. Confusion – people are doing things differently but you don’t know why
3. Understanding – develop a learning attitude. Always ask questions in humility whenever you’re confused
4. Frustration – You know why things are different but you find it frustrating because you feel that your way is better
5. Acceptance & Humility – we need to learn to accept that no culture is better than another. Your way is not better than their way, it’s just different. We might think that we don’t have the problem of cultural superiority but sometimes we find ourselves laughing at the way that people do things in other cultures – laughing is better than frustration but it’s worth asking ourselves if there is an element of cultural pride in ourselves when we do this. It’s OK if you’re laughing at yourself.
6. Thriving, surviving or diving – long-term cultural adaptation is still very up and down but the overall trajectory can be positive, negative or neutral.
  - a. Each time we encounter something which makes us feel confused or frustrated, we need to go through the process of understanding and accepting but then choose whether we need to embrace culture or be different in order to be Christlike.
  - b. If we make the choice and feel happy about it, this will help to increase our resilience for future incidents
  - c. If we try to ignore it or feel resentment about the choice we make, then our resilience will take a hit
  - d. Positive outcomes will lead us onto a thriving trajectory
  - e. Negative outcome will slowly drag us down and we will burn out

- f. If there is a mixture of positive and negative, we might feel that we are *surviving* rather than *thriving* but that cannot continue in the long term.

### **SLIDE 17    Delivery of the message**

- a. Examples from NT
  - i. people of Athens said – why is this foreign man coming and telling us about foreign Gods? Paul found plaque saying ‘to the unknown God’
  - ii. Jesus used farming , building, money, family because that was relevant to their lives
- b. Examples from Middle East context
  - i. using Qur’an verses – not ‘aha, you see, it says this’ out of context but ‘I found this, can you tell me more about it? what does it mean?’
  - ii. using what we see around us e.g. wedding processions (parable of the 10 bridesmaids) – if there’s no petrol in your car or if your lights are broken, the cavalcade will leave without you
  - iii. Dreams: Millions of Muslims today are seeing amazing dreams of Jesus because God knows that they take them seriously in a way that Western people do not. In working with Muslims, we need to develop the gift of dream interpretation
- c. Our delivery of the gospel message is full of cultural assumptions. E.g. Guilt-based vs shame-based. We can’t just use 4 spiritual laws tracts or the Alpha course in every culture without adapting them.

### **SLIDE 18    What the Bible does not say about Church**

We don’t want to bring our culture with us -

1. not a building
2. not a meeting
3. not the same time & place each week
4. not worship → notices → sermon programme

### **SLIDE 19    What the Bible *does* say about church**

- Family

- Meets regularly (regularly ≠ weekly)
- Ordered ≠ programme
- Gifted leadership

Clear but do any of these *mean* different things in different cultures? (esp. family)

Need to learn not to read the Bible through the eyes of our culture - Hard to get these assumptions about what church looks like out of our heads (e.g. Pioneer missionaries in Jordan who I feel should understand this sometimes ask me 'What church do you go to?' assuming that there's a specific building or meeting that we go to every week because that's what Christians do, right?). We feel we need to model the style of church that we feel is appropriate rather than doing one thing but telling local people to do another.

## **SLIDE 20    Multicultural environments**

We might need more than one approach because of the multicultural environment around us. There is no one size that fits all when there are people groups around us from all over the world.  
(Also, different social classes have different cultures, different regions)

## **SLIDE 21    Cutting Edge Christianity**

Illustration which you might have heard before – I've extended it a bit

There were many people walking happily, unaware that they were walking towards a huge cliff. Meanwhile, there was a group of people who knew that the cliff was there standing in a huddle, singing happy songs about how they managed to avoid falling off the cliff. Most of them did nothing to warn those walking by about the danger of the cliff. Some tried to tell people who came close to them, but they did not want to stray too far from the safety of their huddle because they felt safe there. They invited the people to join their huddle but the people walking by mostly ignored them because they thought the huddle looked stupid.

Another group of people were standing near the cliff edge, warning people with great urgency and putting up big warning signs for them to see. They

were also cutting down the trees which were preventing people from seeing the cliff.

Unfortunately, some of these got too close to the edge and ended up falling off the cliff themselves while trying to save others!

## **SLIDE 22 Explanation**

The people walking towards the cliff are people who don't know about Jesus

The rest of the people in the story are Christians who are in three categories:

*Closet Christians* – happily saved but not wanting to leave their Christian comfort zone. No attempt to contextualise the message of salvation – people think it sounds stupid.

*Cutting-edge Christians* – trying their hardest to find ways of communicating the good news of the Gospel to people in a way that they can identify with. Trying to remove the obstacles that prevent them from seeing and hearing. E.g. seminar yesterday – stumbling blocks which need to be removed. We are here because we're wanting to be cutting-edge Christians but we can all go a lot further in doing this.

*Compromising Christians* – read 1 Corinthians 9: 24 – 27. We have assurance of salvation, so why is Paul talking about being disqualified?

- Perhaps you could go so far in being like a Muslim that you are modelling something which is indistinguishable from Islam or you end up being a Muslim yourself
- If you contextualise yourself beyond what is wise when reaching out to the weaker people in society, you could end up exposing yourself to too much temptation or even lead other Christians astray
- Instead of contextualising our delivery of the Gospel, we could go too far and end up changing the Gospel message itself
- These are all very serious mistakes we could make but most of us have probably got a long way to go in our contextualising before we are in danger of going too far. It's something to bear in mind. As long as we keep ourselves in the Discipline of studying the Word, we will know where are the lines that we shouldn't cross, like Daniel and friends.

**SLIDE 23    Questions to ask ourselves:**

1. Do I find myself criticising the way people do things in comparison with my home culture or laughing at them?
  - a. A sign that you might need to repent of cultural pride and ask God for more cultural humility
2. Would I describe myself as thriving, surviving or diving in the local culture?
3. How much have I adapted my delivery of the message to the cultures that I encounter?
4. How much of my picture of what church should look like is based on my own cultural assumptions, rather than based on the Bible?
5. Do I need to step further out of my comfort zone to see more people saved who are from different cultural backgrounds than me?