

TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO SHARE CHRIST

Discussions about styles of outreach tend to be a waste of time. Many turn into disputes between two opposites. Matt, a supporter of “friendship evangelism,” pushes the idea that “we must earn the right to share the gospel by building a relationship with a non-Christian.” To him, any other approach is insensitive. But his friend Jenna claims that “friendship evangelism is too slow and is actually deceitful.”

Who’s right in this debate? Probably both Matt and Jenna are right...and both are wrong. But neither approach—in its extreme form—is biblical. We believe ***there is an unnecessary divide between “friendship evangelism” and “initiative evangelism.”***

Most experienced in ministry agree, the ideal form of evangelism—especially in ministry to internationals is **initiative evangelism that is combined with warmth and friendship:**

- International students are intelligent and perceptive. Even if you don’t declare your faith, they will pick up certain cues from your values and speech. **Don’t hide your faith.**
- But **don’t feel that you must emphasize your faith in your first interaction.** To do so would be counter to social norms for talking with someone you just met. Instead, build common ground as you talk about each other’s families, interests and work. Check out Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the well in John 4. Notice that he began the conversation by asking for a drink of water.
- Many Chinese and Japanese are relatively open to discuss Christian faith while Muslims or Hindus may be cautious or even distrustful. **Your friend’s cultural background may affect the degree to which you can share spiritual truth early in the relationship.**
- **Avoid talking only about the gospel.** Non-Christian internationals need to see that you are a well-rounded person with a variety of interests. And they need to see how your faith influences your overall life.
- Remember that **internationals have many needs.** You can’t discover these needs or meet them if you never talk about things beyond the gospel.
- **When you do talk about the gospel, interact with respect and warmth.** You probably won’t see much impact if you talk in a “preachy” manner—dominating the conversation and speaking too forcefully.
- **Build a friendship that is unconditional.** You will probably spend more time with

internationals that place faith in Christ than those who have not yet done so. But never choose to end a friendship with someone because he or she has not yet believed.

One ministry veteran likes to make this principle clear to his friends. He often says, ***“I hope you will become a Christian before too long, but even if you never believe in Jesus, I will always want to be your friend.”***

Suggested discussion starters:

- Tell me a little about your religious background.
- Where are you in your journey of faith?
- Many people assume that all Americans are Christians. What do you know about Christianity?
- Has anyone ever taken the time to explain to you what Christians believe?
- Christ has made a big difference in my life. Can I tell you a little about it?