

## Conversational Evangelism Series

# Everyday Spiritual Conversations

- Week 1: Ask, don't tell
- Week 2: Enquire, don't disagree
- Week 3: Converse, don't confront (Being a non-threatening person)
- Week 4: A message, not a massage (Building bridges to the gospel)

### Note to preachers:

Some preachers might like to turn message 4 into two messages – which would make this a five-week long series.

The content of this series is strategic, and highly relevant. I hope that you and your church members love it too, and get heaps out of it!

### Small groups

I also encourage that getting church small groups to do the discussions beyond filling heads with relevant teaching, we are called to make disciples! Application of this series is more likely to be achieved if small groups are an intentional part of the discipleship journey.

### Changing your church's outreaching culture

For church and small group leaders, we recommend the 'Outreaching Culture' video about small groups. This can be found at [AllTogether.co.nz/ATConsulting](http://AllTogether.co.nz/ATConsulting) (or in Australia at [GlobalOutreachDay.com.au](http://GlobalOutreachDay.com.au)). This short video teaches leadership habits to help small group leaders integrate the material into their members' long-term memories, and life-long application.

### Videos of interest

Increase your members understanding by playing a short video each week. (When it comes to applying the conversational skills taught in this series, having some knowledge will help people know how to ask even better questions)

**Idea 1:** Videos on the 'moral argument' and 'fine-tuning of the universe' are available at William Lane Craig's Youtube channel, they are spectacular and concise. Search Youtube. At the time of writing the weblink is [www.youtube.com/channel/UCWyWfVgK5EiojiTtfnDpXQ](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWyWfVgK5EiojiTtfnDpXQ)

**Idea 2:** There are 5 five-minute long videos that summarise why we believe Christianity to be true. This could be played over 5 weeks (or reserved to be used as a small group discussion series for another time, as each video comes with a simple discussion guide) Find 'Cornerstone Series Two: Reasons to believe' at [alltogether.co.nz/discipleship-videos](http://alltogether.co.nz/discipleship-videos)

I hope the series helps!

Dave Mann



# Message 1: Ask, don't tell!

## INTRODUCTION

We're starting a new series today called *Everyday Spiritual Conversations*

- In short, it is about conversational evangelism.
- And my primary hope is that our courage to engage people in everyday spiritual conversations will increase as a result.

[NZ Statistics] What portion of our nation do you think is 'spiritual'?

Here are some other statistics from the 2013 NZ Census

- 48% affiliate with Christianity
- 42% said they had 'no religion' (likely to be the majority view at the next census)
- 6% affiliated with religions other than Christianity
- 4% declined to respond

Are we a nation that is closed to spiritual things?

- Would you believe that well over 80% consider themselves 'spiritual'?
  - o 46% believe in a God of some kind
  - o 31% believe in a higher power
  - o And, of the 19% who believed in neither, many still have spiritual views, such as we become floating spirits, or ghosts
    - NB – even many of the most 'secular' nations in the world – Scandinavians or Japanese, are still superstitious or believe in the paranormal

Consider - 46% of Kiwi women believe you can communicate with the dead.

So, what we're asking in this series is this:

- Why aren't there more conversations with these women?
- Or to put it differently: How could we get ourselves engaging more in everyday spiritual conversations with these people?

Let's start! This first message is titled – **'Ask, don't tell!'**

## ASK – DON'T TELL

Most people today don't believe religious truth exists

- Instead they believe all religions are essentially the same.

**Here is a key question:**

Q - How do you tell the truth to someone who doesn't believe religious truth exists?  
You can't. (It is philosophically impossible).

Q - What can you do?

You can talk WITH them about it.  
It's called conversation, and a great conversation is no further away than a great question.

## THE NEED FOR A ROLE MODEL

Who could we look to who could model this conversational approach to us?

- How about Jesus!
- Look at Jesus engaging people in conversation:
  - o He didn't have one set method
  - o Every conversation was different
  - o And the records we have of these conversations show that they usually started with and included questions.

How about this as a summary of Jesus' approach to 'personal outreach':

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

- (1) a conversational approach
- (2) a Spirit-led approach
  - o Might it be wise for us to use this approach also?

## SIX BENEFITS OF ASKING QUESTIONS BEFORE TALKING

1. It creates space for us to ***listen to people*** before we talk

- Who feels that they've said too much sometimes when trying to talk about spiritual things with a non-Church person?
  - o (Does anyone wish they could somehow take some of those words back?)
- Sometimes we assume we understand what a person has said when we really don't
- When you don't know what to say – what do you do?
  - o Ask a question!

(Maybe illustrate with a personal example

- E.g. you reacted to something someone said, only to realise later that you'd misunderstood.
- E.g. doing a job for someone, but you misunderstood what they wanted)
- My example: When 16yo I went to work on an orchard. The owner showed me how to thin the fruit – but unknowingly I hadn't fully understood everything he said. Two days later he came to inspect my work. He was not happy. I got yelled at – and learnt a lesson. Asking questions to check understanding can be important!

2. It creates space for us to ***listen to God*** before we talk

- Look at Jesus in conversation: John 4 - He is with the Samaritan Woman and the Spirit gives him a word of knowledge: 'She has been married five times, and the man she is currently living with is not her husband'.
- We aren't going to hear the Spirit's whispers if we don't develop a habit of trying to listen. By developing a habit of listening we will also hear the Spirit's whispers.



### 3. It potentially opens an **ongoing conversations**

Imagine someone has asked a question

- If you answer by stating your view, they might say 'Oh – thanks'
  - o ...with which the conversation is over!
  - o And their reply doesn't mean they have believed what you said!
  - o (And if they believe all religious views to be essentially equal, they have no motive to really worry about whatever you said either)
- However, if we reply to a question with a question – that can turn things around.

Consider 2 Corinthians 4:4 – *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

- What is blinded? The mind
- People can be blinded to the gospel by the way they are taught to think
  - o E.g. that all life can be explained away as the consequence of a long series of accidents
  - o E.g. all religions are the same

If it is the mind that is blinded – they will probably be disinterested in a debate. (They 'know for a fact' that what we're saying cannot be true).

- However, through questions we could still engage a conversation!

Consider Jesus' conversation with the rich man in Matthew 19:16-24

**16** *Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*

**17** *"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."*

**18** *"Which ones?" he inquired.*

- Note that Jesus returned the question with a question
- Note also that what we have here in the gospel are SUMMARIES of the conversations Jesus had, and also summaries of his teachings
  - o This conversation was likely longer than the approx 40 seconds it takes to read this story.
  - o When Jesus asked '*Why do you ask me about what is good?*' – it is possible that there was additional conversation taking place here
    - (The writers of the gospel have given us an accurate overview of what the conversation was about, and how it took place – but they have not given us a transcript).

Had Jesus simply answered the rich man's question, the conversation might have been brief, and the effect upon his life may have been minimal.

- However, by engaging in dialogue, the impact at the end of this particular conversation was quite hard hitting and impactful!

### 4. It **returns the onus of proof** to the other person in a critical conversation.

Let's look at Matthew 22:15-22





**15** Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. **16** They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. **17** Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

**18** But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?"

**19** Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, **20** and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

**21** "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

**22** When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

- How did Jesus answer their question?
  - o With a question!
- What effect did it have?
  - o It put the onus of proof on them.

Example : Someone says "Look, everyone knows the Bible has been copied hundreds of times and it's really just a myth"

What do you say?

- How about, 'what do you mean by that?' and 'Where did you get that idea from?'

Example : Someone infers that all religions are the same, and that anyone who thinks differently is narrow minded. What do you say?

- How about "Oh – do you think all religions are the same? In what ways? Where did you get this idea from? Have you looked into religion a lot have you?"
- ...because I really don't get that view. The major religions are actually majorly different in the major things (E.g. Does God exist? Does right and wrong actually exist? What is the purpose of life? Is there hope, and what is it? How do we get 'saved'? Can we even be 'saved'? ...)

5. It is **non-threatening** (We can even disagree without disagreeing)

- You see, if you disagree in a conversation, do you think that conversation will last much longer? (Probably not)
- But if you ask a question, and if your general attitude and tone is positive and encouraging, you could discuss what they have said without ever revealing what you believe.

**Next week's message deals with disagreement.**

Finally

6. It **can cause them to re-evaluate their beliefs**

And this is the goal, right?

E.g. If they get your point about all religions being majorly different, and that there must either be a 'god' – or not be a 'god' (it can't be both at the same time)

...this might cause them to think about things that they've not really given time to thinking about.



## CONCLUSION

While we all want to see people we love choosing to accept Christ's forgiveness, the journey towards faith happens one step at a time.

- Our job is to encourage and help them in taking those small steps.

Consider again what 2 Corinthians 4:4 says:

*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

- If people believe all religions are the same – then they have no reason to seriously consider the Christian faith.
- If people believe evolution answers the question of origins – then they 'know for a fact' that the Bible is based on myths, rather than the reality of God's existence and power.
- If people believe the Bible is unreliable – and no different to any other religious book – then they have no reason to ever take what it says seriously
  - o In their minds they are blinded.

And how are we to 'unstick' their minds?

- Are we to preach at them? (That might be awkward – and self-defeating, because they 'know' our religion cannot actually be true)

So how?

While we must pray – we must also engage them in conversation

- We must talk with them about it
- And the key to great conversations is great questions.

**Application:** Share a personal story of a spiritual conversation you engaged, which was opened up and sustained through questions (where it might otherwise not have happened / not have continued)

For years the Christian Church has been 'telling people the Truth' in the West

- and this approach worked because our culture was predominantly 'Christian'
  - o This is not the case anymore.

We must learn to engage *conversations*

- The opportunities are all around us, every day
- and the key to great conversations is? ...Great questions!



## Message 2: Enquire, Don't Disagree!

(Dealing with disagreement)

### INTRODUCTION

Who likes being the odd one out?

...I remember when... (tell your own story) ...It didn't feel good.

However, as Christians we are increasingly becoming the 'odd one out' in society

- If we are to engage people in conversation, it won't be long before people are saying things we disagree with – and this is certainly so when it comes to the big questions of life.
  - o E.g. We believe that God has revealed himself, and that specific answers to life's big questions are therefore possible
    - However, we live in a society that has embraced the view that the truth can't be found – or probably doesn't even exist.
  - o ***What we're going to look at today is how to turn these potential disagreements into conversational opportunities.***

**Illustration – 'Sour notes':** You are listening to a vocal quartet, but one person is singing a little out of tune. While you can't place it, you can hear a 'sour note'

- The same happens in conversations. People say things that don't make sense to us personally
- The 'sour notes' are our opportunities.

**The principle: When you disagree...**

- ...instead of disagreeing (which would end the conversation),
- (1) affirm the good, and
- (2) ask a question about what you 'don't understand'
  - o (While you do disagree – if you say so, the conversation will probably end.

### A personal example

My best story for this is when a friend was in a car with me. She knew I was right into this whole 'Christian thing' – but still dared to confide in me that she felt she had been neglecting spiritual things, and wanted to do something about it.

I asked what she was going to do – and she said she was thinking of getting into Ouija boards.

- Now – the typical Christian response might be to say with concern, 'What are you thinking of doing that for?'
- However, I'm quite sure that if I had said that she would have considered that judgemental. (Society's view is that everyone has their own truth, right?).
- So I said *"Brilliant! That means we're exactly the same. We both recognise that we're spiritual people. Now – why are you thinking to look at Ouija boards?"*
  - o (1) affirmed the good while
  - o (2) asking a question about what I didn't understand



- This led to a conversation in which I gently explained why this didn't make sense to me (Christianity is like a full smorgasbord with entrée, mains and dessert. It answers all the big questions of life. Even Islam answers many of life's big questions. In comparison Ouija boards seem a bit like a game of monopoly on the corner of a table. I don't get it).
- This led to her explaining why she was not looking at Christianity
- And now we were discussing the real stuff!

**NOTE :**

- Small talk established trust
- Spiritual things came into *natural* conversation (I wasn't overtly trying to tell her anything – I was just being myself)
- Where there was disagreement I held my opinion, Instead I applauded what was good, while asking a question about what I didn't understand
- This led to an open two-way conversation that progressed naturally (because I asked questions) onto meaningful matters.

Let's have a look at Jesus to see how he engaged in conflict.

**Luke 5:33-35**

- **The conflict:**
  - o Jesus breaking cultural/religious norms re fasting
- **Jesus' response:**
  - o Jesus uses a question to invite their engagement in a conversation.
  - o Jesus does so while also giving an illustration that might help his reasoning to make sense
- **Note :** What we have in the Bible isn't a record of everything said
  - o These are accurate records of the 'gist' of each conversation
  - o It is quite possible that far more was said in the above conversation
  - o But what is recorded is an accurate summary of what was said – and the authors consistently put questions at the start of Jesus' conversations.

**Luke 6:1-11**

- **The conflict:**
  - o Jesus breaking cultural and religious norms re Sabbath practices
- **Jesus' response:**
  - o Story 1: Picking and eating grain on the Sabbath
    - Jesus used a question. Jesus did so with an illustration that might help them understand his answer.
  - o Story 2: Healing a man's hand on the Sabbath
    - NOTE: In the parallel account in Mark 3:1-6 it adds an important detail – that they remained silent when Jesus asked the question.
    - Jesus asked a question – empowering the hearers to make the decision
    - Only then – in light of their silence (which Mark notes 'deeply distressed' Jesus – yet which could also fairly be taken as agreement because no one was able to disagree), did he heal the man

**Luke 14:1-7**

- **The conflict**
  - o Whether Jesus can heal a sick man on the Sabbath
- **Jesus' response**
  - o Note that – yet again – he asks a question.
  - o Only in the face of their silence does he heal the man
  - o Then (v5) he gives them an illustration that could help





**In summary of these examples:**

- Do you think we have full accounts here of everything Jesus says?
  - o No – we don't. We have accurate *summaries* of these encounters and conversations
- Yet, what did the writers of the Gospels record as having been on Jesus' lips at the start of each incident?
  - o Questions!
- And then – to make things clear, what did he do?
  - o Told a story / gave an illustration

**TO STATE THE POINT AND CONCLUSION:**

As a closing illustration

- In some families, if someone says something that is a load of rubbish, they'll say "That's a load of rubbish!"
- In other families – like the one I grew up in, we don't like conflict, so when someone talks a load of rubbish, we go 'Oh' – and say nothing.
- While in other families – like my wife's, when someone says something that is a load of rubbish, they say "Oh – how interesting, what makes you think that?:" And they say this with such interest that you even feel affirmed, because they are interested in you (but what they're really saying is 'I think what you said is a load of rubbish!')

Which one is – generally speaking- the healthiest response? Possibly asking questions that open a conversation is the healthiest

Which one is you / your family of origin? The point: We will all have a default setting / respond differently to disagreement.

However, if we are going to become more effective as witnesses, we need to learn how to engage people in non-threatening two-way SPIRITUAL conversations

- And doing so is really about people skills – and it can be learnt!
- REVISE: Whenever there is disagreement / whenever you hear one of those 'sour notes'
  - o (1) applaud what is good while
  - o (2) asking a question about what you 'don't understand'
- By speaking in questions and stories, you can engage people in conversations *that would probably not have happened otherwise.*
- By holding your tongue – you disagree without ever really saying you disagree
- ...and by engaging the conversation, you might just discover more of who they are, of where they've been, and of what is going on in their heart.
  - o And because you've been gentle and encouraging and respectful – another conversation follows – and then another – and you find yourself encouraging them along a journey toward a faith in Jesus, one step at a time!

- (1) What do you mean by that?
  - (2) Where'd you get that idea from?
  - (3) Have you considered...? Etc.
- (These questions are the content of a 4.30min video at [alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos-members](http://alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos-members) that comes with a discussion guide)

Jesus modeled an approach that engaged every-day people in every-day conversations *that ended up touching the heart*. Let's hang out with non-Church people a bit more – and do the same!



## Message 3: Converse, don't confront

(Being a non-threatening person)

### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been in a conversation where you tried to talk about spiritual things, but it just got awkward?

Illustrate: I remember a time when...

Most people in our nation are spiritual. The question is this: *How could we engage them in non-threatening two-way conversations about spiritual things?*

This is what we're looking at today.

#### I'd like to start by repeating an illustration I gave in the previous message

- In some families, if someone says something that is a load of rubbish, they'll say "That's a load of rubbish!"
- In other families – like the one I grew up in, we don't like conflict, so when someone talks a load of rubbish, we go 'Oh' – and say nothing.
- While in other families – like my wives, when someone says something that is a load of rubbish, they say "Oh – how interesting, what makes you think that?:" And they say this with such interest that you even feel affirmed, because they are interested in you – but what they're really saying is 'I think what you said is a load of rubbish!'

Which one is – generally speaking- the healthiest response?

*I think asking questions that open a conversation is the healthiest*

Which one is you / your family of origin?

The point: We will all have a default setting / respond differently to disagreement

The good news is that conversational skills can be learnt – and that is what this series is about – because we do need to be engaging people around us in spiritual conversations, with a view to encouraging faith in Jesus!

Let's look at an account of Jesus talking with someone who should have felt threatened – and then we'll discuss some of the principles involved in enabling non-threatening two-way conversations.

### John 8:1-11

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, **2** but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. **3** As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

**4** "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

**5** The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

**6** They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger.



- **The context involves:** The temple guards had been sent by the Pharisees to arrest Jesus, because of his claims that they considered blasphemous (John 7:32). However the guards had not arrested him, because they were awed by all that Jesus did and said (John 7:45-46)
  - o So – the fact that Jesus was even in the temple first thing the next morning was remarkably bold.
  - o *I.e. Things were very tense!*
- **The immediate situation:** They are trying to trap Jesus. How?
- **The theological context:** The law of Moses would support the death sentence (Leviticus 20:10)
- **The cultural context:** However, they were under Roman occupation, and the Romans had removed the authority of the religious leaders to give the death penalty. Had Jesus said they should obey the Jewish law, Jesus would have been in trouble with the Romans (with a likely death penalty).
- But – does that mean Jesus should *not* agree with applying the Law?
  - o If he was lax with the law – he would be condemned by the Jews
  - o If he applied the law – he would be condemned by the Romans
    - It was a catch 22 situation (a trap)!

**7** They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" **8** Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

**9** When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. **10** Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

**11** "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Let's consider how Jesus responded

- Firstly, we don't have to answer every question asked of us
  - o Jesus' first response (v6) was to stoop down and write in the sand without saying anything.
    - Maybe he was writing things of relevance
    - Maybe he was taking time to think, and seek wisdom – because he knew the danger of speaking too quickly on this matter.
  - o (Note - The one who asks the questions controls the conversation)
- Secondly - Jesus often replied to a question with a question – to return the onus of proof to the enquirer/accuser. In this case he did. He returned the question to them, adding a statement. See V7
- Thirdly, he wrote in the sand again.
  - o We cannot know what he wrote – but many have suggested that he wrote down different sins, and that the religious leaders left one-by-one as they recognised sins. Perhaps that they were guilty of committing.
    - If this is the case, we again see the gifts of the Spirit at work in Jesus' ministry to people – and are reminded that we have been given the gift of that same Spirit!

NB – did Jesus ever disagree with the statement that this woman deserved death for her sin? (no)

- However, there are few things we can note here:

1. Jesus had a right to still stand there – when all others left, because he was sinless
2. The wider teachings of Jesus, and of the New Testament, affirm the law – although the timing of some consequences for sin are redefined





- Romans 6:23 – '*For the wages of sin is death*' (death is still the consequence for adultery. It's not a part of our national law) – It was the context of the original instruction at a time when Israel was an independent self-governing nation)
- 3. There was a wider issue of justice here – which also explains Jesus approach. Now only were those accusing Jesus were also guilty of sin...
  - Where was the man who she was caught in adultery with?
  - This woman wasn't brought to Jesus because of a quest for justice/righteousness. She was brought to Jesus to set a trap!
- 4. However – and significantly here - Jesus said he didn't condemn her and then gave her a second chance with the instruction 'go sin no more'. Why? Because grace was about to become readily available for the repentant, through faith in Himself!
  - Jesus was on his way to the cross of Calvary, where he would die for the sins of that woman!

#### **[BRIDGE TO OUR TOPIC]**

Do you think that woman felt threatened by Jesus? (Initially maybe – but not as she saw how he spoke)

- Yet he did consider her sin worthy of death, right?
  - Yet he also believed in the possibility of her salvation/ huh?

### **Toward an application**

**One of the most remarkable characteristics of Christ was the fact that humble sinners didn't feel threatened by him.**

- He was invited by them to meals
- And ate with them without being at all threatening.

**In contrast, Jesus was threatening to proud sinners for example – the Pharisees and teachers of the law**

- He was invited by them to meals by them also
- But at these meals he was scrutinised, and they were looking for ways to criticize, undermine or accuse him.

**Our topic today is 'conversation – not confrontation' – and the question is, what is the key to being non-threatening when discussing topics in which people will have differing views?**

- This is an especially important skill for our witnessing as Christians, because we want to be able to engage non-Christians in open conversations, without awkwardness, or them feeling at all 'preached at' or 'targeted'
  - (But this skill set is also useful in many other settings)
- I would suggest that '*Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks*' (Luke 6:45)
  - **In other words – the key to creating the feel of conversation - rather than of a 'confrontation' – is in the motive of our hearts, which then expresses itself in the tone of our word!**

#### **Illustration - Salesperson:**

Have you ever had a salesperson come up to you on the street?  
How long did it take to recognised he/she was a salesperson?  
(a sentence – a word – you could tell before they spoke)

- \*\*Maybe give a personal example of an encounter with a salesperson
- We feel uncomfortable because, by instinct, we feel **that they have an agenda!**





- Of note:
  - o And if the agenda someone has is to help us or encourage us – we can feel it – and we warm to that person
  - o However, if that agenda is to challenge us or change us – we can feel that too – and the conversation will likely be more uncomfortable to us as a result
- *And this is the key dynamic that is taking place in our spiritual conversations with non-Christian people*
  - o If our agenda is one of selfless interest - to hear their story, to find good things to encourage, etc... - they will be able to tell.
    - BUT, if our agenda is to 'preach at them', to 'tell' them our truth and to change/convert them – that's why some conversations are awkward from the start
      - It's all about how we approach the conversation!
      - *'Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks'*

However, we do want people to consider and accept the Christian faith right (that is one of our motives)?

- *The point here is the primary motive we start with!*

## The motive enables a feeling of conversation vs confrontation (or awkwardness)

**We come to conversations with selfless interest, with a motive to encourage and care**

- If this is genuinely our motive (and our people-skills appropriate), people should have no reason to feel threatened.
- And we will find that conversations about spiritual things are possible with almost anyone!

[Also, in the workplace or elsewhere, where we end up in situations where there is disagreement, if our motive can genuinely be the well-being of the person we are talking with ['people before projects' / 'team before task'], it is remarkable how much it can turn these tense conversations into relaxed ones!]

### In doing this – to note some attitudes

- **We respect their freewill** – and so our motive is not to coerce them or even convert them – because only they can decide for (or against) Christ anyway.
- **If we are ever to share something that hasn't come about within the natural flow of the conversation – we ask permission first**, and then share with a humble tone, and invite a conversation at the conclusion.
  - o This kind of approach is respectful, and can be received. It's all about the motives and manner!
- **We respect that they might already be on a spiritual journey and have experiences and thoughts** – so our motive is to listen more than we speak, and then to wisely (1) affirm what is good while (2) asking questions about what we 'don't understand' (as in last weeks message)

*In other words – we come with a view to finding the good through asking questions – to build upon it through encouraging and sharing hope (CONVERSATION) rather than to find the bad – so we might condemn it and change it by telling them what we believe to be true (CONFRONTATION)*

And – just like that, tension can be dispelled from conversations that might otherwise have been awkward – and so the conversations are able to continue – and people's lives can become changed as a result!



## Some other tips

(Pastor – there are a few additional thoughts here. If you felt a point were particularly relevant to some of your members, maybe you could include it. Otherwise the conclusion is about connecting with their hearts again through an illustration – and then empowering their hands with a challenge):

### 1. Big statements infer arrogance or narrow-mindedness, and end conversations.

- Because big statements reflect that we feel strongly about a point, and that we are convinced of our view (so what need is there for a conversation!)
  - o People don't like confrontation. If we come across too strong, it will close the conversation.
- So, *the way we say what we say is important!*
  - o E.g. "Jesus is the only way to the Father"
    - Worded this way, this statement is confrontational by nature – because it is a truth claim
    - And we also believe it to be true, right?
    - The question is, is saying this bluntly wise?
    - The conversation might end there and then.
  - o Some people think watering our words down is compromise
    - I wonder if it might sometimes have more to do with people skills!
  - o E.g. Here is a conversational way of saying the same thing: *"To me, Jesus' claim that he created a unique path back to God just makes sense. I've never really heard an alternative that compares. While I've heard lots of things about Jesus that have shown how unique he is in history. That's my take anyway - what do you think?"*
    - This statement claims the same but
    - ...is a *personal statement* (it comes across more humbly than a declaration of a truth does)
    - And it invites a conversation and has a better chance of enticing a conversation!
  - o I.e. even to state something as a personal view ('To me...') can make a big difference to the way we come across
    - While there might be a time to encourage someone – "God is there – you should reach out to him"
    - In a different context it might be more appropriate to invite a person to consider this idea, saying, "I suspect God wants to be found. What do you think?"

### 2. We talk differently to different people

Even if our motives are good, if we are not sensitive to cultural differences, and personality differences, we can come across unhelpfully

#### E.g. body-language

- Jesus' manner with the Samaritan woman at the well (starting humorously)
  - o was probably quite different to how he talked to the woman with the issue of blood (gentle)
  - o as compared to the rich man who turned out to be quite self-righteous (comparatively assertive).



- E.g. with Pacifica, you sit beside them to talk,
  - o while talking face-to-face might be perfectly ok with someone of European descent.
  - o Be aware of your eye contact with a person, and how comfortable they may or may not be feeling.
- E.g. with more timid people - some people are intimidated by authoritative males, because they've been abused by them in their childhood.
  - o So being really gentle in our manner and body language is really important for some people

**E.g. the type of illustrations**

- Consider Jesus' illustrations – he illustrated with what he saw, and what the people knew.
  - o Come to me like children
  - o There was a farmer who scattered seed...
  - o I am the vine...
- Indigenous peoples are often more closely connected to the land and nature. So illustrate from the forest, sky, wildlife and sea
- If they work with computers or phones – illustrate with comparisons between software and hardware
- If they seem a relational person – Use stories about the dynamics of family relationships

**E.g. cultural differences.**

- E.g. With many Pacifica peoples, they do not say no to a question you ask, because a primary goal for them in any conversation is to make you feel comfortable.
  - o So if you ask them if they'd like to give their life to Jesus, many will say yes simply to avoid embarrassing you. This tends to be a cultural thing.
  - o So what do you do?
  - o You don't ask them if they want to follow Jesus. Instead *give them two options* and ask them which they would prefer for themselves right now.

**EG whether we take an intellectual approach or a more experiential one**

- o To some people an intellectual argument will really make sense. While to others, discussing the experiential will connect

**Illustration:** I made the wrong call on this with a high-powered inner-city professional recently. I assumed they'd engage with 'thinking' questions, but they didn't. In retrospect I realised I'd have got a lot further if I'd have asked them if they ever had a spiritual experience – and then to have discussed that.



### Application/Conclusion:

Would you like to be able to engage people in spiritual conversations without awkwardness?

The feel of a conversation is primarily determined by the motive we enter it with!

**Personal illustration:** Share a personal illustration of a conversation you engaged that could have been awkward – yet was not, because of your motive and manner.

Maybe note a comparison to earlier conversations where you didn't achieve this (to illustrate that we can all learn and grow).

### Summary of the message:

If our agenda is to understand their views, and to encourage them more than to tell them our views and convert them they will have very little reason to feel awkward and we may find ourselves becoming even more effective as a witness!

However, it remains that we need to be intentional about all this, if we're to actually see our friends taking steps toward Jesus!

An older pastor recently told me about the **3 questions** he was training people in thirty years ago that could be used to turn or open a conversation. I think the DNA of these questions is spot-on!

#### 1. Would you consider yourself a spiritual person?

The point?

- To establish common ground
- To find a shared starting point for a spiritual conversation

#### 2. Do you believe there's a God?

- This would clarify how far common ground goes (many now believe in a 'higher power' or 'force')

#### 3. If a friend at work asked you what a Christian is, what would you say?

This would reveal something of their view on Christianity, and also their understanding of it.

Who could you ask a question of this week – with no initial agenda other than to hear and understand?

Pray



## Message 4: A message, not a massage

(Building bridges to the gospel)

### Notes for the preacher:

- This message gives 4 areas of equipping. To impart this message it probably needs a 'teaching' approach more than a 'preaching' approach. Imparting this content will empower people.
  - o Some preachers might like to turn this message into two messages.
  - o Even if you preach this as one message, it might be wise to ask your small group leaders to do the supporting study over two weeks (I recommend this).
- The fourth point has various illustrations that might go beyond the witnessing experience-level of some preachers. I'd encourage that you give the illustrations anyway – stating them simply, with explanation. Through this, some people might get revelations on how the conversational approach can work to communicate various parts of the gospel through questions.

I hope this series – including the very intentional accompanying small group discussions, has been helpful.

Dave Mann

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### Introduction

While a lot of thought has gone into how we might connect with people during this series, we must end in the most important place – and that is with a reminder that we have a message to communicate.

**In life, it is easy to do good things – while not doing the best things.**

***[Consider a personal illustration related to one of the below ideas]***

- I might do different jobs around the house – while ignoring the one job my wife keeps asking me to help
- A child might run up to mum or dad and say 'I love you' – give a kiss, and a hug – but still not have tidied their bedroom.
- Or maybe a father might do generous things for his children – while failing to say the words 'I love you.'

And it is exactly the same with the mission God has given us:

We have a **message** to tell – but sometimes all we do is show God's love through our **actions, as if giving a person a 'massage' (vs 'message')**

- **and to affirm it we must do this**



- **ILLUSTRATION:** To tell a hungry man God loves him, while eating a sandwich in front of him, will make no sense to that man

**However, to give him the sandwich without telling him of God's love is surely unloving to the core (or at the very least, terribly naive).**

- **ILLUSTRATION:** The building is on fire and the man is hungry. So we give him the sandwich while running for the door ourselves – leaving him ultimately condemned.

And so the message of love and the works of love must go hand in hand.

- One without the other is unbalanced
- But – while inseparable – one really is more significant / important than the other. (it is to pass on a message of love - Matthew 28:18-19, Romans 10:14).
  - To do this is a matter of obedience – and a matter of love!

**So today (or 'over the next two weeks') we're going to summarise**

- 1. What this message is**
- 2. How to share parts of this message through our everyday conversations**
- 3. How to share the whole message concisely when an opportunity comes**
- 4. Finally, how to build bridges to the gospel through the use of questions.**

## **1. We need to know what the gospel message is**

The briefest summary of the gospel message is often said to be the word 'love' – and it is true that God is love

*...however, I wonder if the word 'salvation' might say it better.*

- Because, while it is a message of love
- ...at its core, a message about *Gods love in action to save us.*
- The word 'gospel' means 'good news' – and the good news is that, while we deserve punishment for our wrongs, God is offering us a 'get-out-of-jail-free-card'
  - *[Or for the relational person – while we are separated from God by our wrongs, God is offering full restoration as a gift of love, if we would turn to Him and His ways!]*

### **So what is the message?**

One of the easiest summaries is with the words

- 1. Creation
- 2. Fall
- 3. Redemption
- 4. Restoration

In fact – if you can remember these words they can help you to summarise the gospel in 30 seconds.

- **Creation** – God created everything God, and humans as the best thing in his creation
- **Fall** – God gave us free will so we could love, but we used it wrongly, and brought selfishness and suffering into the world
- **Redemption** – but God loved us enough to provide a solution through Jesus
- **Restoration** – and if we will receive that solution, his plan for us is that we join him in his greater plan of restoring people's lives, and also the entire creation.

However, I would add one fifth point – and that is **an invitation to a response**.

- Because this isn't just a good message
- It is a message from God – *for which he's looking for a response*.
- So asking a person 'What do you think?' whenever you share the gospel... or to ask if they'd like to respond to God's love, is *necessary*.

**1 minute activity:** Would you be willing to have a practice now in pairs – with just one of you trying to summarise the gospel message.

I'll give you 1 minute to say hi, and for one person to try.

If you feel uncomfortable though, just say hi to the person next to you and that will be fine 😊

## 2. How to share this message in everyday life

PIZZA ILLUSTRATION: One of the best illustrations I know of this is of a pizza.

- Imagine the different parts of the gospel are like the different pieces of a pizza
- As we dialogue with people
  - o We seek to discern what their point of need is
    - And then discuss the relevant piece of pizza with them
- E.g. If they don't believe God exists, telling them about forgiveness of sin is irrelevant. Instead discuss what it is that convinces you God does (or doesn't) exist.

[ILLUSTRATION EXPLAINED] I think one of the mistakes some people make is to think that they need to deliver the whole pizza (gospel) every time

- To entice a person with a relevant piece is much wiser
  - o They may then be ready for another piece
- While to try to stuff all 8 or more pieces in their mouth may result in them enjoying none of the pieces!

In short: Our goal isn't merely to state the message

- We want to *communicate* it with them
- That means we need to *connect* with where a person is at in their thinking.
  - o As we Dialogue with people
  - o We Discern the relevant part
  - o Then Discuss it with them, using questions, while sharing brief personal stories (our testimony).



### 3. How to share the whole message concisely (2 minutes)

However, sometimes an opportunity comes up in which it makes sense to explain the whole Christian message – but we want to do so in only about 2 minutes if possible. How might we do that?

I'd like to share with you a simple 'gospel drawing' via video

WEBLINK: <https://alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos-members/>

VIDEO: #4 – how to share the gospel

LENGTH: 4.30mins

(The actual sharing of the gospel takes 90 seconds in this video – though most would need 2 minutes)

#### Revision

The questions at the end of the illustration are particularly important

- Q1. Where do you think you are in this picture?
- Q2. Where would you like to be?
  - o (and then, if you don't understand their answer you could ask, What do you mean by that?)
- Q3. Would you like to pray right now, to invite God to be in charge of your life?
  - o "No" - That's fine. What might hinder you from that? (Then discuss)
  - o "Yes" - Then a prayer is as simple as A, B, C:
    - A – ask/admit;
    - B – believe;
    - C – commit.

As a final segment in today's message, I'd like to discuss some of the 'bridges' that could exist between people's views, and the gospel.

### 4. Building conversational bridges to the gospel

The best way to communicate something new to a person is to build it on something they already know.

- E.g. before teaching a child that  $3 \times 2 = 6$ , you first show how  $2 \times 2 = 4$ .
- When knowledge is connected to prior knowledge, it makes connections more readily.

**What things exist within the gospel, that people around you might already accept?  
And what could we ask that might help them take a step forwards in their understanding?**





**Consider**

**Example 1: They believe in existence of a spiritual realm – but not yet the idea of one specific God**

- **(80 to 90% of all NZers are like this)**
  - o **Question:** Do you think the complexity of life suggests design itself?
    - **Forward step that could be achieved:** They might comprehend that design infers the existence of a 'God' (which is more specific than a 'higher power')
  - o **Question:** Do you believe there are good and evil forces in the spiritual realm? How are you to know that the spiritual forces you are engaging with are good? Is it not the nature of deception that we would be deceived?
    - **Forward step:** They might realise that a spiritual experiences cannot be assumed to be good just because they feel or seem good. Other evidences need considering in the discernment process. (Might God have revealed himself somehow, so he and his nature can be known?)

**Example 2: They believe in the existence of a God of some kind – but not a knowable God. Instead, all religions are basically the same and God is found through them all.**

- (Note: over 40% of NZers say they believe in a 'God')
  - o **Question:** The world's religions say opposite things on the big things - like does God exist or not; does actual good and evil exist or not; what is salvation; how is 'salvation' attained etc. So they can't all be right, right? How do you reconcile that?
    - **Forward step:** They might realise that, while all religions may hold truth of some kind somewhere within them, is it logical that one religion will be more true than others, simply because what it describes better fits the reality of what is true and real (So, is it possible that one religion might even actually be true enough to be considered the actual path to God?).
  - o **Question:** Do you think it possible that, the way we are relational as humans might be an evidence that the God who created us is also relational?
    - **Forwards step:** They might realise that this actually infers that God might be relational and therefore knowable to us also
    - **Additional questions:** If God is relational, do you think it possible God might reveal himself (herself/itself) to us? How do you think God might do that? What about through the creation? What about through the ancient history of the Jewish people? It's truly remarkable – and really unique!



**Example 3: They believe in the existence of right and wrong**

- Have you heard people say 'morality is relative'?
- While nearly all people believe right and wrong actually exist as 'objective realities' – most people's beliefs contain no logical basis for their claim, because they actually believe 'morality is relative' (which basically means, made up by us, to suit us).
  - o **Question:** Where do these definitions of right and wrong come from? If they come from us, doesn't that make morality relative? If morality is relative – doesn't that mean it is made up – so the words 'right' and 'wrong' actually have no real meaning?? I mean – you could think murder is wrong while I think murder is fine – and neither has any right to judge the other???
  - o **Question:** If morality is relative – on what basis do we say pedophilia is wrong, or the moral code chosen by Germany in the time of Hitler was wrong? We kill animals we don't want (like black sheep), so why can't we kill people?

**Forward step:** They might realise that for a moral law to exist there must be a moral law-giver. Just as design demands the existence of a designer and intelligence the existence of an intelligent source.

**Example 4: The fact that all have done wrong**

- This is a point that everyone agrees
  - o **Question:** Do you have a high standard of right and wrong for yourself? Do you live up to your own standard all the time? Do you think God's standard would be higher or lower than your standard?

**Forwards step:** They might realise that, if God exists, that we all fall short of his standard – and this could be a problem?

**What the above examples illustrate is this:**

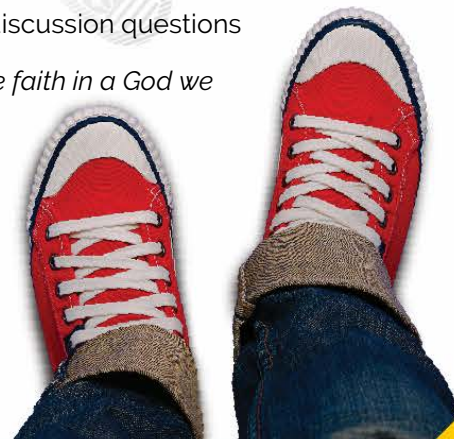
- The 'Creation' and 'Fall' parts of the gospel can be communicated without ever needing to refer to the Bible, or to a Christian teaching or church.

**However – to accept Jesus, a person must then begin to consider the Bible**

- So if a person agrees that God could possibly be known, the next step would be to invite them to investigate the God of the Bible with you
  - o TOOL: The 10daychallenge.co.nz tool (or find the app at the app store)
  - o 10 short video tutorials (5mins) + discussion questions
  - o The first topic is: *How can we have faith in a God we can't see?*
  - o Optional : there is a 3min training tutorial for it at

<https://alltogether.co.nz/10-day-challenge>

Useful?



## Conclusion

### Series Summary

In this series we've looked at four points related to what a conversational approach to outreach is really about

- The importance of asking questions more than we talk, or 'tell' people things
- The art of asking questions when there is disagreement, to understand why people believe what they believe – without creating tension. This can give us the opportunity to help them consider perspectives other than their own
- The idea of our personal witness in daily life being a conversation rather than a confrontation. This message highlighted that there are skills we can learn – eg the three questions below
  - o What do you mean by that?
  - o Where did you get that idea from?
  - o Have you considered...?
- Finally, bring it all back to the core message
  - o Because of love God left heaven to come to earth, to enable us to be forgiven our wrongs, and to restored as his friends.
  - o And he is calling us to have that same love
    - ...that we would also leave our comfort zones to reach out to others through engaging in meaningful conversations.
    - Only through us will many people hear – and thus have the chance to believe for themselves.

**For the heart:** This is our highest calling!

(Revision in small group discussions is really important)

**In closing...**

**RESPONSE:** I'd like to give an opportunity for anyone who would like to begin a journey in which they could get to know God personally to respond in some way....

**Prayer**