

Jews and Christians Learning to Relate Part 3: Advice From Pioneers

Note: This is the third of a three-part series. Please click [here](#) for part 1 and [here](#) for part 2.

Many Evangelical Christians have an appreciation for the Jewish people and would love to be involved in the developing relationship between the two faiths. But the thought of where to begin might be a little intimidating.

How do you learn what to do and what not to do?

While you need to study up a bit to better prepare yourself, the truth is that you don't learn how to have a relationship by reading a book. You learn by engaging with the other person—you learn Jewish-Christian relations by doing it. And unfortunately, you will learn the most from your mistakes.

That said, I do have tips and advice for Christians launching out into this arena. I have been privileged to have been involved in strengthening Jewish-Christian relations for some 40 years now through my work with the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. Over the years I observed great strides and even amazing partnerships develop, both in Israel and the United States. I have also interacted with many other pioneers and recently interviewed several of them to provide you with the very best guidance.

Here are seven tips for how to approach Jewish-Christian relations.

1. Be sincere. The first thing to understand is that your relationship with a Jewish person must be a friendship, not a mission. It is not a means to some other end. There cannot be

a hidden agenda or strings attached to your friendship, or it is not really a friendship. A true friendship is sincere, honest and transparent. So if that is your goal, please read on!

2. Have a learning attitude. One of the most common mistakes is approaching the Jewish people from the point of arrogance—thinking we know more than they and looking for ways to demonstrate that! However, in reality, we have so much to learn from the Jewish faith, experience and knowledge of the Scriptures.

Great theological differences exist between us. One is over the identity of Jesus. Another is how we approach the Scriptures—Christians in a much more direct way, Jews through the commentary of many rabbis. However, we have much more in common and can learn many things from each other.

I have heard rabbis comment on how impactful their fellowship with pastors has been in teaching them how to pray more spontaneously and informally in public settings. And I know of pastors who are excited by the insight into Scriptures they have gained from rabbis.

3. Understand how you are perceived. Though a lot has changed over the last 25 years, some pockets in the Jewish world still fear and distrust Evangelical Christians. Anti-missionary activists have instilled great alarm in their community about Evangelical Christians and our support of Israel. At the heart of this pushback is the issue of evangelization. And it is important that Christians understand how the Jewish community perceives it.

Most Christians would consider a Jew who believes in Jesus as still Jewish but with the added belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. The Jewish community, however, sees it very differently. For them, you cannot be both; they consider accepting Jesus as Messiah and God as converting from Judaism

to Christianity. Therefore, they think evangelization is an attempt to make them no longer Jewish. It is a much bigger issue than losing one person to the faith—it is a threat to the survival of the Jewish people. For every one Jew who converts there may be thousands of descendants lost to the Jewish faith, a serious threat to the future of such a small people group.

There is another source of fear that has less to do with theology and more about politics. Some from the more liberal segment of the American Jewish community have instilled fear of Evangelicals' political strength and conservative domestic agenda. It is unthinkable for them to have a relationship or work together with us in support of Israel. Of course, political coalition-building around one issue happens every day. So as much as we may disagree on abortion or separation of church and state, this does not mean we cannot agree on the support of Israel or even find common ground on the issues with which we disagree. But it is a hurdle that must be overcome.

4. Learn from history. Few Evangelical Christians know the history of Christian anti-Semitism, and when I teach it, they are often astounded—if not downright mortified—by it. It is so important that we learn about this tragic past because the Jewish community knows it, and they view us through its lens. Knowing the history of Christian anti-Semitism will make us aware of the highly sensitive issues, red flags, or hot topics that must be either avoided or handled with great care.

For example, when we learn about the Jewish children in history who were kidnapped and forced to be baptized, we can understand the sensitivity to the whole idea of baptism. And when we read the baptismal rite for a Jewish person in which they had to renounce everything Jewish, we better understand why conversion is viewed as a betrayal of their Jewishness. When we learn of the atrocities carried out under the sign of the cross, we will understand why, to this day, many Jews will

not enter a church.

5. Read up on the topic. The best book to read to prepare yourself for engaging in this relationship is *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* by Dr. Marvin Wilson. Dr. Wilson has been a pioneer in Evangelical-Jewish relations over the last 50 years, and he wrote this seminal book that is even used as a textbook in college courses.

In addition to the history of Jewish-Christian relations, Wilson explains Hebrew thought and the Jewish heritage of Christianity. He also gives practical advice from his extensive personal experience of how to approach and engage your local Jewish community.

6. Learn from the pioneers. Dr. Wilson is one pioneer, but there are others who, over the last 25 years and more, have helped forge a whole new relationship between Jews and Christians. The easiest way to learn from them is by listening to my interviews with them on the *Out of Zion* podcast linked below.

7. Approach the relationship with humility and honor. Again, while studying and preparing yourself is crucial, you will learn most by engaging in the relationship. Of course, you'll make mistakes along the way, but that's OK. When that happens, sincerely apologize, and ask your offended friend to help you understand what you did wrong and how you were perceived.

The relationship is new, and it is extremely delicate. The most important thing is that you be sincere and humble. That means listening more than you speak and apologizing when you are misunderstood.

You will be so rewarded for the effort as there is a spiritual nourishment when the branch is rightly related to its root (Rom. 11:18). And the root will find its greatest fulfillment when it is united with the branch that can bear its fruit. We need each other.

Dr. Susan Michael is USA Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and host of the Out of Zion podcast. Listen to her series on Jews and Christians Learning to Relate. Purchase Dr. Wilson's book Our Father Abraham.