# 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**: **3.** One heart to love with

**SERIES TITLE**: Conversations that Connect

**TEXT**: Luke 19:1-10

**OBJECTIVE**: To inspire Christians to boldly initiate questions / embrace conversational method, while stirring love in the heart - because getting a personal revelation of God’s love for people is probably the only way to become sustainably motivated for Christian witness!

**INTRODUCTION/REVISION:** We are up to our third week in a four part series. To revise - a conversational approach, whereby we ask questions,

* ...creates space for you to *listen to others* before you speak
* ...creates space for you to *listen to God* before you speak
* ...potentially opens an *ongoing conversation*
* ...returns the *onus of proof* to others, if they have criticised
* ...it is *non-threatening*
* ...can *cause them to reevaluate* their beliefs Pretty useful stuff!

Our first message was *Two ears to listen with* - Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan Woman in John 4, the point being that a meaningful conversation likely begins with us asking a few questions and listening well. Any ‘sour note’ is a potential door for meaningful conversation



Our second message was *One spirit to listen with* - Jesus’ brief conversation with Nathanael in John 1, then discussed how we could create an opportunity from that ‘sour note’ through asking questions that help them evaluating their beliefs and consider other ways of seeing things. The three key questions we looked at were…

* 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)

Now, today – we’re going to look at the story of Jesus and Zaachaeus

**Testimony**: Does anyone have an encouraging story as a result of applying these questions in a conversation this week?

**A TEXT: Jesus and Zacchaeus the tax collector. Read: Luke 19:1-10**

* This story reminded me of a verse found in Colossians 4:5.
* *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*
* Here is Jesus, the most holy man who has every lived and here is Zacchaeus, a Jew who has compromised everything by partnering with the Romans, collecting taxes for them from the Jews, profiteering along the way. Yet Jesus successfully struck up an open-hearted, two-way conversation with him!

**1. Learn to make the opportunity:** Jesus could have just walked past Zacchaeus, but didn’t. It is only because Jesus interrupted the flow of his day to initiate a conversation with this outcast of a man, that Zacchaeus’ life was changed. Many witnessing opportunities will only come about because we have first chosen to slow down to give people time.

**2. Try to listen to the Holy Spirit’s whispers**

* It would seem Jesus was prompted by the Holy Spirit to talk with Zacchaeus, and invite Himself to his house. (Re Jesus knowing Zacchaeus’ name, it is possible Zaccaheus was well known, so Jesus’ knowledge of his name may not have been Divine revelation).
* If we want to be effective as witnesses for Jesus, our greatest effectiveness will come from our ability to walk with the Spirit, listening to His promptings, leadings & revelations.

**3. Learn to love the unlovable**

* Zacchaeus was a social reject in his time. Jesus’ actions were considered a compromise by the religious leaders.
* There are people all around us who need love – the lonely, the grieving, the hurt, the disadvantaged, young people and older people, those who are physically or mentally disadvantaged, or emotionally troubled... they need your smile, your time to say hi, your ear, your touch, your love .
* Some people are not pleasant to be around (loud, smelly, talk too much, abrasive...). Love looks past all this.
* Jesus was criticized: *“He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner’ ”* (v7) ...and we are called to follow Jesus’ example.
* We are not told about the contents of the conversation that went on at Zacchaeus’ house, but the end results of Jesus’ love, acceptance, encouragements, and their conversation was significant. Zacchaeus – a sinner of sinners to the Jews - REPENTED of his sin.
  + He gave half of his possessions to the poor
  + and promised to return four-fold anything he had cheated anybody out of.

Jesus didn’t come across as one who judged people – yet had uncompromisable beliefs and standards. If we can learn to love and related to people like Jesus did, we’d find opportunities are not so hard to come by. - There are skills we can learn that help.



Midway summary:

* Week 1 - We have two ears to *hear* what people are saying
* Week 2 - We have a ‘spirit’ to hear what God is saying, to *illuminate* new ways of thinking
* Week 3 - We have a heart with which to love, to *uncover* the deeper reasons and open the way for Jesus. We’re now going to look at this third type of evangelistic conversation – ***‘uncovering conversations.’***

**B. APPLICATION - UNCOVERING CONVERSATIONS**

People resist Jesus for different reasons. Some reasons are intellectual, some are emotional, and some are spiritual – and it is important that we learn to discern the difference in our conversations.

**Example**: at the end of the video we watched last week an example was given of a lady who said she didn’t believe in a God.

* *Intellectually,* it looks as if she is an atheist – and we could therefore try to engage a conversation about that (Have you considered the incredible complexity of life? Do you really think it logical to say that such complex things came about as accidents?)
* However, when the question was asked ‘Where did you get that idea from?’, the reply was “How can there be a good God when there is so much suffering.”

*Sometimes the hindrances are emotional. If we were to address only the intellectual question, we’d have missed the point.*

**SIDE POINT: How love can help us find the words to say:**

Sometimes we feel scared we won’t know what to say. I’d like to encourage you that love not only helps us overcome this fear, it gives us words to say.

* When our conversations are flowing from love, words often come naturally.
* (And practice makes perfect)

**SIDE POINT: Clever answers are not always the best ones:**

An example from the movie ABOUT A BOY: A fatherless 10yo boy with a depressed mum starts randomly visiting a selfish wealthy man in his 30s (Hugh Grant), who really doesn’t want to see the boy. At one point the topic of the boys mothers attempt at suicide comes up. With complete sensitivity Hugh Grant (lacking in people skills) simply swears, calling the boys mum a nut-job, and stating that growing up with a mum like that would do any one's head in. The irony/humour in the movie is that his words were perfect. The boy didn’t need an answer. He needed empathy (and felt greatly encouraged as a result)

Love can give us words to say. When love is the motive God is released through us because, in that moment, our hearts are coming into sync with His!

**The end result of Jesus’ love shown to Zacchaeus**

Consider what happened. Jesus gave Zacchaeus time, and didn’t judge him.

At the conclusion Jesus confirmed that salvation had come to Zacchaeus ‘ house, and then stated His own purpose - *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”* Our sincere efforts to share the gospel will only be effective in as much as we also sincerely learn to live out of love.

**LET'S CONSIDER SOME EXAMPLES OF EMOTIONALLY LOADED STATEMENTS/QUESTIONS**

Example 1: ‘I don’t want to be a Christian because the Church is full of hypocrites’

* There are a lot of people who have been turned off Christianity by the bad example of someone who claimed to follow Jesus.

**What is the sour note / Truth to consider?**

The merits of a product are not determined by the merits of the products representative.

* so while taking offense may be understandable, it is not logical to be angry at God for a humans’ bad behaviour. (be angry at the human!)
* Also Christianity is the greatest cause of good on earth, and also has the clearest and highest standard of moral teaching in the world – so attacking it is rather unfair.

Starting questions (in the manner we’ve discussed in the previous messages):

* What do you mean hypocrite?
* Isn’t it true that none of us live up to our ideals?
  + Have you never done anything contrary to your belief?
  + We’ve all fallen short of our own expectations of ourselves, haven’t we? We’re all guilty of being hypocrites in some way, if we’re honest.

**HOWEVER** - let’s imagine their feelings on this are strong at this point. What is needed now is a question that sees to UNCOVER the deeper issues:

3. ‘Why is this so important to you?’

* You seem to feel strongly on this – why is this?’
* I’m sorry to hear that - what happened? (at which point they may share their story, maybe having been wronged by a Christian earlier in life).

4. ONLY THEN (having shown empathy first) might we return to their stated question:

* I’m so sorry that happened. To be fair, can you see how God could be separate to that?
* OR I’m so sorry that happened. I can assure you from what the Bible says that they will be called to account for that by God. But I think the important question is where you or I stand before God. I mean, we’ve all done things wrong. Who is without fault?

**Example 2:** How can a loving God send people to hell? [If time permits]

Sour note / Truth to consider:

1. It's an issue of God’s goodness and justice, not His love
2. God loves us, and wants us all in heaven, so much that He gave His own Son!
3. If they don’t believe in hell the real topic to discuss is whether they believe the Bible – or even in God.

**Possible questions if we sensed there was some emotion in their question:**

1. Why do you ask that? (Instead of a what or where question, ask a why question) [REMEMBER: The conversation expander's of what, where, when, why and how. Make them your best friends!]

This is an uncovering question. It could be that a loved one just passed away, and they are concerned. We’d want to be sensitive to that. Asking the question helps us be aware

To answer the original question we could ask...

2. If you were God, would you let everyone into heaven? Rapists included?

3. If not, where do you draw the line? What is the standard...?

Through these two questions we’ve clarified already that its not a love issue but a justice issue. They are now already seeing God less as the ‘bad guy’

I think a good response regarding any person who has passed away is to say that ‘I can’t tell you where any person has gone – only God knows that.’

Occasionally you will meet who doesn’t want to become a Christian because they want to go to the same place they believe their late husband or wife went to – or a their friends who have passed on…

A good question in such circumstances is to ask them, if they had passed away, and no matter where they were, would they want their loved ones to think about God so as to secure the best eternal outcome? (The story of Lazarus and the Rich man – who was concerned for his brothers, is relevant in this scenario)

**IN SUMMARY: Sometimes people are resistant for emotional or spiritual reasons**

For the conversation to continue meaningfully, covering questions are needed

* Why do you ask that?
* You seem to feel strongly on this, why?
* Why do you say that, do you really believe that or did you say that because you want to close this conversation?

Whatever the scenario, we seek to understand what they are really saying – which sometimes is exactly what their words say – and sometimes is the opposite o o E.g. How are you? Fine! (Yet they just had the worst day of their life).

Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus,

* He had an EAR to the spirit
* He had a MIND that had grown in understanding
* He had a HEART that loved

He showed love to a social outcast. They engaged in a conversation and Zacchaeus was completely changed as a result!



**CHALLENGE:**

Who can you step out of your comfort zone to reach out to in conversation this week?

- SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION -

# Conversations that Connect Series – Week 3 One heart to love with

**Leader's note:** This session aims to

* Revise lessons learnt
* Consider of how God can use our past experiences to help us relate to and encourage different people.
* Reaffirm that connecting with people so as to share faith really is our God-given mission.

**GETTING STARTED + REVISION (20mins)**

**Testimony:** Did anyone find/make an opportunity to talk about God with someone this week? What happened?

**Reflection:** Last week we ended with three questions. Let’s discuss these now and then pray, after which we’ll look at this week's study.

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?

**Revision: (15 mins if someone shares at Q4)**

1. What is the purpose of a ‘hearing conversation’?
2. What is the purpose of a ‘illuminating conversation?What three questions could be helpful to remember?
3. Can anyone remember, from the Sunday message, what the purpose of a ‘uncovering conversation’ is? (To ask questions that dig for deeper intellectual, emotional or spiritual hindrances that might exist, from a desire to encourage the person. For example, if all a persons given objections have been answered what is still holding them back?)
4. Does anyone here feel they had such a more emotional hindrance that held them back from following Christ at one time? What happened that helped you past it? Where other Christians showing compassion and care a part of the equation?

**TEXT: Reflection on two Scriptures: (15mins)**

**5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.**  For what reason does Paul suggest God can comfort us in our troubles?

**Comment:** Note that we can help both Christians and non-Christians because of our experiences. These experiences can be shared amongst conversations with non-believers.

**6**. To help us connect with this - how about we each share one area in which we would be able to relate to someone else’s struggles *because we’ve been there.* (Note, don’t make people share, and ask for very short answers. The point is merely to illustrate that God has allowed us to have different experiences, and there might be purpose to this).

**7.** While none of us like to suffer, what other benefits are there to suffering and pain?

* They **test and strengthen our faith**, as we must choose to either truth God or linger in doubt.
* That **we gain experiences with which we can help others** has been already mentioned.
* Our **character is developed** (See Romans 5:1-4. What two things does he thank God for? 1. Salvation through Christ 2. Earthly sufferings! Why? They produce perseverance, character and hope – for we grow to trust God irrespective of trials, and are also caused to place our values in the coming Kingdom because we look forward to its perfection / absence of suffering)
* We **learn humility** (for we discover we are not immortal or immune to weakness)
* For the same reason, suffering **often draws people to saving faith,** or back to it.
* And more…

**8. See 2 Peter 3** (maybe reading only the verses suggested below)

* What is the topic that is being discussed in this chapter?
* Read v8-9. When Peter says here that the Lord doesn’t want anyone to perish, for what reason did Peter say this? (He is clarifying that is the reason why Christ hasn’t yet returned)
* Read v15. How could you summarise this in different words, so as to make its meaning fresh?
* Can you think of any other Scripture that also says the timeline for Christ’s return is determined by the spread of the Gospel? (Try Matthew 24:14).

**9.** A challenging question: If your pain were to bring just one person to salvation, and thus it had a purpose in that one person received eternal salvation through your testimony, would that be worth it?

**10. (Optional) A conversation role play:** Ask for two volunteers – one playing a sceptic, and one a Christian. Give the sceptic the below ‘stated’ and ‘heart’ objection – but don’t let the rest of the group know what these are.

**The skeptics ‘stated’ objection:** ‘…what Christians believe is only their version of the truth anyway!’

**The skeptics ‘heart’ objection:** Bitterness at a hypocrite who hurt them.

To begin: The sceptic states their stated object, and the conversation begins.

The Christians job is to ask questions that could help draw out the real issue, and address it.

* Please start with the 3 great questions
* Others in the group can help if the conversation gets stuck.
* Hopefully through the first discussion using the 3 questions there is something that suggests the deeper issue, proving a door for that issue to be uncovered and therefore discussed (see note at bottom for quick ideas).

**APPLICATION (10mins)**

We can’t reach people with the Gospel if we’re not willing to talk with them:

1. Who will you seek to start a conversation with this week?

Consider even the ‘Zacchaeus’’ who you may not normally talk with.

Please be bold to take opportunities that come.

1. Prayer for each other and those we would like to encourage toward faith.

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**Help for with Question 10**

**Objection:** ‘…what Christians believe is only their version of the truth anyway’

**Real heart objection:** Bitterness at a hypocrite who hurt them.

**Sour note / Truth to consider:** This is the same as ‘all religions lead to God’

* They believe truth is relative – which is illogical (and depressing, as there is no moral foundation, no basis for human worth, no hope for a future beyond suffering and ‘evil’…)
* They might think the religions actually say the same thing – which is mis-information

**Possible questions:**

1. What do you mean ‘their version of the truth? ***(an ‘investigating’/’hearing’ question)***

Why would you say that? How many versions of the truth can there be?

1. What led you to that conclusion? / Where did you get that idea from? ***(a hearing question)***
2. Have you considered the religions are fundamentally different – and even contradictory? ***(illuminating question)*** If their reply seems heated at this point you could say…
3. You seem to feel strongly about this. Is there a reason for this? ***(This is an ‘uncovering’ question)***
4. What was your experience?
5. [It would then be appropriate to discuss that topic with similar questions, yet sensitively and with a heart to encourage].

**POSSIBLE SCENARIO**: What if the sceptic says something that really doesn’t make sense – and it seems they might not want to talk about religion?

* Ask them, “Are you avoiding talking about religion?”

**Why ask this?**

* This is also an uncovering question.
* It would reveal their insincerity or avoidance, if that is the case.
* Now that both they and you know they are bluffing, ***you are positioned to have a REAL conversation together about whatever the REAL issue might be, which may be something entirely different to anything you’ve discussed so far*** (because they were only being polite thus far)***.***

Aka, calling their bluff is also an uncovering question, and would be necessary in such a situation if you are ever to discover and discuss the real issue/hindrance.

***The lesson: If we aren’t bold to ask these ‘uncovering’ questions with a goal to hear what they are really thinking, we may never get to the root of the issue for them so as to help them see an important perspective (the truth of the gospel of Jesus) that is different to their own***.

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