# 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 1:43-51

**OBJECTIVE**: To reflect upon God’s partnership with us in Christian witness. Having learnt to identify ‘sour notes’ in the previous message (‘Hearing conversations’), we learn how to illuminate them to others through questions (‘Illuminating conversations’ - for which we will introduce 3 specific questions, to make application easy).

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**Introduction**: In this series we’re considering the very conversational approach Jesus modeled for us through the way he engaged with and ministered to people.

* Last week the message title was ‘Two ears to hear with’, and discussed the importance of talking with people around us each day, and in particular about learning to listen - because meaningful conversations about spiritual things need a starting point.
* Today the message title is ‘One spirit to listen with’, and we’re going to look at the account of when Jesus first met Nathaniel, as found in John 1:43-51.

**Testimony:** Before we start, did anyone have a great opportunity to practice what we talked about last week, asking questions in an effort to encourage faith in God?

**A TEXT: Jesus and Nathanael. Read John 1:43-51.**

* The context: The writer John is recollecting how Jesus went about calling his first disciples. He recalls how Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, heard John prophecy that Jesus was the ‘Lamb of God’ (see v35) and left to follow Jesus. He immediately invited his brother Simon-Peter to join Him. Then there is the passage we’ve just read.
* V43 The fact that Jesus *found* Philip suggests Jesus may have already known Philip.
* V45f Philip then found Nathanael and took him to meet Jesus.

**As an interesting question, who is Nathaniel? Was he a disciple?**

* Nathaniel’s\* name does not appear in the lists of disciples(Mat10:2-4, *Mk3:16-19, Lk6:14-16 and a few of them mentioned in Acts 1:13)*
* While not stated, it seems to many that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person.
* (...because (1) why would John have included this account if it didn’t have a greater significance, noting he wrote only a few of many things he could have about Jesus’ life and teachings? (2) John 21:2 also lists Nathanael as being there with the disciples after Jesus resurrection, when the disciples all went fishing one morning etc. .(This can’t be proven - but is quite possible]).

**Let’s reflect on the small conversation between Jesus and Nathanael**

*V47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him* (as I’ve just read), *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked?*

* It is clear from Nathaniel’s response that Jesus and he did not yet know each other.
* We see again how involved the Holy Spirit was in the daily ministry of Jesus.

*V48b-49 Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the son of God; you are the King of Israel.”*

* Nathanael saw just two evidences that Jesus was anointed by God, and willingly believed. An amazing response.
* Few people are as hungry for God and for truth, or as ready to believe when faced with a miracle, as Nathanael was.

**Point 1: God works with us in ministry**

* It is undeniable that the Spirit’s work was key to Jesus’ success in ministering to hearts. By the Spirit’s revelation, Jesus knew things He could not have known otherwise.
* If we want to be effective as witnesses for Jesus we do well to seek to be sensitivity to the Spirit’s whispers.
* Asking questions more than we talk when in conversation can help us do this, because it creates ‘space’ for us in the conversatoin to think *and listen to God.*

How can we hear God’s voice?

* God speaks by four primary means: (1) His Word, (2) the inner witness of the Spirit, (3) Other people, (4) Circumstances.
* Our time spent with God, reading His word (#1) , listening for what He might say to us is critical. We learn to discern His voice (#2).
* It is out of the overflow of this that our ability to discern the same voice when in a conversation comes.

**Point 2: We need to give time and initiative to engaging people in conversation**

* How can we minister to people if we don’t talk with them?
* How can we care for people unless we are willing to first listen to them?
* How can we discover the deeper hindrances to faith that people have unless we ask a few good questions - with a desire to listen selflessly, encourage generously and encourage meaningfully?
* (Could it be that some of us are so busy with ‘many things’ that we fail to give people our time?)

**B. FOR OUR APPLICATION**

* Last week we discussed ‘hearing conversations’ – these being conversations where we ask general questions with the express purpose of listening carefully so as to hear ‘sour notes’ in what others say... because, when we do, through asking questions these can be turned into great opportunities to encourage them toward faith.
* This week we’re going to look at how we could open those conversations up in a bit more detail. Specifically, we want to learn how we could open up friendly conversations that could *‘illuminate’* to people some possible discrepancies or contradictions that might exist in their beliefs.

**An explanation of worldviews, and an example of 3 differences between the Chrsitian and not-Christian worldviews**

*It’s important that we recognise the key areas of difference that exist between our own worldview as Christians, and others’ worldviews - which will unavoidably reflect their religious framework.*

* *While we believe* ***truth*** *does exist, such as that* ***God*** *is real and can be known, because He has revealed Himself – most people around us do not.* 
  + *If God even exists they believe He is distant, and equally found through any religion, (aka they do NOT believe God has revealed Himself such that He can be known).*
* *While we believe* ***salvation*** *comes by grace through faith*
  + *those around us believe there is no such ‘salvation’. At best, being a good person is what counts (even though there is no fixed basis for defining what ‘good’ is if we deny the existence of a God who is above us).*
* *While we believe God has given us an objective definition of what is* ***right and wrong****,* 
  + *people these days see morality as being a ‘relative’ thing.*

*It follows that, when we share the gospel with them, to them this is no more than ‘our version’ of the ‘truth’*

*If we ‘push’ the gospel a bit, they may feel threatened by our ‘exclusivity’ (apparent arrogance).*

***So, how are we to talk with such people?****You can’t tell the truth to a person who doesn’t believe truth exists! The best you can do is talk WITH them about it. This is what we’re talking about.*

* *A conversational approach to evangelism is one that suits our times. Through the use of questions we can help people to examine their own beliefs, and consider other ways of seeing things- and do this in a way that is non-threatening, which is the point. Westerners are still spiritual people – but because they believe all religions are the same, they don’t believe religious truth exists - so have no interest in someone ‘preached at them’ to tell them the ‘truth’!*

**EXAMPLE:**

For example, if they say they believe ‘all roads lead to God’

1. What is the ‘sour note’ / what do we see as not making sense in that?

* While it might seem a nice belief to some, it is actually illogical, as all the religions say majorly different things in the major areas.

*2. But how do you point that out without ‘preaching’ or confronting them (which would make the conversation uncomfortable)?*

**OPTIONAL VIDEO**: View ‘How to get a conversation started’ (4.30mins) or ‘3 easy questions’ (6.49mins) at <http://alltogether.co.nz/equipping-videos>

* 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

It would be hard to find a better set of questions to use to open a conversation about a matter on which you have a different point of view to the person you are talking with!

**LET’S CONSIDER SOME MORE EXAMPLES [Preacher - chose the examples/illustrations as you need from those below - there wouldn’t be time to mention all of them]]:**

**Example 1: All religions lead to God**

Sour note / Truth to consider:

1. The religions are actually fundamentally different in what they say about ‘God’ and also salvation

**For example:** (a) some religions say there is no God (such as Atheism or one strand of Buddhism) while others believe in a God. There can’t both be a God and not be a God can there?

**For example:** (b) were you aware that the path for salvation is different in the different religions?

In Islam it comes by belief in Allah, Muhammad his prophet, and good works.

In Hinduism it comes by overcoming karma and incarnations by good works.

In Buddhism it comes by getting rid all desires through the eight-fold path.

In Christianity it comes as a gift of love, received by faith alone in Christ alone.

I.e. in nearly every religion our salvation is based in WHAT WE DO, while in Christianity it is UNIQUELY based upon WHAT GOD HAS DONE for us. These are different views of reality, and can’t both be right.

**For example:** Buddha claimed to be a teacher who pointed the way. Mohammad claimed to merely be a prophet. But Jesus claimed to be God come in flesh, to live a sinless life, to die for the sin of the world, and to be the only means for any person living to be forgiven and receive eternal life. The differences between their claims is slightly large! ;-)

**For example:** *“As one person put it, all the religions are essentially the same, except for the area of God and salvation and the problem of man and the afterlife and that kind of stuff. It turns out that on the big issues they are very, very different. They can’t all be true.” [*Gergory Koukl (Founder and President, Stand to Reason) as quoted on ‘The Case for Faith’ DVD by Lee Strobel. See <http://www.leestrobel.com/>.]

**Possible questions to ask:**

1. What do you mean by ‘they all lead to God’? (I don’t get it sorry, what are you saying?)
2. What led you to that conclusion?
3. Have you considered how what the religions say about God's existence is actually really different - like, some say God’ exists and some say he doesn’t!? Etc.

At this point, you introduce one of the thoughts we just discussed about how the religions are different - but you wisely word it as a question.

**[Preacher - here is an alternative, or additional, question - depending how much time you have]**

**Example 2: It doesn’t matter what you believe, so long as it makes you a better person**

Sour note / Truth to consider:

1. If God turned out to actually exist it *would* matter what you believe (what you believe does matter)
2. God’s definition of ‘better’ and ‘good’ is actually ‘perfect’, so ‘good’ isn’t good enough!

*Possible questions:*

1. What do you mean by better person?
2. What led you to believe beliefs don’t matter? / Where did you get that definition from?
3. Have you ever considered that God might actually exist / what the world’s religions actually say?

OR Have you ever considered how we can’t even define what the word ‘good’ means without God in the picture? I mean, have you ever considered where morality comes from?\*\*

Etc.

See footnote\*\* for thoughts on the different views of ‘morality’ / ‘right’ and ‘wrong’

**THE POINT: If we each knew just one way to answer their objection - we’d be able to rephrase that as a question that could open the conversation up.**

**See footnote\*\*\* for an illustration of 10 questions in a row - iilustration of how a conversation could be led with questions - and with very few statements being made**

**IN SUMMARY:** Our objective in Christian witness could be put this way: *Every day and in every way we help people take steps closer to Jesus.*

* ...with the hope that they hear and understand the gospel, and become ready to respond!

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14)*

* *What do you mean by that?*
* *Where did you get that idea from?*
* *Have you considered...?*

Why not try these questions out in a few conversations this week.

**Footnotes**

**\* More about Nathanael [but not necessary for including in the message]**

* Nathanael was a man who loved God, and who sought out God’s truth.
* The fact that Philip went to tell him they had found the Messiah indicates this was of great interest to him.
* He was found under the shade of a fig tree – a common place in those days for study and prayer.
* Nathaniel’s reply to Philip’s comment that Jesus came from Nazareth (‘Nazareth! *Can anything good come from there?’)* indicates scriptural knowledge (the Messiah would come from Bethlehem).
* Jesus said of Nathaniel, by divine knowledge as in v47 *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false”* – which is quite some compliment!

**\*\* To give perspective to the question of where ‘morality’ / ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ come from**

For example (d), in Islam a person can kill others when they believe the situation warrants a ‘holy war’ approach – while in Christianity the law is that of love and forgiveness. To the atheist there is no basis to define right and wrong, leaving the door wide open for anything – including the really bad stuff.

For example, if there is no God there is no value to life – we’re all just meaningless accidents, and no different to any other animal... - so in killing millions of people the Communists actually did nothing wrong... Where as, if there is a God, we’re loved by Him, created special, and therefore life is sacred and of great value.

So, what we believe does matter, doesn’t it?

For example (e), to some Hindus, a person who is handicapped is that way because of bad Karma from a previous life, thus such people are despised and not to be helped by many, so as not to interrupt their bad Karma, so they can have better Karma in their next reincarnation. Do you think abandoning handicapped or needy people like that is OK?

For example (f), as an atheist or multi-religious person there is actually nothing to stop a person and their community believing that the lives of handicapped children are not as valuable, and just killing them off – which is exactly what communism has done exactly this in the past, and has never apologised for it either.

Do you think that is right? (So, what you believe does matter, huh?)

**\*\*\* An illustration of how a conversation could be led with questions**

**- and with very few statements being made**

1. So you think that all religions make you a better person, do you?
2. Why do you think that? What led you to that conclusion?
3. Have you considered that...the religions don’t define ‘good’ the same way? For example, WWII Germany, or the horrors Communism, the way some Hindus neglect of the poor and the caste system entrenches this, Islam’s permission to holy war, contrasted with Christianities ridiculously high standard of no lust, let alone sex outside of marriage?
4. So you do think a standard or right and wrong exists?
5. How high is that standard?
6. Who sets it? (If we do then it’s a made up standard, and is thus not ‘real’ or true)
7. How do you measure up according to that standard?
8. Do you think God’s standard would be higher or lower than yours?
9. Can you see that we actually have a moral problem – that something is wrong with our planet, and that something in the way we are made tells us it’s not supposed to be this way? (where does this idea come from? Why aren’t we adapted to our environment?)
10. I’m a Christian. Could I share with you what Christians believe? (God loves us – he made everything - we used our freewil to be selfish/do wrong/go our own way - in love Jesus made a way for our forgiveness - he is inviting us to follow him / be forgiven / be restored as his friends - and thus to life with him beyond this life also. Do you think it possible this God exists?)

# Conversations that Connect Series – Week 2 One ‘spirit’ to listen with

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

**Note to leader:** Jesus conversed with *intelligence and anointing* with those around Him – and so should we. The natural and the spiritual always work together. However, to converse at all - some conversational skills are needed. These skills - applied to spiritual conversations, are what this series is about. But love must be the motive. Our actions must be undergirded with prayer. And our attitude must recognise that, without God’s help we can do nothing! Only God can turn a heart. In all of this, we are fully dependent upon God’s help and leading.

Please note also that the goal of these discussion-guides is to prepare group members for application. The need for outreach has been discussed at length in many a sermon. Yet, no greater honour can be given God’s Word than the choice to believe and obey it. It is with this in mind that these are intentionally application-focused discussions, rather than Bible Studies.

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**GETTING STARTED (20mins)**

**1. The question game** (5mins): Have a group play-off, where in pairs you have a conversation where you are only allowed to ask questions. The conversations must make sense, and flow without long pauses. The first person to make a statement / pause for too long / ask a question that is not connected to the flow of the conversation, is out.. Then the winners play-off until you have a final winner.

**Note: We will play this game each week, because (a) learning to think in terms of questions and (b) gaining confidence in asking questions, are VITAL skill-sets for Christian witness in today’s world.**

2. Extra Question: If you could receive a phone call from any person on this earth, who would you most want to hear from? (A long lost relative? A famous musician?)

3. Extra Question - part 2: Do any of you feel God has spoken to you before? What did He say, how did you know it was Him, and how excited were you?

4. Testimony: By the way – did anyone manage to engage a conversations about God or faith with others this week? (5mins)

**Prayer** - Thank God for the way he speaks to and lead us in life, and helps to make us fruitful.

**Introduction: Today we’re discussing conversational skills** again. This series being about looking at how Jesus reached out. He gave time to people; he asked carefully considered questions; and he listened for the Holy Spirit’s promptings!

**5. Revision:** Can anyone remember what Sunday’s message was about? *(The calling of Nathanael – a conversation in which Jesus had two words of knowledge, with application of the message being in the area of ‘illuminating conversations’. I.e. both the Holy Spirit and general wisdom can help us in our conversations, so we can encourage others toward faith. Then three great questions - which the group will look at in more details soon. 1. What do you mean by…? 2. What led you to that conclusion? 3. Have you considered…?)*

**DISCUSSION**

**6. Read** John 1:44-49.

Comment: The main reason Jesus was so amazingly effective in impacting people’s lives was because he listened to the whispers of the Holy Spirit. In these verses Jesus has two words of knowledge regarding Nathanael - and it results in Nathanael changing very quickly from being a sceptic of Jesus, to being a believer..

Question: Have any of your ever felt God gave you a word of knowledge when while talking with a non-believer? What happened?

**7. Regarding the ‘3 great questions’**

* Revise again what they are
* What do you think about these questions?
* What is the point of each of the questions (1. Clarifying what, 2. Clarifying why, 3. Redirecting / illuminating - this being the question where a small amount of knowledge is useful, to convey something meaningful)

**8. Lets try a two part exercise: (20mins)**

**8a.**  **Break into groups to discuss what the ‘sour notes’ might be in these three objections**

1. I don’t believe God exists – science explains everything.

2. I think all religions lead to God

3. It doesn’t matter what you believe. We’re just meant to be good

**Then share your conclusions with the whole group**

All they need to do is identify ONE ‘sour note’. *(There are a range of suggestions at the end of this study - only for the benefit of the group leader).\**

**8b. Role-play of a possible conversation - to see how through questions conversations can be opened up:**

Have someone play the role of the person giving the objection. Then have one person - or the group as a whole, considering **questions** that might *gently* ***illuminate*** (or reveal) the assumptions within their stated beliefs, while also revealing an alternative way of thinking/seeing things.

**[Reinforcing the relevance of this] (5mins)**

9. Do you think these are real questions in the hearts and minds of those you know, who are not yet believers?

10. Do you think that conversations like these are possible - and can make a difference?

**Close in prayer**

* For one another - for a revelation of God’s love for others, and God’s help to learn and grow so as to become more effective in reaching those we love
* For those you listed last week who you want to see come to faith.

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**Possible homework:** **Three very soul-searching questions**

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 it is also fully their choice)?
3. If you are hindered in your own outreaching efforts, what do you think the greatest thing hindering you might be?

**Idea for the leader:**

* Maybe you could text or email these questions to group members.
* Maybe members could ‘group-reply’ that email - to help everyone reflect
* You thus reserve your discussion time next week for other things.

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**\* RESOURCE FOR THE LEADER FOR QUESTION 3a**

The below is to resource you, as leader.

If you shared this with your members it might overwhelm and confuse them.

1. Re the belief that science can explain everything: Science is actually unable to explain many things

* Consider first life - that needs a very creative and intelligent (and able) cause.
* Or the beginning of the universe - which point scientists believe was the beginning of time, space and matter - logically requiring a cause that is outside of time, space and matter).
* Or how random chance could account for the insane complexities of what has been discovered inside living cells
* Or how the fine tuning of the constants of the universe came about,
* Or of how the variety of creativity in the creation (bio-diversity) came about (explanations appealing to random chance do not actually explain this),
* Or about the actual (often unreported) lack of a fossil record to verify evolution, with no water tight fossils existing at most times to prove the evolution of species, one from the other (which one atheist named ‘the trade secret of palaeontology’)
* Or the *complete* lack of examples whereby positive (beneficial) DNA information was *added* through mutation (there are a few examples of improvements through mutations - but none that have added *newly written* information to the DNA code. This leaves naturalistic-evolution without a defensible mechanism for the ‘creation’ of the vast amounts of information needed for life - and in all its diversity ).

There are thus many possible directions for a conversation, and it doesn’t have to be complicated. Just as a builder needs a designer, so does this creation (which is many times more complicated).

2. Re the belief that all religions are the same: Those with this belief they don’t believe religious truth exists

* An illogical claim, for if everything is true, everything is false. This is an irrational way of thinking, because it is logical that a specific answer to life’s greatest questions (origins - morality - meaning - hope) exists.
* This is also inconsistent in that the religions are majorly different in their major areas. For example, God cannot both exist and not exist.

3. Re the belief that being good is good enough: Those with this view don’t realise that, for God to be good, he must also be just. Also that God’s standard is perfection.

* Most other worldviews provide no basis on which to actually define any *real* standard of morality to exist. Humans get to make up what they want to be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’). Consider how Hitler considered it good to kill Jews, blacks, gypsies and the disabled. Is it really up to us to define right and wrong? If so, isn’t that a terrifying prospect? (Who can we ever accuse of doing wrong - when it is only our opinion?)
* Regarding God’s goodness - like how a *good* judge in a court must see justice is done, so must a good God. The great news in this picture is God’s solution to human evil and wrong-doing: God’s love meant He made a way for our forgiveness by paying the ultimate price to make our forgiveness possible himself. So God can’t be accused of being unloving or uninvolved! (…and if this were being discussed in a conversation it would be notable that the gospel would be being shared naturally, as part of the conversation).