

10 Tips for Reaching Chinese Students.

Eric McDonald May 28th 2019

1. Understand that the Chinese are often starting far from God. Their worldview is secular, the government education from a young age teaches atheism, science is said to have all the answers in life. The process can be slow as their eyes are opened to God's reality, their sin, God's wrath, and the offer of forgiveness in Christ.
2. Read the Bible together and discuss it. The Bible is the powerful word of God to change hearts and minds. I like to begin with passages on the attributes, the nature, of God - his eternity, holiness, omnipotence, knowledge, love, justice, mercy, etc. With this we read the opening chapters of Genesis covering the creation, fall, up to the tower of Babel. I then summarize the old testament and perhaps read several prophecies of the coming Messiah (Micah 5:2, Isaiah 9 and 14 and 53, Psalm 22, etc) we then read John and the story of the God made flesh.
3. Friendship is very important. The change in a worldview is traumatic. Your world is uprooted, you have much to lose in family and friends. Hang onto your student and love them. Many have few close friends from their younger days and a real friend is precious to them. In groups play basketball, eat meals together, go for hikes. Be solid.
4. Conversion often comes in two stages. First, they come to believe that there is a God. Paul says that what can be known about God is evident. Your student has now, against all their education and upbringing, acknowledged what can be known about God from nature. The second conversion is to the definite belief that God came to mankind in the person of his Son, Jesus, the incarnate messiah to die and rise for sinners - of which they are one. I've had a student make the journey through both conversions in 6 months, but far more often it is 2 - 4 years. Be patient. But don't lose zeal for them.
5. Equip yourself to answer their hard questions. They will ask questions like "If God is all powerful and all good, how is it that evil exists? Doesn't it make more sense that God does not exist?" Or "Isn't the Bible written by men thousands of years ago and what we have is copies of copies that are full of errors? How can you trust the Bible?" This is the area of Biblical apologetics. In the words of Jesus' disciple in 1 Peter 3:15 we want to be "always ready to make a defense for the hope that is in us, yet do it with gentleness and respect..." If the question is difficult, it's always wise to admit that you don't know the answer, but you appreciate the question and will come back. I want them to know that the most difficult question is welcome. If Christianity is true, and I believe it is, then it is defensible. A great introductory book is Case for Faith by Lee Strobel. Consider making this a book to read this summer. Some of your students could be asked to read it with you also. Chinese translations are available, as well as translations of many other books at <http://afcreources.org>
6. Pray with them and for them. I often ask the first time "Do you mind if I pray for you?" I've never had a student say no. I pray over what we discussed that day and whatever is weighing on their heart. After a month or so of praying for them, I ask if they would like to pray. They feel inadequate so I reassure them it's like speaking with a Father. Some of the sweetest prayers you will ever hear come from these first times of prayer. Chinese feel

deeply that they are insignificant, they are 1 of 1,000,000,000 at home and they feel even less significant to God. God's greatness often becomes tangible to them in the midst of prayer.

7. Chinese are often reserved. They will seldom initiate with you, especially at first. You will need to initiate. This can become tiring week after week. You might also wonder if they like you as they are rarely openly affectionate in words or touch. Stick with it. It's likely they actually like you. If they don't want to see you again, they will say week after week they have to study every time you contact them. It's tricky though, because even then they might like you and be telling the truth.
8. Disciple them into the faith. Share with them your life and how the Bible is your food and water. Show them passages that speak to their anxieties about performance, their desire to be wealthy, and their fear of death. (These are deeply felt in almost every Chinese student.) Some of your evangelism will include application of scripture to life. We usually think of this as discipleship. But it shows to them the reality of Christ to change a life. Share your testimony, not only of conversion, but how God walks with you day-to-day. On a practical note, I often meet with unbeliever and believers for 1 or 1.5 hours with the first 15 min to catch up, 30-45 min Bible study and discussion, and the last 5 min of prayer.
 1. For your first meeting: Pray for wisdom as we will seldom approach two students in the same manner.
 1. After chatting about life, studies, family, etc I like to transition the conversation to spiritual topics by asking "What were your spiritual beliefs growing up?" It's less threatening because they are talking about the past and it fits with your interest with their family. Very often after they answer I will share my testimony of coming to faith. "Thank you for sharing.....for me my story begins when I was three...."
 2. I often ask "Do you know any Christians back home?" And "What do you know about the Bible and Christianity?" This fills me in on their background in regard to Christianity and can lead to fruitful questions and conversations.
 3. I then very often will ask "Do you mind if I share the whole message of the Bible in 5 minutes?" I will then share an overview of scripture often using the Bridge illustration at some point. I will often ask if they have heard any of this before. Most say no. I often ask "Does this make sense to you?" I might also ask "What questions can you think of?"
 4. I will often tell them how much I've enjoyed talking with them and ask if they would like to get together to read a bit of the Bible and discuss life, making wise decisions, what God is like, etc. (I tailor the offer here based on our conversation to this point. Some students are very interested in growing in wisdom, or choosing a spouse, or knowing what is good, etc.)
9. Introduce them to other Christians. If possible introduce them to another Chinese believer. Ask them to eat with you and your Christian friends. They often need to see the fruit of God in many more lives than your own in order to conclude that this is all true. I have had many students tell me that the Christians are all wonderfully the same: kind, generous, caring, strong. Everyone evaluates a tree by the fruit it bears. And with many witnesses a truth is established.

10. Help them connect with other believers when they return home. Work in China is brutal, 10-12 hour days 6 days per week. If they are unwilling to work this hard, there are forty people behind them ready to take their job. The new spiritual life in them can easily become suffocated. Help them find a church, a mentor, other believers. Strongly consider continuing to meet with them via Zoom to continue reading together and discipling them. Help them use their often lengthy commute to read Bible, pray, and listen to sermons on their phone.

Resources

A few that I've found helpful.

The Mainland Chinese Soul by Lead Consulting

An intro to the culture, heart, values, loves, sins, and tendencies of the Chinese.

Case for Faith by Lee Strobel

A good introduction to many of the tough questions that Chinese students will ask about Christianity. (Bonus tip - your children will ask these questions some day too, so a great parenting book also.)

English - Chinese New Version Bible (Bilingual Bible)

I often use this and ask the students to read the English aloud and then read the Chinese silently. I then ask if the translation in Chinese is a good one. This helps with comprehension. The Chinese translation is also often less accurate and more difficult to understand than the English. I often avoid the Union translation as the Chinese is a 100 years old and difficult to understand. Many Chinese churches prefer this translation however.

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren

Available in a Chinese translation. The longings that Rick address are in the forefront of the Chinese mind.

Song of a Wanderer

A bit dated now but an instrumental book in the conversion of many Chinese students in the 1990's and 2000's. The story of a Chinese science professor coming to faith.

Four Spiritual Laws (Chinese Edition)

A useful evangelism tool.

The Bridge Illustration

Another useful evangelism tool that you can draw on a napkin. Many students tell me years later that they remember when I drew this illustration for them.

There is much more that I could add, but this is a start. Of course, feel free to write me with questions at emcdonald05@gmail.com or call 319-431-1680.