# 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. This book can be purchased 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**: One spirit to listen with

**SERIES TITLE**: Conversations that Connect

**TEXT**: John 1:43-51

**OBJECTIVE**: To reflect upon God’s partnership with us in Christian witness. To learn a specific method (using 3 questions) for turning conversations to discuss spiritual matters (Aka, ‘Illuminating Conversations’, enabled by having first identified a ‘sour note’ to ask questions about via the previous messages application on ‘hearing conversations.’)

**Introduction**: In this series we’re considering is how Jesus employed a very conversational approach in the way he engaged with and ministered to people.

* Last week the message title was ‘Two ears to hear with’, and discussed the importance of talking with people around us each day, and how if we learn to listen, it is not difficult to find opportunities to talk about faith.
* Today the message title is ‘One spirit to listen with’, and we’re going to look at the account of when Jesus first met Nathaniel, as found in John 1:43-51.

Testimony: Before we start, did anyone have a great opportunity to practice what we talked about last week, asking questions in an effort to encourage faith in God?

**A TEXT: Jesus and Nathanael. Read John 1:43-51.**

* John is recollecting how Jesus went about calling his first disciples. He recalls how Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, heard John prophecy that Jesus was the ‘Lamb of God’ (see v35) and left to follow Jesus. He immediately invited his brother Simon-Peter to join Him. Then there is the passage we’ve just read.
* The fact that Jesus *found* Philip suggests he probably already knew him. - Philip then introduced Jesus and Nathanael to each other.

**As an interesting question, who is Nathaniel? Was he a disciple?**

* Nathaniel’s name does not appear in the lists of disciples(Mat10:2-4, *Mk3:16-19, Lk6:14-16 and a few of them mentioned in Acts 1:13)*
* While not stated, it seems to many that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person.
* (...because (1) why would John have included this account if it didn’t have a greater significance, noting he wrote only a few of many accounts he could have recalled? (2) John 21:2 also lists Nathanael as being there with the disciples after Jesus resurrection, when the disciples all went fishing one morning, amongst others [not proven – but quite possible]).

**[About Nathanael – extra info – don’t’ have to preach it]**

* Nathanael was a man who loved God, and who sought out God’s truth.
* The fact that Philip went to tell him they had found the Messiah indicates this was of great interest to him.
* He was found under the shade of a fig tree – a common place in those days for study and prayer.Nathaniel’s reply to Philip’s comment that Jesus came from Nazareth (‘Nazareth! *Can anything good come from there?’)* indicates scriptural knowledge (the Messiah would come from Bethlehem).
* Jesus said of Nathaniel, by divine knowledge as in v47 *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false”* – which is quite some compliment!

**Let’s reflect on the small conversation between Jesus and Nathanael**

*V47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him* (as I’ve just read), *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked?*

* It is clear from Nathaniel’s response that Jesus and he did not yet know each other.
* We see again how involved the Holy Spirit was in the daily ministry of Jesus.
* *V48b-49 Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the son of God; you are the King of Israel.”*
* Nathanael saw just two evidences that Jesus was anointed by God, and willingly believed. An amazing response.
* Few people are as hungry for God and for truth, or as ready to believe when faced with a miracle, as Nathanael was

**Point 1: God works with us in ministry**

* It is undeniable that the Spirit’s work was key to Jesus’ success in ministering to hearts
* By the Spirits revelation, Jesus knew things He could not have known otherwise.
* If we want to be effective as witnesses for Jesus we do well to seek to be sensitivity to the Spirits whispers.
* Asking questions more than we talk when in conversation can help us do this, because it gives us time to think *and listen to God.*

How can we hear God’s voice?

* Our time spent with God, reading His word, listening for what He might say to us is critical. We learn to discern His voice.
* It is out of the overflow of this that ability to discern the same voice when in a conversation comes.

**Point 2: We need to give time and initiative to engaging people in conversation**

* How can we minister to people if we don’t talk with them?
* How can we care for people unless we are willing to first listen to them?
* How can we discover the deeper hindrances to faith that people around us have unless we ask a few good questions, listen carefully, and encourage generously, so we have opportunity to hear their hearts? Sometimes we are so busy with many things... that we fail to give time to people around us.

**B. FOR OUR APPLICATION**

* Last week we discussed ‘hearing conversations’ – these being conversations where we ask general questions with the express purpose of listening carefully so as to hear ‘sour notes’ in what others say... because, when we do, through asking questions these can be turned into great opportunities to encourage them toward faith.
* This week we’re going to discuss in more detail how we could do this, non-offensively *‘illuminate’* possible discrepancies or contradictions in what they say to them.

(TO RE-LAY OUR FOUNDATIONAL POINT RE THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH TODAY]

It’s important that we recognise the key areas of difference that exist between our own worldview as Christians, and the worldview of those around us who are no Christians.

* While we believe truth does exist, such as that God is real and can be known, because He has revealed Himself – most people around us do not. If God even exists they believe He is distant, and equally found through any religion, (aka they do NOT believe God has revealed Himself such that He can be known).
* While we believe salvation comes by grace through faith (by what God has done in Christ, received through our faith-response) – those around us believe there is no such ‘salvation’. Being a good person is what counts – but they have no fixed basis for defining what ‘good’ is.
* While we believe God has given us an objective definition of what is right and wrong, people these days see morality as being a ‘relative’ thing

It follows that, when we share the gospel with them, to them this is no more than ‘our version’ of the ‘truth’ - If we ‘push’ the gospel a bit, they may feel threatened by exclusivity (or apparent arrogance) of our beliefs

**So, how are we to talk with such people?**You can’t tell the truth to a person who doesn’t believe truth exists! The best you can do is talk WITH them about it. This is what we’re talking about.

* *A conversational approach to evangelism is a method that suits our times. Through the use of questions we can help people to examine their own beliefs, and consider other ways of seeing things- and do this in a way that is non-threatening, which is the point. New Zealanders are still spiritual people –they just don’t want to be preached at!*

**EXAMPLE:**

For example, if they say they believe ‘all roads lead to God’

1. What is the ‘sour note’ / what do we see as not making sense in that?

* While it might seem a nice belief to some, it is actually illogical, as all the religions say majorly different things in the major areas.

*2. But how do you point that out without ‘preaching’ or confronting them (which would make the conversation uncomfortable)?*

* OPTIONAL VIDEO: Illuminating questions from http://alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos/ - Video 8 In summary:
* Question 1: What do you mean by...? This seeks to clarify WHAT they believe
* Question 2: What led you to that conclusion? This seeks to clarify WHY they believe that
* Question 3: Have you considered that...? This seeks to redirect to/illuminate a different way of thinking
* It would be hard to find a better set of questions to use to open a conversation about a matter on which you have a different point of view to the person you are talking with!

**BENEFITS OF LEARNING TO ASK SUCH QUESTIONS** Instead of just saying what you believe...

1. Asking such questions creates space for you to *listen to them* before you speak
2. Asking such questions creates space for you to *listen to God* before you speak
3. Asking such questions potentially opens an *ongoing conversation*
4. Asking such questions returns the *onus of proof* to them, if they have criticised
5. Asking such questions is non-threatening – you can even disagree without ever disagreeing 6. Asking such questions can *cause them to reevaluate* their beliefs

Let’s consider a few examples:

**Example 1: All religions lead to God**

Sour note / Truth to consider:

1. The religions are actually fundamentally different in what they say about ‘God’ and also salvation

For example, (a) some religions say there is no God (such as Atheism or one strand of Buddhism which is also atheistic) while others believe in a God. There can’t both be a God and not be a God can there?

For example, (b) were you aware that the path for salvation is different in the different religions?

In Islam it comes by belief in Allah, Muhammad his prophet, and good works.

In Hinduism it comes by overcoming karma and incarnations by good works.

In Buddhism it comes by getting rid all desires through the eight-fold path.

In Christianity it comes as a gift of love, received by faith alone in Christ alone.

I.e. in nearly every religion our salvation is based in WHAT WE DO, while in Christianity it is UNIQUELY BASED IN WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US. They say very different things, so can’t all be right.

*Possible questions:*

1. What do you mean by that? (clarify instead of assuming)
2. What led you to that conclusion? (clarify instead of assuming)
3. Have you considered …
   1. what the religions say about God's existence is different. or
   2. what the religions say about the necessary path for salvation is very different or...)
   3. … that isn’t really logical – I mean all roads don’t lead to Rome, right? If you go the wrong way don’t you get to the wrong place?
   4. … the claims of the major religious leaders are all really different, I mean...

Buddha claimed to be a teacher who pointed the way. Mohammad claimed to merely be a prophet. But Jesus claimed to be God come in flesh, to live a sinless life, to die for the sin of the world, and to be the only means for any person living to be forgiven and receive eternal life. The differences between their claims is slightly large! ;-)

*“As one person put it, all the religions are essentially the same, except for the area of God and salvation and the problem of man and the afterlife and that kind of stuff. It turns out that on the big issues they are very, very different. They can’t all be true.” [*Gergory Koukl (Founder and President, Stand to Reason) as quoted on ‘The Case for Faith’ DVD by Lee Strobel. See <http://www.leestrobel.com/>.]

**Example 2: It doesn’t matter what you believe, so long as it makes you a better/good person**

Sour note / Truth to consider:

1. If God turned out to actually exist it *would* matter what you believe (what you believe does matter)
2. God’s definition of ‘better’ and ‘good’ is actually ‘perfect’, so ‘good’ isn’t good enough!

*Possible questions:*

1. What do you mean by better person?
2. What led you to believe beliefs don’t matter? / Where did you get that definition from?
3. Have you ever considered…
   1. … that there is no fixed definition of what good or ‘better’ is, if there is not one God? How do you define what the standard is?
   2. … one of the religions could actually be true?
   3. … what the religions actually say?

**To give perspective to this:**

For example (d), in Islam a person can kill others when they believe the situation warrants a ‘holy war’ approach – while in Christianity the law is that of love and forgiveness. To the atheist there is no basis to define right and wrong, leaving the door wide open for anything – including the really bad stuff.

For example, if there is no God there is no value to life – we’re all just meaningless accidents, and no different to any other animal... - so in killing millions of people the Communists actually did nothing wrong... Where as, if there is a God, we’re loved by Him, created special, and therefore life is sacred and of great value.

So, what we believe does matter, doesn’t it?

For example (e), to some Hindus, a person who is handicapped is that way because of bad Karma from a previous life, thus such people are despised and not to be helped by many, so as not to interrupt their bad Karma, so they can have better Karma in their next reincarnation. Do you think abandoning handicapped or needy people like that is OK?

For example (f), as an atheist or multi-religious person there is actually nothing to stop a person and their community believing that the lives of handicapped children are not as valuable, and just killing them off – which is exactly what communism has done exactly this in the past, and has never apologised for it either.

Do you think that is right? (So, what you believe does matter, huh?)

**THE POINT:** You don’t need to know all these different ways of answering a question. The point is, if you knew just one, you would have a direction to take a conversation through the use of questions.

To demonstrate how questions could open a conversation to enable a fuller sharing of the Christian message

1. Do you think that all religions make you a better person?
2. Why do you think that? What led you to that conclusion?
3. Have you considered that...the religions don’t define ‘good’ the same way? For example, WWII Germany, or Communism, or some Hindus neglect of the poor, or Islam’s permission to holy war, or Christianities ridiculously high standard of no lust, let alone sex outside of marriage?
4. So you think a standard or right and wrong exists?
5. How high is that standard?
6. Who sets it? (If we do then it’s a made up standard, and is thus not ‘real’ or true)
7. How do you measure up according to that standard?
8. Can you see that we actually have a moral problem – that something is wrong with our planet, and that something in the way we are made tells us it’s not supposed to be this way? (where does this idea come from? Why aren’t we adapted to our environment?)
9. I’m a Christian. Could I share with you what Christians believe? (God loves us – we don’t measure up – Jesus made a way – we have a Saviour – but He also must be our Lord – we can make a choice to believe and follow, and in so doing be forgiven and ‘saved’)

I hope that was helpful.

**IN SUMMARY:** Our objective in Christian witness could be put this way: Every day and in every way we help people take one step closer to Jesus.

* That is what these conversations are all about
* While we must share the gospel with all people

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14)*

We need to engage the spiritual conversation with people.

* *What do you mean by that?*
* *Where did you get that idea from?*
* *Have you considered...?*

Why not try these questions out in a few conversations this week.

- SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION -

# Conversations that Connect Series – Week 2 One ‘spirit’ to listen with

**Note to leader:** Jesus conversed with intelligence and anointing with those around Him – and so should we. The natural and the spiritual always work together.

However, conversational skills are learnt. That is what this series is about. With love motivating us, we can help our members get a handle on some basic skills that could make a really big difference. It always has, and always will, take people to reach people! We must empower our people! They need knowledge of their culture, and of the approaches that can best work in it.

**GETTING STARTED (20mins)**

1. If you could hear from any person on this earth, who would you most want to hear from? (A long lost relative? A call from a famous musician?)
2. Do any of you feel God has spoken to you before? What did He say, and how did you know it was Him?
3. What is one of the most amazing things you’ve ever seen God do?

**Today we’re discussing conversations** again. This series being about looking at how Jesus reached out. He sometimes just stopped to talk with the people around Him, yet was effective in encourage them in faith.

1. The question game (5mins): Have a group play-off, where in pairs you have a conversation where you are only allowed to ask questions. The conversations must make sense, and flow naturally. The first person to make a statement / get stuck loses. Then the winners play the winners… until you have an ultimate winner.
2. Can anyone remember what Sundays message was about? (The calling of Nathanael – a conversation in which Jesus had two words of knowledge, with application of the message being in the area of ‘illuminating conversations’. I.e. both the Holy Spirit and general wisdom can help us in our conversations, so we can encourage others toward faith)
3. Have any of your ever felt God gave you a word of knowledge when while talking with a non-believer? Tell us about it!
4. [Testimony] By the way – did any of your have any conversations about God or faith with others in your family or work place this week? (5mins)

**DISCUSSION**

**1. Revision: (10mins)** Our Pastor shared six benefits of a conversational approach to evangelism. Can you remember what some of them were? **Six benefits of asking questions before talking:**

1.…it creates space for you to ***listen to them*** before you speak

2. …it creates space for you to ***listen to God*** before you speak

3. …it potentially opens an ***ongoing conversation***

4. …it returns the ***onus of proof*** to them, if they have criticised

5. …it is ***non-threatening*** – you can disagree without ever disagreeing

6. …it can ***cause them to reevaluate*** their beliefs

2. We also heard about (likely through the video) three great questions that can turn a conversation. Can anyone remember what they were?

* What do you mean by…? (Clarifying WHAT)
* What led you to that conclusion? (Clarifying WHY)
* Have you considered… “ (Redirecting / Illuminating) [This question is where a small amount of knowledge is useful]

What do you think about these questions? Are they useful?

**3. Lets try a two part exercise: (20mins)** First (a) we’re going to consider what the ‘sour notes’ might be in some common objections. And then (b) we’re going to role play a possible conversation, to see how through the use of questions, things that may be illogical can be non-offensively illuminated.

**(a) Break into groups to discuss what the ‘sour notes’** might be in these three objections (3mins). Then share your conclusions with the group (3mins).\*

1. I don’t believe God exists – science explains everything.
2. I think all religions lead to God
3. It doesn’t matter what you believe. We’re just meant to be good

All they need to do is identify ONE ‘sour note’. There are suggestions at the end of this study. They don’t need to know (or even hear) all of those suggestions. They are there for your benefit, as the leader.

**(b) Feedback or role-play:** Have someone play the role of the person giving the objection in the course of a conversation, and then see if someone can – through the use of only questions [using the three questions] – gently ***illuminate*** (or reveal) the illogic or discrepancy to them.

**[Reinforcing the relevance of this] (5mins)**

4. Do you think that – if those conversations had been real ones, the sceptic might have been somehow encouraged one step forward in the journey toward faith in Christ?

5. Do you think these are real questions in the hearts and minds of those you know, who are not yet believers?

**ENDING (5mins)** Thanks for your involvement today.

Close in prayer

* For one another, for a revelation of God’s love for others, for willingness to learn and grow, for boldness, grace and wisdom to apply what is learnt in conversations this week.
* For those you listed last week who you want to see come to faith.

Possible homework: Here are three very soul-searching questions I want you to consider this week

1. How important is it to you that those you love come to faith in Christ?
2. How important do you think YOUR part might be in this?
3. If you are hindered in your evangelistic efforts, what do you think the greatest thing hindering you might be?

**Idea for the leader:**

* Maybe you could text or email these questions to them.
* Maybe they could be encouraged to each group-reply that email.
* You thus reserve your discussion time next week for other things.

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**\*RESOURCE FOR THE LEADER FOR QUESTION 3a**

Note – they only need to come up with one.

This page is to help you as the leader.

Sharing all this with your members may overwhelm and confuse them.

1. Re they believe science can explain everything - science is actually unable to explain many things

* Consider such as the need for a very creative and intelligent cause for first life (that’s a miracle),
* or the cause of the ‘big bang’ from which point science has shown both matter and time to have begun (a first-cause is needed),
* or how random chance could account for the insane complexities of what has been discovered to have been going on inside living cells all this time,
* or how the fine tuning of the constants of the universe came about,
* or of how the variety of creativity in the creation came about through random chance,
* or about the real lack of a fossil record to verify evolution, with no water tight fossils to prove the evolution of all species, one from the other
* or the lack of examples whereby positive DNA information was added through mutation (mutation being the current claimed means by which species have evolved upwards to greater complexity – noting there are a small handful of possible evidence, and the evidence of these is not strong – e.g. the bacteria that digests nylon (a common current example) was recently claimed as ‘upward’ development, but is now known not to be positive mutation. The point is, to believe everything that exists is just an accident without God in the picture is a most dubious claim, and certain in the light of current evidences takes more faith than it does to believe the logical alternative that there is an intelligent Creator.

There are thus many possible directions for a conversation, and it doesn’t have to be complicated. Just as a builder needs a designer, so does this creation (which is many times more complicated).

2. Re they think all religions are the same – they don’t believe / see reasons to believe that religious truth exists, or the illogic of their claim

* An illogical claim, for if everything is true, everything is false.
* Also inconsistent in that the religions are majorly different in their major areas. For example, God cannot both exist and not exist.

3. Re being good is good enough – They don’t realise God’s standard is perfection, or that most world views provide no foundation for defining any actual standard at all (aka, What do you mean by good, and what foundation do you have for that definition?)

* They’ve probably not considered how ‘good’ is defined, as Hitler considered it good to kill Jews. Is it really up to us to define right and wrong? If a single God who has revealed Himself doesn’t exist, there is no basis from which to say any actual moral code exists. It is up to each individual or culture to decide for themselves – and different people and cultures may decide differently. Morality becomes something we created – and therefore that we could change. Hitler and communist leaders defined morality very differently to how we do on the basis of a Christian heritage – and people suffered terribly as a result!
* They may not have connected with the thought that if God is good He must also be just, and that the fact that God is loving does not therefore mean everyone goes to heaven – because God can’t do anything (Specifically, He can’t do something unjust /not-good).

However, God’s love meant He paid the ultimate price to make our forgiveness possible – so He can’t be accused of being unloving or uninvolved! (…and if this were then being discussed, you’d be sharing the gospel without really trying to share the gospel. I can all happen as a natural part of the conversation).

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