Cross-Cultural Relationships

**Phase One:
Who are You?**

Barrier:
Are you one of "them"?

Mutual satisfaction, acceptance, and trust

Barrier:
Are you enough like me?

**Phase Two:
Let's Be Friends!**

Barrier:
Are we willing to change for each other?

Emotional openness and appropriate ways to resolve conflict

Barrier:
Do you (or I) want to work towards a good (or more intimate) friendship?

**Phase Three:
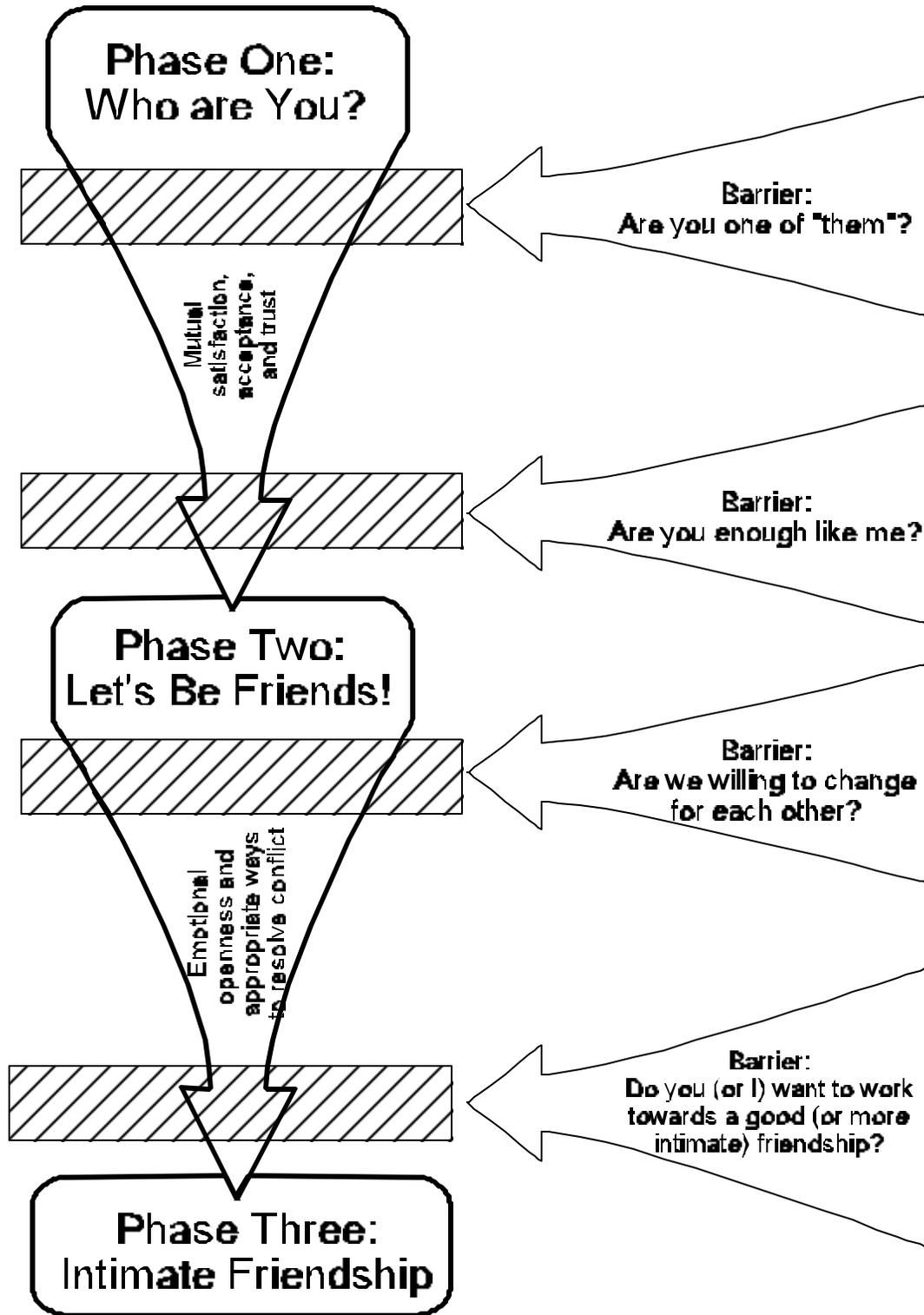Intimate Friendship**

Phase One: Initial Uncertainty

1. The approach-avoidance factor in intercultural relationships:

   a. J. H. Turner suggests seven basic needs shared by humans that motivate us to interact with others (from Gudykunst and Kim, Communicating with Strangers, p. 190):

      i. Our need for a sense of security as a human being
      ii. Our need for a sense of trust (this need involves issues of predictability; "I trust you will behave as I think you will")
      iii. Our need for a sense of group inclusion
      iv. Our need to avoid diffuse anxiety
      v. Our need for a sense of a common shared world
      vi. Our need for symbolic or material gratification
      vii. Our need to sustain our self-conception.

      Question: How do these proposed needs relate to the biblical perspective?

   b. Anxiety in developing relationships

      Though friendships are the means by which many of the above needs are met, we all share the experience of encountering anxiety when we enter into new relationships. One early goal of any relationship is to reduce that anxiety through developing shared communication patterns with the other. While this is moderately important when communicating with those of our own culture, it becomes very important in intercultural communication.

   Combining our need to develop relationships as foundational to our self-conception with our need to avoid uncertainty yields an approach-avoidance motivation. Thus, while we want to develop relationships with others in the intercultural setting, doing this results in greater uncertainty and anxiety for us, and we may tend to avoid them as a result.

2. In this phase of the relationship, we tend to base all of our judgments on our respective cultural maps. Since we have no personal history of relating to the potential friend, we base initial impressions on what we perceive to be his/her culture, ethnic identity, etc.

3. How do we reduce uncertainty, especially in the intercultural setting?

   Every culture have established its own general procedures for reducing uncertainty and anxiety in the process of friendship/relational development. That strategy is built on the culture's values and understanding of humanity.

   Consider, for example, what might be suggested as strategies for reducing uncertainty in cultures in Hofstede's work related values taxonomy:

Power Distance	Large	Small
	Determine your 'power relation' to the other Know the other's title, and use it appropriately.	Give the other's ideas equal weight to your own. Respect the other's freedom to make their own decisions.
Uncertainty Avoidance	High	Low
	Move to new levels in the relationship only when you are sure of your footing. A general schedule for the relationship is acceptable. Prepare to work hard at the relationship. Avoid disagreement.	Take risks in the relationship. Avoid rigid scheduling--be spontaneous. Allow disagreements as a source of creative energy in the relationship.
Individualism/ Collectivism	Individualist	Collectivist
	Communicate frequently; ask questions. Allow necessary time to develop the relationship. Mutual attraction is important. Give every person time for privacy. Allow for individual opinions.	Use leading statements rather than direct questions. Discover the background (including family). Sharing responsibility for decisions, actions, etc. with the friend is important. Privacy is not important; shared harmony is.
Masculine/ Feminine	Feminine	Masculine
	Develop warmth and intimacy based on mutual respect. Overt competition should be avoided. Personal fulfillment is important in the relationship. Freedom to share on personal matters is important.	Make sure the other is acceptable for your "place" in society before establishing a friendship. Some healthy competition is good for the relationship. Though we have friends, we should not completely depend on them.

4. To move from this phase to the next (friendly relations), you need to experience mutual satisfaction, acceptance, and basic trust. This can be accomplished through appropriate relational development strategies, which will vary from one intercultural setting to another.

Phase Two: Friendly Relations

1. During this phase, you will be able to co-exist at a certain level of comfort with the other person. However, if you desire to move on to a friendship, you must move beyond this. While you will still place a major reliance on cultural maps, you now have a history of relating in which you have discovered through individual observations who the other person is. As a result, your reliance on cultural maps lessens.

2. In order to move into a genuine friendship, you must continue the mutual satisfaction, acceptance, and trust built in the first phase of the relationship. In addition, you must now experience emotional sharing/openness and appropriate conflict resolution strategies.

3. One barrier to reaching the third phase of friendship is that of similarity. The more you are like someone, the less anxiety and uncertainty you will experience in developing an intimate relationship. Dodd has captured a means of explaining this through proposing the *homophily* principle (Dynamics, pp. 229-39; see also Gudykunst and Kim, Communicating with

Strangers, pp. 197-99), which is the idea that we tend to share information with similar persons.

As could be expected, the more alike we are, the more readily information is received and the more frequently persuasion occurs. One proposed way to measure the amount of homophily is the Scale of Perceived Homophily (adapted from Dodd, Dynamics, p. 238; lower scores indicate similarity, higher dissimilarity):

Attitude Dimension		
Thinks like me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Does not think like me
Behaves like me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Does not behave like me
Similar to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Different from me
Like me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Unlike me
Background Dimension		
From social class similar to mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	From social class different from mine
Economic situation like mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Economic situation different from mine
Status like mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Status different from mine
Background similar to mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Background different from mine
Value Dimension		
Morals like mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Morals unlike mine
Sexual attitudes like mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Sexual attitudes unlike mine
Shares my values	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Doesn't share my values
Treats people as I do	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Doesn't treat people as I do
Appearance Dimension		
Looks similar to me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Looks different from me
Same size that I am	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Different size than I am
Appearance like mine	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Appearance unlike mine
Resembles me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Doesn't resemble me

Question: Dodd does not specifically deal with the bond that all Christians have, namely being in Christ. How does this enhance the possibility of significant friendships among cross-cultural Christians?

4. Another significant barrier is that of mutual accommodation.

5. A final barrier that may be mentioned is that of a conscious movement towards intimacy.

Phase Three: Intimacy/Friendship

1. Cultures define intimacy differently. It might be helpful for us to note some characteristics of

American friendships (from Stewart and Bennett, <u>American Cultural Patterns</u>, pp. 100-3):

a. People choose their friends based on spontaneity, mutual attraction, and warm personal feelings. In contrast, Japanese friendship patterns involve obligation, duty, and ritualized interaction.

b. Relations with friends are kept separate from work or social obligations.

c. Friendships are formed in shared activities--doing things together. Our friendships form around the activities: we may have church friends, school friends, bowling friends, party friends, etc. Generally, keeping things compartmentalized allows for a large number of friendships, none of which is necessarily intimate (especially for American men).

2. Developing intimate friendships (or discipleship): Building **trust** (from Mayers, <u>Christianity Confronts Culture</u>, pp. 5-73):

a. The *prior question of trust* (PQT) is the question asked before all other questions:

> # Is what I am doing, thinking or saying building or undermining trust?

b. *Developing the trust bond* calls attention to levels and stages of trust involvement, monitoring the relationship, and the transfer of trust.

c. The *acceptance of self* permits the person to accept himself as he is at any given moment, to understand his own strengths and weaknesses, and to be willing to live with them. This then prepares him to accept others, including God.

d. The *acceptance of the other* is the application of self-acceptance to others so that one can interact and accept them as fully responsible members of their own life-way.

e. *Mutual respect* involves balanced reciprocity in interpersonal relations, leaving both persons valid and intact. The following should be used as a check list to remind us of practices that confirm mutual respect (from pp. 67-8):

    i. Acceptance of the limitation of living standards of each culture. As one gains knowledge of the limits of each living standard, one increasingly accepts positive aspects of each.

    ii. Lack of criticism of negative aspects of each culture. Differences are not necessarily inferior. It is wise to examine the reasons why differences exist and to be sensitive to them.

    iii. Ability to make comparisons between the cultures without accompanying negative implications. This is expressed in positive appreciation of the other

culture along with one's own.

iv. Real contentment of lifestyle is experienced by each one residing there. This does not mean abandoning oneself or one's personality. One's security and satisfaction there is genuine.

v. Easy fluency with the language and idiom of each culture. Language is a living means of communication and takes time to master--especially the humor expressed in language.

vi. Control of righteous indignation involving practices considered wrong, until change comes about via converted members of the culture.

vii. Expression of humility within the context of either culture one is involved with, not flaunting one's own experience within the crosscultural setting.

viii. Ability to distinguish between personal tastes, historic backgrounds, and moral issues (absolutes).

ix. Understanding and practicing the ethical code within the other culture without strain and to the degree one's own conscience permits. When one's conscience does not permit, the ability to express this in ways that highlight the issue but do not alienate the person.

x. Understanding the basic means of communication in each culture and handling this effectively, irrespective of age, sex, status, etc.