# Conversations that Connect series

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

# Sermon outlines:

**1. Two ears to hear with (Hear): The Samaritan woman**

2. One spirit to listen with (Illuminate): Nathaniel

3. One heart to love with (Uncover): Zacchaeus

4. One mouth to speak with (Build): Jesus’ teaching

**Credits** for the overall direction of this series go to Dr Norm Geisler & Dr David Geisler, from their book ‘Conversational Evangelism’ (see [meeknessandtruth.org](http://www.meeknessandtruth.org/)). Some points from his *Conversational Evangelism* were included among the content of two chapters of my own book on evangelism, titled ‘Because we care’ as at [bigbookpublishing.co.nz](http://bigbookpublishing.co.nz/).

**For the preacher to note:** In this series, considerable time is needed for the application section. Please keep this in mind when deciding what you will and won’t say, or deliberate upon. These messages have more content than most would preach in one message

**TEXT**: John 4:4-26, 39-42

**OBJECTIVE**: To demonstrate how conversational skills were central in Jesus’ methodology & to help the audience learn how to identify (hear) the things said in conversation that could provide an easy platform for a great conversation about spiritual things because.

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**Introduction**: Starting a 4 week series on the Great Commission/Conversational approach to evangelism. Goal is to equip, while encouraging a passion & love for those outside our churches.

* **Introductory game: The question game** (2 people have a conversation up front – but they can only ask questions. The first person to stumble, delay answering, reply with a question that doesn’t make sense or make a statement, is out. The other wins). Learning points: The key to great conversations is great questions. With practice it’s possible to say things using almost nothing but questions. This is an approach to witnessing that especially suits our current culture.

**A. LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SERIES (the below is a lot to cover briefly - 2 sermons here maybe?)**

* Our mission: Without Christ people are without ultimate hope! The saving message of Jesus is not tied to any culture or people group. God loves all & is willing that none perish (2 Peter 3:9). To summarise Jesus’ mission, he came to seek & save what was lost (Luke 19:10). The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19) describes our mission. It has TWO parts.

1. To go... all nations...baptizing... - in this we share the gospel, they respond & we baptise them.

2. We then teach them to obey Jesus’ teachings (i.e. very basic discipleship).

* A present challenge: people seem very disinterested. What is going on?

**Introduction to postmodernism:** It has been said, regarding religion in today’s world, that the West is becoming more like the East while the East is becoming more like the West (Ravi Zacharias).

* Postmodernism means ‘after the modern era’. The modern era was the time from the industrial revolution onwards during which our culture believed *humans would find answers* – medical scientists would cure cancer, economists bring wealth, behavioural scientists ‘reprogram’ drug addicts and criminals, preachers bring hope & life, welfare state care for the poor (note: poverty is as bad in USA today as before the welfare state), global governments end war. Then they all failed us.
* The result:

1. We became *sceptical of truth claims* as a culture

2. *Rejection of moral absolutes*

3. *Indifference toward religion* (Westerners generally feel that they feel they ’know’ no religion is actually true / all religious are the same).

If you share the gospel, people might respond: *‘I’m really glad you’ve found something that works for you! For me – I’ve got my own beliefs’* OR *‘You’ve got your truth – & I’ve got mine.’*

* Q. How do you tell the truth to someone who does not believe ‘truth’ exists?
* A. You can’t.
* Q. What can you do?
* A. You talk with them about it! This is what this series is about.

**B. THE SAMARITAN WOMEN AT THE WELL (Read John 4:4-26, 39-42.)**

**1. Jesus had a conversational approach**

* He was an expert in conversation. His first question was “Will you give me a drink?’. It broke cultural norms, as referred in verse 9.
* He made a statement she had no way of understanding. Imagine a conversation with humour in it.
* Imagine the tone of her reply in v11-12 – likely the same humour.
* Sometimes we think our small conversations in the course of a day don’t matter, or consider ‘small talk’ a waste of time. In reality it is a precursor to ‘big’ talk. And questions are the key to conversations. (If you don’t think this woman was playing along with Jesus in a fun conversation, read v13- 15)
* It’s not until verse 16 that Jesus asks a question that changed the tone of the conversation.

Jesus made a habit of talking with people wherever He was. He gave people his time & attention – and asked wise questions. If we’re going to influence people toward Christ, we will need to do the same.

**2. Jesus & the Holy Spirit worked together constantly:**

* Our second observation is that Jesus & the Holy Spirit worked together on everything. The Holy Spirit is needed for Jesus to have known what He did in v17-18.
* God can speak to us all in quiet ways.
* Jesus said “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27.
* The whole point of Jesus sending the Spirit (Pentecost) is that we would be empowered for our Mission (Acts 1:8).
* Jesus used the ‘gifts of the Spirit’ in natural, everyday conversations (He didn’t say “Thus says the Lord...”).

God can lead us in our conversations, in the questions we ask.

**3. Jesus broke cultural norms:**

* All people need reaching (all cultures, ages, races, genders, sexualities & beliefs).
* Jewish men didn’t talk with Samaritan women.
* Paul said *‘I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some’* (1 Cor 9:22).
* Our lives are not ultimately about what we can get – but about what we can give! Relating well to a wide range of people requires an attitude of love & giving.

**C. LESSONS**

**‘Hearing conversations’: Do you have friends who seem disinterested in Christianity - but don’t know why? Do you want to encourage them toward faith - but don’t know how?**

* *A ‘Hearing’ conversation is where we begin to talk with a person with the express purpose of seeking to hear what might be hindering them from talking about, or considering faith in Jesus.*
* We ask general questions in an effort to identify areas that we might be able to discuss in more detail (by then asking more specific questions in those areas).

**Introducing the idea of a ‘sour note’:** If we’re listening to a vocal quartet & someone sings out of tune, you can hear it – and the choir master needs to pick up on it to correct it.

* *In the same way, when you’re in a conversation and someone says something that doesn’t seem right to us, if we can pick up on it, it can become a doorway for a meaningful conversation.*

**Example 1: How can God be real when there is so much evil in the world?**

Consider the ‘sour notes’

1. Such a thing as ‘evil’ doesn’t even exist if God doesn’t – so the questions is logically self- defeating.

2. Evil’s existence doesn’t prove there is no God, as what is to say a ‘God’ doesn’t exist who is evil?

3. They are assuming God is wrongly responsible for evil and are probably unaware of the incomparably hope-filled answer that Christianity offers to the problem of evil and suffering. Suffering & evil are a global religious problem, not a Christian problem! When answers are compared, the Christian answer alone provides dependable hope.

**So, how could you respond?** Consider questions such as:

* What do you mean by evil? Where do you get that definition from? Why do you blame God for it?
* Do you think any of the other religions have a better explanation?
* What do you abandon God in favour of?
* Are you aware of the explanation the Bible gives for the existence and end of evil and suffering?

**But also consider that their comments may be emotionally motivated. If you discerned that this might be the case you could ask a reflective question like:** “You seem to feel strongly on this. Why is that?” (Maybe they recently faced a tragedy, in which case they need compassion while going through pain).

**The point: If we don’t first listen to truly hear the ‘sour notes’ we’ll not know what to ask - and important conversations won’t happen!.**

**Summary:** Jesus demonstrated the power of a conversational approach, and the same approach works today.

Through questions we can

* initiate selfless conversations
* identify ‘sour notes’ (as measured from our own perspective) as potential conversation points
* Investigate these so we really understand what they believe and why

...resulting in some relaxed and yet truly meaningful conversations!

But it begins with hearing what people are really saying - taking a selfless interest, with our ears wide open. Why not try it this week, and see what God does?

**MATCHING SMALL GROUP STUDY BELOW**

# Conversations that Connect Series – Week 1 Two ears to hear with

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

**Leaders notes:** This small group discussion seeks to:

* Give an introduction to the topic of evangelism
* Encouraging us to consider who we want to reach out to - and to identify their beliefs
* Affirm the benefits of a conversational approach.
* Discuss the idea of *sour notes* of our culture

The challenge exists that – if we want to be used by God to help people journey toward faith we will need some knowledge. Basic answers to many of our culture's common questions are easily found online. (In NZ consider the Faith Q&A videos at 10DayChallenge.co.nz)

Suggestion: Keep the pace going in the earlier parts of this discussion, so time is preserved for the application discussion and role-plays.

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**GETTING STARTED: (15mins)**

1. What is one of the most loving things anyone has ever done for you (excluding what Jesus has done)?
2. What do you think is the most loving thing a person can do for another person?
3. Read John 3:36. In the light of this Scripture, would you agree that sharing the Gospel may be the most loving act we could do? (...even though loving people in both actions and words are inseparable for the Christian).

**About evangelism**

1. On a scale of 1-10, how strong would you say you are in the area of evangelism right now?
2. On the same scale, would any of you say you were stronger or weaker in this area than you were five years ago? Why?
3. Now – the honest question – on the same scale, how much does it matter to you that you do, at some point, become motivated and equipped to share Christ with those around you? And why?

**DISCUSSION:**

**1. Revision - Part I (5mins):** Can anyone remember what Sunday’s message was about? How might you summarise it?

* (It was about Jesus’ *conversation* with the Samaritan Woman of John 4, with the application being that our outreach can greatly benefit if we learn to ask good questions and listen to what people are really saying. Aka ‘hearing conversations’. It included the concept of ‘Sour notes’\* - see footnote on the next page).

**1b. Introductory comment:** For this session, and the next three, we’re going to be considering how we can become better conversationalists, specifically that we might use our conversations to encourage people toward faith. (We’re going to all of this through guided discussion today - there is no formal Bible study / this is about how we could apply Sunday’s sermon).

**2. Exercise to connect with the heart (10mins):** If you have not done so already in the current year, each take a few minutes to write down the names of the top five to ten people you know whom you would like to encourage toward faith in Jesus.

* Then, next to each name, list what you think might be the hindrances, holding them back from knowing Christ (these being for prayer and conversation)
* Then list some of their interests (these being bridges for relationship - both personally and for this small group)
* Each share the first name only of one of these people you have listed, and what one of their hindrances might be
* Then all pray briefly (at the same time) for for those you have mentioned..

**General discussion (20mins):**

**3. Exercise: Identifying the ‘sour notes’**

**3a. Revise the idea of ‘sour notes’ again** (Note the footnote\* on the next page, if needed).

**3b. Exercise**: Break into four groups, and each discuss what the real issue behind each of these objections might be (5mins only), then share your conclusions with the group (10mins):

1. I don’t believe in heaven and hell
2. I think religion should be a private thing
3. I think all religions lead to God
4. I think we’re just meant to be good people\*\*

(Note: If help is needed, there are a range of possible ‘sour notes’ in the footnotes on the next page)

**Encouragement:** Good answers exist for all the various matters raised today. There are also a core of 10 to 20 questions/objections people will have - so the amount of things we might need to learn is not huge. With a small bit of research / discussion, we could become familiar with the basic direction a conversation could go in to answer each question.

**APPLICATION: (Scripture and prayer) (10mins)**

**Closing encouragement – read John 4:35.**

**Comment:** The fields are ripe, and our opportunity is limited (How many times have you moved house or jobs, and not shared by some means with those who were your neighbours or colleagues in the previous place?). It is therefore important we grow and become more proactive in encouraging faith in others.

Asking questions to initiating and engaging conversations is an easy place to start.

**Let’s spend some time in prayer**

* Praying for ourselves, for willingness to learn and grow in this series
* Praying for our friends, that we represent Christ well, and they be drawn to faith in Christ.

**Final encouragement:** Why not try this out in a few conversations this week. Ask questions - listen for ‘sour notes’ - and ask simple, open questions about them.

**Footnotes**

**\* Sour notes**

...are underlying beliefs that we hear coming through in things people say, that are illogical to us. They are great doors for conversation - through which we can encourage people toward faith. I.e. When there is disagreement about religoius things - that isn’t the problem. That is the doorway for a meaningful conversation *if we know how to engage it.* In this the *manner* with which we discuss things is very important. Rather than ‘confronting’ a view - which quickly ends conversation, we ask open-ended questions, trying to understand what they believe and why. Through this we are positioned to ask additional and even more-meaningful questions that could help them discover a different way of thinking to their own - thus taking a possible step closer to faith in Jesus.

**\*\* Re identifying the ‘sour-notes’ in the 4 examples (The exercise at question 3)**

* **Help with 1.** They don’t believe in the Bible and/or in the existence of a supreme God (So this is the issue to address - with more questions).
* **Help with 2.** They don’t believe that truth exists or can be known / They have rejected the idea of truth, logic and reason are applicable to the area of religion. (So this is the issue to address - with more questions)
* **Help with 3.** They don’t believe that truth exists - even though their belief is actually self-contradictory, because if everything is true, everything is false (because various religious beliefs directly contradict each other - like believing God does and doesn’t exist). As it turns out, the world's’ major religions are majorly different in the major areas. (So this is the issue to address - with questions).
* **Help with 4.** They don’t realise God’s standard is perfection. They’ve never considered how ‘good’ is defined (e.g. Hitler considered it good to kill Jews, gypsies, handicapped people and blacks). Maybe they haven’t connected with the thought that if God is good He must also be just, and so the reality of God’s love does *not* mean everyone goes to heaven. God’s love meant He paid the ultimate price to make our forgiveness possible – because He is just, and sin actually is a problem (So this is the issue to address - with questions).