

## ENTERING THEIR WORLD

Put yourself in their shoes. When was the last time you felt like an “outsider”? How did it feel when a new group that you entered quit inviting you to things? You likely experienced this a few times as a child or a teenager — especially if you moved to a new school where the relationships were already developed and the friendship lines were already drawn. Most of us hated the feelings that accompanied that situation. We felt lonely, fearful, and disapproved by the very ones we needed to accept us — our peers. Those were awkward and difficult days.

### What does it mean to enter their world?

What we are talking about is a depth of relationship and acceptance beyond the surface level. Entering into their world is all about knowing the person, from the inside out — knowing their heart, their way of thinking (whether or not you agree), and their culture. It’s at this point that you can begin to have an influence on them, for they will actually allow you to do so. Here are some thoughts to help you as you get to know your international friend:

- Lifestyle and values differ from culture to culture.
- It is good for you to accept any cultural differences that do not contradict God’s ways.
- As with friends in your own culture, you can appreciate an international’s thinking as valid yet perhaps imperfect. Such imperfection does not necessarily make it “wrong.”

### Some other thoughts...

- **Slow down in listening and communicating.** If English is a second language for your international friend, it is vital for you to allow him or her the extra time necessary to think and act in this new language. We communicate in a hurried pace. Ministry to international students requires patience in allowing them to frame their thoughts.
- **It’s a matter of relationships.** Take time to develop relationships. In many cultures, trust is built slowly over time. By allowing for such a process of trust-building, you will increase the eventual likelihood of developing quality and quantity in your ministry. These bonds will pay rich dividends especially when you introduce the gospel.
- **It is best to take the role of a learner/servant.** Choose to be a learner of other customs and beliefs, and a servant to meet the needs of internationals. How do you find out their

needs? Ask, of course. But also observe them in their typical living situations.

- **It is best to communicate through dialogue.** In cross-cultural communication, feedback is vital. Words often do not have the same meanings. “God”, “faith”, “sin”, and “love” often mean different things in different cultures. When you use a word, ask your friend what it means to them. Then work at coming to a common understanding.

### Some practical ideas...

- Go to a restaurant that serves food from your friend’s country.
- Have him or her come to your home to cook foods from home country.
- Have your friend suggest a book or article from his or her country that has been translated into English and discuss it.
- For English conversation, select topics that deal with character or philosophy of life. These topics are easier to use in bridging into spiritual discussions. A couple of websites that offer many ideas for conversation are: [www.speechtree.com](http://www.speechtree.com) and <http://iteslj.org/questions/>.
- Use the “Soularium” cards to help international students to open up and share their deeper thoughts on life and religion. You can find out these cards or place an order at [www.mysoularium.com](http://www.mysoularium.com).
- The [International Conversation Cafe](http://www.internationalconversationcafe.com) site has a lot of great suggestions for more meaningful discussion..
- Search for a web-based newspaper from your friend’s country and discuss editorials, etc. Try to choose topics that will help you better understand his or her culture. This will allow your international friend to be the expert in the discussion. (Be very careful about discussing controversial issues in politics, especially if your friendship is relatively new.)
- Go together to watch a sport that is popular in your friend’s country.