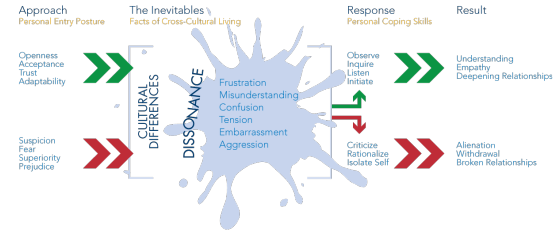




# Responding to Dissonance

## Introducing the Approaching Differences Diagram (Part 2)

By Andy Kim



**Summary:** This Discipleship Cycle will introduce you to the Approaching Differences diagram, a tool that can help us love and work well across cultural differences. The focus of this cycle is on the right side of the diagram – healthy responses to dissonance – and can be used in the midst of ministry involving interacting with different people (New student outreach, retreat/conference, missions trip, urban plunge, etc).

**Total Time:** 40 minutes

### Hear the Word

Time: 15 minutes

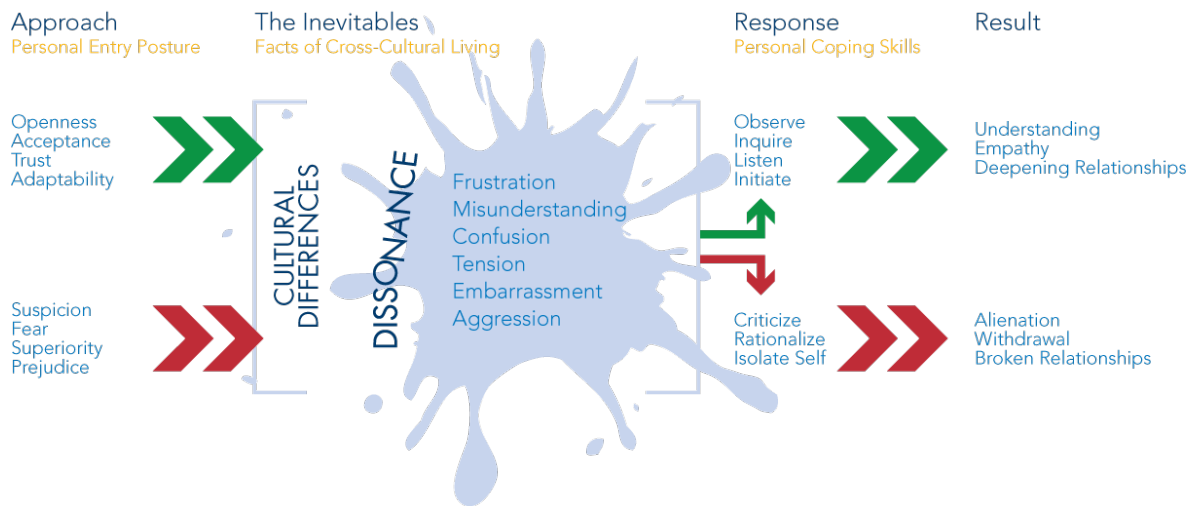
- As a whole group, read **Philippians 2:1-11** out loud. In verses 1-4, Paul exhorts the Philippians to make his joy complete by responding to Christ in four ways. In pairs, pick one of these responses below and describe what would it look like to apply it to loving and working well across different cultures. Then share as a whole group.

| Response to Christ  | What could this look like in loving and working well across different cultures? |
|---|---|
| Being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind (v. 2). |   |
| Doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit (v. 3).                 |   |
| In humility, valuing others above ourselves (v. 3).                           |   |
| Not looking to our own interests, but to the interests of others (v. 4).      |   |

- As a group, read the following introduction aloud:

## Staying on the Green Line

In cross-cultural situations, equally important to cultivating a healthy entry posture is learning healthy responses when we face cultural dissonance. In other words, staying on the green line!



This diagram is available as a bookmark through the InterVarsity Store at [tiny.cc/bkrmk](http://tiny.cc/bkrmk)

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Think of the last time you encountered a cultural difference that forced you out of our comfort zone. Perhaps it was a new food, a team that had a different working style, a friend who had a different sense of time and timeliness.

Whenever we encounter cultural differences, we have a choice between two types of responses. Look at the right side of the diagram under the column, "personal coping skills."

When confronted with dissonance, it is tempting to respond with red line responses: criticism, rationalization, and isolation. And before we know it, we've red-lined our way into alienation, withdrawal, and broken relationships. But if we respond to dissonance with the green line, we are more likely to end up with deeper understanding, empathy and relationships.

To be sure, it really helps to have healthy, green-line entry postures **before** we hit cross

cultural dissonance, but regardless, we still can choose to green-line. But it won't be easy. We'll need to be honest with ourselves, resist the temptation to red-line and intentionally green-line for the sake of others. In other words, we'll need to have the same love and same mindset as Christ, doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but humbly valuing others above ourselves.

## Healthy Responses Worksheet\*

Review the following responses and self-evaluate yourself based on your tendency to respond to cross cultural dissonance in this manner: (1) Very often (2) Often (3) Sometimes (4) Rarely (5) Never

| Red Line Response | What it Looks Like   | Tendency (1-5) |
|-------------------|--|----------------|
| Criticism         | Overly focusing on the perceived faults or mistakes of other people and other cultures. I make myself feel better and deal with dissonance by telling myself (and others who agree with me) how bad and inferior others are. "It's all their fault." |                |
| Rationalize       | Attempting to justify or logically explain dissonance in a way that puts the blame on others and absolve myself from responsibility. In other words, making excuses to get me off the hook. "They are the problem, not me."                          |                |
| Isolation         | Responding to dissonance by withdrawing physically, socially or emotionally. I still will get my work done but will erect a wall to prevent myself from engaging with a group or culture. "I just can't deal with <i>these</i> people anymore."      |                |

| Green Line Response | What it Looks Like  | Tendency (1-5) |
|---------------------|---|----------------|
| Observe             | When you experience dissonance, pay close attention to what is happening. Don't take details for granted. Look for the things that matter to you, but also challenge yourself to pay attention to new or different kinds of things. Remember, details you don't consider important now may be important clues that will help you better understand later. |                |
| Inquire             | If something doesn't make sense to you, respond by asking questions before coming to conclusions. Find a cultural guide or resource to help you better understand the situation or relationship. Stay curious and engaged.  |                |
| Listen              | Engage yourself deeply in conversation and relationships. Pay attention to what others are saying (and not saying), their body language and non-verbal cues. Resist the urge to make judgments, interrupt or inject your opinion. Ask questions to learn more and listen better.  |                |
| Initiate            | Proactively responding to dissonance, rather than becoming passive or disengaged. Resisting the temptation to check out and instead respond by observing, inquiring and listening.  |                |

## ▶ Respond Actively

Time: 15 minutes

- **REFLECT:** Think about your last 2-3 cross-cultural encounters. When did you respond with red line responses? When did you respond with green line responses? If none come to mind, what are red line you struggle with? What are green line response you'd like to grow in?
- **SHARE:** In pairs, share an experience of red-lining in the past and how they could have green-lined.
- **PRAYER:** Stay in your pairs and pray for each other, that Christ's love would overflow into genuine green-line responses.

### Vulnerability

The purpose of this activity isn't to shame us, but rather, to be honest with ourselves so we can grow in self-awareness and loving others. Be sure to encourage one another!

## 🗨️ Debrief and Interpret

Time: 10 minutes

Depending on the size of your group and how much time you have, pick one or two questions to debrief this experience, either in pairs or in a large group.

1. What are you learning about yourself, your community, and God with regard to crossing cultures?
2. How can the Approaching Differences Diagram can help you and your community live out Philippians 2:1-11? How can you apply green-line responses to other areas of your community besides worship?
3. Which of the green line responses do you want to specifically practice? Which of the red line responses do you want to watch out for?

## References

- Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting in Around the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
- Patty Lane, *A Beginner's Guide to Crossing Cultures: Making Friends in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

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*\* Using the Approaching Differences Diagram doesn't mean that we can **never** criticize or that we should never isolate ourselves. There are situations where it may be healthy, safe or wise to create space between ourselves and others, and avoid jumping into the dissonance of cross cultural encounters. There may also be situations where it may be appropriate to raise legitimate criticism about a situation, group or person. However, the Diagram does encourage us not to make red line responses our primary response to cultural dissonance, especially when green line responses could lead to deeper understanding, empathy and relationships. If our first response to cultural dissonance is to red line, we may be misunderstanding and too quickly judging others, and miss out on ways to grow.*