

# Gospel Conversations

Understanding and proclaiming  
the Gospel.

Greg Harris

GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

**GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS**  
**Understanding and Proclaiming the Gospel**

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<b>PROLOGUE .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 - THE GOOD NEWS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 - LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 - GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 - LOVING OTHERS WELL .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5 - 3D GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>EPILOGUE .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>APPENDIX A - ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>APPENDIX B - RESOURCES FOR APOLOGETICS.....</b>	<b>76</b>

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### PROLOGUE

I call myself a disciple of Christ. I desire to grow in my obedience to him daily. I love Jesus and want others to love Jesus too.

So why is it so hard for me to talk about him with others?

Words leave my mouth everyday. I engage in conversations about the weather, my life, sports, movies, television shows, and a myriad of other topics with friends and strangers alike. These conversations occur regularly and with relative ease. When it comes to conversing about the gospel of Jesus Christ, however, I often find myself either resisting those conversations or stumbling my way through them. There certainly have been times when I've felt bold in conversing about Jesus and words flow smoothly, yet they unfortunately seem to be exception and not the rule.

I have found that I am not alone. There are all kinds of reasons why self-identified Christians don't engage in conversations about the gospel. Some reasons why people don't converse about the gospel with others are:

- We think it is a responsibility for *other* Christians (i.e. pastors, evangelists, etc.).
- We battle feelings of inadequacy.
- We have an aversion to coming across as “preachy.”
- We fear a hostile or disinterested response.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

- We believe there is no need to tell people the gospel because God will save people if he wants to anyway.
- We don't believe in eternal punishment for people who do not love and follow Jesus.
- We think right belief is less important than right behaviour, therefore believing the gospel is unnecessary for (temporal or eternal) reconciliation with God and human flourishing.

That list is by no means exhaustive, but it does indicate some underlying reasons why people who love Jesus don't regularly talk about him with others.

I believe the New Testament states - in Matthew 28:18-20 and elsewhere - that it is the responsibility of every Christian to be a disciple-making-disciple of Jesus. I think the sooner we break down the barrier between *evangelism* and *discipleship* in our minds, and see the road ahead of us as engaging in *gospel conversations*, the better.

I define a gospel conversation as:

*A compassionate conversation that (1) clearly articulates the gospel (2) with the intent that the participants will turn from their sinful rebellion to holistically following and trusting Jesus (3) for their good and God's glory.*

Gospel conversations are rooted in, and motivated by, a genuine love and care for people. They speak candidly and clearly about the gospel. There is an intention in the

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

conversation that *everyone* participating will turn away from thinking and acting like *they are* God, to following and trusting Jesus as Lord and Saviour. These conversations about the gospel of Jesus happen for the good of the participants, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for God's glory.

This booklet is based on the content of the *Gospel Conversations* course taught at Northview Community Church in Abbotsford B.C. There are many books dedicated to the theology behind – and practical strategies for - talking about the Christian faith. The content of the course and booklet is not based on my original thoughts, but is rather a distillation of some of the great content that already exists. This booklet will hopefully whet your appetite to investigate the works listed in both the “Recommended Reading” section after each chapter, and the bibliography. The materials referenced in this booklet have been incredibly influential for the development and content of *Gospel Conversations*.

It is my desire that this short booklet will help us all engage in the mission that our Lord has given us to be disciple-making-disciples. A helpful way for us to understand our participation in that mission, in our everyday life, is to engage in gospel conversations.

What do these conversations look like? The following five chapters will help develop an understanding of, and ability to talk about, the gospel in our everyday conversations.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

1. *The Good News*
2. *Living in Light of the Gospel*
3. *The Sovereignty of God and Prayer*
4. *Loving Others Well*
5. *3D Gospel Conversations*

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### CHAPTER 1

## THE GOOD NEWS

There have been a plethora of books written in the last few years with the intention of defining the gospel. I'm not sure if there is a more feverishly discussed topic in Christianity today than defining the term *gospel*. It is important to engage in this discussion because how we understand the gospel has massive implications for how we understand Christianity as a whole. Therefore, it is helpful for us to first put some thought into how we understand *the gospel* before exploring how to best talk about it with others.

In the New Testament the term gospel refers to Christ's saving work through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. The New Testament authors also use the phrase gospel to refer to the bigger story of Christianity. Christ's death and resurrection is the pinnacle or apex of a bigger story of Christianity which spans from a time before the creation of the world to eternity future.

A helpful framework for understanding the big story of Christianity is "Creation - Rebellion - Reconciliation - Consummation." The message of the cross can be understood using the framework "God - Man - Christ." These two frameworks are not competing storylines vying for attention, but rather the same storyline told from both the

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

cosmic and personal point of view - from both in the air and on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Gospel - The Whole Good News of Christianity** (*Creation - Rebellion - Reconciliation - Consummation*)

According to the Christian worldview, all of human history can be understood under the framework of a progression from creation to rebellion; rebellion to reconciliation; and reconciliation to consummation. The framework of “Creation - Rebellion - Reconciliation - Consummation” provides the four main acts of the great story of human history.

#### **Creation**

Before anything else existed, God *was*. This ever-existing God created the entire cosmos as very good, and humanity as the pinnacle of all creation. Both male and female were made in God’s image. The man and wife had a perfect relationship with God, each other, and the rest of creation. They were given the task to rule over creation as God’s image-bearers.

#### **Rebellion**

In the sin of the first man and woman, humanity chose to rebel against God and pursue our own desires, and to make ourselves the arbiters of what is true, good, and beautiful.

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<sup>1</sup> “In the air” and “on the ground” language borrowed from Matt Chandler’s *The Explicit Gospel*

<sup>2</sup> For example, Matthew 4:23, Acts 13:32-33



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

Prior to humanity's rebellion against God, everything functioned perfectly according to its designed purpose. It is hard to grasp exactly what that type of wholeness would have looked like this side of the rebellion, but it would have been experienced primarily in the realm of perfectly functioning and healthy relationships (i.e. man with self, man with others, man with God, and man with the rest of creation).

Humanity's rebellion brought alienation between God and humanity, and disrupted the perfection that previously existed. The rebellion led to work becoming difficult, human relationships becoming strained, and the earth subjected to an imperfect state (e.g., tsunamis and earthquakes).

### **Reconciliation**

God, in his love and mercy, did not leave humanity without hope. He began the process of reconciliation by choosing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be the fathers of a nation that would be called God's people - Israel. God made a covenant with Israel promising to be her God and relentlessly pursue her for his glory and the renewal of the world. In the fullness of time God inaugurated his Kingdom by coming to the earth to live and dwell with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died the death we deserved because of sin, rose from the dead to conquer death, and reigns with God the Father in Heaven. The Holy Spirit, who raised Christ from the dead, came to be present with all who turned away from their sin, follow Jesus as Lord and King over everything, and believe that because of Jesus' righteousness they can stand before God as not only forgiven,

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

but as perfect and blameless. Because of Christ's work, anyone can have a relationship with God when they turn away from their sin and trust Christ as their Saviour.

### **Consummation**

Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead regarding how they responded to the news of Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and will consummate the Kingdom of God by ushering in a time where God will eternally and fully dwell with his people, for their good and his ultimate glory. Those who trust Christ will be given new, resurrected, physical bodies like Christ's resurrected body, and will live in a renewed creation with God forever. All disciples of Jesus put their trust in him and await his return so they can enjoy God forever in a renewed creation.

There are a few examples of New Testament authors using the word *gospel* or *good news* to describe the whole good news of Christianity,<sup>2</sup> the example we will examine is Luke 4:16-21:

**16** And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. **17** And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Matthew 4:23, Acts 13:32-33

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

**18** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
**19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

**20** And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

In this passage Jesus is reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth. Upon completion, Jesus sits down to provide his commentary on the passage, as would have been customary for teachers in the synagogues. The only explanation Jesus provides is his claim that the long-awaited prophecy from Isaiah has been fulfilled - in *him*.

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert provide a helpful and concise comment on the importance of this passage in Jewish theology:

Isaiah 61 begins a beautiful, triumphant poem about God's final victory and the establishment of his reign through his Servant. Jerusalem would be rebuilt as a precious crown in God's hand (61:4; 62:3), God's and Israel's enemies would be destroyed by God's mighty

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

arm (63:1-7), and former troubles would be utterly forgotten (65:16). The poem culminates...in that amazing vision... where God creates new heavens and a new earth where the sound of weeping and distress is heard no more, where infants no longer die after living but a few days, where the wolf lies down with the lamb, and where no one, God says, will hurt or destroy anyone or anything in all his holy mountain.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is making a bold claim. It's a claim that at first brings wonder and amazement from the crowd (Luke 4:22), but eventually resentment and anger (4:29). Here is Jesus of Nazareth claiming that *he* is the Servant Messiah sent by God to fulfill all of what God has promised. All of human history has led to this point (the arrival of Israel's Messiah who will bless all the nations of the world) and will flow from this point until all things in the created order are made new. The best thing about new creation is that God will finally and fully dwell with his people because of what the Messiah has done.

The gospel is the whole good news of Christianity - the biggest story in the entire cosmos. Every event in history has meaning in advancing the plot of this story from its beginning in creation to its destination in the consummation of Christ's kingdom.

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), pg.98-99.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### **The Gospel - The Message of the Cross**

*(God - Man - Christ)*

“God - Man - Christ” is a helpful framework for remembering, and speaking about, the gospel as the message of salvation through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, and holy God who created all things for his glory. Humanity was created by God and for God, yet has chosen to rebel against God. They chose to worship created things rather than the Creator himself. The act of rebellion mocks, insults, and belittles God and is deserving of the full weight of his anger against sin. Humanity is dead spiritually, cares only for their own glory, and is separated from God. However, God in his love and mercy came to the earth as Jesus of Nazareth to live perfectly, die sacrificially, and rise again victoriously. Whoever responds by trusting Jesus as their Saviour and submit to his reign over everything (including their very lives!) are reconciled to God.

The New Testament contains passages where the authors use the term *gospel* or *good news* to summarize the message of salvation through Christ’s substituting death on the cross, and grave conquering resurrection.<sup>4</sup> For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 the Apostle Paul says:

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<sup>4</sup> For example: Acts 10:36-43, Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 1:15:1-5

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

**17** For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the *gospel*, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

**18** For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

This passage shows the clear connection in the Apostle's mind between the "word of the cross" and "the gospel." It is through the work of Jesus on the cross that humanity is able to be reconciled to God. Surely there are many blessings that will be given to God's people in eternity, but those blessings can only be received because of the substitutionary death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the sinless, suffering servant, Jesus was uniquely qualified to take God's righteous wrath against sin on himself when he was executed as a criminal. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The price for sin is paid in full, and there is no longer any outstanding penalty for those who belong to him. But he has done more than save us from punishment. Because of his perfect obedience to his Father, he has done what we could not and has earned the inheritance of all creation; an inheritance he shares with his people. Those who follow him, receive the commendation of God, "well done, good and faithful servant", and enter into the full blessing of restored creation because of Christ's righteous obedience. The only way one can experience the eternal blessings of God is through the repentance of sin and belief that Jesus has accomplished what we could not - a reconciled relationship with God.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### **One Gospel, Not Two**

Though the gospel can be viewed through different lenses, there is only one gospel. Just as someone can see an aerial view of Vancouver and call it “Vancouver,” someone can also stand on the corner of West Cordova and Granville and call it “Vancouver”. Both perspectives rightly call what they see “Vancouver.”

There is one gospel. It is good news. It is the *best* news. It is news that is so big that it involves the entire narrative of human history. It is news about a God who is loving, just, and holy. A God who makes his dwelling with humanity and relentlessly pursues them for their good and his glory. The gospel is news that requires a personal response from all who hear it.

### **Recommended Reading**

Chandler, Matt, and Jared C. Wilson. *The Explicit Gospel*.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### CHAPTER 2

#### LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

I am not the only one who has used phrases like “*living the gospel*” or “*preaching the gospel without words.*” The purpose of these phrases is to highlight the importance of our actions and good works as disciples of Jesus Christ. The point communicated is worthy of serious reflection. I have, however, stopped using these phrases because they unintentionally muddy the good news with how we respond to that news. God has made a way for humanity to be reconciled to him through the perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation with God is the essence, and joy, of salvation.

The Apostle Paul tells us that “[the gospel] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). It is clear that the gospel is essential for salvation. What is less clear is what *salvation* actually means.

#### **Salvation is Multidimensional**

The Bible describes salvation as a multifaceted, multidimensional experience for those who have repented of their rebellion against God and believe the gospel. For many, salvation is synonymous with a disembodied heaven that looks remarkably similar to a Philadelphia Cream Cheese commercial. However, as Wayne Grudem helpfully



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

outlines,<sup>5</sup> salvation is more than playing a harp on the clouds. Salvation includes our justification, adoption, sanctification, and eventual glorification.

Grudem defines the doctrine of justification as “an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.”<sup>6</sup> Often when people talk about someone who “has been saved” they are thinking about the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. When someone is unrepentant and walking in their sin and mockery of God’s holiness, they are subject to God’s anger and wrath. However, when someone receives the gift of salvation they receive Christ’s perfect obedience as their own. Therefore, when God looks at us he sees Jesus, because the believer is *in Christ*. We are perfect before God and have a perfect relationship with him because Christ took our sin on himself and gives us his righteousness.

Grudem, in another chapter, defines the doctrine of adoption as “an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family.”<sup>7</sup> Christians are no longer by nature children of wrath who follow the devil, but are now children of God who follow their perfect Brother, Jesus. Being a part of God’s family means we can call him Father and have a relationship with him. We can trust him to care for us, and we grow in our

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<sup>5</sup> Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 723

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 736

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

love for him. Being a part of God's family also means relating with other Christians as brothers and sisters. By one Spirit, all Christians have one Father and follow the example of one Brother. As children, we are co-heirs with Christ and will receive the inheritance of our Father. Therefore, we wait expectantly to the day when we will dwell with our Father for eternity.

Grudem continues his exploration of salvation by defining the doctrine of sanctification as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”<sup>8</sup> Sanctification is the process of growing in our Christian faith day-by-day. We do not work out our sanctification as a means of earning a right standing with God. We have already been saved (justified) and so we live in response to the gift of salvation by imitating the life of Jesus and giving glory to God in all things.

In describing the final element of salvation, Grudem defines the doctrine of glorification as “[the event that] will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the time perfect resurrection bodies like his own.”<sup>9</sup> While Christians can boldly proclaim that they have already been saved by Christ, they also eagerly await the day when they will experience

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 746

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 829

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

their salvation in all its fullness. All sorrow and pain will cease because they will dwell in perfect relationship with God for eternity.

The gospel is essential for all of life (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). The gospel isn't primarily about either evangelism or discipleship, but is essential for both evangelism and discipleship because it is essential for salvation. Salvation is multidimensional and includes justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.

### **Live in Light of the Gospel**

As was explored in the last chapter, the gospel is what God has done through Christ to reconcile creation to himself at both the cosmic and individual level. We do not live the gospel, but there are some indispensable implications of how Christians live in light of the gospel.

People who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit through repentance and belief in the gospel are identifiable by how they live their life - by their fruit. In Galatians 5:22-23, the Apostle Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit:

“**22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control...”

One of the most important things to notice about this passage is that the Apostle Paul calls them the *fruit* of the Spirit. The

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

word fruit is a helpful image for two reasons. The first reason is that word fruit is singular not plural. If love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control were all separate fruits of the Spirit, it would be somewhat easy to fake. You could pick which fruits you want to work on and which ones you ignore for a season. However, if the list in Galatians 5:22-23 are all the fruit of the Spirit, it means that there should be an increase and growth in all of these areas in the life of the believer. The second reason it is a helpful image is that fruit grows *from* something. It does not exist as an isolated entity. Just as an apple grows from an apple tree, so do love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control grow from the life of a Holy Spirit-filled disciple of Jesus. The proper behaviour of a Christian grows from a life rooted in a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit.

People who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit through belief in the gospel are not only recognized by the fruit of the Spirit but also by the good works that they do. An indispensable implication of the gospel is to do good works. God has created us in Jesus Christ for good works (Ephesians 2:10). You do not need to be a Christian in order to do good works. There are many wonderful deeds done by people of different religious backgrounds that should be commended. The difference is not *that* good works are done, but the motivation for *why* the good works are done. Good works are not a means to impress God, but are done in response to the impressive work accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Good works are done because

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

Christians love God (1 John 4:7-21), love other people (Luke 10:25-37), and desire to show the world God's character and work (Matthew 5:13-16).

### **Telling Your Story**

The gospel is news that must be articulated. There is a difference between *the gospel* and our own faith journey. Our testimony and relationship with God is not the gospel. Telling our story is a valuable and important part of having a gospel conversation with someone because it is relatable, personal, and experiential. However, our story is not the gospel.

Our story is bigger than just how we originally came to faith in Jesus. We need to embrace the multi-dimensionality of salvation and think about how it can aid us in structuring our own testimony. Our story should include the following three categories:

1. Were saved
2. Are being saved
3. Will be saved

Consider the key events for how you *were saved*. When did you come to the belief that Jesus from Nazareth is God incarnate who lived perfectly, died for your sin, and rose from the dead to defeat death? Did you grow up in a Christian home and come to faith at a young age? Did you hear the gospel in high school or college and wrestle with the

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

claims of Christ before putting your trust in him? Did you come to faith later in life and left old habits behind so you could follow Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? What were the events surrounding the moment when you *were saved* by grace through faith?

The story of our faith journey is not static because we are continually *being saved*. When you share the “*are being saved*” portions of your story, make it as relevant and current as possible: what is happening in your life right now?

People don't want to hear fabricated facades; they want authentic experiences. Following Christ isn't about having it all together. This is a good time to share your current experience and to be as real as possible. How is God working in your life today? What challenges are you facing that make you more reliant on him every moment of the day? What doubts and struggles are you working through? What joys are you experiencing? How are you becoming more and more free from sin, and more and more like Jesus?

Consider the hope of your future glorification when you share how you *will be saved*. It is possible to be heavenly minded and still engage intentionally with the world around you. Are you anticipating with expectancy living eternally in a perfect relationship with God? What about the hope of renewed creation and a resurrected body excites you?

Your story can be weighted differently depending on your conversation partner. Gospel conversations aren't just between a Christian and a non-Christian. They can be

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

between two Christians. When you share your own story, be mindful of where your conversation partner is at in their faith journey, and trust the Holy Spirit to guide your words. The *have been saved* and *will be saved* aspects of your testimony will remain largely the same every time. However, the *are being saved* aspect of your testimony will often differ from day to day. Sharing your faith journey story will be a little bit different every time, depending on what God is doing in your life at that time.

The gospel is life altering news that affects every part of our lives, but we do not live the gospel. People who believe the gospel live for the glory of God and the good of others, but we cannot share the gospel without words. Our story of how we know, love, and relate to God is incredibly valuable for people to hear, but sharing our story is not the same as sharing the gospel. The gospel is essential for salvation and we must live in light of it.

### **Recommended Reading**

Wilkinson, Alissa. "Tell Your Story, Tell It Well."

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/02/27/testimonies-beyond-facebook/>

Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Part 5: The Doctrine of the Application of Redemption)

Allison, Gregg. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine: A Companion to Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology*. (Part 5: The Doctrine of the Application of Redemption)

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### CHAPTER 3

## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

The words “evangelism” and “evangelist” produces a plethora of reactions. Some among us hear those words and immediately feel passionate and excited to talk to someone about the greatness and glory of Jesus. For some, the words lead to thoughts of bait-and-switch strategies, or aggressive and domineering salespeople. For others the words bring a deep sense of guilt and they would rather change the subject altogether. Both *evangelism* and *evangelist* come from the root word *evangel*. The word *evangel* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means “good news.” The word *evangel* is essentially synonymous with the word *gospel*. So, evangelism is simply communicating/articulating/preaching the good news, and an *evangelist* is someone who communicates/articulates/preaches the good news.

I have a friend named Fred. He can make friends with anyone and everyone - and he makes sure every single one of them knows how much he loves Jesus. God has equipped his Church by designing some amongst us to be gifted evangelists (Ephesians 4:11). These people find it incredibly easy to talk about Jesus in any (and every) situation without having to force it. Fred is one of these people, and I'm grateful that God has gifted him that way.



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

Evangelists are also typically the ones who are often tapped on the shoulder to help the rest of the church learn how to be a gifted evangelist. Many resources and seminars try to persuade people that everyone is gifted as an evangelist and that the evangelism process is simple, natural, and easy. One can almost get the impression that evangelism is as effortless as breathing, and if it isn't then there must be something wrong with you.

For some, talking about the good news of Jesus is effortless. Others in the church have different gifts that they bring to the community (e.g., serving, teaching, helping, leading, etc.). However, it is clear that in the New Testament all disciples of Jesus must be disciple-making-disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). All disciples of Jesus ought to be able to communicate the basics of what they believe when the opportunities present themselves, even though not everyone will be gifted as an evangelist.

One author and teacher who helps Christians embrace their responsibility to talk about the good news of Jesus Christ is Randy Newman. Randy is someone who has worked on university campuses for decades, talking about the hope that can be found in Jesus, and yet he doesn't consider himself an effortless evangelist. For Randy, every time he is about to talk about the gospel he feels anxious and uncomfortable. In fact, Randy notes that one paradox of sharing your faith in Christ is, "If we think evangelism is supposed to be easy,

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

we're more likely to quit."<sup>10</sup> Randy has embraced the fact that talking about Jesus will feel uncomfortable. Embracing that has helped him continue on with the task anyway.

Evangelism is simply the process of articulating the gospel, and discipleship is the process of helping people learn to follow and obey Jesus Christ as Lord and King. Evangelism and discipleship may be better understood as two points on a spectrum that are connected (like a piece of string) rather than two completely separated entities that vaguely relate to each other (like two cliffs separated by a chasm). It's for this reason that the term "gospel conversation" can be helpful. Every Christian should be able to talk about the good news of Jesus Christ, even if they aren't gifted evangelists. Furthermore, Christians should talk to people of all backgrounds about the importance of the gospel. They should talk about the gospel with atheistic, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist people in their sphere of influence. They should talk about the gospel with nominal Christians in their sphere of influence. They should even talk about the gospel with people in their sphere of influence who are committed to submitting to the Lordship of Jesus in all areas of their life. The gospel is the power of God for salvation, and salvation is a multidimensional process that includes our life today and our hope for tomorrow. The gospel is essential for all of life, therefore, conversations about the gospel are also essential for all of life.

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<sup>10</sup> Newman, Randy. "The Paradox of Evangelism, Part 2." <<http://www.randydavidnewman.com/2011/06/07/the-paradox-of-evangelism-part-2/>>.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

What is meant when the term “gospel conversation” is used? For our purposes it can be defined as:

*A compassionate conversation that (1) clearly articulates the gospel (2) with the intent that the participants may turn from their sinful rebellion to holistically following and trusting Christ (3) for their good and God’s glory.*

Let’s spend a little bit of time unpacking each of the three main parts of our definition.

### **1. Clearly articulates the gospel**

In order for a conversation to be a *gospel* conversation, there must be an intentional articulation of the gospel. This does not mean that in order for a conversation to be a gospel conversation you have to articulate every aspect of the whole good news of the Bible (i.e., Creation - Rebellion - Reconciliation - Consummation), or every aspect of the message of salvation (i.e., God - Man - Christ). However, a gospel conversation will seek to intentionally explore and clearly communicate at least a portion of either the whole good news of the Bible or the message of salvation. While it is ideal to articulate the gospel from beginning to end, not all conversations will allow this to happen in a natural way.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is appropriate at this time to mention that the Holy Spirit may prompt you to have a gospel conversation with someone you do not know at all, but the vast majority of our gospel conversations will occur with people we will talk with again. This fact ought not make us complacent, but it does give us a helpful perspective that the majority of our gospel conversation partners will be people we will have opportunities to talk about the gospel with at a later time.

## **2. Participants turn from sinful rebellion to holistically following and trusting Christ**

Monologues involve one person talking to another person or a group. A conversation is by its very nature a two-way exchange. It is for this reason that gospel conversations do not merely seek to influence one of the conversation partners, but both conversation partners. There is a desire and intent that both conversation partners will turn away from their sinful rebellion, believe and receive the gospel, and holistically follow and trust in Jesus Christ. It is not insincere or inauthentic to come to a conversation with intentions to communicate something. In reality, we all come to conversations desiring to be understood and to communicate something that we believe to be true, beautiful, or important. Intention is not disingenuous. However, intention and manipulation ought to be differentiated. While we have the intent in our gospel conversations for people to repent and believe the gospel, we ought never manipulate a person in the process. We can talk about how Jesus is more glorious than we can conceive of, but we must allow the Holy Spirit to do the work of convicting of sin and making Jesus seem more precious than they could have ever imagined. Our gospel conversations have the intent that God will transform people's lives. And we must always remember that the work of transforming lives is God's work, we are just his messengers. Transforming hearts is the Spirit's work, not ours. The Spirit will transform hearts through repentance and belief in the gospel.

### 3. Their good and God's glory

How people respond to the gospel has an eternal effect. It's our desire that people would respond positively to the gospel so they can be reconciled to God, enjoy him more than anything else in the universe, and experience the benefits that accompany reconciliation with God. We don't communicate the gospel so we can feel less guilty or put a checkmark beside 'evangelize' in our mental Christian to-do list. We share the gospel for the benefit of others. We seek that in all areas of our life, including our conversations about the gospel of Jesus Christ, God would be glorified. The Creator has designed us to function at our best when seek to make much of God and enjoy him more than anything else in the universe, and also when we seek the wellbeing of others.

#### **Gospel Conversations and God's Sovereignty**

The Bible is full of examples of the sovereignty of God over all things.<sup>12</sup> God is sovereign over Creation (e.g., Job 38:1-21), our plans (e.g., Proverbs 19:21), and even salvation (e.g., Acts 13:48, Romans 8:29-30). Whenever the topic of God's sovereignty is raised in a conversation about evangelism and salvation, there is a myriad of responses. One response goes something like this: "If God is sovereign over salvation, then humans do not have the ability to choose freely; everything is

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor, Justin. "What Is God Sovereign Over?" Web log post. The Gospel Coalition. 18 Oct. 2011. Web. 19 Mar. 2012.  
<<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/10/18/what-is-god-sovereign-over/>>.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

determined and human actions have no consequence.”

Another response is: “If God is sovereign over salvation then he does not need us to evangelize in order for someone to come to faith in Jesus Christ.”

After a lengthy discussion on the sovereignty of God over the salvation of both Jews and Greeks in Romans 9, the Apostle Paul says the following regarding the importance of both preaching, and responding personally to, the gospel:

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’  
(Romans 10:12-15)

J.I. Packer’s book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, explores at length the connection between God’s sovereignty and proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Packer argues that, rather than the sovereignty of God prohibiting our gospel conversations, it’s only because of God’s sovereignty that we have any hope of anyone coming to faith at all. Packer states that God’s sovereignty doesn’t negate the nature and duty of

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

gospel evangelism.<sup>13</sup> He maintains four things regarding God's sovereignty and evangelism (or gospel conversations):

1. The belief that God is sovereign does not negate the necessity of gospel conversations
2. The belief that God is sovereign does not negate the urgency of gospel conversations
3. The belief that God is sovereign does not negate the genuineness of gospel invitations
4. The belief that God is sovereign does not negate the responsibility of people to respond to the gospel<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Randy Newman, in a discussion about the role that humans play in evangelism, articulated another helpful paradox of evangelism: "When we remember that evangelism is impossible, we are more likely to evangelize."<sup>15</sup> What Newman means is that without the sovereignty of God and the empowering of the Spirit, it would be impossible for someone to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. God is sovereign over salvation and humans are responsible to respond to what they have heard. The Bible presents both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility as true. As disciples of Jesus it is our responsibility to help others begin, or continue, their life as a

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<sup>13</sup> Packer, J. I. "Divine Sovereignty and Evangelism." *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Newman, Randy. "The Paradox of Evangelism." *Randy Newman*. 7 June 2011. Web. 28 May 2012.

<<http://www.randydavidnewman.com/2011/06/05/the-paradox-of-evangelism/>>.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

disciple of Jesus. And knowing that God is sovereign ought to form our attitudes regarding our engagement in gospel conversations. Packer notes three attitudes that should be formed in light of God's sovereignty over salvation:

1. God's sovereignty makes us bold
2. God's sovereignty makes us patient
3. God's sovereignty makes us prayerful<sup>16</sup>

All three attitudes highlighted by Packer are important to keep in mind. We can be bold in our gospel conversations because we recognize that God is sovereign over salvation and it will only be through the Holy Spirit's work that someone will come to saving faith. We need not worry about fumbling with our words. The Spirit is able to use the words of the faithful to accomplish his purpose. God's sovereignty makes us bold in our gospel conversations.

We must also remember to be patient. We are not able to force someone, or convince someone, to believe the gospel. It is up to God's timing when someone will come to believe the gospel and submit their lives to the Lordship of Christ. We ought to continue on in our conversations with those in our sphere of influence no matter how hopeless or frustrating the situation may seem. God's sovereignty makes us patient.

We must remember to be prayerful. Prayer is essential for a gospel conversation. Prayer expresses our dependence on God. When we are prayerful we recognize that it is God who

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<sup>16</sup> Packer, J. I. "Divine Sovereignty and Evangelism." *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008. Print.



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

saves (Acts 13:48, Romans 8:29-30). When we are prayerful we also recognize that it is God who empowers us to speak the gospel.<sup>17</sup> We must also understand that prayer is a means by which people come to, and grow in, their faith in Jesus Christ. Prayer is a priority for disciple-makers (Acts 6:1-4) and we are all called to be disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18-20). God's sovereignty makes us prayerful. We pray for our gospel conversation partners before we chat with them, and we are wise to silently pray for them as we converse with them.

Even though we are not all gifted evangelists, we can all engage in gospel conversations. Gospel conversations are compassionate conversations that (1) clearly articulate the gospel (2) with the intent that the participants may turn from their sinful rebellion to holistically following and trusting Christ (3) for their good and God's glory. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we can trust that our Lord is sovereign to call and pursue people to himself. It is our job to be faithful in our witness about our faith, and we engage in the conversations with boldness, patience, and prayer.

### **Recommended Reading**

Packer, J.I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

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<sup>17</sup> One of the recurring themes in the Book of Acts is the way that the apostles/disciples were filled with the Spirit and then spoke - e.g., Acts 4:8, 25; 6:10; Acts 13:9-10.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### CHAPTER 4

## LOVING OTHERS WELL

My life changed when I met Claude on a rainy February afternoon in a coffee shop on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. My senses were overwhelmed. I was tasting lukewarm coffee, sitting on a rickety chair, smelling the musty odour of un-bathed bodies and unwashed clothes, looking at a man in desperation, and hearing a story that I would not soon forget.

Claude grew up in an abusive home in Quebec. He made some serious mistakes in his life, which led to his imprisonment for almost ten years, and he currently lives a lonely life. When he was finished serving his time in prison he ventured from the snowy streets of Eastern Canada to the rain soaked streets of Vancouver. Claude was stuck in a cycle of addiction that he had not been able to pull himself out of by his own strength, and he did not seem to have much of an appetite to seek the help of others either.

I didn't know how to respond. Claude must have sensed my discomfort because he asked me how I was doing. He didn't mean it in the way we ask others when we walk by them in a hallway. Claude wanted to know how I was doing with this overwhelming experience I was in, at that very moment.

I told him I was scared. I was scared of him, the other people around me, and the whole situation in general. After what seemed like an hour of silence, Claude responded: "I'm

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

scared too. We're all terrified down here." Claude thanked me for the conversation, took a last sip of his now cold coffee, and walked back onto the rain soaked streets of the Downtown Eastside.

His situation was unique to him but not altogether uncommon. His life was full of pain, guilt, and hopelessness. He needed to be released from the cycle of addiction and poverty. More than that, he needed to repent and believe the gospel so he could be reconciled with the God who formed him in his mother's womb. As I reflect on that encounter with Claude, my heart breaks. I don't know where he is at now. I missed an opportunity in that moment to talk about the hope of new life in Christ. I hope someone will love Claude enough to winsomely share the gospel with him.

### **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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.”

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.

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<sup>18</sup> To read more on this parable, see Timothy Keller's *Prodigal God*.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### **A Farmer or a Salesperson?**

It's clear that God wants us to talk about the gospel with all kinds of people. Followers of Jesus understand, and love, that God has a heart for all people to be reconciled to him. However, for some people who have spent many years involved in the local church, any discussion regarding sharing about the gospel procudes 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



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.<sup>19</sup>

First, when we listen well we are attentive. Attentiveness is essentially being intentional about your participation in the

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<sup>19</sup> See appendix A for more important components in effective listening.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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 welling. 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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.

### **Meeting People Where They're At**

When we have listened to where people are coming from, what they think, and what they have experienced in their lives, we have the opportunity to engage in a *contextualized* gospel conversation. *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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

conversation in three ways: (1) Making Points of Connection, (2) Addressing Points of Contention, (3) Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Person of Completion.<sup>20</sup>

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 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 (known as Satguru or Vahiguru) as the Ultimate Reality as described in their

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<sup>20</sup> Meeker, Kyle. "Christology in Contextualization: Another Look at Paul's Motivation, Methods and Message at Mars Hill (Acts 17) in light of the Missiological Debate surrounding Muslim-Christian Dialogue." Evangelical Theological Society - 2010 Southwestern Regional Meeting. New Orleans. 3 Apr. 2012. Reading

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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 partner's, 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 demeanor 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 is, we would do well to talk about how we believe that God himself was

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.

### **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



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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 look 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.

### **Recommended Reading**

Keller, Timothy J. *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### CHAPTER 5

## 3D GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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, and repent of, 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 relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Jesus has commissioned his followers to be active disciple-making-disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), and making declarative statements about the gospel is the primary way in which we will engage in this mission.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### 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 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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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,<sup>21</sup> 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.

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<sup>21</sup> Stats Canada 2001 - <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo30a-eng.htm>

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

quick example will hopefully suffice.<sup>22</sup> 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.

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<sup>22</sup> For further exploration on understanding various world religions - see Halverson, Dean C. *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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 narratives 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



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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 indefensible. The claim that there is no one true view on a issue, is *in itself* a claim of being the one true view. The claimant is guilty of the very arrogance of which they accuse the other. Furthermore, the claim that it is unkind to try to convince other person of your perspective is once again self-refuting logic. The claimant 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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

examination.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.

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<sup>23</sup> One good source for an answer on this topic is:  
<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-problem-of-evil>

<sup>24</sup> For suggested apologetic resources, see Appendix C

### 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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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 teaches. I asked Andrew to respond to his colleague's 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.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

**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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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



## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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.

### **Recommended Reading**

Keller, Timothy J. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*.

Newman, Randy. *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*.

## EPILOGUE

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.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

Now that leaves the rest of us. If you are a person who finds talking about your faith difficult, I hope you find these this quote as encouraging as I did. It comes from Randy Newman. Randy has noticed in his life that, "If we think evangelism is supposed to be easy, we're more likely to quit."<sup>25</sup>

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 may never 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 are 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 engage in a gospel conversation.

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<sup>25</sup>Newman, Randy. "The Paradox of Evangelism, Part 2." *Randy Newman*. 7 June 2011. Web. 28 May 2012.  
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## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

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## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### APPENDIX A

## **ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING<sup>26</sup>**

1. **STOP TALKING.**  
You cannot listen effectively if you are talking.
2. **PUT THE SPEAKER AT EASE.**  
Help them feel free to talk and encouraged to talk.
3. **DEMONSTRATE THAT YOU WANT TO LISTEN.**  
Show your interest in what is being said. Listen to understand rather than to oppose.
4. **REMOVE DISTRACTIONS.**  
Seek a quiet place if possible, a place free of interruptions.
5. **EMPATHIZE.**  
Try to put yourself in the speaker's place so that you can better understand his/her point of view.
6. **BE PATIENT.**  
Do not show impatience. Set aside enough time for everyone to be heard or be certain to set an agenda that is realistic given the time you have.

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<sup>26</sup> Not the present author's original work. List accessed from Janet Boldt at Columbia Bible College - a PDF accredited to "M.Fogel".

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

7. **DO NOT BECOME DEFENSIVE OR ANGRY.**  
Your anger will get in the way of hearing what is really being said and your defensiveness will get in the way of their listening to you. Keep an open mind and encourage them to do the same.
8. **AVOID ARGUING AND CRITICIZING.**  
They will simply react in kind. Even if you win the argument, you will probably lose in the end.
9. **ASK QUESTIONS.**  
You will learn more about their interest or concerns and they will know you are interested and/or have been listening.
10. **PARAPHRASE.**  
Let them know in your own words that you believe you have received the message which they intended to send. You do not have to be right.
11. **EXPRESS YOURSELF.**  
In order to continue to follow the above 10 commandments, it is essential for you to balance the interaction with your own point of view. It becomes difficult to effectively listen if you do not secure yourself a hearing.

## GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

### APPENDIX B

## RESOURCES FOR APOLOGETICS

### BOOKS

- William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2009).
- Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997).
- John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (P&R Publishing, 1996), chapters 3 and 4.
- Keller, Timothy J., *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008. Print.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), chapters 6 & 7.

### WEBSITES

- Dr. William Lane Craig - <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/>
- Michael Horner - <http://powertochange.com/blogposts/author/mhorner/>
- Andy Steiger - <http://www.apologeticscanada.com/>
- Jim Warner Wallace - <http://www.answersforatheists.com/> ; <http://www.pleaseconvinceme.com/>
- Ravi Zacharias International Ministries - <http://www.rzim.org>



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