

LOST IN TRANSLATION: GOSPEL SHARING TO A NEW GENERATION

Dr. David Geisler

“Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”

Colossians 4:5-6 (NLT)

WHY CONVERSATIONS NOT CONFRONTATIONS

I. The Challenge of Evangelism Today

- The landscape of evangelism is changing today.
- We need to be like the **men of Issachar** who “understood the times they lived in and knew what they should do” (I Chronicles 12:32).

II. Understanding the Need For Pre-Evangelism

- We need to repackage our approach in evangelism to include pre-evangelism.

“If evangelism is planting seeds of the Gospel, pre-evangelism is tiling the soil of their mind and heart, preparing them to at least be willing to listen to the truth.” (Mark 4:8)

III. Learning the Conversational Evangelism Methodology

The Holy Spirit....The Key to Evangelism

The vital role of the Holy Spirit in evangelism. (John 6:65, 1 Corinthians 2:4-14)

- To empower us to speak in a way that makes a difference. (Acts 14:1)
- To empower us to live godly lives. (Philippians 1:14)

FOUR TYPES OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS (Hearing, Illuminating, Uncovering, Building)

1. Hearing Conversations (The Musician)

Like a musician, hear the sour notes (gaps) people are "singing" to us.



This is always the first step where we seek to understand what they actually believe, and to detect some of the inconsistencies in their viewpoint.

LISTEN Carefully.

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” (James 1:19-20)

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Helpful suggestions for increasing your listening skills.

- Reflect back what they are saying to you.

Learn their Story! (Rom.1:18-19; Rom. 2:14-15; ECL. 3:11)

Tell me about your spiritual journey?

Ask questions about what is important to them.

Ask questions about purpose and meaning.

Ask questions about the experiences that have shaped their beliefs.

Where are you now in your spiritual journey?

Do you have a spiritual belief of any kind?

How would you describe your belief in God?

Was your religious experience as a child positive, negative, or neutral?

Invest time in them! (1 Thes. 2:8; Matt. 11:19).

Jesus was called “a friend of tax-collectors and sinners.” (Matt. 11:19)

Search for gaps (sour notes) in their beliefs

By listening to the sour notes (gaps), we may be able to “detect” some of the uncertainty in their beliefs which may give us an opportunity to help them to think more clearly about what they believe and why. It also helps to create a greater interest in knowing about Jesus.

Jesus understood this principle of identifying “sour notes” in someone’s belief system. (Matthew 19:16-22)

Types of Inconsistencies you might hear:

Belief vs. Heart Longing (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Listen to the inconsistency between a person’s worldview and his heart longing

Belief vs. Behavior (Galatians 2:14-16)

Listen to the inconsistency between what they say they believe and how they live or behave.

Belief vs. Belief (Acts 17:22-30)

Listen to the inconsistency between two contradictory beliefs.

Illogical Beliefs

Listen to the inconsistency within a single belief or within the statement itself.

Points to Note:

Don’t forget to really listen to them.

Point out the most stand-out inconsistencies rather than pointing out all inconsistencies.

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Illuminating Conversations (The Artist)

Like an artist, asking questions helps paint a picture to help them see themselves in a more clear light (in terms of their beliefs).



This is where we ask questions to help people to “see” for themselves (without directly telling them they are wrong) some of the discrepancies in their beliefs. Our goal is to help them question whether their beliefs are a strong enough foundation to build their life on.

Throw light on their beliefs.

Ask questions that **clarify beliefs**.

What do you mean by...?

Examples:

- 1) All religions teach basically the same things.
- 2) I’m not really religious.
- 3) God is a moral monster.
- 5) I am an Atheist.

Remember that when we clarify beliefs we are using the boomerang principle!

* *Jesus used the boomerang principle (Luke 20:2-4)*

Note: If people perceive that our goal is to have them help us better understand their beliefs rather than just prove they are wrong, they are more likely to have a more positive response to our probing questions.

Expose gaps (in their beliefs) by surfacing uncertainty.

This is where we ask questions to help people to "see" for themselves (without us directly telling them they are wrong) some of the discrepancies in their beliefs.(To surface the truth themselves) Our goal is to help them question whether their beliefs are a strong enough foundation to build their lives on.

Ask probing questions to get them **to explore their beliefs**.

I am curious to know

- *What helps you cope with difficult times?*
- *Do you think our Creator meant for us to experience life in a better way than we are currently experiencing?*
- *Do you think all religions basically teach the same thing?*
- *Have you come to any conclusions about Jesus Christ?*
- *Do you know the difference between Christianity and all the other religions in the world?*

Would you agree.....?

...that there is more evidence for intelligent design of the universe now than say 20 – 30 years ago?

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Have you ever considered.....?

...the possibility that Jesus was different than every other religious leader that ever lived?

Did you know.....?

...that there are **four facts that even many non-believers agree with that strongly suggests that Jesus was who he claimed to be?**

1. That he died by crucifixion. 2. That he was buried in a tomb that is now empty. 3. That something happened to convince a large number of disciples that he had resurrected from the dead. 4. That the disciples were willing to die for the belief that Jesus appeared to them.

...that the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to me as a Christian? (Rom. 8:11)

...that God can do miraculous things in our lives?

How is it possible.....?

...for all religions to be the same when some of them contradict each other's key beliefs?

...for there to be meaning and purpose in our lives and at the same time believe that there is no God?

...for human life to be really valuable yet believe that life is just a random by-product of nature?

...to believe that there is no God and yet believe in such non-material things as truth and love?

...for the bible to be so corrupt that we have no clear picture of what Jesus said and did nor understand the implications that this has for our lives?

“A person can close his ears to facts he does not want to hear, but if a pointed question causes him to form the answer in his own mind, he cannot escape the conclusion—because it's a conclusion that he reached himself.” -- David Reed, *Jehovah's Witnesses Answered Verse by Verse*, p. 113

Navigate in our conversations with others using the 3 D's.

Ask questions in a way that:

surfaces their **DOUBT** (uncertainties).

minimizes their **DEFENSIVENESS**.

creates a **DESIRE** to want hear more.

We can use the **3 D's** to uncover a person's worldview.

How do we know what questions to ask someone to help them take a step to the Cross?

- Nick Pollard: “if I am to help people who are not interested in looking at Jesus because they are quite

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happy with what they believe, I must first set about understanding what it is they believe. I must do everything I can to understand their worldview. Only then will I know what kind of questions to raise with them.” (*Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult*)

How to build a bridge to the Gospel using “The Five Planks”

For those who especially do not see themselves as sinners...and so have difficulty seeing the need for a Savior.

OPENER: Transitioning to Deeper Questions

Possible transition questions:

- Do you ever get the feeling that our Creator meant for us to experience life in a better way than we are experiencing now?
- Can I explain to you more clearly what Christians believe and how those beliefs provide the kind of hope that some are looking for?

PLANK ONE: I am accountable to someone for my actions.

GOAL: Help non-believers surface the truth that we are accountable to our Creator in some way (Romans 14:12).

Would you agree that we are accountable to someone for our actions?

- We are accountable to our parents as children.
- We are accountable to our teachers in school.
- We are accountable to our boss.
- We are accountable to our government.
- We are accountable to take care of our elderly parents.
- We hope there is some kind of accountability in the afterlife for the crimes of people like Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden and ISIS!
- Now if you and I were created and understand the value of accountability, shouldn't we expect to be accountable in some way to our Creator as well?

PLANK TWO: I don't measure up.

GOAL: Help non-believers surface the truth that our problem is not just that we cannot measure up to God's standards according to the Bible (Isaiah 64:6; Matt. 5:48; Jas. 2:10). Our own experience teaches us also that sometimes we can't even measure up to our own standards.

For example, it bothers me that I am not a better _____ to my (children/brother/sister) or a better _____ to my spouse (parents).

- Now many of us feel this sense of alienation because of this separation from our Creator, but some of us may try to bring about greater reconciliation by doing good things to make up for our shortcomings.

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- The problem is that no matter how much good we do...it is still not going to make a difference. Let me explain what I mean by this by giving an illustration.

Illustration: Suppose you have done something to hurt your spouse, significant other, or good friend deeply. How can I reconcile with them? Can I do something very nice and sacrificial for their parents that will bring about a restored relationship? If not why would we think that by doing good things for others that somehow that will help us in our relationship with our Creator?

PLANK THREE: I am a sinner.

GOAL: Help non-believers surface the truth that we are sinners (Romans 3:23).

- We know that people like Mother Teresa and Gandhi did some good things in their life. But we know others who did some real evil things.
- But I'll be honest with you...it's not just the evil in other people that bothers me. The evil in my own life bothers me as well.
- In fact, you don't have to look in the Bible to see what God says about me...just ask my _____ (spouse, parent, best friend).
- I've noticed it's easy in my own life to minimize the consequences for my poor choices.
- The fact is I don't see sin the way God sees it.
- Sometimes our actions have greater consequences than we think!

Water and sewage illustration: If I place 3 glasses of clean water in front of you; in the 1st one put one drop of raw sewage, in the 2nd one I put 2 drops of raw sewage, and in the 3rd one I put 3, which one do you think you would drink?

- Do you see how something can seem so small but in reality still have a huge impact? That's how we look at our sins, we see it as small but unfortunately to God it has a huge impact.
- Would you agree that our sins could cause a bigger barrier than we think?
- Have you ever done something that you hope no one will ever find out about?
- The Bible teaches that our rebellion against God has caused a separation between God and us. (Rom. 6:23)
- Now if our sins have to be judged, and we are not capable of changing our situation, what can we do?

Answer: We need to turn to an outside source (This then allows us to focus on Jesus)

PLANK FOUR: I need help from an outside source.

GOAL: Help non-believers surface the truth that we need an outside source for help to deal with the sin in our own life. (Romans 7:19, 24; Matt. 5:48; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)

- Why do you use a clean cloth to clean a dirty table?

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- Would you agree that a dirty thing cannot clean itself?
- Would you agree that the only person who can clean away our sins must be perfectly clean himself?
- Did you know that Jesus was the only person in history who claimed to be able to forgive sins and at the same time lived a sinless life Himself?

PLANK FIVE: I need what only Jesus can give.

GOAL: Help non-believer surface the truth that there is no one like Jesus. (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5)

- Not only was Jesus unique in living a sinless life, he also gave evidence that He had power over death. Do you know how he did this?

Answer: By rising from the dead

Do you know any other person in history like Jesus who died, and came back to life and gave sufficient evidence as to what is on the other side?

Do you know why it is so important for Christians that Jesus actually rose from the dead? (Rom. 8:11)

Answer:

Because that same power that rose Jesus from the dead is available for me to live a transformed life!

Because of Jesus' power in my life, I can be a better _____ to my (children/brother/sister) and a better _____ to my spouse (parents).

If I have a huge debt which I am unable to pay and my creditor says "don't pay it. I'll give up my claim...I forgive your debt." I got it for free, but is it free for my creditor?

Would you agree that the one who forgives pays the cost?

So when God forgives who pays the cost?

Did God pay the cost for us for the forgiveness of our sins?

Did you know that Jesus paid that cost for our sins when he died on the cross!

*** Invite them to take a step of faith and trust in Christ!**

I commit on this day to seek and develop pre-evangelistic relationships with the following three people:

Conversational Evangelism in a Nutshell

We want to LISTEN to them, LEARN their stories, and HEAR the gaps (sour notes) in their beliefs. We can then help them illuminate these gaps by ASKING QUESTIONS that will "CLARIFY" their BELIEFS and "SURFACE" UNCERTAINTY. Then we want to UNCOVER the REAL BARRIERS that keep them from Christ and BUILD A BRIDGE to help them take one step closer to Jesus Christ each day (1 Corinthians 3:6).