# The 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. We encourage that time is reserved for the application sections.

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

**OBJECTIVE**: To inspire Christians to boldly initiate conversations, while always seeking to stir God’s love in their heart (because a personal revelation of God’s love for people is needed if we are to become sustainably motivated as witnesses).

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**INTRODUCTION/REVISION:**

We are up to our third week in a four part series. To revise - a conversational approach, whereby we ask questions more than we talk (an approach that works in our times).

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

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Our second message was *One spirit to listen with* - about Jesus’ brief conversation with Nathanael in John 1. We then discussed how we could create opportunity to discuss faith things if we could identify the ‘sour notes’ in people’s words - and address them with questions. The three key questions we looked at were…

* Question 1: What do you mean by...? (This seeks to clarify WHAT they believe)
* Question 2: What led you to that conclusion? (This seeks to clarify WHY they believe that)
* Question 3: Have you considered that...? (This seeks to redirect to / illuminate a different way of thinking)

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

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

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

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

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

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

* It would seem Jesus was prompted by the Holy Spirit to talk with Zacchaeus, and invite Himself to his house. Why else would he be so compelled to go to the home of one particular man in a crowd?
* (Re knowing Zacchaeus’ name - it is possible Zaccaheus was well known, so Jesus’ knowledge of his name may have come from common knowledge).
* If we want to be effective as witnesses for Jesus, our greatest effectiveness will come from our ability to walk with the Spirit, listening to His promptings, leadings & revelations.

**3. Learn to love the unlovable**

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

To note: Jesus didn’t come across as one who judged people – yet at the same time maintained uncompromised beliefs and standards. If we can learn to related to people like Jesus did - the opportunities would be everywhere. Skills are part of this.

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Midway summary:

* Week 1 - Was about ***hearing***what people are saying
* Week 2 - Was about learning how to ***illuminate***new ways of thinking to people through questions
* Week 3 - Today - is about learning how to ***uncover***the deeper things that might be hindering people from engaging in open-hearted conversations. This third type of evangelistic conversation is called the ***‘uncovering conversations.’***
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**B. TOWARD AN APPLICATION: UNCOVERING CONVERSATIONS**

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

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

* *Intellectually,* it looks as if she is an atheist – and we could therefore try to engage a conversation about reasons for believing God exists.
* However, when the question was asked ‘Where did you get that idea from?’, the reply was “How can there be a good God when there is so much suffering.”

***Sometimes the hindrance is emotional (or spiritual). If we were to address it with an intellectual question, we’d have missed the point!***

**ENCOURAGING POINT TO NOTE: How true love can give us the words to say - and the right manner to say them:**

Sometimes we feel scared we won’t know what to say. I’d like to encourage you that *love not only helps us overcome this fear, it gives us words to say, and the right manner with which to say them.*

* When our conversations are flowing from love, words often come naturally.
* Our motives are often subtly revealed in the tone of our words. *People respect (and can receive) selflessness and authenticity!*
* ...and practice makes perfect

**A WISE POINT TO NOTE: Clever answers are not always the best ones:**

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

Love can give us words to say. And when love is the motive, God’s love and presence are released through us.

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

At the conclusion Jesus confirmed that salvation had come to Zacchaeus ‘ house, and then stated His own purpose - “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

Our sincere efforts to share the gospel will only be effective in as much as they come from a sincere heart of love.

**C. SPECIFIC APPLICATION: LET'S CONSIDER SOME EMOTIONALLY LOADED QUESTIONS**

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

* There are a lot of people who have been turned off Christianity by bad examples.

**Eg 1a. What is the sour note / Truth to consider?**

The merits of any ‘product’ or thing are not determined by the merits of the products representative!

* so while taking offense may be understandable, it is not logical to be angry at God for a human’s bad behaviour. (Be angry at the human!)
* Also Christianity is the greatest cause of good on planet earth, and also has the clearest and highest standard of moral teaching in the world – so attacking it is rather unfair.
	+ ( The best things in our society come from our Christian heritage including freedom of speech and religion, concern for the poor, education for all, healthcare, democratic government, and must more - including values like selflessness, humility, forgiveness, and love for others - including even our enemies.)

**Eg 1b: Starting questions** (in the manner we’ve discussed in the previous messages):

* Q1. What do you mean hypocrite?
* Q2 Isn’t it true that none of us live up to our ideals?
	+ And if this conversation were relevant you could ask
		- Q2b Have you never done anything contrary to your belief?
		- Q2c Aren’t we all guilty of being hypocrites in some way, if we’re honest?

**Eg 1c. Uncovering:** However, let’s imagine their feelings on this are strong at this point. *What is needed now is a question that sees to UNCOVER the deeper issues:*

Q2c We are all hypocrites in some way thought, right? So what is it that you are really saying?

Q3 Why is this so important to you? / You seem to feel strongly on this – why is this?’

* Q3b I’m sorry to hear that - what happened?

I.e. Only now are you getting to the real issue. And now - *only after listening first* - you might have an opportunity to communicate something valuable, like...

* Q3c I’m so sorry that happened. To be fair, can you see how God could be separate to that? Is it fair to blame him?
* Q3d Could I share my story about God - because I get frustrated by the same things as you, but for me, God is the solution?

**Eg 1d. Uncovering a possible smoke screen:** However, as another alternative - imagine you ask questions, but really they seem completely dis-intereted in discussing anything about this. Maybe their statement ‘Christians are hypocrites’ was actually a smoke-screen that they said without really thinking - but also because they didn’t expect anyone to ask them about it (they thought it would end a conversation).

* You could ask: Sorry - are you actually disinterested in discussing religious things?
* - And if they reply ‘yes’ - you could ask. ‘Why is that?’
	+ As cheeky as it sounds, you might be surprised by how easily a conversation can open up when the people’s actual thoughts are being discussed!

**\* To the preacher: You’ll find another / an alternative example in the footnotes**

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

For the conversation to continue meaningfully, covering questions are needed

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

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

Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus,

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

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

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**CHALLENGE:**

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

**Footnotes:**

**Example 2: How can a loving God send people to hell? [second/spare example]**

**1a. Sour note / Truth to consider:**

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

**1b. Starting questions:**  I’d skip asking ‘What do you mean?’ Or ‘Where’d you get that idea from?’ - because the meaning is clear, and the source of information is the Bible)

- (...only unless I was trying to define the word ‘send’ - because it implies that God is responsible for people going to Hell - which isn’t what the BIble says. Instead, it says we are all guilty, but forgiveness is offered through Jesus. So where we go is up to us, based on what we do with God’s offer!)

**1c. Uncovering questions: Because this question would usually be asked with an amount of emotion!**

1. Why do you ask that?

This is an uncovering question. Their reasons for asking this question could be things like

(1) ...because that a loved one just passed away - in which case we’d want to be sensitive to that. (E.g. I think a good response regarding any person who has passed away is to say that ‘I can’t tell you where any person has gone – only God knows that. Do you believe in God?’

(2) an emotional question provoked by the perceived injustice of hell or

(3) an intellectual/faith question - because they don’t believe in heaven or hell.

So we ask ‘why do you ask?’ to uncover!

**1d. Then we’d engage with their reply (assuming it wasn’t a smoke screen / simply said to provoke)**

E.g. To answer the original question we could ask...

* If you were God, would you let everyone into heaven? Rapists included?
* If not, where do you draw the line? What is the standard...?

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

**Related issue: What if they say they want to go to the same place that they believe their parents / late husband went?**

This feeling/objection is common especially amongst those from Eastern religions

A good question in such circumstances is to ask them, if *they* had passed away first (instead of their parents/spouse), and no matter where they ended up, *would they want their loved ones to think about God so as to secure the best eternal outcome?*

(The story of Lazarus and the Rich man – who was concerned for his brothers, is relevant in this scenario)

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

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

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

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

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 + REVISION (20mins)**

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

**Feedback on members’ personal reflection times:**

Last week we ended with three questions that you were encouraged to take home to reflect upon.

Let’s discuss these now and then pray, after which we’ll look at this week's study.

The three questions were:

1. How important is it to you that those you love come to faith in Christ?
2. How important do you think *your* part might be in this? (Recognising that only God can convict a heart, and the person still gets to choose)
3. If you are hindered in your evangelistic efforts, what do you think the greatest thing hindering you might be?

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

1. What is the purpose of a ‘hearing conversation’?
2. What is the purpose of a ‘illuminating conversation?What three questions could be helpful to remember?
3. Can anyone remember, from the Sunday message, what the purpose of a ‘uncovering conversation’ is? *(To ask questions that dig for deeper intellectual, emotional or spiritual hindrances that might exist, from a desire to encourage the person. For example, if all a person’s given objections have been answered what is still holding them back?)*

**To hear a story or two**

1. Does anyone here feel they had such a more emotional hindrance that held them back from following Christ at one time? What happened that helped you past it? Where other Christians showing compassion and care a part of the equation?

**TEXT: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: (15mins)**

**5.** For what reason does Paul suggest God can comfort us in our troubles?

**Comment:** Note that we can help both Christians and non-Christians because of our experiences.

**6**. Share one area each in which we would be able to relate to someone else’s struggles *because we’ve been there (one sentence is sufficient).* (Note, sharing must be voluntary - Encourage people to only share what they feel ready to share)

**7.** While none of us like to suffer, what other benefits are there to suffering and pain? (Write suggestions on a whiteboard)

* E.g. **They** **test and strengthen our faith**
* E.g. **We gain experiences with which we can help others**
* **Our** **character is developed** (See Romans 5:1-4. What two things does he thank God for? 1. Salvation through Christ 2. Earthly sufferings - because they produce perseverance, character and hope… ...which bears fruit through the way we then become able to live and love)
* E.g. **We** **learn humility** (which makes us more useful to God - and a better person)
* E.g. **Suffering often draws people to saving faith,** or back to it (so it is a saving grace!)
* Etc.

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

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

**9.** A challenging question: If your pain were to bring just one extra person to salvation through Jesus - because you grew to stand in faith and shared your testimony with them, would that be worth it?

**10. (Optional) A conversation role play:** Ask for two volunteers – one playing a sceptic, and one a Christian. Give the sceptic the below ‘stated’ and ‘heart’ objection. They then begin the conversatoin with the ‘stated’ objection. The goal is for the Christian to discover what the ‘heart’ objection

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

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

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

(If you wanted to play this ‘role play’ game again - you could come up with your own sets of ‘stated’ and ‘heart’ objections

* The skill-set being revealed here is powerful!)

**APPLICATION (10mins)**

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

And we often won’t be able to connect with people’s hearts unless we really listen (‘hearing conversations’) so we can be positioned to ask some powerful questions.

1. Who will you seek to start a conversation with this week?
* Might there be people around you that you haven’t noticed before (like‘Zacchaeus’ up in the tree?)
1. Prayer for each other and those we would like to encourage toward faith.

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**Help for with Question 10**

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

**Heart objection:** Bitterness at a Christian hypocrite who hurt them.

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

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

**Possible questions:**

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

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

1. What led you to that conclusion? / Where did you get that idea from? ***(a hearing question)***
2. Have you considered the religions are fundamentally different – and even contradictory? ***(illuminating question)*** If their reply seems heated at this point you could say…

**However, noticing that they have particularly strong feelings on this - you could ask...**

1. You seem to feel strongly about this. Is there a reason for this? ***(This is an ‘uncovering’ question)***
2. What was your experience?
3. [It would then be appropriate to discuss that topic with similar questions, yet sensitively and with a heart to encourage].

**What if they then seem disinterested in discussing this?**

Maybe theysay some things that really doesn’t make sense – and it seems they might not want to talk about religion?

* Ask them, “Don’t you like talking about religion?” (to ***uncover*** what their real thoughts or motives are in the conversation)
* Why is that?

***The lesson: If we aren’t bold to ask these ‘uncovering’ questions with a goal to hear what they are really thinking, we may never get to the point of discussing the real issues.***

* ***We want to impact lives***
* ***If we can HEAR what people are saying from behind their words (like Jesus did,***
	+ ***...then, with QUESTIONS, we can see conversations opened up, and connect with the heart!***