

Living and Sharing the Good News with Internationals

Knowing Your Audience

Internationals are often confused by the many different churches and denominations, sometimes disillusioned with the organized church in their home countries, and unimpressed by the nominal Christianity they have seen. **It is vital that we focus on Christ** so that our lives and words glorify God.

Spend the most time at the beginning asking thoughtful, open-ended questions in order to learn all you can about their background, hopes and fears. Then you can apply the Gospel most appropriately to their unique situation.

Ask belief questions. Then you'll learn what the other person believes and he may ask you questions about what you believe. If he says he is not religious or is not interested in religion, you might ask why.

Be sure to find out what he means by the terms he uses. His definition of God, sin, etc. may be radically different from yours. Here is where researching the basic tenets of his world view can be very helpful. But be careful not to assume that anyone actually believes exactly what their official religion states. Each person is unique.

Building a Friendship and Establishing Trust

As a start, why not think about being a friend with just one or two non-Christians since being a real friend takes considerable time and energy? Ask the Lord to lead you to the person He's been preparing. It may be a roommate or a student in one of your classes. If you're a man, it will probably be another man; if you're a woman, then probably a woman.

Our actions must back up our verbal witness. Without good life testimony our verbal witness will not mean much to international visitors who carefully watch the actions and attitudes of their new friends in America. Only by the style of your life will you earn the right to be heard.

Spend time together, enjoying each other in many different contexts. You may eat some meals together and participate in recreational events together.

It is sometimes not appropriate to raise the subject of religion at an early stage, unless your friend brings it up. However, it should become clear fairly soon that you are serious about following Jesus.

It is important to pray for your friend, especially when he faces specific problems. If you wish to pray in the presence of your friend, ask his permission first and avoid preaching. Praying at meals, of course, is always appropriate.

Sharing the Good News Naturally and Biblically

Conversation will naturally lead on to the subject which is most important to us: Jesus Christ and what He means to us. Don't force the issue; just pray for the right opportunity and be ready to respond appropriately. Be sensitive to the needs of the other person and what may be behind their questions.

When you talk about the Gospel with your friend, move along as far as he is ready. But when you see his interest fade, wait until he is ready for more. You can tell by the expression on his face and by his verbal responses to what you've said so far—which means it's good to pause after you've said something to see his response. If bringing a person to Christ is primarily the work of God's Spirit, we can move along as far as the Spirit of God has prepared him, but if we push beyond that we may jeopardize future witness.

In witnessing to an international you will find him/her more interested in your personal testimony than in any discussion of church doctrine. Share what Christ has come to mean to you personally.

Make Jesus central to your witness. **Who is He?** What about the claims He made about Himself? Focus on Jesus' death and resurrection, on why He died and rose again. Know the evidence for His death and resurrection. Your testimony or personal opinions are not a substitute for the historical facts of the Gospel. Bible discussions in the Gospels are therefore particularly effective. Also, share the biblical view of God and of man, which may be radically different from your friend's.

Use illustrations and stories—as Jesus did—to explain biblical concepts. In many cultures this approach is more appreciated than straight-line logic.

Don't attack your friend's religion. Never tell your friend that his religion and ideas are all wrong. His beliefs are important to him, so have sincere respect for his position. Investigate his religion so you might appreciate what's of value. Christianity goes beyond religion. Explain that Christianity is unique in that it is not based on what we do, but on what God has done for us in Christ; the relationship is built on God's love and mercy rather than our fear and efforts. Then, over a period of time, clarify the implications of this fact.

Distinguish Christianity from America. It might be appropriate to discuss the difference between people who merely profess to be Christians and people who are committed disciples of Christ and are practicing their faith.

Work hard to focus on biblical Christianity and ethics (e.g., love and justice) rather than on your denomination's or American Christianity's views on secondary issues.

Introduce your international friend to other Christians. Do not be possessive or exclusive. The love of Christians for each other is a most powerful witness.

Invite your friend to relevant Christian events. Be sure to make it clear to your friend what kind of event it will be when you invite him. Also, it's important to discuss afterward what had been said in a Christian talk or in a Bible passage. Patiently and graciously discuss and illustrate these truths.

Provide appropriate literature. Make sure your choice is based on where your friend is in his own pilgrimage. At the appropriate time, it would be good to give your friend a copy of the New Testament or of the entire Bible in modern English. It would also be good to give him a copy of the Scriptures in his own language if he doesn't have one.

If your friend should indicate that he is not at all interested in Christianity, **it is most important that you, nevertheless, continue the friendship.** In doing so, you will demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in him as a person.

Be patient and remember—conviction of sin and conversion to Christ are the work of the Holy Spirit and may take a long time. *"Therefore, we do not lose heart."*

Follow-up and Discipleship: Helping New Believers Grow

1. Once your friends have made known their trust and belief in Christ, be sure to follow up and provide ways to help them grow as Christians and as part of a Christian fellowship, both while in America and upon their return to their home country.
2. Wait for God's time and way for new believers to identify as part of Christ's family. Be careful not to put your friend on public display or in a position where he might experience temptation or be prematurely subject to rejection or persecution by family or fellow citizens.
3. Those who are already followers of Christ when they arrive need to be received as Christian brothers and sisters and helped in finding Christian fellowship and opportunities for growth in their faith and service.
4. Try to get your friend in contact with other believers from his own country and culture, even if they live in another town or state.
5. Help new believers understand their identity as members of the body of Christ, the family of God. Introduce them to other Christians, incorporating them into a loving Christian community that will help them grow in their Christian life and service. Model Christian fellowship in your own relationship. Beware of being selfishly exclusive with your friend instead of providing exposure to other Christians and their views.

6. Work with young believers in developing a personal devotional life of Scripture study, prayer and living a daily life of joyful obedience to Christ. Pray for and with your friend often.
7. Help your friend to grow spiritually and theologically through group Bible study, reading books or listening to tapes and discussing them together, attending lectures and making other Christian training events and conferences available.
8. Explore together God's mission of reconciliation of all people to Himself, and what your role is.
9. Help your friends to apply biblical principles from these broad areas to their own lives and cultures. You should address practical issues such as relationships, honesty, studies, priorities and what their service to God and their relationship to their family and culture might be when they return to their home country.
10. Identification with a church is important in order that faith might be nurtured through regular participation in Word and Sacrament. Help your friends to make this step by telling them about your church, inviting them to join it and introducing them to your pastor and other leaders for arrangements for Baptism and for participating in the Lord's Supper.
11. Try to understand— and help your friend understand—the difference between Western cultural Christianity and biblical Christianity. All methods and thought forms are cultural. He or she will need encouragement to translate biblical principles into the cultural forms of their own people.
12. Avoid over-indoctrinating the new believer. Rather, provide the resources and skills he or she will need to think about and act out as a Christian. Remember, dialogue is more valuable than monologue.
13. Beware of attention only to imparting theological concepts. Your primary aim is that they actively follow Jesus.
14. Be careful about overwhelming your friends with too many programmed activities. Remember, they are busy students who need caring Christian friendship.
15. Help new believers to find a fellowship of Christians in their home country (through LCMS World Mission) and to get in touch with them when they return. Keep contact with them by letter after they have returned home. You may need to be very selective in what you write, depending on the country.