

Gospel Conversations with the Sikhs in the Fraser Valley



by Imran Daniel

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
HISTORY AND BELIEFS	6
SIKH CULTURE	7
ARTICULATING THE GOSPEL	8
CONTEXTUALIZATION – MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY’RE AT	8
CONNECTION POINTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SIKHISM	10
CONTENTION POINTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SIKHISM	11
RELATIONSHIP IS KEY	13
A COMMON QUESTION.....	14
MOTIVATED BY LOVE	15
A FARMER OR A SALESPERSON?	17
KNOWING YOUR CONVERSATION PARTNERS	17
LISTENING EFFECTIVELY	18
BELONGING AND BELIEVING	19
GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS	20
DECLARE.....	20
DEFEND	20
1. <i>There can’t be just one true religion</i>	<i>21</i>
2. <i>If a good and loving God exists, why is there evil and suffering?</i>	<i>23</i>
DIALOGUE.....	24
INTERVIEWS.....	28
INTERVIEW WITH KULDIP	28
INTERVIEW WITH RAMAN	28
INTERVIEW WITH SEAN	29
INTERVIEW WITH JAYME	29
INTERVIEW WITH TANYA	30
TESTIMONY - ANJU	31
BASIC PUNJABI PHRASES	33
APPENDIX.....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING.....	36

Introduction

When we look around the Fraser Valley, we see many Sikh people who came to Canada from India to pursue a better life. I believe that God has brought them to this part of the world so that people who have been transformed by the Gospel will share that same Gospel with their Sikh neighbours. People often tell me that they have neighbours, co-workers, or friends who speak Punjabi - but they do not know how to connect with them and they are afraid of saying something that might offend them.

In this small booklet Greg Harris and I deal with some of those fears, explore who the Sikh people are, discuss their religious history, and examine current sociological information that informs our understanding of the Sikh community in the Fraser Valley today.

This booklet will also discuss how to connect with Sikhs, and how to articulate the Gospel in culturally appropriate ways. Furthermore, if you don't know Punjabi, there are some Punjabi phrases at the end of this booklet that you can learn and practice with your Punjabi friends!

Gospel Conversations with the Sikhs in the Fraser Valley is not the final voice in the conversation of how to engage the Punjabi community with the Gospel for their good and God's glory - it is merely an attempt to help us all get one step closer to feeling comfortable discussing with our Sikh friends about the greatest news ever.

HISTORY AND BELIEFS

The global Sikh population ranges from eighteen million to twenty-six million followers.¹ In 2001, Census Canada reported that there were 278,410 Sikhs in Canada, with approximately half (135,310) living in British Columbia.² Participation in the marketplace and community in the Fraser Valley necessarily includes engagement with Sikhs.

Sikhism stems from the teachings of Nanak, who would become the first of ten Sikh gurus. Nanak began his teaching, in India, in the late 1400s and early 1500s. Sikhism arose in a social and religious context heavily influenced by the Hindu and Islamic worldviews, and around the same time as the Renaissance in Europe and the Reformation of the Church.³ All ten of the Sikh gurus are honored as great teachers and leaders but are not worshipped as gods.

The writings of the gurus were preserved and compiled in the form of a book, the Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh, whom was the tenth and final personal guru, instituted the Granth Sahib as an authoritative holy book and a lasting guru. Nikky Guninder Kaur-Singh, in addressing the role of the Guru Granth Sahib, says that, “Sikhs turn to this holy book for inspiration and guidance in ritual and worship, and they treat it with the highest respect”.⁴

Gurinder Singh Mann, when discussing the central doctrine of Sikhism, says it is, “centered on Vahiguru (the wonderful Sovereign, the most frequently used epithet for God), who is the creator and the sustainer of the world. In this status, Vahiguru is fundamentally different from the creation and is beyond gender and other human distinctions.”⁵ The Sikh view of humanity teaches that all humans are equal before Vahiguru regardless of gender, ethnicity, or caste. Furthermore, humans are supposed to work hard to provide for themselves and to contribute to the good of the community, they ought to strive to understand Vahiguru properly, and they are to refrain from any intoxicants such as alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.⁶ Gurinder Singh Mann says, “according to Sikh belief, a spiritual journey begins with a clear recognition of the nature of Vahiguru and the world.”⁷ Furthermore, author Kamala Elizabeth Nayar asserts that, “the Sikh world view posits the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsar) and sets the goal of religion as to liberate its followers from this cycle (mukti) so that they merge with the Ultimate.”⁸ Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh describes the importance of hard work as “good deeds that earn merit towards a better next life. Sikhs do not look down on any kind of work. They find laziness or living off others unacceptable.”⁹

Historically, the Sikhs have been a persecuted group. Kaur Singh mentions that, “early in their history the Sikhs were forced by religious persecution and by the execution of two of their gurus

¹ Woods, Len. *Handbook of World Religions: A Bible-Based Review of 50 World Faiths*. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Pub, 2008.

² Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, "Population by Religion, by Province and Territory (2001 Census)," (Newfoundland, Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick). <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/demo30a-eng.htm> (accessed August 28, 2014)

³ Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism (World Religions)*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 12

⁴ Nikky-Guninder Kaur, Singh, *Sikhism: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 9

⁵ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 15

⁶ World Sikh Organization of Canada | Promoting and Protecting the Interests of the Sikh Diaspora, “Core Sikh Beliefs.” <http://worldsikh.ca/page/core-sikh-beliefs>

⁷ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 81

⁸ Kamala E. Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 124

⁹ Nikky-Guninder Kaur, Singh, *Sikhism (World Religions)*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 10

by Muslim rulers, to arm themselves for protection.”¹⁰ Thus, Guru Gobind Singh, in 1699, organized an elite fighting force, known the Khalsa, for those committed to, and willing to protect, the Sikh faith and community. Many Sikh theologians, including Kaur Singh, maintain that, “despite the image of militancy that has followed them, the Sikhs’ message is one of universal love and peace.”¹¹

Committed and initiated Sikhs are members of the Khalsa and are distinguished by five signs, known as the “Five K’s”: Kesh – unshorn hair and beard symbolizing reverence of Vahiguru and His creation; Kanga – a wooden comb symbolizing orderliness and self-discipline; Kara – an iron or steel bracelet symbolizing the oneness and eternity of God; Kachera – cotton underwear, like boxer shorts, that symbolize the expected high moral character, fidelity, and restraint; and Kirpan – a small sword symbolizing the personal responsibility to protect the weak and uphold justice.¹²

SIKH CULTURE

From conversations and personal inquiry, the beliefs and practices that most deeply affect adherents of Sikhism in the Fraser Valley, across the gender, age, and cultural groups are: 1) acknowledgment of God in an incomprehensible and utterly unique form; and 2) doing good in the community in general, and the Sikh community in particular. It was interesting to discover that these two core tenets from historical Sikhism were the most important for people across the spectrum in the Fraser Valley, regardless of their level of “devotedness”. There is a fairly clear, and noticeable, trend in the Sikh community in the Fraser Valley, whereby the first generation of Punjabi Sikhs are the most committed to their Sikh faith, the second generation are committed to their Sikh faith but not to the same extent as their parents, and the third generation is tied loosely to the religious beliefs of their grandparents and parents, while also quite open to other worldviews. However, regardless of the extent of devotedness to their religious heritage, the most important beliefs and practices were united among the three generations.

Surprisingly, becoming an initiated Sikh and joining the Khalsa is not crucial for Punjabi’s living in the Fraser Valley. One third-generation informant said, “No one in my immediate family wears the symbols of the Khalsa. It’s arguable whether such symbols are a requirement for all Sikhs. Sikhism is more of an ideological framework than a dogmatic religion in many regards.”

The majority of the third-generation informants mentioned that while Punjabi culture was important growing up, the Sikh religion and its teachings were not. For example, one informant said that, “There are certain festivals that my family attends, but the flavor of such events is non-religious in substance and is more of a social/community festival.” Another informant, who is in his mid-twenties and was born in the Punjab said, “I have relatives that do participate in religious activities and wearing religious symbols, but to be honest I just don’t know much about what the meaning behind them is.” It is interesting to note that for many Sikh people there is a certain level of ignorance of the religious meaning behind some of their cultural practices. It seems as

¹⁰ Ibid.,13

¹¹ Ibid.,14

¹² World Sikh Organization of Canada | Promoting and Protecting the Interests of the Sikh Diaspora, “Articles of Faith”, <http://www.worldsikh.ca>

though the tie between cultural and religious practices are so intertwined that they may not know whether a certain practice is primarily cultural or primarily religious.

There is a strong connection for Punjabi Sikhs of all generations with their ethnic heritage, but the level of devotedness to – and understanding of – the Sikh faith is dependent upon whether they are a first, second, or third generation Punjabi Canadian. Furthermore, regardless of level of devotedness, the two faith issues that most deeply affect Punjabi Sikhs in the Fraser Valley are: acknowledgment of Vahiguru as incomprehensible, and doing good works in and for the community.

The prolific Sikh academic and author, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, is very positive in her evaluation of traditional Sikhism's blending with modernity (particularly in the Punjab) because, "Sikhism has always encouraged its followers to participate fully in the political, social, and cultural climate in which they live."¹³ Kaur Singh's idealism and optimism is not unanimously shared. For example, author Eleanor Nesbit believes that the diminishing Sikh population in the Punjab has more to do with the influence of the modern penchant for consumerism than conversion to another popular Indian religion, such as Hinduism.¹⁴ Furthermore, modernity's impact on the Sikh Community in the Fraser Valley can be seen through intergenerational tension, distrust of gurdwaras (temples), and the failure to transmit the essentials of historic Sikhism to the third generation.

In an exploration on the influence of modernity on Sikhs in the Fraser Valley, Kamala Elizabeth Nayar's seminal work, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver*, must take centre stage. Nayar's extensive sociological research has led her to conclude that the three generations of Sikhs in Canada are in tension, and that "many of the tensions between the generations are a result of the clash between tradition and modernity."¹⁵

It seems that modernity and Canadian culture has weakened the Sikh community in the Fraser Valley. Regarding the effect of modernity and Canadian culture on his family, one third-generation informant said that, "Canadian culture has influenced my family's religious beliefs because I'm sure if I was born in India or grew up there I might be more connected to the religion, but growing up here I'm just more occupied with life and being on the go than religious beliefs." The informant's insight that the level of devotedness is related to geographical location illustrates Nayar's finding regarding the religiosity of the three Sikh generations in Canada. Nayar describes the differing generational views of religion as follows: the first-generation "understanding of religion is that it provides normative structures bearing on all aspects of human behavior, which are viewed as an integrated whole"; "the second generation follows traditional customs and tends to regard its culture as its religion"; and "the third generation has been educated in a modern milieu, and this has generated a self-conscious approach to religion that includes the questioning of practices with Sikhism..."¹⁶

Through her investigative interviews Nayar has discovered that the Sikh community in the Fraser Valley is experiencing significant tension because within this traditionally collectivistic culture

¹³ Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism (World Religions)*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 112

¹⁴ Eleanor M. Nesbitt, *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125

¹⁵ Kamala E. Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 233

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 155-156

there exists incredible diversity in thought and worldview. The first generation Sikh is the traditional generation because they are deeply committed to their faith as a holistic worldview.¹⁷ The second generation Sikh is the transitional generation because they engage in the economic realm of Canadian culture and, “basically accept the [religious/cultural] practices that have been handed down through the ages, but without necessarily knowing or caring about the reasons underlying those practices.”¹⁸ The third generation acquires its modern mentality through Canadian education, which “encourages a self-conscious approach to religion, including the right to question Sikh beliefs and practices.”¹⁹ Nayar goes on to say that the “intergenerational tensions in Canada’s Sikh community arise from the fact that the Canadian-born children ... are expected to practice their religion as it is traditionally practiced, and to do so without questioning it.”²⁰ Tensions occur between the generations, says Nayar, because, “the different mentalities – traditional, modern, and the transitional – represent highly distinctive ways of thinking and viewing the world.”²¹

In her interviews, Nayar identified significant disappointment from first generation Sikhs regarding the state of their gurdwaras. She says that, “first generation Sikhs have observed that Western values have influenced how Sikhism is practiced, [and] that the traditional respect for the sacred space is changing.”²² For example, one of Nayar’s interviewees lamented that, “In India people practice religion with devotion... In Canada, people don’t care about the devotion and only care about socializing with families, and the focus is not on the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib...”²³ The complaints about the gurdwaras do not end with the loss of devotion, but also reflect deep mistrust and disdain. Another of Nayar’s interviewees exclaimed that, “Here [in Vancouver], it [the gurdwara] has become corrupt because of politics and money. Gurdwaras have lost their religion.”²⁴ Similar sentiments were added by a third-generational informant who said, “It really bugs me when I see a gurdwara not being run on the basis of engaging teaching. I feel most of the gurdwaras leadership run them as a business and not a place to get in touch with God.”

Modernity has also impacted the Sikh community in the Fraser Valley because the essentials of historic Sikhism are not faithfully or effectively transmitted to the third generation. Throughout her interviews Nayar observes that the reasons the faith is not transmitted are likely a lack of intentional or explicit teaching from parents and a significant language barrier.²⁵ Nayar says that, “parents expect their third-generation children to practise religion as it has been traditionally followed, without inquiry or questioning”, but that confusion arises for the third generation because their parents equate religious practice with inherited culture.²⁶ However, as the analytically trained third generation engage with the basics of Sikh doctrine and the cultural norms of their ethnic background they identify discrepancies. As Nayar puts it, “[the third generation] often views Sikhism as preached by the ten gurus as contradictory to Punjabi

¹⁷ Ibid., 155

¹⁸ Ibid., 134

¹⁹ Ibid., 228

²⁰ Ibid., 156

²¹ Ibid., 44

²² Kamala E. Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 131

²³ Ibid., 131

²⁴ Ibid., 132

²⁵ Ibid., 133

²⁶ Ibid., 228

culture.”²⁷ A third generation Sikh informant articulated just such a position when he said, “I would argue that Canadian society is more ‘Sikh’ than Punjabi society. Many of the human rights based socialistic frameworks in place are more ‘Sikh’ than the respective frameworks in India.” Furthermore, in addition to the lack of intentional teaching of the essentials of the faith, the teaching and prayers in the gurdwara are done almost entirely in Punjabi,²⁸ and due to the language barrier, third generation Sikhs are most commonly exposed to Sikhism at the gurdwara with family on merely social occasions, rather than for religious reasons.²⁹

The Sikh community in the Fraser Valley faces a challenging season ahead. Intergenerational tension regarding worldview and religious devotedness, mistrust of gurdwaras, and ineffective transmission of historic Sikh doctrine will be key causes for a weakened Sikh community in the next decade.

ARTICULATING THE GOSPEL

Contextualization and 3D Gospel Conversations³⁰

Contextualization - Meeting People Where They’re At

Contextualize is a big word that basically means we are meeting people where they are at so things make sense, yet being careful not to cut off the parts of the gospel that might be hard to hear.

In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul is preaching the gospel in Athens. When Paul entered the Areopagus in Athens he found himself in one of his first non-Jewish contexts. He was talking to a group of Greek people who believed in the existence of many gods (polytheism) rather than the Jewish and Christian belief in One God (monotheism). In order for Paul to engage in an effective gospel conversation with the crowd in the Areopagus, he needed to be aware of what his audience thought and believed. When Paul met his audience where they were at with the gospel message, he approached the conversation in three ways: (1) Making Points of Connection, (2) Addressing Points of Contention, (3) Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Person of Completion.

It is important to be able to find points of connection with your conversation partner. Even if it appears that two people are on polar opposites on an issue, there is going to be some point of connection that can be used to develop a good rapport. Even Paul, the committed follower and Apostle of Jesus Christ, when he entered the pagan-polytheistic Areopagus, was able to identify a point of connection: Paul saw that the people were very religious (verse 22), and even quoted from their own poets (verse 28). The Apostle Paul used the religiosity and culture of the men of Athens as ways to relate and contextualize his message.

By God’s grace, every person has things within their worldview that can be used as a point of connection with the Christian story. When we are in a conversation with a staunch atheist who is

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid., 133

²⁹ Ibid., 141-142

³⁰ Used with permission from Gospel Conversations by Greg Harris

committed to the scientific process as the only means of finding truth, we can make a point of connection that we too desire to know what is true about our world. While the two disagree on many things, the search for truth is not one. Or, when we are in a conversation with a committed Sikh who worships the sovereign Creator, or Vahiguru, as the Ultimate Reality as described in their Holy Book (the Guru Granth Sahib), we can make a point of connection that we too worship the sovereign Creator as revealed in our Holy Book. The above examples will require further nuancing to make clear what we mean by what we say, but that is to be expected - the Apostle Paul had to nuance his language as well.

If we make points of connection without nuancing our language to demonstrate how our beliefs are different than our conversation partners, it can be safely assumed that we agree on everything. It is at this point that it is valuable to winsomely address our point(s) of contention or disagreement. The Apostle Paul does this in Acts 17 when he spoke to the people in the Areopagus about the nature of the 'unknown god' by describing the one true God (verses 23-27, 29-30). We ought not be contentious when we talk about our points of contention with our conversation partners. The only offense that should occur is the offense of the gospel itself, not by the demeanour and tone in which we speak. When we talk with our staunch atheist friend about our differences regarding how we understand truth, we do well to talk about how we understand truth primarily as the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Jesus claimed many things about himself, including his own death and resurrection (e.g. Mark 10:33-34). When hundreds of people saw him resurrected three days after he was buried, Jesus' claims about himself were all vindicated. Jesus was who he said he was, and therefore must be God. When we talk with our committed Sikh friend about our differences regarding who the one true God, that our Holy Book reveals, is we would do well to talk about how we believe that God himself was made known to us not only by the words written by prophets but because God himself came to earth as a person. We don't know about God only from people who claim to have seen him, but we know about God because of the one who claimed to be him - and proved it by fulfilling his own claims of death and resurrection.

If we want our gospel conversations to meet people where they are, we need to find points of connection and contention. However, we must never leave the conversation there. We must do our best to point to Jesus Christ as the one who we trust, follow, and obey.

When we are trying to meet people where they are at, it is very helpful to follow the Apostle Paul's example. We need to find points of connection with our conversation partner, winsomely identify the points of disagreement, and do it all with the intention that they would come to see, know, and love Jesus Christ as the person who has completed what was necessary to reconcile us to God.

Even when we follow the Apostle Paul's model of contextualizing the gospel, it does not necessarily mean that people will repent and believe the good news of Jesus. There were three types of reactions to the Apostle Paul's gospel proclamation in the Areopagus: sneering (verse 32a), further interest (verse 32b), and repentance and belief (verse 34). When we meet people where they are at in our gospel conversations, we too should expect that some people will mock us, some will be skeptical but willing to hear more, and some will be ready to repent and believe the gospel. The Apostle Paul experienced a myriad of responses to his faithful gospel proclamation, and we should expect to experience those same responses.

So what are the areas of connection and contention between Christianity and Sikhism? The sections below will introduce a few examples of both areas of connection and contention.

Connection Points Between Christianity and Sikhism

Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper is quoted as saying, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” Such a remark reminds the Evangelical Christian that God prepares people from every worldview to repent and believe the gospel. Therefore, every study and inquiry of other worldviews ought to prompt the question, “How can Jesus be made known here?” One way in which God prepares people of differing worldviews to repent and believe the gospel is through placing bridges of similarity and commonality between their worldview and the Christian worldview. Evangelical Christianity and historic Sikhism share many bridges of similarity and commonality.

One example of commonality is that Evangelical Christianity and Sikhism are both monotheistic religions with the belief that God (or Vahiguru) is the creator and sustainer of all that exists. Furthermore, both worldviews have their own creation account. The Biblical account of Creation begins with the phrase “In the beginning”, and the Sikh account with “Ek Onkar” which means One Creator³¹ or God is One.³²

Another example of commonality between Evangelical Christianity and historic Sikhism is a great respect of their Holy Scriptures and high esteem for prophets/apostles and gurus. Christianity maintains that the Holy Bible is authoritative and provides all that is necessary for faith and discipleship, and Sikhs “turn to this holy book [Guru Granth Sahib] for inspiration and guidance in ritual and worship, and they treat it with the highest respect.”³³ Both Christians and Sikhs understand their authoritative book came to them through their religious leaders known as prophets and apostles for Christians and gurus for Sikhs.

Evangelical Christians and historic Sikhism also understand their religious practice has more to do with how one lives rather than engaging in external religiosity. The Christian is commanded by their Lord Jesus Christ to obey him by loving God with all their heart, soul, and mind and their neighbor as themselves.³⁴ Furthermore, the Christian believes that someone who has truly repented and believe the gospel will be known by their works, the Christian cannot have faith without works.³⁵ Likewise, as Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh says, “Sikhs reject ritual and external forms of religion. They focus instead on living their faith.”³⁶ She continues by saying, “Sikhs express their beliefs through service to the One... They also serve the Sikh community by helping fellow Sikhs... [and] share the fruits of their labor with the poor outside the Sikh community, giving both money and time to charity”³⁷

³¹ Gurinder Singh. Mann, *Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 73

³² Kamala E. Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 258

³³ Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism (World Religions)*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 9

³⁴ Matthew 22:37-38

³⁵ James 2:14-26

³⁶ Nikky-Guninder Kaur. Singh, *Sikhism (World Religions)*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 9

³⁷ Ibid., 10

Additionally, the Sikh people hold in very high regard two particular dates in their calendar, just as Evangelical Christians hold two particular dates in their own. For the Sikh community the celebration of Vaisakhi and Diwali are major events. For Christians celebrations of Christmas and Easter are major events.

In addition to the areas of connection between the Evangelical Christian and Sikh worldviews, there are cultural similarities that form significant areas of connection between the two groups.

The first cultural similarity is that both groups have a high view of women. In Evangelical Christianity it is a strongly held belief that men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God and should therefore be viewed as equal in value in the eyes of Christians. It is a deeply held conviction that God created humanity in His image, which includes both the masculine and feminine aspects of humanity. Sikhism, in contrast to Hinduism, believes that women are equal in value with men. It is common to hear among Sikh couples their affirmation of the belief of the equal value between men and women, in order to differentiate themselves from some of other religious traditions in India.

The second cultural similarity between both Evangelical Christians and Sikhs is the importance of family. Christians believe that marriage between a man and woman is God's design for the flourishing of humanity in general, and individual family groups in particular. Sikhs likewise have a high view of marriage between a man and woman as the foundation upon which the family unit is built, albeit within a more collectivistic context where extended family will often live in close quarters with each other for the purposes of raising children.

While there may be a variety of differences culturally between Christians and Sikhs in the Fraser Valley, a high view of women and family is a strong area of connection upon which deep and lasting friendships can be built.

Contention Points Between Christianity and Sikhism

While commonalities certainly exist between the worldviews of historic Sikhism and Evangelical Christianity, there are significant differences between the two worldviews that act as potential barriers for conversion. These barriers include different views on the capacity for a personal relationship with God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the means and goal of salvation.

Firstly, in the Christian worldview, knowing God personally is incredibly valuable. The popularity of J.I. Packer's excellent work, *Knowing God*, provides anecdotal evidence for the desire of Christians to grow personally in their relationship with God. Historic Sikhism, however, is "centered on Vahiguru who is the creator and sustainer of the world. In this status, Vahiguru is fundamentally different from the creation and is beyond gender and other human distinctions."³⁸ Thus, the powerful Vahiguru who created and sustains the world is necessarily distant from creation and unavailable for personal relationship.

³⁸ Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 15

Secondly, evangelical Christianity is centered on the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) who is fully God and fully human. He lived perfectly, died sacrificially, and rose victoriously so that sinful humanity could be reconciled to God through faith in Him. Jesus Christ is the most important and unique man to have ever lived in all of human history. Historic Sikhism does not allow for Vahiguru to become personally involved with creation in general, and certainly not through incarnation in particular. This is because, as Gurinder Singh Mann states, “Vahiguru is omnipotent and omnipresent, the transcendent Sovereign. There is, however, a fundamental polarity between Vahiguru and the creation, which leaves no provision for divine incarnation.”³⁹ Therefore, in the historic Sikh worldview, Jesus cannot be truly God if he also exists fully in human form.

Thirdly, Evangelical Christians believe the goal of salvation is to enjoy God forever in perfect relationship with Him, others, and creation in the context of New Creation. Eternal life is humanity becoming fully human and is indescribably wonderful because of the perfect relationship with God there. This hope is available for all who repent of their rebellion against God and receive righteousness through belief in the gospel. Sikhs do “good deeds that earn merit towards a better next life,”⁴⁰ but Kamala Nayar says that, “the goal of [Sikhism is] to liberate its followers from [the] cycle [of reincarnation] (mukti) so that they merge with the Ultimate. The simple recitation of the divine name (nam) is the means of this goal.”⁴¹ Historic Sikhism’s ultimate goal is an impersonal incorporation into the life-force of Vahiguru and is accomplished through good deeds and religious recitation. Thus, salvation in Sikhism is utterly different from Christianity, and is earned as a wage rather than received as a gift.

Fourthly, while Sikhism maintains a desire for union with God - there is no guarantee that such union will occur after death or if the cycle of samsara or reincarnation will continue.

Furthermore, evangelical Christians, in their evangelism efforts, should be aware of the cultural and worldview differences present in the different generations within the Sikh community in the Fraser Valley. Each generation will need to be approached prayerfully and strategically. Third generation Sikhs can be approached evangelistically in a similar manner to evangelism strategies to other culturally Canadian people. Christians would be well served by understanding and engaging in Christian Apologetics with the third generation to affirm the reasonableness for why Christianity is good, true, and beautiful. Second generation Sikhs may best be approached in the context of clarifying and inquisitive dialogue. Christians would be well served by dialoguing with second generation Sikhs and asking questions regarding what they believe and why they believe it. Gracious and loving questioning may plant seeds of curiosity, which could lead to future opportunities to present the gospel clearly and explicitly. An aggressive declarative approach may not be helpful with second generation Sikhs because their cultural and religious identities are intrinsically connected. First generation Sikhs may be the most challenging group to engage with, though a long-term relationship approach is almost certainly a necessary prerequisite for evangelization. The first generation operates with a holistic worldview that includes faith and action, thus a Christian life that demonstrates faith and action would provide a bridge for a gospel conversation. After the Christian life is observed by the Sikh the Christian could discuss the hope

³⁹ Ibid., 79

⁴⁰ Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Sikhism (World Religions)*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 10

⁴¹ Kamala E. Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 124

that they have in the completed work of Jesus Christ. It would be contextually and missionally appropriate to invite all generations to regularly attend a local church because they are already comfortable with the concept of going to gurdwara for religious teaching. Furthermore, at church they can engage in the community and learn about Christianity through the teaching of the Bible.

Relationship is Key

Christians ought to pursue genuine relationships with Sikhs of all generations because relationships will be the primary context in which good Christian mission with the Sikh community will occur. Christians and Sikhs share a desire to better the community, therefore participating in community events and activities would be a great first step in developing genuine relationships.

One of the keys to build a trustworthy friendship with someone is to not start with what we do or what we believe. If we want to reach out to people from another cultural group we need to get to know them, which requires that we ask them lots of questions. We need to find out what they do, what brought them to this country, and what they believe. We should never assume that we know what people believe before we ask them.

It is also important to greet them in their own traditional greetings. For example if you are greeting a Punjabi person, say "Sat Sri Akal Ji." Often when I meet someone from a different ethnic background I greet them in their local language. The response is usually a big smile and a question like, "How do you know my language?" or, "Have you been to my country?" If you choose to visit their temple, follow their instructions (except bowing down before the book or any sort of worship) and be a good guest. In other words, in order to build a meaningful relationship you need to show an interest in their lives. One of the most common ways to connect with other people is over food. Most Canadians love butter chicken, and most Punjabi people love to be hospitable and make food for people. Why not ask your Indian friend to teach you how to make butter chicken?

Here are few other practical tips:

1. One of the most important things to remember is that when you invite a Punjabi friend over for coffee or dinner, do not expect them to leave in an hour. In general when you are meeting them, make sure not to schedule something else afterwards for at least for two hours. Also, if you are inviting them over for a meal, do not serve beef or pork. Most of the Sikh people are vegetarian (which typically means no eggs either), but some people will eat chicken. It is always best to ask if they are vegetarian or non-vegetarian.
2. Invite your Punjabi friend over to your house and make him/her some Indian chai or buy some samosas. Serve them their traditional local food if possible.
3. You can ask them to come to your house to teach you how to make chai or roti (naan bread).
4. Use the language they are familiar with. Someone once said to me, "I asked a Sikh person a question about Sikhism but he couldn't answer it." "Were you using the vocabulary that he was not familiar with?" I asked. "I guess so." You may know more about Sikhism than your Sikh friend and it will never lead you anywhere but if you meet them where they are

at, you will have a meaningful conversation. Again, Apostle Paul, when he went to Athens, found a common ground and started with:

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” Acts 17:22-23 ESV

Contextualizing the gospel into another culture can be a challenge, but it doesn't have to be. We need to find some common interests to connect to the people from other ethnicities just like Paul did. Someone once said to me, “I want to connect with Punjabi people but their food stinks.” It will be impossible to reach out to someone with the gospel message with that kind of attitude. John Piper once in his interview said, "I can't love missions and be ethnocentric. I want every people group on the planet evangelized." As Christians our lives are transformed by the gospel message and we are commanded to take the gospel to every nation and tribe (Matthew 28:19-20). God has brought the Sikh population right to our doorstep. We need to stop being ethnocentric and proclaim the power of the Cross to people of all nations.

Furthermore, it is time that we tell our stories as a part of our gospel conversation. We all have stories of what God has done in our lives, don't we? Let's share our stories with Sikh friends rather than just launch into a prepared gospel presentation or monologue. In our Western culture we like to have a logical answer to every question, whereas in the east, people relate to stories more than logical arguments. In the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, whenever there is power outage (especially in the evening), the whole family comes together and they tell each other stories and riddles to pass time while waiting for the electricity to come back on. We need to tell God's story boldly, but we also need to tell our story.

A Common Question

One question that is asked often by Canadian Christians is, “Do the Punjabi people want to be friends with Canadian people?” The answer is yes. Often people say, “They always hang out with their community, why is that?” First, Indian people are very community oriented. Second, half of the first generation (or new comers to Canada) don't know English very well and sometimes they want to talk to their Canadian neighbors but they don't because they cannot carry the conversation and their Canadian friends speak so fast that they don't understand them.

The description of the commonalities and differences between historic Sikhism and Evangelical Christianity were explored at some length earlier because they are necessary to understand when engaging in Christian mission to Sikhs of all ages in the Fraser Valley. The gospel conversations that Christians engage in with their Sikh neighbors must always include points of connection, points of contention, and consistent appeals to Jesus Christ as the True Vahiguru who offers hope and the opportunity to be fully human through reconciliation with God.

Christians and Sikhs will continue to coexist for years to come in the Fraser Valley. The Sikh community's history is one of resilience, their current circumstance is complex, and the future of their faith in Canada is unknown. If evangelical Christians desire to engage in Christian mission

to Sikhs in the Fraser Valley they must understand the tenets of historic Sikhism, be aware of modernity's influence on the intergenerational Sikh community, and prayerfully engage in relational, strategic, and explicit gospel proclamation. In His providence, God has brought the Sikhs to the Fraser Valley and now Christians and churches must take seriously the commission to make disciples of all nations – for their neighbor's good and God's glory.

Motivated by Love

When the heart of a follower of Jesus is soaked in the truths of the gospel, conversations about Jesus are motivated by an extravagant love for people. This audacious, overflowing, gospel-speaking love for others is formed in Jesus' disciples through the work of the Holy Spirit. God is motivated by love to save sinners and Christians ought to be motivated by love in their gospel proclamation.

Luke 15 contains three of the most beloved parables in the New Testament. In the ESV, the parables are given the following titles: The Parable of the Lost Sheep; The Parable of the Lost Coin; and The Parable of the Prodigal Son. Out of these three beloved parables, the most popular of the three is almost certainly the parable of the prodigal son. The background to this story is that Jesus is hanging out with tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes are grumbling about Jesus' actions. Jesus responds to the Pharisees by sharing the three parables. First, he tells the parable of the lost sheep:

4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Secondly, Jesus tells the parable of the lost coin:

8 “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Thirdly, Jesus tells this parable:

11 And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. **13** Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. **14** And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to

feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” **20** And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. **21** And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ **22** But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. **23** And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. **24** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. **25** “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ **28** But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, **29** but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ **31** And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

The first two parables make a similar point: there is much rejoicing when what was lost has been found. The third parable is most often thought of as a story of one lost son being welcomed back into a family. The brilliant and respected scholars that translated the ESV even give this passage the title, The Parable of the Prodigal Son. There is no doubt that the return of the reckless son is a major aspect of the passage. However, if we think this story is about only one son, we miss Jesus’ introduction and conclusion to the passage. In the story, the father has two sons. In the context for this passage, Jesus is talking to religious leaders about his acceptance of sinners and tax collectors. He is talking to the “older brother” about his heart for the “younger brother.” What makes this parable a bit different from the previous two is this parable doesn’t end with the reckless son’s return. The parable ends with the father talking with the older son.

The parable Jesus tells in Luke 15:11-32 is really a story about the father’s heart to see the licentious younger brother and the legalistic older brother enter the banquet. God wants a relationship with people who are far away from him because of their sinful-licentious lifestyle. God also wants a relationship with people that are far away from him because of their sinful-legalistic lifestyle. At the end of the parable we know the younger son is at the party. We never find out if the older brother entered or remained outside. This passage has many implications for readers, but for our purposes these two emerge:

1. God wants both the reckless and the religious to get over themselves and accept the free offer of the gospel so they can enter into the banquet he has prepared.

2. We should be eager to engage in gospel conversations with all people because both the reckless and the religious need to repent and believe the gospel to join the banquet.

A Farmer or a Salesperson?

It's clear that God wants us to talk about the gospel with all kinds of people. That God wants everyone to be reconciled to him is something followers of Jesus love and appreciate. However, for some people who have spent many years involved in the local church, any discussion on talking about the gospel conjures up thoughts of a shady salesperson. Engaging in gospel conversations is not about closing a sale. Christians are called to be proclaimers of the gospel not converters of the heart. It is up to God to soften hearts, convict sin, and transform lives; it is up to us to articulate as faithfully as possible the gospel of Jesus.

It is very important to be confident in what we believe, and to know why we believe what we do. That said, people don't often repent and believe the gospel because they were convinced in an argument. When we talk about the gospel, we need to make sure we are having legitimate conversations with people, being as clear and humble as we can and recognize that it is God who works on their heart, not us.

When we engage in gospel conversations we do so with the hope that our conversation partner would repent of their sin and follow Christ as their Saviour and King. This is our hope. However, it isn't our job to close any sales for Jesus. If we approach gospel conversations like a sales pitch then we are missing the point. We don't want to fabricate the truth to make it more palatable and less offensive just so people will turn to Jesus. We don't want to manipulate people into just making a decision. Being a Christian is an all or nothing, life-altering commitment. It isn't merely about trying to get people to pray a prayer. Approaching a conversation with the mindset of trying to close a sale shows that we want to close the sale so that we feel like our obedience has fruit. However, just like a farmer that works hard preparing for a crop but can't force it to grow, so too we work diligently to try to articulate the gospel well while also refusing to coerce or manipulate someone to follow Christ. Only God makes the fruit of repentance and belief grow. We hope and pray for repentance and belief, but we do so in the manner of a farmer not a salesperson.

Knowing Your Conversation Partners

I have been a lifelong hockey fan. I have participated in many hockey pools and have followed the NHL closely every year for as long as I can remember. There are definitely people who know a lot more about the intricacies of hockey in general and the NHL in particular, but I still think I know quite a bit about hockey. I, like many other Vancouver Canucks fans, look back on past draft years and marvel at the "could-have-been" situations if only the hometown team made different decisions. For example, if Vancouver decided to select, instead of pass up on, two local boys (Milan Lucic and Brendan Gallagher) in drafts separated by four years, the team would likely have a stronger team now and a more hopeful future. If you follow the NHL closely you will understand what I'm talking about, whether you agree with me or not. However, if you don't follow the NHL, everything I just wrote was essentially worthless and a waste of time.

The point is that it's possible to know something but be unable to communicate it effectively to others. This often happens when the communicator goes off on a topic that their conversation partner has no framework in place to resonate with or understand. When we desire to communicate well we need to do the hard work of knowing our conversation partner. The best way to get to know someone is to carefully listen to them.

Listening Effectively

One of the most valuable undergrad courses I took was Conflict Management with a professor named Janet Boldt. This course drilled into me the importance of listening well. Effective listening is hard work because it takes a lot of energy and intentionality. Listening is not synonymous with not speaking, and it's not a passive activity. Listening is a skill that is developed and an art that is crafted. There are many important components to effective listening but we will focus on three here: (1) Be Attentive, (2) Be Empathetic, and (3) Be Patient.

First, when we listen well we are attentive. Attentiveness is essentially being intentional about your participation in the conversation. God created us to be holistic beings - our minds and our bodies are connected. Attentiveness involves our mind as we concentrate, but it also involves our body language. When we lean forward, keep our eyes looking in our conversation partner's direction, and nod our head, we physically demonstrate our mental attentiveness. Now, of course, it's best to be subtle in our body language rather than aggressive. It would be weird to be bent over, fixating on someone's eyes, and nodding like a bobble-head doll. So don't do that. But, be sure to do something with your body to show that you actually want to be involved in the conversation, and that you are paying attention.

Secondly, when we listen well we are empathetic. We should do our very best to put ourselves in our conversation partner's shoes. When we hear their stories we should do our best to feel what they feel. When they are in a season of joy we should feel laughter brewing; when they are in a season of sorrow we should feel tears nearing. Empathy is hard because it opens us up to feeling something we may not want to feel. However, when we empathize with others we are communicating that what is being said matters to us.

Thirdly, when we listen well we are patient. Patience, in the context of listening well, essentially means that we let the conversation develop the way it needs to. Sometimes this means conversations will move quickly, more often it means the conversation will move slowly. If while your conversation partner is talking, you are trying to think what about what you should say next so you can move the conversation along, you aren't practicing patience and probably aren't listening well. Patience doesn't mean, however, that you talk for three hours longer than you planned. Patience lets the conversation develop the way it needs to, and if you can't get through everything you wanted to in the conversation before you need to pick up your kids from school or get to a doctor's appointment, you try to find another time to meet and continue the conversation. Important conversations can't be rushed.

Belonging and Believing

When we love and engage with people in our sphere of influence with intentionality, we will be developing genuine friendships. Authentic mutual friendships are a powerful foundation for gospel conversations. It is important for us to recognize that allowing these friends to see what Christian community is like will help their understanding of Christianity. Following Jesus needs to be a personal choice, but the disciple of Jesus cannot walk out their faith in isolation. Disciples of Jesus need be involved in a Christian community. When we incorporate our gospel conversation partners into our Christian community, we not only demonstrate what Christian community looks like, we give them a sneak peek of what holistically following Jesus looks like.

When we consider how and when to incorporate people into Christian community, we are contemplating the relationship between belonging and believing. There is no doubt that belonging to Christian community and believing in Jesus Christ are connected. The question, however, is how involved should someone exploring the claims of Christ be in Christian community? Surely this person should be welcome to participate in Christian community, but what does that participation look like? Many local churches have a gathered community in the form of a worship service, and also a scattered community in the form of community groups. Both these gathered and scattered communities have leaders and participants. Leadership in these gathered and scattered communities look different depending on the context, but usually involve facilitation and teaching of some sort. In the church service context, leadership can look like people serving as greeters, ushers, musicians, speakers, sound technicians, children ministry volunteers, and many other valuable roles. In the community group setting, leadership can be teaching, leading prayer, leading times of singing, and facilitating discussion. We ought not allow the person who has yet to submit to Christ's lordship be involved in leading within our communities, but they should nevertheless be encouraged to participate in our community.

When people feel they genuinely belong they are more willing to open up in sharing their thoughts, fears and questions. Inviting our friends into our homes and encouraging their participation in our communities provides a powerful relational foundation as they consider the claims of Christ.

Conversations and monologues function very differently. There is a time and place where well-crafted monologues are edifying and life-giving. The great temptation for many Christians in the realm of talking about our faith is to craft a monologue and then hope for some opportunity to launch into our very best speech. There is not a lot of verbal interaction during a monologue. Listening to a monologue is by no means passive (it takes a lot of hard work to listen to well), but there are not a lot of opportunities during a monologue to ask the speaker to nuance what they just said. Conversations, however, happen much more naturally in our everyday life. They involve a give and take, opportunities to question and clarify, and opportunities to speak and to listen. When we think about sharing our faith with others, we are wise to view them as genuine conversations rather than opportunities to launch into a well-crafted speech.

GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

In his book, *Questioning Evangelism*, Randy Newman talks about the three main components involved in every gospel conversation: Declaring, Defending, and Dialoguing. Newman presents a helpful paradigm that is both robust and practical. It captures all the important elements of a genuine conversation about any topic, but especially the gospel. Plus, it's catchy and easy to remember: real gospel conversations are in 3-D - declare, defend, and dialogue. Regardless of how easily or naturally the words flow out of us, when we engage in our gospel conversations with others we would be wise to use the 3-Ds Newman mentions. Let's take some time and examine each element in a bit more depth.

Declare

The first "D" we will take a look at is declare. Out of the three "Ds," declaring is probably the easiest one to understand. As a part of a gospel conversation we need to do our best to faithfully articulate the core elements of the gospel. We should be prepared to boldly, and winsomely, communicate that God is solely responsible for creating a good world. Humans willingly rebelled against God and his good plan. God initiated a plan to reconcile humanity back to himself ultimately through the perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus will return to judge everyone and will bring his Kingdom to fully and finally bear on all of creation when he makes everything new. Those who recognize their rebellion against God and trust in Jesus as their perfection and reconciliation will be a part of the New Creation, in the presence of God forever. A conversation is not a gospel conversation if there is no attempt to faithfully communicate all - or part - of the good news of Jesus Christ. Communicating the truths of the gospel is the way that people come to, and grow in, their committed following of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Jesus has commissioned his followers to be active disciple-making-disciples,⁴² and making declarative statements about the gospel is the primary way in which we will engage in this mission.

Defend

The second "D" we will examine is defend. It is a common occurrence in a conversation for someone to provide a defense for their declarative statements. Think of the last time you went out for a meal with a friend. It's likely that at some point during the meal your friend, or the server, asked you how your meal tastes. If for some reason your meal is really disappointing, you not only say that your meal is not good but you also provide reasons why your meal is not good. Without consciously knowing it, you have just made a declarative statement and provided a defense. The Apostle Peter wrote about the importance having reasons for our belief in 1 Peter 3:13-16:

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? **14** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, **15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always

⁴² Matthew 28:18-20

being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, **16** having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Many people we engage in gospel conversations with will see the world in a very different way than we do. When we gently give reasons for what we believe and how we think, we are providing a defense that will help our conversation partner know why we believe what we do. We need to be prepared to provide a defense for why we believe what we do. The area of defending Christian thought and belief is known as apologetics. There are many questions and claims that apologetics provides answers for, but there are two significant themes that will arise in most of our gospel conversations: (1) There can't be just one true religion; and (2) If a good and loving God exists then why is there is evil and suffering?

1. There can't be just one true religion

Canadian culture, more than that of many other countries, is intrinsically pluralistic. According to the latest Canadian statistics about religion in Canada, almost 84% of the population self identifies as religious in one way or another (e.g. Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, etc.). While there is a seemingly growing population of staunch atheists in Canada, it is still very common for people in Canada to be respectful of your religious beliefs. However, what the majority of Canadians will not accept is the belief or attitude that there is one true religion. There are three claims that will often be made by people surrounding the belief that there cannot be just one true religion: All religions teach the same thing, all religions see a part of the spiritual truth but not the whole, and it is arrogant to insist one understanding of religion is right and all others are wrong.

The first claim made by people arguing there is no one true religion is that all major religions are equally valid because they basically teach the same thing. Much of the multicultural efforts and events in our cities grow out of the belief that all religions essentially teach the same things (e.g., loving people, being kind, helping the poor, etc.). While there is certainly some overlap between various religions regarding how people should be treated, there are still distinctions. For example, within the Sikh worldview, all people are created equal regardless of their ethnicity or gender and should be treated fairly. The Sikh people try to feed the hungry and give money to the poor, regardless of who they are, as a part of their religious duty. However, in the Hindu worldview, people are divided into distinct and unchangeable castes. A person of a higher class ought never engage with people of a lower class - and it would be unthinkable to help someone who is in a lower caste experience a better life because they deserve that life (the proof being that they were born into that caste). A quick exploration of these two Indian religions shows very clearly that while there may be similarities between religions, they do not essentially teach the same thing - even regarding how people ought to treat each other.

Furthermore, a closer examination and comparison of different religions shows that different world religions, at their very core, teach fundamentally different doctrine. One quick example will hopefully suffice. At the very core of Buddhism is an impersonal life force that overflowed so that the world, and people, appeared. The goal in life is to return, and become amalgamated,

into this impersonal life force just as a drop of rain becomes indistinguishable from the ocean water it falls into. The very core of Christianity is that the God who was personally responsible for Creation, and who was rejected by the very people he created to have relationship with, entered into history as the man Jesus of Nazareth (who was fully God and fully man) so that he could die to absorb all of the consequences and punishments due to humanity for their rebellion against him. Jesus rose from the dead to prove that he is truly God, that all he taught was true, and that he has finished all that is necessary for humans to be reconciled to God and enjoy him forward. When humans choose to follow Jesus they are reconciled to God and wait in anticipation to enjoy eternal life with him and everyone else who trusts and follows Jesus. The two fundamental narratives of Buddhism and Christianity could not be more different. One is essentially atheistic, in the sense that it does not believe in one god or multiple gods; the other is monotheistic, or holds to the belief that there is one true God. One brings 'salvation' through human effort; the other offers salvation to all who trust in the One who is fully God and fully human.

When someone makes a claim that all religions teach essentially the same thing, it is evidence of their desire for people to get along and not fight each other (a noble desire!), but it is also evidence that they have not spent significant time investigating the narrative and claims of the different major world religions. The more one invests time in learning about different world religions, the more one realizes just how unique Christianity is from all the other world religions. There are certainly some similarities between different world religions, however the claim that all religions essentially teach the same thing is simply an untenable and flawed statement.

The second major claim made by people in a multicultural and pluralistic setting is maintaining that there is no one true religion (that each religion sees part of the spiritual truth, and that no one religion can see the whole truth). Often this claim will be quickly followed by a story about three blind men and an elephant. The story goes something like this:

There are three blind men who stumble upon an elephant. Each man encounters a different area of the elephant. They ask each other what this object is that is in front of them. One blind man puts his hands out in front and he feels the firmness and flatness of the elephant's side. He emphatically proclaims, "This object is certainly a wall!" A second blind man puts his hands out in front and he wraps his arms around the wide, sturdy, and circular characteristics of the elephant's leg. He yells with excitement, "No, this object is certainly a tree trunk!" The third man feels the tube-like features of the elephant's trunk. He emphatically responds, "No, the object is certainly a hose!"

The story seems to be a great metaphor for the claim that all religions see only part of the spiritual truth, but not the whole truth. However, the story ironically makes a better case for believing that there actually is only one true worldview that excludes the truthfulness of other worldviews. There certainly are three blind men in this parable, but they are not the only ones involved in the story, there is a storyteller who watches the whole scene unfold. The narrator knows the whole story and is in a position of privilege. The truth of the parable is that the object under investigation was not actually a wall, a tree trunk, or a hose (like the respective blind men honestly believed); the object in question was indeed an elephant. So the question that one must ask at this point is, which worldview or religion gets to narrate the story? Which worldview or religion gets to see not just part of spiritual truth but gets to see all of the spiritual truth?

We live in a world of competing worldviews. That only one of them can be right, and all the others wrong, is not an outlandish belief. Therefore, it is the task of the spiritual seeker not to throw up her arms in bewilderment, but to do the hard work of investigating the claims and histories of the various world religions and worldviews to see which makes the most sense of the world around them. What worldview makes the most sense of the fact that we as humans desire things like love, comfort, and relationship? What worldview makes sense of the fact that we as humans believe that things like a baby's smile, delicious food, and caring friends are good and enjoyable; yet rape, genocide, and incest are evil and ought to be opposed? As followers of Jesus, we believe that God gets to be the narrator, and Christianity is the one true story. It is the narrative of Christianity that lets us know that the elephant is not a wall, a tree trunk, or a hose but is actually an elephant.

The third claim made by people arguing against the existence of one true religion is that it is arrogant to insist that your religion and beliefs about God are right, and it is unkind to try to convince other people of your perspective. This claim rests firmly on the belief that to claim certainty is arrogant and to disagree with someone else is intolerant. However, the very logic upon which this claim rests is the same logic that makes this claim undefendable. The claim that there is no one true view on an issue, is in itself a claim of being the one true view. The claimer is guilty of the very arrogance of which they accuse the other. Furthermore, the claim that it is unkind to try to convince other people of your perspective is once again self-refuting logic. The claimer is trying to convince the other that they are right. Therefore, the one making the claim must also be unkind in their insistence on being right. While this claim seems to be a conversation ender, it can actually be a comment that may continue the conversation in a (hopefully) healthy and helpful direction. To winsomely show someone that their claim is self-refuting may provide an opportunity to make the concession that both parties think they are right and the other is wrong, but nevertheless they hope the conversation can continue.

2. If a good and loving God exists, why is there evil and suffering?

The idea that a good, loving, and all powerful God can exist even though there is evil and suffering in the world is not a very difficult philosophical idea to defend. However, I won't be unpacking the philosophical reasoning of it here. The reason for this is because in the context of the vast majority of our gospel conversations, the question of a good and loving God coexisting with a world full of evil and suffering is not coming from a place of philosophical curiosity but rather a place of deep experiential pain. What your conversation partner likely needs most in the moment is not a philosophically sound argument, but a compassionate and caring friend who acknowledges their pain.

Responding to a claim like this one by saying something to the effect of, "There are many people smarter than I who have thought through this issue and have come to the conclusion that a good and loving God can coexist with a world full of evil and suffering. But, philosophical explanations don't usually take the pain away." This answer does two main things. Firstly, it acknowledges that there is an answer to the question. Secondly, it acknowledges that you care more about them as a person than you do looking like you're smart and have all the answers.

If your conversation partner is one of the very few people who asks this question from a place of pure philosophical curiosity, you can refer them to good resource for their own examination. Let them know that you will read it too, and if they want to talk about it sometime you'd be happy to. By removing yourself from being the one who gives the answer on this topic you are able to continue to build your relationship with the person, and you remain a person who is a true friend during times of pain and struggle. Often it is a true friend who cares, and not a philosophically reasonable argument, that brings comfort in a season of pain and suffering.

We have just scratched the surface of Christian apologetics. Honesty is always the best policy when we answer our conversation partner's questions about Christianity. It is not a failure to honestly admit when we don't have an answer for a question. Actually, it is probably a wise strategy to admit when we don't know the answers rather than making something up out of fear of looking stupid. We don't have to know everything, but we should have some places that we turn to in order to help us find an answer. There are many good books and resources available at both the academic and popular level that can help believers think through their faith. Regardless of the question, and answer, it is imperative to remember that when we defend our faith we do so in a gentle and winsome way. We should not try to win an argument at the expense of losing a conversation partner.

Dialogue

The third "D" we will explore is dialogue. It is to this element of the gospel conversation that Randy Newman has devoted his book *Questioning Evangelism*. It is a book that I think we would all benefit from reading, because it is the part of our gospel conversations that I think we most often forget to include. That we need to make declarative statements about God, Man, and Christ or Creation, Rebellion, Reconciliation, or Consummation isn't hard to grasp. That we should be prepared to gently give reasons for what we believe (engaging in apologetics) has been encouraged by Christian leaders for years. However, the idea of incorporating asking genuine questions and letting the conversation have a real life of its own is something that isn't talked about as often. Dialoguing through asking good questions is the essence of every good conversation in general, and every good gospel conversation in particular. When we engage in dialogue with people by asking good questions, we are following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus.

A friend of mine, Andrew, once asked me to help him with a sticky situation he found himself in with a colleague of his from work. Andrew said that almost every day his colleague would ask him something to the effect of: "As a Christian, do you think that non-Christians like me will go to hell?" Andrew said that he tried to answer him as gently as possible, that yes, indeed that is what he believes the Bible teaches. His answer would infuriate his colleague and the conversation would end abruptly. Andrew told me that this exchange happened often and he didn't know what else to do. He didn't want the conversation (and his relationship!) to be so full of hostility, but he also didn't want to back down from what he believes the Bible to teach. I asked Andrew to respond to his colleagues question about hell with another question, "Do you believe hell exists?"

This question does a few things. The first thing is that it takes Andrew off the hot-seat. The second thing it does is it provides an opportunity for further conversation and thinking. If

Andrew's colleague responds by saying that he does indeed believe that some sort of hell exists and is populated, Andrew can ask him a question like, "Well, if hell exists and people go there, what do you think is the criteria for who is in hell and who is not?" If Andrew's colleague responds by saying that he does not believe hell exists, Andrew can ask him a question like, "Well, then why are you fixated the issue? Why do you care what I think about a place you don't even think exists?" Either way, answering a difficult question with a thoughtful question provides an opportunity for the conversation to continue in a more honest, open, and courteous way.

Answering a question with a question was a common tactic used in the 1st Century by Rabbis in general and Jesus in particular. One example of Jesus answering a question with a question is found in Mark 10:17-18.

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" **18** And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

If there was ever a time that I would launch into a declarative presentation of the gospel, it would be when someone asks me how to inherit eternal life. This seems like hitting a slow-pitch toss floating towards the plate, or shooting a soccer ball into a wide-open net from ten feet away. Jesus responds in a way that seems counterintuitive. He answers a question with a question. He engages the man in a dialogue.

The key to implementing dialogue within our gospel conversations is to ask good questions and listen intently. There are at least two reasons why we ask questions in our gospel conversations: We ask questions to discover the views and opinions of our conversation partner, and we ask questions to help us understand how to answer our conversation partner later in the conversation (or in a conversation that happens later).

When we are trying to understand where people are coming from we are wise to try to understand what people mean when they use certain terms and the basis for their opinions. We can ask people to define what they mean when they use certain terms by asking them, "What do you mean by ___?" In Andrew's workplace situation about hell, he could ask his colleague what he means by hell, so he knows what his colleague believes hell is (or is not). Gospel conversations are always more effective when the tone of the conversation is calm, cool, and collected. Arguments tend to provide more heat than light. A lot of confusion and frustration can be avoided when we understand how people are understanding and using certain terms. Before we launch into a tirade when someone says something we think is ridiculous, we are wise to ask them to define their terms to see if our opinions are closer than they may first appear.

Another important step in understanding what people think and believe is to ask them what the basis is for understanding things the way they do. It is helpful to know how people arrive at certain conclusions. Have they heavily investigated something or is it just a gut feeling? To determine your conversation partners basis for their opinion you can simply ask them, "How did you arrive at that conclusion?", or "How did you get there?" In Andrew's workplace situation about hell, this question would help determine the life situations and experiences that have influenced his colleague's opinion. People do not come to their beliefs in an experiential vacuum.

Events in our lives, and relationships with other people significantly impact our views on issues in general, and our views on religious issues in particular.

When we ask questions to understand our conversation partner, we can then use our discernment to see how we should answer them. The book of Proverbs categorizes people into two groups: people who are wise and people who are fools. Wise people fear and love God. Foolish people do not fear or love God. Proverbs 26:4-5 are two of my favourite verses in the Old Testament:

4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

These verses in Proverbs make it clear that we will obviously be in situations where we need to answer our conversation partner's questions, and times when we ought not answer their questions. So how do we determine whether our non-Christian conversation partner is a fool that we should answer according to their folly or not? The way that I apply these verses into my conversations is by discerning whether my conversation partner is genuinely curious about something, or if they are merely antagonistic and uninterested in my actual opinion. Someone can ask me the question, "What do you think?" in a way that makes it clear that they do (or not) care about what I actually do think. When someone cares about the answer to their questions we are wise to answer them. When someone does not genuinely care about the answer we are wise not to answer them.

Asking good questions helps turn our gospel conversations into a legitimate dialogue rather than a series of monologues that go back and forth.

The gospel is the best news we could possibly hear. We all have a role to play in communicating the gospel to those around us. For some of us, it will be a simple, easy, and natural process because God has gifted us in a particular way. For others, it will be a process full of nervousness and discomfort because God has gifted us in other ways. Just because the process is hard for some of us doesn't mean we quit. Regardless of whether we find talking about the gospel easy or difficult, it is wise to use the 3-Ds (declare, defend, and dialogue) in our conversations for the good of others and the glory of God.

I recognize that I have a responsibility in my everyday life to talk to people about the gospel in relevant ways. I also recognize that I get nervous every time I even think about sharing the gospel with someone. So, like many Christians, I've participated in evangelism training seminars. One of the common occurrences of these seminars is the really well-spoken, joke-telling, and enthusiastic person telling the group how simple, easy and natural it is to talk about the gospel with strangers and friends. Some people do indeed find it easy, simple, and natural to talk about the gospel with those who don't know and love Jesus. I'm not one of those people. I've been to Bible College and work in a church, and when an opportunity presents itself to talk to someone who doesn't know and love Jesus about the gospel, I still get really nervous. I have to swallow that lump in my throat, and hope the nervous energy in my stomach subsides. Usually, the lump stays and so does the nervous energy. For some of us, talking about the gospel with others in our everyday life is easy. For some of us, talking about the gospel with others in our everyday life is hard. However, both kinds of people still have a responsibility to have conversations about Jesus Christ with those around them.

If you are a person who finds talking about your faith easy, you probably can't wait to put down this book and talk to a friend right now! And, consider this permission to do so.

Now that leaves the rest of us. If you are a person who finds talking about your faith difficult, I hope you find this quote as encouraging as I did. It comes from a guy named Randy Newman. Randy also finds engaging in gospel conversations to be difficult. But he also has noticed in his life that, "If we think evangelism is supposed to be easy, we're more likely to quit."

That line of thinking has been very encouraging to me. Recognizing that evangelism may not ever be easy, actually comforts me. It takes the pressure off of feeling like I only need to practice it longer in order for it to feel natural. The truth is, it might not ever feel natural, so when I'm presented with an opportunity to have a gospel conversation I can tell myself that the lump in my throat isn't a sign to not engage. The butterflies in my stomach is not the Spirit telling me to shut my mouth and not talk about the glories of the gospel. It is probably just my nerves and discomfort, but those will pass over time. It won't be easy, and I might even stumble on my words, but I can still do my best to be faithful to the command to be a disciple-making-disciple. And if nothing else just try to get to know the other person, tell your stories and ask good questions and make Christ known through your words and actions.

INTERVIEWS

ESL Students and Volunteers

Interview with Kuldip

1. What were some of the challenges when you first came to Canada?

When I first came to Canada I didn't know anyone. Didn't have license to drive around. I couldn't speak English and it was hard.

2. Do you like to be friends only with people from your culture or do you like to be friends with people from other culture?

I want to be friends with Canadian people but English is a problem.

3. Do you know who can go to church and what they do there?

Only "white people" can go to the church. Punjabi people go to the Gurdwara. They marry people at church and pray to God.

4. What can a church do to help the Punjabi community?

English classes, computer classes and citizenship are very helpful.

5. Have you ever been to a church? If not, would you like to visit a church service?

I never been to a church but I would love to go.

Interview with Raman

1. What were some of the challenges when you first came to Canada?

When I first came to Canada language was a huge barrier. Some English speakers speak fast and it's hard to understand them but if they speak slow, it will be easier to understand. However, I realized that if I want to communicate with Canadian people and get a good job I have to learn English.

2. Do you have Canadian (English speaking) friends?

Not really but I want to be friends with Canadian people.

3. What can a church do to help Punjabi community?

English classes, computer classes and marriage seminars can be a great help.

Interview with Sean

1. What are some of the ways that you find easy to share the gospel or represent Christ to your Punjabi friends?

I haven't had an opportunity to share the gospel in words yet. I hope that in teaching English grammar, discussing conversation topics, and getting to know the students, I can share Christ's love by my attitude, words, and actions.

2. How are you finding your relationship with your Indian friend?

So far, the interaction is primarily in the classroom and break time setting. I've been able to go to two of the students' houses, having taken them home after class. I found both families to be very welcoming and inviting, offering food and drinks. It was quite interesting to get to see the extended family context in which they live.

3. Do you find it easy or hard to build a friendship with Punjabi people? What are some of the challenges that you face when trying to connect with them?

The language barrier is a difficulty to building deeper friendships, as are the cultural differences. I've invited one of the students with his wife and children to our home twice. Both times they had to cancel. It makes me wonder if they too find it difficult to make the cross-cultural connection.

Interview with Jayme

1. What skills do you have that helped you connect with Punjabi people?

This last year, I have been baking and cooking once a month with the ladies from Punjabi Connections. We have taken turns teaching and learning new recipes. I've really enjoyed learning more about the Punjabi culture and food and getting to know the ladies while we worked together in the kitchen. Food is something that almost anyone likes to talk about and, when your hands are busy cooking, the conversation is even easier! I have also enjoyed going out for some amazing Indian food with some of the Punjabi ladies. I'm looking forward to going on a grocery store field trip to learn more about Indian ingredients and foods. My love of cooking has provided a wonderful and natural connection point with these great ladies!

2. Is it difficult to make friends with Punjabi people?

The obstacles to building friendships with Punjabi people are the same as any friendship. It can be really difficult to make room for any new people when your life is already busy and full and it requires you to move out of your comfort zone. Language is the other big obstacle but it is encouraging to know that shared smiles and mutual admiration of each other's children can build a connection. Being friends on Facebook through a common

group (school, sports, etc) can also build relationships as you share pictures and comments and learn more about each other's lives.

Interview with Tanya

1. How are you finding your relationship with your Indian friends?

Great! One of my friends loves sewing, like me, and we've gone shopping for fabric together and can quickly get caught up in a discussion about the best fabrics and ways to sew. Kyle, my husband, and I get along really well with a young family, and have a blast every time we hang out! When I spend time with my Punjabi friends it is refreshing and fun—and there's always something new to learn about their culture.

2. Have you been to your Punjabi friends' houses? If so, what was your experience like?

Yes! I visit a few of my friends' homes quite often—and usually take them up on their offer for chai! Some of the things that we've done together in their homes are sharing Christmas decorations, pondering which outfit is best to wear for a party, playing with their little ones, and going over ESL homework and editing resumes together.

3. Do you find it easy or hard to build a friendship with Punjabi people?

I have found it surprisingly easy to make friends with Punjabi people. When we are talking in ESL class we can really get on a roll sharing our opinions, frustrations, and joys with each other!

4. What are some of the challenges that you face when trying to connect with them?

The biggest challenge I face is myself! The voices in my head try to tell me that I'm not brave enough to step out and talk to someone who dresses so differently from me and speaks a language I don't understand, and has a name that sounds so long that I can only hope to pronounce parts of it correctly! That's why I've really appreciated being part of Punjabi Connection—its helped me to have a place to meet new Punjabi friends. And, as I've gotten to know more and more Punjabi people, things that were my worst fears a year ago feel more natural.

5. How are you representing Christ to your Punjabi friends?

I hope that Christ is reflected in my whole life, and that as I share my whole life with my Punjabi friends that they see Him. Its neat to be Facebook friends with many of them, and to be able to quickly send an encouraging message. I've also been blessed to find my curiosity and desire to learn more about the Sikh faith reciprocated with curiosity about the church and Christianity—I've given more than one spontaneous tour of the church during ESL class because my friends have felt safe to express their curiosity about us! I've also never been turned down when I offer to pray for them and their children. All of these interactions are like pieces of a puzzle that is being built as Christ reveals himself to them through me, his vessel.

TESTIMONY

Anju

I was born in Thailand to a Punjabi, Sikh home. I was taught to believe that there's one God. As a fairly good girl I wanted to follow God. To me He was great and mighty yet distant, somewhere out there and not quite reachable. I would pray to him in the way I was taught – citing the Sikh scriptures. But at times when I really wanted or needed something, I would ask for them hoping he would answer. However, it felt like he didn't actually care because he never seemed to respond.

At the age of twelve, my family and I moved to Surrey, Canada. That is when one of my cousins began to introduce me to Jesus Christ. She told me that I could pray to him, by simply talking to God (that God was my heavenly father and I could have a relationship with Him). She told me that I had to simply invite Him into my life and my heart. I was open and willing; I invited Jesus into my life. Then I began to pray to Him for things I needed or wanted, as I had done earlier to God but now I was asking in Jesus' name. Surprising to me, my prayers were being answered. That was astonishing to me. As a twelve year-old girl I kept praying to Jesus for everything that I needed help with or wanted. He was there, always there... so now God was more real to me than ever before. He was no longer distant nor someone who didn't care but rather He became someone that I always knew would be there for me.

I began then to be discipled by a woman named Judy, who is a local missionary to the Punjabis in Surrey. My cousin was already experiencing persecution simply due to her converting into Christianity from Sikhism. My family, as most Sikhs, believe that all religions lead to God so there is no need for one to change their religion rather they should continue with what they were 'born' into. They are very proud of their beliefs also because the gurus who founded the religion sacrificed themselves and their son's lives to keep it going. Hence I decided to keep it as a secret until I would be strong enough to take a stand for my beliefs.

After a year my family decided to move to Vancouver. As we moved my parents decided to send me to Sikh private school which is called Khalsa School. I went there for two years. That was a tough time for me with my faith. However, no matter what came along, I always went back to Jesus because I knew He loved me, and is there for me, for He is always faithful.

After two years my dad finally allowed me to go to a public school. There I met a friend who was a follower of Christ and she invited me to come to her youth group. I went there whenever I could.

During all this time my love for God was really growing. I felt bad because He was so good to me and yet I was not even brave enough to share that I believed in Him. I wanted to get baptized, but I couldn't because I was still not ready to tell my Dad about my faith. I prayed for opportunity to be able to do so soon. One day God gave me a chance and I told my Dad and he totally ignored it as if I didn't say anything. I was pretty happy about that because I knew I still wasn't strong enough to handle the cost.

Then in May 2002 I went to my friend's church for the youth group. There I had an experience with the Holy Spirit that I sensed strongly He was asking me to declare my love for Jesus and not

keep it as a secret any longer. I was so terrified but God was strengthening me all the way with verses I knew and just an assurance that He would take care of me. I went home and my other cousin Shikha, who lived with us, was home. She asked me where I had been and very fearfully I told her, church. She replied, “good.” I was astonished by her response that it encouraged me to share all about the gospel, my testimony and experiences with Jesus to her right then there. The very next day she gave her life to Jesus.

This led to a huge growth of my faith. It was the first time I had the courage to pray before eating at the dining table. My sister Malika was there and she asked me if I had prayed to Jesus, and my answer without hesitation was yes. She got really upset and threatened me, but I told her that no matter what, I am a follower of Jesus.

Another miracle happened the very next day; Malika began to ask me questions about Jesus. I even began to read the Bible with her, prior to which I had to keep the Bible hidden. Then few months later she ended up giving her life to Jesus.

Eventually, my family found out that something serious was going on as they saw changes in us, especially Malika who was a very devoted Sikh. So one day we were given the option of either following Jesus or continuing our relationship with our family. We chose Christ and had to leave our parents’ house that day. However, after only one week we were allowed back into the home.

A month later we all decided to get baptized and were once again told to leave. It was because the family believed that we were brainwashed and eventually we would come to our senses! However with the decision for baptism they realized that we were quite serious. So we were told that they didn’t want anything to do with us any longer.

At that point I was in grade 12 and I sensed the Lord was calling me to Bible College. So I left home and followed Him in it. Ever since He has been softening my family’s heart and now they are ok with my decision to follow only Jesus. We continue to pray for them to see that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and that there is no other way to God rather than through Him. It has been almost 17 years since I started walking with Lord Jesus Christ and I am so glad and grateful that I know Him. He has healed me in so many ways and truly given me a life. I have really found no one to be like Him, He continues to amaze me by who He is.

BASIC PUNJABI PHRASES

PHRASE IN PUNJABI	MEANING IN ENGLISH
Sat Sri Akaal ji	Hello / Greetings
Ji aaya nu	Welcome
Haan ji	Yes
Nahi	No
Ki haal aya ji?	How are you?
Theek ThaaK.	Fine
Vadiya ji.	Good.
Veer ji / Paji /	Brother
Meharbani	Fine Thank you
Tuhaada ki naa hai?	What is your name?
Mera naa _____ hai.	My name is _____.
Tuhanu mil ke khushi hoi.	Pleased to meet you.
Maf Karna	Excuse Me
Kirpa karke	Please
Eh changga hai / Eh theek hai.	That's fine.
Koi gal nahi.	You're welcome / doesn't matter / no worries
Ki tusi angrezi bolde hoi?	Do you speak English?
Mai Punjabi nahi bolda.	I don't speak Punjabi.
Mai thorhi Panjabi bolda ham.	I speak only a little Punjabi.
Tusi samajhde ho na?	Do you understand?
Mai samajha nahi.	I don't understand.
Mai nahi janda.	I dont know.
Mainu maaf karna, tusi ki kiha?	Pardon / I'm sorry, what did you say?
Mainu maaf karna.	I'm sorry.
Madi Punjabi karke maaf karna ji.	Please forgive me for my poor Punjabi.
Kirpa karke hauli-hauli bolo.	Please speak slowly.
Usda ki arth hai	What does that mean?
Ki keemat hai?	What is the price?
Ki samay ho giya hai?	What time is it?
Ki tusi is nu dobara ucar sakde ho?	Can you repeat that please?
Panjabi 'ch _____ kidda kandey ho?	How do you say _____ in Punjabi?
Tusi kithon ho	Where are you from?

Mai _____ ton haan.	I'm from _____.
Ikk hi pasha jaan ke nahi sarda.	One language is never enough.
Bhot-bhot badhayi!	Congratulations!.
Alvida!	Goodbye!
Mai ta mazaak kar reha see.	I was kidding.
Hun appa chalde haa.	Okay, I'm leaving now.
Mai Punjabi sikhna chaunda haan.	I want to learn Punjabi.
Mainu _____ pasand nahi.	I don't like _____.
Ikk gall dasso.	Tell me one thing.
Pehle aap / Tuhade baad	After you.
Changa fer milange! / Fer milde haan.	See you!

Appendix

Vaisakhi

“Vaisakhi (also spelled Baisakhi) is the festival which celebrates the founding of the Sikh community known as the Khalsa. It is celebrated on April 14 each year. On Vaisakhi day in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh summoned Sikhs from all over India to the city of Anandpur Sahib. At this gathering, the Guru called upon Sikhs to uphold their faith and preserve the Sikh religion. Guru Gobind Singh then lifted his sword and asked that anyone prepared to give his life for his faith to come forward. There was a big silence, but the Guru went on repeating his demand. One Sikh finally came forward and followed the Guru into a tent. Shortly after, the Guru reappeared along with his sword covered in blood, and asked for a second volunteer. Another Sikh stepped forward and again the Guru took him into the tent, and re-appeared along with his sword covered with blood. This was repeated until five Sikhs had offered their heads for the Guru. Finally, the Guru emerged from the tent with all five men dressed piously in yellow robes. Guru Gobind Singh called the five Sikhs the Panj Pyare, the Five Beloved Ones.”⁴³

Nagar Kirtan Parade

This annual event "commonly referred to as a parade, usually marks the day of the celebrations. *Nagar Kirtan* differs from a traditional parade in the sense it has a religious and sacred meaning attached to it. The Punjabi word, *nagar* denotes town, and *kirtan* means singing of religious hymns. So *Nagar Kirtan* literally means going around the town singing sacred hymns.”⁴⁴

⁴³ “Vaisakhi,” *Sikhism Guide*. <http://www.sikhismguide.org/vaisakhi.aspx> (accessed August 28, 2014)

⁴⁴ Bhamra, Anupreet Sandhu, “Why free food is not the highlight of the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan parade,” *Vancouver Observer*. <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/politics/commentary/why-free-food-not-highlight-vaisakhi-nagar-kirtan-parade> (accessed August 28, 2014)

Bibliography and Resources for Further Reading

1. Keller, Timothy J. *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008.
2. Keller, Timothy J. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008.
3. Newman, Randy. *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. Kregel Publications, 2004.
4. Davey, Cyril James, *Story of Sadhu Sundar Singh*. Beacon Hill Press, 1992.
5. Moore, Charles E. *Sadhu Sundar Singh: Essential Writings* (Modern Spiritual Masters Series). Orbis Books, 2005.
6. Koshy, T.E., *Bakht Singh of India: The Incredible Account of a Modern-Day Apostle*. Authentic Publishing, 2007.
7. Harris, Greg. *Gospel Conversations: Understanding and Proclaiming the Gospel* (2013): n. pag. www.northview.org. 01 Sept. 2013. Web. 14 Aug. 2014. <http://northview.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Gospel-Conversations-Sept-2013-JB-FINAL-EDIT-2.pdf>.