

HAVING INTENTIONAL GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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Just spending time with non-Christians, though that is a valuable way to love them and tangibly bless them, isn't what it means to be missional and isn't completely how we are called to live as disciples of Jesus. Part of our identity as disciples is to also be a witness, an ambassador, and a proclaimer of Jesus.

Is this something that's just for extroverted evangelists or well-trained Christians to do? No, it's for every Christian. Is this something that should just be done occasionally, at special times and special places? No, it's something that should be happening often, in different forms, throughout the normal day to day interactions of our lives: at work, school, in the neighborhood, at the fitness center, at our kids' sports and extracurricular activities, etc.

So, how can we learn to do this and help the people in our churches learn to have intentional Gospel conversations over meals, at parties, at their lunch break, while they're at the park, at a sporting event or concert with friends? Let me propose some simple principles and a simple process that I believe God has given all of us the ability to do effectively and fruitfully.

These principles are complementary and work together over time to move our non-Christian relationships to the point of trusted friendship. They also build on each other over time to go deeper and deeper into a person's story, deeper into God's story, and eventually to clear communication of Jesus as the answer to the ultimate need in every person's life.

Remember, these things are building on each other over time. For some people that progress might be slow, while for others it's fast. What's important is that we're making consistent investments in the lives of people and being intentional about the time we spend with them and how we carry on conversations with them.

SERVE/BLESS

As we're deepening relationship with people, whether they are new acquaintances or old neighbors, we are always looking for regular, tangible ways to serve and bless them. These could be a range of things, both big and small. Bringing a co-worker their favorite coffee or favorite snack. Buying breakfast or lunch for a co-worker or neighbor. Helping with a house project, blessing with birthday, anniversary, and Christmas gifts, offering to babysit so a tired couple can go on a date night, etc. As we serve and bless consistently in these ways, it builds trust and provides regular opportunities to have quality conversations.

THEIR STORY

Whether we have 5 minutes before work, 10 minutes over the fence in the neighborhood, a half hour at lunch, 20 minutes after our workout, or 90 minutes at our kid's soccer



game, we always have the opportunity to take relationships deeper. To do this we have to love people enough to be motivated to pursue their stories.

And, we do this by asking LOTS of genuine questions and being good listeners. As we ask people good questions and listen well, we will hear how we can tangibly serve them, we will hear what next questions we can ask to go even deeper into their story, and we will begin to hear the reasons why they are distant from the church and distant from God.

OUR STORY

As we are in conversation with people and are asking good questions and being good listeners, there will always be parts of their story that connect with our story. Those connections will either come in the form of similarities to our story or contrast to our story. They grew up in a big city. We grew up in a big city or small town. They grew up in a small family. We grew up in a small family or big family. They love to play sports. We love to play sports or don't like sports but have other types of hobbies.

There will always be likeness or contrast, which means we will ALWAYS have opportunities to talk about our story and make connections between our story and their story. When this happens, it builds trust and allows for us to be known by them, as they are becoming known by us. Remember, this is happening over time and over many conversations. 10 minutes at work today, 30 minutes after work next week, an hour over a meal before the football game on Sunday a week later, 30 minutes over lunch 2 weeks later. Asking more and more questions. Diving deeper and deeper into their story. Sharing deeper and deeper from our story.

GOD'S STORY

As we get deeper into a person's story and share more deeply from our story, there will always be increasing opportunities to either ask them about spiritual things in a natural way or make spiritual connections to our own story in a natural way. It may mean asking about or talking about our church involvement. Things our church or Missional Community does to bless the city, bless the neighborhood, help single Moms, provide for poor families, care for sick neighbors, etc.

Or, we might ask them if we can pray for them or talk about the role that prayer plays in our lives, our families, or the practical details of life. It may connect with how we approach work, marriage, parenting, finances, retirement, vacation, etc. When it does happen, it will be happening in the context of relationships that are deep and safe and trusting, and relationships where love has been expressed in generous, tangible ways.

HERO JESUS

As relationships grow and deepen in the ways described above, they will always move towards spiritual opportunities, with regular love and intentionality. And, as they do, it will provide more opportunities to clearly talk about Jesus, the hero of God's story. There will be opportunities to talk about how Jesus changed your life, why you needed Jesus to change your life, and how he can also change their lives. How he is the answer



to the broken parts of their story, how he is the only way to have a restored relationship with God, and how he is the only one that can provide the abundant life that God intended for every person.

GOOD QUESTIONS

At this point, you may be thinking, “What are those good, genuine questions that I could be asking people regularly to get to know their story?” Can you give me some examples? Here are some, and I’m sure you can think of many others like these.

- Can you tell me about your family? Where did you grow up? How did you grow up? (city, suburban, rural, middle class, lower income, etc.)
- What was your relationship like with your parents growing up? With your siblings? With your friends? With your teachers and coaches?
- Who were some of the formative people in your life growing up? Why?
- How did you like to spend your time growing up? What were some of your favorite things to do? Where were some of your favorite places to go?
- What are some of your best memories from elementary, middle, and high school?
- How was your college experience? What was good and what was bad?
- What would you say have been some of the most formative experiences in your life?
- What have been some of your best and worst jobs?
- How do you like to spend your days off, your weekends, your vacations?
- Where are some of the best places you’ve ever traveled? Why?
- Do you like to read? What do you like to read? What do you like to watch? What music do you like to listen to?
- What do you do for exercise or how do you try to stay healthy?

Usually, no matter their response to any question, you can always follow up and ask “why” they said that or ask them to tell you more about it. “Can you tell me more about that?” or “I’d like to hear more about that.” Those follow-up questions will often help you get a deeper glimpse into their heart and a deeper understanding of their story.

HOW WE PROCLAIM JESUS

In the visual below, you will see arrows moving in a circular pattern. This is simply communicating that our conversations and relationships with people are an ongoing process. They happen over time. They build and go deeper over time. Our relationships with people are created from many, many conversations... sometimes shorter and other times longer. As we go deeper and as greater trust and friendship is built, this will lead into having significant spiritual conversations about their lives and our lives.

That is what is being visually described at the center of the circle. That through consistent blessing and pursuing of people’s stories, our relationships will move from meeting people, to becoming acquaintances with them, to building trusted friendships with them, and hopefully, them becoming disciples and friends with Jesus.



