



Links Players

A MISSION IN LIFE 5: CROSSING CULTURES

I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, NIV)

LIKE A WIDE-EYED TOUR ASPIRANT SETTING OFF to play the mini-tours wherever they might pay him money for playing golf, 21-year-old Hudson Taylor set sail from England in 1853 for the land where he would spend nearly all of the next 50 years of his life: China.

Most Westerners had scant information about life in this Far Eastern giant, but those who considered souls paramount knew the Chinese people—like all people everywhere—needed to hear the gospel of Jesus if they were to respond in faith and receive eternal life. “How will they hear unless someone preaches to them?” Paul had asked the Romans in his first century letter. Missionaries like Taylor took this as their calling and went to distant lands, sight unseen but with eyes of faith.

In heart and in message, Taylor was like nearly all missionaries of his day. But in another way, he was very different, maybe even radical. Almost immediately, he made a decision to dress like Chinese men and wear a pigtail as they did. If Taylor was an imperialist, as some missionaries proved to be, his only sovereign was Christ. And, like Paul, he was willing to adapt to the culture around him if it meant open doors for the gospel.

The question of adapting to culture for the sake of the gospel has never been a clean one. The Jews, even many who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, could not comprehend Paul’s forays outside the Jewish laws and customs. Other Chinese missionaries thought Taylor was giving up the protection of “the flag” by forsaking his English dress and manner. And, it can be argued, there are reasons still to be cautious. Those whose faith is not firmly established can find themselves back in the world’s grip by adhering too closely to the ways of that world, even if their original intentions are good.

So what are we to do? Should a golfer, for instance, lay big money on the line or camp out at the card tables after the round, all “for the sake of the gospel”? Each person will differ in the comfort of his conscience. But this is acceptable when each is truly led by the Holy Spirit. Here we see why prayer is critical to any evangelistic effort. We must ask for discernment in what we say and do, trust the Lord to guide our efforts, engage faithfully in gospel conversations, and expect salvation to come.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2019 Links Players International. An introductory video for this Bible study is available here: <https://youtu.be/RqtAqYjA0oQ>.

Opening questions What are some hallmarks of the golf culture? To what degree are you comfortable with these? In your conscience or comfort zone, are there lines you would never cross?

READING 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, 24-27; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

All things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)
What boundaries did Paul place on himself when it came to communicating the gospel? What do you think it would mean to “become like a golfer, to win the golfers”?

Disciplines and purpose (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)
While Paul was “free,” he also knew he was “bound” to Christ. How do these verses express the seriousness with which he took his calling? Where do you find the balance between adapting to the culture and holding firmly to the righteousness of Christ?

God as our witness (1 Corinthians 4)
Who is the ultimate judge of what we do? Why is it important to make our conscience and our discernment regular subject matter in our prayers? How does the close of this passage provide a check and balance for us as we reach into our culture for the gospel?
