

**Monte Stephens: 2/17/20**  
**Prepared to Connect**

“HEY! AMEHHREECAN GIRL!” I heard this greeting shouted to the young women in my group during a short-term mission trip in Paris. I could not see much difference between our young women and young Parisians. They didn’t dress nor walk much differently from the locals as far as I could tell. Their hair wasn’t different. The young men shouting this greeting had not heard us speak. But, they could tell the difference between an American and a French girl from 50 yards away.

Funny how we can detect differences in people, some really subtle. You have probably had the experience of being around someone for a while when you suspect he or she is a Christian. Maybe you ask shyly, almost in a whisper, “Do you go to church?” Maybe he or she answers in a whisper, “Yes, where do you go?” That person didn’t mention God or Jesus. Maybe it was what he talked about or didn’t. Maybe it was what she laughed at or didn’t. But you could tell.

Can the people around you tell? Do you act like a Christian? Hope so. I hope I do. Our behavior itself can be a door that leads to connection, then to belief.

When Monema and I were in Singapore in 2014 to help the Pasir Panjang congregation celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we were impressed by how it had grown from a few people meeting in a small apartment to a 3-story building with over 500 members supporting mission points all over East Asia. Monema asked them how they did it. Their formula boils down to, “We loved ourselves and others like Christ would.” Christ-like behavior is a door.

You probably have heard the sentence, “Belong before you believe.” A philosophy of evangelism that promotes inviting people into a church community with the hope that the invited will come to faith. This concept often works.

So, can I tweak this sentence? “Notice before you belong before you believe.” Translation—hopefully someone will notice that you are different in good ways which can lead to a connection and eventually to a connection to Christ.

Jeff Dimick in class recently reminded us that almost no one will be offended by our asking, “Can I pray for you?” When we hear about a co-worker’s or friend’s or neighbor’s challenge, let us all behave like Jesus so that someone will notice and quietly ask, “You go to church, right?” And may we be prepared to connect.