

UNCONDITIONAL FRIENDSHIP

When asked why they became Christians, the number one reason given by international students was the love they received from their Christian friends.

Christians know the importance of **showing unconditional love**, but many have a problem that inhibits their witness. Many are afraid of offending their friends by being too open about their faith in Christ. Jesus is the best example of how to keep a healthy balance-how to demonstrate both **grace and truth**. Here are a few pointers to for maintaining a warm, gracious relationship while still sharing the truth:

1. **Be open about your faith.** Never feel ashamed of being a Christian. Many international students are curious about Jesus and have fewer qualms about discussing religious topics than most Americans do. Share with them the insights you are gaining from your time in the Word. Reveal to them what you are praying for and be open about your dependence on Jesus. Ephesians 5:16 says, “Make the most of your time because the days are evil.”
2. **Take the opportunities God gives.** Remember that your friends have a disease called “sin.” To ignore the opportunities God gives for sharing your faith is NOT a loving behavior. If you ever get into a situation where you feel scared to be open about your faith, it might be a good time to pray. Ask the Lord to reveal your heart’s motive for maintaining this friendship, and ask Him to show you why you are so hesitant to talk about Jesus.
3. **Do not make your friend a project.** International students can detect disingenuous “love” as much as anyone else, and if your love for them is based on an agenda it is not genuine love. Another way of saying this is, “Love your friends where they’re at.” Many international students will investigate Christianity for several years before finally making a decision of faith. Continue to love them and pray for them, and trust God to use your unconditional love as a means of revealing His love for them in Jesus Christ.
4. **Love your friends for who they are,** and don’t stray from the simple message of the gospel. “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,” said Jesus when the Pharisees grumbled about him eating with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:32). Loving your friends unconditionally means loving them where they are at and not judging them for their lifestyles. Your international student friends ought to feel that even

if they never come to Christ, you will always be their friend. They should know that even if all their other “friends” abandon them, you will be there.

5. **Meet them at their point of need.** International students have many needs when they arrive in America, and simple acts of service can go a long way in communicating unconditional love to them. Consider taking them grocery shopping, helping them learn their way around the city and teaching them aspects of American culture.
6. **Go deep with your friends,** as Jesus did. Don't be afraid to “be real” with them. Talk about real heart issues. Of course, you should engage in friendly, fun conversations and activities with them, but those times shouldn't keep you from other opportunities to talk about deeper things. Your friends, like many people who met Jesus, are probably hiding deep areas of shame and insecurity. If you can open up and reveal your issues in the proper time and way they will likely do the same with you. This will give you an incredible opportunity to love them in a way they have never been loved. Then pray and watch what God can do in His power.