INTERVARSITY
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY

STARTING INTERNATIONAL SMALL GROUPS

By Sarah Akutagawa
& Lillie Wong

INTERVARSITY
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY

Visit us online:
ism.intervarsity.org

© 2016 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

CONTENTS

TRAININGS

Introduction 2

Session 1:
Crossing Cultures 4

Approaching Differences Handout 6

Session 2:
Gathering Students 8

Network Mapping Handout 10

Event Planning Handout 11

Session 3:
Following Up 12

Follow-Up Guide Handout 14

Session 4:
Starting a Small Group 16

Small Group Toolkit Handout 18

BIBLE STUDIES

Introduction 24

Threshold 1:
Building Trust 28

Threshold 2:
Being Curious 32

Threshold 3:
Becoming Open 36

Threshold 4:
Seeking Jesus 40

Threshold 5:
Entering the Kingdom 44

Five Thresholds Summary 48

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME!

There are over one million international students in America! As people respond to the great commission to make disciples of all nations, this makes the university campus a critical community in which the gospel can flourish.

For some international students, a year in the US might be the first time they meet someone who believes in God. For others, a year abroad may be the first time they are living on their own, with space to make choices about their career, relationships, and spirituality.

For international students who are following Jesus, it is a unique opportunity to love the global church and deepen their relationship with God in the midst of displacement.

No matter who it is or what they are looking for, the response to all international students is, "Welcome! We are glad you are here!"

WHO WILL WELCOME THEM?

To effectively welcome international students on our campus we need authentic, available, faithful men and women! Consider the difference between a doorman and family.

When a person enters a building, a doorman knows how to say "welcome," but families say "welcome" with a hug, a handshake, or a hot cup of tea. Leaders, in this case, are the people willing to be family to people they don't even know yet.

A leader can be an American student who is willing to learn about different cultures and humbly serve the strangers around him. A leader can also be an international student who is committed to seeing the students around her learn about God.

HOW DOES THIS GUIDE WORK?

This handbook answers two big questions about starting an international small group: What can I do to start a small group? And how do I go about doing that?

The section of trainings and tools will help you identify goals and next steps that can lead to an international small group.

The section of Bible studies will help you prepare for the diversity of spiritual backgrounds you will likely encounter when you engage international students.

5T

The Five Thresholds of Discovering Faith can be distinct in the international student community. This tool will equip you to recognize these differences.

If you aren't an international student, brainstorm what an international student goes through before school starts.

Imagine you are on your own, without a phone, exhausted from the flight, navigating public transportation, and eventually you find yourself in a new home that is entirely unfamiliar. If you are an international student, list the barriers you encountered when you arrived.

When we welcome international students, it's important to meet them where they are since they have already encountered so many transitions.

READ ACTS 8:26-39

SESSION 1: CROSSING CULTURES

How to understand the international student experience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What motivates Philip to reach out cross-culturally?

What steps does Philip take before he preaches to the eunuch?

How do their different cultural backgrounds affect the story?

APPLYING THE TEXT

What cross-cultural experiences have you had that made you feel uncomfortable or out of place?

What cultural barriers do international students have to cross to spend time with you?

What attitude do you want to commit to as you pursue cross-cultural friendships with others?

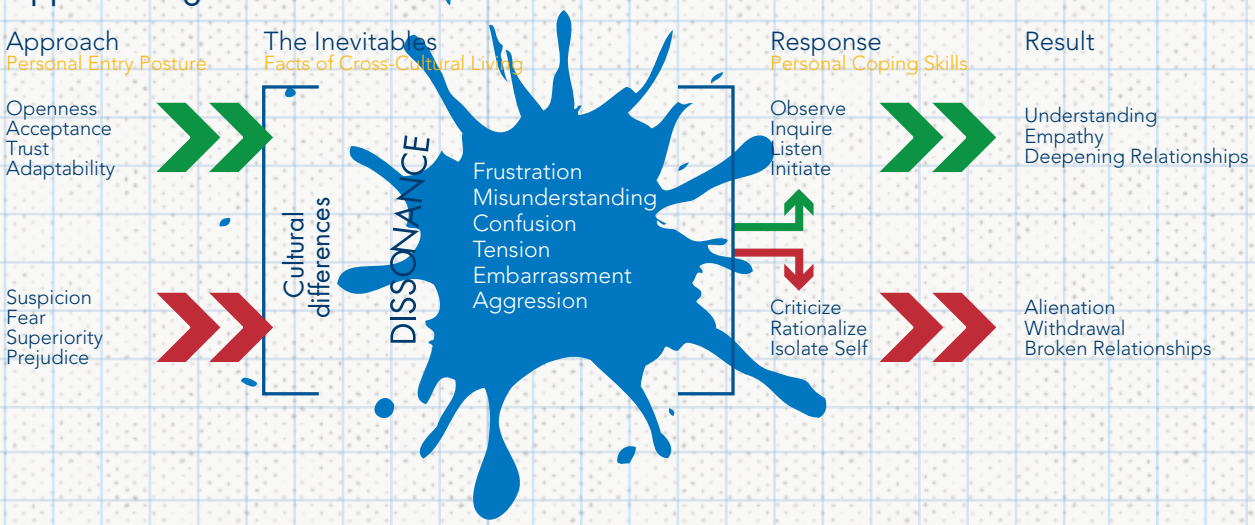
What is exciting about this?

What are you nervous about?

SESSION 1: APPROACHING DIFFERENCES

6

approaching differences



This diagram shows that cross-cultural dissonance happens to everyone. The key is to understand the different approach between the green line and the red line. When we choose to be open and trusting, cultural differences lead us to listen and to deepen relationships.

However, if we allow ourselves to be afraid or suspicious, cultural differences can lead us to criticize others and miss out on relationships.

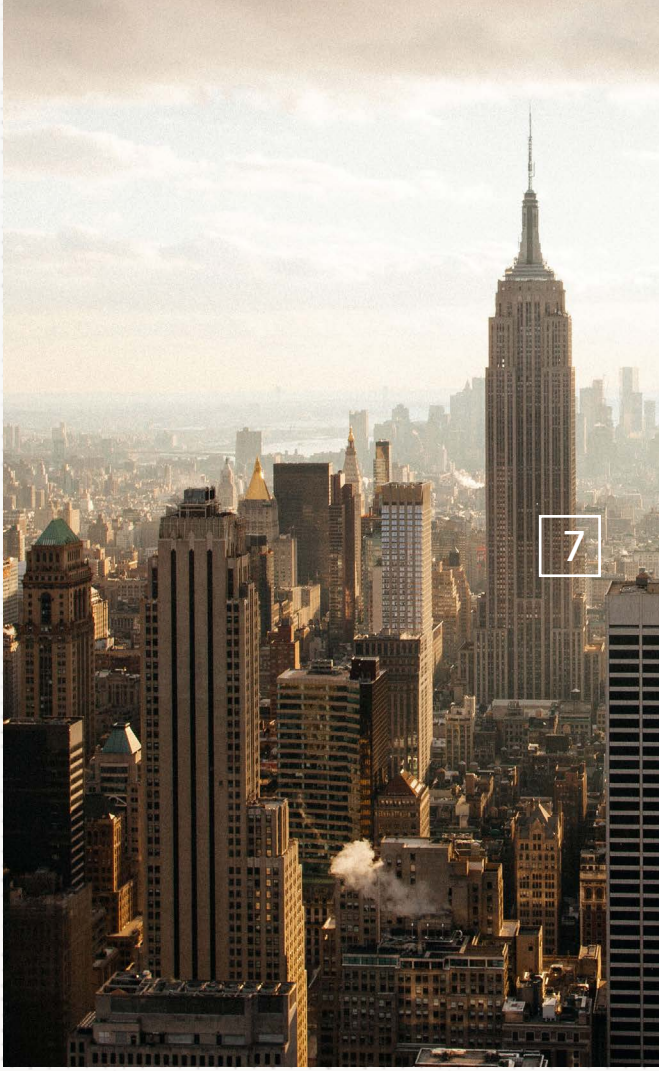
Share about a time you experienced dissonance because of cultural differences. How did your approach affect your response?

NEXT STEPS

Learn:
Do some research about where people are from and what is currently happening there. Ask your friends questions about their experiences at home.

Listen & observe:
Ask about their experience transitioning to the US. Empathize with them and notice if their experiences on campus are different from your own.

Be a good friend:
Crossing cultures is much more than knowing facts about a community. While it may begin there, we eventually want to be welcomed into our friend's life on a deeper level.



GOAL

Do this with at least three international students.

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you meet international students. Ask about their experience of culture stress and practice responding with "green-line" attitudes.

For many international students, a college campus does not feel like it is made for them.

The unfamiliar language, customs, and expectations can make every day an overwhelming cross-cultural experience. At the same time, there are places on campus where students do feel at home: cultural clubs, language learning classes, and international dorms. Though sometimes overlooked, these communities have a lot to offer us as well. When we set out to meet international students, we both open our homes and seek out places to meet them.

Make a list of places you have seen international students and discuss why they gather there.

READ JOHN 1:35-50

SESSION 2: GATHERING STUDENTS

How to meet international students.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What do you notice about the way Jesus meets people?

What action words stick out to you?

How does the geography of the story change?

Why is that significant to the characters?

How does relying on other people for connections affect the way Jesus does ministry?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

How can you invite international students to "see where you are staying" and "come and see"?

How do you want to take the extra step to make international students feel welcome as you gather them?

GOAL

Host three events in the first month of school.

SESSION 2: NETWORK MAPPING

WHO DO YOU KNOW?

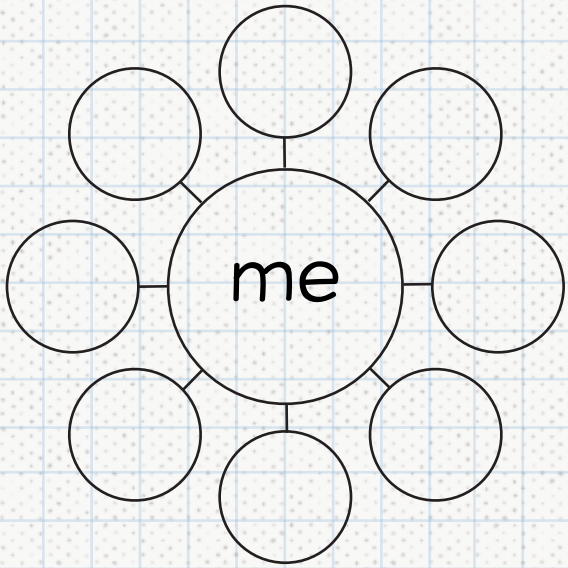
For each space on campus where there are international students, write down people you are connected to and the people who are connected to them. This creates a "network map" of the international student community and can help you identify people to partner with and invite to events.

Pray for the networks you have identified on your network map.

Plan an event that would appeal to international students on your campus.

Use the following event planner to think about goals and next steps.

Visit a language center, tutoring service, international residential building, or cultural club. What are you excited to learn about or experience?



There are three primary ways to meet international students:

- Inviting to our networks
- Hosting events
- Participating in campus organizations

SESSION 2: EVENT PLANNING

BRAINSTORM

Think of an event that appeals to international students: a potluck, a make your own pizza night, an Ikea trip, a game night, a food crawl, or a holiday party.

What activities during the event will connect people to each other? Plan ice breakers, discussions, or "minute-to-win-it" games.

What next step do you want to invite people to? How will you get contact information? How will leaders meet everyone?

DEBRIEF

Where did you see God at work?

What step is he leading you to?

PLAN

Event name:
Date & time:
Meeting location:
Transportation options:
How many people you are hoping will come:

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Personally invite others via a text, a call, or face-to-face.
- [ ] Provide familiar food and drinks (be aware of cultural/religious food restrictions).
- [ ] Prepare decorations and music.
- [ ] Avoid using Christian lingo.
- [ ] Figure out who will welcome people and what you want to say about your group.
- [ ] Pray each person would encounter God.
- [ ] Don't forget to show up early!

It is crucial to follow up and deepen relationships with every person we have met. Our intentional efforts to follow up with people relieve new students of the task of reaching out themselves. As we ask questions, make them feel at home, and invite them into our lives, we get to journey with them through their transition in a new campus.

READ MATT. 25:14-30

SESSION 3: FOLLOWING UP

How to stay connected.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What does God say in Matthew 25 about stewardship?

What talents has God put in your life?

How can you be faithful with them?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What would happen if no one followed up with the students you have met?

How does this passage teach us to "steward" international student relationships?

As you prepare to follow up with international students, what "good and faithful" actions do you sense God calling you to?

GOAL

Follow up with every new student you have met.

SESSION 3: FOLLOW-UP GUIDE

NEXT STEPS

For each person try to have a face-to-face interaction after you meet.

Have a conversation beyond small talk.

Have them come to small group more than once.

Try to meet with each contact face-to-face three times. Invite everyone together to watch a movie or to attend small group.

SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

Send a text or give them a phone call.

Add them on Facebook.

Download other chatting apps such as Line, Kakao Talk, WhatsApp, etc.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

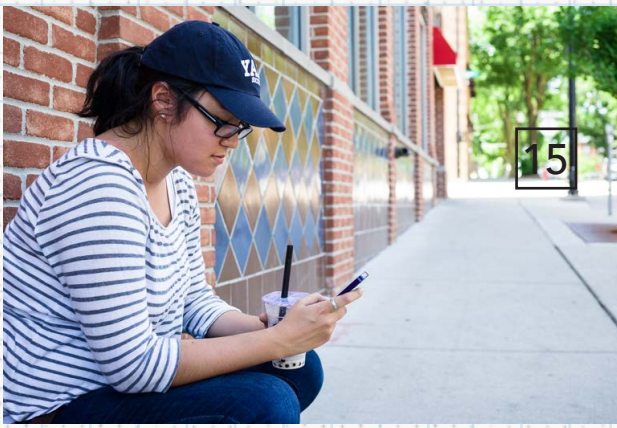
What are you hoping to experience in the US?

What are your career goals?

What do you enjoy about what you are studying?

FIRST CONTACT

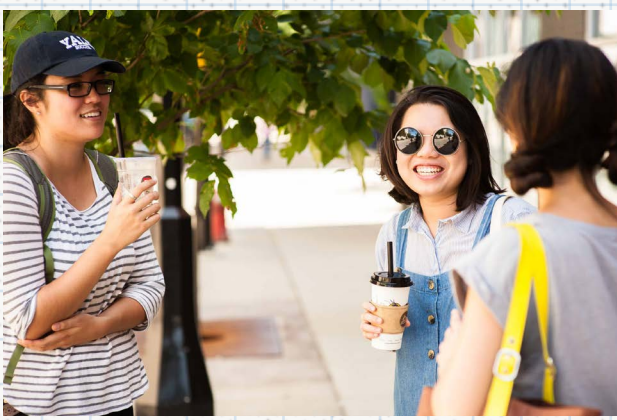
It's so nice to meet you! I'd love to hang out more to get to know you better. Can I get your contact information?



24 HOURS

Initiate:
Send a message.
Be friendly and try to include a question.

Hi Yuki! It was nice meeting you at orientation! Do you want to get lunch this week?



48 HOURS

Get face time:
Grab a meal, hit the gym, shop for groceries, study together, or get boba!

Do you want to come over Wednesday night? My Christian international group is hosting a dinner at my house, if you want to come and meet new people! What do you think?

While large events help us meet lots of new people, small group meetings lead to deep friendships and lasting growth. Small group is one of the best ways we care for the people we meet.

Since international students respond well to personal invitations, it's important to make an intentional effort and have one-on-one conversations.

This passage teaches us that God is already at work in the lives of those we desire to follow Jesus.

As a group, share about significant small groups or friendships that have made an impact on you at your campus.

READ ACTS 17:16-34

SESSION 4: STARTING A SMALL GROUP

How to create an international student community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As the philosophers ask questions, how does Paul build bridges with their cultural background?

How does Paul talk about God?

What does he emphasize? Why?

What is the response of those listening (vv. 32-34)?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

How can you use Paul's mindset when studying the Bible with non-Christians?

When have you built bridges with a person or community that was different from you?

GOAL

Invite every person you have met to join you for a small group gathering.

Continue inviting people to your small group until you have about 10-12 regular participants.

SESSION 4: SMALL GROUP TOOLKIT

Because international students come from many different spiritual and cultural backgrounds, it is helpful to think of small group meetings as mini-events instead of year long Bible studies. Combining food, fun, and Scripture creates a community that is entertaining, meaningful, and lasting.

What are you looking forward to in each of these aspects?

THE BASICS OF AN ISM SMALL GROUP

Bond over food: Whether you take turns cooking, order a pizza, or do a potluck, start off your small group with a meal together. This can be a great way to share about the homes we come from. Be mindful of dietary restrictions!

Become friends: Play games or teach each other traditions from your home. Play music that is popular where you are from or share stories about friends and family. You can also provide English conversation practice.

Experience God: Not everyone you meet will believe in God, so be aware of how they feel talking about faith. Start with spiritual discussions, a Group Investigating God (GIG), or a Q&A about Christianity. If they are comfortable, then suggest doing a Bible study.

Ultimately, we want international students to be welcomed and to feel accepted no matter where they are in their spiritual journeys.

HELPFUL TIPS

1. Choose a location that is easy to find and make it amazing.

   Make sure your group is easy to get to and that everyone has a way to get there. Play music, use international decor, and arrange seats to encourage conversation.

2. If more people come than you expect, consider discussing things in smaller groups such as men and women, undergraduate and graduate, country/language groups, major or department.

3. Prioritize people over tasks. Instead of focusing on making a complicated meal or leading a perfect discussion, concentrate on building friendships and loving people.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

I-GIG: A Guide for International Groups Investigating God: tiny.cc/i-gig

I-DIG: International Disciples Group guide: tiny.cc/idig

Crossing Cultures with Jesus by Katie Rawson (InterVarsity Press, 2015): tiny.cc/ccwj

WHAT TO STUDY

When starting a small group, pray for guidance about how to serve the people you've met.

As you pray, ask these questions:

What are the international students I've met looking for (community, spiritual growth, cultural experiences, etc.)?

What is their spiritual background? What are they curious about?

What stories about Jesus would be intriguing to them?

Small groups for a mixed group:

Use the study guides in this book as a series for both Christians and non-Christians.

Build community by sharing "life stories" or testimonies each week.

Small groups for non-Christians:

After dinner and games, invite people to join an English conversation group, Q&A about God, or a Group Investigating God (GIG).

Host culture nights for students to share songs, traditions, or food from home.

If students are open to spiritual conversations, invite them individually or in pairs to participate in a GIG.

Small groups for Christians:

Learn about worship, prayer, and evangelism from different perspectives.

Honor different languages as you study Scripture.

Go through the *International Disciples Group* Guide *(I-DIG)*.

CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Similar to the barriers international students face arriving on campus, there are religious and cultural barriers they might face when they join a small group. Here are two common barriers international students encounter and phrases you can use to help them feel welcome in discussions.

Approaching Religious Differences:
Some students are new to a Christian environment. Some students are not Christian and may not believe that God exists. Introducing these students to faith requires interpreting Christian practices like prayer, Scripture reading, and worship songs. For other students, discussing apologetics can be beneficial.

Approaching Communication Differences:
Some students communicate differently. Some students are accustomed to learning in lectures. Because they expect the teacher to be the expert, it is helpful to encourage discussion and affirm everyone's contributions. Some students might feel vulnerable when asked personal or direct questions.

One way to serve them is to ask open-ended questions to the group:

Christianity is a faith that encourages questions. Everyone has something to learn! If God exists, what would you like him to do in you?

Make a list of all the questions you have about this passage.

What is something you are taking away from this discussion?

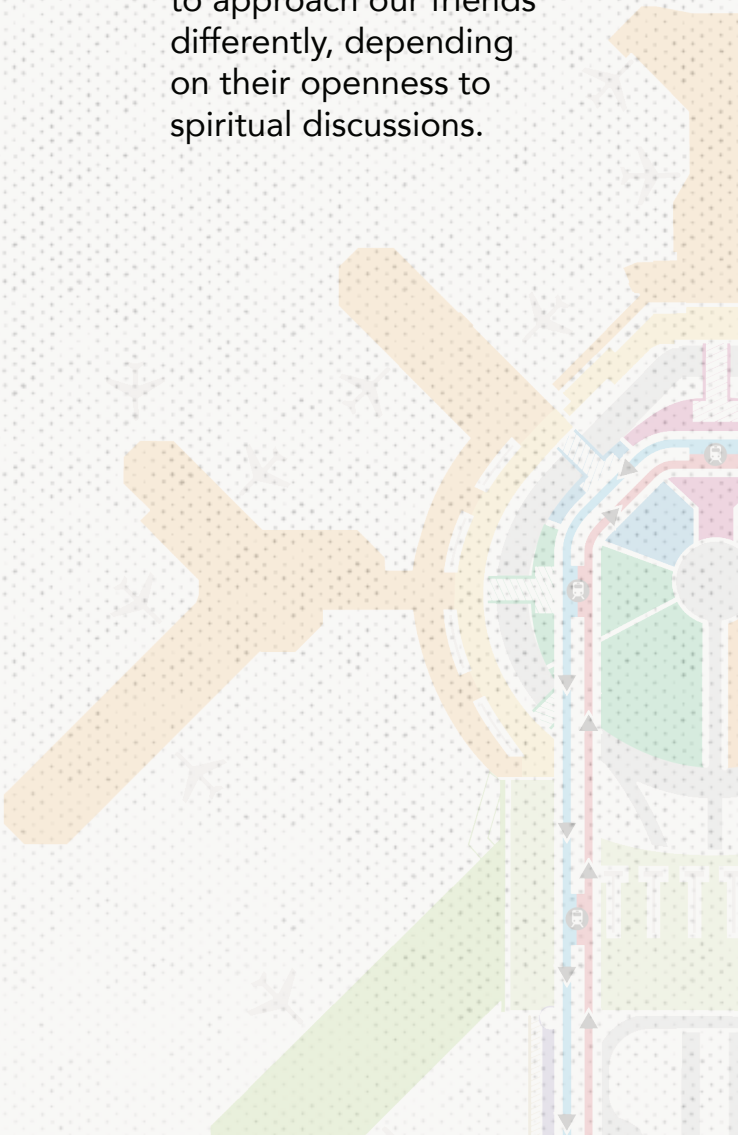
What nations are being impacted by your small group?

Write your group members' names on their home continent as you pray each week!

BIBLE STUDIES INTRODUCTION

Every day, airports are filled with different travelers. On a given day, you might see a business woman routinely traveling from city to city. Next to her, there may be a man who is nervous about flying and worried about getting sick. Some passengers might be frustrated with delayed flights, and some will be extremely excited about their vacation. Either way, the responsibility of flight attendants is to board everyone kindly and get them to their destination. Airline workers must respond to the different passengers based on how they are entering the plane, which can mean greeting them with either enthusiasm or sympathy.

An international small group requires a lot of work and likely serves a lot of different students. The most challenging job of a small group leader is to respond to different people with different spiritual backgrounds. You might meet a student who is suspicious about religion and then someone who is excited to learn about Jesus! For this reason, we need to approach our friends differently, depending on their openness to spiritual discussions.



25

The following Bible study series is designed to frame the faith process so that everyone can take a step closer to Jesus. In *I Once Was Lost* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), Don Everts and Doug Schaupp studied thousands of students to understand the process people took in discovering faith.

Just like the airplane example, they found that people approach faith differently and that leaders must identify these "thresholds" to serve them well. People don't always move step by step through these thresholds and it certainly doesn't happen immediately. While we work to invite people into deeper faith, we have to rely on the Holy Spirit to change people.

This series is useful for two reasons.

First, it invites leaders to study examples of different spiritual places students might be in.

Second, it gives Christians and non-Christians a common language about spiritual openness.

Therefore, it is useful to study the Leader's Guides with people starting your international student small group. As you meet new people, take time to identify which stage they are in and how you can help them grow closer to Jesus.

Also, consider using this series to show how a global faith community can grow together with both Christians and non-Christians. When everyone understands different stages of faith, it can help non-Christians identify internal shifts they are experiencing at a conference or small group. If your gathering events and network maps are attracting a variety of people to your group, consider using the Study Questions in the Bible studies to introduce this language and determine spiritual interest. Since conversion is not always linear, you don't have to do all five studies in order.

SUMMARY

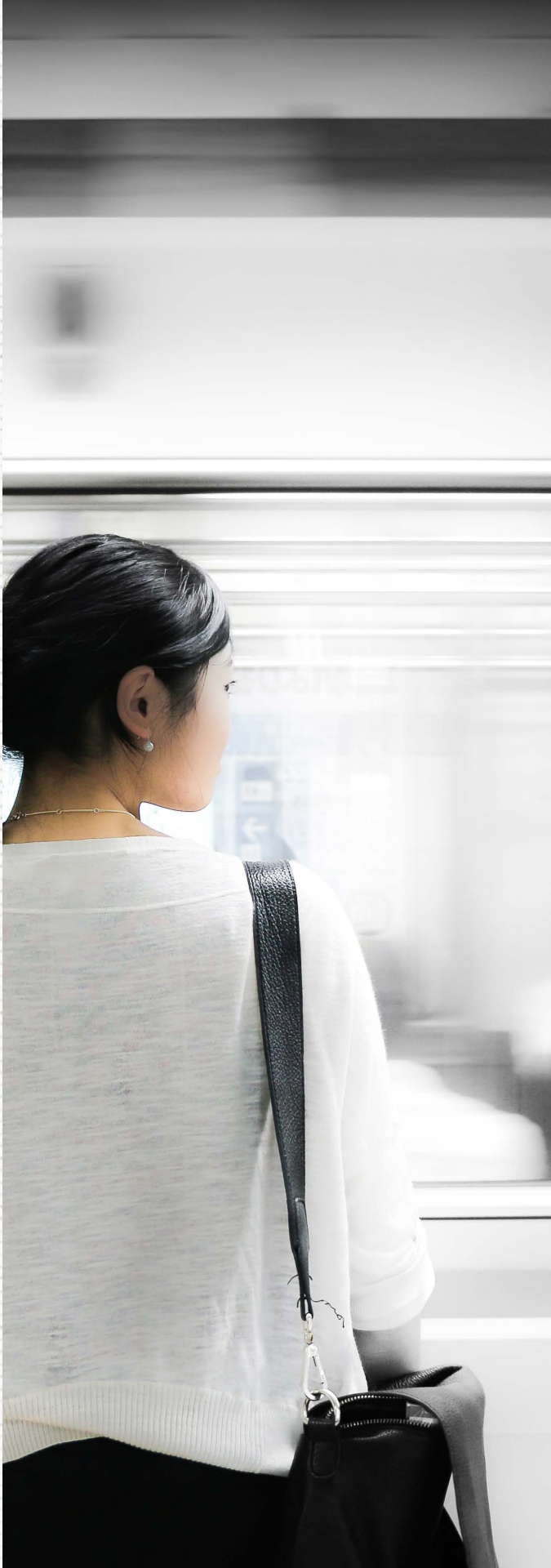
In this passage we observe Jesus' unique conversation with a Samaritan woman. He demonstrates the importance of trust and courage as we learn about God.

TRUST

THRESHOLD 1: BUILDING TRUST

Leader's Guide: 28-29
Study Questions: 30-31

JOHN 4:4-26



WHAT WE SEE

Jesus crosses barriers. It was rare for a man and woman to talk alone.

Jesus hears her suspicion but invites her to experience God in a loving way.

The woman takes risks as she shares about her own beliefs and personal situation.

She is honest about her doubts, but slowly and courageously listens to Jesus' invitation for her.

Jesus helps her move from distrust to trust.

WHY IT MATTERS

Jesus was not afraid to cross barriers and have spiritual conversations with people of different beliefs. He asked a lot of questions and always left the door open to God.

He builds trust with the woman by including her people in God's plan and promises that she will personally experience life differently. These tools teach us how to love people who don't trust Christians.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

1. What brings Jesus and the woman together in this story?

What separates them?

2. What does Jesus offer the Samaritan woman?

How does she respond?

3. What do you notice about Jesus' conversation style in this passage?

SHARE

4. What has brought you to this group?

5. How do you see Christians or God?

6. Share about an experience you had that helped you trust someone.

RESPOND

Discuss how you will build trust with each other as you learn more about God. Decide to do something together this next week.

DEBRIEF

What did God teach you about yourself and the people in your small group?

SUMMARY

Jesus is creative in the conversation he has with Nicodemus—generating curiosity and inviting Nicodemus to engage with him on a spiritual level.

THRESHOLD 2: BEING CURIOUS

Leader's Guide: 32-33
Study Questions: 34-35

JOHN 3:1-15

WHAT WE SEE

Nicodemus approaches Jesus expecting to get a certain answer.

Instead, Nicodemus becomes more curious.

Nicodemus does not get offended, but asks questions.

Jesus talks about spirituality in a new way that Nicodemus is not expecting.

Nicodemus is used to thinking about religion in terms of rules and teachings. Even so, Jesus does not reject him.

Instead, he invites Nicodemus to think of faith in terms of being "reborn."

WHY IT MATTERS

Around the world, there are different roles that spirituality plays in everyday life. Nicodemus is invited to be "reborn," an invitation that makes him curious to expand his current understanding of faith.

Serving the international community deserves this kind of posture, where anyone can come and be curious about Jesus.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

How does Jesus help Nicodemus become more curious?

What does "reborn" mean to Nicodemus?

Why does Jesus use this imagery?

SHARE

When you read this passage, what word or phrase makes you feel curious?

What role does religion or spirituality have in your culture?

RESPOND

For those learning about Jesus: In what ways are you curious about God? Be brave and ask someone you trust.

For those following Jesus: What are some things you can do/say to encourage your friends to be more curious? Ask someone about their spiritual background and how it affects their life today.

DEBRIEF

How did being curious impact you this week?

What did God teach you about himself?

SUMMARY

Jesus encounters a man who has been ill for 38 years. He loves this man by challenging him to pursue healing.

CHANGE

THRESHOLD 3: BECOMING OPEN

Leader's Guide: 36-37
Study Questions: 38-39

JOHN 5:1-15

WHAT WE SEE

The man in this passage has been sick for so long that he is used to his life by the pool.

Jesus is aware that he has been there for a long time and asks an obvious question.

Jesus offers a different way to be healed and tells the man to stand up, take his mat, and walk.

The sick man can choose to continue waiting at the healing pool or take action to be healed.

When Jesus notices the man, asks him a question, and invites him to take action, a great change happens in his life.

WHY IT MATTERS

As busy students, daily routines make it hard to really be open to change. In fact, many people experience loneliness, depression, self-doubt, or homesickness and think this is the only way they can live.

Oftentimes, the community around us maintains patterns we do not realize. Asking critical questions can help us recognize these patterns so we can be truly open to healing.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

What keeps the sick man from being healed?

How does Jesus help this man become open to being healed?

What levels of healing do you see in this passage?

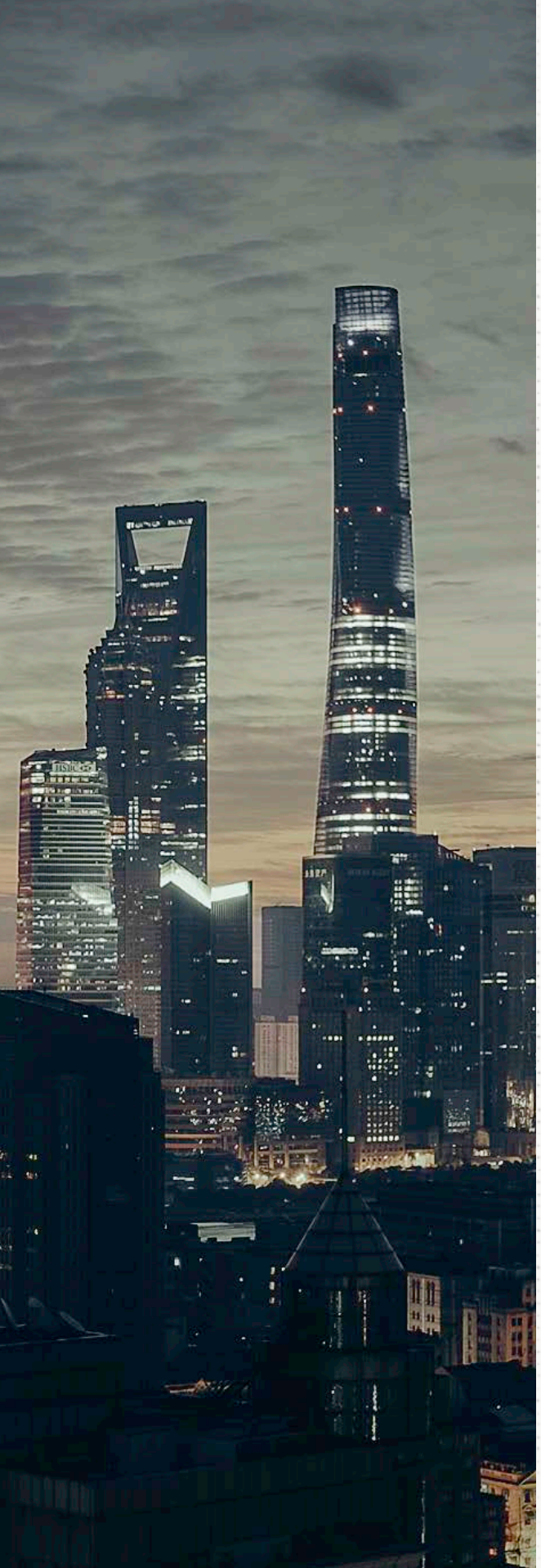
SHARE

Write down one area of your life you want to invite God to change. Are you experiencing any of these: jealousy, loneliness, anxiety, anger, or fear?

What would your life be like if you no longer struggled with this feeling?

What do you think it will take to see change in your life?

How can this community help?



RESPOND

For those learning about Jesus: What is keeping you from being open to change? How does your family tolerate faiths different from their own?

For those following Jesus: How has God changed you in a personal way? Share this with a friend.

DEBRIEF

Where did you experience God changing you this week?

What deeper change do you think God wants for you?

SUMMARY

Zacchaeus overcomes social and physical barriers to get a glimpse of Jesus. Jesus invites himself into Zacchaeus's home, an act that leads to the salvation of Zacchaeus and his household.

SEEKING

THRESHOLD 4: SEEKING JESUS

Leader's Guide: 40-41
Study Questions: 42-43

LUKE 19:1-10

WHAT WE SEE

Zacchaeus is determined to see Jesus, but his unpopularity and height limit his view.

Instead of giving up, he climbs a tree.

Jesus doesn't ignore Zacchaeus.

There are immediate questions from the crowd because Zacchaeus is one of the most unliked people in the community.

Zacchaeus understands the honor of being invited to host Jesus and announces that he will change his life.

Jesus, in turn, announces that salvation has come to Zacchaeus's household.

WHY IT MATTERS

In this story, Zacchaeus seeks Jesus despite the many barriers. We see what it looks like when someone is so desperate to know Jesus he will do anything to see him.

The Son of Man wants to seek and save the lost–not just Zacchaeus, but his entire community! When Jesus brings salvation to one person it impacts the people and systems around him or her.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

What barriers make it hard for Zacchaeus to see Jesus?

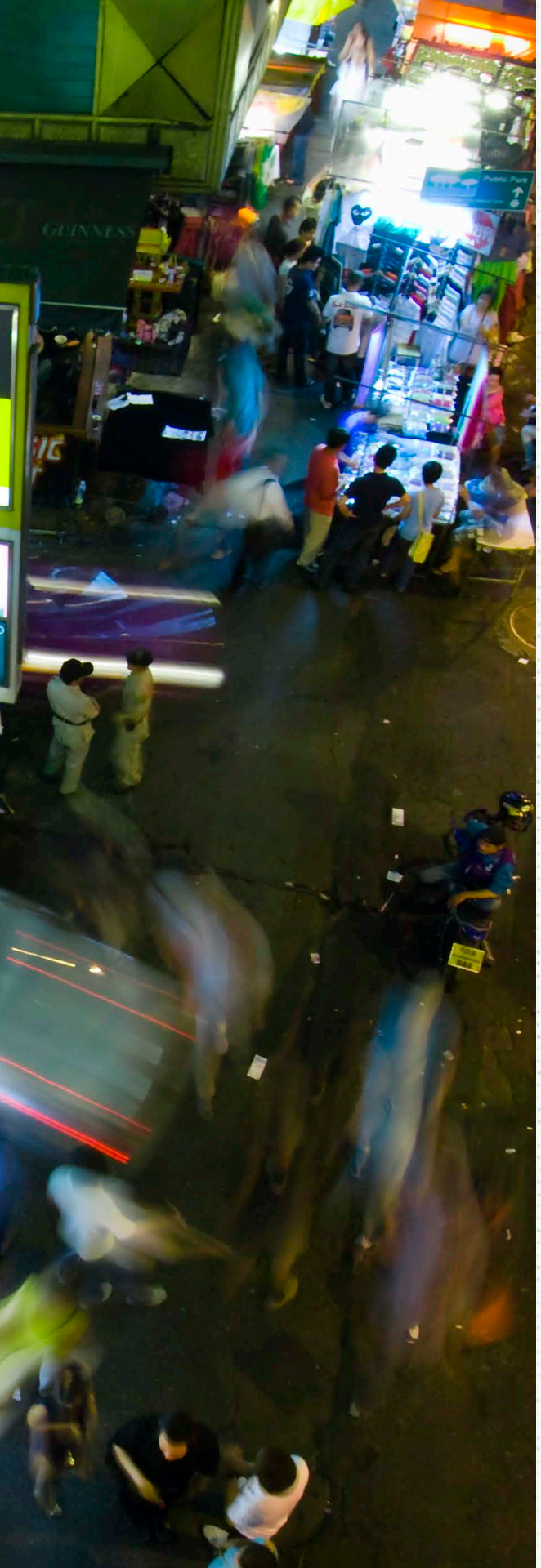
How does the crowd perceive Zacchaeus?

What steps do you see Zacchaeus taking to get closer to Jesus? How do his steps affect his household and the community around him?

SHARE

What barriers make it difficult for people in your culture to talk about Jesus?

From what you know about Jesus, how might he change you? Your community?



RESPOND

For those learning about Jesus: What is a personal or cultural barrier to you seeking Jesus?

For those following Jesus: How does this passage change the way you approach seekers? What barrier is God calling you to cross in order to love others?

DEBRIEF

Where did you experience Jesus impacting your life this week?

SUMMARY

In Jesus' story, the restored relationship between the father and youngest son illustrates the "coming home" and joy of entering the kingdom of God.

FOLLOWER

THRESHOLD 5: ENTERING THE KINGDOM

Leader's Guide: 44-45
Study Questions: 46-47

LUKE 15:11-32

WHAT WE SEE

Jesus tells this story to religious leaders who are suspicious of the time he is spending with sinners and tax collectors.

The father is generous–both with his gifts and his mercy toward his sons.

The youngest son is wasteful with his money, his relationship with his father, and his own sense of self-worth.

The oldest son is bitter and the story ends before we know his final answer to his father.

The kingdom of God is a place of love and belonging. It cannot be earned!

WHY IT MATTERS

We see a God who is always eager for his children to return home. Despite the shame and guilt the youngest son feels, the father responds with celebration and embrace.

The kingdom of God is not found through working hard or being good–it's a place of unconditional love because of a merciful and generous father.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

How would you describe the father, the younger son, and the older son?

How does the son's plan to return home compare with his father's response?

What keeps the older son from joining the celebration?

SHARE

What action in this story surprises you most? Why?

Which son do you identify with most? Why?

What do you learn about what it means to enter the kingdom of God?

RESPOND

For those learning about Jesus: What do you think your life would be like if you "returned home" to God? If God exists, what would you like him to do for you?

For those following Jesus: How would your life be different if you accepted that everything your Father has is also yours (v. 31)?

DEBRIEF

How did you experience God's mercy and generosity this week?

5 THRESHOLDS OF

TRUST	CURIOSITY	CHANGE
Overview Our friends do not yet have a reason to trust a Christian.	**Overview** Our friends are not yet interested in our faith lives.	**Overview** Our friends are not yet interested in changing their current lifestyle.
Our Role Gain trust by loving genuinely and asking questions.	**Our Role** Encourage questions and live curiously.	**Our Role** Practice patience, endure in prayer, and nudge gently.
With Internationals Understand "belonging before belief" (inclusion into the community comes before a decision into faith). Make their role as a non-believer dynamic and not static. Take time to understand cultural barriers and trust builders.	**With Internationals** Be a safe place to ask questions. Be sensitive to shame-based cultures (encourage intrigue, don't argue). Give tools for critical thinking. Be curious about their faith. Recognize the role spirituality plays in their culture.	**With Internationals** Affirm that when changing lifestyle, culture is not meant to be left behind or erased. Help students process the cultural pressures of their home country as they begin to explore a new spirituality.

DISCOVERING FAITH

SEEKING

FOLLOWER

SEEKING	FOLLOWER
Overview Our friends are not yet bringing their questions to Jesus.	**Overview** Our friends realize a decision must be made.
Our Role Clarify the journey, explain how to seek Jesus, and invite them to join us.	**Our Role** Invite them to follow Jesus and help them think through the implications.
With Internationals Be available to talk about what following Jesus at home would look like. Create opportunities to experience following Jesus. Gradually call them to follow Jesus in different areas of life (physical, natural, emotional, etc.).	**With Internationals** Make a clear invitation. Be open to different phrases or words that the student uses to express their trust in God. This should feel like a natural next step. Emphasize life-long discipleship and pray through their return home.

Trainings, tools, and Bible studies to help you start an international student small group on your campus

Order this booklet or view it online at: tiny.cc/sisg

ISBN 978-0-9835848-6-5