

Engage 201 - Spiritual Conversations

Think back to the last time you heard that a friend of yours had started a new relationship. How did you hear about it? Did a leaflet come under the door? Did someone invite you to hear a presentation about it? Did your friend lend you a book that recounted the new couple's first kiss? Or did the news reach your ears because someone—even the friend in question—told you?

The message about Jesus is good news, and like all good news, it is most naturally and effectively shared in interpersonal conversations. As with any such communication, it involves sharing, asking questions of the other person, and listening to their thoughts and perspectives.

Conversational evangelism isn't a recent idea dreamed up by people who don't like preaching. It was Jesus' preferred approach. **Reading over Jesus' interactions with people in the gospels can provide you with inspiration and direction for your own conversational evangelism.** In John 4, for example, Jesus has an interesting encounter. The short version is this:

Jesus is walking through Samaria, and stops to sit down. A woman approaches him and he asks her for a drink. They talk and he asks her to go and find her husband. She replies that she has been in a string of broken relationships and her current man is not her husband. She then asks Jesus a question about the temple, and he tells her people can worship God anywhere. She asks him about the Messiah, and he says that he is the Christ. She runs off and tells her whole village to come and meet Jesus.

It's a simple and famous story. It's also a conversation that provides a great model for you to use too—one with the primary goal to help people see Jesus more clearly and respond to him.

Here are six things Jesus does with the Samaritan woman and ways you can emulate their interaction:

1. Start Conversations with Anyone

The person Jesus talks with in John 4 is a Samaritan – the hated enemy of the Jews. She is also a woman, which means that a Jewish man would never normally speak with her alone. However, Jesus is happy to initiate conversation with her as soon as she walks into his presence.

TRY STARTING:

Everyone has good friends with whom they naturally spend their time. But there are so many other people to interact with: in lectures, dorms, the cafeteria, the supermarket, the coffee shop, or even at the bar. **Why not see every person you meet as a potential conversation partner?**

2. Adjust Your Life Patterns to Make Conversations Possible

Jesus met the woman while he was on a journey, but he could have made the trip in a way that avoided Samaria. Instead, he intentionally takes a route into enemy territory so that he can connect with people who need him.

TRY ADJUSTING:

Join a sports club, start going to a new café every week, shop at a different store, or sit next to someone new in your lectures. **If you're not regularly getting to talk to people who need Jesus, make some small changes, so that you can meet new people.**

You might also want to consider whether you are spending too much time in Christian meetings. **Maybe trade one or two chapter or church events for the opportunity to do things you enjoy with people who don't yet know Jesus.**

3. Chat about Everyday Life

Jesus begins by asking the woman for a drink of water. He doesn't leap in and say, "Hey, let me tell you about the Messiah—he's me!" He knows that **any serious and authentic conversation is just a hair's breadth away from the gospel.**

TRY CHATTING:

Tell them a story about your day. Ask them how their week has been, what they've enjoyed eating, reading, or watching lately. Discuss sports scores. **Start light and see where the conversation goes.** The worst that can happen is you have an interesting chat.

4. Ask Questions

Jesus suggests that the woman go and find her husband. He could have told her she was using romantic relationships as part of a futile search for meaning. Instead, he asks a razor-sharp question that gets to the heart of who she is as a person.

TRY ASKING:

Don't think of yourself as the expert with all the answers. Until you've asked your conversation partner some questions, you may not even know quite how to relate the gospel to their lives. You can read more about asking good questions in *Why You Should Ask More Questions in Spiritual Conversations*.

5. Listen to Questions, Then Answer the Question *Behind* the Questions

The woman wants to know whether the Jewish temple or the Samaritan temple is the one true place of worship. Jesus isn't interested in debating the finer points of historical theology unless they are relevant. He knows she is asking him to state whether Jews or Samaritans are following one true religion. Instead, Jesus points her beyond religious places and toward relationship with himself.

TRY LISTENING:

Try not to get caught up in arguments, but get to the core of their concerns. For example: A question about the biblical teaching on homosexuality is not necessarily an invitation to explain biblical sexual ethics. The underlying question may be something else like "Am I welcome in your Christian community?" or "Do you look down on me?" **A good way to discern the underlying question is to say, "Why do you ask?" or "Good question, what do you think?"** and then listen to what they say.

6. Share Jesus

The pinnacle of Jesus' conversation with the woman comes when he tells her that he is the Messiah. She is so amazed by this that she runs off and brings the whole village to come and meet him for themselves.

TRY SHARING:

A helpful question to ask yourself (and the Holy Spirit) is "How is Jesus good news for this person?" **Is there a story about Jesus or an aspect of his atonement that is relevant to what you are discussing? Or is there a part of your personal testimony that would be helpful?** Share it and ask them what they think.

If people seem receptive, then it's also good to **give them the opportunity to respond to Jesus**. Maybe ask them if they would be interested in welcoming Jesus into their own lives. If they say yes, find a quiet corner and pray together.

Jesus never had the same conversation twice, so there is no real formula for sharing our faith any more than there is for telling people about new romantic relationships. But we can draw inspiration from Jesus' interactions with people.