

What I learned living cross culturally as a Christian

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January 8, 2015

I have lived cross-culturally almost my entire life. Born in Taiwan, I knew one language, one culture, and one worldview until I was introduced to the strange habits of the West at age 10. As my tongue adjusted to swirling out two diverse languages, I began to know life only by straddling both the worlds of the East and the West. I was raised cross-culturally, married cross-culturally, worked cross-culturally, and am raising my kids cross-culturally. Some days I feel fractured and fragmented, but mostly I am grateful to be privileged with an unique vantage point. Like I have been given two sets of spectacles in a world where most people wear one.

It has been complicated, to say the least, navigating my faith with my two sets of spectacles. When I was introduced to the Christian faith, many of the habits felt awkward: standing up and walking down the aisle to pledge my allegiance, praying out loud, and singing lots of songs about loving God, which felt totally irreverent coming from a culture where the word *love* was reserved only for romance. I thought all these habits felt strange, like clothes that didn't fit quite right, because I was a new believer, new to the ways of Jesus. But that was only part of the reason. As a child, I hadn't yet perfected the skill of switching my spectacles. My teachers who taught me how to be Christian wore one set of lenses and I imitated them wearing a different set. By the time I learned how to wear the western lenses, the habits of being Christian no longer felt weird, it was natural.

We all wear a set of spectacles. Everyone does. Those lenses dictate the way we view life. They determine the habits we make, what to eat, when to sleep, when to marry, and how to work. They assign value to our lives, determining what is meaningful: family, faith, honor, love.

If you are like me, you wear two sets of spectacles. Some people in the world wear three or more.

What I learned living cross-culturally as a Christian is that you can see Jesus wearing different spectacles. You do not have to abandon your spectacles, or switch it out for a new one in order to find Jesus. You do not have to forsake the cultural values you were assigned at birth, taught by your parents, passed down by your ancestors, in order to know Jesus. No, you find Jesus by looking through them.

What I learned living cross-culturally as a Christian is that some people have mistaken the good news to be changing out the spectacles for new ones. We have reduced the gospel to be an exchange of values and habits. What I have seen in both cultures I reside in is that there are good values and bad values in both; we are differently good and differently bad. We are quite equally flawed, not one culture can claim superiority to teach the other much. As long as we believe we are the Bearer of Right Values, we will be pronouncing ill-informed judgment on other cultures because we have not yet learned to see God through their spectacles.

What I learned living cross-culturally as a Christian is there is more than one right way to be Christian. When you see Jesus differently, your walk with Jesus is going to look different. When people with different spectacles worship Jesus in the same way, it is likely because the dominant cultural narrative have subsumed the minority, often in the name of unity. They say that God is the same here, there, and everywhere, therefore if you follow God, you will look like me. Uniformity is a passive form of aggression. Homogeneity is coercing everyone to wear one pair of cultural lenses. It is leaving some people stripped of their core values, robbing them of dignity, leaving them without sight to see their way forward. It is perpetuating violence in the name of a nonviolent Jesus.

No, the good news is not that there are new spectacles we get to force upon other people's faces. Jesus came wearing old spectacles, practicing Jewish laws, performing Jewish rituals.

What I learned living cross-culturally as a Christian is that so much strife, across races, cultures, and nations, happen as a result of people being unaware of their spectacles, believing their worldview is the only right way to live. They begin to see others who live differently as evil or secular. That their way of living is uncivilized, less enlightened, sub-human. They refuse to believe that others also see God, that their lenses are just as clear, their view just as bright. That God reveals Jesus to everyone regardless of what culture they were raised in, no matter what color their skin.

What I learned living cross-culturally as a Christian is that the good news is the possibility for every tribe and nation to participate in the life-giving, humanity-affirming way of Jesus. When he taught us to love our enemies, he is showing us the way to honor a different way of doing life, to rest assure us all that every person is made in God's image but situated to see God differently.

What I learned living cross-culturally as a Christian is that the gospel makes room for everyone, those who wear this set of lenses or that, and even, there is place for me, someone who wears both.

It is good news, indeed, that not any of us possess the singular image of God, that we only see a partial view, so that we spend our lives inviting more people to our table, to sit, eat, and tell us what they see.

Originally posted at [Brandt's blog](#)