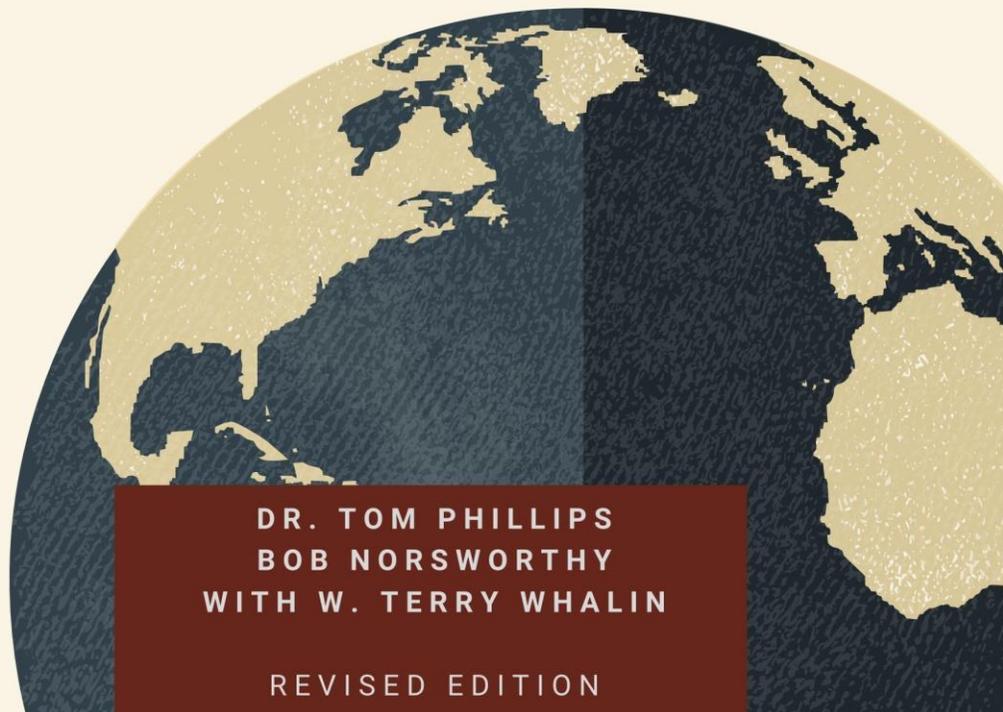


FOREWORD BY  
DR. BILLY GRAHAM

# THE WORLD AT YOUR DOOR

REACHING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS  
IN YOUR HOME, CHURCH, AND SCHOOL



DR. TOM PHILLIPS  
BOB NORSWORTHY  
WITH W. TERRY WHALIN

REVISED EDITION



# The World at Your Door

Reaching International Students  
in Your Community

Dr. Tom Phillips  
Bob Norsworthy  
with W. Terry Whalin

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International Students, Incorporated (ISI)

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The unwavering support of my wife, Ouida, has made this book possible as well as the many years of ministry for our Lord. Thank you, dear, for being the best partner in service together for Christ.

This book is also dedicated to my loving parents, Johnny and Lorene Phillips, and my children, Cara, Molly, and Matt, whose support has been my encouragement in ministry.

Tom

---

This book is dedicated to my wife, Cindi, my life partner, and best friend. You are the best gift God has ever given me in this life. Thank you for teaching me about joy, laughter, and love. May we continue to serve Jesus and build His Kingdom until He takes us home.

It is also dedicated to my three wonderful children, Leisa, Joel, and Danielle. I am extremely proud of each of you. May you seek above all else to know and love Jesus all of your days.

Bob

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Christine, you've helped turn this book into a reality through your constant belief and love. Thank you.

Terry

## About the Authors

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## Acknowledgments

We wish to express our deep appreciation to all of the International Students, Inc. (ISI) staff who have worked diligently with us to secure the wonderful testimonies that are expressed throughout the book as well as past and present ISI team members who have written ISI witnessing, discipleship, and training materials from which some of the material in this book was gleaned.

Also, our thanks to all of those who are servant leaders in the Christian community and endorsed the book, reflecting its potential impact in the Church. We believe that ministry to the future leaders and executives of our world is the most strategic, evangelistic, and reproductive ministry opportunity for the Church today. It affords us the greatest amount of leverage for the investment—personally, economically, and spiritually.

Our thanks to all who have stood with us in the development of this tool for the sake of the growth of the Kingdom through those who will impact their nations for Christ when they return home.

We especially want to acknowledge Terry Whalin, who has labored diligently and faithfully to help us write this work.

We also acknowledge the sovereign work of God both through the ages and today. By His hand He moves the peoples of the earth where He wills, lifts up nations, peoples, and leaders, and has led the leaders of tomorrow to our nation today. We are privileged to be His servants for such a time as this.

## Foreword

In his arresting foreword (below) to the original edition of *The World at Your Door* (published in 1997), Dr. Billy Graham recounted sharing these words with Bob Finley, the founding president of ISI: “Every Christian in America should help reach international students for Christ.” Nearly 25 years since it appeared in published form, Dr. Graham’s observation remains just as relevant, if not more. Today, the United States plays host to over a million international students from all over the world. There are students from nations in the 10/40 Window and from the world’s unreached (or less reached) people groups who throng the college and university campuses of our very cities. They may even live across the street from us. Isaiah 5:26 tells us that God has raised a banner for the distant nations and whistled for those at the ends of the earth, and they have assembled, swiftly and speedily, at our very door in response to His summons!

The idea of the world being at our door opens a new way to reading Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (NIV). We are tempted to interpret, and indeed many of us might have historically interpreted, this verse to mean we begin witnessing first in our Jerusalem, then in our surrounding areas, and then to the ends of the earth—that is, a movement that extends and progresses outward, not unlike how a pebble dropped into a pond causes ripples that extend in concentric circles in all directions. And there is nothing wrong in thinking that way.

But then God does something surprising and quite extraordinary: *He brings the ends of the earth to Jerusalem!* In Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, we learn that there were staying in first-century Jerusalem God-fearing Jews *from every nation under heaven*, who heard the wonders of God being declared in their own native languages (Acts 2:5-6). This means the first recorded sermon ever preached by the followers of Christ, reportedly by the apostle Peter, was carried out in Jerusalem to an *international* audience, because the ends of the earth had indeed gathered in Jerusalem! It also means that Pentecost—the coming and baptism of the believers by the Spirit of God—has everything to do with Christ’s Great Commission to reach and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20)!

Hence this newly revised edition of *The World at Your Door*. Much has taken place around the world and in America since the book’s original release in 1997. My ISI colleagues and I felt it was high time for an update of this wonderful resource. I am enormously grateful to the many who contributed time, toil, and talent to this project, and I highly recommend this book to you. “You might be the person that God uses to bring the next world leader to a personal relationship with Christ,” as Dr. Graham wrote in his original edition foreword. “Or your relationship will cause this person to be more open to spiritual truth through your expression of the love of Jesus

Christ.” May Christ’s Kingdom come, and His will be done on earth—in and through all of us—as it is in heaven!

—Dr. Seng Tan, President/International Students, Inc.

## Original Foreword

When I ministered with Youth for Christ, I became friends with Bob Finley who, in 1953, launched a full-time ministry called International Students, Incorporated (ISI). I was honored to serve on his board of advisors. I told Bob, *“Every Christian in America should help reach international students for Christ.”* In 1957, during the tremendous New York Crusade in Madison Square Garden, Bob brought a number of international students to the meetings who were able to hear the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Today, my good friend Tom Phillips is the president of ISI. For over twenty years, Tom worked shoulder to shoulder with me in organizing evangelistic crusades nationally and internationally. Now he leads one of the most strategic organizations in its efforts to evangelize international students.

Over half a million students come from around the globe to study in the United States—right in our own backyard. As we develop friendships with these future leaders and executives, we have an opportunity to reach our world for Christ. When these students complete their education and return to their homelands, they assume leadership in international corporations and national institutions. Or, they become political leaders, influencing thousands. Unfortunately, during their time in the U.S., it is believed that over 70 percent of these students never enter an American home or visit a place of worship.

You hold a new tool in your hands to help you take advantage of a wonderful evangelistic opportunity. First, you will discover how this ministry is simple and uncomplicated. Then, step-by-step, you can learn how to develop international friends. Finally, you can gain the skills and insight to lead a student to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Everyone can benefit from the guidance in this book. As you reach out to these potential world leaders at your doorstep, your own Christian life will be strengthened. God will use you as an instrument of peace for the nations. And you don’t have to go to the other side of the globe to have an impact.

You might be the person whom God uses to bring the next world leader to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Or your relationship will cause this person to be more open to spiritual truth through your expression of the love of Jesus Christ.

I pray that God will use this book to draw many people into the Kingdom of God through our Lord Jesus.

—Billy Graham, 1997

## Preface

Some years ago, when I was in graduate school, my wife was working as a teacher at an inner-city high school. She was one of only three white teachers among several thousand students and a couple hundred staff.

One year, one of her colleagues invited us to participate in a family Thanksgiving celebration. We had gone out to dinner several times with the host couple and had always had a good time. Newlyweds at the time, we were living in a small apartment, so it sounded like a great chance to escape our confining quarters and limited culinary talents to gorge ourselves on fine food and fellowship with people we liked. We were told to expect a true family gathering, probably 30 relatives or more. We would be the only outsiders present.

For me, this would be a memorable cultural experience. Our hosts were African American, and though I had some African American friends and had many working relationships with African American professionals, I had never been in their homes. I had many preconceived notions about what the day would be like. As it turned out, my predictions were not even in the ballpark.

We arrived at their front door with gifts in hand and smiles on our faces. The six hours that followed were unlike anything I had ever experienced before. Everything was different—the language, the customs, the relationships, and the food. Even the prayer before the meal was different. It was a great day, not only for learning, but for being with warm, loving, accepting people. My life was forever changed. I grew in ways that never would have been possible if I had not been invited to share in the world of that family that day.

### **Common Scenario**

My experience is but a microcosm of what could be happening in the lives of more than half a million visitors to the United States. I am speaking of college students who travel here from other nations to earn their degrees. Although I was a graduate student at the time of the above cited experience, I had only a limited understanding of significant segments of the American culture and the people who comprise this diverse nation. Think of what it must be like for an international student coming to America to be educated. Many may not speak our language well. They arrive here with a mindset of a different culture, with likely no preexisting relationships, and with a completely different orientation to resources. All they know about America is what they have seen on TV or read in their homeland publications—and much of that information is skewed by the mass media and filtered through the lens of international politics.

Most importantly, the vast majority of visiting students enter our country as non-Christians. They have ideas and perceptions of what Christians and Christianity are about; but those perceptions, like their ideas about our culture, may be wildly inaccurate.

Yes, there are hundreds of seminars and conferences about Christianity they could attend. There are tens of thousands of Christian churches that would welcome these students on a Sunday morning, and there are millions of Christian adults throughout America who may be willing to tell these young people about Christ. But realistically, what are the chances of the typical international student registering for a Christian seminar, visiting a Christian church, or initiating a personal relationship with a Christian adult? In truth, there is a huge invisible wall isolating international students from mainstream Christianity. They do not know how to penetrate that barrier. Nor is it their responsibility to do so.

### **A Glorious Opportunity**

As believers living in America, we have an incredible opportunity to influence the lives of this world's emerging generation of influencers. International students sent to America are typically the best and the brightest their countries have to offer. While American high schoolers think of college as their first extended taste of freedom and independence, adventure and romance, or even academic exploration, for the international student studying in the U.S., it is a very special, highly sought-after prize. They are the future leaders, the chosen ones. And their training in the U.S. will shape the ways they lead.

We are doing them a terrible disservice if we allow them to glean what our professors, books, and research have to offer, but do not expose them to what our faith has to offer. Imagine the impact we could have as disciples of Jesus Christ on the spiritual, moral, and intellectual future of humanity. We have the unique opportunity of building relationships with these fledgling leaders and exposing them to Christianity in its many facets and in a natural setting. And yet the authors of this book tell us that we are squandering this phenomenal privilege of penetrating numerous cultures around the world for Christ.

The type of outreach opportunities described herein do not require travel, large financial investment, uprooting our families, or even substantial training. They do require our being committed to our faith and sharing that faith in genuine and authentic ways with international students, inviting them into our homes and into our lives. Many of these students come from nations that are closed to missionaries, Christian churches, and other forms of evangelism. But while they are visiting America, the only obstacle to American Christians touching the lives of these future international leaders is our own lack of effort to reach out to them.

The authors remind us that we do not need the spiritual gift of evangelism to influence international students. They are seeking hospitality, not a Hollywood experience. We don't have to have a clever evangelistic strategy or presentation prepared. We do need to love Jesus and want to share that love with others in a comfortable, appropriate manner. The authors will help you understand how to make the transition from unaware and uninvolved to caring and connecting.

Did you know that most international students will receive their degrees and leave America without ever having stepped foot into an American home? In his wisdom and compassion, God has brought the mission field right to our door and affords us the

outreach opportunities of a lifetime. The question is, are you and I courageous and committed enough to exploit that opportunity for the glory of God?

—George Barna, President Metaformation

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# 1. A Disguised Opportunity

*“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*

Sometimes opportunity knocks at our door but is so disguised we don’t see the potential.

In 1941, a young father in El Salvador won the national lottery. It changed the course of history for his youngest son, Napoleon. The young man traveled with his older brother on a bus from his country to South Bend, Indiana, home of the University of Notre Dame. In St. Louis, the pair went into a bar, and someone asked them where they were going. They answered, “We’re going to Notre Dame.”

One of the men laughed, “Looks like Notre Dame’s importing Latin-American football players to beat Army and Navy.” The brothers were surprised that a school would be best known for its athletics. Napoleon tried out for the football team and was flattened seconds after someone tossed him the football. He knew very little about the American sport.

In his autobiography, *Duarte: My Story*, Napoleon tells about his first class, “Christian Virtues,” taught by Father Theodore Hesburgh, a young priest beginning his teaching career. Napoleon listened to the lecture but couldn’t understand anything about philosophy or ethics. He leaned over and whispered to his friend Cordova, asking what was being said.

The nervous professor suddenly stopped his class and pointed at the young man asking, “What’s your name?”

“Napoleon Duarte.”

“Well, Nappy, if you continue talking in class, I’m going to throw you out the window!” Father Hesburgh said. After class, the priest motioned for Duarte to stay. “Why were you talking in class?”

In his best English, acquired mainly during that week, Napoleon said, “To understand what you say, I need help.” Father Hesburgh softened his attitude and decided to outline his lecture each day in Italian. This language was closer to Spanish and helped Duarte work to complete the course. He worked hard and eventually earned an engineering degree, while also taking on odd jobs in a laundry, an ice cream factory, and washing windows. Napoleon Duarte returned to his native country and became involved in politics. Many years later this young man served two terms as El Salvador’s president.

## A Nobel Prize Winner

In 1949, another international student came to New York for two years with his wife, Sonia, and his little daughter, Zviva. Years later, Shimon Peres was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In his autobiography, *Battling for Peace*, he writes about his time in New York and Boston, saying, "It was a formative period both of my life and of my intellectual and political development... Every corner of that great country presents fascinating information and insights for the curious observer. I was immediately swept up by the originality, ingenuity, and boundless enthusiasm of the people, especially the young." While Peres doesn't give a great number of details or stories about his time in the U.S., he draws an interesting characterization of America, saying, "Despite all the materialism in American society, it is not the dollar that is the strong underpinning of that society but the Bible, both the New Testament and the Old. By the same token, the basis of the special relationship that developed between the United States and Israel was not a common enemy but rather common values."

From his words and tone, you note that Peres developed strong friendships while in the United States. While firmly holding to his Jewish faith, he expresses openness to a spiritual dialogue with Christians. Some of these impressions were formed early in his time abroad.

## The First Modern Woman Muslim Leader

In *Daughter of Destiny*, Benazir Bhutto writes about her education at Harvard-Radcliffe. Her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was the Prime Minister of Pakistan. In 1988, nine years after his execution, Benazir became the first woman to lead a Muslim nation in modern times. Before Benazir went to college, her father gave her a beautiful copy of the Qur'an and told her, "You will see many things that surprise you in America and some that may shock you. But I know you have the ability to adapt. Above all you must study hard. Very few in Pakistan have the opportunity you now have, and you must take advantage of it. Never forget that the money it is costing to send you comes from the land, from the people who sweat and toil on those lands. You will owe a debt to them, a debt you can repay with God's blessing by using your education to better their lives." These words give insight into the motivation and pressures that international students face when coming to America.

She wrote about her early days in college. "Pak-i-stan? Where's Pak-i-stan?' my new classmates asked me when I first arrived at Radcliffe."

"Pakistan is the largest Muslim country in the world," I replied, sounding like a handout from our embassy. "There are two wings of Pakistan, separated by India."

"Oh, India," came the relieved response. "You're next to India."

"I smarted every time I heard the reference to India, with whom we had had two bitter wars. Pakistan was supposed to be one of America's strongest allies...The United States used our air bases in northern Pakistan for their U-2 reconnaissance flights, including the ill-fated flight of Gary Powers even in 1960...Yet Americans seemed completely unaware of even the existence of my country."

Benazir Bhutto took her experiences from the land of Harvard into her everyday decisions and actions as she led this Muslim nation.

### **Friendship with a Future World Leader**

Sean was on campus frequently at the university in Arizona. He befriended several Muslim students from a Southeast European country. One of the students came to value his friendship with Sean so much, that he continued to communicate with him even after he returned to his home country. He also invited Sean to visit him. Imagine how Sean felt when during one of his last visits to see his friend, he learned that this former international student became his country's first president after they declared independence from a neighboring country. Not only did Sean's friend become president, but he won praise from other world leaders for his humanitarianism and peaceful governance. It was his experience in the U.S. that also led him to help legislate religious freedom for his people.

### **Some Students Come with Christian Backgrounds**

Not every international student comes to America without a Christian background. In fact, two African Christian leaders studied at Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the founder of modern Nigerian nationalism and the first president of Nigeria (1963-1966). As a Lincoln student, Azikiwe became one of the most earnest recruiting agents for Lincoln in West Africa. One of his recruits was Kwame Nkrumah, who became the first prime minister and president of Ghana. As a student in the U.S., Nkrumah earned a Master of Science degree at the University of Pennsylvania and, in the same year, a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree from Lincoln Seminary. During his summers at Lincoln, Nkrumah worked as a colporteur and research student of the religious practices among African Americans. In 1942, he wrote, "Almost every one of my Sundays has been devoted to preaching either in Philadelphia, New York, or Washington." Horace Mann Bond, author of *Education for Freedom*, wrote about Nkrumah, "He was seeing life in the raw and sharing in the humble joys, defeats, and exaltations of the American Negro, his overseas cousin." Years later, Nkrumah became a leader in Ghana and guided his nation from colonial rule to independence. A major portion of his theological and religious training came from his years in the United States.

Nearly one million international students are studying in the United States. In five to twenty years, they will be the leaders of their nations. They *will* return home to make a difference. The question is, "Will they make a difference for Jesus Christ?" As they attend the university, these students face a marketplace of ideas. At the university, they formulate ideas about the world, their belief system, and values. Long ago, Marxist, and communist leaders realized the power and potential they possessed to influence young university students and worked diligently toward this end.

Abraham Lincoln said, "The philosophy of the classroom today will soon be the philosophy of the government and the nation tomorrow." The sixteenth President clearly observed a link between young minds and the direction of the nation. Many

years later, Adolph Hitler agreed, saying, “Let me control the textbooks and the ideas postulated in the classroom, and I will control Germany.”

Martin Luther said, “Schools rule the world.”

Social changes for our world most often come from the universities and like-minded institutions. Chuck Colson says in *Against the Night*: “Profound social changes often trace their origins not to sinister conspiracies but to the paneled libraries of genial philosophers or the study alcoves of the British Museum or the crowded cafes of our universities. *Powerful movements are rooted in the realm of ideas* (italics by authors).”

These world leaders present an incredible mission field. Here’s a list of past and present world leaders and the U.S. institutions where they studied:<sup>1</sup>

**Bolivia**—Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, President; University of Chicago

**Chile**—Ricardo Lagos, President; Duke University

**Colombia**—Juan Manuel Santos, President; Harvard University

**Costa Rica**—Laura Chinchilla, President; Georgetown University

**Ecuador**—Rafael Correa Delgado, President; University of Illinois at Urbana

**Estonia**—Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President; Columbia University and University of Pennsylvania

**Greece**—Kostas Karamanlis, Prime Minister; Tufts University

**Israel**—Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defense Minister; Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University

**Italy**—Mario Monti, Prime Minister; Yale University

**Japan**—Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister; University of Southern California

**Kenya**—Uhuru Kenyatta, President; Amherst College

**Liberia**—Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President; Madison Business College; University of Colorado; Harvard University

**Mexico**—Felipe Calderón, President; Harvard University

**Moldova**—Maia Sandu, President; Harvard University

**Monaco**—Albert II, Prince; Amherst College

**Nicaragua**—Enrique Bolaños, President; St. Louis University

**Panama**—Martin Torrijos, President; Texas A&M University

**Philippines**—Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President; Georgetown University

**Poland**—Marek Belka, Prime Minister, Columbia University and University of Chicago

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<sup>1</sup>Wikipedia. “List of heads of state educated in the United States”  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_heads\\_of\\_state\\_educated\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_heads_of_state_educated_in_the_United_States)

**Portugal**—José Manuel Barroso; Prime Minister, Georgetown University

**Singapore**—Lee Hsien Loong; Prime Minister; Harvard University

**South Korea**—Chung Won-shik; Prime Minister; Vanderbilt University

**Taiwan**—Ma Ying-jeou; President; Harvard University

**Thailand**—Yingluck Shinawatra; Prime Minister; Kentucky State University

**Tunisia**—Zine El Abidine Ben Ali; President; Senior Intelligence School (Maryland), School for anti-Aircraft Field Artillery (Texas)

Virtually every continent and part of the world is represented, and this list is only a small sample of the leaders who have been educated in the United States. Many others, though not top-level governmental leaders, have powerful influence over the industry, education, economics, science, politics, technology, agriculture, and faith of their countries. Several years ago, a Colorado family became friends with a Peruvian student. During his education in America, this family developed a close relationship, and, while the student attended religious functions, he never made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

After completion of his studies, the young man returned home and eventually became the head of the Department of Education in Peru. At the time, the Peruvian government was suspicious of the motives of Wycliffe Bible Translators who were working in their country. The government sent their head of the Department of Education to investigate Wycliffe to determine if the mission organization should stay in Peru or not. This was the same man who had been befriended by the family in Colorado. He remembered the love of that family and was overwhelmed by the loving attitude of the Wycliffe missionaries he met during his investigation. He was convinced the organization was a benefit to his people and should remain in Peru. In his report, he recommended no further action. Today, Wycliffe's work of Bible translation in Peru continues to advance. The attitude of this Peruvian government official was shaped through a loving friendship outreach during his college days—a family who selflessly shared Christ's love with him.

One international student director in Arizona researched more than 3,000 returning students who became leaders in their countries. When these students were asked about the value of their experience in America, nearly all of the respondents said it was not their academic experience that they remember. Instead, the most valuable experience to them was their time with Americans and the opportunity to experience life in America. Relationship is key in the formulation of ideas. One cannot separate the emotion from the rationale.

## **Our World Isn't Far Removed**

Twenty-four-hour radio and television stations blast the news into our homes. When a disaster or breaking story happens, we turn on CNN and watch as events unfold across the globe. It's sometimes easy to turn away from a horrible disaster in another country or remove ourselves from the ongoing trauma in a distant location such as the Middle East. We rationalize, "Well, it's so far away."

Or we feel helpless to do anything about the situation. “I’m only one person. How could I make a difference?” Well, we *can* make a difference in our world even if it is only one person at a time. We can accomplish this feat of love without ever leaving our homes. For example, Lee of China wrote of his appreciation for Edward, a retired professor living in Hawaii with his terminally ill wife. Lee wrote, “I was a visiting scholar, and in September my wife returned to China. I had to move out of the house where we lived, and Edward and Lisa provided a house to me. When I lived with them, they told me much information about Christianity that made sense to me, and I made a decision to receive Jesus as my Savior. After that, I felt peaceful and happy. Thank God.”

Admittedly, the world is a huge place. Currently in the United States alone there are more than 330 million people, and the world has a population of almost eight billion. It’s easy to be overwhelmed by this mass of humanity.

But instead of feeling insignificant, let’s consider the possibilities. The late Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, once said, “Every soul is equally precious in God’s sight, but not every soul is equally strategic.” Every individual who does not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is lost and bound for an eternity separated from love, from God. In our day-to-day activities, it’s easy to lose that perspective for helping, that passion to help the lost people around us.

### **The Historic Approach for Overseas Missions**

Traditionally the Church and individuals have trained for going to the world with the Good News about Jesus. Our view of missions is nearly always dominated by the picture of an individual or family being called to quit their job, pack their belongings, and move to another part of the world in order to minister to people in another culture. For people to make this commitment is a strategic and key part of God’s plan. It is born out of the familiar passage in Matthew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” However, let’s consider this historical approach in light of a constantly changing world, our place at the end of the twenty-first century, and God’s present plan.

Bible college graduates Jerry and Corinne trained in linguistics for a cross-cultural ministry. It wasn’t easy, and it took them several years to raise enough prayer and financial support to move overseas to Papua New Guinea. Despite their excellent training, they were not prepared for the drastic change of lifestyle. After a few weeks, Corinne couldn’t tolerate their living situation, and they returned home. They’ve never been back. Sadly, for one reason or another, Jerry and Corinne’s situation as overseas missionaries is fairly common.

Statistics show that over the last 100 years less than half of one percent of American and Canadian Christians have actually heard that call to international missions and gone out to work overseas. As the last generation of career missionaries returns home, they are not being replaced by a flow of new recruits.

One missionary agency reported to ISI that it can cost over \$90,000 a year for a foreign missionary couple to live and work in Japan. After these new missionaries arrive in Japan, it often takes two years of language study before they will be able to fluently communicate about their faith in Jesus Christ and help someone to make a personal spiritual commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior.

## A Blessing to the Nations

In Genesis 12, God gave a blessing to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. He said, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3). Through the spiritual seed of Abraham, the nations will be blessed as we follow God's promise and plan. We obediently accomplish his blessing in two ways:

1. Going to the nations.
2. Ministering to individuals from the nations who come to us.

For centuries, historic missions have dealt with the first method. Yet missions as a sending opportunity is changing. There are now at least four approaches to missions:

1. *The apostolic missions approach* in which missionaries are called, ordained, experienced, and trained. Appropriately, they are still going to areas of the world where there is no church. Outsiders, through Christ's love, minister to and help others to know Christ, plant churches, and disciple believers.
2. *The assistance approach* to indigenous ministries. Missionaries from our nation are resourced, trained, and called to come alongside indigenous laborers who need their assistance.
3. Another approach is to *resource and support indigenous missionaries*, nationals whom God has raised up for ministry.
4. *Get out of the way*. Some parts of our world that have been developing spiritually are now at a point where they can carry their own load in the missionary enterprise. South Korea, for example, is a nation that is ministering to the rest of the world through their own gifted individuals and have organizations to support them.

Besides these approaches to missions, the *short-term missions movement* has grown with enormous momentum. (A major church in Minnesota is a prime example of this explosive growth. Their goal was to have 2,000 short-term missionaries involved, and they ended up with even more). This effort accomplishes some dramatic results in the local church:

1. Personal involvement by their people in missions.
2. Blessings to the people to whom they minister overseas.
3. Revitalization of the heart and approach of missions.
4. Future support for missions throughout the local body.

## The World Is at Our Door

While it has always been God's plan for the Church to go to the world, this strategy is only half of God's equation for reaching the people who don't have a personal relationship with Christ. Over the centuries, the Church has missed or nearly missed an equally significant part of God's plan—reaching the world that God brings to the Church. The New Testament book of Acts records in its early chapters how men and women were gathered together from around the world. In Jerusalem, these people heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, accepted it, and returned to their countries as ambassadors for God.

Today history repeats itself in the U.S., where over one million of the world's best and brightest students from every nation are within minutes of a local church. Such a representative gathering is unparalleled in human history. These students are attending America's institutions of higher learning. Their present quest is not for land or gold but for the prestige of an American education or a grasp of new Western technologies. These future leaders will return to their societies with the competitive skills for the geo-economic race into the future.

In the 2020-21 school year, over a quarter million new international students began their studies in American universities and other institutions of higher learning.<sup>1</sup> While these students come to America with specific goals and plans, most of them are unaware of a personal divine plan from God. As caring and committed Christians come across their paths and offer friendship in Him, they can learn about the greatest friend of all—Jesus Christ.

Immersed in a new culture and away from family and friends, these international students are often lonely. They often feel out of place, lost, and anxious about understanding new people and a new situation. Simple tasks can be bewildering for the international student—as they would be to us if we were overseas for a period of time—such as the best way to locate housing or banking, or the difference between a grocery store, drugstore, specialty shops, and a department store. When these internationals face these challenges alone, daily life can become extremely discouraging to them.

Several years ago, one of our staff attended a college president's reception for incoming international students at a California university. The president tried a creative idea. He had two graduating seniors tell about their experience in the U.S. during the last few years. After the first senior spoke, it was an idea he regretted.

A Middle Eastern student stood stiffly behind the podium and began, "I have been in America for four years, and these have been the most lonely years of my life. When I walk down a hallway and an American says with a smile, 'Hi, how are you doing?' I stop and try to tell them how I am doing. Instead, they just keep on walking and don't really care about my answer."

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<sup>1</sup> From *OpenDoors*® 2020/21 New and Continuing International Students in the United States.

The staff member was saddened at the thought of this lasting impression on an international visitor who was about to return to his homeland. In ministry, ISI has noted that this student's story is all too commonplace. It is believed that approximately three fourths of international students who study in the U.S. have never been invited to an American home during their stay, or invited to an American church, or have any meaningful contact with genuine Christians during an average stay of four years.

Still there is good news from these statistics. These students feel a tremendous need for relationship. They are open to anyone who will stretch out their hand and say, "I'll be your friend." We can change these statistics—one lonely student at a time—each of us can be that friend.

Lienna, from China, said after coming to the United States to study, "In my country, I had friends but no freedom. Here, I had much freedom but no friends." But Lienna added, "Then I met friends at ISI and through them met the greatest Friend of all, Jesus Christ."

During the 1920s, Yosuke Matsuoka, from Japan, came to Portland, Oregon, and studied at the university. While in the U.S., Matsuoka felt poorly treated. He returned home hateful and embittered about America. Over time, he rose through the ranks of power. Finally, he got his revenge on the American people when he assisted in the planning and execution of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The course of history might have been different during the 1940s if the lonely student Matsuoka had been befriended by loving Christians twenty years earlier.

Mengistu Mariam, from Ethiopia, arrived at Aberdeen, Maryland, in the 1950s for military training. He soon became embittered and resentful as a result of the way he was treated by Americans. Over time, he too rose to a position of power, and in 1974 was a key figure in the coup against King Haile Selassie. Mariam established a Marxist government and began a relentless campaign to root out what he called "alien religion" in Ethiopia, even though Christianity originated in the Middle East. In an address to the nation, Mariam called missionaries the number one source of imperialist infiltration in the past. Shortly after the speech, he expelled all missionaries and made it impossible for anyone who attempted to evangelize to continue their work. He also confiscated a \$15 million missionary radio station and began to broadcast Marxist propaganda. Churches were closed and believers in Jesus Christ fell under intense religious persecution, including frequent imprisonment. The key leader in this effort was one international student who had a bad experience in the "land of the free."

In stark contrast is the experience of Bakht Singh, a Sikh man who came from northern India to study engineering in Canada. This young Indian began his studies like any other international student, but a Christian couple reached out to Bakht in friendship and love. They gave him a Bible and encouraged him to meet other Christians. Through their friendship, Bakht accepted Christ. The couple also taught him the Scriptures. Later he returned to India not only as an engineer but as a preacher and evangelist. As

a result of his faithful work for Christ, hundreds of churches have been established in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

Beverly Watkins, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, stated, “The U.S. educates more international students than any other country in the world.” Currently, over a quarter of all students worldwide who study abroad enroll at U.S. institutions.<sup>1</sup> Many of these students and scholars use funds from family or other non-U.S. resources for their primary means of financial support during their studies. A number of students come from the upper levels of their society. Traditional missionaries would rarely meet or impact these people, but near our homes, we can meet, interact with, and serve these future leaders. These young people are incredibly sensitive, kind, and appreciative. They don’t know that they are future leaders. Dressed in athletic shoes, jeans, and T-shirts, they are respectful, yet personally searching for a friend—away from their traditional peer pressure, family pressure, political pressure, and religious pressure. In the midst of their pilgrimage is a search for truth, and we have the honor of loving each one of them for Christ’s sake.

### **The Unreached and Unengaged**

In the last few years, a number of mission agencies have highlighted the need for Christ in a small, targeted area of the world called the 10/40 Window. This is a geographical belt confined between the tenth- and fortieth-degree parallels stretching from northwest Africa across to the eastern islands of the Philippines. The belt represents the resident majority of the unreached people groups in the world—people who have never had a chance to hear about Jesus Christ. Research shows that 95 percent of the people who live in the least-evangelized countries are located in the 69 nations that compose the Window. This geographic location is of particular interest because of the over 1,000 unreached people groups there. Of the international students from countries closed or less than accessible to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, over 50 percent are from this 10/40 Window. Yet these closed countries’ future leaders and executives are *here*.

In God’s plan, He has brought these leaders to our door. In many cases, it is difficult or impossible for traditional missionaries to enter these nations. Forty million Christians have been mobilized to pray for the people of the 10/40 Window, and many groups have made prayer journeys to of those 67 nations of the Window. Prayer is vital, as is shown by these statistics compiled by Beverly Peques of the Window International Network (WIN).<sup>2</sup> It’s important to have creative ideas for reaching these nations in person. Yet many future and current leaders of these countries aren’t presently in their countries. They are studying in our universities and are at your doorstep.

As the Church is mobilized to “go” to this region, *it is entirely possible that we will overlook the fact the future leaders of the 10/40 Window are here now*. These leaders

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<sup>1</sup> “International Students in the United States” by Jie Zong and Jean Batalova for Migration Policy Institute, May 9, 2018. [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)

<sup>2</sup> Window International Network (WIN) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1999 to continue the international outreach segment of the Christian Information Network. [www.win1040.org](http://www.win1040.org)

are easily reached with the Good News about Jesus through friendship and love. This important opportunity must not be overlooked by the 10/40 Window strategists. It is perhaps the most practical and strategic way for the average American to have a long-term impact on the unreached people of our world. Few American Christians will go to live in the 10/40 Window countries, yet the majority of these Americans live within a few minutes of a 10/40 Window student, especially those from China and India (who send the largest number of students to the U.S).<sup>1</sup>

## Our Journey Ahead

In the following pages, we will address some of the misconceptions and fears about working with international students. Developing a friendship with internationals isn't complicated or frightening. We will show you how to easily entertain them in your home and give ideas about how to converse with them and develop a friendship. Then, with simple steps, we will show you how to respectfully present the claims of Christ to an international student and help the individual grow in his or her Christian faith. Finally, we'll share tips from our combined years of ministry experience regarding how to help these international friends when they return to their homelands. Also, this book will address some of the many benefits for the local church, and how you can befriend or mentor a future leader and join a global movement. It will mix the practical with motivational stories so you will become excited about the possibilities—no matter what your age or Christian experience.

## Apply What You've Learned

The chapters within this book are more than simply motivational. Our desire and prayer are that you will be challenged to grow in your Christian life and touch your world for Christ. Each chapter will conclude with several ready-to-apply suggestions, which are developed from its contents.

1. *Consider the world.* In our day-to-day activities with family and friends, it's easy to think our influence is limited. You will see that it is not. Begin in prayer to ask about your own role in influencing your world. Commit to spending time each day praying about how you can apply the material on these pages to your own life.
2. *Find a map of the world.* The average American has a limited understanding of geography. Where is Zimbabwe? Can you locate Taiwan on a map, or Argentina? Purchase a world map and post it where you'll see it every day. Use the map as a tool not only to learn about the locations of different countries but also as a prayer device. Specifically pray for God to move in the hearts of international students and to use your life to influence theirs for good.
3. *Begin to pray for the unreached and unengaged peoples of the world.* Order *The Yes Effect: Accepting God's Invitation to Transform the World Around You*. This book by Luis Bush "reveals that true transformation begins when we restart our hearts--getting in sync with God's tenderness toward the oppressed and regaining

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<sup>1</sup> In school year 2020-21, 35% of students were from China and 18% from India. *Open Doors*: [www.opendoorsdata.org](http://www.opendoorsdata.org)

compassion for the lost.” Begin to pray that God will lead you to a relationship with a potential future 10/40 leader who is studying on a campus near you.

## 2. Understanding Students and Meeting Their Needs

*“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”* Philippians 4:13

*“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”* Philippians 2:13

Every few months, Matt and Bonnie heard their pastor announce an opportunity to help international students in their town. “It’s friendship, plain and simple,” the pastor would say with a smile. “But it could change lives significantly. Give Gary a call if you’re interested....” Matt and Bonnie typically thought about something else the minute they heard the word “international.” After all, they had never been out of the country or even traveled around the U.S. much. What would they have in common with an international student? Could they even begin a conversation? What if the student didn’t speak English? What if he or she didn’t like their food? And in their small home, they certainly didn’t have room for an international student to live with them.

This young couple held many of the common misconceptions people often have toward friendship with international students. Friendship is just what it means—friendship. This relationship begins small and can grow to various depths and commitment levels. Here are five things that friendship with an international does *not* involve:

1. The student does not live in your home. While some people choose to be a host family and ask a student to live with them, scores of thousands have chosen to be what we call “friendship partners.” As a friendship partner, they get together once or twice a month to build a relationship with the student and talk on the phone or communicate through text or email messages.
2. It does not require a financial commitment. In fact, you are encouraged not to become involved in any financial matters with an international student. It’s friendship, not sponsorship.
3. It does not require legal sponsorship. These students are already here in the U.S. and have housing in their particular university setting, or their own apartment or house. They are responsible for their own legal status within the country and the resulting obligations. Not only is it not your responsibility, but we do also not encourage such a relationship.
4. It does not require that you speak a foreign language or that you be an expert about the particular country of the student. Students studying in our universities must pass the Test of English Fluency (TOEFL) with a good proficiency in the language before they can be accepted into our higher learning institutions.
5. It does not involve a major alteration or adjustment to your lifestyle! Many people feel like they must go to great lengths and set up special events or impressive activities for their international students. Students aren’t interested in these special events or elaborate activities. Instead, they want to see the inside of an American home and have the opportunity to observe the everyday life of an

American family. These students are happy to join any family activity and are thrilled to be included.

### **The Tables Are Turned**

For a few moments, consider all the typical fears and challenges for an overseas missionary. These aspects are reversed in a friendship outreach to international students. Most missionaries face the challenges of raising financial support, learning another language, adjusting to a completely different culture, separation from family and friends, and often fear of failure and rejection.

Conversely, as previously stated, when we become friendship partners to international students in our country, the tables are turned. It is the student who is facing all of the awkward and stressful challenges of adapting to our culture, language, and environment.

Permit this understanding of the international student to alleviate your fears. You are in a position of loving strength. As you come alongside your new international friends, they view you as the expert. You are someone they can trust and who can help them make their way in this new and unfamiliar country. You have an advantage in this area over any overseas missionary. You have the opportunity to minister to the international student in your own country! In addition, the student will often sense his or her need and desire for your friendship.

### **Walk in Another Person's Shoes**

Let's take an imaginary trip to another country for a few minutes. Let's say you have an intense interest in Near Eastern archaeology, and you decide to study for a semester in Egypt. After traveling for nearly half a day to get to the country, you step off the plane and a blast of heat hits you in the face. The heat seems to hang in the air with an intensity you've never felt before. With great difficulty, in the midst of a dry sauna, you locate your bags and shuffle through customs. With some effort, you manage to tell a cab driver that you'd like to go to the university.

The cab driver knows you are a foreigner and takes you the "long" route, which involves an extra thirty minutes of driving and a much larger fare. When you finally reach the university, nothing is open because you've arrived on a holy day. So, the driver takes you to a nearby hotel.

Before coming to Egypt, you had been studying Arabic and thought you were fluent. At least you made good grades in your Arabic classes, but now that you are in Egypt, everyone talks so fast and seems to think *you* have a strong accent. At the restaurant in the hotel, you try to find something "normal" to eat but everything looks different, and you wonder where to begin. Exhausted from your travels, you drop into bed. At 5:00 a.m. you are startled awake by blaring horns that call people to prayer. You begin to wonder: "Will I ever like it here? Can I understand the Egyptian ways of life?"

International students, including those who are well-respected leaders in their own countries, arrive in the United States with the same fears and concerns. The simplest

tasks become enormously complicated, and many face plans that fall apart or situations that are unexpected.

One evening as an ISI family sat down to dinner, the conversation around the table was broken by the ring of the phone.

“Hello, is Rob there?” came the heavily accented voice on the phone.

“Yes, this is Rob. How can I help you?”

“I am Fernando from Peru and I heard you speak at the university orientation this morning about your program for American friends. I went to my host family where the university has set up for me to live. But when I got there, they said they change their mind. I have nowhere to go.”

“And where are you now, Fernando?” Rob asked.

“I have my suitcases and I am downtown.”

Within half an hour, Fernando was in Rob’s home. Soon “Nando,” as he preferred to be called, became a part of the family. Eventually, he made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Fernando’s experience with host families is not uncommon. Most students have no one to meet them at the airport when they arrive in America, or no one to help them find the campus or housing. Oftentimes, their best laid plans fall apart. If you are available to step into these situations at the student’s time of need, you will make a lifetime friend.

Like another student, Johanna, said: “When you first come to America, it is very confusing. The first thing we face is loneliness. We need to have a friend to talk with who can explain things to us. It is very different. We need to know how to open a bank account, how to get around town. We need to know what bus to take and how to get tickets for the train. Many times, we don’t know where to shop and what is the difference between grocery store and department store, and what in the world is Walmart?”

Students like Fernando and Johanna are typical in their experience and the first months of adjustment. These first few weeks in America bring one bewildering experience after another. Your friendship outreach may begin with nothing more than being there to meet needs. Activities and time spent picking up your students at the airport, helping them get settled, showing them around town, and helping them with English will afford you opportunity for deep impact on their lives. It’s an experience that for overseas missionaries takes months or even years to develop.

## **A Different Arrival**

Daoming arrived in the U.S. from China and was learning his way around the university and struggling with his accounting classes. Daoming had a wife and a one-year-old son who would remain in Beijing for the time Daoming was in the U.S. His mother, who was in poor health, was also living in Beijing. Because of his upbringing and education

in China, Daoming was suspicious about Christianity, but he was willing to have American Christian friends.

Through a friendship program at their local church and in cooperation with the local university, Carl and Rose became interested in an international friendship. Carl was a CPA and Rose was a stay-at-home mom. Because Daoming was studying for a business degree, he was matched with Carl and Rose's family. They had been Christians for about six years. They had a six-year-old daughter and an eight-year-old son, and Rose's father, who was in poor health, lived with them.

First, Carl invited Daoming to their home for dinner. There were no opportunities prior to the meal to discuss spiritual matters. Before they ate, Carl prayed and thanked God for their meal. Daoming politely joined the prayer time and then said, "The only person that I know who believed in God was my aunt in Shanghai. She also prayed before her meals." Carl and Rose wanted to carry on a spiritual discussion with Daoming, but they struggled to know where to begin. Surprisingly, Daoming opened the discussion without much effort. This is commonplace, since international students don't carry a stigma regarding discussion of religion like most Americans do. Carl and Rose knew that as they loved Christ, other opportunities to share would come about in the natural course of the friendship. In the meantime, they would enjoy Daoming as a person and include him on family outings such as picnics or shopping trips. Daoming was happy to go whenever invited and when his intense study schedule allowed.

Carl and Rose and Daoming were in the early stages of a friendship. Carl and Rose were simply helping Daoming with some of his basic relational needs, and it didn't take any special skill to accomplish these tasks. Just being a friend for Christ's sake was all that was required.

### **Practical Needs You Can Meet**

Anything new is challenging. You may feel inadequate or afraid of a new relationship with an international student. Let's examine some of the needs of this person and how you can meet them in simple ways:

**Physical Needs:** International students will often face tremendous physical needs during their first weeks in the United States. Arrival in the U.S. is often the end of a grueling cross-country race of preparation, packing, saying goodbye to family and friends, and hours of sleepless travel before reaching their final destination.

As mentioned earlier, students typically arrive with no one to greet them at the airport, and they are unsure of how to locate their campus and housing on their own. An American family or friend who awaits them with a smile and an offer of temporary lodging and a comfortable bed is a gift that can seldom be outdone. There is perhaps no greater avenue for bonding with your new friend than to meet them when they arrive and bring them to your home. You will be remembered forever.

Another very practical way to meet physical needs is to provide for household items for students as they set up their new place of residence. In many areas of the country, Christians provide furniture and household items at giveaway events to help students.

Or they organize shopping events to help students locate needed items. Students see these events as tangible expressions of God's love for them as they set up their homes.

Another great physical need for students is a craving for food that is familiar. Students love to share their culture and are often thrilled to take over your kitchen and prepare some food for you and your family from their home countries. You might research grocery stores that specialize in ethnic foods not common in American grocery stores.

A student may be athletic, or even a soccer star in his or her home country. There is probably an exercise facility on campus that students can use at little or no cost. But students may need your guidance and help to find it, understand how to use the lockers and the system for use of towels. You could work out alongside the student and develop your friendship together in play as well as conversation.

Talk with students about security. Many countries have a strong military presence, and the police are feared in some countries. You could let students know that the police on their campus or in their community are there to help. Also encourage them not to go out alone at night and to lock the doors to their rooms and dwellings.

**Mental Needs:** These new arrivals in the United States often speak a limited amount of English. You can help them practice their skills. Their vocabulary may be extremely limited when it comes to colloquial sayings or idioms, so think about these aspects when talking with them. Imagine some of the images that are conjured up in the minds of students as they interpret some of our idioms literally. For instance, what might the student think when they hear that some of us stay after church just to "shoot the breeze." Or how about hearing that the registrar at the school "jumped the gun" in telling him that he was definitely enrolled in the morning accounting class. Or what about the expression "It's raining cats and dogs"?

There is perhaps no easier way to spend time ministering to an international student than to come alongside him or her as a conversational English partner and to help the student gain a better command of our language.

Also understand that their studies are the top priority, so don't make too many demands on their time. Many friendship partners have offered to assist students by proofreading their papers before they submit them to their professors and making suggestions on grammar or presentation. Students often appreciate this because their studies are so vitally important to them.

Many of these students are already brilliant in their particular fields of expertise. Talk with them about world events and their views and perspectives on life in general. Later on, we will detail specific topics of conversation, but the key is to let the students express themselves and to be interested in their needs. For example, make sure they know it's okay to talk with their professor. Many students are from cultures where the teacher is the ultimate authority and out of respect is not to be questioned or challenged. Students need to know the freedom they have in our Western system of learning.

**Social Needs:** Students will naturally be attracted to others from their own country. You can help them develop new friendships outside this sphere of people who speak

their native language. Introduce them to your Christian friends. A word of caution is necessary about touching and overfriendliness—particularly with the opposite sex. Be sensitive to different cultural expectations. For example, students from some cultures are unaccustomed to being touched, especially by the opposite sex. In friendly religious contexts, we sometimes are accustomed to hugging. Be aware that such touching may not be appropriate or may be misinterpreted by the international.

**Emotional Needs:** How do you handle new things in your life? Think about change and how you adapt to it. Some of us do it easily, but some have great difficulty. Cultural changes are also difficult. Often, the international student feels like there is so much to learn about the American way of life. You can help students develop an attitude of trust so they can talk about their feelings and emotional difficulties. One of the commonplace reactions to a new culture is to withdraw and isolate. But that is a lonely way to live, and you can help the student face his or her fears and overcome them.

**Spiritual Needs:** While spiritual concerns are a key motivation for us to interact with an international student, make sure it's not your single focus and only motivation. Students sense when they are merely a project or target for evangelism. They also know when you are sincere and genuine toward them with "no strings attached." Your first priority should be reaching out to help with the student's needs and from there developing a basis to talk about spiritual matters. In this sense, it's no different than reaching out to a neighbor or a business associate.

Initially, you will not know the international's attitude about religion or spirituality. Take the time to ask about their experiences. He or she will probably be willing to talk about the topic but make sure you avoid arguments, heated discussions, or judgmental statements. You will find that many African Muslims attended missionary schools for their education. Some Chinese, who generally are atheists, have attended Baptist high schools. This often opens the door to discuss their views on the Christian faith.

It is appropriate to invite your international friend to attend a church service, wedding, funeral, or baptism. You can free the student from pressure by inviting him to come simply as an observer. Many students believe that it is American to be a Christian.

Mohammed flew into the San Francisco airport and was met by Ben, an ISI staff member, who at the time was working at a university in the area. As they made their way back through town, traffic to the Bay Bridge was detoured onto the city streets of the North Beach District, notorious for its live strip joints, pornography shops, and illicit sexual opportunities.

The rapid get-to-know-you conversation screeched to a halt as Mohammed sat looking in shock at the flashing neon signs on one city block announcing seemingly every sexual sin mentioned in the Bible. Billboards of half-naked women towered over entrances to dark night clubs, each with an employee in front beckoning passersby to indulge in the show inside.

Mohammed looked at Ben and said, "I do not understand. Why do Christians have this kind of place. My God Allah would never allow this in my country. I think Islam is better than Christianity."

For the remainder of the trip, Ben explained the difference between cultural Christian roots in America and genuine Christianity. Mohammed's beliefs and preconceived notions of America are common to many students. They don't understand that all Americans are not Christians. When the cultural situation is reversed, we tend to draw the same conclusions: i.e., that a Latin American is Roman Catholic; a person from Saudi Arabia is Muslim; a person from Thailand is a Buddhist, etc. Talk with the international student about how our culture is distinct from our faith. Do not be discouraged. The ever-increasing darkness of our culture allows us as Christians to stand out in stark contrast to what students see in the non-Christian part of our culture.

Many international students feel that a balanced life indicates a successful society. Therefore, they are very interested in our spiritual life because they feel that it has had a major contribution in our success.

**Local Acclimation Needs:** Every international faces thousands of questions, most of which are usually easy to answer. Here are some practical ways you can help your friend:

1. Show the student around the area. Explain how to use the public transportation system (you may first have to learn yourself if you haven't used it). Show how to use a parking meter and other modes of transportation.
2. Show students where to find a public rest room when they are away from their residences. Explain that rest rooms are usually available in stores, coffee shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Tell them it is safe to drink the water in the U.S.
3. Help students set up a bank account, phone, and internet service. Explain how to use a toll-free 800 number, and the charges involved with using other numbers. Explain the security risks of using public Wi-Fi.
4. Help them shop in a grocery store. Help locate foods and seasonings from their countries. Help select a particular store for shopping. Explain the many possibilities. Explain about using store loyalty cards and how to use coupons and mobile apps for discounts.
5. Teach the student about tipping in restaurants and other places.
6. Explain the difference between a Walmart store and a high-end store. Introduce students to the concept of buying furniture or used items through online sites and at garage sales. Be sure to talk about how to be safe when buying from sites like Craigslist (e.g., meeting seller at a public place). Give them pointers about when to shop—seasonal sales, year-end sales, etc.

Other practical tips for the student are included in a resource called *How to Survive in the U.S.*, from ISI. (See Appendix A)

**Meeting the Children's Needs:** As an American, you have a lot of internal information about what is proper and what is not. If the international student has children, you can assist him/her or the family with additional needs:

1. Help parents understand acceptable dress for their children at school. They may come from a situation where children wear uniforms, and they need to know whether their child's school has a dress code. As you assist them with these matters, their children will be able to merge into the American schools without becoming the subject of laughter or embarrassment. Help parents feel at ease, knowing that children adjust to culture and language far more quickly than adults. They will often help their parents with language because they learn it so rapidly.
2. Explain the necessity of parents' involvement with their children's education. School teachers are often busy with a large number of students. Parents need to attend school meetings and express their willingness to get involved. Explain that the teacher may not initiate such contact unless a student is having a problem. It's appropriate to schedule an appointment with the teacher to introduce the family's situation to him or her.
3. Help internationals understand the importance of their children's friendships, but also to be aware of their children's friends and get to know who they are.
4. Help them understand the advantages and disadvantages of television as well as online video games and social media for children. Help them to achieve a balance with their children regarding healthy media and to be aware of the danger of overexposure.
5. Take international students and their children to the local public library. Show them how to use search options, then give them a brief tour of the library. Unless shown how, they may hesitate to ask questions at the reference desk or other places of assistance. In many libraries, you can enlist the help of a librarian to give a tour that can direct students to resources in their language.
6. Help students learn about the inexpensive forms of entertainment available in the region. Show them resources for family activities and ways to learn about the area.

**Language Needs:** You can help international students learn to speak better English and also to understand what's going on around them. It doesn't take any special language training to meet this need. Most of the time, it involves simply listening to the international and being available to help. Ken went to lunch with his international friend, Hassan. The student wanted to buy lunch for his American friend and thought of the word "hospitality" when he said, "Let me hospitalize you." With patience and love, Ken explained how to use the word "hospitality." What embarrassed Hassan was not this single use of the word but the fact that he had used the phrase on many occasions, and no one had taken the time to correct him.

The English speaker can also make language errors as well as the international. For example, Myra was cooking and couldn't open a jar of tomato sauce. She asked her student, Manuel, from Mexico, to help. With ease, Manuel twisted open the jar. Myra smiled and said, "Thank you. You are very macho." Instead of a smile, Manuel was horrified at the words and said, "No! No!" Later Myra learned that in his part of Mexico, "macho" is used when referring to a man who is considered to be promiscuous.

## A Key to Meeting Needs

Awareness and sensitivity are two words that are crucial with internationals. Ask God how He wants you to be involved in their lives. These students are scattered throughout the United States, and some of them are on your doorstep.

Friendship partners in Montana described how a married couple from the Middle East had moved to their town and the university they served. Since their arrival, they encountered various trials with finances, visas, jobs, and academics. Their citizenship required them to be Muslim, but they did not have a true faith in Islam. They were surprised to find that Christians surrounded them during this difficult time, blessing them with financial gifts, warm meals, and hospitality. These showers of blessings and love caused the couple to ask questions about Christianity. Soon they also desired to have a personal relationship with Christ. While this international couple received blessings of love, the Christians who were faithful to God's calling on their lives were also blessed to witness God's salvation, provision, and faithfulness showered on this international couple. [Excerpted from *A Call to Keep Shining*, (Colorado Springs, CO: International Students, Inc., 2013). February 8.]

## Apply What You've Learned

1. Examine your fears about meeting people from other nations. What concerns come to mind? How can you face these concerns and begin to overcome them? Feel free to ask an international student to help you.
2. How can you increase your sensitivity and awareness of internationals who cross your path? Ask God to open your eyes to new opportunities for ministry and ways you can meet their needs.
3. Close your eyes and pretend you have just stepped off the airplane in China. You will not return to the U.S. for four to six years. Make a list of the needs you feel you might have during your first week or month away from home. What emotions run through your heart and mind? Take your list and ask yourself what ministry programs or activities you could create to meet the needs of international students in similar situations.

### 3. Felt Called but Didn't Go

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."* 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Sometimes Helen felt overwhelmed with guilt. These strong feelings swelled whenever a missionary spoke at her church, or the pastor talked about having a vision for the world. Each year when a missions emphasis service came about, and people went forward to commit their lives to world evangelism, Helen made sure she wasn't there.

Every time Helen's thoughts or attention turned to overseas or to international matters, she flashed back to her childhood. As a young girl, Helen attended a series of evangelistic meetings. On the final night, the evangelist urged people to walk to the altar and give their lives to world evangelism. At eight years old, Helen felt caught up in the emotion of the evening. Her best friend, Bobbie, stood and walked down the aisle. Under obvious peer pressure, Helen followed her friend to the front and dedicated her life to overseas missions. Her parents were particularly proud of her decision, but later, Helen experienced regular waves of guilt because her life took a different direction. During her final year of college, she met a godly man who was planning a career in business. Kevin and Helen married after college, settled down in their community, and had three children. Helen had never traveled outside of the continental United States. To make matters worse, Helen had kept in touch with Bobbie, who went into career missions in Africa. Each month, in fact, she received reports and letters from Bobbie about her significant ministry.

"The Lord called me," Helen told a visiting missionary, "but I never followed through on my call."

While some readers may scoff at Helen's feelings of guilt, there are people like her scattered throughout the Church in this country. These individuals feel they've let God down because they don't work in full-time Christian service or because they are not missionaries overseas.

While there are those who are truly called to overseas missionary service, people like Helen may need to realize that the "go" of the Great Commission can be fulfilled in ways other than a career in missions.

Too often we miss the fact that the "go" means to *go to people*. Most of us think it means to go to another country. In fact, the "go" of the Great Commission may entail going no farther than the local university, where the nations of the world are already gathered. Many do not realize that dreams and desires for overseas ministry can be fulfilled without ever boarding a plane.

#### **Following the Call to Go by Staying**

At age seventy, Ethel Hatfield became a Christian. She felt grateful for her salvation and wanted to give the rest of her life in service to Christ. When she told the Sunday

School director about her willingness to help, he said, "It's too bad, but we don't have a place for you in our program." Not easily discouraged, Ethel asked the Lord for opportunities.

One day while working in the flower garden in her front yard, a Chinese student stopped by and visited with her. He was on his way to the nearby university campus. Ethel invited the student for tea. As days and weeks passed, their friendship grew. Eventually they began to study the Scriptures together, and the student invited other Chinese friends. Soon they were all involved in regular Bible study.

Two years later, Ethel died. At her funeral, seventy Chinese students stood at attention. Ethel Hatfield knew the meaning of missions. She was a missionary in the truest sense of the word...without ever leaving home.

### **God's Unique Answer to Missionary Prayer**

Victor and Amy lived in a small town in the Midwest only blocks from their local college. Both Victor and Amy had a rich background in ministry. As a student, Amy had been involved in a campus ministry at her college. Though Victor and Amy didn't know each other at the time, both attended a Christian conference and came away with a deep burden for world missions. Individually they prayed over the years, then as a couple after they met and married, for God to open a door of direction for them to go overseas. Though they prayed consistently, no doors opened.

As time passed, they both felt an overwhelming burden for China. Often, they would drive past student housing at the college and see the Chinese students entering the dorm. They sensed the Lord wanting them to reach out to the Chinese students on campus.

"During a missions' emphasis at church," says Amy, "the Associate Pastor spoke about target ministries. At one point, he highlighted the importance of being aware of international students in our midst and what a strategic mission field they are for us to reach. He said, 'Many of these students will be future leaders of the world when they return home.' At these words, suddenly light bulbs were going off in my mind, and I knew that God was speaking to my heart. I really began to seriously pray about this vision.

"It was shortly after that weekend as I was parking my van in front of our house that God showed me. We never see international students walk by our home...never. But as I pulled up, there were seven Asian students walking right by my house. I have no idea where they were going because we are not on the normal route students take to campus. Before I could even get out of the car I heard very clearly from the Lord, 'You need to reach out to these internationals now. You need to go to the college and volunteer to befriend students and invite them to your home.' And that's just what I did.

"That same day, I went to the campus and learned of seven students from mainland China. We sent invitations to them to come to our home, and three of the seven accepted our invitation. That night began a ministry of hospitality. We had them back

to our home numerous times for dinner, and we took trips together to Chinatown in Chicago. Soon God blessed our relationships to the point where some began to study the Scripture with us on a regular basis.

“To our surprise, later in the year we found that we had gained a reputation among students on the campus. In our first meeting, students would often say, ‘Oh, so you are Victor and Amy! I’ve heard many good things about you.’

“One day a Chinese scholar, a visiting professor of English, was on his way back from the library and my kids were out playing. I looked out the window to check on my kids and saw a Chinese man talking to my children. So, I watched, thinking, *this is interesting; I’m sure he won’t talk to them very long*. But the conversation kept going and going. So, I thought to myself, *I’m going to go see who this man is*. I struck up a conversation with him and learned he had just been in the United States a month and was incredibly homesick. He shared how he was really suffering, having left his wife and son back in China. The culture shock was so great, and he felt incredibly lonely. ‘I decided,’ the scholar said, ‘instead of becoming depressed, that I would go and talk to children because they are not threatening, and they are so accepting and will talk with me. This helps my loneliness.’

“We invited him to dinner and over the next nine months we became close friends. He told some friends of ours before he returned to China, ‘I want to be a Christian, please pray for me. I am going back to China, and I will miss the Christians. I love being with the Christians.’”

During one evangelistic potluck gathering with students at Victor and Amy’s home, this once lonely professor’s heart was receptive to the Gospel message he heard before his return to China.

Many like Victor and Amy are faithful, obedient Christians. They have heard God speak to their hearts about the lost world. They have prayed the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Here am I. Send me.” But the door for overseas ministry seems to remain to them. Too often Christians who have this experience internalize guilt or feel they must not be good enough for God to use. After all, if they were truly useful to the Kingdom, God would have opened a door for them to go.

Another false interpretation that is made, because of the way we tend to glorify overseas missions with a certain mystique, is the erroneous conclusion that the lack of an open-door stems from a lack of spirituality. It is tempting to feel that those who are laboring overseas are somehow more spiritual or above the average believer who remains at home.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We must make room in our understanding of God’s dealings with us as laborers that He does not call every believer to a career in overseas work. In fact, there is only one difference between the missionary that is “over there” and the missionary that is “here.” It is that the one “over there” is “over there.” Surely Victor and Amy’s ministry to the Chinese at their local college is as much a step of obedience and fulfillment of their call as going to China.

## Missionaries on Our Own Campuses

*“Wouldn’t it be great if God used us to touch the lives of international students on our campus?”* wondered a few of the college students from Western Hills Community Church in California. Many of them attended a state university with about 600 international students from all over the world.

Soon the dream became a reality, when three of the college students began a Sunday morning class called English for Internationals (EFI), to assist students with their command of the English language. Through this class some of the international students who were regulars grew more deeply involved with American Christian college students, building genuine bonds of friendship and sharing.

One night the group of students was sitting around the living room of an American home playing a conversation game. Jingyi, a student from Hong Kong, drew her question card from the stack. The card read, “Share one thing you are thankful for with the rest of the group.” In a matter-of-fact tone, Jingyi said, “I am most thankful for becoming a Christian.” The Americans around the circle looked at one another in bewilderment, because for months they had been praying for Jingyi’s salvation.

“When did this happen?” one of them asked her.

“Oh, I accepted Jesus on my own a couple of months ago,” she said.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” came the next question.

Jingyi smiled and said, “Well, because no one asked.”

Still another asked, “What made you take this step?”

Jingyi looked down and said with a smile of calm joy on her face, “It was because of all of you. I could not deny the love of Jesus in all of you, and I knew He was real and that I needed what you have in your life.”

Missions is about people. Someone once said that every person’s life is like a book. A book has a beginning and an ending and tells a story as each new chapter unfolds. The exciting thing about each life is that its story is not finished. While God sees our lives from beginning to end, every life can be influenced for good or for bad.

It is in the intersection of our stories that the future is born. As God brings people across our path, we are changed by them and are used by God to impact others. Missions is nothing more than those of us who carry the story of Jesus in our stories going to those who have not yet encountered Him. It is our privilege to help their stories intersect with the life-changing story of Jesus Christ. His story will change their futures forever. And we have the privilege of helping to connect their stories with His story.

We don’t need to be called by God to a foreign land to be used by Him in His plan for reaching the nations. Ethel Hatfield, Victor and Amy, and the college students of Western Hills Community Church are on the cutting edge of what God is doing in missions today. They simply took the story of Christ with them to those from other nations who haven’t had the opportunity to meet Jesus Christ. Their trip to the mission

field didn't entail quitting their jobs or uprooting their families to settle in another part of the world. The door of missions opened for them onto a nearby campus or the dormitory of their local university.

### **Apply What You've Learned**

1. Has God burdened you for a particular country or group of people? Go to your local university or college and see if there are students enrolled from that country. Begin to pray for them.
2. If there are students from a country for which you are burdened, offer your assistance to your local university's International Student Office as a friendship partner or a conversation partner. Explain to the International Student Advisor (ISA) that you have a special interest in friendship with a student from that country and ask to be matched up or introduced.
3. Invite students from that country to your home. Encourage them to bring a friend with them.

## 4. Friendship and Blind Spots

*“Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.” John 4:36-38*

Our culture and neighborhoods have grown distant. People rarely know the names of their neighbors—much less have a friendship with them. We’ve increasingly grown more isolated.

Dr. Richard Halverson, former chaplain of the U.S. Senate and former board member for ISI, said, “Friendship! What a beautiful, uncommon word! Uncommon, not because it is rarely used; uncommon because it is rarely used in the context of personal evangelism.”

He continued, “Most personal evangelism—as I have observed it for over fifty years—is something ‘done to’ someone with whom the personal evangelist has little relationship—certainly not friendship. Tragically, zealous personal evangelists often reject those who refuse to respond favorably to their evangelistic advances, thus alienating the target.”

Consider the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He made an intentional effort to be a friend to people like Matthew (a tax collector) or the woman at the well (a Samaritan). Through His friendships, Jesus Christ loved people into a relationship with God.

Friendship evangelism isn’t complicated, but it means what it says—it is a friendship, *and* it is evangelism. One element without the other falls short of the guiding purpose of the relationship.

Darren is an outgoing person and forms relationships easily. But if you ask him to talk with his friends about Jesus Christ, he falls into silence and doesn’t know where to begin.

On the other end of the spectrum is Jesse, who has gained a reputation for being a vocal Christian. For almost any topic, Jesse finds a spiritual connection and steers the conversation accordingly, without any sensitivity toward the other person’s faith relationship or cultural background. When it comes to evangelism, Jesse is like a bulldozer. He’s bound to plow over whomever he contacts rather than move toward a relationship with eternal significance.

One of the most helpful tools to understanding the concept of friendship evangelism is *The Spiritual Awareness and Growth Chart* (developed by Dr. James F. Engel).

This tool (see below) clarifies the big picture of moving a person from a casual friendship to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Students who have been raised

under certain repressive systems, may have no conscious awareness of a Supreme Being.

### Spiritual Stages Scale

*Adapted by Dean Halverson and Howard Killion from the Spiritual Awareness and Growth Scale by Dr. James F. Engel. Note: Not everyone goes through these stages exactly as indicated, but they are important signposts.*

Gods Initiative	Christian's Responsibility		International's Response (Becoming aware of, and then more and more in love with, Jesus Christ)
<p style="text-align: center;">Witness of the Spirit</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gives spiritual life</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Convicts</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Reveals Himself</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Ministry outreach</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Christian fellowship Personal growth</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Harvesting</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cultivating and watering the crop</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Planting the seed</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Preparing the soil</p>	+10	Vision for future ministry
		+9	Effective outreach to others
		+8	Development in Christian leadership
		+7	Growth in total stewardship
		+6	Recognition and use of spiritual gifts
		+5	Understanding and application of Bible doctrine
		+4	Growth in Bible study
		+3	Conceptual and behavioral growth
		+2	Adoption of Christian identity
		+1	Assurance of salvation
			<b>Conversion: New Creation in Christ because received Him as Savior</b>
-1	Repentance		
-2	Decision to act		
-3	Recognition of personal sin problem in relation to God		
-4	Positive attitude toward the Gospel		
-5	Understanding fundamentals of the Gospel		
-6	Positive attitude toward the God who has made Himself fully known only through Jesus [Biblical Monotheism: Christianity (but no personal relationship with Jesus)]		
-7	Understanding that God made Himself fully known only through Jesus		
-8	Belief in a Creator God with personal attributes but not belief in Jesus as God [Nonbiblical Monotheism: Judaism, Islam, some forms of Hinduism]		
-9	Belief in a spiritual reality but not in a single Creator God who has personal attributes [Monotheism, Pantheism, Polytheism: Hinduism (most forms); Jainism; Sikhism; Buddhism; Shintoism; Taoism; Zoroastrianism; Animism/Voodoo/Santeria; New Age; Native American religion; Wicca; Druidism; Gaia; Astrology; Mormonism]		
-10	No belief in any spiritual reality [Secularism, Atheism, Agnosticism; Scientism, Neo-Darwinism, Marxism, Confucianism]		

Other students may have some exposure to religion but no real knowledge of God. Many Muslim students have a positive attitude toward discussions about God even though they have no information about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The spiritual journey for each international will be unique. Someone at –10 on this scale—or no conscious awareness of a Supreme Being—could take a long time to move into a personal commitment to Christ. On the other hand, some internationals have had a great deal of contact with other Christians and may be very close to committing their lives to Christ.

If you have the opportunity to help an international move from a –10 (no conscious awareness of a Supreme Being) to a –6 (awareness of the fundamentals of the Gospel), you can be greatly encouraged. That is a great deal of progress. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our job is to discern the spiritual position of the student in their journey and then lovingly help him or her further along the way. Often, we face confusion about our involvement with evangelism. We hang our heads in failure if we do not lead a person into a relationship with Jesus Christ. *Successful evangelism is when a Christian is available for God to use in another person's life. Through your availability, you help the other person move in a positive direction, whether or not that means coming immediately into a relationship with God.*

Sometimes in working with an international, you will have the opportunity to build on a spiritual relationship that someone else has helped to develop. Jean-Claude, a young university student in Switzerland, suffered from deep depression. The despair reached the point where Jean-Claude decided to end his own life. After buying a gun, he selected a peaceful place by the river and left goodbye notes to his family.

While enroute to this secluded spot, Jean-Claude was approached by a woman he had never met before. "Did you know that Jesus Christ loves you and that He wants to be a part of your life?" the woman said with a warm smile on her face.

Her words riveted Jean-Claude's feet to the ground so that he was unable to move forward. The woman told Jean-Claude about a God who desired a relationship with him. She explained, "My husband is a pastor in the city of Lausanne. Would you like to come home for dinner?" Without knowing why, he accepted the invitation. During the evening, he poured out his troubles, including his plans to commit suicide. Although the pastor and his wife helped Jean-Claude reach stability and get through his crisis and depression, he did not commit his life to Jesus Christ.

Two years later, at a university in California where he was attending a short-term English program, Jean-Claude sat on a bus. As the bus made a routine stop, a young Chinese girl boarded and sat next to Jean-Claude. He noticed a Bible on her lap, and it vaguely reminded him about the pastor friend and his wife in Switzerland. Then the girl spoke to him: "Did you know that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?"

For the next half hour on the bus, the two discussed spiritual things. "Have you ever heard of the group International Students, Incorporated?" she asked Jean-Claude.

“They have a wonderful group on campus with students from all over the world. You could join one of their Bible studies. You must call their leader.” Two nights later, Jean-Claude called the ISI staff member and went to his home. He recounted his spiritual journey from depression and the two people who had talked with him about Christ. That night with the ISI staff member, Jean-Claude attended an evangelistic meeting in a local church. Ken Poure, then director of Hume Lake Christian Camp, clearly presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jean-Claude knew that God was speaking to his heart. During the invitation, he was the first to go forward, with tears in his eyes. He had finally found the peace and forgiveness that he had sought for many years. Long before we have the opportunity to reach out to international students, God is at work in their hearts, weaving a tapestry of relationships, experiences, and people to bring students to Christ.

Friendship evangelism works differently for every student because the spiritual awareness of each can be at a different level. In some parts of the world, such as Latin America, Africa, or Korea, evangelistic outreach is strong. Possibly your international friend has already made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Ask about the specialized ministries available to this student in their home country. Maybe God will use you to challenge your international friend to have a vision for a new ministry with his/her own people upon returning home. You can be a part of the discipleship and training of your international friends when they return, so they can make a significant spiritual impact in their own countries.

## **Blind Spots**

One evening, Jeremy had scheduled dinner with his Japanese friend, Hisashi. Since it was getting late, Jeremy decided to drop by Hisashi’s apartment on the way home from work to pick him up.

As Hisashi opened the door, a look of horror passed across his face as he saw Jeremy dressed in his business suit. “Please, Jeremy, I cannot come to your house now. Can you please wait and come back in one half hour? Then I can come.” Puzzled but not wanting to pry, Jeremy said, “That will be fine. I’ll be back in thirty minutes.”

After Jeremy left, Hisashi stripped off his jeans and T-shirt, showered, and selected his nicest suit to wear for the formal dinner that Jeremy and his family had obviously planned for the evening. Since Jeremy had thirty minutes to spare, he went home and slipped into casual clothes for the evening before returning for Hisashi.

Imagine the shock for both Hisashi *and* Jeremy when the student opened his apartment door. Jeremy now wore jeans and a T-shirt while Hisashi was dressed in his finest formal attire. Now they laugh over this story and love to tell others when they discuss the necessary adjustments for each other’s culture and expectations.

It is fun to relate to someone from another culture, but it can take a little effort for both parties to overcome differences and unique blind spots. As English-speaking Americans, we approach life from our own experience and perspectives. Think back to

the first time you got behind the wheel of a car. It's doubtful that you were aware of your own blind spots. Remember how you practically jumped out of your skin when you glanced over your shoulder on the freeway and unexpectedly saw another vehicle?

As we approach sharing our faith with someone from a different culture, we have our own distinct differences or blind spots. Unless we recognize and conquer these problem areas, they will hinder our effectiveness in a cross-cultural ministry.

*Blind spot #1: We minimize our cultural differences.*

There are profound cultural differences between us and internationals. Our nation is based on a Christian heritage and basic understanding of the Bible and its values, though our society is moving away from these. Many other cultures lack this Judeo-Christian approach to life and moral issues.

When you compare North America to the rest of the world, what cultural differences immediately come to mind? To start your answer, think about some other religions in the world, such as Buddhism, Islam, or Hinduism. (For brief profiles of various religions, see *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, by Dean C. Halverson.)<sup>1</sup>

Many in our culture generally accept the idea that God exists, people are sinful, and that Jesus Christ is a historical figure. Each of these concepts may be completely foreign to your international student. Be careful not to load your conversation with commonly used religious terms and assume your friend will understand you. At the same time, don't hesitate to talk about your faith. The Good News about Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation. Often the international student will initiate a conversation about religion, faith, or spiritual things. It is common for students to be open to discuss this subject with an American.

Keep in mind two distinctions about this particular blind spot:

- The worldview differences that separate people from various cultures and religions are real.
- These differences rarely crumble with a single conversation. Rather, they must be eliminated, brick by brick.

*Blind spot #2: We don't understand our audience.*

We tend to act as though everyone approaches life from our cultural perspective and Western thinking. An excellent resource for learning about spiritual and cultural differences is *Operation World*, by Patrick Johnstone.<sup>2</sup> This book, as well as the

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<sup>1</sup> Dean C. Halverson, General Editor. *The Compact Guide to World Religions—Understanding and Reaching Followers of Islam Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, Secularism, The New Age, and Other World Faiths* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World—The Day-by-Day Guide to Praying for the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993).

previously cited *Compact Guide*, will help you understand the political, social, and spiritual climate of other countries.

When we fail to get to know our international friend's customs and culture, we demonstrate this second blind spot and can make simple mistakes. For example, during the Christmas break, the Thompson family invited a Japanese student to stay with them in their home. Each morning, Mrs. Thompson changed the towels in his bathroom and to her chagrin found that he had taken a bath but not emptied the water in the tub. Also, the tile floor was covered with water. The first day she attributed it to forgetfulness and emptied the tub and mopped the floor.

But her frustration increased when this pattern continued through the week. She thought the Japanese student either lacked manners or was lazy. Mrs. Thompson felt angry that the student expected her to clean up after him. The least he could do was empty his own bath water.

The problem was Mrs. Thompson did not understand Japanese culture: one washes his body outside the tub, rinses off with water on the tile floor, then gets into the tub to soak. Homes in Japan have drains built into the floor to carry away the water. Because the hot water in the tub is clean, it is left for other family members to use for soaking. To empty the tub before several have used it is considered wasteful.

Similarly, it is easy for us to misinterpret actions, words, and customs. Too often we look at a situation through our own culture's eyes and attribute ill motives, judging others accordingly. If we don't anticipate the possibility of differences, we can damage relationships. We need to "think the best" and then allow room for correction of what is usually a misunderstanding. Through openness and discussion, we can learn and make the necessary adjustments.

If we are sincere in our desire to befriend someone from another country, then our first step is to become familiar with the person's country, culture, and family. Your international student is the best person to help you learn these cultural differences. Take a learning posture and let your student teach you about his or her world.

Some questions to ask might be:

- What's your country like?
- What would you like us to know about your family?
- What has surprised you about the United States?
- What actions have we Americans taken that you find offensive?
- Are there some cultural differences that you would like to tell us about?
- How can we meet your needs? Tell us how we can best help you and be friends with you.

As you seek to learn more about your international friend, it will draw you closer together and make your relationship more natural and more enjoyable. Through your genuine interest, you may also gain the opportunity to meet the student's spiritual needs by tactfully applying the Gospel to his or her own cultural grid.

Remember that even though students may call themselves Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu, they are not necessarily religious. For this reason, it is important not to push the student to defend the religion of his/her family or nation. Such a tactic is likely to alienate the student from the Gospel.

In many other places in the world, religion and culture are one and the same. For example, in many European countries, the people belong to the state church even though it has no spiritual significance in their daily lives. Many internationals see America as a Christian nation in the same way we see Saudi Arabia as an Islamic nation or Thailand as a Buddhist nation. Students' perception of Christianity is often based on what they see on television, in American movies, magazines, and even life in the university dormitory. You can help them understand that not everyone they meet in America is a Christian.

Sadly, after their experience in American universities, some Muslim women return to their homeland with a new commitment to Islam. Their observations of immoral lifestyles and resulting assumptions regarding the typical American have convinced them that they do not want to become Christian, and that Islam is a better way of life.

*Blind Spot #3: We view evangelism as an event.*

The Christian Church has perpetuated the concept that evangelism is an event rather than a relationship. Years ago, the Church encouraged enthusiasm through evangelistic meetings. Today we still gather unsaved friends and take them to large events where major evangelists are speaking. While these events are crucial and give an opportunity to begin a personal relationship with Christ, they are not enough. Evangelism should become a lifestyle and not be focused on an event.

In Acts 26:12-18, Paul tells of Jesus meeting him on the road to Damascus. Jesus said, "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

These words of Jesus explain three stages of evangelism. *First*, we need to open the eyes of the people. The Word says that the truth sets us free in Christ. Often the Bible uses metaphors related to farming when it comes to evangelism. The process of opening another person's eyes to the truth of Jesus Christ involves forming a relationship. Friendship evangelism in the early stages involves learning about that other person. As we become acquainted, we build the opportunity to talk about spiritual matters. To put it into the farming metaphor, this process is like plowing. We open a relational opportunity for dialogue about spirituality and God.

The *second stage* of evangelism is "turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." After forming a relationship, we need to tactfully discuss spiritual matters with the international student, or "plant" truth from God's Word into his or her heart. As the Word of God works in a life, it leads the individual to turn from evil and to an awareness of the need for a Savior—Jesus Christ.

The *third stage* is “so they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” If your friend has arrived at this point in his or her spiritual journey, you may lead your friend in a prayer of commitment to God and to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Follow up that decision with a study of the basics of the Christian life.

As we have said before, evangelism is not a single event, but a process. As an essential step in the process of friendship evangelism, you will need to determine the spiritual awareness of your international friend. Determine this before you begin to communicate spiritual truth. It’s impossible to reap a harvest where no seed has been planted. You may befriend a Chinese student who has never even talked with a Christian. Or befriend a Muslim who believes Christian’s worship three gods: God, Jesus, and Mary. If the overconfident friendship partner attempts to lead a Chinese or Muslim student to Christ without first assessing the student’s spiritual knowledge, he/she will only encounter frustration and confusion and perhaps alienate the student.

Each of us bears a responsibility as an ambassador for Jesus Christ. As we seek to work with the future leaders of the world, we do not want to say or do anything that would hinder their spiritual journey or create negative feelings about Christians or about God. Prematurely pushing a student to make a decision for Christ can have a damaging effect if he/she is not ready. Our task is to remain sensitive to God’s Holy Spirit and His leading.

Dr. Song, a slight Chinese man in his mid-fifties, had been in the United States for nine months when he visited the ISI Coffee House in a major northwestern city. He had earned a master’s degree in archaeology in the People’s Republic of China, and a Ph.D. while studying in the Pacific Rim. He was offered a professorship at a university in mainland China but had given up that position to come to the United States with his wife and nine-year-old child. His wife was involved in a post-doctorate fellowship at another northwestern university.

Dr. Song’s English was somewhat limited, and he spoke to an American Christian in the coffee house through a Japanese interpreter. (This type of cross-cultural interaction isn’t unusual.) In his zeal to share his faith, the Christian was less than sensitive and asked Dr. Song abruptly, “Do you know that you are a sinner?”

The question came as a total shock to Dr. Song, because to him, being Chinese, the word “sinner” meant “criminal.” He answered, “No, how could I be? If I were a ‘criminal,’ I would be in prison and not in the United States.” From his religious frame of reference, Dr. Song had no theology of sin.

The interpreter was stuck and tried to explain to Dr. Song what it meant to be a sinner, but to no avail. Out of frustration, the Christian handed Dr. Song a Chinese Bible in simplified script. He told him, “Please read this. It will help you understand what I am talking about.”

During the next few weeks, Dr. Song read the entire Chinese Bible several times! Later, he said that he understood who God is and that he himself was a sinner. From the

Bible, he understood that he could be forgiven for his sins, and he received Jesus Christ. In addition, he helped his wife and child to personally know the Lord.

As Dr. Song looked back at his spiritual journey, he felt that God brought him to America and to that coffee house in particular so he could learn about the Creator God. From his study of archaeology, Dr. Song came up with some unanswered questions, such as why there was a great flood throughout the world and why China had some of its origins in Iraq, or the Mesopotamian area.

Dr. Song had been taught that men came from apes, but he knew this could not be true because, he said, “apes begat apes and humans begat humans.” To explain the evolution of humans from apes, Dr. Song was told that humans evolved because of labor. Apes are tool users and came out of trees. Then they used tools to dig out honey from trees and ants from ant hills. Through using their minds and tools, apes evolved into humans. According to Dr. Song, this theory is believed by about 80 percent of all Chinese, but he could never make sense of it. As he read the Bible, Dr. Song’s studies in archaeology made sense. Science helped him in his pilgrimage to Christ as Lord and Savior.

While the American in this story didn’t have a perfect balance of spiritual sensitivity, God used him in spite of his mistakes and through the Scriptures led Dr. Song and his family to personal relationships with Jesus Christ. Again, we need to be sensitive to the spiritual condition of the international student before we begin our friendship evangelism.

#### *Blind Spot #4: It depends on me!*

We need to understand the importance of our relationship with an international student, but balance is crucial. We tend to overplay our role in the student’s making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Remember: we communicate truth, but God saves. Our understanding of this blind spot means keeping two things in perspective:

1. Patience and proper timing are critical if the seed of Gospel truth is to take root and grow. As the apostle Paul taught the Church at Corinth, “The Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6).

It’s important not to become either overconfident or oversensitive in your friendship partner relationship. For example, an overconfident friendship partner meets Bao from China. Without seeking basic information about Bao’s spiritual background, he plows ahead and pushes her to make a commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Bao fails to understand the cost of becoming a Christian. If she converts to Christianity, she will probably do so because her culture constrains her to please her American friends and not lose face. Her commitment will not be out of conviction of a genuine need for salvation but out of obligation to please.

The opposite could also occur if a friendship partner is oversensitive. Aware of the cost for an individual from a Communist country to make such a commitment, the oversensitive friendship partner may make no effort to speak of a commitment to Christ because he or she doesn't want to threaten the friendship. The result is that a person such as Bao would have no concrete witness and no opportunity to seek God for salvation through Christ.

As we seek His will, the Lord will open natural opportunities for us to talk about our personal relationship with Jesus Christ or to study the Bible with an international so he or she can make a personal decision. Our first need is to be willing servants. God will take our willingness and our reliance on the Holy Spirit and guide into all truth.

2. When it comes to international student evangelism, we must remember how successful evangelism is determined. It is not only when a student makes a personal commitment to Christ. Success is responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:38).

German students Gisela and Inge lost their baggage and money while traveling in Canada. A Christian family came to their rescue, brought them home, and bought new clothes for them. A month later, they stayed in a youth hostel in Oregon. Unknown to the girls, the hostel was run by Christians. The host couple told Gisela and Inge about Jesus Christ. Two weeks later, while hitchhiking, the girls were picked up by two widows who drove them down the west coast to San Francisco. During the trip, the two older women shared the love of Christ with the girls. When Gisela and Inge reached San Francisco, they wrote the couple in the hostel and told them they had both accepted Jesus Christ. God uses many people in the chain of events to bring students into a personal relationship with Christ. At ISI, we seek to follow 1 Peter 3:15, in the J.B. Phillips version: "Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord, and if anybody asks why you believe as you do, be ready to tell them, but do it in a gentle and respectful way."

We need to faithfully turn our lives and spiritual conversations over to the Holy Spirit and trust God to bring "success" from our faithfulness. Success is simply being a part of the process and the chain of events that brings Christ to an international student as his or her personal Lord and Savior.

*Blind Spot #5: We have a narrow view of evangelism.*

Cross-cultural evangelism with international students involves a variety of approaches. Too often the words "evangelism" or "witnessing" evoke the image of a person with an open Bible in his hand, verbally challenging someone with the Good News about Jesus Christ. Evangelism is much more complicated than this stereotypical image. We will cover evangelism in depth later in this book, but for now we need to recognize various avenues of witness to international students.

## Life Witness

Jean grew up in a church with a strong missions emphasis, but she never dreamed she could have a missionary impact without ever leaving home. As a college student, Jean saw international students every day from all over the world. When her church began an outreach to international students, Jean became a small group leader for a weekly English as a Second Language (ESL) class that met at her church.

Li Ming, a speech pathology major from Taiwan, attended Jean's group to work on her vocabulary, but after a few weeks she had to drop out because of a schedule conflict. It was a painful decision for her because Li Ming really wanted to be a part of the class. Sensing an opportunity to serve, Jean offered to meet individually with Li Ming on a weekly basis. Each time Jean gave Li Ming new vocabulary words and reviewed the lesson from the previous week.

After a month of sessions, Li Ming said, "Why do you do this for me? You faithfully come every week, without pay, and you don't even know me. You are a very kind person, Jean."

Li Ming's question opened the door for Jean to share the Gospel and explain that her actions came from her love of Jesus Christ. Not long afterward, Li Ming's father died in Taiwan. His death triggered a wrestling over many internal issues. "I'll never be good enough to please God," Li Ming said to herself.

Feeling sad and lonely, Li Ming thought, "Who can I turn to? There is only one person—Jean. She will listen and help me." Through a phone call, Li Ming found Jesus Christ. Through Jean's selfless service and sacrificial lifestyle, the Gospel opened a door in Li Ming's heart. Repeatedly, international students who have found Christ say that seeing Jesus in the lives of their American friends brought them to where they could not deny their own need for Jesus in their own lives.

As Joe Aldrich says in his book *Lifestyle Evangelism*, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."<sup>1</sup>

Amira found comfort in her new American friends, Roger and Michelle. Much of what she saw in American culture disturbed her. From the Middle East, Amira was often shocked by the loose morals and behavior in the media and in everyday dormitory life at the university. While she did not understand what made her friendship family different, she found similarities in their family life to the values and devotion of her own Islamic faith. She felt their home was a refuge from the negative side of the American culture, a side that her own religion would not have tolerated.

As the months passed, Amira attended many family functions. Roger and Michelle made her feel like part of their family. She was even invited to their children's birthday parties and large family gatherings with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph C. Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1978), p. 209.

One thing that intrigued Amira was the family's devotion to spiritual things and their commitment to their holy book—the Bible. They were what was called in Islamic culture, "People of the Book," even if their book was not the Qur'an. In her heart, Amira knew that they lived what they believed, and she admired their love for one another and commitment to family life. Her curiosity started many conversations about their Christian beliefs. Amira felt a freedom to ask questions because these friends never pushed their faith on her. She was aware that they wanted her to know about their faith and that it was central in their family's life, but they never pressured her. Amira also knew in her heart that they loved her for who she was—no strings attached.

On Easter Sunday, Amira attended the church program with her Christian friends. It was a phenomenal presentation about Jesus' death and resurrection. As they left the parking lot to go home, Amira began weeping—first silently, then audibly sobbing. Surprised and concerned, Roger pulled off to the side of the road.

"Amira, what is wrong?" he asked.

Trying to regain her composure, she spoke in a whisper, "I know that the story of Jesus we saw today is true, and I know I need Him in my life like you have Him in you and your family . . . but I cannot accept Him. My family will never understand if I become Christian. I know it is true because I see Jesus real in you and the other people, but to accept him, I must say to myself everything I have ever believed from my life in Iran is not correct. Islam is my life."

The life witness from this family brought Amira closer to the truth.

Students who come from nations with little or no Christian heritage are attracted and most receptive to this style of evangelism. 1 John 3:18 says, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

Your lifestyle can testify to the goodness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life.

## **Verbal Witness**

Our verbal witness is when we talk about our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This verbal witness can take place in many different forms. One is telling the international student about your own spiritual journey. Another would be to go through a tract or booklet such as *Knowing God Personally* (see Appendix A) or watching the *Jesus* video together and using the study guide. Each of these methods for verbal witnessing will be explored in depth in the chapter on evangelism. The international students who are most receptive to this particular approach are "prepared people" or students who over time have been exposed to Christ through the Bible and His people.

## Corporate Witness

Life-changing power is also revealed when an international student sees a community of faithful believers in Jesus Christ. A church that has genuine worship and caring relationships within the congregation is the best place for this type of witness. For corporate witness to work in the life of the international student, you will need to go with the student to church and introduce him or her to your Christian friends. The reality of such loving relationships will be observed not in a single meeting but over time.

Luke records the impact of corporate witness in Acts 2:42-47, and concludes by saying, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

A survey was conducted among students who had converted from Islam to Christianity. They were asked why they finally became Christians. Their answers emphasized the importance of corporate witness: they cited unexplainable answers to prayer and the unmerited acts of love from Christians. The average length of time between their first introduction to Christianity and their conversion was seven years.

*Friendship evangelism is a process and not a single event.* As we understand the different approaches to evangelism and the variety of avenues for witness, we will have more tools at our disposal for reaching international students with the Gospel. As we recognize our blind spots and overcome them, we will increase our effectiveness in turning these future leaders toward a spiritual relationship with Christ.

In summary, here are some basic do’s and don’ts for friendship evangelism:

### *Do:*

- Be committed for the long term—trust takes time.
- Be a genuine friend and don’t base your friendship on the student’s spiritual interest.
- Take an interest in the whole person and the variety of the person’s needs.
- Know your student.
- Learn from your student.
- Build a true friendship (going out of your way to sacrifice and give).
- Share your faith gently and respectfully.
- Find points in common for an ongoing relationship.
- Pray *with* the student and *for* the student.
- Invite the student to church and attend with him or her.
- Trust God to work.

### *Don’t:*

- Make assumptions.
- Argue.
- Pressure a student to make a decision.
- Take the student only to Christian activities.

- Assume that church is the only place where the student will hear and understand the Gospel.
- Give up!

## **A Ministry for Everyone**

Everyone can have a ministry to international students. In the next chapter, we'll go into more specifics. Whether you are young or old, single, or married—if you have a willing heart, you can be friends with an international student. The next chapter will detail part of the range of experiences you can have with an international student. It will also explain the lost art of hospitality and the distinction between it and entertainment.

## **The Perfect Family Ministry**

Often families are separated as they seek to follow Christ. Mom attends a women's conference, while Dad is involved in a men's study, and the children and teens are in their programs. Being a friendship partner with an international student is a ministry in which the entire family can participate together.

For nearly eight years, John and Sarah, along with their four daughters, have been reaching out to international students in California. As John said, "Nothing can provide your family a better missions experience than reaching out to international students."

He added, "It's one of the most affordable and effective ways to teach your kids the importance of reaching out to people from other cultures. Our children have a genuine sensitivity and acceptance of others because they realize that God has made all of us the same way and with the same basic needs."

Their daughter, Laura, said, "Our family is very family-oriented, and this has been a great ministry to do together. We've had the opportunity to share our faith in the process." The oldest daughter, Valerie, went on, "Some of the students have even stayed with us, like Kimiko, an author from Japan. Our family developed such a close relationship with her that she invited me to Japan and paid my expenses to come and stay with her family. The fact that we are an openly Christian family opens doors for us to share what makes our family different."

Another friendship partner had international students from Indonesia visiting their family. Daniel and Lylah could not understand why two women in their thirties were having so much fun playing with their seven-year-old son and his friend. To their surprise, they learned both of these international students had sons the same age whom they had not seen for eighteen months because of their studies! As these women stayed overnight, Daniel and Lylah had an opportunity to talk about Christ during their regular family devotions. It was a natural means to talk about spiritual matters. The children in your home and the way they are treated will speak volumes to students about spiritual needs.

Here's a series of action steps to take with your family as you consider becoming a friendship partner:

1. Gather as a family and discuss your involvement as a friendship family with international students. Talk with each family member to see how they like the idea, then secure their support and excitement.
2. Pray with your family about your involvement and ask for God's direction.
3. Trust God for your family's ministry in friendship to international students. Understand that the benefits to your family will probably outweigh the benefits to the student. Some of these benefits include:
  - knowledge of another culture
  - training for your children in the geography and customs of another country
  - having a new friend from a faraway place
  - encouraging a missions emphasis in your family
  - learning about the food and language of another culture
  - seeing how God is at work in other lands
  - God's blessing as you *give* without motive to *get*
  - developing closeness in your family as you minister together
  - becoming international missionaries right in your own home
  - requires reasonable amounts of time
  - having your family become a model for other families within your local church.
4. See ISI's resource videos on reaching internationals at <https://internationalstudents.org/reach-international-students/>.
5. Review the videos and share them with your pastor.
6. Contact a local international student ministries representative, or your local university's International Student Office for information about contacting local international students. [Check out ISI's website, [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org), to use the "Search for Staff" feature]
7. Become acquainted with your international student through an evening meal, by asking questions about their family, country, culture, and personal goals.
8. Begin your international friendship (whether you are a family, a single person, a family with children, a retired family, or a senior living alone.) International students are lonely and hungry for relationships. In addition, they want to know the American culture and the American way of life. Although they may not assimilate it, they are curious, and we have an opportunity to assist them.
9. Feel free to call ISI (1-800-ISI-TEAM) at any time for counsel and advice about this relationship or further training (see Appendix A for ISI contact information).

To sum up, remain faithful to your international students in times of stress and personal trials as well as joy. Be willing to be with them when family members

overseas are going through great difficulties and the students feel alone and need your help and prayers, and perhaps condolences. You will be just a call or text away.

Communicate with your international student and follow up if they move to another school or when they return home. International students are often from very close-knit families. Consequently, friendships with them are very meaningful, deep, and rewarding. Be their friend. You will find this reality as you take time from the very rigorous pace of American life, shift your priorities, and give yourself to them as a true friend. They are generally sensitive, caring, loving, appreciative, and responsive. Their friendship will enhance your life immeasurably.

### **Apply What You Have Learned**

1. Do you struggle with unfulfilled ministry or service desires and expectations in your life? Take a few minutes in prayer and ask God to replace those desires and expectations with a new vision. Perhaps you made a childhood commitment to go overseas and were unable to fulfill it. How can friendship evangelism with international students give you a fresh opportunity to reach the world for Christ?
2. Review the five blind spots when it comes to working with international students. Which blind spots are evident in your own life?
3. How can you overcome these blind spots? Part of the answer may come by reviewing the do's and don'ts section of this chapter.
4. Pray that God will help you to overcome your blind spots and give you an international student for a friendship partner.

## 5. Entertainment or Hospitality

*“Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”*

Hebrews 13:1-2

Through their local church, Al and Rita had met an international student in their area. Mohammed, an Indonesian Muslim, was coming that evening to dinner for the first time.

Suddenly there was a knock at their front door. “Oh, Al, it’s that international student we invited.”

Al frowns. “It’s about time. Doesn’t he know his way around here? The rolls are probably stone cold, and the pork chops overcooked.” Al reaches the front door and flings it open, saying, “Hey there, where have you been?” Then he looks to the kitchen and shouts, “Honey, it’s that international student! Come on in. Let’s see now, your name is, uh... (he looks down at a card)... how do you say it?”

“Mohammed,” the student says with confidence and a smile.

“Huh?” Al looks puzzled. “Well, let’s call you ‘Moe.’ Come on inside, Moe, and have a seat. I hear you are from Indonesia. Isn’t that somewhere in Africa? Or is that Indochina—I’m still mad about that war we had over there.”

Mohammed sits down in the living room and with embarrassment looks at the floor. “Well, it’s really—”

Al interrupts, “I see. Well, listen, Moe, we have a great evening lined up for you. Rita is fixing our all-time special meal—pork chops! Then after dinner, we can turn on the TV and watch the Giants kill the Patriots. Monday night football is an American tradition that you should know about.”

Now Mohammed looks even more confused, saying, “But, sir, I can’t eat—”

Making no attempt to listen to what his guest is trying to say, Al interrupts again, “Sure you can! I know you must be hungry . . . I’m starved. We’ll eat in a minute, but first I want you to know how special it is to have you here in our home. You know, God has blessed this country of ours, and I know you will come to see that Jesus Christ is really the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Aren’t you glad that God is finally going to show you the True Path to Him, and wash away your sins through His blood?”

Now it’s Mohammed’s turn to frown and he tries to begin again to squeeze in a word of conversation. “We Muslims believe—”

Like a jumping bean in a jar, Al skips to the next question on his mind: “That brings me to another question. I know it’s awfully hot in your country. Do people wear shoes? And do you live in grass huts or what?”

Rita calls into the living room, “Dinner is on the table.”

Al puts his arm around Mohammed and continues telling him how great the pork chops will be.

If you follow the example of Al and Rita, you will do irreparable damage to an otherwise enjoyable relationship. While we may chuckle at this story, virtually all of the mistakes that Al made have also been made by well-intentioned Americans who are cross-culturally insensitive. Take a few minutes to consider how Al and Rita fell into the series of blind spots outlined in the last chapter.

### **There Is No Need to Be Afraid**

In our culture of fast food and instant meals, some people are petrified at the thought of entertaining someone from another country. What does it involve? In their thinking, such entertainment requires an extremely high personal standard. For their house to be perfect, they will need to either hire a housekeeping service or spend a week doing spring cleaning. Some feel they need to use the formal dining room with their fine china and crystalware. Because people with these expectations have set such a high standard for entertaining, they will likely never take advantage of the opportunity to have an international student in their homes.

Students are not looking for high-quality entertainment. They are looking for simple hospitality and friendship. One Sunday an ISI family had Shigeko from Japan in their home for lunch after church. Following a time of conversation, the family was ready for their customary Sunday afternoon nap. They explained to Shigeko, “We are going to rest now,” and told her, she could also rest on the couch. For the next two weeks, this family heard reports of how Shigeko proudly announced to her student friends how much she felt a part of the family. She had never taken a nap before in an American home, but this family felt free to include her in their regular routine. A nap could hardly be considered impressive or special, but Shigeko felt honored to be treated as part of the family.

Throughout the New Testament, we are encouraged to offer hospitality to others. “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9). “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13). Beyond the confines of hospitality to fellow Christians, we are to reach out to nonbelievers and in particular to international students.

“But I don’t know how to cook,” you moan.

With a bit of preparation, it doesn’t have to be complicated. The student will be delighted to participate in your family meal—provided you prepare in advance for your first meeting. If you are too busy to cook, you can get take-out or invite your guest to join you at a restaurant and possibly at your home afterward for conversation.

### **Before the First Meeting**

Perhaps through your church, or through ISI, or the International Student Office on campus, you’ve been given the name and contact information of a nearby international student.

Your first step should be prayer. Ask God to prepare you and the student for the first meeting. Pray that you will approach the situation with spiritual sensitivity and a willingness to express a balance between friendship and evangelism.

When you receive the name and country of the student, locate the country on a world map and discover something about it—the religion, politics, economics.

When you contact the student and invite him or her to your home, be specific about the time you will arrive if you are to pick the student up. If the student is female and you are a man, make sure that your wife or children are along with you; if your student is male, and you are a woman, make sure your husband or children accompany you, to avoid the possibility of a misunderstanding. Single friendship partners should only be matched to students of the same gender.

Let the student know what you will be doing and what type of dress would be appropriate. If you have difficulty reaching the student, the best time to connect may be between 10:00 p.m. and midnight, the time when most students return from the library. When you do reach your student, find out what is the best time to connect in the future.

Your first meeting doesn't have to be some special event. Plan to include the student in things you normally do as a family, such as dinner, a ball game, a day at the park, or a trip to a local site like a museum or zoo. He or she will not want to be entertained or singled out. Rather, the student generally wants to experience normal American life. Remember to include the student in your holiday celebrations such as Thanksgiving or Christmas and be ready to answer a lot of questions about American culture!

### **During the First Meeting**

When you meet your new friend, enjoy getting to know him or her. Learn to say his or her name correctly. If the student's name is Mohammed, call him Mohammed. Don't use a nickname unless he asks you to. Don't ask questions that could be insulting, such as, "Do they drive cars in your country?" He may normally have a chauffeur!

The next chapter includes a number of conversation starters to help you get to know your student friend.

In many countries, conversation is a form of entertainment. Your student is probably used to relaxed conversation. He or she will be especially interested in talking about his or her family and homeland.

You may be presented with a gift. Accept it graciously and be aware that the custom for opening gifts varies in different countries. Feel free to ask what is appropriate. For example, in parts of Latin America, the recipient of a gift doesn't open it in front of the person but waits until they leave. In America, we like to see the expression of the person opening the gift, so we generally open it when we receive it. Ask the student about their cultural expectation: "If I were in your country, would I open this now, or after you leave?" and then act according to the response. You should be prepared for the fact that he or she may bring you an alcoholic beverage. Graciously accept it to avoid offending.

Before meals, you can say, "It is our custom to thank God for our food." Don't simply bow your head and begin praying. Also, don't change your normal routine for a meal. If you have children, they will let everyone know that what you are doing is different than normal!

Usually, we encourage our guests to serve themselves first. But don't ask the international student to go first. He or she probably doesn't know what the foods are or how they are intended to be served or eaten. It helps to explain what the different foods are and to show how they are served and eaten.

In some cultures, it is considered impolite to accept seconds until you are asked several times. Help your student understand that the American custom is to help oneself or accept the invitation for seconds the first time it is offered.

Some students will be unused to and uncomfortable with pets in the home. In fact, Asians and Africans can be terrified of pets, and for Muslims it is generally taboo and offensive to have pets in the house. It is best to keep your pets away from the student until you know how he or she feels about them.

In some cases, the student may be a smoker. If it is your family's practice not to allow smoking inside the house, offer to step outside with him or her or go for a walk together.

When talking with the student, speak slowly and distinctly. Do not raise your voice. The student isn't deaf just because he or she has an accent! Be careful not to use idioms or humor or Christian clichés (see chapter 6).

Make sure you explain the significance of different holidays. Can you imagine someone arriving at your international friend's door dressed as a ghost on October 31? Unprepared, the student could be terrified at the American cultural tradition of trick or treating.

Do not ask the student to babysit your children. Despite their attraction and relationship with your children, each culture maintains different values. Your request could lead to a rift in your friendship. Until you are more acquainted, do not allow your children to ride in a car that a student is driving. His or her concept of safety may not coincide with yours.

During your conversation with the student, don't mention that you have missionary friends in their country. You don't know the student's opinion of missionaries or experience with them. If that experience has been negative, it could hinder your new friendship. Or possibly your missionary friend is in the student's country to teach English or work at a business. If you reveal their missionary purpose, it could put them at risk. While you don't want to talk with the student about your missionary friends, you may want to talk with your missionary friends about the student. It may be possible for the missionary to initiate friendship with your student when he or she returns home.

Make a point to listen to your international friend's perception of life in America. He or she may be experiencing culture shock and your friendship can help him or her adjust to the culture. The following is a graphic illustration that shows the felt needs that all international students have in common. Understanding these basic needs will enable you to be a helpful friend to your student.



**A. Church, (1982) "Sojourner Adjustment," *Psychological Bulletin*. 91. E540-572**

**T. Stafford, *The Friendship Gap: Reaching Out Across Cultures* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1984).**

As the graphic illustrates, students need a friend as soon as they arrive in the U.S., and especially during the first six months. Otherwise, without a friend, an international student may be a lonely "foreign" student during all their years in our country. The student may spend time only with his or her own people and never experience the "international" environment. This happens often. Let's be that friend who offers the gift of our culture as a part of the student's overseas experience.

Don't promise the international student that you will do something with him or her unless you actually plan to do it. We are prone to say things like, "Let's get together next week" or "We'll go to the lake sometime." The student will expect that you are going to follow through with the plan and may feel confused or hurt if you do not.

### **Continuing Your Friendship**

The Nelsons were thrilled! The ISI team leader from their church had matched them with a student from Indonesia to come to their home for Thanksgiving. As they

dropped Fajar off at the dorm after a wonderful day and a traditional turkey dinner, they told him how much they enjoyed hosting him and how they looked forward to getting together with him again. They gave him their phone number and told him to call anytime if they could help with anything.

Weeks passed and during a sharing time with the other friendship partners from their church, the Nelsons discussed their sadness with the rest of the group. It had been almost two months since they heard from Fajar. They couldn't understand it because they had had such a wonderful time on Thanksgiving Day, and he seemed to enjoy their family.

Unfortunately, the Nelsons had the false expectation that it was Fajar's turn to call them. In our American culture, we have come to expect reciprocation. When we invite someone to an activity, we subconsciously expect contact back from them as a sign for the relationship to continue. With international students, this is almost never the case.

For the student, living in another culture is enough of a challenge, much less taking the initiative to call or reciprocate. As their American friends, we need to take the initiative and set up time together. This will be true long into the relationship. Many cultures would deem it forward or improper to impose oneself on an American friend. That is why a lack of initiative on the part of a student should not be interpreted as a lack of interest. More than likely, they are wanting to continue the relationship with you and are hoping that you will seek them out.

Trust takes time. Ask God to give you the grace to persevere with your friendship through the challenges of communication and scheduling. It's important that you count the cost of a continuing friendship and not begin one unless you can faithfully meet with the student on a monthly basis and call him or her regularly throughout at least one school year.

As your friendship grows, share more about your own personal life. As you risk new topics of conversation and are open to the student, it will permit the student to share his or her deeper feelings with you. Be careful not to be dogmatic about your opinions on such controversial topics as divorce, abuse, abortion, or politics. Many students will have experienced some of these things in their own lives, and if they perceive you will judge their experience negatively, they will never share deeply with you.

Allow the student to initiate expressions of friendship to you. One ISI couple, Brian and Cindy, met Andrei, a former tank commander from Russia. Brian and Cindy's family opened their home and shared freely with the young man, and he expressed a desire to return their kindness by cooking a Russian meal.

So, the date was set, and several other American friends were invited to experience this culinary feast. Realizing that Andrei lived on a limited budget, Brian and Cindy asked for a grocery list for the meal and purchased the supplies ahead of time. On the appropriate evening they greeted Andrei warmly, then stepped out of his way. The young chef went to work.

The meal was a delight; the food was excellent. The chef glowed. What an experience! And it is one many friendship partners can enjoy.

Pray daily for your new international friend. Get together with him or her regularly and call to see how the student is doing. Find out your student's birthday and plan to do something special. Many countries do not celebrate birthdays. You may have the opportunity to give your friend his or her first birthday celebration!

One key to a successful friendship with an international student is to *relax*. If you make a mistake, it will not create an international incident! Laugh at yourself. This may even help put your student at ease. It often becomes the great leveler of cross-cultural differences. Your friendship could be one of the most exciting adventures of your life. And you never know the long-term effects of your friendship on the student.

## Activities to Strengthen Friendship

The building block of a developing friendship is a shared event—particularly when that friendship is based on the love of Jesus Christ. The following activities give you an opportunity to know each other in natural ways. You can anticipate many opportunities for sharing Christ's love both in word and deed through shared experiences. Use these pages as a resource guide but feel free to expand the list and explore other possibilities. You'll notice most of these ideas are simple and easy to accomplish. They will keep your friendship moving in the right direction.

### *Communication*

- Pray daily for your friend.
- Visit with him or her in person once or twice a month.
- Make weekly contact by phone, text, or email.
- Ask about his or her birthday—send a card; plan a celebration.

### *Family*

- Meals—include your friend at different times, not just at dinner
- Family celebrations—birthdays, holidays, special events
- Family outings—picnics, visiting friends and family, shopping, walks/hikes (students really enjoy these)
- Overnight stays—especially during school breaks
- Tour of your home—ask about what may be unfamiliar
- Visit the student's residence and meet his or her friends.
- Ask your friend to cook a national dish for you.
- Teach him or her your favorite recipe.
- Make your home a place to relax and be at ease.
- Integrate your friend into your family's routine.

### *General Helps*

- Invite your friend to church but don't force or insist (inform the student beforehand of the purpose of the program or event and what they may experience, i.e., offerings, baptisms, communion).
- Help with conversational English and writing skills (offer to proofread papers).

- Give a Bible as a gift, preferably in the student's language, and offer opportunities for study.
- Watch the *Jesus* video with your student which is available online in multiple languages through the Jesus Film Project ([www.jesusfilm.org/watch.html](http://www.jesusfilm.org/watch.html).)
- Take pictures for the student to keep or send home.
- Interpret American customs.
- Share problems and needs; develop a good listening ear.
- Help him or her find seasonal clothing or other special needs.
- Find out his or her favorite activities and sports.

### **Resources from International Students, Inc.**

A general resource list is found in the final pages of this book. Here are some relevant resources for strengthening friendship.

- See ISI's online store at [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org)
- Give the student *How to Survive in the USA* (see ISI's online store).
- Invite the student to ISI events, retreats, holiday conferences, and fellowship activities to meet other internationals.
- If your student is moving to another location within the U.S., utilize ISI contacts to link your friend with other Christians in that area.
- When your student returns home, link him or her with other Christians at home through ISI's contacts.

### **Places to Go and Things to Do**

Like the previous list of ideas for strengthening your friendship, the following list will generate more possibilities. When you are stuck for an idea, turn to this resource. Each of these activities or places will strengthen your relationship with an international student.

#### *Athletics*

- Attend amateur or professional games.
- Observe children's sports.
- Attend university or college sporting events together.
- Join a city sports league and play together.
- Watch events on television.
- Ask your student to teach you a national sport.
- Work out together at a gym or the athletic center of the college or university, if permissible.

#### *Trips Out of Town*

- Visit relatives.
- Take mini vacations together.
- Take camping trips and visit national parks.
- Take sightseeing trips to historical locations.

### *Places to Visit*

- Scenic locations in the area
- Historical sites
- Recreational areas (i.e., parks, hiking/biking trails, lakes)
- Specialty shopping (ethnic grocery stores, discount stores) or traditional shopping

### *Fun Activities*

- Holiday celebrations (use any occasion)
- Picnics and festivals
- Weddings/special family events
- Fairs
- Art shows
- Parades

### *Visiting*

- Relatives and friends
- Friends with vocations of interest to the student
- Friends with special hobbies and/or talents

### *Short Visits*

- Visit locations on campus where your friend studies or works.
- Drop by with baked goods or small gifts.
- Meet him or her for a cup of coffee or a soda (on campus or off).
- Visit your work location and introduce your student to co-workers.
- Attend a lecture or other cultural event together on campus.

### *Outdoor*

- Hiking, biking, walking together
- Camping
- Outdoor concerts
- Lakes, parks, waterfalls
- Kite flying
- Play catch, tennis, or yard games.

## **Build a Relationship Around the Table**

Inviting your international friend for a meal is a wonderful way to strengthen your relationship. As you become better acquainted, you'll learn the types of foods your friend likes and dislikes, and also his or her favorites.

Although we may not think of them as such, meals are a key part of our culture. Families and friends fellowship and interact around meals at home, eating out, having coffee or snacks together, or picnics. The following insights will help build confidence to develop your relationship with the international student around the table.

## Dietary Restrictions

The dietary restrictions of an international student may be religious, cultural, or individual. The following recommendations are generalizations and don't pertain to every person in a given group. Religious dietary restrictions depend on how strict an adherence one has to his or her religion. A good rule of thumb is, if in doubt, ask!

- Hindus and some Buddhists generally do not drink beer, while many Germans drink it as a regular beverage served with a meal.
- Some Hindus and Buddhists are strict vegetarians. They eat no meat, fish, poultry, eggs, or dishes containing any of these ingredients.
- Muslims and most Jews do not eat pork of any kind.
- Some devout Muslims may not eat any form of beef, lamb, or poultry, unless it has been butchered in a specific manner. Fish is usually acceptable.
- Many international students will not eat chopped and/or processed meats that contain unknown ingredients.
- Many Asians and Africans do not care for cheese or canned tuna.
- Some international students avoid dairy products or are unfamiliar with them.

## What to Serve

In general, chicken, rice, fruit, and vegetables are good choices to include in a meal. Casseroles are usually not familiar or enjoyed initially by internationals. It is a good idea to have a bottle of hot sauce on the table. Many cultures prefer their food hotter and spicier than Americans do.

*The following are basic guidelines for meals:*

- Rice is a staple food in many cultures.
- Vegetables and fruit—fresh, canned, or frozen—are generally appreciated.
- Chicken is a favorite. In many countries, it is served with rice.
- Fish, seafood, lamb, and cheese may be acceptable alternatives for those who don't eat beef or pork.
- Many prefer simple fruit desserts or ice cream instead of rich or heavy baked goods.

If you need ideas for vegetarian or vegan recipes, you can find many sites online.

## Apply What You've Learned

- How do you distinguish between entertainment and hospitality?
- Make a list of ideas you've gleaned from these pages. What two or three ideas can you apply this month?
- Expect a fun-filled time with international students. Let them cook a meal for you and share their culture.
- Make a list of family activities and events that will occur over the next six months. Decide which of these would be appropriate to include your international friend.

## 6. Jump-Start Your Conversation

*“Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you.” Proverbs 4:7-8*

*“But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” James 1:6*

Throughout his years of schooling, Drew has always been a bit shy. Now he’s begun a friendship with Felipe from Colombia, and he wonders what in the world they will talk about. Drew likes the idea of an international friendship and wants to share his faith, but he’s also uncomfortable with silence in their relationship.

Most international students enjoy the opportunity to speak with Americans. The sincerity, patience, and understanding of your communication is an especially important part of building a new friendship. The following guidelines, while basic, have proven to be helpful to many Americans as they form friendships with international students.

*Listen attentively.* In conversation with your international friend, remember that listening is an art and takes effort. When you listen attentively, you are paying him or her a high compliment by showing your genuine interest and concern.

*Speak carefully to be understood.* Remember that your new friend may be limited in his or her knowledge of English and may not fully understand what you are saying. Articulate your words and speak slowly and clearly.

*Avoid idioms or slang.* Your conversational English is probably quite a bit different from the classroom English your friend learned in his or her homeland. Idioms and slang are particularly perplexing for internationals. Imagine what mental images might be stirred in your friend’s mind by phrases such as “play it by ear” or “kill some time.” If you do use idioms or slang, explain what these phrases mean. As you speak, make direct eye contact and pick up on any nonverbal clues that you are not being understood. Encourage your friend to ask you about expressions you use that he or she doesn’t understand. We have included a few cartoons that illustrate some English idioms. (More are available online. See appendix A.) Show them to your new friend as a conversation starter.

*Use jokes and humor sparingly.* Because international students lack the cultural context and immersion in the English language that we possess as Americans, they may have difficulty understanding jokes or humor. If you do use jokes or humor after your friendship is established, make sure you explain them when necessary. Avoid teasing. Those from other cultures may take this as an insult or be offended due to lack of understanding.

*Explain words and phrases patiently.* Invite your friend to ask you about words or phrases he or she does not understand. As you speak, carefully and patiently explain

anything you think was not understood. A puzzled look, an inappropriate response, or a hesitancy to answer can be a cue that the student did not understand you. When this happens, repeat yourself, using different—perhaps simpler—words. Do not raise your voice to make a point. The student may interpret this as impatience or condescension. Explain the use of slang or idioms that will help the student converse with others on a day-to-day basis.

*Respect differences of opinion.* Obviously, you and your international friend will have differences of opinion from time to time. It's important that you share what you think—honestly, but with sensitivity—and that you also respect the student's ideas and opinions. Try, however, to avoid controversial subjects that may create tension or arguments.

Most international students enter this country with preconceived ideas about American life. These ideas can be traced to movies, magazines, the news media, propaganda, social media, and the observation of Americans abroad (some of whom may have been poor examples). Some international students arrive in the United States already suspicious and envious of the prosperity enjoyed by most in this nation. Other students have a difficult time separating our government's political and military policies from Americans in general.

An international student's homeland may be either pro or anti-American. The country may be old, with an established culture and history dating back thousands of years; or it may be new, struggling to establish its identity. These factors will certainly influence your conversation on certain issues.

As your friendship with the international student deepens, so will your mutual trust. He or she will become more willing to discuss personal or semi-controversial subjects. As you become acquainted with your friend, you will want to learn a great deal about him or her. In the following pages, a number of conversation starters are included. Add your own topics to these pages. A key to stimulating conversation is to avoid asking simple questions that require yes or no answers. Rather, utilize who, what, when, where, and how questions for good conversation.

Another caution is to avoid sounding like a talk-show host or an interrogator. Include more than one international in conversation, when possible, to promote interaction between cultures and countries represented.

To the Church at Colosse, Paul wrote about good conversation, saying, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

### *Geography*

- Where is your city? What is it like (large, small)? What kind of climate do you have there? Can you show me where your city is on a map?
- Describe the appearance of a typical home in your country. Which is usually the largest room in the residence? Are there extended families living together or nearby?

- Describe your country's physical features (mountains, lakes, deserts, forests, rivers). What is the physical environment around your home?
- Are there national parks, historic places, and recreational areas that you have visited in your country? What are some of the most interesting?
- What would you like to see while you are in America?

### *Photographs/Family*

- Do you have family photos that I could see? Show family photos of your own.
- Ask your friend to share photographs taken in his or her country and share photographs you have taken.
- Watch a video or a film on American life and culture, national parks, scenery, or other points of interest.
- Ask family-related questions: How large is your family? What is your birth order in your family? Which family members live at home? What kind of work does your father and/or mother do? What is your extended family like?

### *Language*

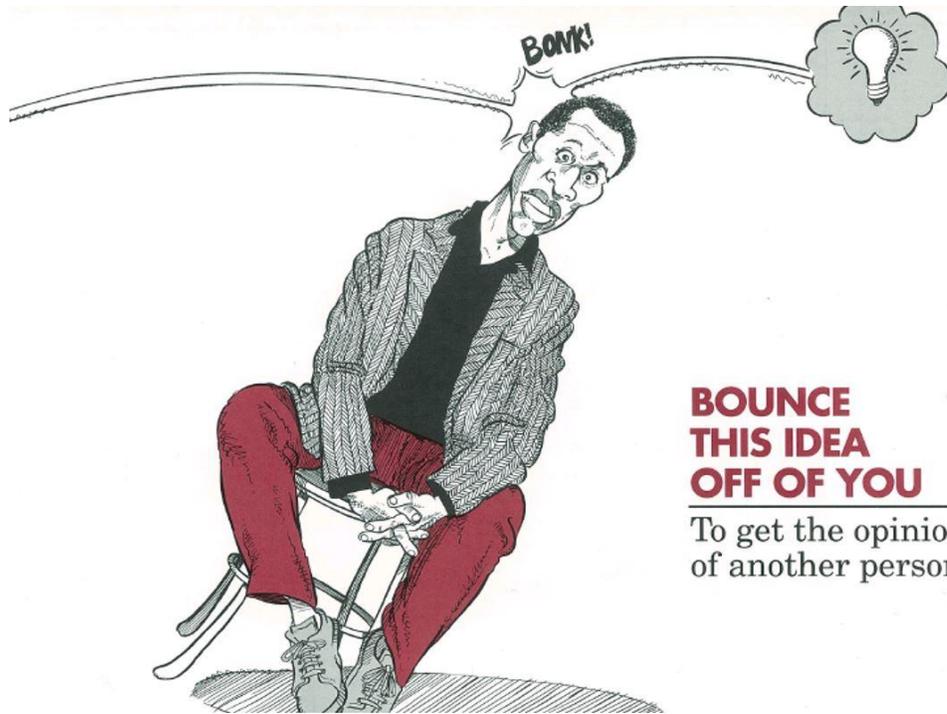
- What languages do you speak? How long have you been studying English?
- Ask how to say various greetings and other common phrases in his or her language, such as, "Hello! How are you?" "Please," "Thank you," and "Goodbye." Write them down phonetically, and practice saying them with your friend.
- Learn how to write words of greeting or other expressions in his or her language.
- Offer to help with any expressions or concepts in English with which he or she is having difficulty. Explain American slang and jokes.

### *Money*

- Ask to see currency used in his or her country.
- Discuss how his or her money corresponds with U.S. currency according to the exchange rate.
- Inquire about the cost of food, fuel, housing, and other things in his or her country.
- Find out if your friend has had any difficulties getting money from home or getting money exchanged. Maybe you can be of help.
- Ask about trading corresponding coins as mementos of your friendship.

### *Socializing, Dating, and Marriage*

- In your culture, how do young men and women get to know each other? Are marriages arranged?
- At what age do young people begin dating in your culture? Do you and your friends go out in groups or as couples?
- At what age do most couples marry? Does the father (or both parents) need to give permission to marry?
- What are some of the wedding customs?
- If you are planning to serve a meal at 7:30 p.m., at what time do you ask your guests to arrive? If a friend invites you to a party that begins at 8:00 p.m., at what time do you plan to arrive?



## **BOUNCE THIS IDEA OFF OF YOU**

To get the opinion  
of another person.

### *Family Life*

- What roles or functions do the father or mother perform in the family of your culture?
- What influence do older people, such as grandparents, have on their adult children and grandchildren?
- What responsibilities do children have in the family?
- What are the holidays in your culture, and how do families celebrate them? Which holiday is your favorite?
- Where did you grow up—in the city or a rural area? Who does most of the cooking and housework in a typical family? Tell me about your parents' daily lives.
- At what age do children start school? How many hours per day?
- How are children disciplined for disobedience?
- What is the average number of children in a family?

### *Men's and Women's Roles*

- What kinds of work do men traditionally do in your country?
- What kinds of work do women traditionally do?
- Are women included in your country's armed forces? If so, in what capacities?
- Do married women work outside the home? If yes, do husbands assume additional responsibilities at home?
- Who is the head of the family unit?
- How do you feel about the role women play in American culture?

### *Recreation*

- What games do children play at home? At school?
- What games do middle school and high school youth play?
- What are favorite forms of recreation in your country?
- What are popular recreational activities for families?
- Does your country have a national sport? More than one?

### *Education*

- What are some different aspects between your educational system and ours?
- Are teaching methods different here than in your country? If yes, how do they differ?
- Do you have difficulty understanding your professors here? Are they sensitive to your problems? If yes, in what ways?
- How are students chosen for higher education in your country?
- Is it expensive to pursue higher education in your country?
- What degrees are most popular or valuable in your country?
- What degree are you pursuing?
- In what ways do you hope to apply the education you are receiving here when you return home? How long do you expect to study here?
- Is it possible for students in your country to transfer educational credits over here?

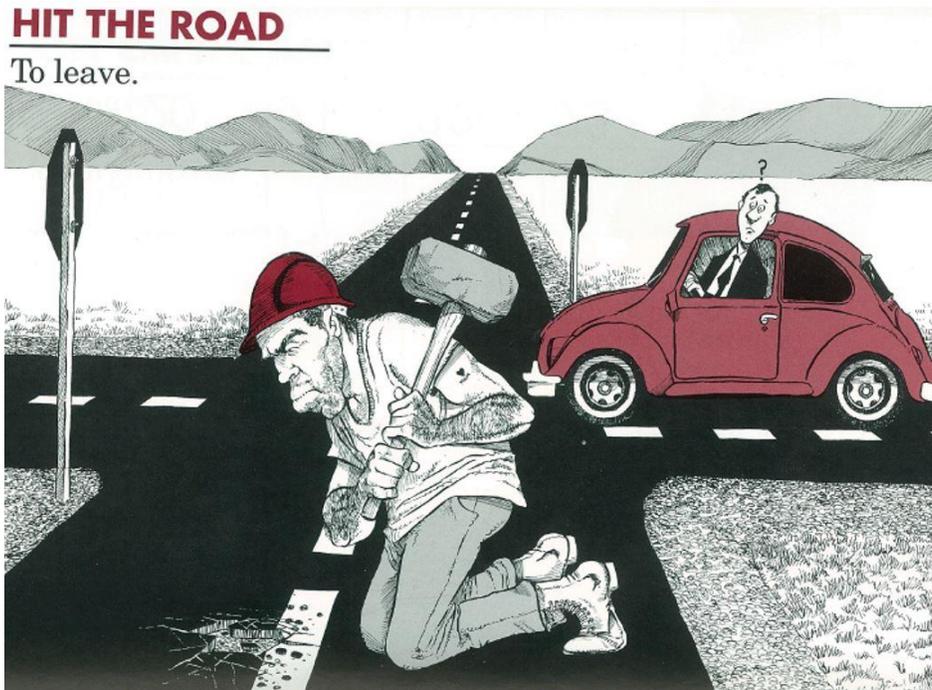
### *Transportation*

- Do you have an international driver's license? How does a person obtain one?
- What experiences have you had in getting your driver's license? (Note: Many international students will not have driver's licenses; some have never learned how to drive.)
- What differences are there between driving here and driving in your country? (You might discuss rules and regulations, driving habits, and so forth.)
- Do most people drive in your country? What kind of cars are most common? How do vehicles in your country differ from those here?
- Is a pedestrian given more or less consideration in your country? Please explain.
- What other modes of transportation are common in your country besides cars (e.g., mass transit systems)?
- In your country, how do you get to school or work? Do people travel much from town to town?
- Is bus and train travel in your homeland the preferred form of transportation? How much does it cost to use a taxi or local bus in your country?
- Is it customary for a family to travel a distance for a vacation?

### *Food*

- What was your first reaction to American food? Has anything surprised you about American food? Do you have a favorite dish?
- What are the staple foods in your country? Which of these are grown locally and which are imported? What foods does your country export?

- Are your foods highly seasoned? If yes, which seasonings do you use?
- What is your favorite food in your country? How is it prepared? Would you like to use my kitchen to cook sometime?
- Do you cook your own meals here? If so, are you able to buy the ingredients you need? Which ones are hard to find?
- What beverages do people in your country drink?
- Where do you usually eat at home or out?
- What is a typical morning, midday, and evening meal in your country? Does the family eat together most of the time?



### *Spiritual*

Religion can be a sensitive topic for discussion. Make sure you've established a foundation of mutual respect and trust. Many cultures are less sensitive about discussing religion than we are in the United States. Feel free to develop your own questions but be careful about when and how you ask them. And remember not to press for answers.

- I'd like to learn more about your religious beliefs. Would you be willing to share something about them with me? Is there something about your religion that is very important to you? (If yes, listen attentively. If no, politely move to another topic.)
- What do you believe is the meaning of life?
- What is your concept of God? May I tell you mine?
- Before you came here, what did you know about Christianity?
- Has anything you've learned about the Christian faith since you've been here surprised you? If yes, what?
- What is your perception of religion in this country?

- How do people in your culture worship? What are your worship centers like? What are some of the religious customs? (Be willing to share some American religious customs as well.)
- Would you like to attend church with me sometime? (Don't pressure your friend but offer the opportunity.)
- Would you like to study the Bible together? [See ISI's online store at [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org) for available studies or check out ISI's Bible Discovery mobile apps: God's Story (Android) and God Story (iPhone).]

## Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is a key ingredient to good conversation with an international student. While a cultural anthropology course is outside of the realm of this book, there are a number of key issues related to increasing our sensitivity. If we approach internationals with these elements in mind, we will be less likely to hinder the relationship and, in fact, will build a deeper relationship.

One Thanksgiving, four international students attended a seminar entitled *The Search for Freedom*. Each student came from a different part of the world—a Marxist from China, a Muslim from Mali, a Buddhist from Japan, and a black student from South Africa. At the beginning of the seminar, each student was asked to define freedom.

The Chinese student said, "Freedom is the absence of capitalistic exploitation."

The student from Mali replied, "Freedom is to escape unbelief through submission to Allah."

The Japanese student confidently said, "Freedom is to be free from desire."

"Freedom is to break the power of racism," concluded the South African.

Notice how each student defined freedom from his or her own worldview. Our belief system, background, and environment deeply shape who we are as people—in fact, values can be so ingrained we don't even think about, challenge, or realize there may be an equally reasonable way to think.

Without knowing it, each of us has become ethnocentric or has the tendency to view our own culture and way of life as normal and a standard for judging other people. Because of our own ethnocentrism, we tend to view people from other countries as different, strange, or even wrong.

Before we can become more sensitive to other cultures, we must understand our attitude toward our own culture. Each of us holds many beliefs, habits, and thoughts about life that are cultural rather than right or wrong. We need to recognize that other cultures have equally valid means and ways of doing things. When we do, we come to appreciate people from other cultures.

Following is a sample list of Western values that many Americans hold as important contrasted with what are frequently non-Western values:<sup>1</sup>

<b>Western Values</b>	<b>Non-Western Values</b>
nuclear family	extended family
Individualism	group most important
written language	legends and stories
social mobility	no career changes or “climbing”
Technology	Relationships
progress and change	family and stability
time efficiency	resistance to change
romantic love	arranged marriages
Democracy	socialism, communism, dictatorship
free market	business is cooperative—strategic alliances
Youth	age and wisdom
Directness	Indirectness—use of go-betweens
worth in terms of achievements	people more important than production
Competition	Equality
secularization and pluralism	religion and culture may be one
entertainment is bought	conversation is entertainment
reasoning in terms of probability	reasoning in terms of known
distrust of authority	submission to authority
Privacy	Socialization
personal problem solving	corporate problem solving
goal orientation and control over future	fate has predetermined the future

As we increase our awareness of these cultural differences, it helps us become more sensitive to international students. The values in this list are neither right nor wrong; they are simply different. For the student, these distinctions may create an experience of deep culture shock.

### **Student Culture Shock**

Culture shock is the emotional upheaval that comes from negative feelings a person experiences while adjusting to life in a different culture. The phenomenon comes in two stages for the international student. At first, they may think the people and culture in general are quite similar to their own—initially they don’t notice all the differences. Then it gradually dawns on them that these people and this culture are indeed [very] different from their own. Herein lies the shock.

A Christian international student, Yuna, arrived on her Tennessee campus from Malaysia. During her first few days, Yuna stayed in a motel near the university and searched for an apartment. She recalls, “I felt lonely, miserable, and homesick to be on

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from L. Robert Kohls, Ph.D., “The Values Americans Live By,” unpublished paper, 1988.

my own. I was so upset, depressed, and frustrated in that motel room, as I didn't know people or how to get around, and everything was so expensive that I felt like giving up. I asked myself, *How could God possibly send me thousands of miles away from home and yet not provide me with accommodations?*"

Then Jack Smith and his wife invited Yuna to stay in their home. With these new friends, Yuna walked through her culture shock. Later she said, "I am staying with them currently, and Mr. Smith is helping me look for a place to stay. I am following them to church on Saturday nights and it was a real miracle for me."

## Signs of Culture Shock

Culture shock can be evaluated and observed in your student. Here are some physical and emotional signs:

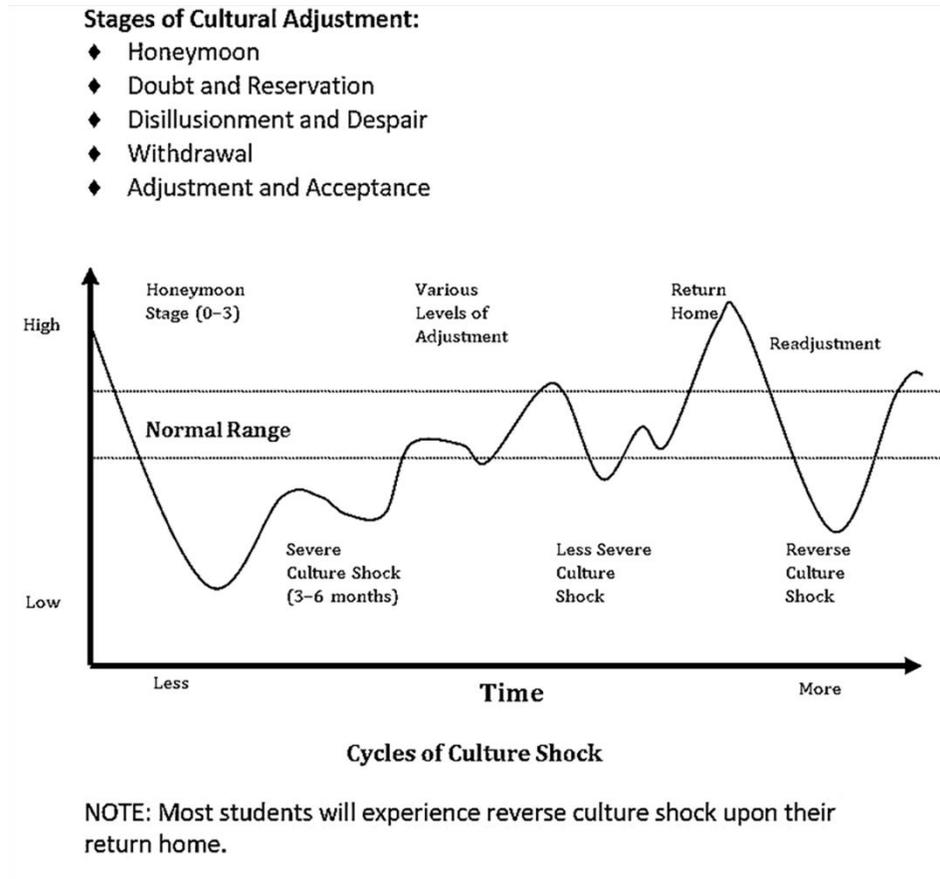
- strain—so many psychological adaptations have had to be made without any break or time apart
- sickness—headaches, sleepiness, or insomnia
- sense of loss, or feelings of deprivation with regard to status, friends, possessions, food, housing—to which they have been accustomed
- overeating or not eating
- rejection—being rejected by members of the new culture and/or rejecting members of the new culture
- withdrawal—the student may not respond to your efforts to help or relieve and, in general, any desire to be with other people is greatly diminished.
- feelings of discrimination
- confusion—in roles, expectations, values, feelings, and self-identity
- frustration—may result in their verbally tearing apart the U.S. culture
- anger
- surprise, anxiety, disgust, and indignation
- feelings of powerlessness—due to fear of not being able to succeed in the new culture.

When you see your student suffering culture shock, there are two possible solutions to the crisis:

1. Time. Like anything new, it takes time to adjust.
2. Break the routine. Actively doing something to learn about their new culture is helpful. In any case, it is a critical time, and the student needs your friendship and concern.

## Stages of Culture Shock

As you develop your friendship with the international student, it is helpful for you to recognize the different aspects of culture shock or adjustment.



The first stage is called the *honeymoon stage*. During this time, the student experiences many similarities to his or her own culture. He or she is excited with the newness and adventure of living in the United States. This stage can last from a few weeks to several months. The primary time for bonding and developing a lasting friendship is during the honeymoon stage. The earlier we get involved in the life of an international student, the easier he or she adjusts, and the greater our opportunity for impact on the student's life.

*Doubt and reservation* mark the second stage. The student begins to ask questions like, "Why did I come? Will I ever fit in? I have a doctorate in engineering at home, so why can't I understand engineering here? The language is so difficult."

As culture shock intensifies, it moves into the third stage of *disillusionment and despair*. Severe culture shock may hit around final exam time. It's helpful for you to know and understand these low times in a student's life so you can understand the impact it has on your friendship. You may feel the student is resisting your invitations because of busyness or stress or fear of failure, when in reality it is the time when your student needs you the most.

*Withdrawal* is the next step in the downward spiral. At this point, you may need to take a more aggressive role in fostering your friendship. It helps to understand this stage and the ensuing resistance rather than being put off by it.

You must take a proactive role in helping the student through this withdrawal stage. Go to the student's residence and take him or her out for ice cream or to the park.

Insist on making a time to get together, then stick with it. Send notes of encouragement. More important than anything at this point: *Don't give up*. The friendship can easily end at this juncture if you do not understand the emotional needs of the student.

The final stage of culture shock involves *adjustment and acceptance*. Each student will respond with varying levels of acceptance, but almost every student will adapt to their life in the United States. If he or she is here for a short time, there will be more resistance to adapting than if he or she plans to be here for a longer period of time.

## **The Importance of Nonverbal Communication**

Whether we realize it or not, 70 percent of our communication is nonverbal. It is important in our dealings with international students that we be aware of our other expressions.

First, we communicate nonverbally in the area of *body language*. Our posture, gestures, and movements indicate a great deal of information. Simply the way we sit or move communicates certain degrees of acceptance and enjoyment of the situation in which we find ourselves. For example, how do you feel when you are talking with someone who crosses their arms during the conversation? What does this gesture indicate to you?

*Eye movement and position* is another area of nonverbal communication. In America, it's important to maintain good eye contact with the other person during a conversation. If someone does not, we sense either disinterest in us or lack of self-confidence on the part of the individual. However, in many cultures, individuals never look at each other. You may particularly notice this aspect with students of the opposite sex; they may feel it is inappropriate to look you directly in the eye.

*Touch* is a nonverbal communication skill. But we need to be careful and sensitive in this area—who, where, when, how, and how much, are all culturally distinctive when it comes to touch. Some cultures kiss on the cheek—including those of the same sex—each time they greet. Others, particularly older Asians, almost never touch someone of the opposite sex in public.

*Personal space*, particularly the amount needed, varies drastically from culture to culture. We have a comfort zone in which we feel at ease relating to others. If someone moves too close, we automatically take a step backward. However, if he or she is not close enough, we tend to feel a sense of rejection. For Americans, this personal space is about an arm's length, but in some cultural groups the person needs to be close enough to smell your breath! Personal space is an important factor in developing cultural sensitivity.

*Formality/informality* is another area of distinction among cultures. Americans tend toward a more informal lifestyle. Generally, there is flexibility in social situations regarding dress, and through that flexibility we show the value we place on individuality. By contrast, in some cultures—Japan, for example—formality in dress, in

language, and in greeting another shows respect for the host or declares one's social status.

*Time perception* is the final area of nonverbal communication. What does it mean to be "on time"? Western culture runs by the clock, whereas other cultures do not and generally place more value on relationships and less on time and events.

## **Value the Other Person**

As we relate to the international student, our emphasis is on valuing the person. When we are sensitive to the multiplicity of change that he or she is facing, we can appropriately share Christ's love. Understanding the phases of culture shock the student is going through will enable us to minister to them in this critical phase of life when they are particularly vulnerable. A review of the culture shock sequence will prepare you to help the student wherever they are in the process of cultural adjustment.

## **Beyond Good Conversation—the Art of Good Listening**

Throughout this chapter, we have emphasized good conversation and increasing your sensitivity to the cultural differences of international students. Successful cross-cultural communication often involves a strong investment in the development of good listening skills. While the main objective is to encourage internationals to open up and speak, merely shooting questions back and forth can become dull. For mutual satisfaction to develop out of the relationship, you must learn to practice good communication skills. Some of the characteristics of a good listener include:

- selecting topics that are of mutual interest and require more than short answers. (Make sure your surroundings are quiet enough and distraction free so you can hear each other.)
- being alert to nonverbal cues that indicate the other person is feeling uncomfortable and resisting the urge to speak louder if your friend finds it difficult to understand what you are saying.
- using clarification questions to promote dialogue. (Proper feedback maintains conversation.) Don't ask, "Don't you understand?" Instead, ask, "Do you mean to say...?" Use open questions rather than ones that require yes and no answers.
- using questions that indicate your interest in his or her feelings, such as, "How did you feel after that happened?" or "How would you respond to this if you were in your country?"
- helping to bring the conversation into focus by summarizing statements, such as, "So, you are concerned about..." or "Your greatest interest seems to be..." Often, such statements stimulate additional dialogue or discussion.
- resisting the urge to blurt something out in order to fill the void of silence. Though silent periods may seem awkward to you, they may indicate that the student is showing you respect, is thinking about his answer, or is allowing a transition between topics.

- selecting questions that will get some mileage out of the conversation, which will indicate a greater depth of interest in knowing your student. Avoid questions that are too specific about family, or overly trite, such as, “Where is your country?” or “When are you going back?”
- being careful not to judge the quality of the relationship by how well you communicate or connect. It may take some time to adjust to each other’s communication habits.
- remembering cross-cultural communication is a skill to be developed.

### **Apply What You Have Learned**

1. Consider your own sense of other cultures. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being totally ethnocentric and 10 being highly sensitive to other cultures)? What issues highlighted throughout this chapter do you need to examine in your own life?
2. How can you develop skills to become a better listener? List three practical steps you will take in this area.
3. Armed with these various conversation starters, how do you feel about engaging in conversation with an international student? If you don’t feel ready, find another friendship partner and take turns pretending one of you is from another country and that you are meeting for the first time. Use questions from this chapter to become skillful at conversation and listening.

## 7. Evangelism with International Students

*“He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” Psalm 126:6*

*“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”  
Jeremiah 29:13*

Some time ago, one of our staff was speaking at the Friday night meeting for the International Christian Fellowship in Austin, Texas. Following the meeting, two young women from mainland China came to talk with him. They were both in the master’s program, one in electrical engineering and the other in computer science. They asked a pressing question: “How can we know God personally?”

Despite years of experience in evangelism, the staff member said he suddenly felt unable to respond in detail. His only thought was John 3:16. So he opened his Bible and located the passage, then turned his book around so both girls could read it with him. Then he briefly explained the meaning of the verse and how they could know God personally. Several months later, he heard from another local ISI staff worker that both students had made personal commitments to Jesus Christ during the following months. One student committed her life to Christ in the summer and the other in the fall. He was thrilled to have a small part in their personal and newfound relationship with Jesus Christ. A lesson learned from that situation was that God uses the scriptural truths from the Bible to bring others to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And that simplicity is highly effective.

### **Bathed in Prayer**

While we desire that every international student experiences personal salvation through Christ, evangelism has to be accomplished with great sensitivity and in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. In our own strength, we can do nothing to draw another person to Christ. In the power of Christ Jesus, we can do all things because we know that nothing is impossible for God (Matthew 19:26).

As we seek to share our faith in Christ with internationals, the first step is prayer. Here are some general guidelines:

- Pray for sensitivity to know where your student is emotionally, culturally, and spiritually.
- Pray that God will move in the heart of your student to give him or her a desire to know Christ. (The simple fact that God has brought the two of you together is an indication that God is working.)
- Pray for discernment to know when there is an openness to the Gospel.
- Pray for a genuine love for your student and commitment to him or her.
- Ask your student how you can specifically pray for him or her.

## Prepare to Give an Answer for the Hope Within You

To effectively share the fundamentals of Christianity, you should be able to answer basic questions about what Christians believe.

- What do Christians believe about God, the Bible, the meaning of life, mankind, sin, etc.?
- How does a person come to have a relationship with God?
- How does man communicate with God? How does God communicate with man?
- Who is Christ? Why do you believe He rose from the dead?
- If Christianity is the only way, what about my family and friends back home?
- What is the way to salvation?
- How do we know God wants a personal relationship with us?

A good study Bible will help you answer these questions and prepare ahead of time for solid answers. *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (see online store link in Appendix A) is also a good tool for understanding where your student may be coming from regarding religion. It will be a good investment of your time to know how to give an answer for the hope that is within you.

## Positive Approaches

- Ask your friend if he or she is acquainted with the Bible and what they know about it. Be willing to listen—without interruption—to your friend’s impressions, even if you disagree with certain comments. At this point, building your friendship is more important than correcting biblical knowledge.
- Ask the student if he or she would like to have a Bible to read (perhaps in his or her native language) or if he or she would like to study the Bible.
- Ask your friend what he or she knows about Christianity. Again, in your discussion, welcome honest impressions and be prepared for a negative or positive reaction.
- Discuss basic questions:
  1. What do you think is the meaning of life?
  2. Do you know what the Bible says about God, or what God says about Himself in the Bible?
  3. In your opinion, can we know God? Why or why not?
  4. Has God revealed himself to us? If so, how? If not, why not?
  5. What do you believe is the nature of man?
  6. What is sin? How can man overcome sin?
  7. Is there life after death? Why or why not?
- During an appropriate time, talk with your friend about what Christ means to you personally. Point out the uniqueness of a Christian’s relationship with God through Christ. (Explain the fact that God sent His Son to earth to make it possible for every person to have a relationship with Him, rather than demanding that we do whatever we can to reach God.)

- Answer your friend's questions honestly and diplomatically. If he or she poses a question for which you do not have a ready answer, admit that you don't know the answer, but also tell him or her that you will research the question before your next meeting. Carefully discern between sincere questions and "smoke-screen" or "roadblock" questions. Avoid being drawn into tangents.
- Many international students want to learn the essence of Christianity, but for some their interest is limited to cultural curiosity. Others will have a genuine concern for spiritual matters and a thirst for spiritual truth.
- Encourage your friend to investigate Christianity and the Bible—at least on an intellectual level. It is reasonable to expect that a well-educated person would have a basic knowledge of this major religion and of Jesus, one of history's greatest spiritual leaders. You may also point out that the Bible is the bestselling book of all time.
- As you communicate, keep Christ central in your discussions. His life and teachings are known around the world. Build on this knowledge. Talk about who Jesus is, what He claimed about Himself, and what God said about Jesus through the Bible. Jesus often told stories and used illustrations to teach truth. Don't hesitate to use some of His parables and other stories. In many cultures, the use of story is appreciated and easily understood.
- Concentrate on Jesus' death and resurrection. The evidence for His death and resurrection is powerful. The book *The Case for Christ* by Lee Stroebel lists supporting sources, including archeological evidence.
- Invite—but don't pressure—your friend to attend church with you. If he or she chooses to attend, make your friend feel welcome and carefully explain what will take place.

## Use God's Word

Paulina was an international student journalist who was studying in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Some friends brought Paulina to a Friday Bible study group and her life was changed forever. As she says, "I confess my spiritual life was empty. I was a Christian only by name, and religion was something I would remember for Sunday! As I studied the Bible in depth for the first time in my life, I found myself becoming more aware of a living Christ who could be my personal friend." The friendship partners around Paulina were skilled at using God's Word and were not hesitant to use Scripture in their conversations.

As you share your faith, don't hesitate to support what you say with the Bible. Quote from it and turn to it as an authority for answering questions and dealing with life situations.

- If your international friend has doubts about the authenticity or historical accuracy of the Bible, here are three good books for you to read and research appropriate responses:
  - *Tell It Well: Communicating Across Cultures* by John T. Seamands (Beacon Hill Press).

- *How to Give Away Your Faith* by Paul E. Little (InterVarsity Press).
  - *The Case for Christ* by Lee Stroebel (Zondervan)
- Tell your international friend about the biblical concept of God. The idea of a personal, holy, and loving God may sound strange to your international friend. But we must consider who God is if we are to tell about the importance of what He has done for us.
  - Talk with your international friend about the biblical concept of man. World religions and philosophies often portray man in the best possible light. The concept of man as a sinner in willful rebellion against God is difficult for most people to accept. Yet the Bible teaches this harsh truth. As sinners we live in a broken relationship with God; the only way to mend this relationship is by repentance and asking for forgiveness.
  - Acquire appropriate literature for you and your international friend to study together. You could offer him or her Scripture portions from a modern English translation such as the New Living Bible Translation (NLT) or the New International Readers Version (NIRV) or even a translation in the student's own language. The Gospel of Luke may be the best portion to start with, followed by the Gospel of John. "Diglot" versions (a bilingual Bible with English and another language) can be extremely helpful. At the appropriate time, you may wish to give the student a complete Bible in his or her own language. YouVersion.com, the YouVersion Bible mobile app, or Biblica.com have online bibles in many translations. (See Appendix A for bible resources.)

### **Rely on the Example of Jesus Christ**

Jesus told His disciples, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Consider the life of Jesus Christ. He met the needs of people everywhere. If they were sick, He reached out and touched them, and they were healed. If they were bound up with demons, He touched them and freed them. He met people right where they were at the time.

As you develop a friendship with an international student, he or she may ask, "Why are you helping me?" An appropriate response is "Because I've experienced Jesus' goodness in my life, and He's told me to show kindness to others."

Our words and our actions should provide natural opportunities to share our faith. As you witness to your international friend, make Jesus central to everything. The life and teachings of Jesus as found in the Bible command great respect around the world. Build your conversation on Him. What does your international friend know about Jesus? Does he know what claims Jesus made about Himself?

- Use illustrations, stories, and parables as Jesus did to illustrate truth. As we said before, in many cultures this approach is more appreciated than straight logic.

- Focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Why did Jesus die, and what is the importance of His resurrection? These two concepts should be the heart of our evangelism. As the apostle Paul confirms, “What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- Explain what Jesus means to you. You are living proof of what Jesus has done and is doing in the world. The international student may revere a teacher or prophet who died many years ago, but as Christians, we fellowship with a living Savior and Lord who has transformed our lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to abide by the teachings of Jesus and make right decisions about moral standards, race relations, the importance of people over things, and all kinds of issues and situations that touch our daily lives.

### Use a Variety of Resources (Don't Go It Alone)

Don't try to be a one-person show. There are all sorts of resources and help available to aid you in telling an international student the Good News.

- *The witness of others.* Introduce your international friend to other Christians who come from different social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Some of these Christians may be facing struggles; yet contact with such people can be a testimony to your friend of the reality of the Christian faith. Often God uses more than one Christian to bring a person to faith in Christ.
- *Prayer.* Offer to pray for the international students you know, especially when they face specific problems. Sometimes this is all the witness you can be to students. As Christians we know to rely on God to do the work of changing people's hearts.
- *Christian fellowship.* Invite your international friend to join you in attending Christian events and activities, such as Bible studies, church programs, retreats, concerts—even your own family devotions. Be alert to events planned especially for international students. Be careful to explain to your non-Christian friends the nature and program of the meeting or activity they will be attending.
- *Christian support materials.* There are many good books to share with an international student who is curious or interested in the Christian faith. Be selective in the material you offer, so that it is appropriate to the place your friend is at on his or her pilgrimage. Here are a few recommended titles to consider:
  - *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis (Simon & Schuster)
  - *Basic Christianity* by John R. W. Stott (InterVarsity Press)
  - *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer (InterVarsity Press)
  - *Can Man Live Without God?* by Ravi Zacharias (Word Publishing)
  - *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian* by Ravi Zacharias (W Publishing Group)
  - *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* by Nabeel Qureshi (Zondervan)

- Scripture portions in the student's native language are always a good place to start. Begin with the Gospel of Luke, followed by the Gospel of John. A bilingual version might be especially helpful.

## Understanding World Religions

To talk about spiritual subjects with an international student, you will need to have a basic understanding about their religious background. You don't need to be an expert in world religions to be effective in sharing your faith. As mentioned previously, the best resource for understanding world religions is *The Compact Guide to World Religions* by Dean C. Halverson (Bethany House Publishers). With clear, easy-to-use chapters and concise charts, this book helps you understand the origins, basic beliefs, evangelistic challenges, and opportunities of the world's religions. Our next chapter will highlight some specific insights in evangelism for internationals from different backgrounds.

Ah-lei, from the People's Republic of China, has been studying at a university in the Midwest. She regularly attends a Bible study for international students. Recently Ah-lei talked about her American friends saying, "As Christians, they never force or persuade us to become Christians. It is more important for them to share Christ's love with us. As loving representatives, they are patient, tolerant, and friendly.... Through Christians, I know what is a Christian's quality, and I feel caring and love from the Church. I am not a Christian, but I want to say, 'I appreciate you, all Christians. I thank Lord Jesus for sending you to help us who need help.'"

## Open the Opportunity to Discuss Spiritual Topics

Many times, the student begins asking spiritual questions and will open this topic of discussion. However, if the subject never comes into your conversation, you can encourage it by using some of the following questions:

- Where do you consider yourself to be spiritually?
- Do you consider yourself a Muslim (or Buddhist, or Hindu)?

An international student from Turkey gave an interesting answer to this question posed by his friendship partner. He said, "I guess you'd say that, since that's all I've ever known, but I want to know about Christianity." It launched an interesting spiritual discussion.

- What are some of the religious practices of your country? Does your family practice these? How about you?
- Would you like to know what Christians believe?
- What do people in your country believe about God? Jesus Christ? The Bible? The concept of sin, etc.? Do you also believe these things?
- Would you like to learn English through using the Bible?
- Do you have a Bible? Would you like one? I could get one for you. Would you like it in English or your language?
- What are the main differences you see between your religion and Christianity?

- Would you like to learn more about God and life as a Christian?

## Share Your Spiritual Journey

One of the most non-offensive tools for sharing your faith in Jesus Christ is your own personal testimony. As you share your own spiritual journey with an international student, he or she can learn from your experience, and it will open doors of conversation to further spiritual discussions.

Maybe it's been years since you've told anyone about your spiritual journey. Take a few minutes to consider these questions:

- What was your life like before you became a Christian?
- How did you become a Christian?
- How has your life changed since becoming a Christian?
- You may want to write a short outline of the points of your life you'd like to cover. Practice giving your testimony to a close friend. Before you give it to your international friend, ask your Christian friend to monitor your language. As Christians, we tend to fall into our church jargon: "born again," "saved," etc. Look for ways to express yourself without using these buzz words.

Also, by practicing ahead of time, you will gain some confidence and be able to create a target for discussion afterward. Make sure you stick to the point. Don't wander with your storytelling. For example, can you list three benefits added to your life through following Jesus Christ? These benefits would be the major points to stress for the third question: How has your life changed since becoming a Christian?

## Use *Knowing God Personally*

When it comes to tracts and tools for evangelism, ISI has created a special tool called *Knowing God Personally*.<sup>1</sup> It is designed to emphasize relationships and was written for international students. The colorful tract is simple to use and covers everything that a student needs to know. It emphasizes what the Bible says about Jesus Christ and can be read together. The student can then take it home for reading again and again. This resource is available directly from ISI (Check out the online store. Also, see Appendices section.)

## How to Use *Knowing God Personally*

*Pre-evangelism*: You can read through *Knowing God Personally* with your international friend, explaining how Christ gave His life for our sins and how we can know Him

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<sup>1</sup> *Knowing God Personally*, International Students, Inc., 2020. Original material taken from *Knowing God* by Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Scripture references used in tract are taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society; *The Message*, Eugene Peterson, 1993; *The Living Bible*, 1971, Tyndale House Publishers; *The New American Standard Bible*, 1977, The Lockman Foundation.

personally. Leave the booklet with the student to reflect on and to share his or her response with you later.

*Evangelism:* Read through *Knowing God Personally*, explaining any area that needs further detail. Use your Bible, if available, to amplify each point. Share your own testimony as well, using *Knowing God Personally* as a guide for your discussion.

Be sure to address the questions regarding one's personal salvation and ask if he or she wants to make a commitment. If so, share a similar prayer out loud. Verbalizing the prayer aloud brings the student to a decision point that he or she may not follow through with, should you ask him or her to pray silently. It also helps you measure the sincerity of his or her decision.

If the international student has trouble praying the prayer out loud, simply pray the prayer together, or allow him or her to repeat it after you, using his or her own words. Explain to the student that prayer is simply talking to God.

*Follow-up to the Commitment:* Never assume that any explanation of the Gospel is so easily understood that one comprehends it in a single review. One of the largest evangelistic denominations in North America indicates that the average North American receives twenty-four different presentations of the Gospel before responding.

The international student may require even more. Therefore, after a commitment is made, it is appropriate to review *Knowing God Personally* again. In this way, you can answer the student's questions, emphasize the promises of God, and encourage the student in his or her walk with Him. Students can also learn to share their faith in Christ with others, building upon the tool with their own testimony and knowledge of the Scriptures, regardless of how rudimentary their grasp is. The end result is that they are more likely to lead others to Him.

*Knowing God Personally* is a tool that anyone can use for pre-evangelism, evangelism, or commitment follow-up. Study its pages until you feel completely comfortable in sharing your faith and using this tool.

## Reasons for Hesitancy in Response

Be sensitive to how your international friend responds as you share your faith. There are a multitude of reasons that make it difficult for your international friend to openly profess faith in Jesus Christ. Try to understand his or her situation and recognize that there could be a variety of factors that keep the student from making a public commitment to Christ.

- If your friend forsakes his or her family's traditional religion, he or she may face family pressure, possible loss of job or financial support, and perhaps even being disowned.
- Your friend may face severe persecution, even death, if he or she returns home as a Christian to a country that prohibits Christianity.
- If your friend becomes a Christian and returns to a country where Christianity is held in low regard, he or she may have to discard political or leadership ambitions.

- Your friend may be preoccupied with his or her own goals and academic achievements and not want to consider spiritual needs at this time.
- International students often view Christianity as a Western religion.
- He or she may find it difficult to separate Christianity from political structures and democracy.
- Your friend may be disillusioned by prior contact with either nominal or overly aggressive Christians.
- Friends or nationals who studied in the United States previously may have “warned” him or her about Christianity.

## Issues Often Raised by International Students

There are some common questions international students ask in the area of spirituality. Some basic answers and responses are included in the next few sections. As you consider your response to these issues, think about the example of Jesus as He dealt with tough issues and questions. He did not always answer the question He was asked, and sometimes He asked counter-questions. He often looked to the motive of the questioner. And He relied on the Scriptures for the most appropriate answers.

Before you attempt to answer an international student’s questions, consider the questioner. Some people are not ready for answers, or at least, detailed answers. Some questions or issues are not genuine. Perhaps the person only wants to debate or obscure important issues. We must be cautious and prayerful in our responses.

Keep in mind that you will not be able to answer every question—don’t try. Don’t hesitate to consult the expertise of other authoritative sources, such as your pastor, Christian writers, or other sincere Christians.

### *Issues and Possible Responses*

*Issue:* The Bible is full of mistakes and contradictions. The Bible has been changed and corrupted.

*Response:* You might ask whether this understanding comes from your international friend’s personal study or if it’s an impression he or she has received from somewhere else. Offer to lend your friend material that gives evidence for the reliability of the Scriptures. Encourage him or her to read the Bible. Books such as *Evidence That Demands a Verdict (Volumes 1 and 2)* by Josh McDowell are excellent in this area.

*Issue:* Christianity is too narrow and exclusive. All religions are really the same and equally valid.

*Response:* You could answer, “In science, mathematics, and other fields of learning, truth is narrow and follows specific rules and often exclusive logic. Why should Christianity be different?” Jesus taught that spiritual truth is narrow. Jesus said that He is the only way to God and His Word alone is our authority.

*Issue:* What happens to those who have never heard about Jesus? Or those who are morally good but not Christians?

*Response:* The Bible teaches that all people are lost and need salvation, regardless of time, location, or apparent moral goodness. The Bible also says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). And yet we understand from the Bible that:

- God loved us enough to send Jesus to save us (John 3:16-21).
- God’s plan for our salvation has existed since the beginning (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 and John 1:10-14).
- God’s plan for salvation is simple (1 John 1:8-9).
- We must have faith to please God (Hebrews 11:6).
- God deals with mankind justly (Genesis 18:25).
- God will not let man ignore him (Romans 1:18-32).
- The person who follows God will be blessed (Psalm 1:1-3).

*Issue:* There are so many Christian churches, denominations, and groups. Which one, if any, is the right one?

*Response:* You could answer, “All people who have made Jesus Lord and Savior of their lives are—under the authority of the Bible—one in Him.” You may deem it appropriate to explain that throughout history Christians have not always agreed with each other on certain points; such discord may reflect cultural tradition, unclear interpretation of the Bible, and even error and conflict between believers. Also, you may explain that there are many churches and religions in the United States because of the laws allowing religious freedom. Historically, many people (with differing beliefs) came to the United States seeking religious freedom.

*Issue:* How can God be three and one at the same time? How can God have a Son?

*Response:* This kind of question can be a good lesson for your international friend, in that you may not be able to give an answer fully or clearly. How can finite human beings understand the nature of an infinite God? Not all areas of God’s Truth, as revealed in the Bible, are easy to understand. That’s why we have faith, trusting God for some of these answers. You may want to give your international friend (or study with him or her) the excellent aforementioned book *The Compact Guide to World Religions* by Dean C. Halverson. Note that the last two chapters deal concisely with Jesus as God and the Bible as God’s Word.

### **Jesus Video (and Study Guide)**

Ian and Macy had built a good relationship with Chen, a professor in his fifties from mainland China. Since Chen had a family of his own back in China, he enjoyed the casual visits with Ian, Macy, and their children. He especially enjoyed the long talks with Ian as they shared about different cultures and views on life. Chen even pulled books from Ian’s bookshelf about China or Christianity and then asked questions.

One night, Ian asked Chen and another professor to visit his church and see a movie about the life of Jesus Christ. As they sat together on either side of Ian, their eyes were riveted to the unfolding story. During the crucifixion scene, Ian was a bit shocked when Chen put his hand on top of Ian’s. As Ian turned in surprise, he saw tears streaming

down Professor Chen's face. Then Chen said, "This is too wonderful. I did not know that God did this for me."

Months later, Ian and Macy took Chen to the airport for his return flight to China. As Chen entered the jetway to board the plane, he paused, turned around, and came back to Ian. He hugged Ian with a very uncharacteristic show of affection, saying, "Please do not forget me. Please pray for me and my family." Millions of people around the world have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ after watching the *Jesus* video. It is available in over 1,800 languages through [Jesusfilm.org](http://Jesusfilm.org). Based on the Gospel of Luke, this video is an excellent tool for international students. Ask your friend if he or she would like to view this video with you.

#### *Before viewing:*

Before a student can understand the person of Jesus Christ, he or she must first understand who we believe God to be. Take the student to Genesis 1:1. From this passage, we can see that God existed before the world, is powerful, a creator, and a personal God. Looking at Genesis 3, tell the student about how sin entered the world and about God's promise to deal with Satan. Genesis 12 gives God's promise to bless all nations.

Discuss the prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ. These show that God's plan was in operation throughout history. Read with the student Acts 17:22-34. In these verses, Paul explains to the Athenians the identity of the Unknown God. Let your international friend read verses 24-31, after explaining the context to him or her. After the student understands the concept of the Christian God, explain the concept of sin that separated us from God, and thus, the need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. After you have laid this groundwork with the student, you are ready to watch the video on the life of Jesus Christ.

A discussion guide is also available at [Jesusfilm.org](http://Jesusfilm.org). This guide provides helpful questions to direct your discussion about the video after you have viewed it together.

Because the *Jesus* video is available in many languages, you may want to encourage the student to view it in his or her native language. This video may also be appropriate as a Christmas gift or as a gift when he or she is returning home.

### **Lead a Discussion Party**

Simon and Maggie were involved with many international students from their local university. Every Friday evening, they hosted an informal, small group dinner with some of the students and discussed questions the students had about the Bible and the Christian faith.

One evening they were watching a portion of the *Jesus* video and discussing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. After the discussion, Hideo, a new attendee to the discussion group from Japan, sat down next to Simon.

"Simon, tonight is first time I ever see a Bible. Can I ask you a question? We talk about God. God this and God that. This is very interesting to me. Can you tell me, who is God? I never hear of him in my country when I am growing up. I like to know more."

ISI has a guide for hosting a discussion party, called *Let's Talk About It* (see ISI's online store to order). The majority of the contents of this publication are summarized in the following pages.

A discussion party involves several families who meet to discuss life and issues about God. The forum of a discussion allows students to openly express their views. You will be amazed at how the truth of God comes to light during these discussion times. This format allows students to talk about interesting topics that might not otherwise be brought into routine conversation. These parties provide a relaxed atmosphere where internationals can have fun with American Christians without fear of rejection, hostility, or harmful argument.

The purpose of such a gathering is to help friendship partners and international students become better acquainted and communicate on deeper levels. These gatherings will crystallize each participant's thinking regarding his or her beliefs about issues. Also, it gives internationals a clearer understanding of Christianity by experiencing Christian love and acceptance, seeing the validity of biblical truth, and beginning to grasp the implications of biblical Christianity.

The ideal use for this program involves five discussion parties, each lasting two hours. The first two weeks are orientation sessions for the friendship partners, while during the last three weeks, both the friendship partners and internationals participate.

During the first session for the friendship partners, they get acquainted, discuss the overview of a discussion party, learn how to invite students, and pray for the results of the parties. Also, during this first session, the friendship partners choose a topic for the discussion parties. Some of the possibilities are included below. In the second session, the friendship partners discuss the process of evangelism and role play a potential discussion, and again pray for the series of parties. The process of evangelism with international students has been covered elsewhere in this book (such as attitudes about successful evangelism—it's a process and not a one-time event). After each of the three discussions with international students, the friendship partner and an international student meet for one-on-one discussion.

### **Guidelines for Effective Discussion**

These guidelines form the basic ground rules for the discussion parties. They are important because they will set the tone for the entire sessions and the comfort level of every participant.

- Help the internationals feel accepted and encourage them to freely share their opinions. Let them know their opinions will be accepted.
- Be enthusiastic and friendly.
- Contribute freely to the discussion, but don't do all the talking.
- Wait until an individual is finished sharing his or her point of view before responding.
- Be gentle in responding to someone's point of view. Never argue.
- Don't play the "devil's advocate" or pose as a non-Christian. This can be confusing to students.

- Internationals from some cultures may be hesitant to speak out in a group or in the presence of their host or hostess. Be sensitive to this and try to “draw out” more reserved participants.
- Stick to the topic; don’t go off on a tangent.
- Don’t be afraid to clearly present a biblical viewpoint on the issue. However, avoid stifling the discussion with “cut-and-dried” answers. If others feel that you are not open to truly hearing their ideas because you already have “the answer,” they will not respond as openly and the discussion will deteriorate.
- Articulate your answers carefully. Avoid slang words, idioms, and Christian jargon.
- Be sure the internationals leave the discussion party knowing that you like them for who they are.

*After the discussion party:* Usually the most meaningful interaction will take place after the party is over. The discussion itself is the vehicle for this interaction. Here are some helpful hints to make this informal time more profitable:

- Avoid huddling with other hosts and thereby excluding international guests with whom you could interact.
- Be sensitive to persons standing alone or those with apparent needs. Be friendly and relaxed.
- Continue the dialogue on a one-on-one basis, or at least in very small groups. Start the conversation with something like: “I didn’t get to hear your impression of the discussion. What do you think?” or “Your comment on \_\_\_\_\_ was very interesting.”
- Ask an international with whom you have a good relationship what he or she thought about the discussion time. And remember, it is generally unwise to invite someone to accept Christ at a discussion party. Trust God and be patient for a future opportunity to share your personal faith and the Good News of Christ with your international friend.

### **Selecting a Discussion Topic**

When choosing a topic for the discussion party, it should be:

- interesting to the participants
- important to the participants
- within the knowledge and experience of the group
- international in scope.

Specific topics related to ethics, philosophy, love, marriage, politics, and religion are usually of great interest to international students and friendship partners. A list of some topics and actual questions are furnished in Appendix B. You may want to talk with some international students and get their suggestions about topics of current interest. Or select a topic for the first discussion party, then allow the participants to select the topics for the subsequent sessions.

Every participant in the discussion party should know the topic well in advance of the meeting. Use the first topic in your invitation to international students, then at the conclusion of the first session, agree on the next topic. Present the topic informally,

yet with enthusiasm. For example, “I’ve been thinking about a topic I think everyone would enjoy discussing...” Every participant should be given the opportunity to research and prepare for discussion on the topic.

Sometimes a good topic is suggested but the scope is too narrow for an international discussion. For example, one student might say, “It seems that America has few friends in the Middle East. I would like to discuss America’s role in the Middle East.” If used for discussion, this question could lead to a sectarian debate that might not be productive. To expand this question so that everyone could participate, the moderator might say, “Because we have so many nations represented here tonight, we may want to rephrase your question to say something like, ‘What attitudes and actions do you think are being expressed by the developing nations and industrialized nations in regard to the Middle East?’”

### **Prepare for the Discussion**

After the topic is selected, secure information pertinent to the discussion by reading relevant books and articles. Discover good quotations or current news events that relate to the topic, or interview people familiar with the issues you hope to discuss. Then organize your information to assist in guiding the discussion. What issues should be discussed? What are possible solutions to at least some of the problems related to the issue?

*Formulating questions:* Each discussion topic should be approached with the attitude of a co-learner rather than a scholar. Don’t appear to have all the answers from your preparation. You don’t. Clearly define the issues you hope to discuss and develop appropriate questions. Questions, not statements, enhance discussions. Here are some guidelines to creating good questions:

- Limit the questions to a single topic. Briefly touching on several topics in a single discussion party will only confuse group members. Let the participants cover one topic as completely as they desire so they can gain a good understanding of their own thinking and the thinking of others. Be careful that the discussion does not become a dialogue between only two or three participants.
- Use “open-ended” questions—that is, questions that lead to a variety of responses. Try not to ask questions that can be answered by a simple yes or no. A monosyllabic answer in itself will not stimulate discussion. Ask participants to explain their answers.
- Avoid questions that assume a certain answer will be given.
- Ask questions that will lead from facts to opinions to personal application as the discussion progresses.
- Make your questions clear and to the point. Keep in mind that some of the internationals may not understand slang, puns, or irony.
- Formulate enough questions to keep the discussion party going for about an hour. You may want to have a few optional questions on hand in case the discussion begins to lag. Be sensitive to the group’s needs and guide the group members out of arguments or diversions.

- Avoid any ambiguous wording in your questions.

### **Prepare the Place for Discussion**

The environment for your discussion party will make a difference as to its success. A home with a large room is the most comfortable environment. The host or hostess should be responsible for preparations. If you have a larger group, try to find a comfortable meeting room in a dorm, on campus, or at a nearby church. If possible, appoint someone besides yourself (the homeowner) to be responsible for the preparations and to act as a “host” or “hostess.” Here are some things that the host or hostess should keep in mind:

- Provide a comfortable, informal atmosphere—one that allows for relaxation, but not sleep! Keep your discussion group with no less than six and no more than twelve for the best discussion.
- During the initial get-acquainted time and after the discussion, provide some simple yet appealing refreshments such as crackers, fruit, and/or vegetables with dip, as well as sweets.
- Provide name tags for all participants; use a marker that shows clearly and legibly. You may want to ask the international students to write their home countries as well as their preferred names on the tags.
- Arrange the seating so that all members can see one another. A circle is best.
- Provide adequate lighting so that it is easy to see others, and adequate ventilation to keep the discussion lively.

### **Inviting Internationals to a Discussion Party**

As a friendship partner, you are responsible for inviting your international friend to the discussion party series. If possible, invite at least one of his or her international friends to join you at the party. The discussion party is most effective when the ratio of internationals to Americans is about two to one.

Here are some suggestions for inviting students:

- Invite them about two weeks in advance. Follow up the initial invitation with a reminder about five days in advance.
- Describe the evening as a party where people will discuss topics of interest to internationals. You may mention, if it is appropriate, that the evening is sponsored by a church, but assure them that no pressure will be exerted on them.
- Arrange to pick up the internationals and take them to the discussion party. Consider inviting them to dinner before the party. The dinner might give you an opportunity to establish rapport before the party begins.

### **Guidelines for the Moderator**

Every discussion party needs a moderator to guide the group conversation. If you have taken the role of moderator, there are some additional guidelines to keep in mind.

During the first meeting of the discussion party, make sure everyone agrees to two clear promises:

1. The group discussion time will be limited to exactly one hour.
2. All opinions, ideas, and beliefs will be accepted and appreciated.

Your role as the moderator is to present each topic to be discussed and moderate the discussion. You will not be giving a lecture. Instead, your task is to facilitate participation from every member of the group. Participation can be:

- *Spontaneous*. The simplest and perhaps most comfortable way to direct a discussion is to allow participants to speak freely. If the group members are not well acquainted, or not experienced in discussion, some moderation may be necessary.
- *By your recognition*. Having group members raise their hands and speak only when you recognize them helps control objectivity during emotional or controversial times when several participants want to talk at once.
- *By your directed questioning*. If the discussion is lagging, or if a few vocal members are dominating the discussion, you may need to direct specific questions to specific individuals. Simply say something like, “Han, what do *you* think about this issue?”

You will discover that each of these methods comes into use during a discussion evening. If the discussion begins slowly, you may have to ask specific individuals questions. Once the discussion picks up, participants will feel free to speak up. During an emotional time, you may say, “Why don’t we speak one at a time. Ali, would you like to go first?”

Here are some additional points to keep in mind:

- Be patient and be a good listener.
- Encourage and compliment every sincere contribution.
- Be unobtrusive. Don’t force your ideas on others. Be genuinely interested in what other people say.
- Be sensitive to the group’s dynamics. If discussion stalls, try to motivate participation by rephrasing questions or making them more specific.
- Take time to coordinate and integrate opinions. Follow up with questions or statements which will help the participants clarify their opinions and reach conclusions.
- From time to time, briefly summarize the group’s conclusions. Try to keep others from summarizing the conclusions and forcing their personal opinions on the group.
- Handle emotional outbursts by allowing momentary silence and having the emotional individual repeat themselves after they become calmer. Try to prevent others from reacting too strongly to such a situation. Although some tension and controversy stimulate thinking, do your best to maintain a relaxed discussion atmosphere at all times.

At the end of the discussion party, summarize the basic issues discussed and the group’s conclusions. Remember, the purpose of the discussion party is to help

participants crystallize their thinking, not to confuse them. Tactfully present some Christian perspectives to leave the participants with “food for thought” that will stimulate one-on-one discussions following the group session. Include the Christians present in the after-discussion interaction.

Announce the topic for the next discussion party. Present a few thought-provoking questions that will give the participants a taste of the next discussion and encourage them to come back. Thank the group for coming and announce the time and place of the next discussion party.

As soon as the discussion party ends, make sure the friendship partners mingle with the international students. Participate in these informal discussion times, making yourself available to answer any questions from international students. Again, make sure that no international is “forced” to discuss Christianity. Being a friend is the most important aspect, and times to discuss Jesus and the Bible will occur naturally at a later time.

### **A Variety of Tools**

Sharing your personal testimony, the *Knowing God Personally* tract, discussion parties, and the *Jesus* video are tools to help an international learn how to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Remember, the most important things are:

- to establish a loving relationship with the international student for Christ’s sake—agape love with no personal strings attached
- to give the student an opportunity to ask questions and receive information about spiritual life in a nonthreatening situation
- to use appropriate tools (tracts, Bible studies, videos, discussion guides).

### **Apply What You Have Learned**

1. Pray for the international students you know.
2. Review the various methods of sharing your faith. Which have you attempted? What approach is the most comfortable for you? Which approach would cause you to grow in your spiritual relationship?
3. Write down three or four ways you can minister through your life to your student with acts of love. These actions will open the door for you to possibly share your faith with him or her.
4. Get copies of the *Knowing God Personally* tract and go over it with a friend so you will be comfortable sharing it with your international friend.
5. Choose one book on sharing your faith or answering spiritual questions that may be asked by your student. Commit to reading two books over the next three months.
6. Plan a fun time—a discussion party with several friends and students.
7. Follow up with any students who attend the discussion party, especially regarding any questions that might not have been fully answered.

## 8. Understanding Your Student's Background

*“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”* John 14:6

Carrie was worried. In a few hours, she would meet an international student from the People's Republic of China for the first time. She had studied a map of China and looked through some basic reference information. Unfortunately, there was little information about the spiritual climate of China or other necessary background about her new Chinese friend. Her problem was, what was she going to say?

Unless we understand the cultures and worldviews of students from different parts of the world, such as Africa, China, India, Japan, or the Middle East, it will be difficult to know how best to relate to them spiritually and effectively share the Gospel. This chapter will help you sort through the various religious backgrounds and provide some historical framework and key areas for preparation. It will help you as you relate to students from their particular orientation. Also, you will want to return to these sections immediately prior to meeting an international student. Preparation will enhance your relationship and increase your effectiveness in leading your friend toward a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

As we have mentioned before, the most authoritative and easy to use source of information about religions is *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. This book covers the material in greater detail. What we will do here is give you some brief information about African, Chinese, Hindu, Japanese, and Muslim cultures.

### Specialized Approaches for Students from Particular Backgrounds

#### African Students

African students in the United States no longer represent just the significant and influential segment of Africa's elite. Today, with scholarships from charitable institutions, and from foundations in America (like the Master Card Foundation), numerous disadvantaged students from impoverished communities who previously could not have dreamt of education outside their countries are now studying at American colleges and universities. Many of them will be the opinion leaders and change agents who chart the future course of their developing nations. In today's rapidly changing world, the innovations these future leaders will introduce will have global effects politically, educationally, socially, and spiritually.<sup>1</sup>

Among the most popular fields of study for African students are agricultural sciences, business global management/logistics, political science, biomedical and mechanical

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<sup>1</sup> This section includes excerpts from the ISI training brochure by Dr. Wilson Awasu, *How to Share the Good News With Your African Friend*. Dr. Awasu was born and raised in Ghana, West Africa. For additional material about your African friend, order the complete brochure (see ISI's online store). Some of the additional material covered in this booklet relates to Islam, a dominant religion in North Africa and sizable areas around the Sahara.

engineering, mathematics and computer science, medicine and medical sciences, and social sciences. More than half of the African students studying on American campuses are enrolled in undergraduate studies. A portion of that number are involved in graduate study and postgraduate programs. Due to persisting political and economic instability in several African nations, most African undergraduate students in American colleges and universities are funded by scholarships, while much fewer are funded by family and friends. Graduate students tend to draw their funding from their home government or university, the American university where they attend, or from international organizations.

### ***Befriending Your African Student***

Africans value community and interdependence with others as opposed to independence and solitude. To reach African students on your campus, invite them to activities that include others rather than trying to single them out or separate them. Because African students are likely to come from a culture where extended family is an integral part of everyday life, that will be the one thing they miss the most—that family support. Including your African friend in your own family's activities such as picnics or other social events will be much appreciated.

Do not be surprised if the student refers to you as his or her parents. It is a common practice for Africans to “adopt” anyone at the age of their parents as their own. It is not unusual for some to refer to their new friends as “mom” or “dad” even though you did not offer to be a surrogate parent. Welcome it! It is also an expression of the utmost respect and appreciation.

Africans are constantly confronted with negative attitudes blasted in media about Africa. Sometimes it is referred to as “the Dark Continent.” Media often shows the worst poverty-stricken areas and only the faces of black Africans. For an African student, this distorts his or her identity and dignity. Missionary agencies have been guilty of emphasizing poverty and uncleanness to raise funds. What is missing is the positive side of the continent. Take an interest in learning about your student's country and some of the positive aspects of that country. Give your African friend an opportunity to show you the best of his or her culture. This could include food, music, and clothing.

Studies show that African students are most likely to experience prejudice compared to other students. Search your own heart. Make sure you do not have a negative attitude towards Africans or black people in general. Seek to know the hearts of your students. Show them the unconditional love of Christ. Take the time to earn their trust and be there for them in their time of need.

### ***Understanding Your African Friend***

#### ***African Concepts of Religion***

“Animism,” “ancestral worship cults,” “primal religions,” and other terms used by Western-trained anthropologists do not fully describe the African concept of religion. From the African perspective, religion—in whatever form—bears the following marks:

- It deals with a creator god who is transcendent—he created and sustains all creation.
- Creation includes the elements—sun, moon, stars, water, air, land, human and spirit beings, plants, and animals. These—particularly the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and oceans, are deified and worshipped in some cultures.
- Religious experts must understand the spiritual and human realms and be spiritually powerful. These experts must remain adept at their practice to retain their position and influence.
- In ancestral worship, which is prevalent, dead ancestors are venerated and consulted as mediators to god(s) through proscribed animal sacrifices and festivals.
- Religion permeates every area of human existence.

### *Concepts of Christianity*

Africans generally divide Christianity into two streams—Christianity before colonialization, and Christianity during and after colonialization.

The Ethiopian Orthodox and Egyptian Coptic Christianity—influenced by such early church leaders as Tertullian, Ireneus, Augustine, Cyprian, and Apollos—are examples of pre-colonialization Christianity.

Christianity closely associated with colonialization—primarily in sub-Saharan Africa—exists in “daughter churches” planted by Western missionaries during the colonial era. Typical examples include the Catholic Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches.

A third stream that has emerged since post-colonial independence of African nations include independent Pentecostal/Charismatic churches as well as Christian organizational and student movements. These are African counterparts of such organizations as the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International, CRU, and the Navigators in the United States.

### *Charismatic Movement in African Christianity*

Many independent African churches tend to be charismatic, with much emphasis on miracles and the pursuit of wealth as part of Christianity. These kinds of churches are very common in sub-Sahara Africa. They are influenced by prosperity gospel from the U.S. and from local evangelists who have no training. Consider these believers as desiring to please God and follow Christ as they understand the Scriptures, though they may have been taught wrong doctrine.

Here are some suggestions when dealing with African students who have been misled by wrong doctrine:

- Avoid being argumentative.
- Let Christ’s love shine through you.
- Appreciate their desire to follow God.
- Gently discuss their beliefs and help them discover God’s Truth in Scripture so they can see where they are incorrect.
- A relationship-based ministry is always most effective.

### ***African Churches in America***

Many African Christian immigrants have started their own churches in the U.S. Another reason for this is that they feel comfortable being within their own culture. For the most part, these churches will tend to be charismatic and lean toward a prosperity gospel. But they welcome any support or ideas to help make them better. In many cases, the pastor is bi-vocational and has another full-time job. If approached with humility, they will welcome any training we can offer.

### ***African Students in the United States***

#### ***Secularistic Students***

Secularistic students relate easily to contemporary American society. They can also easily make American friends. If American Christians don't reach out to these students, especially in the critical first few weeks and months they are here, they may return to Africa even more closed to the Gospel than they were before their U.S. experience.

Many of these students have been exposed to and have already made up their minds about Christianity before coming to the United States. Many have attended church-oriented schools and colleges—and the mandatory worship services there. Some have been approached by insensitive Christian activists on university campuses in Africa. Others have bought into the prevailing unpopular image of clergy in African society. Still others, by influence of the internet, social media, and global television arrive in America already embracing the popular Hollywood celebrity culture and media image of success and fame that is not necessarily dependent on God...and so they have no intent whatsoever to seek after God in any religion. Consequently, many have forged negative views about Christianity.

Some of these negative views include the following:

- Christianity is anti-intellectual. Because most African pastors are not highly educated, Christianity is thought by many African students to be fit only for “dropouts,” the aged, and the lowest classes of society.
- Christianity is only concerned with the human soul. The Christian God is often presented as a soul-saving, hero God who has no concern for the mind and body.
- Christianity contains inconsistencies. God is portrayed as powerful in the past but is thought to be no match for local evil spirits and witches today. Christianity advocates a loving God but is practiced by Christian groups who are often intolerant and unloving toward others.
- Christianity is a religion of impractical beliefs. While Christianity stresses the importance of adhering to its beliefs, the practice of these beliefs has not noticeably improved human relationships and lifestyles in “Christian” societies. In fact, it often isolates and insulates its adherents from human needs.
- Christianity is therefore perceived as anti-progressive and against success, fame, and wealth.
- Christianity is a white man's (European or American) religion and should be dismissed as such. The geography and culture of the Bible has closer proximity and similarity to Africa than to Europe or America; therefore, when helped to study the

Bible African students discover how the stories in the God's Word and His plan of salvation are more closely related to their own background.

For secularistic students, these negative views of Christianity are the basis of resentment and rejection. Such notions reinforce Marx's view of religion as "the opiate of the people." Many African elite have concluded: "Christianity is the handmaiden of Western colonization and the exploitation of Africa."

Secularistic students often come to the U.S. to explore and experience American democratic institutions and to see how they differ from other forms of government. They try to discern how the principles underlying these institutions and government can be adapted to nation-building in modern Africa. Of course, we know that true spiritual faith is vital for all institutions and governments.

Many of these students arrive determined to discover and walk in the footprints of their predecessors who, while they studied here in the 1940s, caught the spirit and love of self-rule and then returned home to liberate their countries from colonial rule. These students want to make a difference in their countries' governments and histories. It's urgent to befriend these students with the love of Jesus Christ and to reach them as early as possible.

### *Muslim Students*

Students from Northern Africa generally tend to be Muslims or familiar with the Muslim faith. Expect some of them to be nominal in their faith. Do not assume that they are committed followers of Islam. Learn to listen and allow them to inform you about the level of their commitment.

Free from the governmental and cultural restraints they often face in their own countries, African Muslim students in the U.S. are often more open to the Gospel during their studies here. With patience and sensitivity—getting to know these students and becoming involved in their lives—American Christians can help Muslim students explore the Good News of Jesus Christ.

African students at American colleges and universities, regardless of their religious backgrounds, tend to formally or informally associate with and care for each other. This is always a great ready-made platform for mature African Christian students to discreetly and lovingly share the Gospel of Christ with their Muslim peers—in ways they would not ordinarily do in their homeland.

### *Christian Students*

African Christian students can play a vital role in international student ministry. There are two types of African Christian students: young or new believers who may have accepted Christ only a short while before coming to the U.S. or during their stay here and mature believers who may have played an active leadership role in local churches or ministries.

Young or new Christians may be highly susceptible to backsliding while in America. Therefore, these students have a critical need for follow-up, discipleship, and Bible study to build their faith.

If your student is a believer, learn to listen to their understanding of the Scripture without being judgmental. Consider that your greatest input is discipleship and mentorship. Use ISI's Bible discovery tools to help African Christian students to discover true teaching from God's Word.

Because of their ministry experience, the mature African Christians can be highly effective in reaching out to other international students. They can also contribute significantly to the local churches they attend in America. Welcome spiritual wisdom your Christian student may have to share. Consider that what these students need most is additional training and the opportunity for lay-leadership roles in ministry. Give your African friend the opportunity to participate in the Church—whether in choir, Sunday School, or by sharing his or her testimony.

### ***Sharing Jesus with Your African Friend***

#### *Hurdles to Effective Ministry*

Stereotypes: Not only do Africans have misconceptions about the U.S., but Americans also have misconceptions about Africa. Hollywood, as well as *National Geographic* (among other periodicals), stereotypically portray the “local natives” image of Africa—picturing black Africans as subservient to their white colonizers. The image of Africa as a “dark” continent is further perpetuated by Western media coverage of famine and political unrest in African nations.

American Christians (no matter how well-meaning) who approach secularistic African students from such perspectives will not succeed in reaching these students with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

#### *Christianity and Culture*

When sharing the Gospel, you must consider three cultures—your own, that of your African friend, and the cultural context of the Bible. Therefore, you should sensitively consider your African friend's cultural perspective and tailor your Gospel presentation accordingly. To do this, you must first seek to know and understand your friend and his or her culture.

As you honestly open your hearts to students from Africa, let them know...

- that you love them because of Jesus Christ.
- that you will be their friend.
- that both you and the students will likely make culturally insensitive mistakes.
- that the friendship is to be an enjoyable experience for everyone.
- that openness and honesty will be important to the relationship.
- that your American culture is by no means the model state for the Kingdom of God that the Bible and the Gospel presents.

Africans are passionate, unashamed, and very expressive regarding what they believe. Bearing this in mind, reaching and properly discipling an African student while

here in the U.S. makes him or her a “disciple”—a ready witness and bold ambassador for Christ when he or she returns home).

## **Chinese Students**

Thousands of students from mainland China are currently studying in the United States. To effectively reach these students for Jesus Christ, there is a great deal we can learn about the history, culture, and people that will increase the effectiveness of our efforts to share Christ.

### ***Befriending Chinese Students***

#### *Who Are These Students?*

Chinese students in the United States represent the cream of the crop. They have proved their intellectual achievement in their various fields of study. Many Chinese students come to the U.S. for graduate study, usually specializing in the sciences—such as computer science, mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology—and many other natural and social science fields.

One way to understand Chinese students is to consider the different age groups (and backgrounds) of Chinese who study in the U.S. We will divide these students into three major groups: older, middle, and younger generations.

#### *Older Generation (Ages 40 to 60)*

This group represents mostly visiting scholars with J-1 visas. They are often faculty members from universities in China. They are typically in doctoral research or post-doctoral programs and are required to return home after they complete their studies abroad. Unfortunately, under increasingly stringent U.S. student visa policies it is becoming more and more challenging for them to come to the U.S. here for educational pursuits; however, they may still be allowed to come to take care of their children or their grandchildren.

This group needs help with language skills.

Older Chinese students will understand the Gospel better if an approach focusing on honor/shame (such as in practiced in cultures valuing rank, status, honor, esteem and assigning shame) is used in Bible studies with them. Some will be open to genuine friendships. Chinese Christians back in their home province can be instrumental in reaching out to these students when they return home. Building an authentic relationship will provide the best environment to share your faith with these students. A number of older Chinese have enjoyed close friendships with American Christians and have returned home as believers.

#### *Middle Generation (Age 29-39)*

American student visa policies can also make it difficult for these students to come to the U.S. from China.

This group represents a generation that has benefited from the economic reforms begun in China in late 1978. During that same year, China officially adopted the one-

child policy. These Chinese students have no memory of the cultural revolution or of the true political issues behind the Tiananmen incident. In this regard, they are pro-establishment, with no grand ambition to “revitalize” the country. When they graduated from universities in China, there were no guarantees that they would get a good job even in a strong job market. Those who come to study in the U.S. do so because they believe it will make them more marketable in their career fields. Most of this generation have chosen to go to domestic colleges at home rather than study abroad.

Chinese in this age group who come to the U.S. are typically in their mid to late twenties and graduate students. They often will not immerse themselves in U.S. culture. Instead, many will primarily socialize with their Chinese peers whom they meet in graduate school or work. A number of these Chinese students/scholars joined the Communist Party while in college, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they believe in communism.

Having grown up in a one-child family, where they didn’t need to compete for attention, these students have been the center of their universe. They are open to new things, thoughts, and ways of living. Compared with the younger generation, they tend to comply with social norms. The reasons for this vary:

- They grew up in the decade when China was most politically open.
- The disparity between the rich and the poor is not blatantly visible.
- As only children in their families, extremely high expectations are placed on them by their parents and grandparents.

Currently, the majority of these students have families of their own. Those who stay in the U.S. are usually professionals who have higher educations, as well as social status, and are very unlikely to leave. The grandparents often live with them to take care of their grandchildren while both parents pursue their careers.

Effective ministry approaches to consider:

- *Family/Language Assistance.* Help the stay-at-home spouse in practical ways: family activities, play dates, or anything that helps with childcare will be welcomed. English conversation groups are well received by this group.
- *Professional Growth.* This group of Chinese tend to trust other professionals, so involving peer Christian professionals in your outreach is important. Understand that they are heavily impacted by their peers because they have no siblings. Because they typically try to stay and work in the U.S., it is helpful to match them with American professionals.
- *Life Needs.* To this (typical middle-class) group, justice and freedom may not be the biggest draw. They may have started to think about the meaning of life or have experienced some major life change such as divorce, loss of love, or unemployment causing more reflection. They may also have more self-awareness; therefore, talking about sin is not taboo. Because they come from a culture emphasizing *honor and shame*, the Bible message that addresses this is often the most effective approach. In particular, the teachings and life of Christ

are the most appealing to them. The ultimate peace and security that the Gospel offers is a welcome message.

### *Younger Generation (Ages 18 to 28)*

Most students in this group are in undergraduate and graduate programs, with some entering their undergraduate studies directly from U.S. high schools. These students usually hold F-1 visas and are a relatively diverse group. Those coming from poorer families typically need to work more than those from wealthier families. The earlier the age at which these students came to study in the U.S., indicates the wealth of their families who generally support them through the first several years of their college education. Some of this generation plan to stay in the U.S. permanently; however, more than half who come for graduate studies choose to return home because they believe life in China is better materialistically. Most are the only child in their families, so they tend to be somewhat “spoiled.” Also, parents who can support their child as he/she studies in the U.S. are of middle or upper class, adding to their child’s sense of entitlement. These parents often use their relational networks to help their child secure employment when they return home. Thus, with the assistance of their parents, many of these students choose what they consider an “easier life” back home.

Often, this generation of students are not interested in the Christian faith due to their materialistic life goals. However, they love to meet with their peers, so including college students from your local church to befriend them is an effective way to reach these students with the love and message of Christ. A powerful collateral benefit is that involving American students will help those students catch a vision for reaching the world on their campuses.

A number of these Chinese students are living in the U.S. with a spouse. A small percentage of these spouses are part- or full-time students themselves. Offering opportunities for English conversation groups is often an effective way to develop genuine relationships and be a positive witness for Christ.

Other ways to reach out to these students include home-group activities and relational evangelism and discipleship. Of particular concern regarding those who come to faith in Christ while in the U.S. is the high percentage abandoning that faith when they return home. It is important to equip them to effectively reintegrate into their home culture with their newfound faith. This includes continuing to disciple them once they return home (if possible, and when it does not put them at risk) and to connect them with in-country Christians who will introduce them to a healthy spiritual support system. This must be done with prayer and great caution so as not to increase risks for Christians in China.

## ***Understanding Chinese Students***

### *Cultural Background*

Most Chinese students reflect a cultural identity that is a mixture of ancient Confucianism and modern communism. The teachings of Confucius, or Kong Fu-zi (551-479 B.C.) have deeply influenced China for more than twenty-five centuries.

Above all else Confucius emphasized the need for an equitable social order. Confucianism teaches the Chinese to value social relationships, to live proper lives of respect and courtesy toward others, and the denial of self for the good of all. This goes along with Confucius' belief that human nature is basically good but becomes disordered and crippled by a poor environment, such as under the leadership of a weak or corrupt government.

Marxism's ideals regarding human nature and the value of mankind are quite similar to Confucianism. This may explain how easily these two philosophical approaches coexist in many Chinese people. In a sense, Confucianism cleared the way spiritually for communism's temporary success in China. While some Chinese students may now disparage communism, they may be confusing their distaste for this philosophy with their distaste for China's government. That may explain why some Chinese want to adjust and adapt to Western culture but have difficulty understanding the emphasis placed on individual freedom, religion, and family values.

Basically, Chinese students tend to have three kinds of culture-based resistance to Christianity. First, Chinese intellectuals may resist and reject the Gospel because of concerns that Christianity will destroy traditional Chinese culture. Traditionally, Chinese intelligentsia see Christianity as some kind of superstition or as an inferior foreign philosophy.

Secondly, many Chinese remember Christianity's historical link with the imperialistic invasion of China in the 1800s. These Chinese might agree with the communist phrase: "Christianity is the running dog of imperialism."

The third form of resistance comes from Marxism's attack against all religion. To the Chinese Marxist, religion only frustrates people's efforts toward happiness. Marxism affirms that man—not a sovereign God—controls his own destiny.

### *Philosophical Background*

Although many Chinese students may not think of themselves as "communists," in reality their worldview is identical to communism. They will tend to accept certain Marxist doctrines as the only proper way to view the world:

- Human beings create and decide human history.
- Science leads man to truth.
- Religion (especially Christianity) is opium to people.

While many Chinese students will accept these teachings as fact, most know little or nothing about the source, which is Marxism. Very few have even read anything by Karl Marx. What these students know and believe is what the Chinese government has promoted through education and propaganda. Thus, when Chinese students hear about Christianity, their presupposition is that all religions, in essence, are untrue. When Christians explain Christ's pronouncement that He is Truth, they may get one of two responses. The first may be rejection without much consideration. The other may be the questions of a seeker who realizes he has been a victim of indoctrination. Rudy, a friendship partner serving an elite university in Southern California, sat with the president of the Mainland Chinese Students and Scholars group. Rudy was at the

meeting to talk with the Chinese leader about a professional mentoring program that could match Chinese students and scholars with American professionals already established in the same career field. Suddenly, as Rudy explained the program, the Chinese scholar interrupted midsentence to say, “You know, all my life in China I am taught that religion is for old people and for foolish people. I do not think this is true. Can you tell me what the Bible teaches?” For the next two hours, the men discussed the claims of Christ.

While Chinese have been indoctrinated with Marxist and atheistic ideology, many have a hunger to know about spiritual things, which have been absent and suppressed in their culture and upbringing. In fact, the mainland Chinese are historically the most open and receptive of all international students to the Gospel and spiritual matters.

### *Spiritual Background*

In the tradition of Confucianism, many Chinese students have a fundamental problem with two of the major teachings of Christianity: the sinful nature of mankind, and the anticipation of eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ. Central to Confucianism are concepts teaching proper behavior in relationships, both between individuals and under an appropriate government. Thus, Confucius’ teachings imply the natural goodness—or at least the natural perfectibility—of humankind.

Also, Confucius’ emphasis on reason and practical living leaves little room for discussion about heaven or hell, or even the need for such places. Confucius said, “Without knowing this life, how can I know the life after?” Thus, many Chinese value practicality, concentrating on the here and now, and on cultivating one’s own “perfectness.”

In light of recent history, many Chinese, particularly students in the United States, are experiencing a “crisis of belief.” Representing the intellectual community of China, these students and visiting scholars were raised to accept and support communism without exception. They put all of their hope, love, and confidence in this “religion” (though most Chinese would not accept this as a definition for their devotion to communism).

After generations of suffering and persecution for a “new China,” many Chinese have become disillusioned with communism and their government. This disillusionment has made some Chinese students hypersensitive about where they can place their faith. Such hypersensitivity carries over into doubt, criticism, and sometimes even discrimination toward other political and religious teachings.

Many Chinese, consciously and unconsciously, are on a spiritual search to find truth that they hope will help themselves and China’s future. This search has often translated into a curiosity about and study of Christianity.

### ***Sharing Jesus with Your Chinese Friend***

#### *First Be a Friend*

America’s “fast” approach to food, entertainment, and even friendship doesn’t translate well to the Chinese. They don’t consider “acquaintances” as “friends.” To

most Chinese students, friendship is the result of time and patience, which produces mutual trust. Friendship is also the willingness to sacrifice one's own interests to meet the other's needs.

For example, friends show a sincere interest in each other, asking questions such as, "How are you really doing?" and waiting for a response. In befriending Chinese students, find out about their personal lives and involve them in yours. Invite them over for meals; introduce them to your friends.

Chinese students in the United States tend to be lonely. They often suffer loneliness because of separation from family, language difficulties, cross-cultural frustrations, financial burdens, and sometimes the insensitivity and inattention of others.

### *Live Out the Christian Life*

One impression some Chinese students have about Americans, particularly Christians, is that they have "big mouths but small hands." To the Chinese it seems that Christians are very good at talking about their faith, but their actions fail to demonstrate it.

One Chinese student related his experience with Christians: "Christians don't do what they say every day. My car was stuck in the snow just in front of a church last Sunday. Although many people carrying Bibles saw me, no one stopped to give me a hand. It seemed to me they were more concerned to get into the church on time."

In Chinese culture, action is more important than words. In fact, Chinese people traditionally regard a person who talks too much as untrustworthy. It might be said that the Chinese prefer "down-to-earth" people. In light of this, your Chinese friend may be slow to respond to the Gospel. Your response must be to "walk the talk," and live out what you believe.

It's been said that when it comes to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. One woman from Taiwan wanted to be involved in the ISI English class, but she could not make the Sunday morning meetings. Knowing her disappointment, ISI volunteer Jean took the English class to her, meeting her every Wednesday on campus to go over her vocabulary words. Each Friday another volunteer, Leo, met with her to discuss American idioms.

It was not long before this student paused one day to ask, "Why do you do this for me? It seems to me you do not get paid to do this and that you are very decent people." In an instant, friendship opened the door to an evangelistic opportunity which ultimately led to this student's commitment to Christ. If students experience the love of Christ at first in you, they will ask you what makes you different.

### *Care about the Student's Family*

Estimates put the number of Chinese students in America at over 300,000 but this does not take into account a greater number of Chinese spouses and families of students studying in the U.S. In most cases, these spouses are women. Here are some facts about these student spouses:

- Most are college graduates.

- Many worked in China as professionals (professors, doctors, engineers, technicians, and in many of the science fields).
- Most have been unable to continue their education in America because of their spouse-status visas or financial difficulties. But some are part- or full-time students themselves. Even more than the students, these spouses tend to experience loneliness and isolation while here in the United States. This may be because of poor language skills, lack of transportation, parental responsibilities, and the inability to obtain meaningful employment due to visa or other restrictions.

Christians working with Chinese students should seriously consider ministry among these spouses and families. In fact, these spouses are often more responsive to the Gospel, will be more active in Bible study and other activities, and may become the best Christian witness to their husbands or wives.

Xi and Sun were students at a large university in Washington, D.C. During her time in the U.S., Sun became a Christian and attended church and Bible study on a regular basis. Though she gently tried to witness to her husband, Xi showed no interest in Christianity. However, he would drive his wife every Sunday to church so that she could attend services because it was so important to her. While Sun attended church, Xi would sit in the car and read the newspaper or study. Noticing this, the pastor of the church wisely approached Xi while he was reading in the car and said, “You know, I have a very warm study in my office, and I am not using it. Why don’t you come in and use it each week while I am preaching, and Sun is attending the service and Sunday School?”

The genuine and sincere offer touched Xi’s heart. Over the next few weeks, a friendship formed between the pastor and Xi. Ultimately, Xi felt free to discuss his beliefs and questions with his new friend. Over time, Xi committed his life to Jesus Christ. He began attending Bible study with the pastor, who faithfully met with him through the year. One day, Xi did not show up for Bible study. The pastor phoned his home only to find the number had been disconnected and that Xi and Sun were gone. His fear and bewilderment were eliminated two weeks later when the phone in his study rang and he heard Xi’s voice: “I am sorry I did not call you, but I received a call from the government of my country to return home in twenty-four hours. I now have an important position in my government.” Now Xi leads a Bible study for a small group of friends each week.

### *Engaging Chinese Student Believers*

Increasing numbers of Chinese students are arriving in America as Christians and the potential impact of their witness to other students cannot be ignored. While it is impossible due to the underground church in China to know an exact number, many of these believing students were raised in Christian families, and/or were involved in China’s house churches or the Three-Self church movement. Often these students have strong and often dramatic testimonies of faith due to previous persecution.

These Chinese Christians are scattered across hundreds of college and university campuses in the country. Some are outgoing, expressive witnesses of Christ, eager to

share the love of Christ with their fellow students. Other Chinese Christians will tend to be reserved and cautious about publicizing their faith.

## **Hindu Students**

Indian students represent the second largest group of international students currently studying in the U.S. making up about one out of every four international students. Seventy percent of these students come from Hindu families. To reach them, it is critical to understand their system of beliefs, the degree to which they desire to practice their faith, the way they view the world, and the pressures and expectations they face. To learn these things there is no substitute for engaging them with sensitively framed questions. But without a broad understanding of Hinduism, it is difficult to ask meaningful questions and avoid unnecessary offence.

### ***Befriending Hindu Students***

#### *Create Belonging*

In order to befriend Hindu students, it's essential to have a genuine interest in them, their family, their community, and their culture. Don't have an agenda, and don't talk only about spiritual topics. Learn some words and phrases in their language. Initiate "casual calls" with those who consider you to be their friend. You may also use video chats and messaging.

Try to be there for their ups and downs. In fact, sharing your own ups and downs will make them feel more comfortable sharing theirs with you. Be reciprocal—look for opportunities for them to help you with your needs. Get to know their extended family, in person or with videos, and share your own family stories and photos. Acknowledge and celebrate holidays, festivals, and birthdays with them.

You can evaluate your friendship with Hindu students by asking yourself these questions:

- Have you ever asked them for help?
- Are you comfortable going to see them or eat with them on the "spur of the moment"?
- Can they borrow things from you (and you from them)?

Once we have truly become friends with our Hindu students, then we can share those things that are important to us, including our faith. Friendships take time to develop and grow deeper when they are not rushed. Whether our friends are of our own culture or of one different from our own, it helps to understand more about the beliefs that are important to them.

### ***Understanding Your Hindu Friend***

#### *Religious Background*

While the term Hinduism is used to describe a religion, in practice it is really a term coined during the time of British rule in India to describe the religious beliefs of all the

people who lived in *Hindustan*. Hindustan is the Hindi name Indians use for their country. As a result, it consists of a range of theologies that cover the entire spectrum from atheistic Buddhism to the monotheism of the Hare Krishna movement and everything in between. For those who are in between and who happen to be polytheists, Hinduism offers 330 million gods. So, for an individual, that could mean, a personal deity, one that is worshipped by the family, another that is worshipped by the village, and others that are worshipped on special occasions. India is also home to a hybrid religion of Sikhism, which is a blend of Hinduism and Islam. And beyond the Brahmanical Hinduism, where the beliefs can be traced to ancient scriptures, there are many tribes that practice more primitive forms of animistic worship.

India also hosts many faiths that came to its shores by both trade and conquest. Zoroastrianism and Christianity were trade-route influences, while Islam made it to India through the Mughal invasions. Today India hosts the world's second largest Muslim population. Islam in India is greatly influenced by Indian culture. Indian Muslims almost universally share the belief that "all religions teach the same essentials."

### *Common Philosophies across Hinduism*

The following concepts are important pillars shared across most of the theological spectrum of Hinduism.

#### *Maya or Illusion*

Maya is the view that the world we see is really the world that we think we see. That is because "true" reality is inaccessible to human beings because it is not the full picture. We may conclude one thing, but the reality is another. For example, if while driving to the airport you had a minor mishap which caused you to miss your plane you would not think that the mishap was a good thing. However, if the plane crashed, you would now think that the mishap on the road was fortunate for you. That false reading of the mishap is the effect of maya, they would say.

You could invite your Hindu friend to explore for him or herself what role the Hindu gods play in the effect of "maya" in their lives. Because human beings have limited access to ultimate reality, the God of the Bible reveals what we need to know in many ways. The Bible can be seen as an invitation to see the world through God's eyes because God's eyes are not limited in any way.

#### *Karma—Spiritual Cause and Effect*

Karma, a popular term in the English language today stems from the idea that a person's actions in this life either gain or lose them spiritual points. These spiritual points are continuously being earned or lost over one's lifetime and the tally of these points account for what will happen to that individual's soul at the end of his or her life. At death, the belief is that the soul separates from the body and looks for another body in which to be born. If a person accrues a lot of good karma, he or she will be born again to a good life. If the karma account is not so good, he or she will be born into a difficult life in a lower caste. If the karma is really bad, he or she may not even be reborn in human form but as an animal or an even lower life form. It is not clear

how one can work up from a non-human life form. But the karmic account of an individual soul cannot be modified in any way by any other soul and not even by the gods themselves.

### *Samsara—The Perpetual Reincarnation Cycle*

In this philosophy, the soul is eternal, but the body is not. When the body dies, the soul leaves the body and finds another body to inhabit dictated by the karma associated with that soul. However, human beings are stuck in an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Each birth brings with it another life full of suffering, but it is also an opportunity to neutralize the bad karma of one's previous lives and earn good karma for one's next life. While there is no eternal judgment in Hinduism, there is a karmic judgment at the end of every life made by the universe itself that decides what kind of life the soul will have to live through next.

### *Moksha—Salvation*

It may seem from the idea of Samsara or the endless cycle of birth and rebirth that there is no concept of salvation in Hinduism. On the contrary, the idea of salvation or Moksha is a very integral part of the karma-samsara-moksha triad within the seven element DNA of Hinduism. The ultimate karmic goal is to gain so many positive points that no additional rebirth is necessary, and the soul attains union with the soul of god never to return to the earth again.

### ***Sharing Jesus with Hindu Students<sup>1</sup>***

#### *Ask and Listen*

Ask questions about your Hindu friend's beliefs concerning God, man, sin, and salvation. And listen carefully to his or her answers. Listen carefully to the words that your Hindu friend uses to describe the way to enlightenment. He or she might use words such as "achieve," "attain," "overcome," and "strive." Such words are significant because they reveal how enlightenment—the Hindu equivalent of salvation—is based on human effort, not on God's grace. After your friend has used such words, you might discuss with him or her such passages as Romans 3:19-24 and Ephesians 2:8-9, which speak of the futility of attempting to earn one's salvation and of how salvation is a gift from God to be received by faith.

Don't assume they know much about the faith in which they were raised. Many Hindus don't typically go to temples regularly like Americans attend church; therefore, they don't receive regular religious instructions. Different casts have different levels of knowledge about their scriptures.

Finally, don't think that just because Hindu students don't know much about their faith background that walking away from it will be easy for them. Hinduism is a lifestyle and is intrinsically linked to their social and family structures. Walking away from it will

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<sup>1</sup> Based on information contributed by Dean C. Halverson and Natun Bhattacharya. Please see *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Bethany House, 1996) for further thoughts on reaching Hindus.

affect not just their day-to-day relationships with their family of origin but could negatively impact finding a spouse and contact with their social networks.

### *Be Aware of Differing Definitions*

Be cautious when using terminology or concepts that could be misunderstood by followers of Hinduism. For example, Hindus would understand being “born again” as referring to reincarnation, which is something from which they are striving to be liberated. In Christian terminology, however, being “born again” is to be made new or to be regenerated by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. It is something to be desired.

### *Emphasize Jesus’ Forgiveness*

Forgiveness is a great need for Hindus because it is not available in their karma-based belief-system. The law of karma is like a law of nature—there is no place for forgiveness. The fact that forgiveness is not available in Hinduism troubles many Hindus because they are aware that the actions that bind them to this illusory realm keep accumulating, and the prospect of escape is hopelessly remote. One biblical passage that is good to use is, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28-30). When He spoke those words, Jesus had in mind the kind of people who felt burdened by the effort needed to attain salvation.

### *The Objection that “Jesus Christ is not Unique”*

The Hindus see their gods and *avatars* (incarnations) as manifestations, ultimately, of the impersonal *Brahman* and more specifically, of *Vishnu* or *Siva*. They view Jesus as merely one of those *avatars*. Your Hindu friend might be willing to incorporate Jesus into his or her pantheon, but he or she would not be willing to accept Jesus as the exclusive incarnation of God.

If the objection of Jesus’ uniqueness comes up, encourage your Hindu friend to read through the Gospel of John and to judge the issue for himself or herself. Remind your friend that even Gandhi said, “I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus” (Hingorani).

### *The Inclusiveness of Jesus*

While you want your Hindu friend to see how Jesus is unique, you will also want to share how Jesus Christ is *inclusive* toward others. Point out that...

1. Christ beckons “*all* who are weary and heavy laden” (Matthew 11:28, emphasis added) to come to Him.
2. The inclusive Christ *associated with the most unlikely of people, even the social outcast* (Luke 19:1-10) *and the sinner* (Luke 15:1-7).
3. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is intended for the *whole* world. As John wrote: “I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could *count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language*, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, emphasis added).

Such an all-embracing Christ will naturally appeal to the Hindu (Sudhakar, 3).<sup>1</sup>

### *Experiencing (Jesus)*

Be a good witness to the miracles of God by sharing what He has done in your life. Help your student experience the power of Jesus in answered prayer and ask him or her to pray for you as well. Look for opportunities to serve together—many experience Jesus while serving alongside others. Embody the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Find a Bible translation that has language that is understood by Hindus.

### *Believing (in Jesus)*

Model your devotion and obedience to God and the teachings of Jesus. Be careful to explain that the student doesn't need to abandon his or her family to follow Jesus. Share about other Hindus who are devoted to Jesus exclusively yet remain in their Hindu families and communities. For many Hindus, belief in Jesus begins non-exclusively (i.e., adding devotion to Jesus to devotion to Krishna, Ganesh, etc.).

Share scriptures that explain how the God of the Bible describes sin and Christ's work that erases our sins if we believe (e.g., Romans 3:21-26).

A good resource for more information about sharing your faith with your Hindu friend is *Living Water and Indian Bowl* by Swami Dayanand Bharati. This book analyzes how Christians have failed in communicating Christ to Hindus and has suggestions for how to communicate clearly.

## **Japanese Students**

The vast majority of international students from Japan come here as non-Christians. These are Japan's best and brightest students, and a few follow some form of their country's traditional religions. For many others, the rampant materialism and emerging individualism in Japanese society have squeezed out concern for spiritual matters.

Yet our window of opportunity to share Christ with these students is only for a few short years. Once the students graduate, they return home—where less than one percent of the Japanese people are Christians.

### ***Befriending Japanese Students***

#### *A Natural Desire for Friendship*

Most Japanese people desire friendship with people from other nations. As an island nation, Japan has been learning foreign ways and borrowing what it thought helpful for centuries. For the most part, Japanese have a natural curiosity about other parts of the world and are eager to learn from other cultures. This curiosity is true even more so for those Japanese who have ventured to other countries as international students, visiting scholars, or business professionals on assignment.

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<sup>1</sup> Sudhakar, Paul. "Mission to the Average Hindu" (unpublished paper, no date).

This desire for friendship, however, is not expressed in the same way it would be in Western culture. For some Japanese living overseas, showing initiative toward friendship is difficult and would be considered presumptuous. The Japanese person, when first overseas, feels like an outsider. You must, therefore, be ready for a lot of unilateral social outreach. Social politeness often dictates two or three refusals before an offer is accepted. Don't give up too soon.

### *Practical Tips for Developing Friendships*

- In arranging a social contact with a Japanese person or family, make sure to *plan something* in particular and let your friend know the agenda when making the invitation. In Japan, social contacts are usually highly structured, especially at the outset.
- Take trips with Japanese people. They have a genuine fascination with the world and they love to travel. Day trips to local areas of interest are often a good way to befriend Japanese students.
- Arrange for a picture-viewing session. Whether slides, photographs, or videos, chances are that your friend has some visual record of the places he or she has visited.
- If your Japanese friend has an interest in sports, an introduction to the local sports facilities and a friendly match of tennis or round of golf would be much appreciated. With regard to spectator sports, taking in a professional baseball game makes a great outing, because baseball is extremely popular in Japan.
- Japanese women often enjoy cultural activities unique to the United States. Anything related to handmade crafts (e.g., quilt-making) is a particular favorite. Learning to prepare American foods is also appreciated.
- On the whole, Japanese are more interested in various forms of music than Americans. If there are concerts or musical programs offered in your area, invite an interested Japanese friend to attend with you.
- The Japanese also seem to be more interested in flowers and plants than are most Americans. A trip to a local plant conservatory or botanical garden will be enjoyed by most Japanese.

### *Social Reciprocity and Gift-Giving*

The Japanese are gift-exchanging people. Early on in the friendship—often the first time they enter your home—they will bring a gift. You should express genuine thanks at the time you receive it and again when they are leaving the home. If you are invited to a Japanese home, make sure you bring a gift, however small, with you. In Japanese society, a gift given is to be met with a gift in return.

Gifts exchanged in Japan are similar to housewarming gifts in Western culture. Think of gifts that have great personal value rather than monetary value. One extremely valuable gift would be to introduce your friend to someone you know who is studying the same academic discipline or is involved in the same line of business as your friend. Because the Japanese are typically hesitant to introduce themselves to people on their own and usually rely on go-betweens for making new relationships, these types of introductions are highly appreciated.

### *Japanese Commitments to Family*

Family ties in Japan are stronger than those in the West. Therefore, beginning a friendship with a Japanese means that you are beginning a friendship with that person's family. If family members visit, make sure that you show as much hospitality as possible. Once you have met family members, especially parents, consider sending a Christmas card and then a New Year's card to your Japanese friend's family back in Japan. Learn all you can about your friend's family and pray regularly for his or her family members.

Some Japanese experience pressure from their families not to become too involved with Christianity, especially firstborn sons who have the responsibility of continuing the worship of ancestors. A friendship that has included conversations on spiritual topics may experience a time of apathy toward spiritual matters from your friend. Be patient. It is important that you respect your friend's spiritual comfort zone. If he or she is wary of Christians, be a genuine friend and pray for the right opportunities in your friendship.

### *Horizontal Versus Vertical Friendships*

Japanese society is vertically stratified. This means that one defines his identity by the people above or below him in social status. Status may be determined by age, wealth, education, occupation, and family. In fact, the society is so stratified that it even affects how a person speaks Japanese. Japanese speakers constantly monitor their audience and change the pronominal forms and verbal endings, depending on whether one is speaking *up* to someone of higher status or *down* to someone of lower status. Relationships among Japanese are thus vertically oriented and can be called "vertical" friendships.

When a Japanese person goes overseas to countries with different social patterns, however, he or she is likely to anticipate some "horizontal" friendships, in which neither partner is concerned about status. Here are some practical steps toward developing a horizontal friendship with your Japanese acquaintance.

- Learn how to pronounce your friend's name. For the first several times you are together, ask for a brief check on your pronunciation and for tips on how to say it better.
- Treat your friend with respect. If he or she has a Ph.D. or is an M.D., call him or her "Dr. \_\_\_" until your friend asks you to be on a first-name basis. If your friend wants to be called by a nickname, do so, but don't make up your own nickname for the person.
- Invite your friend into your home, along with your parents and/or extended family, if possible. Japanese couples and families who are overseas seem to enjoy experiencing things together.
- Be sensitive about what food you serve. It is usually best to serve a Western dish, as opposed to something that fits your stereotype of Japanese food.

### *Japanese Attitudes Toward Americans*

Typically, Japanese people go through a “honeymoon period” at the outset of their stay in the U.S. During this time, they will focus on the positive aspects of American life: the open spaces, the variety and lower cost of food, the friendly people, and the convenience of living in the United States. When you hear remarks along these lines, do not agree too quickly. Always respond that Japan has good points not always found in the Western world.

The “honeymoon period” will be followed by a time of increasing disillusionment with Western culture. Listen to your friend’s criticisms of life here without interrupting and without defending your country. Then agree with the valid criticisms of American superficiality, selfish individualism, consumer waste, and the impersonal nature of American society. Any defense of your own country, even if motivated only by a desire to help your friend enjoy his or her stay, can reinforce the negative attitudes already in your friend’s mind.

Gradually your Japanese friend will gain a more balanced perspective and be able to see both good and bad points to American society. This is the time when friendship can develop in a most genuine way.

During a going-away reception, three Japanese students approached an ISI staff member expressing their appreciation for their relationship with ISI. One student said, “You know, when we first came to the United States, the university matched us with some American families from the community. Later, you matched us with people from the Church. We want you to know we saw a very big difference in the Christian people and the relationship they had with us. There is something very different about these people from the Church, and we really appreciated our time with them.”

### ***Understanding Your Japanese Friend***

Japanese who follow traditional religions do so for cultural reasons as opposed to deeply held spiritual beliefs.

#### *Shinto*

This religion is indigenous to Japan and is an essentially animistic religion that worships gods and goddesses in various aspects of nature. The religious rites that the world viewed during the accession of the emperor in 1989 are Shinto, for the emperor cult is a part of the Shinto religion.

The Japanese are religious pluralists or engage in more than one religion. Christianity’s slow growth within Japan has not simply been because Japanese will not accept Christianity, but because they will not accept it exclusively. If one were to present Christianity as simply another “insurance policy” along with Shinto and Buddhism, it would meet with a ready response. As you share the Gospel with your Japanese friend, make clear the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and those who followed Him (Acts 4:12). One way to emphasize the exclusive claims of Christ is to start with monotheism. This is a strange concept to the Japanese, since there are eight million gods and goddesses in Shinto. The best way to approach this concept is to explain the

attributes of the one true God according to the Bible. Encourage your Japanese friend to read such texts as Exodus 10:3-6 and 34:6-7.

### ***Buddhism***

This religion entered Japan during the sixth century A.D. The roots of Buddhism in Japan are rather deep and to this day the religion is an integral part of the national identity.

There are several effective bridges between Buddhism and Christianity. From a historical perspective, you might ask your friend to review the teachings of the tenth-century Buddhist priest Kobo Daishi. This priest returned from studying in China with a form of Buddhism that contained a heaven, hell, and salvation through the merit of another. It can be documented that there were Nestorian Christians in the Chinese city where he studied. The influence from Christianity on Kobo Daishi's form of Buddhism makes it a helpful starting point for dialogue.

Westerners should understand that there are many varieties of Buddhism, just as there are various Christian denominations. If your friend is interested in Buddhism, you should listen carefully to the description he or she gives. Always try to understand before offering any answer or alternative to your friend's beliefs. Resist the urge to dispute a point before understanding (Proverbs 18:13).

### ***Ancestor Worship***

While not a religion itself, ancestor worship is a popular religious activity that is related to some forms of Buddhism. Ancestor worship may not seem to be a problem when sharing your faith in Christ with your Japanese friend. Your friend, however, may face extreme pressure to continue the tradition of worshiping the family gods when he or she returns to Japan.

Two present-day examples show how vital this issue of ancestor worship is to Japanese considering Christianity. One Japanese man trusted in Christ and made a complete break from ancestor worship. A firstborn son, he asked his father to transfer his rights of inheritance to his brother, since he would not have to continue the family's worship of ancestors. In God's time, this man's father and brother also became Christians, and the man and his brother served as pastors in Japan.

On the other hand, a Japanese man who is friends with an American Christian has seemed, at times, very close to making a complete identification with Jesus. But he refuses to be baptized, because he senses that if he takes this step, he will have to renounce his duties as firstborn to worship the family gods. The spiritual warfare is especially intense with some forms of Buddhism—and always with ancestor worship. Ask God to deliver your friend into His Kingdom.

### ***Sharing Jesus with Your Japanese Friend***

#### ***Show Appreciation for the Japanese Culture***

Because Japan emphasizes racial and cultural uniformity, one can only imagine how displaced his or her Japanese friend feels in our country. It is crucial, therefore, to

show interest in and appreciation for the Japanese culture especially during the first months of your friend's stay here. Daily, your friend may be painfully aware of how inadequate his or her English skills are and how little he or she knows about living in this country. Affirm your friend in his or her knowledge of business or the academic discipline studied or simply his or her Japanese heritage.

### *The Importance of Sensitivity*

As you encourage your friend, keep in mind that he or she has a different set of values and a different sense of humor than you do. The distinctives of your values and sense of humor, while a source of pride to your American individualism, may irritate your Japanese friend. James' advice is best: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

### *The Example of Servanthood*

An excellent way to avoid misunderstandings is to *be a servant*. You and the Gospel will gain credibility as you show yourself to be a servant on behalf of your friend. You can do this in many practical ways.

It also means that you will deliver on what you promise. Consider the implications before you tell your friend such things as "Don't hesitate to call me if I can be of help." A Japanese student will often interpret a casual remark as a commitment.

Good relationships take time to build. Credibility is gained over a period of time, but with God's help and patience your relationship will become one that bears fruit.

### *God as the True Father*

Much of the trouble many of us have in our spiritual walks stems from our incomplete understanding of God. It follows, therefore, that when you start to share Jesus Christ with your friend, you will want to ask about his or her understanding of God. Then, talk about how the Bible presents God as the Creator-Father who has a claim on humanity.

Japan is clearly a patriarchal society; the Japanese know what it means to have a human father. Since the Bible describes God as Father, this is a point to emphasize. The Shinto gods or various conceptions of Buddha do not have the theme of fatherhood.

### *Sin as Self-Centeredness*

You may also emphasize that sin is a self-centered departure from one's true Father. While most Japanese do not have a clear idea of sin, they do acknowledge that self-centeredness is wrong. The problem of sin and self-centeredness has profoundly affected Japanese thought because of the widespread Buddhist influence in Japan.

You can explain the "Fall of Mankind" as a self-centered move away from the true Father who took delight in creating and providing for humanity. This Fall is lived out in our lives when we pursue self-centered ends instead of God.

### *Jesus—the Ultimate “Go-Between”*

Once the sin problem has been explained, you can go on to talk about Jesus as the ultimate “go-between.” Japanese society operates through mediators, sometimes called “go-betweens.” The biblical concept of Jesus as mediator, therefore, makes perfect sense to the Japanese once the condition of human alienation from God has been accepted.

Mark 15:37-39 shows how through Jesus’ death God removed an obstacle between humanity and Himself. Even now, Jesus is our “go-between” in the sense of His priestly role. Hebrews 4:14-16 shows this well. The status of Jesus as “go-between” has significant implications for our response to God.

### *A Return to the True Father*

Because humanity is in a condition of desertion from its true Father, and because Jesus is the “go-between,” our response to God should be one of dependence on the work of Jesus in His death and resurrection to bring us to God. 1 Corinthians 15:3 states that Christ died for our sins. This means that He bore the punishment that believing sinners deserve (1 John 2:1-2). Our responsibility as runaway humans, therefore, is to place all our hope of reaching God in Jesus (Acts 16:31).

Since Jesus is God’s only Son, our only access to God is through Jesus (John 1:18, Acts 4:12). While other religions contain aspects of truth about the human condition, only the Bible explains the way back to our true Father—faith in Jesus Christ. Only through placing our faith in God’s provision for covering our sin can we live with God (John 6:29, 1 John 4:10).

## **Muslim Students**

A significant percentage of international students in the U.S. are from the Islamic areas of the world, representing some 49 countries in which they are the majority. These students are part of a worldwide population of more than two billion Muslims, the second largest religion in the world.

Because most Muslims have had as little contact with Christianity as Christians have had with Islam, there are some unique opportunities to share Christ with these international students. In fact, many Muslims come from countries where no Christian witness or Bible teaching has been permitted for centuries.

As sensitive Christians, we know we cannot force our beliefs on our Muslim friends; yet we desire to share the hope within us. There is no easy formula for witnessing to a Muslim. The key principles are:

- Be a true friend.
- Live your faith transparently.
- Use the Word of God.

Indeed, people of the Islamic faith represent a variety of cultures and subgroups from many nations. Therefore, we must follow the example of Jesus, who never dealt with

any two individuals the same way. He simply said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

### ***Befriending Muslim Students***

To befriend a Muslim, it's important to understand the cultural expectations. Here are several key areas:

#### *Friendship*

People in every society value friendship, but they express it in different ways. For most Muslims, friendship involves an investment of time and effort: to be together, relate to one another, share food, talk, and much more. Muslims may have only a few friends, but they are usually willing to commit their lives, wealth, and good names to their friends.

Americans have difficulty meeting such a standard; in fact, the complaint of many Muslims is that most Americans seem superficial in their expression of friendship. We need to be conscious of our Muslim friend's expectations and be the best friend we can be. In Muslim countries, most friendships are between people of the same sex. Close relationships between people of the opposite sex who are not immediate relatives are unusual. Both you and the Muslim students you meet will probably be more comfortable in relationships between the same gender.

#### *Hospitality*

Hospitality is a way of life for Muslims. If you are invited into the home of a Muslim family, they will almost always offer food and drink, no matter how brief your visit. Your friends will look for the same hospitality from you. When you invite them into your home, remember to offer refreshments or share a meal. You don't have to be elaborate in your hospitality, but simply offer whatever is available, such as fresh fruit, coffee, or tea.

Devout Muslims do not eat pork or drink any alcoholic beverages. However, many Muslims learn to drink alcohol after coming to the U.S. and often assume all Americans drink. Don't be surprised if your Muslim friends offer alcohol as a part of their hospitality.

#### *Conversation*

Conversation and the exchange of ideas will be more important to your Muslim friends than activities or meetings. You don't always have to do something special. Just invite them over; they may savor the opportunity to relax and "feel at home."

You may find that you and your Muslim friend hold opposing views on important issues, enough to cause an argument. While arguments can be counterproductive, many Muslims enjoy a good argument. It is not uncommon to see students from a Muslim country hotly debate a subject one minute and warmly embrace the next. You need not always be in agreement with your Muslim friend to maintain the friendship. As a Christian, you will not agree with many of the beliefs your Muslim friend holds, but don't be overly concerned. Of course, you should listen to and try to understand

what your friend is saying before giving a response. Learn to disagree amiably. In many Muslim countries, disagreements are often a way of testing friendships.

### *Time and Obligations*

To most Americans, time is extremely important. We tend to keep tight schedules for ourselves and expect an appointment will be kept within a few minutes or so of the designated time. Much of the rest of the world, including the Muslim world, may not observe such guidelines. When making an appointment with your Muslim friend, discuss your expectations. Remind your friend of the engagement, learn to be patient, and try to be sensitive to his or her expectations. For example, if you are invited to a Muslim home for a meal, your host may wish to socialize with you before eating. You may want to do the same when you invite Muslim friends to your home.

Sometimes you may feel “stood up” by your Muslim friend. There might be several explanations for this. Your friend perhaps neglected to write a reminder note and simply forgot the invitation. Or he or she may have had unexpected visitors; in an effort to attend to these guests (which is an important social obligation in Islamic cultures), your friend may have overlooked his or her prior commitment to you. If you have been disappointed by a Muslim friend, don’t give up. Be understanding and try again.

### *Be a Friend in Word and Deed*

Jesus is our example. As you develop friendships with Muslim students, they may ask, “Why are you helping me?” An appropriate response is “Because I’ve experienced God’s goodness in my life, and He’s told me to show kindness to others.” We should model Jesus. He met the needs of others—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—with no personal strings attached. Our Muslim friends will be watching closely. We must be available as a daily witness of God’s love in our lives. Our words and actions should provide natural opportunities to share our faith.

### ***Understanding Your Muslim Friend***

You don’t need to be an expert on the Islamic faith to befriend a Muslim and share your faith with him or her. Christians who make the effort to investigate the religious convictions of others, however, are in a better position to communicate the Gospel.

Christians sometimes make the mistake of calling Muslims “Followers of Muhammed.” But Muslims do not regard the prophet Muhammad the same way as we follow and worship Jesus Christ. Muhammad lived from A.D. 570 to 632, mainly in Mecca and Medina on the Arabian Peninsula. He united the Arab peoples and abolished their former polytheism. Muslims don’t believe Muhammad to be divine, but consider him to be “God’s Messenger,” last in the series of great prophets—including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. It is neither wise nor appropriate for Christians to speak against Muhammad. While we cannot call him “The Prophet”—as Muslims do—we ought to show respect for what Muhammad taught his followers.

### *Religious Practices*

“Islam” is an Arabic word meaning “surrender” or “submission.” A Muslim is one who is surrendered to God. This slave-like submission is reflected in five ritualistic practices, which are often referred to as the five pillars of Islam.

These are:

- *Declaration*: The main tenet of Islamic faith is the declaration that “Allah is one and Muhammad is his prophet.”
- *Prayer*: Muslims participate in five prayer sessions at specified intervals throughout the day, which require prostration in the direction of Mecca and recitation of verses from the Qur’an.
- *Fasting*: Every year devout Muslims will keep a fast during the month of Ramadan, in which the believer refrains from food and drink between sunrise and sunset.
- *Tithe*: Muslims give a charitable contribution of 2.5 (1/40th) percent of their total income to the poor, homeless, needy, and to those who fight for Islam.
- *The Holy Land*: Most Muslims hold to the once-in-a-lifetime aspiration of going on a pilgrimage (called the Hajj) to the birthplace of Islam, the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Devout Muslims will do their best to observe all of these dictums, but you will find great variation in the dedication and observance among people of Islamic faith, especially among those living away from home here in the West.

### *The Qur’an*

Muslims believe that the Qur’an, the Islamic scripture, was directly dictated by God through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad. Although Muslims respect the Bible, they value the Qur’an above the Bible as the last and final revelation of God. The Qur’an is not an easy book to translate because of its poetic Arabic content. Orthodox Muslims declare that the Qur’an cannot be translated and ought to be studied in Arabic, since “that is the language in which God revealed it.” This book is about two-thirds the length of the New Testament and contains 114 Suras (chapters) that are arranged according to length (from the longest to shortest) rather than chronologically.

Because of a traditional belief that Muhammad was uneducated and illiterate yet able to utter the sayings for the holy book, the Qur’an is often called “the miracle of Muhammad.” The Qur’an is the supreme validation of the Islam faith. The public recitation of the Qur’an in Arabic is extremely important and highly valued among Muslims.

### *Islam: A Way of Life*

More than Muhammad, the Qur’an, or a stringent set of beliefs, Islam is a way of life. In Muslim societies, Islam encompasses cultural, economic, political, and social as well as religious dimensions. The psychological impact of growing up in such a society cannot be minimized.

When Muslims encounter another religion with different and often contradictory ideas, it can be quite threatening. And yet, the Qur'an teaches that Muslims should respect the "people of the Book," that is, Jews and Christians who follow the Bible and worship the one true God.

### *Jesus in Islam*

Muslims have a high regard for Jesus. In the Qur'an, Jesus is called "the Word of God" (Sura 3:45) and "the Spirit of God" (Sura 4:171). The holy book presents Jesus as one of the great prophets; He is even called "Messiah." Also, Jesus is declared to have been born of the Virgin Mary and to have lived a sinless life (Sura 19:19). He also accomplished many wonderful miracles, such as giving sight to the blind, healing lepers, and raising the dead to life (Sura 3:49). According to tradition, Jesus will return again to earth—to establish Islam throughout the world.

But devout Muslims are adamant in denying that Jesus is the "Son of God" or "Savior." In fact, in the Islamic faith, to equate anyone with Allah (or God) is blasphemy, the unforgivable sin. The Qur'an seems to indicate (in Sura 4:156-158) that Jesus was not crucified; instead, God spared Him from the cross, took Him to heaven, and had someone else die in Jesus' place. The book, however, is not entirely clear on the subject. (See also Sura 19:33).

### ***Sharing Jesus with Your Muslim Friend***

#### *The Right Approach*

Your Muslim friend will likely not feel free to ask questions or show any interest in Christianity if other Muslims are present. Your best opportunities for witnessing to Muslim students, therefore, will be on an individual basis.

#### *Identify Their Beliefs*

Before you share Christ with a Muslim, find out what he or she actually believes—which may or may not be orthodox Islam. Ask questions such as:

- What is the meaning of life?
- Is there a God? Can we know Him?
- What is the nature of man? If man is basically good, why does he often behave so badly?
- Is there life after death?

These questions may help draw your Muslim friend out to share his or her true beliefs rather than what was taught or said by others.

#### *Discuss Who God Is*

Muslims have 99 names for God, most of which concur with the teachings of the Bible. However, the concept of a holy, loving God is not emphasized in Islam, especially in terms of God loving sinners. Share with Muslim students how Christianity teaches that God is our loving Father, and how His care and personal concern affect you personally.

### *Emphasize Jesus*

You may find it helpful to use the Muslim teachings about Jesus as a starting point for a discussion about your faith. For example, you could ask your friend, “When the Qur’an refers to Jesus as the Word of God, what does that mean to you?”

You will need to emphasize what the Bible says about the life and teachings of Jesus. The Qur’an emphasizes the keeping of rules and regulations that are rather rigid, inflexible, and legalistic. Jesus, on the other hand, gives us freedom from the curse of the law and grace to live righteously in Him. Share with your Muslim friend how you apply the teachings of Jesus to your everyday life.

### *Use God’s Word*

As you share your faith, support what you say with the Bible. Quote from it and turn to it as an authority for answering questions and dealing with life situations. Be careful how you physically use your Bible, because how and where a “holy book” is placed speaks much to a Muslim. For example, Muslims always keep the Qur’an in a high place in order to show reverence to their “holy book.” In the same respect, you should never place the Bible beneath you, such as under your chair, because this displays an irreverent attitude.

Suggest that your Muslim friend read appropriate portions of the Bible, such as the Gospel of Luke, followed by the Gospel of John. Be prepared to take time to discuss with your friend the exact meaning of the introductory verses of John’s gospel.

You will find it helpful to use a modern English translation of the Bible, such as the New International Version, or the New Living Translation, or the Contemporary English Version, or even a translation into the student’s own language.

### *Include the Witness of Others*

Invite your Muslim friend to join you in attending Christian events and activities such as Bible studies, church programs, retreats, concerts—even your own family devotions. Be alert to events planned especially for international students. The combined Christian testimony of yourself and others can be an effective instrument for demonstrating the reality of God in believers’ lives.

Never pressure your Muslim friend to go to these activities and carefully explain the nature and program of the meeting or activity in advance.

## **Apply What You Have Learned**

1. Each section of this chapter contains practical principles to use in your evangelism efforts with African, Chinese, Hindu, Japanese, or Muslim students. How can you become increasingly more effective with students from these areas of the world?
2. Order the people-group-specific booklet in ISI’s *Sharing the Good News* booklet series to learn more about ministry to your international student. (See Appendix A.)
3. Plan a strategy to utilize what you have learned in this chapter.



## 9. Studying the Bible with International Students

*“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” 1 Peter 1:23*

Gabriela from Venezuela was already a Christian when she arrived in the U.S. to begin her graduate studies. Before long, she joined an ISI staff member in regular Bible study. Later she returned to her hometown and told the staff member, “The Friday group meetings changed my life. I learned how to have a prayer meeting and a Bible study group. I am teaching a discipleship class in one of the toughest ‘barrios.’ Last Wednesday, I had thirteen people and we keep on growing.” Gabriela also travels to other South American countries and trains women to lead Bible studies.

To study the Bible with another person, you don’t need a seminary degree. Bible study can be nothing more than two friends discussing biblical truths together. All you need are the right resources, prayer support, and perhaps a little guidance. A one-to-one Bible study provides a relaxed, unhurried atmosphere in which your friend can examine biblical truths, raise spiritual doubts, and perhaps wrestle with his or her questions about making a decision for Christ.

Your role in leading a Bible study is to guide your international friend through the discovery process in the Christian faith. Your friend may be anywhere along the continuum of this discovery process—from no knowledge of Jesus Christ to a total acceptance of the Savior. Wherever your friend stands, you must be totally accepting of where he or she is and not make spiritual progress a condition of your relationship.

As your friend observes your life or informally discusses spiritual issues with you, he or she may want to learn more about your faith in Christ. This may lead him or her to become interested in studying the Bible with you.

### Is Your Friend Ready to Study the Bible?

Before you begin a Bible study with your international friend, take a moment to evaluate whether your friend is ready to receive the Gospel. Check each of these points and decide if you agree with the statement or not. If you agree, make a check mark by the statement.

*Is a relationship under way?*

- We have spent time together.
- We have exchanged basic information about each other.
- We have made formal or informal plans to see each other again.

*Is there freedom in the relationship?*

- We like each other.
- We feel comfortable around each other.
- We each take initiative in spending time together and appreciate that time.
- There is fun and laughter when we are together.

*Is there trust in the relationship?*

- We share and keep information confidential.
- We speak well of each other to other people.
- We ask each other for favors.
- We have an active awareness of each other's needs.
- We entrust responsibility to each other.

*Is there acceptance in the relationship?*

- We are not threatened by our differences (religion, culture, personality, habits, tastes, and values) and are able to discuss these differences.
- We are open to learning from each other.
- We are sincere in our conversation—we listen attentively and remember shared information.
- We are frank—we say what we feel without fear of threatening our relationship.

*Does your friend understand the concept of being a "Christian?"*

- My friend identifies me as a committed, rather than cultural, Christian.
- I have shared my personal testimony, both about my conversion and what Christ means to me.
- My friend has heard or read other testimonies that have reinforced mine.
- My friend knows other committed Christians.

*Is your friend interested in Christianity?*

- My friend asks me questions about my faith.
- My friend has attended a church service or other Christian activity.
- My friend has expressed a desire to meet Christians.
- My friend has expressed an interest in reading and discussing the Bible.

If you checked most of the applicable boxes above (probably no one will be able to check all of them and not every question may apply to your relationship), then your international friend is likely prepared to begin studying the Bible. If not, you may want to let your relationship develop further before attempting to study the Bible together.

**Before You Begin*****Bible Study Materials***

ISI has developed several Bible studies (see ISI's online store) designed especially for use with international students. These Bible studies require little or no preparation on the part of the international student. The Bible passages are often written in an easy-to-read translation in the study guides themselves, making it easy for students to make notes in the margins and define words they do not understand.

These studies emphasize discovering the Word of God through personal investigation. Here are a few of them:

1. One study is called *I AM* and leads the student through the various claims of Jesus Christ.

2. A second study, titled *Jesus the Liberator*, examines the teachings of Jesus Christ.
3. A third, *Jesus Christ—Bible Study in Simple English*, is a foundational study in simplified English focusing on the life of Jesus, His death, and resurrection.

These studies are designed to help the international students consider and understand the claims of Jesus Christ and make personal decisions based on what they learn. Leader's guides are available and can help you answer questions your friend may raise. Additionally, ISI has developed a Bible discovery model called M28 Global Discipleship (*references Matthew 28*) that helps students discover the truth of God's Word and how to grow as disciples. ISI's complementary mobile apps, *God Story* (Apple) or *God's Story* (Android), make it easy to discover truths in God's Word. It may also be used once students return home.

### ***Make Sure Your Friend Has a Bible***

Although the ISI Bible studies often have the passages written in the study guides, your international friend should have his or her own Bible for personal reading and study. You may want to give your friend a Bible as a gift; however, some people tend to place more value on something they buy themselves.

Help your friend find a Bible in a readable translation, such as the *New International Version (NIV)*, the *New Living Translation (NLT)* or the *Contemporary English Version (CEV)*. (The latter is designed for a third grade reading level.) The version you select should correspond with the version you will use during the Bible study. For example, if you have a *New International Version*, help your international friend find the same. Then you will both be reading from the same text when you read and study together.

An English Bible is helpful for your study together, but a Bible in your friend's native language is important for his or her complete understanding of the passages. Encourage your friend to look up the passages in both English and his or her native language before your meeting. Elsewhere in Appendix A we share how to secure various language Bibles.

Your international friend may prefer to study the Bible in English in order to improve his or her proficiency. If so, encourage your friend to read the passage beforehand, looking up any words he or she does not understand. Understanding the passage is the most important aspect of the reading process.

### ***When to Meet***

Remember, most international students are here for one primary purpose—to earn an academic degree. As a result, their time schedule will be busy and oftentimes hectic. Ask your international friend about his or her schedule and find the most appropriate day of the week and time of the day for both of you to meet regularly. Maintain this regular schedule, but be flexible because exam times, term papers, and other course requirements may affect the student's availability.

Your Bible study should last at least 50 minutes but no longer than 90 minutes. However, if your friend has the time and wants to talk further, your conversation may

be extended longer than planned. These can be important opportunities, so don't schedule yourself so tightly that you can't take advantage of them. At the same time, remember your friend's schedule and don't go too long past the planned meeting time.

If your international friend has difficulty making the study on time, it doesn't mean he or she doesn't care. As we have emphasized already, some cultures place a different value on time. Or perhaps your friend couldn't let you know he or she was delayed. Whatever the case, be flexible and understanding.

### ***Where to Meet***

If possible, meet your international friend on or near campus. This shows you are willing to accommodate your friend rather than expecting to be accommodated. However, you will need to be sensitive to your friend's religious and cultural background. For example, a Muslim will often receive great pressure from fellow Muslims if they discover he or she is studying the Bible with you. For this reason, your home or other location away from campus may be the best choice.

If meeting on campus is not a problem, look for a place that is quiet, appropriately lighted, out of the way, and available. Places such as the library, cafeteria, or a dorm room often provide the right atmosphere for study.

Don't forget to begin with prayer. Before you start meeting with your international friend (and throughout the Bible study), pray for God's guidance, for His revelation to your friend through the study, and for the penetration of the Holy Spirit through God's Word into your friend's life. Most importantly, pray for your friend no matter what his or her response to the Gospel message might be. And don't try to go it alone. Get others to pray for your Bible study and for your international friend.

Later in the study, when you sense your friend feels comfortable, you may want him or her to begin and/or end each study with a time of prayer. Be sensitive to your friend's needs and expectations (for example, don't require your friend to bow his or her head, allow your friend to listen as you pray).

### ***Be Sensitive***

Here are a couple of issues to consider before starting your Bible study:

- In some cases, the teacher should be as old or older than the student. Most cultures place a high degree of respect on age. Older students may not attribute much credibility to you as a teacher if you are younger.
- The teacher and student should be of the same gender unless there is an obvious age difference. A male teacher should never meet with a female student alone. He should bring along a Christian woman (who could learn to lead a similar study with another female student, if she does not already know how to lead one).

### ***Inside the Word***

When your international friend has agreed on a place and what to study, you are ready to begin.

**Stick to the Bible**

When you begin the Bible study, your friend may not believe the Bible is the Word of God. Accept that possibility. Both of you must understand that the purpose is to find out what the Bible teaches about Jesus, and not to debate personal opinions. Discussion about the reliability of biblical accounts should be postponed until a later time or even a separate study. The Word of God is powerful, and its truths can penetrate and convict even the most skeptical person—in God’s timing.

Some “Bible studies” may turn into philosophical discussions on peripheral issues such as, “How can a loving God judge people?” or “What happens to people from cultures that have never heard the Gospel?” Avoid tangents. If a particular question seems to be a real obstacle to your friend, ask if you can get back to him or her next week, and then take the time to research the issue.

Answer questions using the Bible as much as possible. For instance, if your friend asks, “Why are so many intelligent people atheists?” direct him or her to 1 Corinthians 1:27 and surrounding passages: “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise....”

Above all, avoid arguments of any kind. You may win the argument, but you will not be displaying Christ’s love. Your friend’s belief system—though it may be incorrect in certain areas—is still very important to him or her. Dismissing or condemning your friend’s beliefs will only drive him or her further away from Jesus Christ. Discussions are appropriate; arguments are not. Concentrate on presenting the truths of Christianity through God’s Word, and let the Holy Spirit do the convicting.

**Start With the Basics**

Western Christians tend to start with the book of Romans and then lay out the Gospel in a neat doctrinal system that is expected to persuade anyone to accept Christ. This approach fails to recognize that someone who adheres to a different religion may not have even a foundational understanding of the existence and role of God in the universe and His sovereign role in human life. As a result, you may need to start from “square one,” presenting God’s existence. How do we know there is a God? How can we know the Truth? Present God in His work of creation and His authority over mankind as outlined in Genesis 1-3.

Using the foundations passages featured in the M28 Bible Discovery model can help your friend discover the truth of God’s Word and how to grow as disciples. (For more information see Appendix A.)

Also, many people from other cultures have never heard of Jesus. If your friend has not heard of Jesus or has little knowledge of who He is, you will need to present Jesus as a person—His character, His works, and His claims—as shown throughout the New Testament accounts. The ISI Bible study *I AM* can be a good place to start because it effectively accomplishes this objective.

Have patience as your international friend hears many new truths. Present Jesus Christ as a person and let the Holy Spirit persuade your friend to seek a relationship with the Savior.

As you study together, opportunities will arise to explain the complete Gospel. At some point in your study, your friend should hear about Christ's death and resurrection and how these events enable all people to enter into a right relationship with the Savior.

Make sure your friend knows how to accept Christ if he or she desires to do so. But don't force your friend or exert your own pressure (rather than the Holy Spirit's conviction) on him or her to make a premature decision. Most people hear the Gospel many times before responding to it. Your friend may need to hear numerous presentations of the Gospel before it becomes clear.

### ***No Strings Attached***

As you begin the study, your international friend may fear that your friendship is conditioned upon his or her response to Christ. Let your friend know that your friendship is a "no strings attached" relationship. If he or she does not want to start or continue the Bible study, assure the student of your friendship.

Under no circumstances should you discontinue the friendship because of your friend's response (or lack of it) to the Gospel message or your invitation to study the Bible together.

As the study progresses, your friend may become more open, but may continue to struggle with doubts or the cost of following Christ. Encourage your friend to openly express his or her feelings. Try to provide a nonthreatening atmosphere in which to discuss questions. Make it clear that you accept your friend and his or her opinions, even if you do not necessarily agree. Remember, only God's Spirit can give spiritual insight.

### ***Avoid Jargon***

Many Christian terms today are difficult even for churched Americans to understand. International students who come from different religious backgrounds and have difficulty with English will be confused if we use doctrinal terms without stopping to explain what they mean. Religious terms also may have a different meaning in other religions and cultures. For example, the term "born again" may mean reincarnation to a Buddhist or Hindu.

### ***Things to Remember***

Here are some additional guidelines for effective Bible study:

- Show you care about your international friend's progress not only in the Bible study but also in the classroom. Ask questions about his or her studies, how classes are going, and how you may be of assistance.
- Write down things as you speak. This will not only help your international friend "see" what you are saying, but it provides a record of your study. (Make sure your friend is positioned to see what you are writing.)
- Contribute freely to the conversation, but don't do all the talking.
- Be enthusiastic and friendly.
- Wait until your friend has finished discussing a point before responding.

- Don't be defensive about your faith or what the Bible says. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God are powerful enough to defend themselves.
- Be gentle in responding to a statement or point of view. Don't argue.
- Stick to the topic but be sensitive to your friend's need to simply "talk." More positive witnessing can often be accomplished in informal discussion than in theological discourse.
- Avoid stifling the interaction with "cut-and-dried" answers. If your friend feels that you are not open to truly hearing ideas because you already have "the answer," he or she will not respond as openly, and interaction will deteriorate.
- When stating answers, preface them with the phrase: "This is what the Bible says." Your answers should come authoritatively from God not personal opinion.
- Be flexible. Don't feel that you need to complete one lesson each session. Your friend may need more time to discuss certain issues. Rather than trying to rush through a lesson at one sitting, continue the discussion later if needed.
- Once again, the goal of the Bible study is to increase spiritual awareness, not necessarily to convert your friend to your faith or thinking.

## Asking Questions

Christ often used questions to provoke thought or bring forth affirmation of belief. A truth will be more meaningful to your friend if he or she personally discovers it through guided study and discussion rather than simply having it "preached." *A truth understood is more meaningful than a truth recited.*

The questions in ISI's Bible study guides and Bible Discovery model have been designed for the purpose of getting students to read and think about the text on their own by assessing their comprehension of its teaching through a series of questions. In the ISI Bible studies, there are three primary types of questions: observation, interpretation, and application.

### **Observation Questions**

Observation questions ask, "How do the truths of this passage affect my life?" and begin with words such as *who, what, when, where, find, list, and describe*. Knowing the facts is essential before interpretation of the passage can begin.

Observation questions also give you a chance to quickly test your friend's comprehension of the passage. You may be surprised at how much insight your friend has; however, he or she may need occasional help to understand the passage's vocabulary or cultural context.

### **Interpretation Questions**

Interpretation questions ask, "What does the passage mean?" and begin with words such as *why, how, and explain*. Consider which words and phrases may not be clearly understood and develop clarifying questions such as, "What do you think this word means?" These questions should be related to the truth discovered through the observation questions.

### **Application Questions**

Application questions ask, “What does the passage mean to me here and now?” Simply knowing truth makes no difference in a person’s life unless it is applied in some way (James 1:22-25). Ask how people in your friend’s culture would react to the passage and why.

In addition, ask questions such as, “How could knowing this truth about God make a difference in your life?” Since your friend is still probably investigating Christianity, be careful not to ask questions that are too direct or personal, or questions that pressure your friend to make a premature decision. For example, instead of asking, “Are you a Christian?” ask, “How does one become a Christian?”

*Note:* You may need to postpone application questions until you get deeper into the study (a period of weeks) so as not to confuse your friend. Make sure you lay the foundation of the Gospel first.

### **Practical Guidelines**

Here are some additional points to remember as you develop questions:

- Make sure your questions are well understood. Use clear, concise language without idioms or difficult words. Rephrase the question if your friend does not understand you. You may want to write out the question on paper for better understanding.
- Try to avoid yes or no questions. Inquiries such as “Did Jesus die on the cross to save us?” leave little room for discussion. Instead, ask, “Why did Jesus die on the cross?” (Sometimes you’ll need to ask yes or no questions as a first step but follow with “why” or “explain” questions.)
- Never assume an answer. Your friend will feel pressured into answering a certain way if you ask a question such as, “Jesus died on the cross to save us, didn’t he?”
- Ask opinion questions (“What’s your opinion...?”) to see if your friend is understanding the material.
- Ask “feeling” questions in addition to “fact” questions. “Feeling” questions deal with your friend’s reaction to the discovered truth. “What do you think about that?” or “How does that make you feel?”
- Be prepared to wait for an answer. Don’t be afraid of silence. Your friend may need time to think about his or her answer or time to formulate the answer in English. Rephrase your question if necessary or guide your friend to the right place in the text, but don’t be hasty to give the answer yourself.
- Listen attentively. Show your friend that you are interested through facial expressions, eye contact, and by responding sincerely to what has been said. If you do not understand your friend’s answer, rephrase what you think he or she said and ask if that is what was meant. If you sense that your friend has more to say, ask, “Would you like to add anything to that?” Ask further questions based on the responses given.

- Give praise for involvement (“good answer”). To help your friend “save face” when correcting an answer, make statements such as “Good answer. What if we look at it this way?” or “Good answer. Here’s what the Bible says...”

### ***Stop and Evaluate Along the Way***

After several lessons together, you will want to evaluate your friend’s progress. The following checklist will help:

#### *Has the Bible been discussed?*

- My friend owns a Bible in his or her own language (preferably) as well as English.
- We have discussed the characteristics of the Bible—its origin, its authorship (God’s Word), and its reliability.
- My friend shows an interest in the Bible studies.
- A “healthy” tension exists in my friend’s life as he or she deals with God’s Truth.

#### *Does your friend have a sufficiently accurate picture of Jesus Christ?*

- My friend has a biographical knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- My friend understands Jesus’ claims of deity.
- My friend’s information is based on the Bible rather than hearsay.

#### *Has the Gospel message been explained?*

- My friend knows, after several lessons, the irreducible core of the Gospel that one must believe to become a Christian.
- My friend has verbalized a clear understanding of the Gospel.
- My friend senses a need to respond to the message of Christ.
- My friend knows how to receive Christ.

#### *Has a personal decision been faced?*

- My friend is clearly aware that the next step is his or hers to take.
- My friend knows that a personal decision is required.
- My friend has been invited to make a commitment.
- My friend has considered the personal costs involved in following Christ.
- My friend knows that I will remain a friend no matter what he or she decides.

#### *Making the Decision*

If your friend makes a decision to follow Christ, ask yourself the following questions:

- Was the commitment made privately or with someone else?
- Has my friend verbalized the decision to me?
- Has my friend received help with the assurance of salvation?
- Is my friend being disciplined or trained in the basics of the Christian walk?

Here is a special word of caution if your friend is from a country that is hostile to Christians or Christianity.

- Be very discreet when talking to others about your international friend.

- If your friend makes a decision for Christ, let him or her determine with whom, when, where, or if it should be made public—he or she could face severe persecution if certain people know.

Studying the Bible with your international friend is perhaps the greatest simple approach to guide him or her to the truth. Truth sets a person free. Faith in God's Truth in Christ secures personal salvation when received by an individual through confession, repentance from sin, and faith in Christ. Bible study together can be an adventure, a discovery for the international student and for the friendship partner.

*"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ,"* (Romans 10:17).

### ***Apply What You Have Learned***

1. Think for a moment about the value of God's Word in your own life. How can you share this testimony with an international student?
2. Select the best Bible study tool to help you in your early discussions with your international friend.
3. Share how to have a twenty-minute daily quiet time:
  - Five minutes—talking to God (prayer).
  - Ten minutes—listening to God (reading His Word).
  - Five minutes—applying God's Truth to your life today.
4. Be available to join your student in a deeper Bible study (even if you meet only once every four to six weeks). Or encourage your friend to be in a study if you are not available.

## 10. The Shock of Reentry

*“I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.”*

Isaiah 45:2

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Acts 1:8

Jia-Li an international student from Taipei came to the United States to study. In the process she never realized how her thinking had changed until she returned home. She explained, “Before I went to the States, I didn’t really see people as individuals...I saw people as units—families, etc. But after the U.S., I started to see people as individuals. It made me feel not as accepted by my culture. I felt like a foreigner.” Jia-Li says that after some time she did feel better again, and now she feels she can bridge between the two cultures, seeing both sides and seeing things at home the way they were before. However, her feelings about privacy have changed permanently. She explains about what happened when she went to a family wedding celebration, “One of my cousins asked about my family. I didn’t want to tell him, felt it was too private. Before I would have shared, but not anymore.” [Excerpted from *Returning to China: Keys to Successful Reentry for Believers* (Colorado Springs, CO: International Students, Inc., 2012).]

This experience is mirrored in the lives of many international students when they return home.

### **The Shock Ahead—In Reverse**

While international students may or may not be aware of it, their period of time in the U.S. has changed them. They have grown as individuals in academics, in adaptability to a new place, and in making new friendships. They may also have adopted Western thinking.

Because they have changed, they will experience a unique shock upon returning home. This is called reverse culture shock. Many students are not aware of this and don’t prepare for it. You can help your international friend by talking to him or her about this very real possibility and encouraging the student to anticipate reverse culture shock upon returning home.

Though the student anticipates the process of readjustment, it is no guarantee that he or she will bypass all uncomfortable moments upon return. For example, some returnees inadvertently try to recreate their U.S. lifestyles. Others attempt to suppress or deny the influences of their U.S. experience and seek to return to their former life

patterns. Some try to change their home environment, get frustrated, and either leave or associate with other people who have gone abroad and feel the same way they feel. This “flight” behavior during readjustment is often accompanied by a sense of disorientation—not being able to “connect” with peers. One may dream about returning to America for additional studies or feel trapped in what is perceived as a hopeless situation.

For those students who delay returning home for years, the struggle to fit in at home is particularly difficult. These students have often become totally absorbed with life in America. Research indicates that these students will probably experience greater reentry-related problems on their return because the changes in themselves and at home will catch them by surprise. If a student is expecting an extended time away from his or her homeland, it is often helpful to consider returning home to visit every one or two years (if possible) to stay current with their worldview and culture.

These are just a few of the practical pitfalls of reentry for internationals. No one can fully eliminate the low periods of emotional adjustment when entering a new culture or returning home. Returning students should expect varying degrees of stress and ineffectiveness during these times. But proper preparation can actually reduce the adjustment period. Preparation is the best prescription, and helping your international friend know that pitfalls exist can keep him or her from stepping in a hole.

### ***Give Your International Friend a Head Start***

Reverse culture shock can be overcome through some simple steps, such as maintaining regular contact with friends and family at home by phone and letters. Also, the establishment of regular routines, such as work, diet, and exercise, help the student foster a sense of regularity, whether he or she is in another country or at home.

Years ago, author Lisa Espineli-Chinn was an international student in the United States. She wrote about her own reentry to her country in the introduction to a book called *Think Home*, saying, “My own reentry preparation, after three years of graduate study and service in the U.S., was a day set aside to review, reflect, check my attitudes, look to the Word and pray for God’s strength to return home as His servant. Although that special day helped me in many ways, I wish I had had the benefit of broader reentry material.”<sup>1</sup>

At some point in your relationship with the international student, you should give him or her a copy of *New Horizons: Adjusting to Life Back Home* (See [www.store.internationalstudents.org](http://www.store.internationalstudents.org)). This book helps the student focus attention toward home, changes undergone, expectations from people there, and opportunities at home for ministry and service.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Espineli-Chinn, *Think Home—A Practical Guide for Christian Internationals Preparing to Return Home* (Colorado Springs: International Students, Incorporated, 1987).

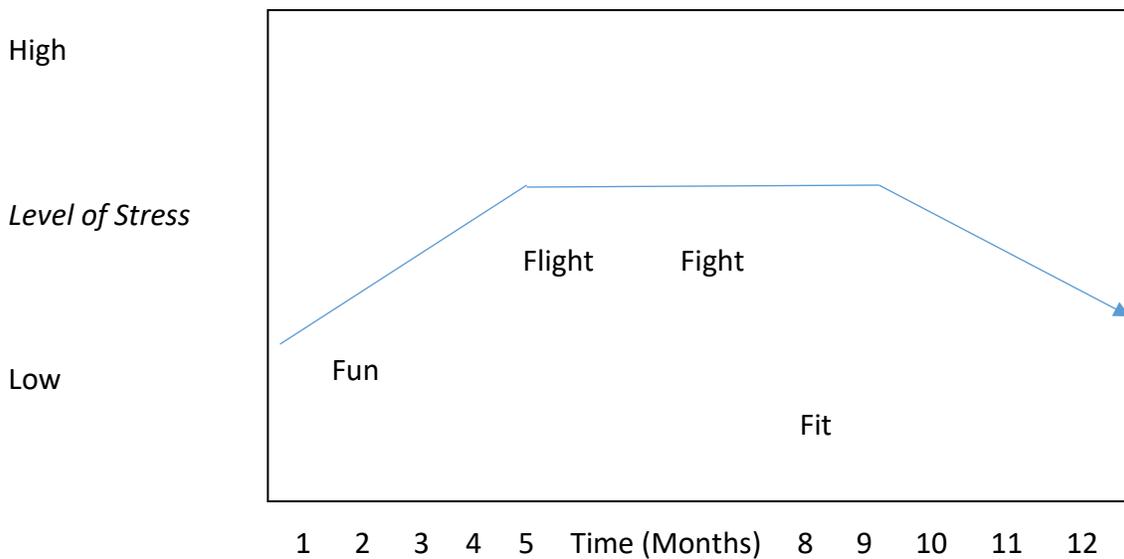
While *New Horizons* covers the aspect of reentry thoroughly (helping the student to think through numerous topics) some of the material is useful for friendship partners to understand what returning internationals will face back home.

### The Reentry Process

When a student returns home, they will feel at home and a foreigner at the same time. The international’s feelings will swing from excitement to exhaustion, enjoyment to frustration. This emotional turbulence/tension is a very normal part of the transition process. “Continuing reentry stress,” said the late Dr. Clyde Austin, a Christian psychologist and editor of two reentry books, “is normal for six to twelve months. A significant minority may experience readjustment stress beyond that point.”<sup>1</sup>

People in transition often go through these stages: *Fun* is where everything is working fine. They are full of anticipation and excitement about returning home and are often received back with celebrity status because of their studies abroad. *Flight* is when the international’s time as a celebrity is over, and he or she is faced with the daily demands of work and life back home. Returnees begin to wish for life back in the United States. *Fight* is the next stage, when they experience a lot of frustration and anger toward their home situations and begin to criticize and distance themselves from other people. *Fit* happens when they are able to resolve their inner conflicts, find a place back home, and feel confident that they are making a positive contribution to others. As returning students understand these stages of transition, it helps them understand themselves better and thus enables them to handle the adjustment in a mature manner (See graphic).

### The Reentry Process



<sup>1</sup> Clyde Austin, *Cross-Cultural Reentry: An Annotated Bibliography*. (Abilene, Tex.: Abilene Christian University Press, 1983).

Returning home is like being in two worlds. Dr. Miriam Adney, a Christian anthropologist, tells her students that they “will never be able to go home again...they will probably always leave part of themselves behind, and thereafter be split...and home may be more than one place. But that is the price paid for the richness of having experienced more than one culture deeply.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Taking Inventory of Changes*

You can help your international student understand the changes that have occurred in him or her through a personal inventory. Here are some of the questions (excerpted from *Think Home*):

#### How Much Have You Changed?

##### *Physically*

1. Have you gained or lost weight?
2. Do you prefer American food?
3. Are you more (or less) conscious of your physical appearance or “image”?
4. How has your choice of clothes changed?

##### *Socially*

1. Are you more (or less) outgoing or shy?
2. How has your attitude toward the opposite sex changed?
3. Have you changed your manner or attitude toward older people?
4. Are you more (or less) class/status conscious?
5. Do you prefer being or living by yourself?

##### *Academically*

1. Do you feel more (or less) academically competent?
2. How has your relationship with your professors changed?
3. What study habits have you changed or maintained?

##### *Emotionally*

1. Are you more (or less) free to express your feelings to others?
2. Are you handling your emotions (happiness, anger, disappointment) differently now than you did at home?

##### *Politically*

1. How much attention have you paid to the political situation?
2. To what degree have your attitudes about politics been affected by the U.S. media, professors, fellow students, or other people?
3. Have your views concerning the role of government back home or concerning U.S. foreign policy changed?

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Espineli-Chinn, *Think Home—A Practical Guide for Christian Internationals Preparing to Return Home* (Colorado Springs: International Students, Incorporated, 1987).

**Financially**

1. In what ways have you changed your opinion and/or handling of money and material wealth? Have your buying habits or “tastes” changed?
2. Are you more (or less) generous with your money or possessions?

**Spiritually**

1. How has your attitude changed regarding the religious beliefs and practices of your family and/or friends back home?
2. To what degree have your theological or doctrinal views changed?
3. Is your relationship with God stronger/weaker?

**With regard to purpose and ambition?**

1. How has your purpose or goals in life changed?
2. Would you consider your foreign experience life-changing? Why?

**Developing a Spiritual Support Group**

If your international friend has become a Christian or would like to have an ongoing relationship with Christians in his or her homeland, you can help him or her develop a spiritual support group. ISI’s team members and ministry partners can often help to connect students with a mature Christian friend or mentor in their home countries. Contact ISI for further information or help.

As students anticipate returning home, they should consider how they feel about having friends in the U.S. committed to pray for and encourage them after they return home. If they want this type of prayer support, encourage them to list friends who would be willing to pray for them, then begin enlisting their pledge of prayer support.

**Potential Reentry Problems**

Every international will experience some adjustments when he or she returns home. The degree of difficulty will vary, depending on each person’s maturity, unique situation, and reentry preparation. The following list is a compilation of some of the problems returnees experience. You can help your international friend by giving him or her a copy of this checklist or possibly using it as a springboard for conversation before your friend returns home.

**Cultural Adjustment**

- Identity confusion—who are you now?
- Unrealistic expectations
- Changes in lifestyle
- Changes in fashion
- Localized or “provincial” mentality of relatives and friends
- Different concept of time
- Different pace of life (faster or slower)
- Family or community pressure to conform

### *Social Adjustment*

- Loneliness and alienation
- Envy and distrust in interpersonal relations
- Tension between individual- and family-centeredness
- Feelings of superiority due to international experience and travel
- New and different interests from local peers
- Lack of modern conveniences or advanced technology
- Role or status changes
- Dissatisfaction with some ritualized patterns of social interaction
- Indifference of friends and relatives to your foreign experience; lack of serious, interested, and willing listeners to your stories
- Adjustment to noise, pollution, crowds, city congestion, unsanitary conditions, etc.

### *Communication Barriers*

- Adoption of verbal and nonverbal codes that are not familiar to your countrymen
- Speech mannerisms that may be misinterpreted
- Impatience with roundabout, indirect communication styles
- Absence of colleagues who speak the same “language”
- Unfamiliarity with new forms of communication and styles of expression; current jargon and slang

### *National and Political Problems*

- Changes in country’s conditions, national priorities, policies, and views
- Political climate not helpful to professional activity and/or advancement
- Economic uncertainties and conditions
- Changes in leadership, ruling parties
- Bureaucracy—how efficient and effective?
- Reluctance to live in a setting of political uncertainty
- Dissatisfaction with political situation
- Observed lack of national goals

### *Educational Problems*

- Relevance of U.S. education to home situation
- Lack of facilities and resources for research or application of skills
- Absence of professional education programs to keep up with new developments and knowledge in the field
- Little opportunity to improve skills
- Incomplete fulfillment of educational goals in the U.S. and its implications back home

### *Professional Problems*

- Inability to work in chosen specialty
- Facing oversupply in the job market/no openings
- Absence or inadequate translation of foreign scientific terminology
- Feeling of superiority due to U.S. training

- Isolation from academic or scientific developments in the U.S. and in own field
- Nonrecognition or appreciation of foreign degree
- Jealousy of colleagues
- Unrealistic expectations (job position, salary, what a U.S. degree “should” bring, etc.)
- Low compensation; few benefits
- Concern with quick material success; impatience with rate of promotion
- Perceived lack of enthusiasm and/or commitment among co-workers

### *Spiritual Problems*

- Absence of fellowship, support, and security of Christians who love and care (especially for those who became Christians while in the U.S.)
- Difficulty in finding a good church, which leads to “church hopping”
- Not being welcomed with open arms in some churches
- Expectation for young people to listen and accept what older people say
- Proof of returnee’s commitment to Christ before accepting him or her into the church
- Viewed as a threat to the pastor or church leadership
- Over eagerness to be a part of the church (is ignored or overloaded with work)
- Judgmental attitude toward church at home in contrast to U.S. church
- Sharp contrast between clergy and laity
- Perceived as aggressive, arrogant, and/or critical (whether true or not)
- Difficulty in distinguishing between “Christian” and “American”
- Limited methods of promoting Christianity
- Different dynamics in small groups or Bible studies
- Difficulty in using or applying ministry skills learned in the U.S.
- Impatience with program, process, or slow production
- Temptation to feel superior to church leaders who may not have been in the U.S.

As you can see, the returning international student may experience a broad sweep of difficulties. The challenge is to first recognize problems, then plot strategies to handle them. You can help serve as a sounding board for your international friend.

### ***Some Practical Suggestions for Returning Students***

1. Find other returnees with whom you can share and have fellowship.
2. Give yourself time to readjust; be patient with yourself and with others.
3. Recognize and accept which transition stage you are going through and remember that “reverse culture shock” or “reentry shock” is a normal part of the process of returning home.
4. Have a good sense of humor.
5. Let your reentry work for you: use it as a growing process to continue learning about yourself as a bicultural or multicultural person.
6. Appreciate the opportunity you have had to go abroad and your commitment to return home.

7. Find someone who can give you a current briefing about your community, church, culture, country, job situation, and people you know.
8. Review the most significant changes you have undergone while in the U.S., and the implications of those changes.
9. Review your great expectations in returning home. How relevant and realistic are they?
10. Keep a clear perspective and remember that God is there with you!

### **Apply What You Have Learned**

1. After reading this chapter, be prepared to help your friend prior to departure. Remember that preparation is the best deterrent to stress.
2. Periodically encourage your student to be in regular contact with loved ones at home through text messages, email, phone/video calls, etc.
3. Discuss with your friend how he or she might be changing during his or her stay in the United States.
4. Prior to the student's departure, discuss the vital elements of this chapter with him or her.
5. Encourage the student by lovingly discussing:
  - the positive aspects of their country and home
  - how the student can minister to and impact his or her culture positively through his or her newly gained faith, education, and experience
  - how you can pray for each other during the upcoming transition period.
6. Establish clearly how you can best communicate after the student has gone home.
7. Purchase a copy of *New Horizons: Adjusting to Life Back Home*<sup>1</sup> and go through it with your student before he or she returns home.

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<sup>1</sup> *New Horizons: Adjusting to Life Back Home* can be found at [www.store.internationalstudents.org](http://www.store.internationalstudents.org)

## 11. Old Ideas and New Ones for Ministry

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

John 13:34, 35

One of the most effective means we have found to minister informally to international students is the Friday night group meal. It’s a tried-and-true method that we will enlarge upon in this chapter. Another means to touch international students is via social media.

### **A Friday Night Favorite—Group Meals**

It’s a Friday afternoon in California. Kiet and Mari are making some preparations for their weekly gathering of international students and friendship partners. Most students enjoy getting away from their classes and studies to share a meal with friends. Years ago, Kiet and Mari were themselves international students in America, and through the years since, they have had one of the most active ministries to internationals as a result.

They have been blessed with a large home that comfortably accommodates 30 to 70 students and friendship partners for meals and get togethers. Students arrive from four to six different campuses in the area. These students are committed to the Friday night gathering. Some drive 30-45 minutes one way to attend.

Kiet says, “We focus mainly on meeting the needs of the Christian international students, but non-Christians know they are welcome to attend and observe. Most of our students have been drawn to the Lord because of the love among Christians.” One summer, about one third of the participants were non-Christians, but by the end of the following summer, every one of those who continued were Christians, including a Muslim girl.

The students who attend this gathering are predominately from Pacific Rim countries, but others come from Europe, South America, and Africa. Kiet says, “We find it builds a stronger group when the nationalities are not too diverse, because Christians have a greater chance of bonding here and following up with each other back home. We do not strive to find many nationalities, nor do we try to limit it to one group of people. We just pray for hearts open to learn about Jesus and who are willing to be obedient to His teachings.”

Many international student groups meet on Friday evenings around the United States for a group meal and get together. Kiet and Mariah’s group is one of scores of ISI weekly student meetings across the U.S. These gatherings are called “International Christian Fellowship” (ICF) or International Student Fellowship (ISF) and are designed as a regular gathering of Christian internationals and Americans for the purpose of learning how to grow and function as the body of Christ. They are intentionally

nondenominational and cross-cultural with the desire to help the students grow in worship, Bible study, Christian character, small group leadership, involvement, and stewardship. The ICF/ISF wants to help believers experience the Christian life in a practical way and provide a way for non-Christian students to see a living testimony of Christians. It's a safe place for Christian internationals to invite their non-Christian friends and forge new friendships. While Kiet and Mariah serve as mentors for the group, the international students themselves lead the worship and organize the meetings.

Following are guidelines you may find helpful for *your* Friday get togethers with international students. You too can start an ICF and provide interaction with internationals from various nations.

### ***When and Where***

Friday evening is generally the best time to meet. After a full week of classes, most students are ready to get away from their studies for an evening. These Friday evenings together are *not* intended to be an alternative to the local church.

There are various location options for the Friday evening gathering, such as a home, available public facilities, or a room in a building on campus. The space should be in good condition, and the area should have adequate parking and be within walking distance for the students. The disadvantage in using a public facility is time limitations. Often students like to stay late and unwind after a hard week of studies. Sometimes a church or campus setting doesn't permit a relaxed atmosphere.

A private home is the first choice—either a student apartment or a community member's home. Students feel more freedom to use the kitchen, play games, sing, or just visit with other students. The disadvantages of a home are size limitations and possible transportation challenges. You will need to work out a place that suits your group's needs.

### **An ICF/ISF Friday Schedule**

ICF/ISF Friday evenings generally include snacks or a meal. The food is often provided by other U.S. Christians or church groups who take responsibility for an individual Friday night. The fellowship starts in the early evening and can go quite late depending on student needs. Kiet explained, "For our group, we don't set times for arrival or departure, since this could imply there are times when the students are not welcome."

After a buffet-style meal, which allows students to serve themselves, singing begins. Newcomers are introduced, announcements are given, and an offering may or may not be taken, followed by more singing. Then, the students have a small-group Bible study. As much as possible, mature international students should take leadership of all aspects of the evening, including leading the Bible study groups if they are equipped. English conversation groups are sometimes offered as an alternative for non-Christian friends who are not yet interested in a Bible study. Finally, refreshments are served, such as tea, coffee, cookies, fresh fruit, and when appropriate, a birthday cake or two. Kiet said, "The time of greatest closeness and openness among the students is often

later in the evening. They will usually discuss serious and personal spiritual issues during this time.” Be open to what schedule is most effective for your group and meeting venue.

### ***How to Begin Meaningful Friday Evening Gatherings***

- Pray for the students and their times together.
- Cultivate vision for the overall ministry and share this vision with key Christian international students who will support these gatherings.
- Focus your energy on discipling leaders. Give student leaders opportunity to lead as you coach and encourage them in this ministry.
- Don’t be discouraged by small numbers. Kiet wrote, “We should not be surprised when some we trust and invest our lives in disappoint us. Be patient and set the example with your own commitment.”

### ***Guidelines for New People at the Friday Evening Gatherings***

- After an international student has attended two or three times, Kiet makes a follow-up appointment with the student on campus.
- Leaders make sure each student meets three or four other students during the evening.
- New students fill out a short information card, and then are sent a welcome card, text, or email.
- Hosts should develop a relationship with the newcomers and help them with their practical needs (i.e., moving, transportation, etc.).

### ***Reasons for Dismissal from the Friday Evening Meeting***

It will be rare, but sometimes participants are asked not to return to the meetings. Here are a few possible reasons for dismissal:

- Students who are looking for a girlfriend or boyfriend and are not trustworthy in relating to the opposite sex.
- Anyone who creates disunity in the meetings by pushing secondary doctrines.
- American college students attending simply for the good food.
- Americans who are not interested in relating to international students or attend for inappropriate social contact with students.

Friday night meals are an ideal way to meet and interact with international students. They can be a first step toward a meaningful friendship. Contact ISI for more information or to arrange to host such a regular meeting yourself.

## **The Cyberspace Connection**

Several years ago, one of the ISI staff members attending an East Coast welcoming reception for new international students spoke briefly but did not sit on the platform. Later that evening at the reception, attended by about 300 people, he noticed a young man sitting alone.

Since he was a shy individual himself, he hated to see others sitting alone. He introduced himself and met Dr. Wu, a forty-year-old medical doctor from China, who had come to the United States for two years of post-doctoral research. As they talked further, the staff person discovered that Dr. Wu had left his wife and family in China for the time of his studies. He also told him he was a Marxist and an atheist and had arrived in the U.S. from China only two days earlier. Because Dr. Wu's English was excellent, the staff member inquired how long he had studied English. "Three and a half years," was the response. The church was located several miles from the campus and the staff person wondered how the doctor had heard of the meeting, having arrived only two days prior. When he asked, "How did you find our meeting?" Dr. Wu smiled. "On the internet," he said. He had found ISI's webpage through the cyberspace connection that for many international students answers questions and gives guidance about America long before they set foot on this soil.

Still curious, the staff member asked why Dr. Wu had come to an ISI meeting. "I want to find out about God," he said matter-of-factly. After that particular meeting, Dr. Wu faithfully attended a Bible study almost every week and made a commitment to Christ. His wife later joined him and also became a Christian. Dr. Wu is one of many who come to the United States hungering to know about God. For Dr. Wu, his spiritual journey began on the internet.

Millions of people tap into the internet for information. About half of those users are from the United States, but the other half are from around the globe. Though some people may be using it for evil purposes, ISI and other Christian groups are using the internet for God's purposes.

### ***A Dual Purpose***

International Students, Incorporated is an organization that helps Christian volunteers develop friendships with international students and visiting scholars. One purpose of ISI's website resources is to educate and inform those who are interested in having an international friend, or in being a friend to internationals

Previously, when a student from the other side of the world planned to come to the U.S., he or she may have had many questions—which remained questions until the student arrived in the U.S. But with the internet, students can have those questions answered and even arrange for someone to meet their plane at the airport. They can get answers to questions about

- U.S. etiquette/manners
- purchasing insurance
- learning to drive
- learning about their campus, and a multitude of other relevant topics.

Additionally, they can contact ISI to request the booklet *How to Survive in the U.S.* as well as an English language Bible designed with helps for international students. ISI's website contains a section specifically designed to provide resources for students planning to study in the U.S.

Many internationals develop friendships with believers via email correspondence or instant messaging apps. Kuan-lin, in Taiwan, found such a friend. He had completed his bachelor's and master's degrees at a state university. Then he returned home and found a job as a computer programmer for a major computer corporation. While attending university, Kuan-lin had been active in international student activities, including Bible studies. However, he said, "I was not a Christian. I couldn't believe that God really existed in the world and couldn't understand how so many people could believe in God. I had never seen any miracle that the Bible depicts; therefore, miracles could not happen."

After returning home and corresponding by email with his Christian friend, Kuan-lin's ideas about God began to change. He wrote, "So many things happened to me after I came home. Difficulties and pains. The pains in my mind were killing me, and I just couldn't get away. I needed Jesus. I found a church that helped me a lot."

The electronic world is only a few keystrokes away from anyone in any country who has a device. The future is bright for a worldwide witness for Christ using the internet. You might want to check out the ISI site at [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org) to view a wealth of information and resources for both volunteers and students.

### ***Apply What You Have Learned***

1. Are you involved in a Friday night event to meet and form friendships with international students? If not, how could you get involved? Contact ISI (see Appendix A) for more information about joining or hosting an ICF/ISF.
2. Commit to pray for God's guidance with regard to the use of the internet to resource international students and volunteers and to foster friendships.

## 12. A Boost for the Local Church

*“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”*

Matthew 9:36-38

As a member of her church missions committee, Julie was known as the spokesperson for cross-cultural missions. One day, she made an appointment to meet with her pastor to discuss pouring some new energy into their church and missions.

Pastor Williams began the session by saying, “Julie, I hear you have some new ideas for ministry. Let’s hear them.”

Julie pulled out a legal pad filled with notes and ideas. “For the last several weeks, I have been noticing how many international students are in our community. What really caught my attention was running into a student from Thailand who told me there are almost 150 students from his country here, some with families. Our missions committee has been wanting to support the missionary efforts better approach to reach out to international students from Thailand while they are here, but I’m not sure how to do it.”

Pastor Williams agreed. “It’s a good idea, but, like you, I don’t know exactly how to proceed and organize such a ministry within the church.” Julie and her pastor discussed how many new ideas for ministry had begun strong but faded within a short period of time. To start an effective ministry for international students within their local church, they needed a comprehensive plan. The difference between a good idea and the implementation of it is in securing adequate information.

ISI comes alongside many local churches to help them start ministries to internationals in their area. Over 1,000 churches have implemented these programs in the nation, and this chapter is built on the cumulative experience of these churches. Through a step-by-step process, we will give an overview of how any church can begin this vital ministry.

The Church in America is not callous or hardhearted. It has an enormous love for others and gift for missions. But at this point, the Church needs to be guided and directed toward that mission field, which is most strategic. David Aikman, former *Time* magazine correspondent to China said, “Mainland Chinese students, spouses, and diplomats in the United States are the most strategic evangelistic mission field in the world.” This mission field is within the reach of virtually every church in America.

### How Long Does It Take to Get It Going?

ISI has various resources available to help guide your church as you plan and build a ministry to internationals, including *How to Develop an International Student Ministry in your Church* (See ISI’s online store). Keep in mind these four phases:

**Phase One: Preparing for Ministry** (Up to 6+ months) emphasizes the necessity of acquiring a working knowledge of your specific ministry opportunity to international students.

**Phase Two: Starting a Ministry** (Up to 12+ months) addresses the practical how-to issues of organizing a ministry team and designing a workable ministry strategy and structure.

**Phase Three: Building the Ministry** (1 to 3+ years) examines how to keep this newly formed outreach moving forward and properly focused by identifying issues that can creep in and derail an unsuspecting ministry.

**Phase Four: Maintaining and Renewing the Ministry** (3+ years) takes the long-term view about how you can keep your church's ministry vibrant and relevant to both the international students you serve and the volunteers providing the services.

### ***Phase One: Prepare for Ministry***

#### *Step One: Agree on Some Fundamental Issues*

- Define the ministry focus. Distinguish between God's view and the church's view. This book has promoted the importance of ministry to international students, but the local church will need to reiterate this need. God wants to create a global congregation from every tribe, tongue, and language (Revelation 5:1-6). We've been called to share our faith with international students, and the Church has been designed as a community of love to the nations these students represent (Isaiah 56:6-7; Ephesians 2:19).
- Define the ministry focus and what our response should be—prayer. Christians in the local church need to be mobilized for concerted prayer about establishing a ministry to international students. Pray that the Lord will bring volunteers for the key positions in the ministry, such as Church Team Leader, Friendship Partner Coordinator, and coordinators for the areas of activities, publicity, prayer, and evangelism/discipleship. Also pray for volunteers within your church who will befriend international students. Pray for the international students whom your church may befriend. Finally, pray for the church's relationship with the local university or college.

#### *Step Two: Gain Knowledge About What Can Be Done and What Is Being Done*

- Obtain information from ISI about materials and staff members in your area. These resources will enable you to start your ministry on a solid foundation.
- Meet with the International Student Advisor (ISA) at the university. ISAs are charged to care for the welfare of international students. Some may be open to volunteer involvement from churches, others may be suspicious. When you call on the local ISA, indicate your personal desire for involvement. The ISA wants someone who genuinely cares, will meet the needs of international students, won't force his or her religious or personal beliefs on students, and will follow through on commitments.

Your objectives in meeting with the ISA are to:

- Establish yourself as someone willing to help meet the needs of international students
- Determine the international student enrollment
- Find out what programs are currently offered and who offers them
- Ask if there is any way you could help as a volunteer.

The ISA may know of services they would like to provide but for which they do not have the people or resources.

If you find the ISA tentative or uncooperative, making it difficult to establish any kind of rapport, try to discover the reason for the difficulty. Maybe the last volunteer was not committed and let the ISA down. Also, seek a common acquaintance who can provide you some credibility with the ISA. This could be a leader in your congregation who is also a business leader in the community or the university. If you are unable to establish rapport with the ISA, ask God to open another door of opportunity. Finally, persevere and prove your willingness to do anything. Small things, such as picking up students at the airport, could lead to greater opportunities. Call ISI for help if the ISA is totally unreceptive.

- Survey existing programs in the community. Are there other programs already in operation, such as conversational English classes? If so, you will want to visit this program to learn how they are meeting the needs of international students. Your purposes at this point are to research and discover any unmet needs in the community or to cooperate with existing programs.
- Survey the resources within your church. How near is your church to the college or university? Are there members of the congregation with campus contacts?
- Visit other communities that have established model programs in their churches. ISI may be able to refer you to situations that will be similar to yours. Take one or two interested people to visit and learn how others have been successful.
- Create a list of the outreach possibilities in an international student ministry. How can your church meet the needs of internationals? (i.e., friendship, providing transportation, providing seasonal clothing, mentoring, housing assistance or furnishings, and other needs).

### *Step Three: Examine Your Motives for Ministry*

We have given you a multitude of motivations for an international student ministry, but a key part of establishing a local church ministry is self-examination. International students are very good at detecting a hidden agenda in our outreach efforts. We've listed some guidelines in this area:

- Regardless of the activity or program, always give the student complete details of what he or she can expect. The quickest way to kill your reputation with a university or college is to invite international students to an evangelistic dinner without a clear indication that the program will be religious in nature.
- Exercise unconditional friendship. Show love to students regardless of their response to you or the Gospel.

- Remember that the results of any program are in God's hands. Our goal in a church program is to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel can be effectively shared from our lives and testimonies.

#### *Step Four: Do Your Homework*

Unfortunately, many churches launch an international student ministry only to discover that it is not what the internationals need or that someone else is already providing the same service—and doing it better. Find out what the needs are and then go about trying to fill them. One such church in the Washington, D.C. area was stumped in their international ministry.

Glenn, the international ministry team coordinator, had no idea what to do next. The church had a reputation for a proactive involvement in the community with an active membership of 400 families and more than a dozen major ministry programs. They even had a special budget for their international student ministry. Yet this ministry to internationals lacked a personal touch. They had twenty friendship partners matched with international students, but the members in the program didn't have time to meet regularly with the students.

Reverend Woodward encouraged Glenn, saying, "This ministry is key for our church, but it's all in the timing. Keep trying!"

Glenn took the pastor's counsel and set up a special brainstorming session with the other international student team members. They agreed to skip lunch every day for the next week to pray for renewal of the ministry. In addition, the team took their concerns to the entire church, and Glenn asked Reverend Woodward to schedule a Sunday evening church presentation.

At the Sunday meeting, Lim, an outgoing Christian student from Malaysia and his friendship partner, Dennis, gave a presentation. They began by discussing Lim's difficulties when he first arrived in the United States three years earlier. At a "chance" meeting in a grocery store, Dennis and Ann invited Lim to attend an international student meeting at their church.

During the interview, Dennis paused and asked Lim, "What would have happened had you not joined our international student ministry?"

Without hesitation, Lim said, "I would have given up and gone home. And I probably would have asked everyone in Malaysia after returning, 'What happened to all the Christians in America?'" Lim continued, "Churches need to help. Students like me need Christian friends, and you can make a difference in our lives." Dennis concluded the presentation and explained the simple nature of ministry to international students.

In the weeks after the presentation, Reverend Woodward continued to remind his congregation of the prayer needs of the international student ministry. By the following August, when the ministry team advertised for the fall semester, more than twenty new people volunteered to be friendship partners. Glenn was glad he persevered but waiting for God to move was not easy.

## ***Phase Two: Start a Ministry***

Before your church begins a ministry to international students, it's important to determine what needs to be done (Phase One) and also to recruit volunteers by telling them about specific needs and opportunities.

### ***Step Five: Define Your Capabilities***

- Determine a tentative strategy for your international student ministry. Make sure you temper your plan with realism and don't try to do the impossible. It's better to achieve one well-planned program than four disorganized ones.
- Secure the firm support of the church leadership. This doesn't mean they will necessarily provide "hands-on" help from the pastoral staff, but you do need them to be behind your efforts.
- Arrange a second visit with the ISA to talk about your research and how some people in your church want to be involved. ISAs are usually more comfortable with individuals from the community rather than a church. When you face hesitancy from the ISA, here are three approaches:
  1. The real concern for ISAs is motivation. Why are you interested in these international students? Explain that as a Christian you are concerned and motivated to reach out to people with love (Leviticus 19:33-34; Romans 12:13).
  2. It is worth mentioning that through your new program international students can experience American culture beyond the university. It gives them a chance to meet and befriend people outside their academic community. Can you imagine attending Tokyo University and the ISA saying to you, "We're glad you are here, but please don't associate with the Buddhists while you are in our country." Sometimes our biases can be unconsciously extended to others who do not share the same reservations.
  3. Assure the ISA that your intention is not to proselytize the international students, but to simply be their friend with no strings attached. This is our true motivation.

### ***Step Six: Recruit Ministry Team Volunteers***

- Begin small enough to maintain top quality. You probably have some idea who in your church will join you in this international outreach. Begin by talking with these people about the findings from your research and inviting them to participate with you. Be sure to screen people carefully, recognizing that hidden agendas, needs, and problems are more easily dealt with through selection than through discipline. Look for people who have proven themselves in their ministry and professions.
- Seek the cooperation of the congregation. Set a date with the church staff to present the ministry to the church body.

### ***Step Seven: Get Organized***

- Identify a ministry team from your list of potential volunteers.
- Invite the ministry team to an organizational meeting. Your agenda should include at least these three items:

1. Lead the group in creating a purpose statement to define the focus of the ministry. This step helps the ministry team give their own personal stamp of ownership and commitment.
2. Determine the strategies you will use to fulfill your purpose. The prior research will be helpful to this process.

You could sense the excitement in the international student ministry team at Central Valley Church. They had gathered to plan their strategies. Emily, the ministry coordinator, had done an excellent job of gathering data and establishing a strong working relationship with the university ISA. When the team met, they agreed to implement three ministry strategies: a friendship partner program, an activity each month for the partners and their international friends, and an international Sunday School class.

Unfortunately, the Central Valley team didn't establish how often they would meet. Problems began to arise, and activities were postponed because the team didn't plan ahead or consider the university's event schedule. The international Sunday School class floundered because the ministry team didn't consider the level of interest from Christian international students. They also misjudged the interest of non-Christian internationals matched with church friendship partners. The only program to survive the school year was the friendship partner program. The ministry team sensed they had lost credibility among themselves and the church leadership because they had attempted a larger program than they could carry out with quality. Fortunately, they were quick learners, and the next year they refocused with different results.

3. Determine when you would like to hold a training session for your volunteers. Keep in mind that the best time to recruit and train volunteers is just before the students arrive in the fall.

Be accountable. Discuss with the church leadership how this can be done. Ideally, the ministry should be incorporated into the missions strategy of the church. One of the most appropriate links to the broader church is through the missions committee.

### *Step Eight: Train Volunteers—Tools for Outreach*

- See the appendices for resources, and contact ISI for help with training your volunteers.
- Training volunteers and coordinators sounds like a major undertaking, but keep in mind that ISI has many helpful resources such as videos to help with training volunteers.

### *Step Nine: Implementing Outreach Plans*

- Friendship Partners. This program is the most common outreach strategy. International students are matched to church members. These friendship partners agree to meet with their student at least once each month and to make some kind of weekly contact by phone, a text, or a note to keep in touch.

- Professional Partners. This type of program links students with professionals in your church whose career interests and professional specialties match the students.' The details of implementing this type of program are found in the next chapter.
- There are a multitude of other creative possibilities, one being the regular Friday night meal and get together for students, highlighted in the previous chapter. You may want to form a group of conversational partners who can help international students with their English skills. A ministry to the female spouses of international students is another possible outreach. See ISI's website, International Women's Connection, at [www.internationalwomensconnection.org](http://www.internationalwomensconnection.org) for information about offering hospitality and genuine "no-strings-attached" friendship to international women. The key is selecting a program that can be accomplished consistently.

### *Here Today . . . Gone Tomorrow*

Abby was always looking for things to do within her church. A vibrant, energetic lady, she preferred a hands-on approach to tasks. When challenged with the idea of international student ministry, Abby embraced it wholeheartedly.

Before long, she single-handedly recruited seven couples to be friendship partners. Her pastor was enthusiastic, so he encouraged her to continue the outreach. In fact, the pastor wished he had more people in his church like Abby who could see a need and fill it.

Soon her friendship partners were matched with students. Some of these students Abby met in the grocery store, others signed up for an American partner at the college. The new friendship partners enjoyed their relationships with the students. For encouragement, Abby planned a Christmas party. The Chinese students were overwhelmed with the warmth and love from the Christians. It was a completely new experience for them. Each received a gift from their American friend, learned about the true meaning of Christmas, and at the end laughed together when a Chinese student made a surprise showing in a Santa suit.

During the first year, thanks to Abby's hard work, the ministry progressed. Abby made plans to double the ministry the next fall, but it didn't double. There was no Christmas party organized for the Chinese students and, in fact, there was little evidence in the church of a ministry to international students. In June, to Abby's surprise, her husband was transferred to a new location. Though the church had been thrilled with Abby's ministry to internationals, there was no accountability between her and the broader church. Because she was doing such a good job, no one thought to inquire how things were done. Consequently, when Abby left the church, the ministry folded. She had not been responsible in preparing for her replacement and in structuring a long-term ministry for the church. If a ministry team is well organized, with plenty of group participation, it can survive the loss of its leader. But in this case, the church's ministry to international students was here today and gone tomorrow.

### **Phase Three: Build the Ministry**

#### *Step Ten: Review the Operation*

After your outreach is underway, seek regular feedback from the church volunteers and internationals at regular intervals. Document the feedback and use the information to make adjustments in your program. The first time is always a learning experience. You will find that some things work well one year and fail the next. For example, you may find that your volunteers are insensitive to the school academic schedule. Many times, churches plan a big Christmas program during finals week on campus.

#### *Step Eleven: Communicate and Continue Education*

- Keep volunteers and friendship partners informed through texts or emails, church announcements, and informal gatherings for encouragement.
- Keep everyone in the congregation informed. Continue to keep prayer needs and ministry needs before the entire church. Encourage the pastor to pray for the ministry often and to share special prayer needs with the Sunday School classes.
- Prepare a ministry that lasts for the long-term. Recruit and train replacements for every position so the ministry isn't dependent on a single individual.
- Prepare for changes in your ministry. As the ministry progresses, the questions will also change. For example, initial questions might include: "What kind of food do I prepare for internationals?" and "Will I be able to communicate with them?" Later, the questions will change to: "How do we know if students are interested in the Gospel?" or "My student is Muslim; how can I tell him about Christ in a way he can understand?" (See Appendix A for additional resources to help answer these questions.)
- Maintain meaningful team meetings for prayer and planning. Each church and group dynamic are different. You will need to determine the frequency of the meetings for your situation, but be aware of three common errors with these types of meetings:
  1. Don't meet *too* frequently (so everyone tires of meetings).
  2. Meet frequently enough (so you are not in danger of losing touch).
  3. Don't meet when you don't need to meet (team members will feel they are wasting time).

#### *Necessity—the Mother of Invention*

The friendship partner program at Hope Church was flourishing. Coordinator Faith was enthusiastic about her two-year investment. She had effectively recruited and trained volunteers and kept in contact through regular social activities and monthly updates. She established a regular follow-up for the friendship partners to share their struggles and experiences with her volunteer prayer group. Over the past year, seven international students had committed their lives to Jesus Christ—four Asian students, two Africans, and one European. Little did Faith know that the blessing of these eager new Christians would turn into a personal struggle.

Faith had given little thought to the steps beyond friendship and evangelism—namely *discipleship and integration* into the local church. She learned also that the friendship partners knew little about discipleship. They had taken their international student friends to church, but it had not worked out well. The Asians seemed disinterested (later they shared that they had a hard time following the fast-talking pastor), and the Africans were bogged down by the unfamiliar music. These international students didn't fit well into either the adult or the college Sunday School classes.

None of these friendship partners had ever helped a new believer grow in his or her faith—neither did they feel qualified to begin learning with an international Christian. As Faith thought about integrating the students into the church, she felt badly about not having planned ahead. Even the social activities for internationals had taken place in natural settings outside the church. “They’re islands sitting out there,” Faith said. “How can I build these students into a community, into an international Christian fellowship?”

Faith called upon some staff members at ISI to learn how to follow up with new believers. They gave her some solid suggestions, then guided her through the next steps. They suggested the following:

- Begin a new Sunday School class within the church, a cross-cultural Bible class with joint fellowship time, then electives to meet the students' specific needs (e.g., sermon discussions).
- Look within the church for mature Christians gifted in the areas of discipleship or cross-cultural ministry.
- Survey your friendship partners to determine what ministry gifts they have among them. Can some of them teach a Bible study? Show hospitality? Explain how to live out one's faith through one's vocation?
- Locate mature Christian internationals from the community or campus to help.
- Learn about cross-culturally sensitive discipleship resources from ISI and elsewhere to help the friendship partners be effective in discipleship and studying the Bible with their international friends.

A year later, with the help of two mature church members, Faith has seen several of the new Christians fit into their cross-cultural Sunday School class. They are becoming a part of the church body also—even to the point of serving others in some of the church's programs and ministries. Faith is very pleased about having a more balanced ministry for outreach and discipleship to international students. Necessity was the mother of invention at Hope Church.

#### ***Phase Four: Maintain and Expand the Ministry***

Prayer, communication, and fellowship are themes that run throughout the ministry of the local church. As your ministry to international students makes use of these three resources, the ministry will have a vital role in your local church. This final phase is critical for the continuation and growth of the ministry.

### *Step Twelve: The Church Link: Does Your Church Embrace the International Student Ministry?*

Continually invest in the relationship between the church and the international student ministry. Your link should be maintained in the following areas:

- *Service.* You are serving the church with international student ministry, but the ministry is also serving the needs of the church and its members. A life of service is best learned when modeled in the context of the local church and its outreach to the community.
- *Support.* Prayer, financial, and manpower support are the tangible expressions of how the ministry functions within the church and determines its importance. If you need anything in one or more of these three areas (prayer, financial, manpower), don't be afraid to ask—provided you have served in these areas first.
- *Accountability.* When the church leadership asks, "How's the ministry going?" it represents more than a greeting. It is a question about the use of God's resources, and it provides an opportunity to talk about God's blessing and work in your midst.
- *Commitment.* The quality of your relationship with the church depends on the depth of your commitment. Be as committed to the health of your church as you are to the ministry.

### *Step Thirteen: Keeping the Vision for Ministry Alive*

Your international student ministry runs on gallons of clear vision. The ministry vision needs systematic restatement, clarification, and communication within the ministry team and the church. It is the guiding result, inspiration, and focus of the ministry.

- *Vision.* A vision statement is a brief, clear description of the result that the ministry intends to achieve. It tells why the ministry exists and what it intends to accomplish.
- *Restatement and clarification.* The vision statement should be consistently repeated until everyone understands clearly what you are doing, as well as what you are not doing. It's probably not possible to repeat the vision statement too frequently.
- *Communication.* Each member of the ministry needs to be given an opportunity to demonstrate a basic understanding of the vision. This vision is maintained and kept alive when people see us moving steadily toward the accomplishment of the vision. Communication is critical.
- *Identity.* The vision also tells us who we are as a ministry. It affects our values, the ends we seek, and the means we choose to accomplish those ends.
- *Focus and direction.* Vision points us toward our goal and warns us of distractions along the way. Without a clear vision, there are no real priorities to guide our activities.

### *Step Fourteen: Generating Teamwork—the Personal Touch*

Great teamwork isn't magic. It requires much effort on the part of the leader. Your team members will stay encouraged when they know they are cared for, appreciated, encouraged, and assured they are making a significant contribution to the ministry.

- *Hard work.* It takes hard work to care for international students, but it also takes work to care for the friendship partners and volunteers. Every member of the team is important.
- *Care.* Team members need to know they are valued as individuals and not only for their productivity on a task.
- *Appreciation and significance.* Saying “thank you” often is a powerful way to encourage your team in their specific personal contributions. The fact that you recognize what God is doing through their roles in the ministry is critical to their perception of their value to the ministry. If people do not feel they are contributing significantly, they will take their efforts elsewhere. On the other hand, enthusiasm is contagious when team members fully understand their part in the total ministry picture.

### *Step Fifteen: Training—Keeping Up the Pace*

A major challenge for international student ministry leaders is to continually help their team members grow and to equip them with new tools for the task. Good training will increase the capacity of your team to serve and will deepen their commitment to the ministry. As you give time and attention to training the team, it will enable them to be more effective and productive.

- *Growth.* As your team grows spiritually, intellectually, and interpersonally, it will result in a dynamic ministry. We are stretched outside of our comfort zones through a variety of experiences which God uses to help us to grow.
- *Training.* Increased training will build the personal confidence and effectiveness of the ministry team. International Student Ministry volunteers and friendship partners may want to become Ministry Representatives with ISI, be in the ISI communication loop, and receive the same training opportunities as ISI staff for regional and national training conferences (see Appendix A for information).
- *Confidence.* Well-trained people will feel confident to initiate within their sphere of ministry.

### *Step Sixteen: Stop, Look, and Listen—Reevaluating*

If you expect to maintain momentum in international student ministry, regular reassessment, and reflection on the quality of your ministry is essential. Are you asking the right questions? Why are you doing this ministry? What are the results? How could it be done better? Are you still enjoying it? There is always data for evaluation, but the challenge is to study the data and learn from both mistakes and successes. Then you will be progressively doing things better.

- *Reassessment and reflection.* An old Chinese proverb says, “Unless we change direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed.” Looking back and forward is a time-consuming yet crucial process to maintaining and renewing ministry.

- *Evaluation of the data.* There are many ways to measure a successful ministry. One of the critical methods is observing people's responses to our efforts. Ask pertinent questions and do periodic follow-up to give you the necessary information for good ministry decisions. The natural tendency in established ministries is to assume that our years of experience allow us the luxury of making assumptions—without ever questioning their accuracy.
- *The challenge.* It takes concentration and courage to analyze our past efforts and continually improve. For the ministry to stay vital and fresh, we must take this step. Without it, a ministry loses touch with the needs and priorities of those it serves.

### *Step Seventeen: Stay in Touch with Returnees*

Your commitment to international students should be characterized by the statement "Out of sight but *not* out of mind." Someday, the majority of these students will be returning home. You can help them prepare for reentry into their home cultures and then keep in contact with them after they return home. This connection will secure a lifeline of friendship, fellowship, and encouragement.

- *Reentry preparation.* See Chapter 11 to help your student prepare for returning home.
- *Contact.* As a student readjusts to his own culture, it helps immensely to have a friend who understands.
- *Lifeline.* With many international friends, we can provide encouragement and perspective. For Christian returnees, we are spiritual partners to support their faith and walk with Christ. For non-Christian returnees, we can continue to encourage them in their spiritual journeys to discover God's Truth. Our prayers and friendship may make the difference in a long-term impact on their home cultures.
- *Students who do not want to return.* Occasionally, students will seek help from their friendship partner to stay in the United States. Despite your love for the student, any decision should be the result of concerted prayer and counsel with the local ISI staff member and the student's ISA. While we may want a student to remain with us, we must consider God's redemptive purpose for the nations.

### *Step Eighteen: Strengthening the Partnership with the Campus*

As your ministry with international students matures, it can be a significant source of help to the university. Cooperation with the international student office can result in meeting more students. The welcome mat may be kept out for you if you are faithful in identifying common goals and working together with the ISA to meet the needs of international students.

- *Cooperation.* We must not compromise our purpose but seek to discover where we can serve each other—areas where we agree, and our goals coincide. Mutual trust, which is established over time, is the result of sensitive listening to the concerns of each party and faithfulness in doing what was promised. This area requires personal and interpersonal maturity, so be careful who represents your ministry in this area.

- *Meeting needs.* As Christians, we seek to serve a wide range of human needs: physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual. Internationals are not exempt. A maturing ministry keeps a good balance in all these areas and teaches everyone involved in the ministry how to work in each area.

### *Step Nineteen: Increase Service by Termination/Expansion*

Programs and services that meet student needs require regular maintenance and updating. Eliminate unnecessary aspects and add more strategic dimensions of ministry. Find out from the internationals what their greatest needs are and then create a new approach to serve them. A carefully planned expansion effort will bring renewal, balance, and quality to your ministry.

- *Fine-tuning and updating.* Because something worked well at one time or with one group does not mean it will continue to work well. We need to ask ourselves, “Are we currently meeting the most important student needs?” Find out definitively. The discovery process and response to the results will bring excitement to your students, volunteers, and ministry team.
- *Renewal.* “New and improved” is not merely a marketing technique. It is necessary to keep a ministry alive and growing. Within every ministry that pursues excellence, there is room for improvement. Adding new aspects to the ministry will usually mean adding new people. This process alone adds a renewing agent through the questions novices ask.

### *Don't Become Overwhelmed*

Nineteen steps to a vital international student ministry in your church might seem a bit overwhelming to the uninitiated. Instead, we hope you will see these steps as a beacon of light that can guide you to effective ministry in the local church. Thousands of churches have followed these steps and you can join them in this important service to strategic future leaders.

## **Getting It Together by Getting Together**

Angie Cooper had her hands full as her church's International Ministry Team Coordinator for the international student ministry. Their suburban church of 600 members had 25 friendship partners. Her husband, Steve, was taking adult education classes at a nearby community college where 250 international students attended. His contact with these students and a guest speaker at their church sparked Angie and Steve's involvement in the ministry.

However, two years into their ministry, they started to lose many of their friendship partners. After evaluation, they discovered that many of them felt left alone—not sure what to do, and lacking support and confidence. Several suggested getting together to discuss specific issues and problems facing friendship partners.

The Coopers began hosting a monthly gathering of friendship partners and other volunteers to encourage everyone in the ministry. Because the meetings were informal, the participants felt free to talk about their personal needs, and a strong sense of community began to develop. At each meeting, people shared prayer

requests and personal needs as well as highlights and disappointments in their relationships with international students. These meetings also served as a forum to share ideas and discuss issues relating to the international student ministry. As a result of these meetings, everyone took a greater interest and pride in the ministry. They felt like a part of a team.

Occasionally, the hosts invited someone to the group who was experienced in cross-cultural relationships—either Christian international students, Americans involved in international relationships or studies, or an ISI team member. At one meeting, a couple who had recently returned from missionary work with youth in Japan discussed how to befriend and share the Gospel with Japanese youth. At another meeting, the group studied ISI training materials on how to initiate conversations on spiritual matters with their international friends.

During these meetings, the Coopers quickly discovered that one of the major obstacles facing most of the friendship partners was getting beyond friendship into spiritual discussions. Finally, the group decided to simply ask their international friends if they would be interested in being involved in a Bible study. Surprisingly, several students were eager to begin. It was almost as if they were waiting to be asked.

As a result, the Coopers recruited a church member to teach introductory Bible lessons. In turn, the students began asking friendship partners about spiritual issues brought up in these studies, and many students began attending the church. ISI encourages the use of *M28 Global Discipleship*, an easy-to-use Bible discovery and disciple-making model (see Appendix A for information).

The Coopers faced another obstacle after Steve stopped taking classes at the college: a lack of support from the international student office. Angie began to look for ways to support and serve the office to win their trust and cooperation.

The college's annual international student dinner provided an excellent opportunity. Angie and the ministry partners volunteered to prepare food. A group of ministry partners and students were mobilized to prep, cook, and serve at the event. This group effort impressed the international student office and opened the door to further joint activities and access to the students.

This group discovered how to improve their international student ministry by increased communication and greater participation.

### ***Apply What You Have Learned***

1. Where is your local church in relation to starting a ministry for international students?
2. If there isn't a ministry, how can you take some steps to start one?
3. Who in your church has a heart for missions and/or been on a short-term missions trip? Invite them to a discussion meeting with regard to beginning an international student ministry. Are there cross-culturally aware members who have returned from overseas service?
4. Using the guidelines in this chapter, begin your ministry.

5. As a church international student ministry group, get connected with ISI for further help and support (see Appendix A for information).

## 13. Mentor a Leader

*“He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.” Mark 3:14*

*“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:9*

One day, Texas stockbrokers Joseph and Brad began meeting with an international student couple on a professional level about portfolio management. It started an important relationship. Ziyi and Shan, both MBA students at a university in Texas, hungered for some practical and real-life instruction beyond what they could reap in a classroom setting.

Their initial meeting for this mentoring relationship centered around different aspects of the business. The more time they spent together, the more Shan asked himself why these two successful businessmen would make time in their busy schedules for him and his wife—especially when they could have used the hours for making money.

Finally, Shan mustered the courage to ask why they were making such a sacrifice. His question provided these two business partners an opportunity to share about their Christian values and worldview, which drove all their business practices.

“We got to share how you can plan and implement the most brilliant of strategies . . . but how, ultimately, it is God who controls people and the world’s economy,” said Brad.

“Also, we got to talk about the fear and greed that drive many people who don’t know God and who try to make big money short-term in the market,” added Joseph. “We shared by contrast how we make ethical decisions based on the truth of God’s Word.”

Soon this mentoring relationship blossomed into a cultural exchange and afforded opportunities for Joseph and Brad to open their homes to Shan and Ziyi. With a firm foundation of unconditional friendship, the new friends talked often and openly of spiritual things. Ziyi and Shan confirmed that they had already made commitments to Christ.

As Shan’s studies drew to a conclusion, Joseph and Brad helped him prepare his resumé and gear up for his upcoming interview with a prestigious firm. The firm quickly discerned what an asset Shan would be and offered him a position on their team in Asia.

Before he left the United States, Shan thanked Joseph and Brad profusely for their input into his life and asked what he could do to repay the debt he felt he owed them. They said, “Do for someone else what the Lord has done through us for you. That’s all the repayment we ask.”

## **The Commitment from a Professional**

ISI encourages development of a program for professionals to partner with students. The professionals who participate in the program should be committed to initiating and cultivating a friendship for at least one year with an international student or visiting scholar who has an interest in their professional field. The friendship provides an opportunity for an international student to learn about the various perspectives on life in a given profession. It is a wonderful way for a professional to build a friendship within his sphere and an opportunity to share the relevance of his Christian faith to his life and work. Likely, there are also ways beyond one's profession to practically assist an international partner.

### ***The Opportunities and Benefits***

As a professional partner, you entrust your professional insights and personal perspectives to an international professional who will impact his or her country as a future leader in your field.

You are also able to impart the best values that you and your profession offer to an international partner who is eager for your insights and friendship. Also, you model professionalism to your international friend who respects your professional accomplishments. You will be able to show him or her how to pursue wisdom as well as knowledge, to cultivate character as well as achievements, to value generosity and service above personal gain.

The professional partner ministry has a flexible friendship agenda that will dovetail with your professional goals and also acknowledge the constraints of your personal schedule. Beyond the professional satisfaction, this program allows you to put your faith into practice and provide lifelong benefits to people from the other side of the globe whom you may never otherwise meet.

Professional partners are not limited to doctors and lawyers. A broad gamut of professionals is involved in this program.

### ***How to Get Started***

"Mentoring" is a very real need in our world today. Many students are looking for a mentor, and you can be that mentor for an international student by being a professional partner. ISI can help you develop an application form to help you match professionals with international students.

### ***First Contact and First Meeting***

After you have been matched in a professional partners relationship, you will be expected to make the first call to your international partner. Despite his or her eagerness to hear from you, as a guest in the United States it may seem improper for him or her to call you. In fact, even after the initial meeting, it will remain primarily your responsibility to initiate continued contact. During the first call to the international partner, be sure to identify yourself. Explain how you acquired the student's or scholar's name and other details. (Your ministry team may also want to host a group event to introduce partners and students who are matched.)

We recommend that you make arrangements for your first meeting within two weeks after your first phone call. If your international partner is new to the area, you may wish to arrange to give him or her a ride to the meeting place. Select a meeting location that will best suit both of your schedules: your home or office, a restaurant, or a site on campus. If your new friend is a bit late, don't be offended. People from other countries are frequently less time-oriented than Americans. (Also, when dining out, be sensitive to any financial limitations the student may have.)

Your first meeting is a chance for you and your international partner to get acquainted, to learn a little about each other, and hopefully to establish the foundation for a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship. Suggest a meeting place that will allow both of you to be comfortable and one that will afford the opportunity to talk casually.

Some ideas for your first meeting might include the following:

- a visit to the campus and a meeting with your student and his or her advisor
- a brief tour of your office and place of employment
- taking your international partner to a professional association meeting you regularly attend
- lunch or dinner in a restaurant
- inviting your international friend to your home for a meal and to meet your family.

### ***What to Talk About***

The primary goal of your first meeting is to begin building a relationship based on truth and friendship. Ask about your international partner's family, how he or she became involved in your profession, and perhaps what courses he or she is enrolled in. Ask educated questions about his or her home country and seek to discover what a professional lifestyle is like in that part of the world. It is important, however, that you don't pry or try to force a conversation. More guidelines about things to discuss are suggested in Chapter Five.

Be a good listener, but also allow your international partner to get to know you as well. Offer helpful information about yourself without dominating the conversation. Use this time to begin sharing perspectives on your profession. Remember that your international partner enrolled in this program out of a shared professional interest and a desire to learn from your experience and insights. Meeting this goal should be your central focus as you begin your relationship. Later, as you spend more time together, your relationship will likely grow beyond the professional aspect into more of a personal friendship.

Here are some suggestions for beginning discussions related to your mutual professional interests:

- Focus on personal character traits, ethics, and values that play a major role in your professional life.
- Discuss career paths, office politics, dealing with interpersonal conflict, and—if you have a family—explore how your family fits into your career.
- Allow for an exchange of perspectives. Although your international partner may not have your depth of experience, he or she can add insight as to how his or her

culture perceives and values your profession, enabling you to gain a sharper professional worldview. This interchange will give you an improved understanding of another culture, and it will give your friend a positive view of American professionals.

### ***Helping in Practical Ways***

Perhaps there is something that only you can offer your international partner, especially if he or she is a student. You can allow your international friend to see, experience, and learn the aspects of your profession that you would have liked to have known before you entered the field. There is valuable information in every field that can only be gained from experience.

- Invite your international partner to spend a day with you on the job. After a brief tour, allow him or her to follow you around to observe your work, or arrange for colleagues to share various aspects of your profession. Include your friend as a silent partner in meetings or during appointments, if appropriate.
- Provide your international partner with copies of professional journals or other related magazines to which you subscribe.
- Use your friends and network to expose your international partner to cutting-edge ideas, processes, and other aspects of your profession.
- Discuss specific skills and competencies your international partner wishes to develop. Together, action plan to address each skill or competency.

### ***Cultivate Your Friendship***

Other sections in this book give detailed suggestions for increasing your friendship with your international partner. As you get to know your new friend, you will probably discover some common interests besides the obvious professional ones. Even if it is only a shared appreciation for a sport or music, which can be another solid building block as you cultivate your friendship.

### ***Cross-Cultural Awareness***

Culture shapes the way we go about our profession and daily routines. Most international students and visiting scholars come from cultures quite different from our own. Accordingly, our perceptions are likewise different. Cultural differences can show up in simple things, such as punctuality, or complex matters, such as speaking with frankness versus being polite by speaking indirectly. These differences can add intrigue and also a little frustration. Other sections in this book highlight the need for cross-cultural awareness. You will need to have these matters in mind as you relate to your international partner.

### ***Not Alone***

As you develop your friendship with your international partner, you may likely have the opportunity to move the relationship in a spiritual direction. Other chapters in this book will give you insight and helpful guidelines for this process.

ISI is committed to helping you be successful in your relationship and ministry to the student or scholar. Check out the many resources available online.

***Apply What You Have Learned***

1. What is your profession? Could you mentor an international student as a professional partner?
2. What steps could you take to initiate this process (i.e., find out what resources are available)?
3. What personal benefits and blessings can you see in working with a professional partner?
4. Are there others you could encourage to get involved in such a program?

## 14. Join a Growing National Movement

*“Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”* Isaiah 6:5-8

*“Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart.”*  
1 Chronicles 12:33, KJV

What an opportunity! In our nation, nearly one million international students need a friend! Can we meet this challenge? Absolutely!

If one half of one percent of all Christians who say they know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in a personal way became friendship partners, we would have a friend for every international student in the nation. Christians in our country are not callous. They simply do not know this wonderful mission field exists.

God is sovereign. He knows. God also knows those He has prepared for this wonderful mission opportunity, who are waiting for the chance to minister internationally. These volunteers can easily be trained through ISI’s volunteer resources. God has already prepared them in evangelism. They have a heart for discipleship. Are *you* one of these people?

If you are, your first step is to contact ISI. You can work at any level you desire. Many are needed at every level. The mission field is “white unto harvest” and ready for laborers.

After reading this book, you know that a fulfilling and thrilling opportunity to reach beyond your borders in a way that is comfortable for you is a real possibility. You will be able to love someone for Christ’s sake who is in need of your love and of God’s love and who will return that love. What a wonderful personal and spiritual relationship can develop without your leaving the country!

There are a variety of service levels:

- local ISI ministry volunteer
- volunteer Friendship Partner®
- coordinator for a group in your local church
- mobilizer of other people and other churches in your city
- Ministry Representative with ISI
- part-time or full-time ISI staff

Be a pioneer in this most strategic of all mission fields. Be a foreign missionary on your own doorstep! Love an international, a future leader of our world, for Christ’s sake—

without learning another language. Touch someone who will impact others—perhaps a nation, perhaps the world.

Reach the unreached while they are here in our country. Join the most reproductive mission in the world—the international student outreach of love and hospitality.

Lam, from the southeastern corner of the People's Republic of China, now a Ph.D. in electrical engineering, said after six years in the U.S., "For six months after coming here, I was totally alone and deeply depressed. Then I met someone from ISI, and he introduced me to my best friend, Jesus Christ. Now I am going home to tell my country how to know God."

Each of us can be such a friend and help change our world!

## Appendix A

Be a part of the movement—join the ISI team to reach international students on your “doorstep.”

Since 1953, God has blessed International Students, Incorporated as a model of ministry to international students. There are several ways in which you can join hands with ISI:

- Local volunteers, churches, or organizations are linked with ISI staff members to reach international students in their areas.
- Ministry Representatives are “volunteer” team members with many of the same ministry responsibilities and privileges as ISI staff members. Check out [www.get2knowisi.org](http://www.get2knowisi.org) for more information on this special position.
- ISI Staff: use the link above to check out a number of staff positions available with ISI’s ministry, ranging from administrative to leadership roles.
- Friendship Partners® are matched with an international student as described in this book. Check out [www.isi4training.com](http://www.isi4training.com) for helpful resources such as tips on cultural sensitivity, Bible studies, and ESL tools (e.g., additional idiom cartoons).

### ***Prayer***

Prayer support is critical for ISI’s ministry to international students. Contact ISI to receive periodic updates on ministry prayer needs and to partner with prayer teams in your area.

### ***Phone Consultation***

A special phone service allows you access to ISI’s international student ministry specialist. Simply dial 1.800.ISITEAM, to learn more about resources available to volunteers or ask questions regarding international student ministry in general or in your area.

### ***Transfer Network***

International students often move from one city to another—or even to another country—to continue their studies. Because of the breadth of their ministry contacts, ISI can often help locate an international student ministry worker or volunteer in your student’s new location to help him or her find opportunities for fellowship and growth. Contact ISI by phone (see above) or email: [Team@isionline.org](mailto:Team@isionline.org).

### ***Global Returnee Follow-Up***

ISI’s team of staff and student ministry contacts can often help to connect your international students with other vibrant Christians and returnees when they return to their home countries. Contact [Team@isionline.org](mailto:Team@isionline.org) for assistance.

### **Staff Contacts and Visits**

ISI stands ready to connect you with ISI team members for training, strategic planning, and the evaluation of new and existing ministries. Contact [Team@isionline.org](mailto:Team@isionline.org) for more information.

International Students, Inc.  
P.O. Box C  
Colorado Springs, CO 80901

Phone: 719.576.2700

Fax: 719.576.5363

Toll-free: 1.800.ISITEAM

Email: [Team@isionline.org](mailto:Team@isionline.org)

Web: [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org)

Online Store: <https://store.internationalstudents.org/>

## **Resources from International Students, Incorporated**

### **Online Store**

You can find a number of helpful resources, including Bible studies, tracts, books/booklets, and DVDs, for download and purchase in ISI's online store at <https://store.internationalstudents.org/>. These resources will provide important cultural and spiritual insights for a more effective witness with your international friend.

### **Witnessing Tool**

*Knowing God Personally*: A witnessing tool (tract/booklet) designed for use with international students, stressing our relationship with a personal God (See Appendix B for text-only version or order the attractive four-color tract in the online store).

### **Booklets**

ISI has a series of foundational booklets for American Christians involved in international student ministry. Each booklet is designed for use with a specific people group or to address a unique need. (See online store.)

### **Videos**

ISI has designed a series of ten videos, "REACH International Students," to equip you as you build a friendship with your international student. See <https://internationalstudents.org/reach-international-students/>.

### **Bible Discovery Tools**

M28 Global Discipleship (from Matthew 28:18-20—the Great Commission) is a simple, relevant, and reproducible tool designed with international students in mind—those from every culture and nation. Its aim is to lead students to Christ and equip them to be disciple-makers in their home cultures (or other spheres of impact). The M28

approach was designed to be *Simple* (anyone can understand it), *Relevant* (to any context), and *Reproducible* (in any culture).

The M28 Global Discipleship mobile app (God Story/God's Story) puts this entire process at their fingertips! Seekers, disciple-makers, and trainers download the app and have instant access to a truth-discovery process that facilitates a personal discipleship and witnessing lifestyle.

The God's Story app is a simplified version of ISI's M28 disciple-making approach and is designed for truth seekers who are interested in discovering God's story through selected passages of the Bible. This truth discovery approach incorporates all the disciple-making elements of the M28 model without burdening the seeker with material that is relevant only to the trainer/disciple-maker.

In Apple App Store: God Story (for iPhone and iPad)

In Google App Store: God's Story (for Android)

### ***English as a Second Language (ESL)***

You will find a variety of humorous English idiom cartoon illustrations online under the Games, Skits, and More category at <https://www.isi4training.com>.

## ***Additional Resources***

### ***Bibles***

*Biblica-The International Bible Society's* mission is to provide the Bible in accurate, contemporary translations and formats so that more people around the world will have the opportunity to be transformed by Jesus Christ. The Bible is available to read online in many languages, and there are other resources for ministry as well (e.g., daily devotions, Bible reading plans, NIV study Bible, and links to partner resources.) See [www.biblica.com](http://www.biblica.com).

*Multi-Language Media's* mission is to make Bibles and evangelical Christian literature available to people in their heart language, so they may come to faith and maturity in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a variety of resources on the website. You can browse by language or category (e.g., video, tracts, Bibles, music CDs, DVD's, and ESL curriculum.) See [www.multilanguagemedia.org](http://www.multilanguagemedia.org).

In addition, Bible mobile apps (e.g., YouVersion) often provide multi-language versions and are easy to use.

## Appendix B: Additional Topics for Discussion Starters

The following pages include some examples of topics and related questions for discussion parties. Each topic poses a particular question for discussion. You will want to adapt these ideas for your use or create your own topics and questions.

### ***The Nature of Truth***

- Is truth relative, absolute, or both? What is the difference between absolute and relative truth? Where can absolute truth be found? Where can relative truth be found?
- How has the concept of truth changed during the course of your life? What has caused this?
- In what ways has living in a different culture been of value to you in searching for truth?
- What truths do you think are commonly understood in various cultures?
- What do you consider to be the most important truth in life?

### ***The Nature of God***

- Do you believe that God exists?
- How would you describe this God?
- How would the God you have just described indicate interest, if any, in people?
- Does this God hear and answer prayers? What examples do you have to indicate that this God does or does not respond to prayer?
- In what ways has this God revealed himself to people, if, in fact, he has done so?
- What is your reaction to this statement by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal, “Man has a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill”?

### ***The Meaning of Freedom***

- What is your response to the statement: “Freedom equals the absence of all restraints?”
- What are some different kinds of freedoms?
- What pressures or demands interfere with an individual’s personal freedom?
- If one lives in a country where political freedom is limited, to what extent can one have personal freedom?
- What is the relationship between personal freedom and such conditions as physical or financial security?
- What steps can an individual take to experience more personal freedom?

### ***What Is Sin?***

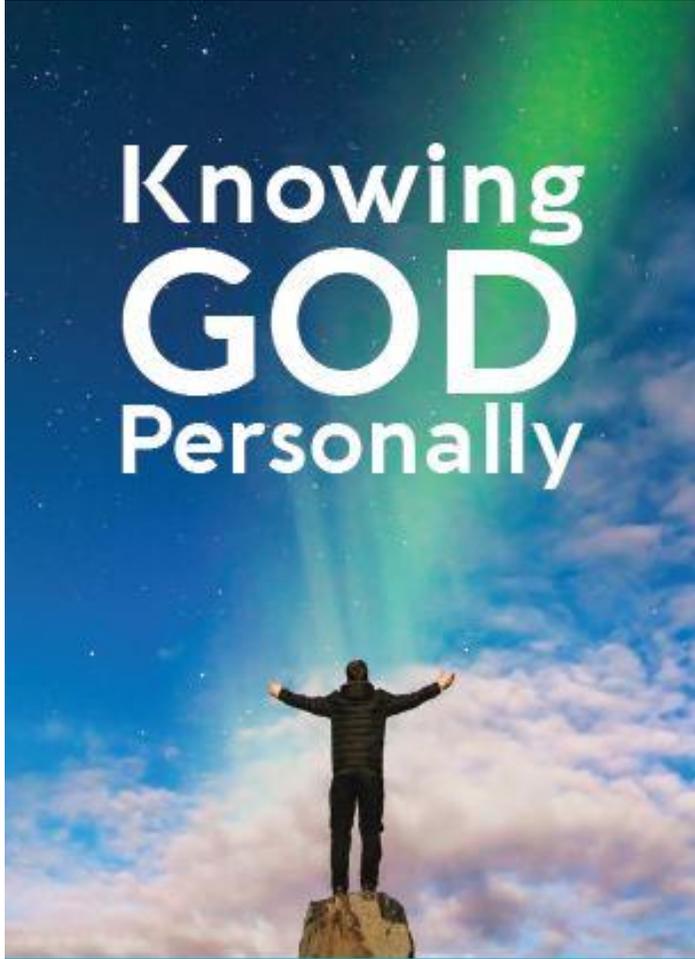
Note: This topic should only be used in a group that has been very open in discussing other topics and one in which the members have indicated an interest in discussing “sin” as a topic.

- Do you believe there is such a thing as “sin”?
- How would you define “sin”?
- Give some examples of what you would call “sin.”
- Why, in your opinion, do people sin?
- What do you believe is the worst sin?
- What is the solution to sin?

### ***General Topic Questions***

Finally, here are some other general topics for discussion. If used, more detailed questions than those listed above will need to be developed:

- How do we deal with disappointments?
- What are the possible solutions to world hunger?
- Success: What is it and how can it be measured?
- Science or God as related to the source of hope.
- The role of government in a society.
- React to the statement: “All religions lead to the same God.”
- How can we have peace in the world?
- Which is more important: the well-being of the group, or the well-being of the individual?
- What should be our attitude toward the care of natural resources?
- Morals: relative or absolute?
- What is man’s purpose and ultimate destiny?



# Knowing GOD Personally



**International  
Students Inc.**

Sharing Christ's Love With International Students

P.O. Box C • Colorado Springs, CO 80901  
719.576.2700 • [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org)

## Tract: Knowing God Personally

### **GOD is:**

The ultimate source of everything. God is the creator of all that is seen and unseen.

*The Bible says:*

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”  
Genesis 1:1, 27

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” John 1:3

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

### **GOD’S desire:**

*Knowing Him Forever.*

God loves you and wants you to know Him forever.

*The Bible Says:*

“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3, 4

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave His Son, His one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in Him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.” John 3:16

God wants us to know Him personally, now, and forever. But we have a problem.

### **Our Problem:**

*Broken Relationship*

God created us to enjoy life and a friendship with Him.

He did not force us to love and obey Him but gave us a will and freedom of choice. The first man and woman chose to disobey God and to go their own willful way. We still make this choice today. This results in our relationship with God being broken.

*The Bible Says:*

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

“But the trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God.” Isaiah 59:2

Throughout history, individuals have tried many ways to make themselves acceptable to God...without success. *But God has provided a way to restore your relationship with Him...*

### **God's Solution:**

#### *Jesus Christ*

Jesus Christ is the only solution to this problem.

The final result of our disobedience—sin—is the penalty of death. (See Romans 6:23)

By dying on the cross, Jesus took our punishment on Himself. He rose from the dead and made the way for us to have a relationship with God now, and eternal life forever.

#### *The Bible says:*

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

“...Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture ...he was buried ...he was raised on the third day...” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

God has provided the way. Will you accept this new relationship with Him and His promise of new life?

### **Our response:**

#### *Receive Christ*

We must place our trust in Jesus by accepting the payment for our sins that Jesus paid for us on the cross. If we give our lives to Him, then we can have a right relationship with God.

“Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I’ll come right in and sit down to supper with you.” Revelation 3:20

#### *Steps to a New Relationship with God:*

1. Admit your condition. (I disobeyed God and broke my relationship with Him. This is called “sin.”) “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9
2. Be willing to turn from your sins (repent).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave. “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” John 14:6
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit. (Receive Him as Lord and Savior.) By this, you establish a lifelong

relationship with God. “But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God” John 1:12. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them.

*Example of what to pray (Make it your prayer)*

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite you to come into my life. I trust You as Savior and follow You as Lord. Thank you, Lord, for saving me. Amen.

*God’s Assurance is His Word:*

“For ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Romans 10:13

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9

*Did you sincerely ask...Jesus Christ to come into your life? If so, He has promised to do so.*

*The Bible says:*

“So whoever has God’s Son has life; whoever does not have his Son, does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:12, 13

*Walking With God*

This is the beginning of a wonderful new with Christ. To deepen this walk with Christ:

- Read your Bible every day to get to know Christ better.
- Talk to God in prayer every day.
- Be guided by the Holy Spirit.
- Tell others about Christ.
- Share your new life by your love and concern for others.
- Find another Christian or two with whom you can pray and share regularly your successes and failures.
- Worship and serve with other Christians in a church where Christ is preached.

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