

# South Asia: Penetrating questions and honest answers

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Photobombing. It's not how I typically try to meet strangers, and definitely not how I try to start off friendships. But one of the biggest things I've learned here in South Asia is how the Father truly can—and does—use all things to bring people to his name.

My teammate and I met and befriended a group of girls a couple of Saturdays ago when we photobombed their selfies. Granted, it was a rather awkward first impression, but ironically, it has turned into a beautiful friendship. We met with them over pancakes—the first ones they ever had eaten—and the conversations we had with them blew us away.

## **Solarium Cards**

Soularium cards—basically glorified picture postcards, used as a witnessing tool to help spark conversations about spiritual subjects—were scattered across the kitchen table, and six of us sat around it holding photos in our hands. My teammate and I asked, “Which photo describes your life right now?”

The answers we received from our four friends floored us.

“I feel lost.”

“I just want to be happy.”

“I'm looking for peace in my life.”

“I want freedom.”

Each girl answered with brutal honesty, and in such a pride-centered culture, I was shocked they admitted to things that normally would cause them shame.

Not only were they honest about their personal lives, but also with their thoughts on religion. We asked them, “Which photo describes your view of God?”

Again they answered bluntly, and each admitted to things I had never expected to hear. One girl’s answer in particular stuck out.

“I feel trapped within this religion,” she said. “I feel that I should be able to pray wherever I am, not just in the temples. And I do not understand how pouring milk on an idol is considered worship, when I could give that milk to a starving child on the street who needs it.”

### **Opening up**

Another girl agreed with her, and added:

“I do not like that I am not allowed to pray on certain days. When there is a birthday in my family, I am not allowed to pray. If there is a date that someone died on in my family, I am not allowed to pray. If I am on my period, I am not allowed to pray. I do not like this.”

For the first time all summer, I heard someone actually open up and voice their questions, and I was shocked. In a place where religion is culture and culture is religion, most people preform their rituals out of habit, and it is rare to find people asking questions or seeking answers. And even if they do have questions, those questions won’t be asked out of fear of being shamed. But here these four girls were, opening up to us about themselves and their doubts, and seeking answers for their struggles.

Each of their questions can be answered by the hope we have in Jesus. And

each of their questions, struggles, and doubts, show that in our heart of hearts it is Jesus who we desire. When it came time for my teammate and me to answer the question of how we view God, my partner talked about how she thinks of freedom. I described how I view God as the One who gives life and the One who loves us the most.

### **Applause for sharing the gospel**

We were able to share the gospel, and when we finished, they clapped for us, saying that they really liked our answers. When our friends found our Bibles, they became extremely curious, and one of them asked if we read our Bibles to satisfy a ritual in our religion. We explained that the Father loves us, and created us to know him personally. We told our friends we read the Bible because it grows us closer to him.

“You mean you can really have a personal relationship with God?” one of the girls asked. “I wish we could have a personal relationship with our gods. Our gods are just gods to us.”

At the beginning of the summer, my supervisor told our team an African proverb about catching chickens. “If you want to catch a chicken with a loaf of bread, you can’t throw the entire loaf of bread at the chicken” he said. “The chicken will think you’re trying to harm it, and it’s going to run away. But if you break up that loaf of bread into pieces and make a trail, then you can catch a chicken.”

And so it is with the friendships we develop with non-Christians. Right after meeting our new friends, my teammate and I were alerted by a national Christian that one of our friends has an uncle who is a member of a neighbor extremist group. So within this friendship, we tread carefully, and strive to be innocent as doves and wise as serpents. A little at a time, we get to share hope and truth with them, and each time, they come a little closer.

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