

Cross-Cultural Friendships

Give exotic FOOD – “eat this politely!”

- We're not very good at being adventurous – we're really phased by unfamiliar food
- But this is what international students face all the time.
- It's not easy living in a foreign country....

We're going to be thinking this morning about how we can build friendships with people cross-culturally. But first let's remind ourselves why we should be doing this!

Biblically

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

- *What does this passage tell us about God's desire for the people he has created? (v9-11)*
- *What did Jesus have to do to make this possible? (v6-8)*
- *What is God's desire for the people who come to the Barn?*
- *What do we need to do to make that possible?*

This doesn't mean we should see the people who come to the Barn as evangelistic targets, but it does mean that we should desire to present them mature in Christ. If we really care for someone as a friend we should want for them to become mature followers of Christ.

- *What is God's ultimate purpose in everyone confessing Jesus is Lord?*
- *Do we desire for God to be glorified through what we do at the Barn?*

Then we need to humble ourselves and help our international friends to bow before Christ as Lord. That means humbly learning how to overcome the cultural differences between us and them, and build friendships with them so that we can share the gospel, even if that requires us to make sacrifices for them (maybe in terms of our time or our energy or our tastebuds!). Later on Bartow will be doing a session on how to share the gospel cross culturally, but in this session we're going to focus on how to build friendships across cultures.

Understand your own culture

How would you describe British culture?

English people are generally very bad at communication. We're naturally reserved and very easily embarrassed. Actually it's often easier to talk to someone from a different culture because they're often far more responsive than English people. Also, if they think we're strange they'll probably assume it's because we're British rather than thinking we're personally strange!

The invisible wall

There's an invisible wall between us and someone from another culture. It's there because of the cultural differences between us.

What is Culture?

- Affects what we think and how we behave
- Sense of right and wrong, what's important, beliefs, taboo subjects etc. (not obvious).
- Our food, dress, language, body language, customs (obvious)

However there's also an invisible door and it is possible to learn the skills needed go through it.

Building friendships cross-culturally

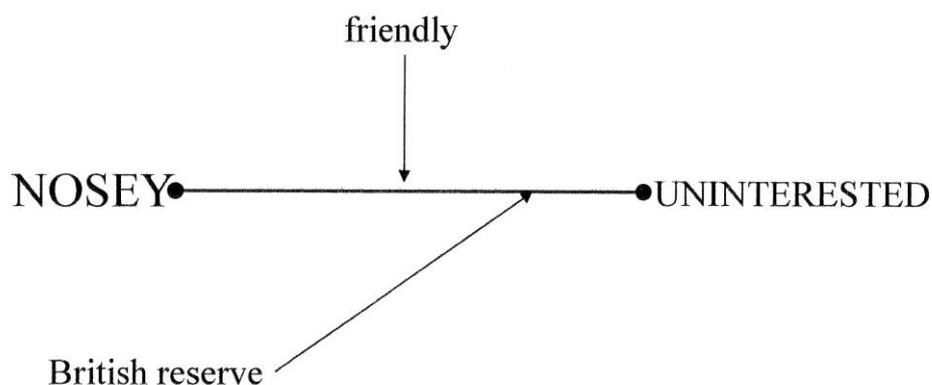
We hope that the international students we meet at the Barn will in time become real friends, so we should try to see them as potential real friends from the start.

In many ways the way we form friendships with international students is just the same as with someone British! But there are also differences because of our different cultures.

1) Asking questions is great

We tend to be afraid to ask questions, especially with people of another culture: we're afraid of asking the wrong question or not understanding the answer.

How we think, and how we come across to other cultures



Because we are so afraid of being nosy, we “mind our own business” as it seems rude to ask people too many questions. Sometimes, though, our polite reserve can appear as lack of interest in others.

But asking questions shows that we are interested in someone. Listening to the answers (and communicating to them that we're listening) shows that we care!

What sort of questions can we ask to really get to know someone?

- *What are their ambitions for the future*
- *What do they hope to get from being in Britain*
- *What's the best thing about being in Britain*
- *What's the worst thing about being in Britain*
- *What they miss most from their country*
- *How do they feel about things in their lives/in the news etc.*

But there are some cultures (Japanese especially) where they are as private as English people so we need to be careful with them that we don't ask questions that are too personal.

In many cultures the family is especially important. I was talking to MICHAEL (China) a couple of days ago and he asked me "when you meet a friend, do you ask them how their family is?" I said that no normally I wouldn't, unless for example I knew their husband and hadn't seen him for a while, and he said that in China when you meet a friend one of the first things you ask them is how their family is, it's a way of opening up the conversation and showing that you really care about them. So we need also to take an interest in their family and try to remember what they tell us.

How can we show someone that we're listening to them?

- Eye contact (but some cultures don't maintain eye contact when talking – watch how they behave).
- Nod and smile and say 'yes' in the right places.
- Ask questions about what they've said which show you're listening.
- Remember what they say and refer to it later.

2) Go on – talk about yourself

Don't be afraid to talk about yourself. It allows the other person to relax with you and makes them feel less like you're interrogating them! They feel honoured when you show that you trust them by making yourself vulnerable. It also gives them permission to talk about themselves. ELAINE and SUJIN (Paul)

But be careful you don't talk about yourself constantly!

3) Accept that differences are real

Cultural differences are real. We tend to think that they are the ones living in a foreign country and so they should adapt their behaviour in order to fit in. Most of them will have made huge cultural adaptations even before they get here and far more when they're actually here. However they usually can't adapt completely to our culture so we need to be willing to meet them somewhere in the middle. This is part of humbling ourselves for the sake of the gospel. Understanding how difficult it is for them to adapt can help us to accept them as they are.

Where there are differences it's usually not that one of us is right and the other wrong, but simply that we're different. It's important that we have a humble attitude and expect to learn from them.

What specific cultural differences have you come across?

- Provocative clothing (MIYAKO)
- Physical touch in Asian cultures (but CHAN)
- Blowing your nose in front of Japanese
- Giving something to a Muslim with your left hand
- Throwing things (SEUNG MI)
- Licking your fingers (MICHAEL)
- Dealing with embarrassment (ELAINE)

The better you know the culture your friend comes from the more you will know what is offensive, so try to find out what is and isn't culturally acceptable (ask your friend or someone else from the same culture, read books etc.).

Take a genuine interest in their culture, but don't assume you know things about their culture – don't tell them what they think. Don't criticise their culture.

Don't be offended by what your friend says or does, it's probably totally acceptable in their culture.

Wherever possible keep to same sex relationships especially with Muslim or Asian people. I have a female, non-Christian East Asian friend who recently told me that she's started fancying someone she met at the Barn. I don't know for certain if it's someone on the team or not, but I do know he's a Christian, so it's quite likely it's a team member. I'm absolutely sure she is not the first East Asian girl to find herself attracted to a nice friendly team member who was only wanting to show her God's love through his friendship. And it can work the other way round too (Karunashur). So lets be careful how we relate to people of the opposite sex.

4) We (and they) will not always get it right

Making friends cross-culturally is a learned skill and we won't always get it right. We all know that even within our own culture there are some people who we just don't naturally get on with. We just don't click with them. This will be the case with people from other cultures too. But we are called to love even those who we don't click with.

Anyone who tries to make friends with someone from another culture will make plenty of cultural mistakes but don't be overly concerned about this.

If our love is genuine it will show through our mistakes and overcome any barriers they might cause.

They're in foreign country so they will expect there to be differences and (hopefully) will be forgiving.

What do we do when our friend leaves Cambridge?

We need to stay in contact and maintain the friendship.

The first thing to say is that it's hard work staying in contact with someone when we're not able to seem them regularly. We're busy, they're busy, it's hard to make time. Maybe you already feel like there are too many people you're trying to stay in contact with and that you're doing a bad job of maintaining meaningful relationships with any of them. ***But try to think if there are one or two internationals who you have got to know at the Barn in the last year or so where staying in contact with them could be really significant for them.*** SHOKO.

But we need to be realistic and realise it is going to be hard to make the time for it. The point is we need to MAKE time, otherwise it won't happen. And we need to pray for ourselves and for each other.

How can we continue meaningful relationships with people when they move away from Cambridge?

- Email, write, send things (photos), phone (MIN), visit (SUJIN), invite them to stay

Don't be discouraged if they don't reply, they may be really busy, but they probably still appreciate your letters etc. (MICHELLE)

What sort of things can we say in letters/emails/phone calls etc.?

- Ask about family, ask about their work, share your life
- Share what you've been learning at church or from the Bible, ask if they're still reading the Bible/going to church, if they have any questions they want to ask you
- do Bible studies with them, send Bible study notes, literature, cassettes etc. Put them in contact with churches/Christians at home

What are the security issues (i.e. what can/can't we say to people in Muslim countries/China)?

- China – avoid really Christian words (Him for God, thinking for praying) but it's words like Falun Gong, Tibet and Taiwan that they're really looking for
- Muslim countries, be really careful

What sort of issues will they face when they return to their own country?

- Missing friends here, find they've changed and no longer fit in with their home culture, find friends and family have moved on – they don't know all the things that have happened while they've been away, have missed things in the news, their family and friends don't understand their experiences here, have to find a job, find they forget their English
- Find the church at home is quite different to the church in England, persecution/rejection, too busy to go to church, don't know the right Christian language

How can we prepare them for this?

- Warn them it may not be easy and why, stay in touch especially early on,
- Introduce them to Christians from their own country here, encourage them to go to an ethnic church here, pray for them

In the first year of someone going home it's the relationship with those who led them to Christ that is the most important - after that we hope their relationship with local Christians will have grown strong enough that we will no longer need to see them as our 'responsibility' - though of course the friendship can continue.

How can we get Christ into our conversations?

Often in ordinary conversation there are opportunities for us to say something about our faith. We mustn't force people to talk about the Gospel if they don't want to, but we can pray for opportunities, look out for them as we're talking with people, and make the most of them when they arise. Often it's a case of throwing out a comment and seeing if the people we're talking with respond with interest – a lot of the time they won't but sometimes they will. We can then take things further.

How would you respond to the following questions/comments?

- *Christian people are always so kind and caring.*
- *Why do you celebrate Christmas/Easter?*
- *What did you do at the weekend?*
- *What are your plans for the future?*
- *I like visiting churches, they're always so peaceful.*
- *Why do you come to the Barn?*