# 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**: Luke 14:25-35

**OBJECTIVE**: Having considered how we might create conversational opportunities out of ‘sour notes’ we’ve heard in others, today we are going to turn the mirror on ourselves to consider ‘sour notes’ that might exist in our own thinking, as Christians. We will then conclude with a very practical conclusion, showing members how they could very simply share the gospel, were an opportunity to arise. It is essential that we teach this.

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**INTRODUCTION**: This is the final message in our four-part series, during which we’ve been looking at the way Jesus conversed with the people around Him every day. Today we are going to to finish by coming back to the gospel. God has given us a message to take. It’s the most important message in the world!

**TESTIMONY:** Would anyone have a testimony to share about conversations you had with someone about faith this week?

**READ Luke 14:25-35** Let’s take a brief look through this passage, highlighting a few points.

V25-26

* Sometimes it’s a popular thing to do to follow Jesus. Sometimes all our friends are all Christians, or our family are. It was like this on this day – see v25
* Sometimes, the Christian life is really fun. Sometimes we’re part of a vibrant Christian community. And maybe we sometimes misunderstand all this and think that the purpose of our Christian faith is all about helping us feel fulfilled in life - when in reality it is all about laying our lives down for the purpose of Christ in this broken and temporary world.

In v 26

* Jesus got straight to the point with those who were ‘following the crowd’ with joy, and reminded them of what it would cost to truly follow Him.
* Note: ‘hate our parents’ is a comparative statement / a figure of speech.
* God wants us to be head-over-heals in love with Him / in love with Him more than any other person or thing.
* If we commit to follow Christ, wholeheartedness is *expected!* (e.g. see Luke 9:57-62)

**Jesus then illustrates this with two stories.**

STORY ONE: v28-30 - a man who makes an investment calculates beforehand whether he can complete it.

STORY TWO: v31-32 - a king who goes to war calculates beforehand whether he can win.

**Then Jesus comes to the punch line.**

V33 *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

* Who could say they have given up *everything* they have?
* We have discussed ‘sour notes’. Here are some ‘sour note’ in Christianity:
  + A Christian who doesn’t share the gospel
  + A Christian who hoards wealth – it shows their heart.
  + A Christians who hates, lies, steals, cheats, look at pornography, or commit fornication or adultery, - Jesus’ teaching is clear.

There is plenty here to challenge our hearts (and we’ll come back to questions this raises shortly)

But there are other sour notes in many church-goers also:

**CHALLENGE: What about these possible sour notes of Christianity?**

* A Christian who thinks all beliefs are the same / all roads lead to God
* A Christian who thinks morals can be relative, and thus that things like sex outside of marriage is OK
  + Let us be reminded – there is a straight and narrow path that we are called to walk on
  + We need our Bibles
  + We need the Holy Spirit – because we need help in the face of all our weaknesses
  + And we need commitment in our hearts

There is a cost / a ‘cross to carry’

and there is a call – to make Christ known

This is our PRIMARY mission

It is the MISSION of the Church, and of every church group, and of every church person

It is the reason for which Christ’s return is delayed.

It is therefore the primary purpose for our existence at this time, as followers of Christ.



**Could it be that we’ve allowed the things of this world to cloud our minds, and to ensnare our hearts?**

* Maybe we are concerned about our financial well-being and assets
* Maybe we are concerned about our many hobbies and pleasures
* Maybe we are concerned about our own families (a good concern)

...but is this so much so that we give little diligence to our mission – while, all the while, our neighbors and colleagues and friends are going to an eternity apart from Christ? They are all around us every day, yet we say near to nothing about it.

**Jesus finished the teaching as recorded in v34-35.** These are sobering words

* What if a faith without works really is dead?
* What if our so-called Christian lives are declared ‘void’ if we aren’t willing to live out the faith we claim to follow?
* What if we are saved by faith alone, but the sincerity of the commitment in our heart really is a condition that follows (Lordship).
* What if you actually have to follow Jesus to get to heaven – and a simple prayer or half- effort is not actually enough.

**Absolutely we need the grace of God**

* Because (absolutely) we’ll never be perfect
* But God wants sincerity. He wants our devotion – including our devotion to His mission ...because He loves all the people who are around us more than we can imagine
* ...and He died for their benefit as much as He died for ours.

The point of the passage: There is a cost to embrace. It is not an option. It is what we committed to when we first gave our lives to Christ *and this includes a resolute commitment to our mission.*



**CONCLUSION TO THIS CHALLENGE: Evangelism is not an optional extra in Christianity**

* **It is core business**
* Who will you try to reach out to through your everyday convesations?

**APPLICATION – SOME VERY PRACTICAL POINTERS {FOR NOW - OR TO GIVE 5-10MINS TO IN SOME FUTURE WEEKEND SERVICES]**

If we are going to be witnesses for Christ, the most basic thing we need to know is

1. What the Gospel is.
2. and how to share it (clearly).

**VIDEO: What is the Gospel and how could we share it (when opportunity arises)?**

If useful, please see the videos at [http://alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos](http://alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos/#video4)

Two options:

* What is the gospel? - 5mins long (Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration)
* How to share the gospel - 4.30mins long (a simple, memorable drawing)

**CONCLUSION:**

In 1 Peter 3:15 it says *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”*

* The key to great conversations is great questions
* I hope this series has helped!

**RESPONSE**: Who is willing to make a fresh commitment to Jesus’ mission?

# Conversations that Connect Series – Week 4 One mouth to speak with

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

**For the leader:** This session is primarily about revision.

* Revision is important for memory. Without it lessons learnt have little chance of being *applied*.
* We encourage you to hold the view that the revision of conversational skills learnt in this series is very important, because it has the potential to enable group members to engage in their mission where they have previously been unable to.
* Helping people to *“...obey Jesus’ teachings…”* is what true discipleship is really about (Matthew 28:18-19)!
* The study of God’s word *without application* is a disrespect to God’s Word - while *the greatest respect we can give God’s Word is to believe it and obey it!*
* What would happen if a growing number of your members started regularly engaging other people in spiritual conversations?

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**INTRODUCTION: (15mins)**

**1. Testimony:** Did anyone have an opportunity to talk about faith with someone this week?

**2. Series revision and informal evaluation: How would you answer the following questions**

1. How do people in our culture think differently today, compared to maybe 40 years ago? *(i.e. about how we’ve become a postmodern / multi-religious culture etc.)*
2. Why is a conversational approach beneficial for our evangelism?
3. What do you think the best end goal is for from an evangelistic conversation? (How about to have encouraged or helped a person to take a step closer to Jesus?)
4. What is the purpose of a ‘hearing conversation’?
5. What is the purpose of an ‘illuminating conversation’, and what were the easy three starter questions we looked at?
6. What is the purpose of an ‘uncovering conversation’? (What sort of question might illustrate?)

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***3. Optional introduction to ‘Bridging Conversations’ (Or give them an article to take home and read. Check it out).***

***Comment:*** *Before we look at the topic of sharing the gospel, I’d like to mention a fourth type of conversation: ‘bridging conversations’*

***To review*** *i. Hearing conversations - to discern a person’s worldview*

*ii. Illuminating conversations - to help them assess their views, and consider other ways of thinking*

*iii. Uncovering conversations - to draw out why they might avoid talking about something, or be disinterested, or have strong/aggressive views about something, or...*

*iv. Today - Bridging conversations*

*The goal of a ‘bridging conversation’ is to establish common ground with a non-believer, to make discussion about the gospel easier for them to understand and the message easier to receive.*

***Read the book excerpt attached below OR summarise it for them OR give them copies to take and read at home***

* *Then ask: Could someone summarise the point this brief article is making?*
* *Does this make sense?*

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**4. Discussion regarding sharing the Gospel (20mins)**

4a. Let’s say you were in a conversation, and the person you were talking with asked you *‘So, what do you believe as a Christian anyway, and why?’*, who here feels they could answer that now?

**4b. VIDEO**

Let’s review what the gospel is, **and/or** how we might very simply share the gospel and lead a person in a response?

* We note ‘What is the gospel?’ (5mins long)
* and ‘How to share the gospel?’ (4.30mins long)
  + Both found at [www.alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos](http://www.alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos)

**4c. Demonstration / practice in pairs**

Let’s break into pairs now and each practice sharing this Gospel message, beginning with the questions, “Could I show you the basics of what Christians’ believe about that?”

*Note that, even if you do not have paper, the gospel can be articulated by remembering the parts of the ‘gospel drawing’.*

To note for your conversations: In Acts 2 and 3 we see Peter’s example when preaching the gospel. On both occasions *he included evidences that were relevant to his hearers - to give them reasons to believe in the truth of what he was saying*.

* We are wise to do the same, including testimony, reasons for believing in God, things that amaze us and cause us to look up, miracles, prophecy …
* If wisely chosen, sharing these things can intrigue them, open conversation up, and further validate the message.

**APPLICATION: (15mins)**

**1. Feedback:** Do you feel more equipped? / Has this series been helpful?

**2. Discussion on next steps:**

* What do you think our next steps as a small group are in reaching our friends?
* How could we sustain this focus?
* What could we to do help each other reach out more, and more consistently, to our friends and family?
  + (E.g. When in our calendar could we revise some lessons learnt?)
  + (E.g. How often will be ask for testimonies about opportunities to engage in spirtiual converastions? etc.)
  + (E.g. What topical area related to outreach will be study next - and when? Consider gospel skills, team skills, partnership with the Holy Spirit, or more on conversational skills)

**3. Further reading**: If anyone did want to learn more about evangelism there are two books that include the ***conversational content*** we’ve just looked at.

* *Conversational Evangelism* by Dr Norm Geisler and Dr David Geisler. [www.meeknessandtruth.org](http://www.meeknessandtruth.org/) (order via internet from overseas).
* *Because We Care* By Dave Mann [www.bigbookpublishing.co.nz](http://www.shininglights.co/). This summarises teaching on conversational evangelism into three of its sixteen chapters. It is a *comprehensive* book for Christians and Christian leaders.Evangelism is often said by churches to be in the ‘too hard box’. This book shows us how we could realistically and sustainably get it out. (9 small group studies included).
* *‘God Space’* by Doug Pollock (from the UK)
* Or see a Christian bookstore near you.

**Close with a time in prayer**

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**Excerpt on Bridging Conversations**

Adapted from chapter fourteen of *Because we care* by Dave Mann

The Apostle Paul said, ‘I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some’ (1 Corinthians 9:22). In Christian outreach, there is no one method that works for all. To the Jews Paul reasoned like a Jew, but to the Greeks he reasoned and spoke like a Greek. To the ‘weak’ he related with humility, sitting where they sat. To the ‘strong’ he no-doubt dressed in his finest clothes, and reasoned with authority.

In conversation we seek to find common ground with those we converse with... In conversation, the things we agree on become the foundation off which we can discuss the things we may disagree on.

**E.g 1: If we agree with a non-believer that there has to be justice for rapists and murderers *in the afterlife,* then we have a common ground:** God will meet out justice in the afterlife. Off this basis we have easy opportunity to share the Gospel, explaining the problem that we are all guilty before God, and therefore deserving of punishment. While also explaining the significance of what Jesus has done.

The common ground is thus the bridge across which we share the uncommon ground.

**E.g. 2. Imagine they believe there must be a God somewhere - because the universe and this planet are just too amazing…** you could say… *“We are so on the same page! I agree. Could I share with you why I believe that the God who behind all of this can be personally known?* ...and then share about your experience of God, which you connected with when you put your faith in Jesus.

**E.g. 3 Imagine they agree that the world’s religions really are very different - and therefore can’t all be true.** ...it begs the question ‘What is true?’ So ask humbly,*“Could I share with you for a minute what caused me to consider the claims of Christianity?”* ...and then share your experience of connecting with God, and what led you to conclude that Jesus was God’s Son, and the way to become connected with God.

**E.g. 4. Imagine they agree that it’s not faith itself that saves people, but what we put our faith in.** Ask, *“What do you think we could put our faith in to deal with the problem of our sin? Could I share what led me to think Christ is trustworthy for this?”*

**E.g. 5. Imagine you are simply talking about how amazing Jesus was as a man, in how he related to people and what he taught etc... and they agree** (which many would). You could ask, *“Could I share some things that caused me to actually accept some of the radical things Jesus claimed?”*

**E.g. 6. Imagine they agree that without God, some people find it difficult to find meaning in their life.** *“Can I share with you the difference Christianity has brought to my life?*  ...and then share a testimony of how this faith helped you, but also of why you believe it to be true.

In every example above, it could be comfortable to communicate gospel truths (or the whole gospel) as a natural part of the conversation - without ever pushing a view (which is what can quickly end conversations like this).

Through questions, we can establish common ground. These ‘planks to the gospel’ make it easier to then share the gospel *as part of the natural conversation.*

**In summary:**

Because we as Christians believe the gospel to be true, it is natural for us, and authentic of us to want to give people an opportunity to at least hear and understand the message - because the implications are significant.

However, there are ways of approaching this that can be more natural than others.

By finding common ground between the gospel and non-Christian’s worldview, we create links to the gospel that can enable us to share it as a part of the natural conversation, and also in a way that makes the message more understandable for them.

As we begin to identify the witnessing potential that sits within these ‘common views’ - every time we hear people express these views it then serves as a prompt for us to be bold enough to actually share the *whole gospel* too!