

Cultural Intelligence in Christian Counseling

Key Takeaways & Practice Considerations | Mark Crear, Ph.D. | AACC 2026

CORE PRINCIPLE

Culture is already in the room. Effective cross-cultural care begins with humility, curiosity, ethical sensitivity, and a willingness to understand context before interpreting behavior.

Key Takeaways

- Culture is broader than race or ethnicity. It may include faith, family, language, region, class, disability, profession, generation, military experience, church tradition, migration, loss, power, safety, and belonging.
- Cultural humility is a posture, not an arrival. It means remaining teachable, relational, and accountable rather than assuming expertise equals complete understanding.
- Good intentions matter, but impact also matters. When intent and impact diverge, curiosity and repair are more useful than defensiveness.
- Christian conviction and cultural humility belong together. Conviction does not require coercion, and humility does not require abandoning deeply held beliefs.
- Faith integration should be responsive rather than assumed. Ask about the role of faith or spirituality, respect client preference, and use spiritual interventions with appropriate consent and competence.
- Culturally responsive care is not about memorizing every culture. It is about learning to notice assumptions, seek context, adapt appropriately, and remain open to correction.

“Conviction tells me what I believe. Humility governs how I carry it into relationship.”

Biblical Anchors

John 4	Jesus crosses cultural, religious, gender, and social boundaries without pretending difference does not exist.
Acts 10	Peter loved God and was spiritually gifted, yet still needed his cultural assumptions challenged.
Revelation 7:9	Biblical unity gathers people from every nation, tribe, people, and language without requiring cultural sameness.

Participant takeaway • intentionally concise • not a reproduction of the presentation

Practical Considerations for Culturally Responsive Care

A concise reference for counseling, coaching, pastoral care, and ministry leadership

Before You Respond, Consider

- What feels “normal” to me in this situation—and could that assumption be shaping my interpretation?
- What context, history, identity, or power dynamic might I be missing?
- Am I distinguishing cultural difference from dysfunction, resistance, or pathology?
- Have I asked what this experience means to the client before assigning meaning to it?
- Would faith or spirituality be helpful here, and has the client been invited to express a preference?
- Does my response honor dignity, autonomy, informed choice, professional scope, and client welfare?
- Am I willing to adapt my language, pace, examples, setting, or referral approach when appropriate?

Helpful Counseling Language

- “Help me understand what that means for you.”
- “What does this experience mean in your family or community?”
- “Which parts of who you are feel most relevant to this concern?”
- “What practices, people, or beliefs have helped you endure?”
- “Would you like faith or spirituality included? If so, how?”
- “What about this plan fits your values—and what does not?”
- “I may have moved too quickly and made an assumption. What was that like for you?”

Three Practice Principles to Carry Forward

Stay curious before becoming certain.	Premature certainty narrows understanding; curiosity creates room for meaning.
Adapt without stereotyping.	Use cultural knowledge as a hypothesis to explore, not a verdict about the person.
Stay repairable.	When impact differs from intent, own your contribution, invite feedback, and adjust the relationship.

Stay humble. Stay curious. Stay repairable.

Learn your neighbor to serve your neighbor.