

# Lesson 18: Cross-Cultural Communication

## The Unchanging Gospel in Changing Cultures

I have become all things to all men,  
that I might by all means save some.

— 1 Corinthians 9:22b (NKJV)



# The Cultural Lens (Ethnocentrism)



## Culture

The shared system of values, beliefs, and practices that give a people group its identity.

## The Trap: Ethnocentrism

Judging other cultures by the standards of your own—assuming your cultural practices are simply “normal” or even biblical.

## The Rule

An African missionary must be as willing to examine their own cultural assumptions as they are to learn the new culture they are entering.

# The Communication Spectrum

**High-Context**

**Low-Context**

Relies on relationships, shared assumptions, and non-verbal signals.

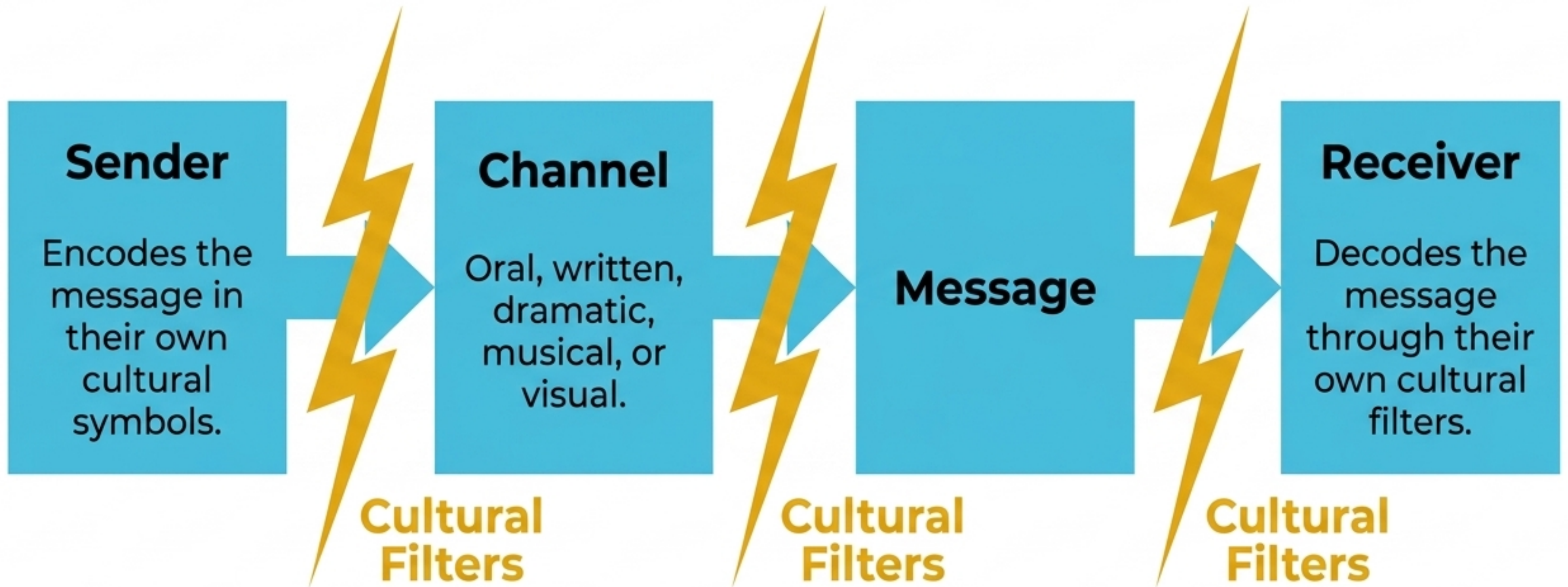
Examples: Most African, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures.

Relies on explicit, direct, and verbal information.

Examples: Most Western cultures.

**Takeaway:** Missionaries must adjust their style: learn to listen for what is not said, observe non-verbals, and build relationships before delivering information.

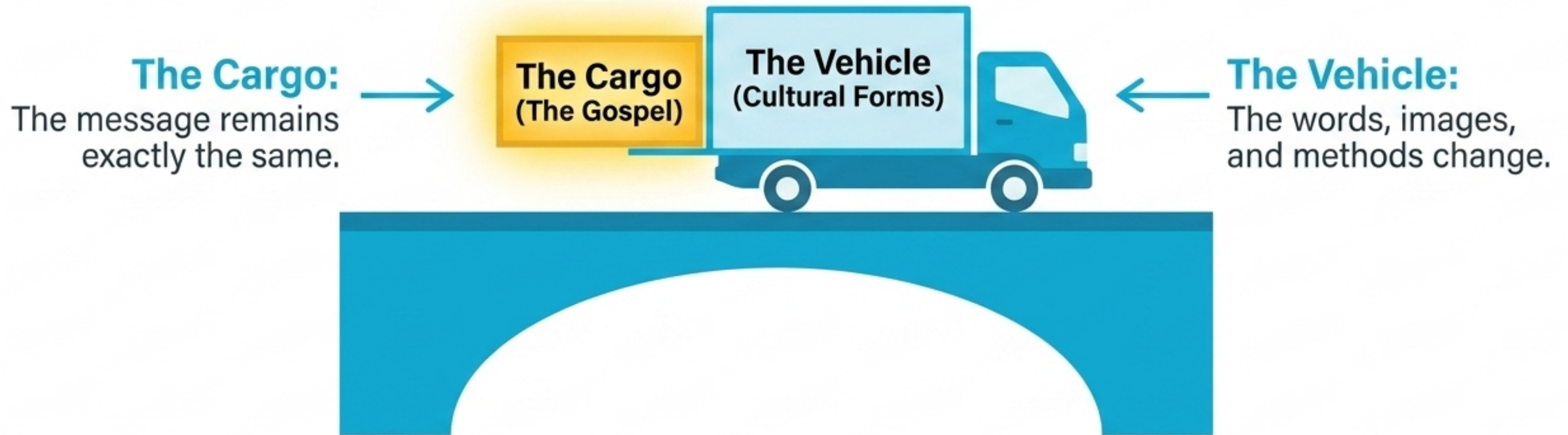
# Where Misunderstanding Occurs



**The Problem: The receiver's cultural filters can produce a meaning very different from what the sender intended.**

# The Solution: Dynamic Equivalence

Eugene Nida's principle of translation applied to gospel communication.



**Goal: Produce the same spiritual understanding and response in the hearer's own cultural framework.**

# Paul's Contextualization Matrix

Audience	Starting Point	The Message
Jews (Acts 13)	The Old Testament Scriptures	Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy.
Greek Philosophers (Athens, Acts 17)	The "Unknown God" & Greek Poets	Repent to the One True God.
People of Lystra (Acts 14)	Creation and Nature	God's Providence.

**Conclusion:** The message was always the same (Jesus Christ, crucified and risen), but the cultural entry point was always different.

# Practical Principles for the Field (1 & 2)



## 1. Learn the language.

Nothing communicates respect and commitment faster. Relying on an interpreter for decades chooses comfort over the gospel.



## 2. Understand communication styles.

Do they use direct logic or indirect stories? Jesus used stories, images, and questions for his Middle Eastern oral culture. Match their style.

# Practical Principles for the Field (3 & 4)



## 3. Observe before you speak.

Who are the leaders? How are decisions made? What are the community's greatest fears and hopes? Answers shape your gospel presentation.



## 4. Use indigenous arts and media.

Music, drama, storytelling, and dance reach the heart in ways formal preaching often cannot.

# The Ultimate Cross-Cultural Communicator

**The Pentecost Advantage:** The Holy Spirit broke the language barrier supernaturally at Pentecost. Gifts of the Spirit (tongues, prophecy) operate across cultural barriers.



*The Holy Spirit works through human preparation and sensitivity, not as a substitute for it.*

# Reflection Questions

- 1** What aspects of your own culture might you be confusing with the gospel?
- 2** How did Paul adapt his communication style for different cultural audiences?
- 3** What are the primary communication styles of the culture or people group you are targeting?
- 4** What indigenous art forms or communication channels could you use as vehicles for the gospel?

# Prayer Focus

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- **Ask the Holy Spirit to give you genuine cultural sensitivity and a deep love for the people you are called to reach.**
- **Pray for the gift of languages and perseverance if you are entering a new language group.**
- **Seek God's guidance to show you the most effective cultural forms for communicating the gospel in your specific context.**



## Identify your target culture's communication style this week.

**Assignment:** Interview someone from your target culture. Ask them:

- How are important community decisions communicated?
- How are stories and proverbs used?
- What are their community's primary fears and hopes?

**Outcome:** Use this information to begin designing a culturally appropriate gospel presentation.