

be·coming·us

Sermon #1: Students

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Text: Matt 28:19

Theme: Impacting international students.

Intro: God told us to go to all nations. In a strange twist, just when the church has most mobilized to go, God is bringing the nations to us. God's strategy is not only cost effective; it is brilliant. The average cost of a missionary family from the US is approximately \$40,000. They may work for years before breaking cultural barriers and making their first disciple. Even when they do, they will likely reach the marginalized, young, and poor. Similarly, short-term mission trips are, on average, \$2,500 for each individual and almost never result in long-term community transformation. Is there a better way? What if God would send prospects to our doorstep? What if they were eager to learn our culture rather than us learning theirs? What if they were from the most elite echelon of their own cultures and countries?

I. Did you know?

A. International students:

1. One million foreign students are currently in the U.S., the highest rate in 35 years.
2. 50% of them will be national leaders.
3. 231 nations are here in U.S. universities.
4. Yet tragically, 70% of all international students will study for four years here and not be in one Christian home during that period of time!

B. Demographics:

1. The top six countries that have students who study in the U.S. are: China, India, Korea, Canada, Taiwan, and Japan. They total 56 percent of our international students.
2. The top five host states are California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, and Illinois.
3. The top fields of study for these international students were: business and management, engineering, physical and life sciences, math and computer science.

II. God's word in our world:

A. Twisted Scripture: [we don't mean we will twist Scripture, but God is doing something new and startling that gives a whole new twist for two passages]:

1. Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."
 - a) If you trace the history of missions, you realize that not until the 20th century did the church as a whole take seriously the Great Commission. And even then, most who went were profession clergy.
 - b) That is until the 1980's when a movement began to send strategically gifted Christians around the world for community

transformation: farmers, doctors, lawyers, builders, accountants, and engineers.

- c) Today, God is doing something else new and astounding. Through the American University system, American Christians don't need plane tickets, visas, passports, or shots. We simply need to open our vehicles and dinner tables once a month. It will cost you less than a movie and will give you purpose, global impact, help raise your children with better perspective, and give you experiences and information you could never have had before. How?
Hospitality. That leads to a second passage:
2. Hebrews 13:2 "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."
 - a) The Greek word, philoxenia is made up of two words: Friendship (philos) and Stranger (xenia). When we befriend a stranger, we are following the biblical mandate for hospitality.
 - b) This rare word is only used twice in the NT (also in Romans 12:13), both times it is intended to goad local Christians into helping Christian evangelists.
 - c) In our context, it is exciting to think that our simple acts of hospitality could make evangelists, especially to countries we could not evangelize and at social levels much higher than we will ever infiltrate.
 - d) See this article for a long list of foreign dictators and political leaders who studied in America:
https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/OIE/documents/YED_TERDAYSINTERNATIONALSTUDENTS.pdf .
 - e) Stop complaining about the cost of war if you're not willing to share a meal. Stop complaining about the rise of terrorism if you ignore the foreigner among us. Stop expecting your government to do what only the church of Jesus Christ can.
- B. Forgotten Scripture: Matthew 25:35-40, "I was a stranger and you invited me in'... the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"
 1. The power of the stranger is their openness to change. They have already demonstrated their willingness to adopt and adapt to a different culture. Christianity is a cultural phenomenon most are interested in. If you are sharing culture rather than overtly proselytizing, they will be far more open.
 2. When people are lonely and out of their comfort zone, they are most appreciative and most open to change. The first 72 hours after arrival and holidays are the most important windows for engagement.
 3. They want a relationship with you not compassion from you. Normal is extraordinary. Foreign students want to know what real life is like since their image is almost exclusively from Hollywood portrayals...God help us!

4. Share a story here of a foreign student who found Christ through local hospitality.

III. Simple and effective strategies that YOU can do:

A. Students:

1. Offer a ride to the store.
2. Help with colloquial English.
3. Invite to join your group to a movie, concert, sporting event, family picnic, or to church. This is all new, frightening, and exciting to them.
4. Bring them home with you for weekends and/or holidays. These are especially lonely times. The act of having them in your home is unbelievably powerful in **most cultures**.

B. Homeowners:

1. Find a person of peace—a current student they connect with, a faculty member, or service provider from your church. If you have no connections through the church, most universities have an Office of International Students who would welcome a host family for international students.
2. Invite a group to dinner once a month. Often inviting two is better since having a friend with them will put them at ease. Remember to ask about dietary restrictions: Muslims and Jews would be mortified if you served pork, and Hindus and Buddhists often feel the same about beef. Your children and pets can be magnetic for making an international feel at home (although it's good to remember that many cultures view dogs as frightening or unclean).
3. Showing interest and awareness of their country goes a long way to establish good will (10 minutes on Wikipedia will do wonders). If you don't know, ask and listen. Have them teach you a couple phrases from their language or cook a dish in your kitchen from their country (after a relationship has been established). By all means, learn to pronounce his/her name correctly.
4. Empty nesters can open their home for study nights, laundry, game nights, and holidays, especially when dorms are closed. Holiday traditions can be powerful, like decorating a Christmas tree or baking cookies. Offer them a gift of a Bible. If you see someone in a local coffee shop who looks like they are struggling with language or culture, offer to help.
5. Share a testimonial from a host family and how it benefitted them.

C. Your church:

1. Organize a group of potential host families.
2. Host a goat roast...seriously. It's a big deal for students to have a "home" cooked meal.
3. Provide a space for them to celebrate important holidays from their culture when they might be homesick. Some Asian cultures observe a Mooncake festival in September or October. Other Asian countries (such as China, Korea, Vietnam, and Mongolia) celebrate the lunar New Year anywhere between December and March on our calendars. Still others (Laos and Thailand) celebrate their New Year in April. Islamic calendars

mark the New Year in November or December. Inviting international students to celebrate their holidays gives them hope and may well open a dialogue about Christian celebrations and the good news of Jesus.

4. Share a story here of a church that has had success doing these things to illustrate how easy it is.

D. Take Away:

1. Isaiah 60:3 (ESV) “And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”
2. This is happening right now. Who’s in? Have a way for people in the church to meet with a key point person from a nearby university and to offer their home as a host family for monthly meals.

FIELDS OF STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

