# The Conversations that Connect series

*Jesus talked with people, with an ear open to the Spirit*

**1. Two ears to hear with (Hear): The Samaritan woman**

2. One spirit to listen with (Illuminate): Nathaniel

3. One heart to love with (Uncover): Zacchaeus

4. One mouth to speak with (Build): Jesus’ teaching

**Credits** for the overall direction of this series go to Dr Norm Geisler & Dr David Geisler, from their book ‘Conversational Evangelism’ (see [meeknessandtruth.org](http://www.meeknessandtruth.org/)). We have partnered with Dr David in a couple of things, & have summarised (with permission) a number of points from his Conversational Evangelism material among the content of the three chapters in Dave Mann’s book, ‘Because we care’ that address this topic area. Book purchasable at [bigbookpublishing.co.nz](http://bigbookpublishing.co.nz/).

**For the preacher to note:** In this series, the application section includes solid, practical teaching on how to apply the Biblical principles today - not merely brief directions regarding this (in the way that is more common in our preaching). Time thus needs protecting in the earlier parts of the messages so this most-important part of the message is not cut short. There is probably too much content in each message outline for most to use.

**TITLE:** Two ears to hear with

**SERIES TITLE:** Conversations that connect

**TEXT**: John 4:4-26, 39-42

**OBJECTIVE**: To demonstrate how conversational skills were central in Jesus’ methodology & to help the audience learn how to identify (hear) the things said in conversation that could provide an easy platform for a great conversation about spiritual things because. Once identified, all that is needed in such a situation is to ask a simple question or two.

**Introduction**: Starting a 4 week series on the Great Commission/Conversational approach to evangelism. Goal is to equip, while encouraging a passion & love for those outside our churches.

* Introductory game: The question game (2 people have a conversation up front – but they can only ask questions. The first person to stumble, delay answering, reply with a question that doesn’t make sense or make a statement, is out. The other wins). Learning points: The key to great conversations is great questions. With practice it’s possible to say things using almost nothing but questions. This is an approach to witnessing that especially suits our current culture.

**A. LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SERIES**

* Our mission: Without Christ people are without ultimate hope! The saving message of Jesus is not tied to any culture or people group. God loves all & is willing that none perish (2 Peter 3:9). To summarise Jesus’ mission, he came to seek & save what was lost (Luke 19:10). The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19) describes our mission. It has TWO parts.

1. To go... all nations...baptizing... - in this we share the gospel, they respond & we baptise them.

2. We then teach them to obey Jesus’ teachings (i.e. very basic discipleship).

* A present challenge: people seem very disinterested. What is going on?

**Introduction to postmodernism:** It has been said, regarding religion in today’s world, that the West is becoming more like the East while the East is becoming more like the West (Ravi Zacharias).

* Postmodernism means ‘after the modern era’. The modern era was the time from the industrial revolution onwards during which our culture believed *humans would find answers* – medical scientists would cure cancer, economists bring wealth, behavioural scientists ‘reprogram’ drug addicts and criminals, preachers bring hope & life, welfare state care for the poor (poverty is as bad in USA today as before the welfare state), global governments end war. Then they all failed us.
* The result:

1. We became *sceptical of truth claims* as a culture (like all the above people’s claims).

2. *Rejection of moral absolutes* (with no belief in one God there is no basis for a fixed definition of morals).

3. *Indifference toward religion* (not interested, because they feel they ’know’ no religion is actually true).

If you share the gospel, people might respond: *‘I’m really glad you’ve found something that works for you! For me – I’ve got my own beliefs’* OR *‘You’ve got your truth – & I’ve got mine.’*

* Q. How do you tell the truth to someone who does not believe ‘truth’ exists? (You can’t)
* A. You talk with them about it! This is what this series is about.

**B. THE SAMARITAN WOMEN AT THE WELL (Read John 4:4-26, 39-42.)**

**1. Jesus had a conversational approach**

* He was an expert in conversation. His first question was “Will you give me a drink?’. It broke cultural norms, as referred in verse 9.
* He made a statement she had no way of understanding. Imagine a conversation with humour in it.
* Imagine the tone of her reply in v11-12 – likely the same humour.
* Sometimes we think our small conversations in the course of a day don’t matter, or consider ‘small talk’ a waste of time. It’s not. It’s a precursor to ‘big’ talk. And questions are the key to conversations. If you don’t think this woman was playing along with Jesus in a fun conversation, read v13- 15.
* It’s not until verse 16 that Jesus asks a question that changed the tone of the conversation.

Jesus made a habit of talking with people wherever He was. He gave people his time & attention – and asked wise questions. If we’re going to influence people toward Christ, we will need to do the same.

**2. Jesus & the Holy Spirit worked together constantly:**

* Our second observation is that Jesus & the Holy Spirit worked together on everything. God can speak to us all in quiet ways.
* Jesus said “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27.
* The whole point of Jesus sending the Spirit (Pentecost) is that we would be empowered for our Mission (Acts 1:8).
* Jesus used the ‘gifts of the Spirit’ in natural, everyday conversations (He didn’t say “Thus says the Lord...”).
* The Holy Spirit is needed for Jesus to have known what He did in v17-18.

God can lead us in our conversations, in the questions we ask.

**3. Jesus broke cultural norms:**

* ALL people need reaching (all cultures, ages, races, genders, sexualities & beliefs).
* Jewish men didn’t talk with Samaritan women.
* Paul said *‘I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some’* (1 Cor 9:22).
* Our lives are not ultimately about what we can get – but about what we can give! Relating well to a wide range of people requires an attitude of love & giving.

**C. LESSONS**

**‘Hearing conversations’:** Sometimes we know someone & they don’t seem interest in Christianity at all – but we have no idea why. We want to encourage them toward faith, but don’t know how.

* A ‘Hearing’ conversation is where we begin to talk with a person with the express purpose of seeking to hear what might be hindering them from talking about, or considering faith in Jesus.
* We ask general questions in an effort to identify areas that we might be able to discuss in more detail (by then asking more specific questions in those areas).

**Introducing the idea of a ‘sour note’:** If we’re listening to a vocal quartet & someone sings out of tune, you can hear it – and the choir master needs to pick up on it to correct it.

* *In the same way, when you’re in a conversation and someone says something that doesn’t seem right to us, if we can pick up on it, it can become a doorway for a meaningful conversation.*

**Example 1: How can God be real when there is so much evil in the world?**

Consider the ‘sour notes’

1. Such a thing as ‘evil’ doesn’t even exist if God doesn’t – so the questions is logically self- defeating.

2. Evil’s existence doesn’t prove there is no God, as what is to say a ‘God’ doesn’t exist who is evil?

3. They are assuming God is wrongly responsible for evil and are probably unaware of the incomparable answer that Christianity offers to the problem of evil and suffering. Suffering & evil are a global religious problem, not a Christian problem! When answers are compared, the Christian answer alone provides dependable hope.

*[Pastor's Note: Islam’s hope isn’t ‘dependable’ in the sense that they have limited assurance of salvation. Their definition of the hope of heaven is also considerably different, their heaven including men getting many wives / women’s continued subservience.]*

**Consider questions such as:**

* What do you mean by evil? Where do you get that definition from? Why do you blame God for it?
* Do you think any of the other religions have a better explanation?
* What do you abandon God in favour of?
* Has it occurred to you that you might not yet actually understand what the Bible says about evil and suffering?
* Could I share how I understand this?

**But also consider that their comments may be emotionally motivated. Ask:** “You seem to feel strongly on this. Why is that?” (Maybe they recently faced a tragedy, in which case they need compassion while going through pain).

The point:

* If we don’t first listen to truly hear the ‘sour notes’ we’ll not know what to ask.
* And if we don’t bother to ask a few questions we’ll never know what they really believe in the first place, let alone why. We’ll have missed a very real opportunity – for they stated a religious belief!

**Summary:** Jesus demonstrated the power of a conversational approach and the same approach works in our day and time. Through nothing but questions we can

* initiate selfless conversations
* in which we identify ‘sour notes’ as potential conversation points
* which we investigate with nothing but questions also

...and it can all be completely non-threatening!

But it begins with hearing what people are really saying - taking a selfless interest, with our ears wide open. Why not try it this week, and see what God does?

**MATCHING SMALL GROUP STUDY AVAILABLE AT** [**alltogether.co.nz/resources/sermons-studies/**](https://alltogether.co.nz/resources/sermons-studies/)

- SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION -

# Conversations that Connect Series – Week 1 Two ears to hear with

**Leaders notes:** This session seeks to:

* Give an introduction to the topic of evangelism, encouraging us to consider who we want to reach out to (A VERY PRACTICAL START)
* Help us together to recognise postmodern/multireligious ‘symptoms’ in those we love, along with a recognition of the benefits of a conversational approach. (PERSPECTIVE DEVELOPMENT)
* We then discuss some of the *sour notes* of our culture (KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT) …before closing in a time of prayer and personal commitment.

The challenge exists that – if we want to be used by God to help people journey toward faith we will need some knowledge. Basic answers to many of our culture's common questions are easily found online. The Hope Project’s Gospel website, launched late in 2014, has videoed answers to common questions. Love for those outside our churches can motivate us to learn.

Suggestion: Keep the pace going in this session. There is a bit of content.

**GETTING STARTED: (15mins)**

1. What is one of the most loving things anyone has ever done for you (excluding what Jesus has done)?
2. What do you think is the most loving thing a person can do for another person?
3. Read John 3:36. In the light of this Scripture, would you agree that sharing the Gospel may be the most loving act we could do? (Note this isn’t to say loving through actions are not also needed).

**About evangelism**

1. On a scale of 1-10, how strong would you say you are in the area of evangelism right now?
2. On the same scale, would any of you say you were stronger or weaker in this area that you were five years ago? Why?
3. Now – the honest question – on the same scale, how much does it matter to you that you do, at some point, become motivated and equipped to share Christ with those around you? And why?

**DISCUSSION:**

**1. Revision:** Can anyone remember what Sunday’s message was about? How might you summarise it? (5mins)

* The message matching this study is about Jesus’ *conversation* with the Samaritan Woman of John 4, with the application being that our outreach can greatly benefit if we learn to ask good questions and listen to what people are really saying [aka ‘hearing conversations’].

Comment: For this session, and the next three, we’re going to be considering how we can become better conversationalists, specifically that we might use our conversations to encourage people toward faith.

**2. Exercise:** If you have not done so already in the current year, each take a few minutes to reflect on the top five to ten people you know whom you would like to share the gospel with. (5mins)

* Next to each name list what you think might be the hindrances, holding them back from knowing Christ (these being for prayer and conversation)
* Then list some of their interests (these being bridges for relationship)

**3.** Each share about one person you would like to see come to faith (maybe use first names only), and what you think their hindrances might be. (5mins)

**4.** General discussion: how close do you feel the people on your lists are to faith? (Q 4 & 5 – 20mins)

* How significant are their resistances?
* If you were to share the Gospel, how many do you think might be ready to believe?
* What do you think are the key hindrances? Are there any that you feel might be common to many of those on your lists?
* Do they believe a God exists, or might that be a hurdle that needs crossing first?
* Do any of them possibly think all religions are essentially the same? Do people that you know really believe this?
* Do you think any of them might even see our Christian beliefs as a little offensive, because we believe our beliefs to be actually right?
* How do you deal with that? (Provided our manner is graceful – and the criticism thus not justified – they are declaring that there is no actual religious truth. The problem is, that is a truth claim [It’s self-contradictory]. Tolerance is not about forcing people to give up beliefs they don’t like. It’s about people not forcing their beliefs on others, and being tolerant toward people with different beliefs).

**5.** Now, many of those who are not Christians in our culture are not really interested in talking about their beliefs. Why do you think that might be? And how can we respond to that?

**6.** In the Sunday message, our Pastor talked about ‘Sour notes’. What was all that about? (Sour notes are viewpoints that are in some way illogical. They are great doors for conversation, enabling us to encourage people toward faith, one step at a time. However, we never criticize other beliefs. Nor do we openly disagree. With wisdom and tact we help them discover things for themselves through our wise use of questions, thus helping them take steps closer to Jesus, one step at a time).

**7. Exercise** (15mins): Now for some practice at recognising sour notes.

Break into four groups, and each discuss what the real issue behind each of these objections might be (5mins only), then share your conclusions with the group (10mins):

1. I don’t believe in heaven and hell
2. I think religion should be a private thing
3. I think all religions lead to God
4. I think we’re just meant to be good people

* **Help with 1.** They don’t believe in the Bible and/or in the existence of a supreme God.
* **Help with 2.** They don’t believe that truth exists or can be known / have rejected the idea of truth, logic and reason are applicable to the area of religion.
* **Help with 3.** They don’t believe that truth exists, but the view is self-contradictory as if everything is true, everything is false. As it turns out, the world's’ major religions say majorly different things in the major areas.
* **Help with 4.** They don’t realise God’s standard is perfection. They’ve never considered how ‘good’ is defined (e.g. Hitler considered it good to kill Jews, gypsies, handicapped people and blacks). They haven’t connected with the thought that if God is good He must also be just, and that God’s love does not mean everyone goes to heaven, because God *can’t* do anything. Specifically, He can’t do something unjust (not-good). God’s love meant He paid the ultimate price to make our forgiveness possible – because He is just, and sin actually is a problem!

**Encouragement:** Good answers exist for all the various matters raised today. With a small bit of research / discussion, we could become familiar with a basic direction a conversation could go in to answer each question.

**APPLICATION: (Scripture and prayer) (10mins)**

**Closing encouragement – read John 4:35.**

**Comment:** The fields are ripe, and our opportunity is limited. How many times have you moved house or jobs, and not shared with those who were your neighbours or colleagues in the previous place? We’ve all done it. The point is this: Our opportunities can be short lived. It is therefore important we are active to do something to encourage faith in others. Asking questions to initiating and engaging conversations is an easy place to start.

**Let’s spend some time in prayer**

* Praying for ourselves, for willingness to learn and grow in this series
* Praying for our friends, that we represent Christ well, and they be drawn to faith in Christ.

**Final encouragement:** Why not try this out in a few conversations this week. Ask questions, listen for ‘sour notes’, and ask questions about them.