



Connecting with Japanese ~ Fast Facts...

Japanese and Western cultures are quite different. Below are some tips to help you connect with Japanese students:

Background

1. **Religion:** Most Japanese claim no interest in religion and know next to nothing about Christianity. Many even see Christianity as a cult. So they may become suspicious when you bring up issues of faith.
2. **Curiosity:** Because of this limited background, Japanese students are often intrigued by the number of churches they see in the U.S. and by the loving care of Christians.
3. **Honne vs. Tatemae:** Because Japanese place such a high value on social harmony and a strong dislike of any type of confrontation, they often suppress their real feelings (*honne*) in favor of what is expected in social interaction (*tatemae*).

Helpful *Attitudes* in Connecting:

1. **Initiation:** Japanese generally have a positive view of Americans, so most will look forward to making friends with you.
2. **Persistence:** Students are often shy (usually due to language and culture differences) and may seem uninterested but really are not. Be patient in conversation. Also because of their shyness be persistent in reaching out to them.
3. **Concrete vs. Abstract thinking:** Japanese tend towards concrete, relational thinking vs. westerners who often express thoughts in terms of abstracts. Keep your examples to the “here and now” as much as possible.

Helpful *Actions* in Connecting:

1. **Discern:** Before sharing the gospel, try to discern how open they are to spiritual things. Ask, “Are you interested in the Bible”? Even if not, maintain the relationship. They may become interested over time.
2. **Define:** As you share the gospel, ask what certain words (God, sin, grace, etc.) mean to them. There are no really good “dynamic equivalents” in Japanese for these words. For example: Instead of “God” use “God of the Bible”. Also, explain that the word “sin” in the Bible refers to selfish attitudes.
3. **Observe:** Be sensitive to their non-verbal behavior – Japanese usually will not tell you directly when they disagree. They don’t want to cause you to “lose face”. They may express “no” by hesitating, tilting the head, saying “not sure”, “maybe”, “sometime”, etc.
4. **Gently Correct:** If a student expresses something that you don’t agree with, respond gently and as indirectly as possible. You don’t want to cause them to lose face either.