

The World at Your Door

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While it has always been God's plan for the Church to go to distant parts of the world, this strategy is only half of God's equation for reaching the people who don't know Christ. Over the centuries, the Church has missed or nearly missed an equally significant part of God's plan—reaching the world that God brings to the Church. The New Testament book of Acts records in its early pages how men and women were gathered together from around the world. In Jerusalem, these people heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, accepted it, and returned to their countries as ambassadors for God.

Today history repeats itself in the U.S., where over 550,000 of the world's best, brightest, and/or privileged students from every nation are within minutes of a local church. Such a representative gathering is unparalleled in human history. These students are attending America's institutions of higher learning. Their present quest is not for land or gold but for the prestige of an American education or a grasp of new Western technologies. These future leaders will return to their societies with the competitive skills for the geo-economic race into the future.

Each year over 120,000 new international students and scholars begin a four-year sojourn in American universities and other institutions of higher learning. While these students come to America with specific goals and plans, most of them are unaware of a personal divine plan from God. As caring and committed Christians come across their paths and offer friendship in Him, they can learn about the greatest friend of all Jesus Christ.

Immersed in a new culture and away from family and friends, these international students are often lonely. They often feel out of place, lost, and anxious about understanding new people and a new situation. Simple tasks can be bewildering for the international student—as they would be to us if we were overseas for a period of time—such as how to locate housing or banking, or the difference between a grocery store, drugstore, specialty shops, and a department store. When these internationals face these challenges alone, daily life can become extremely discouraging to them.

The course of history might have been different during the 1940s if the lonely student Matsuoki had been befriended by loving Christians 20 years earlier. Mistreated as a student in the United States, he returned home and helped

plan the attack on Pearl Harbor. Later in his memoirs, Matsuoki attributed his anger toward America to his experience during his short sojourn in the United States.

Mengistu Mariam, from Ethiopia, arrived at Aberdeen, Maryland, in the 1950s for military training. He soon became embittered and resentful as a result of the way he was treated by Americans. Over time, he too rose to a position of power, and in 1974 was a key figure in the coup against King Haile Selassie. Mariam established a Marxist government and began a relentless campaign to root out what he called "alien religion" in Ethiopia, even though Christianity originated in the Middle East. In an address to the nation, Mariam called missionaries the number one source of imperialist infiltration in the past. Shortly after the speech, he expelled all missionaries and made it impossible for anyone who attempted to evangelize to continue their work. He also confiscated a \$15 million missionary radio station and began to broadcast Marxist propaganda. Churches were closed, and believers in Jesus Christ fell under intense religious persecution, including frequent imprisonment. The key leader in this effort was one international student who had a bad experience in the "land of the free."

In stark contrast is the experience of Bakht Singh, a Sikh man who came from northern India to study engineering in Canada. This young Indian began his studies like any other foreign student, but a Christian couple reached out to Bakht in friendship and love. They gave him a Bible and encouraged him to meet other Christians. Through their friendship, Bakht accepted Christ. The couple also taught him the Scriptures. Later he returned to India not only as an engineer but as a preacher and evangelist. As a result of his faithful work for Christ, over 700 churches have been established in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

Time magazine attests to the exploding opportunities to shape future leaders at American universities. In an April 13, 1992 article, Jim Smolowe says, "American universities and col-

leges are the envy of the world. For all their abiding troubles, this country's 3,500 institutions were flooded with 407,530 foreign students (a number up nearly 150,000 in six years with enrollment at 554,000 in 1997) from 193 different countries last year. Asia led the way with 40,000 from the Peoples Republic of China, and 36,610 from Japan, followed by India and Canada." In fact, international students are capturing a large proportionate share of the Ph.D.s awarded annually in the United States.

Beverly Watkins, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, stated, "The U.S. educates more foreign students than any other country in the world. Nearly one-third of all students worldwide who study abroad enroll at U.S. institutions." Nearly 75 percent of these students and scholars use funds from family or other non-U.S. resources for their primary means of financial support during their studies, says Richard Krasno with the Institute of International Education. This fact points out that these students come from the upper levels of their society. Traditional missionaries would rarely meet or impact these people, but near our homes, we can meet, interact with, and serve these future leaders. These young people are incredibly sensitive, kind, and appreciative. They don't know that they are future leaders. Dressed in running shoes, jeans, and open-collar shirts, they are respectful, yet personally searching for a friend—away from their traditional peer pressure, family pressure, political pressure, and religious pressure. In the midst of their pilgrimage is a search for truth, and we have the honor of loving each one of them for Christ's sake.

Developing a friendship with internationals isn't complicated. Every day kindness is all you need to entertain them in your home. It's not hard to develop a friendship. As relationships form you can find sensitive ways to respectfully present the claims of Christ and help them grow in his or her Christian faith. We're learning some of the ways that international students can be helped as they return to their homelands.

Study Questions

1. What kind of simple tasks could be done with an international student which could be a significant act of caring?
2. What factors make international students more receptive to truth when studying in the West?

