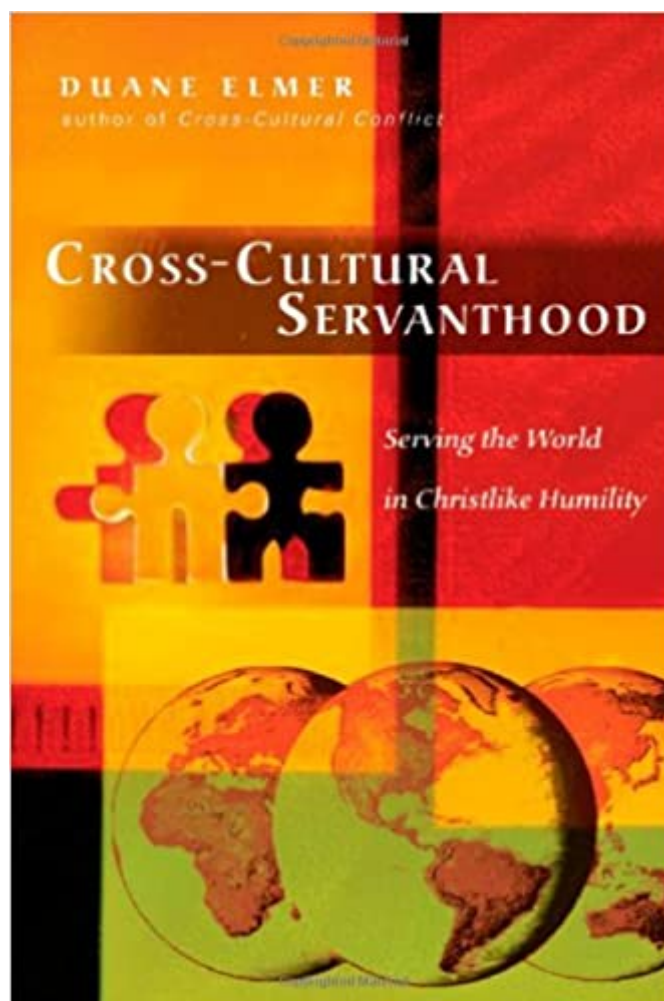


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Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving The World In Christlike Humility



Synopsis

Duane Elmer asked people around the world how they felt about Western missionaries. The response? "Missionaries could be more effective if they did not think they were better than us." The last thing we want to do in cross-cultural ministry is to offend people in other cultures. Unfortunately, all too often and even though we don't mean it, our actions communicate superiority, paternalism, imperialism and arrogance. Our best intentions become unintentional insults. How can we minister in ways that are received as true Christlike service? Cross-cultural specialist Duane Elmer gives Christians practical advice for serving other cultures with sensitivity and humility. With careful biblical exposition and keen cross-cultural awareness, he shows how our actions and attitudes often contradict and offend the local culture. He offers principles and guidance for avoiding misunderstandings and building relationships in ways that honor others. Here is culturally-savvy insight into how we can follow Jesus' steps to become global servants. Whether you're going on your first short-term mission trip or ministering overseas for extended periods, this useful guide is essential reading for anyone who wants to serve effectively in international settings with grace and sensitivity.

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Customer Reviews

"The insights of this book will help us develop shared and mutually understood servanthood within our ministry team to more meaningfully serve the community around us." (David H. Greenlee, *Mission Studies*, 2009) An engaging and easily read work, full of sage advice and principles for

cross-cultural sensitivity. Those preparing to serve in ministry or mission work, either short or long-term, will find this book helpful. (Haddington House Journal, 2007) A clear, well-written, and eminently practical book for training people going into missions at all educational levels. With vivid examples and an easy to follow format, Elmer lays out what it means to live and work as a servant of Christ in a different cultural context. . . . Elmer's solid grounding in scripture and frequent use of personal experience, coupled with his engaging writing style, leave the reader wanting more. . . . This book is ideal for missionary training and beginning-level missiology classes. It should spark some lively discussions and challenge many of our commonly held views of doing ministry cross-culturally. (Robert Danielson, *Missiology* 35/1, January 2007) "Duane Elmer has created a gem! This latest of his creations reminds us that Duane writes stories rather than documents. The reader will discover in *Cross-Cultural Servanthood* a delightful encounter with people, places and situations. The examples and reflections that come through these pages shine with the warmth and reality of letters from a close friend. But this is no ordinary friend--Dr. Elmer sheds light on cultural mysteries. His experiences as a missionary, teacher, consultant, school administrator and quite surely a researcher who 'gets to the bottom' of the curious events that pepper these stories reveal a depth of understanding that makes this book shine. The choice of servanthood reveals the fundamental difference in Dr. Elmer's understanding of the cross-cultural situation. Others have written of the information-flow task from one culture toward another, the management dimensions of intercultural affairs and the quest for excellence in intercultural experiences. Note that each of these assumes that the intercultural encounter calls for a series of top-down skills moving from foreignness toward control. Not Duane Elmer. Choosing Christian styles and biblical sources, he develops applications of principles that ring true, reflecting the warmth and wholeness of sound interpersonal affiliation. This is the strong stuff that overcomes the differences, tensions and conflicts that otherwise will plague the intercultural environment. The key is adopting the posture, manner and style of a loyal servant." (Ted Ward, Professor Emeritus of Education and Intercultural Studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Michigan State University) "Elmer provides a fresh and provocative look at learning and ministering cross-culturally through the scriptural mandate to be servants of the master engaged in kingdom work. Noting that the practice of servanthood must vary in every culture, the book provides powerful and practical insights into how to become an effective servant in another culture. This is an excellent resource for practical mission training, and for those already in ministry, the book enables willing servants to sharpen their emotional and behavioral practices to more appropriate contextualized servanthood." (Sherwood Lingenfelter, Provost, Senior Vice President and Professor of Anthropology, Fuller Theological Seminary, and

coauthor of *Ministering Cross-Culturally*) "As the Son of God entered first-century Jewish culture and discerned and used its expressions of servanthood--a basin and a towel--to communicate the nature of his Heavenly Father, Duane Elmer draws helpfully from Scripture and his broad experience to help us enter another culture today and discern and use its expressions of servanthood to communicate the nature of our Heavenly Father as well." (J. Dudley Woodberry, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Islamic Studies, School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary) "My library is filled with books, tapes and materials all on servanthood in which I see and hear the oft-repeated phrase 'servant-leader.' But how do we live as servants or 'slaves' in a cross-cultural context? Duane Elmer has provided a much-needed cultural guide for any of us involved in intercultural ministry. His writing gives us a biblical foundation along with living anecdotes from across the world in real-life situations. Duane helps us understand the lifelong process and guides us through the matrix of personality, cultural and generational differences. I believe his comments on the mantra 'servant-leader' were especially needed." (John H. Orme, Executive Director, IFMA) "Cross-Cultural Servanthood is needed more today than ever in the history of missions. In today's mission context, millions of short-term missionaries travel cross-culturally every year. Tens of thousands of non-Western missionaries serve in almost every country of the world. Many churches from the West are forming partnerships with churches from other countries. In all these scenarios, there is a tendency toward an attitude of superiority. The danger of ethnocentric arrogance is exploding. Dr. Elmer provides crucial principles of servanthood illustrated with timely examples. Short- and long-term missionaries from the West as well as the non-Western world need to read and practice the principles of this book. God's glory in the nations is at stake!" (James E. Plueddemann, former International Director of SIM, and professor of intercultural studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) "Cross-Cultural Servanthood offers short-termers and career missionaries a wise and practical guide on how to serve God and others. Duane Elmer is a master at cross-cultural relationships and nearly every page of the book shows it. It's a must-read for SIS staff and volunteers. The relationship between task effectiveness and relational effectiveness is a crucial issue for missionaries and Christian workers of all kinds. Duane Elmer has pinpointed the essential linchpin--servanthood. He ably shows how Jesus' example of servanthood enables one to honor others while honoring God." (Michele Rickett, founder and president, Sisters In Service, and coauthor, *Daughters of Hope*) "With effective illustrations and ready-to-implement practical applications, Duane Elmer reminds us that Jesus-style servanthood must be biblically understood and culturally applied--in ways that the recipients interpret as servanthood. This book should be required reading for every Christian seeking to serve

cross-culturally, whether in a long-term or short-term capacity." (Paul Borthwick, author of *How to Be a World-Class Christian and A Mind for Missions*)"Elmer's wisdom in preparing people for cross-cultural service comes across clearly throughout this wonderful book. His humbly told stories interwoven with carefully explained truths invited me to revisit things I wish I had done differently in my cross-cultural work and to reflect on the areas in which God still has work to do in my life. Simply put, this marvelous book opens significant doors to more effective cross-cultural service. If all missionaries lived out the lessons Elmer presents, the effect on missionary service and outreach--not to mention the church--would be incalculable." (Scott Moreau, department chair and professor of intercultural studies, Wheaton College, and coauthor of *Introducing World Missions*)"Dr. Duane Elmer is my good friend and mentor, and I have learned a lot from him: not only from his teachings and writings but also from our relationship. He lives every day what he believes. I highly recommend his book *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* to anyone who understands the importance of learning from Christ's example and principles; to those who live in the twenty-first century in the global village; to those who serve or desire to serve successfully among people from different ethnic, national or language groups; among people from different countries and cultures. I especially recommend this book to those who are interested in praying more specifically for missionaries; to those who train missionaries in universities or seminaries, colleges and institutions; and especially to everyone in Europe, where we face so many challenges. After his books *Cross-Cultural Conflict*, *Cross-Cultural Connections* and *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century*, this book, in my opinion, is going to be God's instrument for blessing many people and a great help for people from every nation, every language and in every position. May God bless the book and its author!" (Nikolay Nedelchev, President, European Evangelical Alliance, and Executive Director, Bulgarian Evangelical Theological Institute)"As Christians we all strongly affirm servant leadership, and leave it at that. Duane Elmer leads us on a pilgrimage on what this means in our everyday lives. This is not another book of quick and easy formulas to be applied in specific situations. It is a call to a new way of relating to one another and to those around us. It is not only for Christian ministers and missionaries, but for all of us as parents, teachers and colleagues. The danger is that if we read this carefully and embody its deep insights, it might make servanthood a part of our lives as Christians in this world." (Paul G. Hiebert, Distinguished Professor of Mission and Anthropology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and author of *Incarnational Ministry*)

Duane H. Elmer (Ph.D., Michigan State U.) is director of the Ph.D. program in educational studies

and is the G. W. Aldeen Chair of International Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. In addition to traveling and teaching in over 75 countries, he has provided cross-cultural training to Fortune 500 companies, relief and development agencies, mission organizations, churches and educational institutions. He has also conducted peace and reconciliation efforts in several countries. Recently, he led faculty development workshops at over 25 European and Middle Eastern schools on the theme of Teaching for Transformation. He has taught at Durban Bible College (Durban, South Africa), Michigan State University and Wheaton College and Graduate School. His articles have been published in journals such as Moody Monthly, Evangelical Missions Quarterly, Christian Education Journal, Discernment, and Christianity Today. His books include *An Analysis of Hebrews: A Programmed Instruction, Building Relationships, With an Eye on the Future: Church and Development in the Twenty-First Century, Cross-Cultural Conflict and Cross-Cultural Connections*.

In *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, Duane Elmer tells the parable of a monkey who sees a fish swimming against the current of a stream (pp. 27-28). Assuming the fish is struggling to survive, the monkey plucks the fish out of the stream and places it on dry ground. At first, the fish flops around--excited to have been saved, the monkey thinks. When the fish stops moving, the monkey feels satisfied, believing the fish is resting contentedly. Of course, the fish is dead. In cross-cultural exchanges, we intend to serve others, but our efforts may be perceived as exercises of arrogant power. The remedy is Christlike humility. "Humility is mandated," Elmer writes, "but"--and this exception is crucial--"its expression is culturally defined" (p. 33). We must both intend to be humble, in other words, and act in ways that people from other cultures perceive as humble. How do we do this? *Cross-Cultural Servanthood* examines "the process of becoming a cross-cultural servant" (p. 19). Elmer outlines this process with six steps: 1. Openness: "the ability to welcome people into your presence and make them feel safe" (p. 39, emphasis in original). 2. Acceptance: "the ability to communicate value, worth and esteem to another person" (p. 58). 3. Trust: "the ability to build confidence in a relationship so that both parties believe the other will not intentionally hurt them but will act in their best interest" (p. 77). 4. Learning: "the ability to glean relevant information about, from and with other people" (p. 93). 5. Understanding: "the ability to see patterns of behavior and values that reveal the integrity of a people" (p. 125). 6. Serving: "the ability to relate to people in such a way that their dignity as human beings is affirmed and they are more empowered to live God-glorifying lives" (p. 146). Elmer is G. W. Aldeen Professor of International Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. His book is clear and simply written, mixing theological and sociological

analysis in balanced measure, and using illustrations from his life and career, as well as from the lives and careers of others. I highly recommend this book to Christian missionaries, pastors, and laypeople who work in cross-cultural or multi-cultural settings. It will help them understand how to better communicate the gospel in word and deed. It will also help them examine their own motives to make sure they are serving rather than patronizing others.

While this isn't the only book to address cross-cultural and leadership issues in American Christianity, it should be "required reading" for any contemporary Christian who is serious about serving and about connecting with others in an era of multi-ethnic diversity. This would apply to any denomination within Christianity and uses examples in the New Testament about Jesus' example of being a servant, and how he led with humility. It also reveals aspects of our culture that are incompatible with other cultures (and are perhaps incompatible with Biblical standards). This was required reading for a Master's Degree course on Ministry Leadership and Organizational Development. A great read with insightful (and sometimes humorous) examples.

I read this book in preparation for a trip to Myanmar in December. It provides excellent perspective on how to approach missionary work--both long and short term--in a manner that respects the dignity, assets, and culture of the host community. Using research and stories of personal experience, the author humbly and gently asks us to shift our perspective of poverty, to develop methods of helping that involve the local people, and to work alongside them as equals to find and implement solutions. Although it is written with foreign development work in mind, I found myself wishing I could buy a copy for every political candidate this election year. The ideas and methods espoused in this book are proving themselves in the development field, but would be just as beneficial in approaching problems in our own country.

Good resource for cross cultural missionaries. Love the lessons learned here though I do have some questions on chapter 11 on leadership

This book begins with a brief vignette from the author's life that shows the importance of cultural sensitivity. He then goes on in the book using a very readable style to walk the reader through the many facets of work or ministry in a cross-cultural experience. It is well illustrated with examples for the author's life and the lives of others. It is profoundly simple but people shouldn't be fooled by that.

It places before those who are considering cross-cultural events such as mission trips to inner-city venues, working among Native Americans, or going to another part of the world the importance of self understanding and what it means to learn from folks in other cultures. This book is also a valuable tool for those who may be considering working for a company in the midst of a different culture. The principles in this book for understanding living and working in a different culture would be valuable in helping them avoid isolating themselves out or being paralyzed by culture shock. Many people I know feel they have in their hearts and minds the truth about what cross-cultural servanthood is all about only in that attitude to betray some of the important principles clearly described in this book. Elmer has made a very valuable simple tool for all those involved in or who will be involved in cross-cultural ministry or work.

In so many ways I found this book disappointing, as I read I was blown away and challenged about how I view people from other cultures and my own. The reason I was disappointed is that I was in many ways forced to read this book due to preparing for cross cultural ministry. When this is a book that all pastors and church members need to read not just those who are going to work in another culture, to think that I would have missed out on the blessing of this book if not for going overseas.

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