



# Learning from a Parable (Part 2)

Greg H. Parsons



*"Part 2" continues (from last issue) a reprint of a parable that first appeared in the March-April 1979 Mission Frontiers. The parable recounts the experience of Osaku, a Shinto missionary to the U.S. following the second World War.*

My father told me that in order to penetrate their culture we'd have to develop a definite strategy. I thought it would merely be a matter of gathering together some Shinto literature, hopping a boat, landing in New York, and taking the country by storm. My father said that would be impossible. "Their culture," he told me, "is too diverse. Why, in New York City alone there's probably 30 or more people groups. There are Spanish, Blacks, Italians, Polish, Greeks, and a score of others, most of which even have several sub-groups within themselves. Even if you go into smaller areas you have dozens of types of people."

"Why, father," said Osaku, "that's just like it is in Japan, and even India and China with their thousands of different sub-groups. It's easy to think of those Americans as being all alike, but actually they are a mixture of people with different customs and beliefs that just happen to live within the same continental borders. And if there is that much cultural diversity there in a country with only 220 million people but yet full of technological communication, just think of the problems in a place like China, with 1 billion people and over 2000 different sub-groups. The Hindus with over 500 million adherents and the vast number of Muslims, over 700 million, all necessitate an enormous amount of work on strategies and culture learning."

"Father, how will we even begin to penetrate the United States with our religion?"

"Osaku, it will take an enormous interest among the Japanese believers to generate the proper planning and research necessary for this task. Because most of us have never visited America, we find it hard to relate to the problems of such a complex people. Perhaps if you were able, somehow, to communicate your burden to many others, something could be done. Otherwise, all those people will be lost forever. It's a shame more of us don't have your vision or enthusiasm. I guess we'll just have to continue with our burden and ask the gods to help those Americans in their time and way. But what we can do now, Osaku, is believe that as we inform others, many more will respond to the needs of those 'hidden peoples'."

The moral of the story is that we can rush into the world to try and reach people with the right message but the wrong methods. Understanding cultural differences is crucial.

How might you apply these "reverse" lessons in your own life or church? Can you see similarities with our evangelical mission mobilization efforts? How might this type of parable influence our evangelism? Or our short-term programs? We must work at balance between our enthusiasm and global realities. 🌐



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