

Opposing Cultural Values: Trust in the individual

Wow! Now here's an important topic, trust! Trust is more valuable than gold, slower growing than a forest, and yet more fragile than glass. It's a value that's personal, one that can't be bought; we're not born with it, yet it's essential for us as Christians if we want to have an effective ministry. Trust can only be earned, and it isn't given to you automatically in most cross-cultural settings, but it may be assigned based on the experience they've had with it from others who've come before you. Trust may be withheld completely in many cases based on that culture's own worldview regarding individual trust.

- ❖ Distrust of the individual, demonstrated by excessive oversight and control, typifies the society that resists development.
- ❖ Societies that trust individuals are favorable to development.

Trust isn't given out much in Sub-Saharan Africa and definitely not freely; in fact, distrust of other people is the norm. Why is that? Well, it's primarily because one of the core values in African society is getting ahead as an individual, gaining power and influence. Power, unlike freedom, isn't easily shared.

Here's a story of a situation in which I was mistrusted by a merchant. I'd purchased things from him several times before, but we didn't really have a personal relationship. I'd ordered some electrical cable to carry the power from the hospital powerhouse out to the site where we were building our house on the hospital's land many years ago. At that time, cable like that was usually from remnants of rolls and had to be bought in the port city, so the cable arrived at our local building material supplier's shop in several smaller coils.

I needed and had ordered 600 meters of cable for our project, so when I went to pick the cable up, I'd brought just enough money with me to pay for that quantity. The shop owner told me when I arrived that because the cable was in several smaller pieces, they had sent 618 meters instead of the 600 meters I'd requested. I told him that that wouldn't be a problem, and that I'd take all of the cable that had come,

because we'd be able to use it in the hospital at a later date. I then told him that unfortunately I'd only brought with me enough cash to pay for the 600 I'd ordered. He immediately became very skeptical and implied that he wasn't sure I would come back. I was a bit taken back by that and told him that I'm a Christian and a... but he quickly interrupted me and said, "Christians lie all the time!." I was really shocked by that statement because my assumption was that when I said I was a Christian, that should have immediately elicited a sigh of relief from him. He did finally agree to "trust" me, and I did return the following week with the additional money. Today, Robert, the shop owner, is a good friend who would send me anything I might need on credit, knowing that I'll always pay him. In fact, I developed that type of relationship with many businesspeople over time. On several occasions, if the hospital administration asked for credit from a few of these people, the people would call me to see if I would assure them that they would be paid. There is, sadly, an automatic distrust within the culture.

One of the reasons is that the ability to collect money owed is difficult, if not impossible, as it is wherever the justice system is ineffective and certain technologies may be lacking. However, I still contend that being a Christian should be synonymous with trustworthiness.

Our hospital had recently spent a substantial amount of money to purchase security cameras and hard drives to record the video from the cameras.

These cameras were set up in several areas of the hospital to observe workstations and supply centers to ensure that people were working and to ensure that goods weren't being stolen. It's a sad situation, given that the hospital is a "Christian" institution staffed by people who would mostly claim to be Christians. First, the need to have the cameras says a lot about the lack of transformation in the people's hearts, but second, it says a lot about the lack of trust and trustworthiness, even in a "Christian" workplace.

Africans desire to get ahead in life, just like most people in the world. The difference

is that people may become jealous of others, rather than being happy for and encouraging someone who wants to improve their circumstances. In some cases, other people will seek to undermine the aspiring individual. This causes many people to go underground, so to speak, and be very careful about letting others know what they're doing. People develop a protective shell of distrust rather than a mutually encouraging atmosphere. Not much can thrive in a culture of distrust. I see trust and trustworthiness as a primary starting point in discipleship because it's one of the first places in a person's life that transformation will become evident.

Colossians 3:9-10: Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

2 Corinthians 8:21: For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

Proverbs 11:3: The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

I recommend a book written by David Horsager, called *The Trust Edge: How Top Leaders Gain Faster Results, Deeper Relationships, and a Stronger Bottom Line*, to conclude this section. David wrote this book based on his graduate work regarding trust and now has a business that helps leaders and businesses grow, deepen their relationships, and become more successful. The book really drives home the importance of trust, and he has broken the subject down into what he refers to as the

“8 pillars of trust.” Trust, he points out, isn't a soft skill and isn't just a virtue but is a table or foundation for all the virtues to rest on. To underscore this point, he points out that “Trust, not money, is the currency of business and life.”⁸ The reason that we have faith in God is based on the fact that we trust Him. With that in mind, we must begin by being trustworthy ourselves if we want to be effective disciples of Jesus or be involved in discipling others and making disciple makers.

⁸ Horsager, David (2012). *The Trust Edge: How Top Leaders Gain Faster Results, Deeper Relationships, and a Stronger Bottom Line* (p. 20).

Here is a bit more clarification on the idea of trust as not being a “soft” skill. A **soft skill** is a personal, relational, or character-based ability — things like communication, empathy, teamwork, adaptability, emotional intelligence, or conflict resolution. They’re called “soft” not because they’re unimportant, but because they’re **not technical, measurable, or task-specific**. They’re about how a person behaves, interacts, and leads. Trust is **not** just one of those interpersonal abilities you can list alongside communication or teamwork. It’s not merely a relational ability. Trust is something deeper and more structural. Trust is not just a nice interpersonal trait. Trust is the platform on which all other virtues stand:

- Integrity depends on trust.
- Courage depends on trust.
- Humility depends on trust.
- Stewardship depends on trust.
- Leadership depends on trust.

In other words, trust isn’t one virtue among many — it’s the **precondition** that makes all the other virtues possible, believable, and livable.

Module | opposing Cultural Values— *Trust in the Individual* [Pages 34 – 37]

Theme: ***How trust and integrity shape discipleship, development, and relational influence.***

Grounding Scripture:

Colossians 3:9–10 – *“Do not lie to one another... put on the new self, which is being renewed...”*

2 Corinthians 8:21 – *“We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.”*

Proverbs 11:3 – *“The integrity of the upright guides them...”*

Puzzle Piece

Insight: Trust is fragile, slow-growing, and foundational. In cultures where distrust is the norm, development and discipleship are stunted. Distrust of individuals leads to excessive oversight, suspicion, and relational breakdown—even in Christian institutions.

Challenge: When Christians are not known for integrity, the gospel loses credibility. Trust must be earned and embodied before it can be taught.

Bridge Thought | Connection

- Trustworthiness is one of the first fruits of transformation. It’s the foundation for discipleship, leadership, and sustainable influence.
- In cultures where jealousy and sabotage undermine progress, believers must model mutual encouragement and transparent integrity.

Toolbox | Practical Tools

Trust Audit: Identify areas where distrust hinders ministry or development.

Integrity Stories: Share testimonies of trust earned through consistent character.

Encouragement Culture: Create environments where growth is celebrated, not sabotaged.

Reflection Prompts

1. When have you experienced distrust in ministry or leadership?
2. How does your culture view individual success—celebrated or resented?
3. What habits build trust in your relationships and community?

Action Steps

- Teach trustworthiness as a core discipleship value.
- Model integrity in financial dealings, promises, and leadership.
- Celebrate others’ growth and success publicly to shift cultural norms.