



Spiritual Conversations

Effective evangelism begins with, or at least is greatly enhanced by, Christians having spiritual conversations with those who are lost. People rarely walk up to us and say, “I want to have a spiritual conversation with you”; but having spiritual conversations is not as difficult as we tend to make it. Engaging in spiritual conversation means speaking a word for Jesus, counting blessings, asking thought-provoking questions, and—as opportunities arise—inviting someone to have a Bible study.

BE A GOOD LISTENER

Effective soul-winners listen carefully for every opportunity to speak a word for Jesus. Not everyone who hears truly listens. A good listener shows heartfelt interest. He does not pretend to listen while planning his next remark. Instead, his attention is riveted on the person who is speaking. A good listener is patient and courteous; he does not constantly interrupt or finish another’s sentences.

Good listeners will hear crucial statements about past religious experiences or stereotypes of Christianity. As you listen, you may learn what your friend or loved one believes about the Bible. Does he ever study the Bible? Does he attend church services? Is something missing in his life? Is he trusting in his own goodness to provide a proper relationship with God? Paul gave practical instructions along this line in Colossians 4:5, 6, when he said,

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

In order to be able to speak and respond appropriately, you need to be a good listener.

ASK QUESTIONS

General Questions

As you seek to have spiritual conversations, ask questions. Everyone is an expert in three areas: his job, his family, and his background. Questions about such areas of a person’s life demonstrate concern for that person as an individual and also allow you to know his life’s context.¹ Ask questions like “Would you like to tell me about your family?” and “What do you enjoy doing?” As you listen, follow up on any way to turn a conversation to spiritual matters.

Open Questions²

Asking open questions will also help you in having spiritual conversations. Open questions are questions that start with words like “which,” “why,” “how,” “when,” “what,” and “where.” They are particularly effective because they create interest, encourage feedback, and draw out a person’s true feelings. Open questions help soul-winners to avoid arguments by helping them to discover what someone is really asking or saying. For example, an elderly gentleman said to me, “The church of Christ doesn’t use musical instruments, does it?” Instead of answering defensively, I asked, “Why do you ask

¹R. Larry Moyers, *How To Book on Personal Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998), 21–22.

²I am indebted to Fishers of Men, 24 West 150 75th Street, Naperville, IL 60565, for teaching me the use and benefits of open questions. I recommend their twelve-week training course without reservation.

that question?" He graciously explained that he liked a cappella singing "because you can actually hear the words." As a result of asking an open question and listening, I was granted an open door to invite him to a gospel meeting, where there would be powerful, biblical preaching as well as beautiful a cappella singing.

One woman asked me, "Do you believe that only members of the church of Christ are going to heaven?" This remark is often a hostile question, asked in an attempt to start an argument. Beware of such questions. As James 1:19 encourages, "be quick to hear, slow to speak." In this case, I responded, "Why did you ask that question?" She answered, "I am thinking about joining the Muslims. They seem to be the only religious group willing to say that something is definitely right or wrong." A study was set; and in the course of the study, an appropriate and biblical answer was given to her question. That woman is now a faithful Christian. Knowing *why* a question is being asked is always helpful.

No single approach or set of questions will work in every situation. People are different. If you are speaking to a rice farmer whose crop desperately needs rain, you will approach the subject of God differently than if you are talking to a mother of three children whose husband has left her. Of course, there is only one message (the gospel), but there is more than one method for introducing the gospel.

Let others lead the way into spiritual conversations. For example, someone's comment about a beautiful sunset would allow you to say, "Why do you suppose God created such a beautiful world?" If someone expresses unhappiness with a job, you could ask, "Why do you think so many people seem unhappy with their lives?" Other situations could provide the opportunity to say, "A lot of people seem worried today. What do you think worries most people?"

You could ask at an opportune moment, "If there is only one God and one Bible, why do you think so many different churches exist?" You might also inquire, "What religious topics interest you?" The options are endless.

SET UP BIBLE STUDIES

Often, open questions lead to opportunities to conduct Bible studies. Once I was traveling with a local preacher, and we stopped for fuel.

One of the employees at the gas station mentioned that she was getting married soon and wondered about using the church building for the wedding. She told the preacher that she really wanted a good marriage. Perceiving that God was opening a door, he asked about her family background and her church home.

At this point, he could have invited her to the gospel meeting (which he did). He could also have added her name to a prayer list or invited her to a Bible class that would encourage a strong marriage. He might have shared a tract with her or perhaps suggested that she borrow a book on marriage from the church library. Any of these actions would have been good and appropriate. As he asked her some additional questions, he learned that she was concerned about the Day of Judgment. A study was scheduled so she could see what the Bible says about being ready for judgment, and two weeks later she and her fiancé were baptized into Christ.

When you have spiritual conversations, you will be amazed by the opportunities that God will provide. You will discover that a real spiritual hunger exists in our world today. You will also find seekers of truth; perhaps God has placed you in their lives to help them.

Those who are seeking God do not carry signs saying, "I'm ready to have a Bible study" or "I want to talk about God." However, as you listen and ask questions, you will notice subtle signs of spiritual interest. When people express dissatisfaction with their direction in life, mention needs, express regret over past mistakes, or ask for your opinion on a moral issue, they are giving a clear signal. God is opening a door.

Experience is essential. The way to get experience is to start talking with others and you will be taught how to turn your conversations toward spiritual matters.

CONCLUSION

Enjoy your conversations, pray for opportunities, and watch your comfort level grow as you practice having spiritual conversations. The ultimate goal of having a spiritual conversation is to schedule a Bible study. If God opens the door, walk confidently through it. Ask questions, listen, be sincere, and respond appropriately. Trust God for the results. Remember, you are always a success when you try! ❖