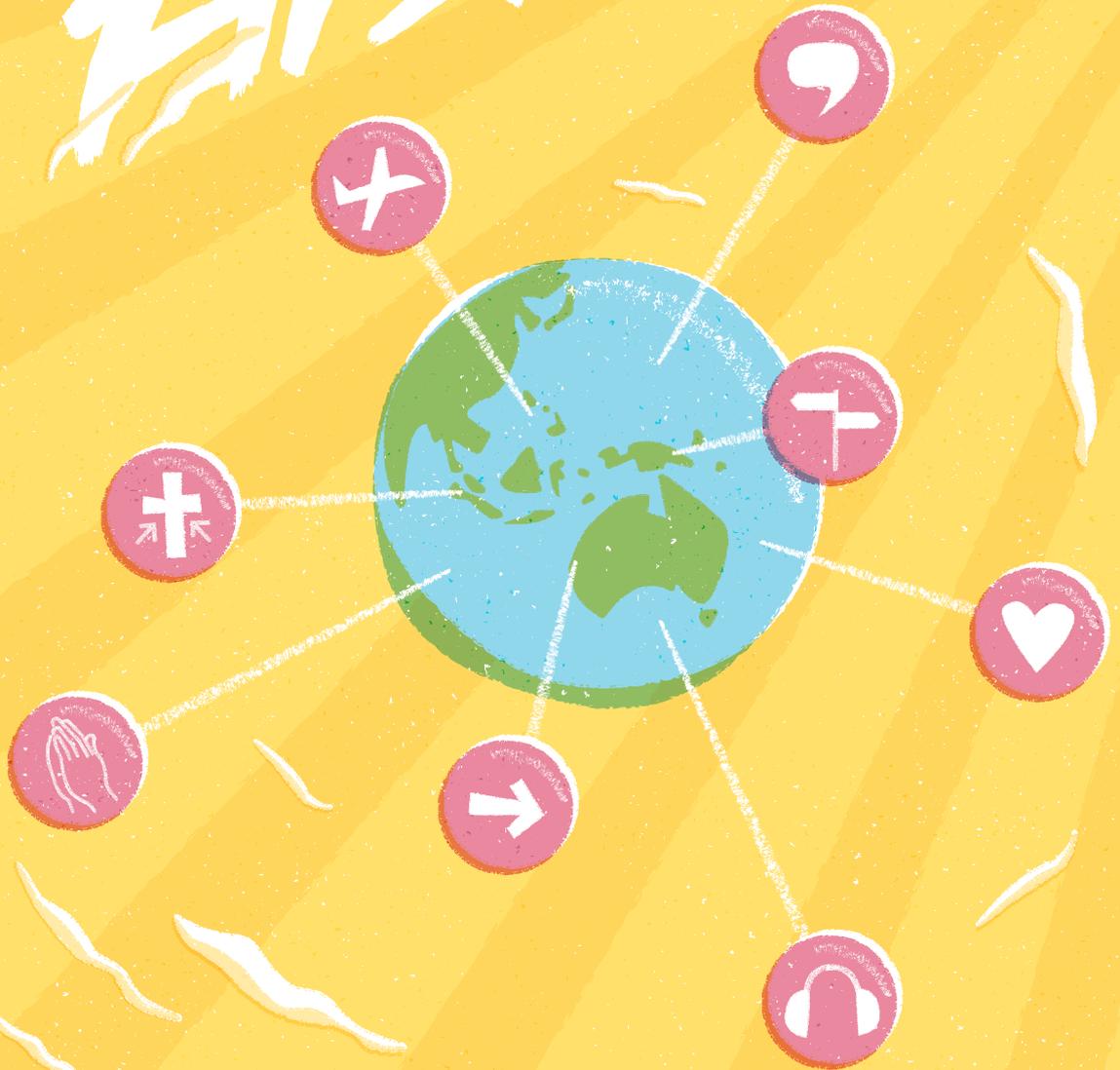


Friends First



We have a vision to see people meet Jesus... but how will we see this vision become a reality? Dave, South East Asia Team Leader, believes that despite their challenges, authentic relationships are key to answering that question.

Relationships are messy. Cross-cultural relationships are definitely messy. However, time and time again Caz and I have witnessed that it is within the context of relationships... messy, long-term, authentic relationships... that people are most open to conversations about Jesus.

Our context for the past 20 years has been among the B.I and S.I people of South East Asia, however, I would be very surprised if the story was different in your context. We have been created to be in relationship with God and others.

Reflecting on our ministry, three key principles of building authentic relationships have been to enter our friends' worlds, listen to them and listen to God.

Enter Their World

Entering the world of another person is key to building an authentic relationship. This takes time, commitment and humility.

When we first enter the world of another person or community, it can seem as if we are banging up against a 'wall of noise'. We can't seem to understand them, and they can't understand us – there is just noise between us.

This noise is amplified if we come from radically different cultures and languages. Breaking through the wall is confronting. It is humbling to struggle to understand and it can make us feel foolish. However, as others watch us persevere and struggle they see that we really care, and this opens the doorway to deepening relationships.

Honour and respect are key concepts in the Bible. God created us to live with honour and respect, and to treat others this way. One way we can do this is by participating in the world of another to the greatest extent we can without violating the values of God's Kingdom.

As we participate in the lives of others – sharing hospitality, seeking to understand them, seeking to bless them - we demonstrate honour and respect which comes from an attitude of humility. The opposite of this is to bring shame which comes out of a posture of pride – reflected by an attitude that says, 'I have all the answers, and you need to listen to me'.

Listen to the Other

Listening respectfully to others allows us to enter their world and to develop authentic relationships. In South East Asia, we have witnessed many westerners enter the culture with an attitude of superiority and arrogance. They demonstrate this by the way they treat others and their expectation that others should listen to them... and in English! This kind of attitude does not lead to authentic relationships.

Caz listened one day to a woman who described an accident which she attributed to malevolent spirits. Many westerners respond to stories like that with an attitude of superiority and discount these kinds of beliefs. This leaves the person telling the story feeling belittled and shamed. As a result, those who hold these beliefs learn not to speak to westerners about them. Caz, however, listened with respect and humility. This led to a deeper relationship and understanding of the worldview of this woman and grew further opportunities to discuss many matters related to spiritual truth.

Over time this woman came to trust in Jesus and is now influencing others in her extended family and community with the Good News of the Kingdom. As we develop authentic relationships based on respect and care we build bridges that are strong enough to bear the weight of spiritual truth.

Listen to God

We also listen to God. Each day we ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us, and help us to be sensitive to those around us and to where God is already at work.

Jesus appointed twelve, designating them Apostles that they might be with Him and that He might send them out. (Mark 3:14) We have been sent out with the message of the Kingdom, like the Apostles. Like them, we must first spend lots of time with Jesus, listening to Him. As we listen and surrender our hearts to the Living One, He will give us sensitivity and spiritual power to share the Good News of the Kingdom to others. In this way, we help people respond to the message of the Kingdom, to remain in their context, and to change their hearts and lives rather than their clothes. They in turn are motivated to build authentic relationships out of which they also share the Good News of the eternal Kingdom.

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Yes, relationships are complicated. However, despite this, I have seen trust grow, people begin to explore Jesus and then choose to follow Him. It's in those moments that I know without a doubt, that I am called, not to transform hearts (that's God's job) but to love Him and love others.