

AMEN *MINISTRY*

Sharing Jesus in Your Everyday Conversations



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Introduction

Your Ministry of Conversation



Love your neighbor as yourself.

- Jesus

One Conversation can change a life.

Mark was walking to the parking lot from Sears when he noticed an older man sitting alone on a bench with his face in his hands. Moved by concern, Mark stopped and asked, "Is everything okay?"

"What?" asked the man somewhat startled by Mark's voice.

"I was wondering if everything was okay?" he repeated, taking a seat next to him.

"Oh, I don't know," the man replied, not looking at Mark. "I came to the mall to get away from my wife for a few minutes and now I can't remember where I parked."

“So you needed a vacation from your wife,” smiled Mark, “and can’t find the car, is that it?”

“You don’t know what it’s like being married to the same woman for forty-seven years,” he sighed. “And feeling like you don’t know her anymore”

“What’s that like?” asked Mark.

With that invitation, he talked about his wife’s physical ailments and memory loss, and shared about a close friend’s recent death. The older man sighed a second time and added, “Life seems to give you more than you can handle some days.”

Mark nodded his head, paused, and then asked, “Can I pray for you, right now?”

“Well, I guess so.”

Mark said a brief prayer, just a few seconds really. After that they talked a little more. In the middle of one of his own sentences, the man asked Mark, “Are you religious?”

“No, not really,” smiled Mark. “I’m a follower of Jesus.”

Mark gave the man his cell number and invited him to call if he ever wanted to talk again.

Smiling to Mark he whispered, “Maybe I will.”

Then Mark said, “Now, how about you and I go look for your car.”

“You might need to pray again,” laughed the older man.

“Maybe I will,” laughed Mark with a wink and a smile. With that the two men walked into the late afternoon sun together.

Two men of different ages and different lives who would become friends in the year that followed.

YOUR MINISTRY OF CONVERSATION

Jesus tells us that people will know we are his disciples by the love we show one another. Most of us will never pastor a church, lead a worship service, go on a foreign missions trip, or even lead a Bible Study. But as followers of Jesus, we are all called to share the

love of Jesus with others. And the love we share is rarely some heroic work of sacrifice or monumental act of surrender.

Instead, the love we share can be demonstrated everyday in the way we acknowledge and greet one another, the questions we ask, the manner in which we listen and respond, the words of encouragement we speak, the appreciation we convey, and the prayers we share, even with a stranger on a bench.

These brief conversations sprinkled throughout the day are opportunities to bless others, and ultimately, to show the love of Jesus to everyone we come into contact with everyday of our lives. This is your ministry of conversation.

For the most part, the ministry of Jesus took the form of ordinary conversation---the act of speaking and listening to others for a brief period of time. No long formal speeches. No panel discussions. No weekend seminars. Instead, Jesus, the Creator of the universe, speaking and listening to people from all walks of life, in everyday settings, at all times of the day and night. Yet from the ordinary came the extraordinary.

Brief conversations, all with an eternal destination. Conversations with a fisherman, a tax collector, a blind man, a Samaritan woman, a prostitute, a Pharisee, a Roman centurion, a rich man, and a dying thief on a cross. A question here to open a mind. A statement there to make a point. One parable here to open the eyes. Another story there to unlock a heart. Conversations of a minute or two that blessed others rather than cursed. Healed rather than hurt. Enlarged rather than diminished. Conversations that all led to the Kingdom of Heaven.

CONVERSATIONS AS DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

We are all given the opportunity to speak and listen to all kinds of people everyday of our lives. Our daily conversations with loved ones, friends, acquaintances, and strangers are more than just occasions to exchange greetings and pleasantries---they can be opportunities, divine opportunities to show the love of Jesus.

You can view every conversation you have during your day as a divine appointment to express in some way the love of Jesus.

You have the power to guide and redirect just about any topic of conversation back to Jesus if you see the interaction as a divine appointment from God.

Whether at home, work, school, in the neighborhood, or at the corner mini-mart, our conversations can minister the love of Jesus to others. This is the method Jesus used during His ministry on earth. It can also be yours. *Your ministry of conversation.*

Your life as a Christian is lived out in the moment to moment, the day to day. Our Christian walk, to a large extent, is expressed in our interactions with others everyday.

Here are four simple communication steps that will invite Jesus into every conversation you have for the remainder of your life. Those four steps can be summarized by the acronym **A.M.E.N.**

Asking

Mirroring

Encouraging

Nurturing

There are many communication skills required for good interactions, but these four skills are designed to bring the love of Jesus into your daily conversations.

Let's begin our training right now... **AMEN?**

1

Asking Others

“How’s your spirit?”



*What would you have me do?
- Jesus*

Questions are the catalyst of conversation.

The first step (the A) in your AMEN Ministry of Conversation is to invite someone into conversation by **Asking** questions. The quality of every conversation is determined by the questions that are asked. Many conversations never get off the ground or if they do, they quickly die due to lack of questions. Without questions, the conversation can quickly deteriorate into a dreary monologue or a struggle of warring egos fighting for center stage.

ASKING QUESTIONS---THE CATALYST OF CONVERSATIONS

Questions are the lifeblood to any conversation. They demonstrate an interest in the other person. They invite others into the dance of dialogue. They can guide, redirect, and deepen the course of the conversation. They can also serve to stimulate, encourage, and sustain a timid or reluctant speaker. The ability and willingness to ask questions separates those who are effective conversationalists and those who are not. That's how we were created.

THREE BASIC TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are three types of questions that you will need to familiarize yourself with as you prepare for your ministry of conversation. They are closed, open, and probing questions. Let's take a look at each question.

Closed Questions. Closed questions are questions that require very limited responses from the person answering the question. The response is usually one or two words. "Yes" or "No" responses are very common answers to closed questions. By the nature of a closed question, the speaker is not encouraged to develop an answer that is longer than a few words. Sometimes a brief sentence at most. Here are some examples of closed questions:

Are you going to the store?

Do you work at Safeway?

When were you born?

Is red your favorite color?

Did you go to college?

Are you married?

Did you notice how each one of these closed questions could be answered in one or two words? So, avoid using closed questions in conversations. Good conversation demands another kind of question that doesn't limit the speaker to short answers. You need to ask more open questions during conversation.

Open Questions. An open question requires a developed answer from the speaker. Open questions are the What, Why, and How kinds of questions that asks for much more developed responses from the speaker. When asked open questions, the speaker is given greater latitude in his or her responses, so they are freer to go into greater depth than when limited by closed questions. Here are the same ten topics from the previous section restated as open questions:

Why are you going to the store?

What do you enjoy about working at Safeway?

How was your birth different from your siblings?

Why is red your favorite color?

What did you like and dislike about college?

How has marriage changed you?

Did you notice how these open questions were different from the closed questions in the previous list, even though they involved the exact same topics?

The power of open questions to encourage, promote, and stimulate more developed answers is one of the most powerful skills in your ministry of conversation. Open questions will enable you to get the other person to open up more than any other single conversational skill.

Probing Questions. Probing questions are specific questions directly related to the response of the speaker. Probing questions ask for additional information that help the speaker further explain, describe, and develop his ideas, thoughts, and feelings. They act to draw the speaker out, to have them expand their thinking, and to deepen their explorations of what it is they're discussing. By the use of probing questions, you will actually help the speaker discover more about himself.

Probing questions can take the form of either open or closed questions. Keep in mind that the open form of probing questions will guide the speaker to more developed, detailed responses to your inquiries. Observe how Jennifer, from the campus Christian club uses probing questions to help Dave explore his thoughts and feelings about his church Bible study.

Jennifer: “How are you doing, Dave?” (open)

Dave: “Okay.”

J: “**How**’s that Bible study of yours going at your church?” (open probing)

D: “I wish I hadn’t started the Bible study.”

J: “**Why**?” (open probing)

D: “Well, I thought it’d be really successful by now. But it’s been sort of a disappointment.”

J: “**What** do you mean ‘successful?’” (open probing)

D: “I thought we’d have 10 or 15 guys by now. It’s been 12 weeks and we still have just four guys.”

J: “The numbers might not be what you wanted, but **how** are the guys growing in the Lord?” (open probing)

D: “Well, Ted and Freddie are new Christians. They’re reading the Bible and praying everyday. And Ted’s even taught two times.

J: “Praise God! **How**’d that make you feel?” (open probing)

D: “I was proud of him. He did a really good job. I guess there are some neat things that God’s doing with Ted and the whole group.”

J: “**What** other things has the Lord done with your group?” (open probing)

D: “You know, I guess the Lord has been faithful. Freddie is teaching next week thanks to Ted’s encouragement and Paul started a Bible study at his work three weeks ago. And I’m talking to my dad about our studies and he seems to be listening. I think I told you, my dad’s not a Christian. I guess our Bible study has been fairly successful.”

J: “I think the Lord is blessing your efforts, Dave!”

D: “Hey, thanks for talking, Jennifer. I appreciated it.”

J: “My pleasure.”

Did you notice how Jennifer’s six probing questions encouraged Dave to talk, explore, and eventually draw a different conclusion on the success of his Bible study? Did you see how Jennifer didn’t judge, evaluate, or give advice, but simply asked for additional

information with her probing questions? What do you think would have happened to their discussion had Jennifer evaluated Dave's initial statement of discouragement like this?

Dave: "I wish I hadn't started the Bible study."

Jennifer: "You're such an immature cry baby, Dave. Just grow up and take responsibility for once in your life."

Her conversation with Dave would have probably been much different had she used those words. In fact, I doubt if Dave would have even stuck around to respond to Jennifer's criticism. But thank the Lord she probed with open questions. By asking questions, rather than evaluating or criticizing, Jennifer was showing the love of Jesus in her ministry of conversation.

QUESTIONS THAT SHAPE YOUR CONVERSATION

Now that we've learned to use closed, open, and probing questions, let's look at specific questions that can help you initiate, develop, and end a conversation.

Questions That Initiate Conversations. Most of your interactions with the strangers you pass on the street, in the mall, or at the beach will be a simple smile, nod of the head, and a friendly "Good morning" or "Hello!" A friendly greeting of acknowledgement, then you pass each another, perhaps never to see their face again. And that's how it should be. It has to be. You can't go around attempting to initiate a conversation with every person you see during your day. You have a life to live, work to do, and people to see.

But there are those times when you're standing in a slow line at Costco, waiting at a bus stop, or sitting next to a stranger at a church dinner when you have a few moments or minutes to show the love of Jesus. Who knows, this might be one of those divine appointments, scheduled by the Creator of the universe, just for your ministry of conversation.

In those cases, there are some helpful questions you can use to acknowledge and maybe even initiate a conversation with any person, even strangers. You can ask

questions about the environment, the occasion, and the person themselves. Here are some examples:

Environment:

How have you been liking the weather we've been having?

What classes are you taking here at the college?

What do you think of this beautiful landscape?

Occasion:

Are you a friend of the bride or groom?

What workshops are you going to at this conference?

How long have you been coming to these concerts?

Person:

That's a beautiful coat. What kind of material is it made of?

I've noticed you at church before. How long have you been attending?

I see you drive a Ford. How do you like those trucks?

I realize that these questions won't win any awards for originality, depth, or spiritual insight, but they are a beginning. There are two things that are important to remember when you attempt to initiate a conversation with a stranger.

First, be friendly. Most of communication is nonverbal in nature. Initially, in any conversation, your smile, warmth, and sincerity are more welcoming than the actual words you speak. I love what St. Francis of Assisi said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel, *using words if necessary.*" So be friendly, showing the love of Jesus.

Secondly, let the Holy Spirit have His way. Whether the person responds to your initial gesture of friendliness is none of your business. You are called to be loving, not a salesman trying to close a deal with high pressure tactics. So offer an initial friendly question or two, and if the person responds and engages in conversation, great! Another opportunity to be a blessing!

If the person is unwilling to talk or is cool towards you, let it go. The Lord is sovereign. If it's a divine appointment, you were meant to have a conversation, to be a blessing to this person. Even if the conversation is for just a minute or two. A blessing is what you were intended to be. And if the Lord did not intend for it to be a divine appointment, it won't be. The Holy Spirit touches people's hearts, not you. All you can do is welcome others with the love of Jesus that lives within you and the Holy Spirit will open doors and close doors.

And if the person isn't receptive, is rude, or even rejects your invitation to talk, respond in love. Leave the person with "Have a nice day" or even "God bless you." Perhaps the greater testimony in your ministry of conversation is the manner in which you respond to those who reject your welcome.

Don't get your feelings hurt. Don't feel rejected. You're doing what you're called to do and that's to show the love of Jesus to everyone with whom you come into contact. Remember, you're going to heaven! Be a witness to that joy with others!

Questions That Deepen Conversations. If the person responds to your opening question or two, enjoy the conversation! God is good! From here on out, your ability and willingness to ask open, probing questions will determine how successful you are in developing and deepening the conversation.

Here's another thing to always keep in mind. The purpose of your ministry of conversation is not to have the person accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior every time you enter into a conversation. Your purpose is to be a blessing, showing the love of Jesus by the words you use, by the things you say.

Your ministry of conversation is to be God's blessing in your daily conversation with others. And one of the ways you can be a blessing is with open and probing questions. Here are a list of open, closed, and probing questions that will help you develop any conversation:

Where did you grow up?

What was your family of like?

What did you like / dislike about growing up?

How would you describe your parent's relationship?

What did you like / dislike about your early adult years?

Who shaped your personality / character?

What experiences shaped your personality / character?

Who made a positive difference in your formative years?

What strong beliefs do you hold?

What are your spiritual beliefs?

How have you changed?

What do you like / appreciate about yourself?

What gifts / skills do you have?

How are you doing?

How's your spirit?

These are just a few questions you might find helpful in your ministry of conversation. I'm sure these and other questions you'll think of will help you in showing the love of Jesus.

Questions That Close Conversations. Whether a conversation lasts one minute or one hour, it eventually comes to an end. Here are some specific questions that might be helpful in ending a conversation.

I have about five more minutes to talk, is that okay with you?

Do you have anything more to add to what you've said?

Have we covered everything we needed to talk about?

There might be times when the person you're speaking with isn't skilled enough to interpret your hints at ending the conversation or doesn't want to end your time together. In that case, you can choose to be more direct. Notice that these are statements not questions.

Well, it's been good talking with you, but I need to go now.

I need to wrap things up. I have things to do at home.

I have to pick my kids up so we need to bring this to a close.

By using a statement, rather than a question, you will most likely end the conversation with even the most stubborn individual.

Questions That Invite Future Conversations. You might want to invite the person for future conversation. In the case of loved ones, friends, or acquaintances, you don't always have the luxury of saying good-bye forever and riding off into the sunset. But in either case, here are some questions that welcome future conversation:

I've enjoyed our time together. Would you like to get together again?

Would you like to meet for coffee sometime?

Can I invite you to lunch and we can talk again?

Let's do this again, shall we?

However you choose to welcome future conversation, remember to smile, be sincere, and be of good cheer!

There are no right or perfect questions. So try not to get too concerned or worried about asking just the right questions when you're talking with others. The mere fact that you're asking questions, rather than talking about yourself, will be enough to demonstrate your interest in the other person. Most people want to talk, to be listened to, and to be understood. Give them that opportunity by asking questions of them. It's the secret to good conversation and the first step in blessing them with the love of Jesus that lives within you.

This is your ministry of conversation.

PREPARING FOR YOUR MINISTRY OF CONVERSATION

Exercise 1.1 Identifying different types of questions.

Let's see how good you are at identifying questions. Read the following questions and identify each one by writing C=closed, O=open, P=probing, and L=loaded. The answers are found at the end of Exercise 3.3

- ___ 1. Do you want to talk?
- ___ 2. What would you like to talk about?
- ___ 3. So, what happened next?
- ___ 4. Are you stupid or what?
- ___ 5. What is your favorite color?
- ___ 6. Why do you get along so well with others?
- ___ 7. How can I improve my prayer life?

Exercise 1.2 Only asking questions.

Here's a great exercise on getting you experienced at asking questions. You'll need a partner for this drill. You and your partner will alternate asking questions of each other for a period of three minutes. No answering or responding to the questions. Just asking one question after another, back and forth with one another. The point is not to get answers, but rather to ask open questions of one another. Try it for three minutes. Take a break and try this exercise a second time. What was the experience like? What did you learn? How might this exercise help you in your ministry of conversation?

Exercise 1.3 24 Hours in the real world.

For the next 24 hours, you are to make a conscious effort to ask each person you have a conversation with at least three open questions during the first few minutes of conversation. You can ask one open question, followed by two probing questions. Don't tell the other person what you're doing. Just make a real effort to ask three open questions during the first few minutes of your conversation. Put them first and you

second. What was that like? Did the other person notice what you were doing? What did you learn?

Here are the answers to Exercise 1.1: 1.C, 2.O, 3.P, 4.L, 5.C, 6.O, 7.O

How'd you do?

Fujishin

2

Mirroring Others

“Are you saying...?”



He who has ears to hear let him hear.
- Jesus

Mirroring is the proof that you understand others in conversation.

Now that you've invited someone into conversation by asking questions, the second step (the M) in your AMEN Ministry of Conversation is **Mirroring** the content of what they're sharing. So remember, when we listen to others, we should be more like mirrors rather than judges. We should reflect rather than evaluate what is being shared.

Once we've invited someone into conversation by asking questions, the biggest mistake we can make is to immediately judge the content of what the speaker is saying.

Evaluation is the most common killer of conversation. Once we've been given negative judgment or advice during a conversation, we tend to become more defensive, withdrawn, or reluctant to continue talking to that person.

We can judge others by evaluating the rightness or wrongness of their statements. We judge others by responding with advice or instruction. We judge others by immediately telling our own story before the speaker has completed their story. We judge others by rescuing them, taking over, or intervening on their behalf. There are numerous ways we judge the content of what others say often our evaluation ends the conversation.

LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING---MIRRORING.

Instead of judging what others say, you can listen for understanding. You can listen to discover what the speaker is saying or feelings, rather than judge or evaluate the speaker's words.

An easy way to remember to listen for understanding is to think of a mirror.

Mirroring means to restate in your own words what you heard the speaker say. This simple, yet effective paraphrasing technique provides the most powerful way to prove understanding in any conversation. The simplest mirroring questions can begin with "Are you saying...?" or "Do you mean...?"

Mirroring is the process in which the listener paraphrases what the speaker has said to the satisfaction of the speaker. In the listener's own words, the message is mirrored or paraphrased back to the speaker for approval of its correctness.

And it also gives the speaker the opportunity to confirm the listener's interpretations or to restate the message again if it was inaccurately received. True communication requires the active participation of the listener, as well as the speaker.

There are four basic steps involved in the mirroring or paraphrasing process. By following these four simple steps in your conversations with others, you will have mastered one of the fundamental skills of effective communication---listening for understanding.

Step 1: Speaker makes a **statement**.

Step 2: Listener **paraphrases** statement. ("Are you saying...? "Do you

mean...?” “You’re thinking...?” “You’re feeling...?”)

Step 3: Speaker **accepts paraphrase** (“Yes, that’s what I meant”) **Or**
Speaker **rejects paraphrase** (“No, that’s not what I meant”)

Step 4: **If rejected**, they repeat **steps 1,2,and 3** for clarification.
If accepted, **listener is free to express** his thought/feeling.

Here are two example of successful paraphrasing or mirroring:

Sherry: I don’t think I’m doing enough in church.

Tyler: **Are you saying** you want to be more active and involved?

Sherry: That’s exactly what I mean!

Sharon: I’m not feeling good about my grades this semester.

Jared: **Are you feeling** disappointed?

Sharon: Yeah, that’s how I’m feeling.

Did you notice the pattern in these two simple examples? The speaker makes a statement. The listener mirrors the statement back to the speaker. And finally, the speaker approves the mirroring. This is the basic pattern of listening for understanding or as it is often referred to as mirroring.

Now what happens if the listener’s mirroring isn’t accurate? Let’s take a look at these next two examples and notice how they negotiate a successful message exchange.

Kerry: I think I need to move closer to my sister.

Tina: **Are you thinking** you’d like to move to California where she lives?

Kerry: No, I mean that I need to phone her more often. Maybe even visit her the next time I’m going to the west coast for business.

Tina: **So you’re saying** that you’d like to stay in touch, maybe even visit her?

Kerry: That’s exactly what I’m saying.

Ted: I’m not interested in coming to the Bible study anymore.

Brad: **Are you saying** you’re not learning like you thought you would?

Ted: Oh, I'm learning a lot. I just don't think the guys are very friendly.

Brad: **Are you feeling** neglected by the men in the group?

Ted: Yeah, they don't talk to me before or after the study.

Did you notice in both examples how the listener's initial mirroring attempt was not what the speaker intended? The speaker then restated the original message in a different way. After the second statement, the listener again mirrored to get an interpretation that the speaker could agree with. This back and forth negotiation for meaning is the purpose of listening for understanding.

Your goal is not to judge, give advice, or rescue the speaker or what is being shared. Your goal in mirroring is to prove to the speaker that you understood what they're saying. It's not only important for the speaker to know that his message was accurately received, it's equally necessary that you, the listener, know that you're actually understanding what is being said.

It's amazing how often we go through an entire day of countless conversations and never once paraphrase or check out a vague, confusing, or misleading statement. So it shouldn't come as a big surprise when misunderstanding, confusion, and hurt feelings often punctuate our daily interactions with others.

By using this simple technique of mirroring or listening for understanding, a great deal of miscommunication can be avoided. More importantly, by proving that you, the listener, understands what is being shared, the speaker is receiving a blessing that not many people receive in the course of a day.,

The mere fact that you take the time and effort to welcome a person to talk and truly listen for understanding, rather than judge, give advice, or rescue is a blessing in and of itself. Don't overestimate the need that others have to be heard, to be listened to, and to be understood. It's difficult for a person to fully experience the acceptance, understanding, and love from a follower of Jesus without being listened to with understanding. This one accomplishment with someone you're talking with might be the purpose of your ministry of conversation for that day. Be a blessing, not a judge.

GUIDELINES FOR MIRRORING.

As you focus your attention on listening for understanding, here are a few suggestions that might help you be more effective in your ministry of conversation.

Use Your Own Words. The easiest way to listen for understanding is to simply repeat the exact same words back to the listener. The speaker says, “I think I’m not going to be around much longer.” And you mirror back, “Are you saying you’re not going to be around much longer?” But that’s not really making any attempt to show or prove understanding. Your mirroring needs to be in *your own words*, not in the speaker’s exact words. Let’s revisit our example without parroting the exact words and offer several possible paraphrases to give you an idea:

Bob: “I think I’m not going to be around much longer.”

Jill: “Are you saying you’ll be laid off from our company?”

“You’re fearing that you don’t have much longer to live?”

“You’re saying that you’re leaving work early today?”

Now, we’re only listening to one statement made by Bob taken from a much longer conversation. Jill’s three paraphrasing possibilities wouldn’t be so different from one another if we could see the entire conversation up to this point. But the important thing to remember is that each of the three paraphrases use Jill’s interpretation and words, not a parroting attempt to mimic only the speaker’s statement. Use your own words when you mirror.

Don’t Overuse Mirroring. Another common mistake is to overuse mirroring or paraphrasing in conversations. Most of the time it’s unnecessary to mirror the speaker’s statement. In fact, most of the statements made by a speaker are easily understood by you. And the purpose of much of the content of daily conversation is to catch up, for fun, to fill time, or to connect with one another, making paraphrasing unnecessary.

But there will come moments in any conversation when there is confusion in your mind about what’s being said, vague or misleading words are being used, strong feelings are being shared, conflict enters into the discussion, or you desire to prove to the speaker that you’re understanding important points they’re sharing .

Not every statement requires paraphrasing. Use your listening for understanding response sparingly. You don’t want to become tiresome, obnoxious, or boring by overdoing it. Focus on

being a blessing, not a curse.

Create A Safe Harbor In Your Conversations. There are very few people who can listen to another human being without wanting to interrupt, evaluate, or give advice. Once again, the focus of the listener is the self, not the other. Many listeners want to regain the spotlight of conversation, judge the comments of the speaker, or offer advice as to the right course of action that should be taken.

There's a storm of competition, evaluation, and advice that troubles the sea of most conversations. But in your ministry of conversation, you can be a safe harbor for people to come to enjoy shelter from the storm.

When you listen to others, refrain from evaluating, giving advice, or rescuing them too quickly. Give the speaker 30, 60, or even 90-seconds to speak. Very rarely does anyone get more than 5 or 10-seconds to share a thought or feeling before being interrupted by their listener. Don't be that kind of listener. Give them lots of room. Be spacious with your speakers. Be a listener where the speaker feels the freedom, the acceptance, and the grace to be themselves. To speak their mind. To share their heart.

A safe harbor is a rare experience in today's conversations. The storm of judgment, advice, and rescue comes upon us all too suddenly. Be a blessing to those you interact with. Listen for understanding. Listen with an open heart. Listen to discover new things about the people who the Lord brings into your life. Be a safe harbor for the ships at sea.

Jesus gave us two ears and one mouth so we might listen twice as much as we talk. Be a blessing with your ears. Listen for understanding.

This is *your ministry of conversation*.

PREPARING FOR MINISTRY

Exercise 2.1 Being Silent.

Listening to understand demands that you be silent and listen to another human being. Most of us, during the course of an everyday conversation, have a difficult remaining silent even for 5 to 10-seconds, so here's an exercise that will help you listen for longer periods of time. The

next time you're in a conversation, remain silent for periods of 30-seconds. No verbal interruptions of any kind. Just be silent and listen. Remember to smile. If the speaker asks you why you're so quiet, tell him or her that you're interested in what they're saying and didn't want to get in their way. How did your extended silences feel to you? Did your speaker notice a difference? What did they say? What did you learn about yourself?

Exercise 2.2 Using the Understanding Response (Mirroring).

For the next few days during your conversations with friends and acquaintances, make it a point to use your understanding response (mirroring) once every two or three minutes. Don't overdo your paraphrasing. Just two or three times during a five minute talk. Keep your mirroring simple. "Are you saying...?" "Do you mean...?" "You're feeling...?" "You're thinking...?" and "Am I understanding that you...?" How did that feel to you? Did you notice a difference in the conversation? Did your partner notice a change in your behavior? What did you learn about yourself?

Exercise 2.3 Listening To Feedback.

Ask three loved ones, friends, or co-workers to give you feedback on your listening behavior. Request that each person spend just five minutes giving you the strengths and weaknesses of your listening skills. What do you do well? What can you improve on? As each person shares their perceptions with you, remember to listen for understanding. Although you might feel the urge to defend yourself, debate, or give them advice on their listening, remain silent. Listen to their words. And paraphrase what they're saying to you. How did this feedback session go for you? What did they say? What truth did you hear? What can you improve upon? What did you learn about yourself?

3

Encouraging Others

“Can I pray for you, right now...?”



If two of you agree on earth
about anything they ask, it will be done for them
by my Father in heaven.
- Jesus

Praying for others brings the eternal into your conversations.

After you have asked some questions to invite someone into a conversation and you've mirrored them to prove your understanding, the third step (the E) in your AMEN Ministry of Conversation is to **Encourage**.

NOTICING OTHERS IN NEED

In your ministry of conversation, you are to be on the lookout for opportunities to encourage and serve the needs of others. Jesus told His followers that, “Whoever wants to

become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”

It is the immature Christian who fails to see beyond his own life, his own desires, and his own wants. It is the mature Christian who can move beyond the self and begin to see the needs of others. To notice the lonely in need of a listening ear. To notice the disheartened in need of cheering up. To notice the discouraged in need of reassurance. And to notice the hopeless and frightened in need of a prayer.

In the end, these are the things that really matter. To encourage, to lift up, and to support others. This is what Jesus commanded us to do---to love one another, in our everyday life, with our words and actions. We will look at five helpful ways you can encourage another person during your Ministry of Conversation, but the first way is the primary focus of this chapter---praying for another person *during* the conversation.

PRAYER---THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ENCOURAGEMENT

In the course of a conversation, you will often discover the opportunity to encourage another person by praying for them, right then and there. Not in every conversation. Perhaps not in most conversations. But every once in awhile you will be given an opportunity to pray when that person shares a problem or difficulty with you.

The issue they share with you might be a work related problem, physical illness, a relationship frustration, financial difficulty, unrealized dream, conflict with a family member or spouse, a challenge looming in the future, guilt rearing its ugly head from the past, or a host of other problems that face us all from one time or another.

Now, simply because a person shares a problem with you, do you need to pray for them right then? Not always. But as the person begins sharing, listen for the Holy Spirits’s leading. Trust that the Holy Spirit will lead you in the direction He wants you to follow. There are many ways to encourage others in times of need, but be open and bold in your efforts to show the love of Jesus in your Ministry of Conversation.

And of all the ways you can encourage others, prayer might be the most powerful and life-changing of them all, because when you pray for another person, Jesus is literally invited into your physical conversation. Where there were just two a moment ago, now

there are three---you, the person you're praying for, *and* Jesus, the Creator of the universe in your midst, listening to your every word.

And the way you invite Jesus into your conversation is simply to ask the question of the other person, "*Can I pray for you, right now?*" That's it. Just seven words. And that one question will turn any conversation from an interaction between two people into a sacred, holy experience dialogue with the Lord of Creation. From the ordinary to the extraordinary. From the everyday to the eternal.

"*Can I pray for you, right now?*" Simple words. But extremely difficult to ask during a conversation, especially if the other person is a stranger, not a Christian, or you just don't feel able or willing to ask. No matter what the circumstances or your personal feelings, opportunities to share a brief prayer of encouragement will come up time and time again.

One of the reasons people don't always want to pray with others is that they think they have to use the right sounding words or they have to pray long, drawn-out prayers. Jesus tells us we're not to worry about those things. In fact, He instructs us to not be like those folks who pray on and on or who use repetitive phrases. We're not addressing a God who is hard of hearing or who has to have every request outlined and explained in great detail. He already knows our needs before we even ask.

So when you pray for another person during a conversation, remember to take them aside and be as private as possible. No big show. No crowds looking on. Just you and the person you're praying for, without others listening or looking on. The prayer you offer is for the person you're praying for and God, no one else.

Sometimes it might not be possible to pray for another person in private, especially if your conversation is taking place in a public setting like a restaurant, the hallway at work, or in a store. That's okay, just pray loud enough so the person can hear your words, not everyone else in the place.

Keep your prayer brief. Jesus tells us, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."

Keep your prayers brief and to the point. The more you say, the greater the chances you will actually increase any uneasiness, apprehension, or anxiety that person may already be experiencing. Remember, God knows their needs before you even open your mouth.

When I offer to pray for another person, I will actually tell them the amount of time the prayer will take. I say “Can I pray for you, right now? It’ll take just 10-seconds.”

There are two advantages to this specific approach. First, the person knows I want to pray for them right now. And second, the person knows exactly how long the prayer will take. The unknown is much more difficult to agree to. Will it be one minute? Two minutes? The uncertainty can often present enough of a barrier to have them politely refuse your offer. But if they know it will only be 10-seconds, they’re more likely to accept your invitation.

Stay good on your word too. Keep your prayer short. There is nothing that can turn someone off than to be kept hostage as you’re praying on and on. Remember, this is your ministry of conversation, not a formal Bible Study or evangelical crusade. The purpose is to show the love of Jesus, not show how long you can pray.

THE 3-R PRAYER (10-SECOND PRAYER)

Here’s a real simple, short, and effective way to pray that I have used in my ministry of conversation. Each prayer usually takes only 10-seconds and contains three basic component. Each component provides you with a simple prayer goal---reframe, request, and reveal. You might want to consider using this approach in your ministry of conversation. **The 3 R’s of Prayer:**

Reframe. Reframe an earthly perspective to a heavenly perspective.

Request. Request the specific need of the person.

Reveal. Ask God to reveal Himself to the person.

Using these three basic components of prayer, you can feel confident to pray for anyone who desires prayer during a conversation. Each component takes only 3-seconds to say, accomplishes a specific purpose, and will allow the Lord to begin a work in the person's life. A 10-second prayer that could change a life. Let's examine each of these three components.

Step 1. REFRAME. People who are fearful, anxious, hopeless, hurt, or lost often see the world and their lives from a worldly perspective as opposed to a heavenly perspective. If the person you are praying for is not a Christian, he can only see what the world has taught him to see. The things a non-Christian could place his faith in might be money, status, power, attractiveness, possessions, or popularity. And when he doesn't possess these articles of his faith, he loses faith. Such a person needs a new frame of reference. He needs to be reframed to a heavenly perspective.

On the other hand, some of the people you will pray for during a conversation will be fellow Christians, who just need to be reminded to see their situation, circumstance, or condition from a heavenly perspective.

As Christians, we all get sidetracked occasionally and begin seeing our problems from worldly eyes. At times like that, we need to be reminded that God is sovereign and His perfect plan is unfolding for our lives as He intended. Sometimes you will simply remind a fellow Believer to see with heavenly eyes.

Here is a list of sentences that reframe or remind the person you're praying for to see life through a Godly, heavenly perspective:

Heavenly Father, Creator of the universe...

Dear Lord, Maker of all that is...

Dear God, You love us more than we can ever know...

Father, the world will fail us, but You will never fail us...

Sovereign God, you know every aspect of our life...

Father God, we are your children and you know our every need...

These are just suggestions for reframing the person you are praying with to see life from an eternal, heavenly perspective. To get his eyes off the world and the uncertainty,

anxiety, and darkness that perspective can bring to a heavenly, eternal perspective focused on a loving, all knowing, all caring Father God. Reframe them. This is your ministry of conversation.

Step 2. REQUEST. The second step in your 3R Prayer is to make the specific request for the person you are praying with. During a conversation, the person you're talking with might share a concern, problem, or need they have. It might be an illness, a family struggle, conflict at work, financial difficulties, car problems, a difficult decision, or depression. Rather than taking a worldly approach and wish them luck with their concern or tell them you hope everything will work out, you can instead offer up a prayer request on their behalf right then and there.

Jesus told His followers, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Whether it's for their provision, peace, healing, encouragement, or job, state the request simply and clearly. Avoid using a lot of fancy words and descriptions. Don't feel that you have to provide every detail of the request, because God knows all the details. Remember, He knows what you're going to pray for before you even pray. The important thing is to be specific about the prayer request, keeping it short and simple. Here are a few examples of brief requests that you can make during your 3R prayers in the future:

I ask that You send Your Spirit into Mike's home.

I pray that You heal Sarah's arm.

It's our request that You provide a job for Tim.

May Your will be done in Jared's life.

We ask that You soften Amy's heart so she can forgive her mother.

It's our desire that You move upon Bill and his situation at work.

I pray that Your will be done in this situation that faces Paul.

We pray for wisdom in this very confusing situation for Ed.

Remember to keep the request short. No long speeches here. Just a specific request. The

Lord knows what you want even before you pray, so state the request briefly, then move on to the final component of your 3R-prayer.

Step 3. REVEAL. The final step of this three step prayer is to have the Lord reveal Himself to the person you're praying for. Now that you've reframed the person's perspective heavenward and made your specific prayer request, you end with the most important element of your 3R-Prayer and that's to invite God to reveal Himself to the person. This final component is especially vital if the person you're praying for is not a Christian.

Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." In the third sentence of your prayer, you'll invite the Lord to reveal Himself to the person you're praying for. This revelation might be for wisdom, guidance, encouragement, direction, support, or even salvation.

This request that the Lord reveal Himself to the person through circumstance, other people, or miraculous intervention is the most important part because it re-establishes or begins that divine connection with the Creator of the universe. Whereas all other connection and input is worldly, the Lord's revelation of Himself to the person you're praying for is the most significant gift you can offer.

Everything else will not provide what the person needs most---relationship with Jesus. He stands at the door and knocks. You're asking for the person to be listening for the voice of Jesus in the hours and days to come. You're asking for the person to open the door to the Lord. And the Lord promises to enter and dine with his willing child. This invites the person to open up and be alert for the presence of God, perhaps for the very first time.

Here are some ways to ask for the Lord to reveal Himself:

And in the days to come, Lord, speak to Mike.

Heavenly Father, reveal Yourself to Teri in circumstances and people.

Jesus, speak to Bill's heart in the hours and days to come.

Father God, make Your presence and will clearly known to Helen.

Lord, reveal Your love and goodness to Jennifer as she reads Your Word.

God, make known what you would have Ed do in the days to come.

Jesus, unveil your plan for Karen's life.

Heavenly Father, speak to Tim in the next day or two.

Lord, reveal Your love and will for Lisa's life.

God, show Paul what You want him to see in this situation.

The primary purpose of each of these requests is for the Lord to reveal His presence, His will, and His love for the person you're praying for. This opens the door for the Lord to speak to the person through the people He brings into his life, the circumstances that meet him, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit within him. This will turn the person's attention and focus to the gentle voice of God in the hours and days to come.

Just as you reframed his focus from a worldly view to a heavenly perspective in the first component of the 3R-Prayer, so do you redirect his attention once again to the voice of the Lord as you end the prayer rather than the voice of the world. That's the purpose of the 3R-Prayer---to establish a relation between the Lord and the person you're praying for, even if that's not their reason for praying in the first place.

So the next time during a conversation and someone shares a need or concern, show the love of Jesus by asking, "Can I pray for you, right now?" Don't miss your divine appointment. Your prayer will be an encouragement, comfort, and blessing for the one for whom you're praying. And it just might mark the turning point of their life on earth and maybe for all eternity. Don't miss an opportunity to bless others. Pray for others, right now, in your ministry of conversation.

Now, let's look at the four other ways ways you can encourage others in your ministry of conversation.

1. Being Available. Do you take the time to talk with others during the course of your day? Or are you too busy, too rushed, too overbooked to take a few minutes for leisurely conversation?

When your spouse or one of your children wants to talk about a concern, a friend wants to share a problem, a co-worker drops by your office, or a stranger asks for directions, do you pause for a few minutes and engage in conversation? Or do you

mumble something about being too busy and skirt off to your next item on the daily to-do list?

Granted, there are times when it's not feasible nor desirable to hang out and talk with a particular person at a particular time. But overall, are you available for people to talk to? Do you welcome others with a smile, a friendly attitude, and three or four minutes of your life?

It's difficult to encourage others in conversation if you're not available to talk. So, the next time your co-worker, a neighbor, your spouse, or one of your children wants to talk about a concern, slow down, take a breath, and enter into a conversation that might change a life by sharing the love of Jesus.

2. Listening. Once you make the time for conversation, another way of encouraging others is by simply listening. Not an avalanche of wise and sensible words. Not an outline or plan of what you think or propose. Just a listening ear is often all the encouragement a person needs.

The miracle of one person listening without interrupting is truly a wonder indeed in a culture where the desire to interrupt every four or five seconds is conditioned into us at a very early age.

With verbal interruptions happening in our daily conversations as frequently as scene changes in the television sitcoms, it's no wonder that to be listened to, to be heard, and to be understood is an encouragement in and of itself.

Be a source of encouragement during your daily conversations with others. Simply listen. And you will often discover that your silence will support, stimulate, and even inspire the speaker to experience greater awareness, opportunity, and growth.

After the apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to Him all they had done and taught, He said to them, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." In your ministry of conversation, create that quiet place where people can speak without interruptions, judgments, or advice. It will encourage them to talk freely and rest in the quiet of your safe harbor.

3. Expressing Confidence in Others. You can be a real encouragement to others by expressing your confidence in their skills, abilities, and talents. No long speeches or heart-to-heart talks are required. Just a word or two of belief in another person's ability to

do what they set out to do. Whether it's making a Godly decision, being successful with a task at work, doing well on a school assignment, completing a project around the house, or competing in a football game, an expression of confidence to another person can be a support, an encouragement, and even an inspiration to strive to do their best. Consider these following statements as you express your confidence in others:

“You can do it!”

“I'm confident you'll do well.”

“You've prepared well and I know it will pay off.”

“I'm certain you'll do well.”

“I'm convinced that you have what it takes.”

One sentence can make a difference in any conversation. It doesn't have to be an elaborate or super spiritual vote of confidence. Just a sentence expressing your sincere belief in another person's desire to attempt a task well, to complete a project they begin, or to succeed in a goal they set for themselves. Your decision to express confidence in others, will not only encourage them with the task at hand, but can affect their lives years from now. Be a blessing in your ministry of conversation.

4. Reframing. A good friend of mine views his entire earthly life from an eternal perspective. Whenever something bad or undesirable happens to him, Dave will smile, point his finger to the sky, and say “Goin' to heaven!” That's it. “Goin' to heaven!” In one sentence, he can reframe a seemingly major negative event into an insignificant incident by casting it into the light of eternity.

One of the most powerful ways to encourage another person is to help them change the way they see something. Often times in conversation, the person you're speaking with will bring up something they consider negative, terrible, or undesirable plaguing their lives. Whether it's another person, event, or situation that bothers them, you can turn their negative perception or frame into a positive one in a single sentence. It's called the reframing technique.

The first type of reframing we will look at is reframing for encouragement. You can use this reframing technique by simply offering another perception or interpretation of the same person, event, or situation that the speaker is complaining about.

The open words of a reframing sentence are simply, “**Another way of looking at this is _____...**” followed by a **positive** frame on the exact same person, event, or situation they presented that emphasizes a heavenly perspective. You don’t attempt to rescue the speaker, release them from the results of the event, or change the situation plaguing them. What you do change is the way they see that same person, event, or situation.

Let’s say someone is complaining about a recent car accident where their car was damaged pretty badly, took weeks to repair in the body shop, and the entire incident prompted a significant increase in their annual car insurance premiums. The person is lamenting the accident, wishing the event had never happened, and complaining of a minor depression brought about by the whole ordeal. Instead of agreeing with the person, giving them money to help out with the increased premiums, or sending them to the nearest Barnes & Nobles for the latest self-help book, you can offer an encouraging reframe.

“**Another way of looking at this is** the Lord spared the lives of all involved.”

“**Another way of looking at this is** that it gives you the opportunity to show your belief in God’s sovereignty in all things, including this car accident.”

“**Another way of looking at this is** your chance to grow as a Christian.”

“**Another way of looking at this is** a lesson in seeing all the good things that the Lord can bring from a seemingly bad situation.”

“**Another way of looking at this is** a chance for you to disengage from worldly possessions and focus on heavenly things.”

Or you could simply say, “Goin’ to heaven?”

Think of some other things you can offer after “**Another way of looking at this is _____** that will cast this same situation in a heavenly light. This heavenly reframing approach to encourage others to see the world from

an eternal perspective, rather than a worldly one, can not only change the person you're speaking to. It can change you as well. The power of the spoken word to lift the eyes of others from this world to the next is indeed a gift of encouragement that can bring a change of mind, as well as a change of heart to both the speaker and the listener whenever the negative is being placed before you in conversation. Choose to be a blessing that sees from Godly eyes and not the eyes of men.

5. Giving Physical Support. Up to this point, we've been looking at ways to encourage others with our words. Now, I'd like to turn our attention to giving physical support to others.

There might come that moment in a conversation when you feel led to ask the question, "**Anything I can help you with?**" At that point, you have opened yourself to the possibility that you could actually be asked to help with some physical task, whether it's taking a bag of groceries to an elderly person's car or maybe helping a new neighbor move a pile of boxes into the house.

Whatever the task or favor might be, Jesus commands us to help physically others. "Give to him who asks you," Jesus tells us, "and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." Unlike the world's advice that your purpose is to get yours now. To store in barns more than you'll ever need. To keep your possessions, your time, and your life focused on yourself. That's what the world teaches.

But the Creator of the universe, tells us to give our lives away. Not to store in earthly barns. To give away your possessions, time, and self-focus. That's the secret to this life and the key to the next. The commands of Jesus seem foolish from the world's frame of reference, but they are the secret to a full life on this earth. "He who keeps his life will lose it," Jesus warns us, "and he who loses his life will find it."¹¹ So, loosen the grip on your time and possessions. Help others. Be a blessing with your time, energy, and strength.

There is no more tangible way to encourage others than by your physical assistance. In the end, what really matters in your life is not so much what you helped yourself to, but how much you helped others. Really, you only possess that which you give away during your brief stay on this earth. So, be willing to volunteer more than just your words. Volunteer yourself.

That's how people will know that you're a follower of Jesus. By your willingness to lose your life, time, and money for others. And it's then and only then when you will truly and deeply discover who you are. Your ministry of conversation might also minister to you, the one who gives of his life.

This is your ministry of conversation.

PREPARING FOR MINISTRY

Exercise 3.1 How Do You Pray?

Take a few moments and jot down on a piece of paper your prayer life for the past 24 hours. Start your record with the first prayer you offered to God. When was it? What did you say? How long was it? Did you notice any change of heart, mind, or attitude as you were praying? How about after? Record the next time you prayed and briefly address the same questions. Make a list of all the times you prayed either alone or with others in the past 24 hours. What do you think of your list of prayers? Did you even pray at all? Could you pray more? What might you change or improve about your prayers specifically? What could you change or improve about your prayer life in general? What did you learn about yourself and your prayer life?

Exercise 3.2 The 3R-Prayer (10-Second Prayer)

For the next 24 hours use the 3R-Prayer Method of 10-second Prayer in your daily life. Each hour of your waking day, offer up a 10-second prayer using the 3R-Prayer---reframe, request, and reveal. Say the prayer out loud. And to make things easier, set your wristwatch on a one hour alarm or simply pray every hour on the hour, for just 10 seconds. This will give you 12-16 very brief practice sessions with this method of praying. Sure, you can do longer prayers during the day, but every hour try the 3R-Prayer, just to get you in the habit of praying specifically, briefly, and often. How did this prayer exercise go for you? Could you limit your prayers to 10-seconds? Remember to be brief. We're aiming

for 10-seconds and that's plenty of time to include all the three of the R's. What did you do well? What might you improve? Are you ready for a real-life application?

Exercise 3.3 Using the 3R-Prayer Method in Conversation

During the next three days, offer to use the 10-second 3R-Prayer method at least once during a conversation. Don't say "Would you like me to use the 10-second 3R-Prayer method on you?" Instead, simply say, "Could I pray for you, right now? It'll just take 10-seconds" That's all there is to it. The person might say, "No." If that happens, smile and say, "Okay," and continue the conversation. When the person says, "I'd like that," well, your ministry of conversation just took a quantum leap forward toward the kingdom of God. Praise God!

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4

Nurturing Others

“Time for coffee?”



*Teach them everything
I have commanded you to do.
- Jesus*

Nurturing others can be the fruit of conversation.

Now that you've asked some questions, mirrored some responses, and prayed for the person, the fourth and final step (the N) is to **Nurture** that person. Whether the individual is a family member, friend, co-worker, neighbor, acquaintance, or even someone you've just met, you can choose to invest in the person you've just prayed for.

It's not necessary of course, but as a Christian you are called to love your neighbor, especially if you've invited Jesus into the relationship through prayer. Here are some ways you can nurture a person you've decided to invest some time and effort into.

1. Time for coffee? Or tea. Or a dessert. Or a phone call. It doesn't have to be lunch, dinner, or big deal anything. But an offer, on your part, to continue the conversation sometime in the near future is one of the most nurturing gestures you can make. It says that "You're important." It communicates that "Let's do this again." This isn't just a one time event. A chance meeting, then never to meet again. It's an invitation that compliments the heart and raises the spirit of the person being invited.

If the person declines your invitation or is vague or reluctant to accept your offer, don't push it. Just smile and say, "Well, thanks for letting me invite you. I enjoyed our conversation." Not every person you talk with is destined to be a friend or acquaintance. But your offer to treat them to coffee is one of nicest ways to love a neighbor that I can think of. Good of you to offer.

More than likely, the person will accept your offer, gladly. Who wouldn't want to spend a little more time with you? You know how to ask questions, mirror their responses, and even pray for them about important matters. Who does that? See what I mean. You are a blessing. A gift from God.

If they do accept your offer to meet for coffee, remember to give the person *your* phone number or email. That protects them from feeling vulnerable by providing too much personal information initially and it increases your credibility in their eyes.

Remember to be specific about the place, day, and time you're to meet. And arrive 5-10 minutes early. There's nothing more disrespectful and discouraging than having the person wait for your late arrival. No matter what your excuse, your behavior says that you don't keep promises. Arrive early. And remember to pay for both your coffees or teas. You did invite them to coffee, so make sure you treat. Oh, and enjoy your time together. Who knows where the Lord might take this relationship.

2. Checking-In. If the person you have decided to invest some time into is someone you see on a regular basis---a co-worker, a neighbor, a relative, the cashier at the corner convenience store, or someone you share the bench with as you wait for the bus---you can simply say, "I'll check-in with you...

at our next weekly sales meeting."

next Tuesday when when we take out the garbage cans."

at our next family gathering.”
tomorrow morning when I get my donut and coffee.”
when we’re waiting for the bus.”

You don’t always have to issue an invitation to coffee. Instead, you can tell them that you’ll connect with them again. Nothing formal or pre-arranged. No phone number or email. You’ll just drop by and check-in for a few moments.

Believe it or not, the mere thought that you will be making an effort see them in the future can be an occasion worth looking forward to. Take the time to make a difference and bring the presence of Jesus to someone by simply stopping by and saying hello.

3. Looking for the best in others. Do you look for the best in others? Or do you look for the worst? In your efforts to nurture others, it would serve you well to develop a willingness to look for the best. This perspective, both in thought and deed, can nurture growth in others. Here’s one way you can accomplish this goal.

It’s called the “80-20 Rule.” At any given moment, 80 percent of a person’s life is working and 20 percent is not. Let’s look at you first, for a moment.

Right now, 80 percent of your life is going along pretty well, but you don’t always see or appreciate it. You have a bed to sleep in, a roof over your head, food to eat, water to drink, a few friends to talk with, and maybe a cell phone that works. If you think about it, you’re blessed with vision adequate enough to read the words on this page, even if you need glasses or contacts. There are blind people who would give all that they possessed to have your vision. And you possess the ability to see right now, at this very moment.

When you woke up in this morning, you hopped out of and walked to the bathroom. Not everyone has the ability to walk. There are those who will never walk again. Can you imagine if you weren’t able to walk ever again? How would that change your life? Most likely, you have the ability to put one foot in front of the other and you need to appreciate that fact. We could go on and on about all the things that are going well in your life. The kinds of things that we all take for granted. Things that we neglect to appreciate and acknowledge.

Meister Eckhart, a 13th-century theologian and monk, wisely advised that “if the only prayer you ever said in your entire lifetime was ‘Thank you,’ that would be enough.” We need to look for and appreciate all the things that are working and going well in our lives and consider them thankfully, maybe even prayerfully.

But instead, many of us, tend to focus on the 20 percent that’s not to our satisfaction and neglect the 80 percent that is. We’re more concerned and focused on what’s wrong and wishing we had things we don’t possess. And while we are complaining and desiring that which we don’t possess, 80 percent of the good things in our life go unnoticed and unappreciated. That might be the true tragedy of life. Maybe your life. So, it would be extremely beneficial for you to constantly strive to see the 80 percent of your life that is working just fine, thank you.

Now for your purposes your ministry of conversation, you need to look for and appreciate the 80 percent of the good in others. Sure, no one is perfect. We all have our shortcomings, our flaws, and our goofiness. But in our conversations with others, we would benefit from purposefully looking for and appreciating the 80 percent that is working and good in the other person. To focus on the things you appreciate, like, or admire about the person you’re talking with rather than on those things you disapprove of, reject, or dislike.

One technique that might help you to look for the best in others goes like this: Imagine the person you’re in a conversation with will die in a month. The individual does not know this. In fact, you are the only one who is permitted to know this secret. But in 30 days, you will never see this person again. How would this change the way you look at her? How would this change the way you talk with her? Listen to her? Felt about her?

Your first reaction to this changed frame of reference is that you’d most likely probably see this person with very different eyes. With more accepting, understanding, and compassionate eyes. Death does that. It changes the way we look at others, life, and ourselves. This changed perspective toward the person you’re interacting with will hopefully soften your critical eye and shift its focus on the 80 percent that is acceptable, good, and even admirable. Wilbur Chapman encourages us to “look for the strengths in people, not weakness; for good, not evil. Most of us find what we search for.” So be looking for best in others.

Your second reaction to this more positive frame of reference is that you might suddenly have the urge to share these newly recognized and appreciated traits and behaviors of the other person. You may find yourself even overlooking minor irritations and flaws in others and investing more energy in seeing what is working, what is good in others. This change in your perspective can be extremely nurturing to the person you're trying to support spiritually. It all begins with seeing. Let your prayer be, "Lord, let me see what *you* see."

4. Saying the best to others. Now's the time to verbally share our awareness of, appreciation, and maybe even admiration for the other person. This is where you can communicate nurturing words.

It is only then that the other person becomes aware of your positive thoughts and feelings. Until then, the good things we want to express exist only in our minds. How often we think good things about another, but neglect or forget to share these words of appreciation, admiration, and affection.

"If you see something good, share it" is a good motto to adhere to in your conversational life. Those are wise words to live by. We need to see the 80 percent that is good in others and verbally share it. It can serve as the foundation for a bridge to friendship, even with those whose opinions and beliefs are different from our own. See the good in others. Say the best to others. Remember, the purpose of your conversations should be to enlarge others, not merely express your opinion or win an argument.

A simple way to say the best to others is to share a sincere compliment. You can compliment many things in your attempt to nurture another person.

The first form of complimenting is recognizing **achievement**. This requires some familiarity with the person you're complimenting since these compliments are aimed at accomplishments, not physical features. In this type of compliment you acknowledge some achievement the person has accomplished or realized. The achievement can be as modest as remembering your name or as monumental as overcoming some physical disability. Here are some examples of complimenting achievement:

I'm impressed you remembered my name.

I was moved by your prayer.

Congratulations on your promotion at work.

I'm happy you were given a raise.

Your watercolors are beautiful.

I'm pleased you passed your driving test.

A second form of compliment is to compliment a person's **character**. It requires some familiarity with the person to compliment character because it focuses on the internal goodness, strength, or beauty of the person. Character traits such as kindness, trustworthiness, empathy, loyalty, generosity, optimism, gentleness, humor, and candor are just a few of the hundreds of character or personality traits you can compliment.

A character compliment is longer lasting because these are things that do not diminish with age, such as a trim figure or a full head of hair. Instead, character compliments are directed at the internal nature of the individual. Here are a few character compliments:

I really appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Your loyalty is a trait that I admire in you.

I treasure your honesty.

Few people have your enthusiasm.

I like the fact that you are dependable.

You can compliment a person even if that individual doesn't achieve what she or he set out to accomplish. You can compliment **effort**. In our culture, we tend to compliment only the winners—those people who finish first and receive the trophies. But you can compliment others for the effort they invest into an endeavor or project. What matters is that they tried. It's not the destination, but the journey that matters. Here are some examples of complimenting effort:

I'm proud of the effort you gave to this project.

I'm proud that you at least tried out for the team.

Your attempts at publishing a book were inspiring to me.

I don't know of anyone who tries as hard as you.

Your enthusiasm at practice shows your commitment to the team.

The last form of complimenting is a bit unusual. It involves complimenting others on the things they don't do—**complimenting the invisible**. There are a million things people don't do that are worthy of appreciation, yet we rarely tell them. We don't even think of all the things they don't do. Maybe the person doesn't swear incessantly, chain-smoke cigars, interrupt constantly, complain without ceasing, or mope around in a depressed state. You might want to compliment people for not doing these things. Acknowledge them with a compliment.

After you begin to compliment the invisible, it can become fun, even entertaining, to enlarge others by praising them for what they don't do. Here are some examples of complimenting the invisible:

You could have complained, but you didn't. Thanks.

I'm impressed you don't use your cell phone when you drive.

I'm thankful you don't correct me when we're with others.

I'm happy you don't play video games.

Thank you for not swearing.

By complimenting the invisible, you not only communicate your appreciation of behaviors that you normally don't recognize, but you nurture an increased self-awareness for the other person as well.

5. Praying for them. Another way of nurturing a person is to pray for them. Whether it's during your morning devotionals, your afternoon prayers, or your evening quiet time before going to bed, you can remember the person in your prayers. The Bible tells us to pray for one another and what a great opportunity to bring this person's needs and life before the throne room of God.

In addition to praying for the specific need or needs they shared with you during your conversation, you can also pray that the Holy Spirit continue to awaken a need and a desire to know Jesus more intimately. Ultimately, that is all that really matters. To

receive and deepen in personal relationship with the Lord of the universe. There are all kinds of other things you might add to your prayer list for this specific individual, but remember to pray that his or her relationship with Jesus will become more real and intimate with each passing day. That's my prayer for you.

6. Praying with them. If you have the opportunity to meet with the person again, don't forget to pray with them before you say good-bye. It's one thing to chat about the weather, the local sports team, their relationships, or issues. But it's an entirely different thing to pray with them. It will take you both from the worldly to the heavenly.

Your praying doesn't have to be the purpose for the get together or a long, drawn out ordeal. Just a few moments for the two of you to pause, focus your attention upon God, and share whatever is on your hearts. A minute or two of prayer can not only change their day, it can nurture the other person's spiritual growth in exciting ways.

So, don't be reluctant or bashful to invite the person into prayer. You might just say, "Hey, before we say good-bye, would you mind if we prayed for a few moments?" Remember to keep the prayers short, unless the other person desires to express his or her heart at greater length. Don't cut their prayer short. It's good to listen to another person. But keep your prayer short so you don't set up the expectation that prayers need to be long to be effective.

7. Invitation to fellowship. As the relationship develops, one of the most impactful ways you can nurture their spiritual growth is to introduce the person to other Christians. This can be done by simply inviting the person to your church, a Bible Study, a potluck with friends, or gathering a few friends at the local coffee shop. There's a range of opportunities to that will introduce your friend to other people who love Jesus. There's strength, encouragement, and growth in groups.

A fun way to introduce your friend to other Christians is to host a BBQ at your house or apartment. That way, you can invite people you know who you know to be welcoming, friendly, and willing to build a bridge to a fellow follower of Jesus. A gathering of God's people is always a cause for celebration. It's a preview of heaven. And your new friend will benefit and grow from the experience and new found friendships.

Your ministry of conversation is bearing fruit by your efforts to bring people together who share a common love. Their love for Jesus.

To invite someone into a conversation, mirror their messages, and encourage their hearts at that moment are powerful ways to show the love of Jesus. But by extending the experience and nurturing that same person over a period of time requires much more focused effort and time. But that's what Jesus commands us to do, to love our neighbors. What better way is there to love our neighbors than actually inviting them to open up to the Kingdom of God and help them grow closer to Jesus in their lifetime.

This is your ministry of conversation.

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