

Security Briefs: Secure Connections – Episode 053

Part 8: Language and Labels — Identity and Wisdom

Introduction

Today on Security Briefs, we continue our Secure Connections series.

We've talked about transparency, context, stories, social media, crisis communication, prayer, and expectations. Today, we're going to talk about something that seems simple — but often carries more weight than we realize.

Language.

More specifically, labels. Words like “missionary,” “Church planter,” “Evangelism,” even “pastor.” In some parts of the world, these words are neutral — even welcomed. In other parts, they are politically charged, culturally sensitive, or legally problematic.

So today, we are going to talk about how language can either open doors or close them — and how secure connection requires wisdom in how we speak.

The Missionary Side

First, to our missionary friends. Your identity in Christ does not change based on geography. But the language you use to describe your role may need to. In open contexts, it may be entirely appropriate to publicly say you are a missionary or church planter. In sensitive contexts, those terms may raise unnecessary suspicion. In restricted environments, they may create legal consequences.

Using alternative descriptors — teacher, consultant, development worker, community partner — is not compromise. It is contextual wisdom.

The Apostle Paul described himself differently depending on his audience. He emphasized what was helpful and withheld what would create unnecessary barriers. Your calling does not depend on the label you use publicly. It depends on obedience.

When we served in a restricted access context, we were frequently asked what we did. I went into as much detail as the occasion and audience called for. But I almost never used the term “missionary.” I knew that in their context, that word carried unnecessary baggage and obscured rather than helped the Gospel message.

Secure connection includes helping supporters understand why terminology may vary — without feeling defensive about it. You are not changing your mission. You are adapting your vocabulary.

The Supporter Side

Now, to our supporters and churches. If your missionary uses alternate language publicly, please honor it. Do not “correct” them online. Do not publicly introduce them with terminology that may be problematic in their context.

It may feel like you are defending their calling — but you may unintentionally create exposure. Sometimes supporters unintentionally create risk by posting:

- “So proud of our missionary serving in _____!”
- “Excited about their church planting work in _____!”

Even if meant as encouragement, those public labels may travel further than intended. Ask your missionary what terminology is appropriate in public settings. Then use that language consistently.

Identity is secure in Christ. Public vocabulary can be flexible.

The Shared Principle

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says he became “all things to all people” so that by all means he might save some. That was not compromise, it was strategy.

Secure connection requires humility on both sides — missionaries willing to adapt language wisely, and supporters willing to follow that lead. The Gospel does not change. But our words may need to. And sometimes, wisdom is choosing which words not to use.

Practical Takeaways

So here are today’s practical takeaways. **Missionaries:** Clarify for your supporters what terminology is appropriate in public communication. Be proactive rather than reactive.

Supporters: Before posting or introducing your missionary publicly, ask: Is this the language they have requested?

Language can build bridges. Or it can build barriers. Secure connection means choosing words that protect the mission while advancing it.

Now you know.

We’ll see you next time as we continue to talk about Secure Connections.