

Crossing the Christian Cultural Frontier

by Craig Colbert, InterFACE Ministries Staff in Columbia, MO

Culture is a wonderful paradigm for getting real about discussing evangelism. I've heard it said that after a person has followed Christ for two years they no longer can name any non-Christian friends. Within two years the average Christian is immersed in a Christian sub-culture that effectively builds barriers to his or her ability to understand the world or culture of non-Christians. So, how can we understand the world through the eyes of non-Christians if we don't have any non-Christian friends?

When I was a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia I had many internationals in my classes. They would often come up to me after class asking me to explain what the professor had taught. When time came for group projects, I had internationals asking me to be in their group. I was so busy in my



studies that I didn't have time to get to know any of these folks personally.

Toward the end of the second semester, I asked Hari if he and his wife could come over to my apartment for dinner. Nine months had gone by since I'd first met Hari. He said he'd love to but he and his wife were returning to Indonesia the next day. I left that meeting with Hari disappointed and discouraged. I started to reflect. Here I was a "missionary" who was too busy to be friends with Muslims. I looked at my weekly schedule and saw that I was involved in no less than four small group Bible studies with Christians each week and attended church three times a week.

I decided to attend only one small group Bible study, and rather than attend the Sunday evening service of my church, to use that time as a social time that my wife, Shirley, and I could spend with non-Christian international friends. We ended up having so many international friends coming to our apartment that I involved our InterVarsity small group and invited them to join us on Sunday evenings. We agreed as a small group to have one evangelistic event and one social/welcoming event each month.

A couple months later we started the ministry of International Friends, which involves monthly international friendship dinners, English Conversation Partners and Groups, a grocery shuttle, Friday or Saturday night dinner followed by I-GIGs (International Groups Investigating God), and a Sunday afternoon time for followers of Jesus. Today, spending social time with non-Christians is a regular part of my life. I have crossed the cultural frontier of my Christian sub-culture to really enter into the lives of Internationals, and I am involved in helping other Christians cross this cultural frontier.

Thank God It's Friday

by Terrell Smith, ISM Staff in Madison, WI

Friday is one of my favorite days of the week. Today I get to spend time in the student union, sharing Christ with international students. During the short fifteen minute drive to campus I pray for two things: significant conversations and a parking place. God grants them both.

The International Conversation and Coffee Hour, sponsored by the university for international students, is a welcoming place for about fifty internationals of all kinds—undergrads, grads, visiting scholars, and even bored spouses of internationals, looking for a chance to improve their English, meet a friend, or just hang out. I choose an empty table directly under a light, so that later we can see enough in the dimly lit room to read. As internationals begin filtering into the room, I smile at some, greet others by name, and pray that God will lead the right person to my table.

"Excuse me, may I ask you a question?" a Chinese student asks, coffee cup in hand.

"Sure, would you like to join me?" I reply.

"I'm really confused," the Chinese woman starts. "I've been reading the Bible. Is Jesus a god, or is he a man?"

Not all conversations start out like that. It's gloriously fun when they do, though. Most are more on the order of, "May I sit here?" "Are you a professor?" "Where is home for you?" "What do you study?" "Can you tell me how to get a driver's license?"

During the course of conversation over snacks and hot chocolate or coffee, I silently ask God to direct the conversation. Sometimes I ask questions, such as, "How

did you decide to study your major? What do you hope to do in the future? Why?" because these questions often lead to deeper conversations about goals in life.

Sometimes I take a more direct approach and ask, "What is your family's religious background? Is that something you also practice, or is it for you more the religion of your parents?"

I always bring a briefcase full of Bibles in various languages, and as the conversation leads, will pull out a Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or other language New Testament, hold it out to them with both hands (indicating it's a gift), and ask if they have ever seen a book like this. "Is this your language?" I ask with a smile.

"Oh! A Bible! I've heard about this book, but I've never touched one before! Is this for me?"

The joy in their faces as they hold their first Bible is precious. We usually

turn to the table of contents, and I share briefly what kind of book it is, who wrote it, and that the main theme is about how much God loves each one of us, and how we can know forgiveness and new life.

Of course, there are many questions. As we discuss these, I have discovered that I am also learning more about God and his grace.

Often the following Friday the same international will seek me out to continue our conversation. Sometimes they have already read through a Gospel account and are filled with new questions. As we share together, I pray silently for myself and the people I'm talking with, that God will give me his words, and that he will touch their hearts.

Not all Friday conversations go the way I hope—sometimes we discuss passing the driver's exam, English idioms, current issues or their major. Sometimes what may seem superficial to us may be important for building relationships.

After two hours of what I thought was “blah-blah-blah” one Friday, I walked out of the room, silently complaining to God, “Lord, why didn’t you give me a good conversation today? No one wanted a Bible. No one wanted to talk about spiritual things. Lord, I wanted a good conversation today.”

“Excuse me.” I heard a voice behind me as I walked out the door. “May I ask you a question?”

“Sure,” I replied.

“Could you please explain to me who Jesus is?”

Amazed, I asked why.

“Well, I have talked with Christians before and they always made me feel uncomfortable. I was sitting at the table next to yours, and I overheard your conversation. You made me feel very comfortable. So, could you please tell me who Jesus is?”

We stood there in the hall for the next two hours talking about Jesus, and as I drove home, I confessed to the Lord that his ways are not my ways. He is the Lord, and in control of everything—praise God! Sometimes internationals accept an invitation to our Wednesday small group Bible study; sometimes they join our family Sunday for worship services and the International Club luncheon which follows. God uses these conversations to draw internationals into his Kingdom. Thank God it’s Friday!

Note: If you try this on your campus, please be sure you have permission from the organizers to engage in conversation with students, being careful to respect their meeting. This calls for careful and wise interaction answering students’ questions without pressure or manipulation. You want to be able to return regularly and build relationships.



Praying In the Harvest

by Katie Rawson, ISM Area Director in Raleigh, NC

A few months ago a team of InterVarsity staff decided to skip lunch once each week and pray for their non-Christian international friends to come to Christ. One day, a woman they had been praying for suddenly announced that she was going to be baptized, somewhat to the surprise of the staff member who knew her best. A volunteer talked and prayed with her, and when the day of the baptism arrived, her testimony left no doubt that she had come into the kingdom. The staff team decided to try the experiment again, but this time they added a three-hour prayer meeting on one of the days.

Following this prayer time, a number of non-Christians registered for an evangelistic retreat at the last minute, and the total number of registrants rose from 44 to nearly 70. Four people came into the kingdom, and many seekers made significant progress during that retreat. These stories highlight the crucial nature of prayer in seeing individuals come to Christ.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they do not see that Jesus is God. Evangelism always involves us in some degree of spiritual conflict, and worshipful,

listening prayer is the major means to victory. Prayer also keeps us dependent on the Holy Spirit for leading and power. One of the groups I supervise is an Indian Christian Fellowship at Virginia Tech. Early on in the history of the fellowship, these students chose to fast and pray weekly, particularly for their non-Christian friends. A number of their friends, including Hindus, came to Christ as a result.

Here are a number of ways that individuals and groups can pray during the process of sowing the seed, watering, and reaping. I could tell a story, usually multiple stories, about most of the points given below, but the Scriptures provided are even more valuable:

1. Abide in Christ through the Word and prayer in order to bear fruit (John 15).
2. Pray to meet people who are searching for God (Philip, Acts 8).
3. Prayer walking: Pray near or inside places where people live or meet (Joshua 6:1-20).
4. Pray for boldness and a clear message when sharing (Ephesians 6:20; Colossians 4:4).
5. Pray for the sowing, watering, and reaping process (Matthew 13:1-23).
6. Pray to understand the obstacles to conversion for your friend, then ask God to tear down these strongholds in the name of Jesus (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).
7. Pray to understand what God is doing in your friend’s life (John 5:19).
8. Pray with fasting, asking the Lord for direction in evangelism (Acts 13:2).
9. Pray with your friends for their needs when they are open to this.
10. Pray beforehand and have others pray while you are sharing your faith.
11. Pray in agreement with one or two prayer partners (Matthew 18:19-20).
12. Pray that the enemy’s power to blind would be bound and that your friend would see the glory of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6).
13. Pray corporately (Acts 4:23-31). Enter prayer through worship and thanksgiving, allow time for confession, and spend time listening to hear how to pray. Then pray God’s Word (see below). This is how to pray “in the Spirit” and can keep a prayer meeting from dragging or becoming dull and lifeless.
14. Declare God’s Word over people and situations (Isaiah 55:10-11), and pray scriptural prayers such as these:
 - for insight into God’s character and will for both seekers and believers (Ephesians 1:17-19; 3:14-19; Colossians 1:9-12)
 - for God to turn on the light in a person’s spirit (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)
 - for the Holy Spirit to hover over a situation, bringing life (Genesis 1:1-2)
 - for a revelation of God’s vision for a person or situation (Proverbs 29:18)
 - for God’s will to be done and his kingdom to come in a person or situation (Matthew 6:10)
 - for deliverance from evil for individuals and freedom for captives (Isaiah 61:1-4)
 - for the salvation of a people group (Romans 10:1)
 - for protection and maturity for believers (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Colossians 4:12)

