

## 2. BUILDING BRIDGES TO SOUTH ASIANS

Due to many misperceptions of Christianity, it is unusual for Hindu students to honestly consider the gospel apart from contact with a Christian friend or community. It is within that relational environment that they can understand the gospel and wrestle with their questions.

**Our goal is to build bridges:**

- **Relational bridges** of relational trust that demonstrate the love of Jesus and open doors for further connection and conversation
- **Spiritual bridges** to clarify misunderstandings about the message of Jesus and focus on a restored relationship with God (a transformed heart rather than a conformed cultural identity)
- **Cultural Bridges:** Take time to get to know South Asian students on an individual basis and as part of the larger community. Ask about their family background (language, siblings, culture, religious traditions, holidays, etc). Learn about their hobbies and interests.

1. **Ask about their religious background.** Is their family devout? How do they worship, and what holidays do they celebrate? Share your family's religious background (Protestant, Catholic, etc.). Don't hide your identity as a follower of Jesus.
2. **Be quick to affirm the positive aspects of Indian culture** like loyal families, strong community values and the quest for spiritual truth. Refrain from criticizing traditions like the caste system or arranged marriages.
3. **Fellowship over chai (tea) or a meal is a great way to get to know Indian friends.** Indian food is an integral part of the culture, and hospitality is highly valued. (Note: Indians have a variety of dietary practices and restrictions. If you are entertaining South Asians, it is very important to have vegetarian food available. Avoid serving beef to Hindus and pork to Muslims. Muslims will eat chicken, and so will many - but not all - Hindus.) Ask your friends about their food preferences when inviting them to a meal.
4. **Remember to consider an Indian's orientation toward family and social groups.** Pray for a person's family when you pray for the individual. Enter his or her circle of friends and

allow your friend to enter yours. Decisions are often made as a group, so include the group in planning activities whenever possible. Join South Asian events and celebrations - by yourself or with your group of friends.

5. **Think twice about making appointments for surveys or spiritual discussion.** Such appointments may seem too formal for a friendly conversation. Try spontaneously texting: “Hey, I’m on campus till 7. Let me know if you want to meet up.” If you know a friend well, dropping by his or her apartment unannounced is fine.
6. **Expand your friendship and your knowledge of their culture by watching Bollywood movies with South Asian students.** Two good choices are: “PK,” a 2014 hit that explores the search for spiritual truth as conducted by the major religions of India, and “3 Idiots,” a view of life at the top engineering colleges of India. Note: “3 Idiots” contains profanity, and both these films contain some sexual references, but these are mild compared to what is found in most American films.
7. **Don’t pretend to be someone’s friend in order to share the gospel with that person.** Love and serve everyone without distinction. But also look for those with whom you have a natural affinity or shared interests.