

SHARING YOUR FAITH NATURALLY IN CONVERSATION

... involves listening for an open door to bring up some facet of the “salvation message.”

1. THE SALVATION MESSAGE

Peter and Paul never omitted these four areas when introducing the Christian faith:

1. Our need for God’s help
2. How Jesus has met this need
3. Insight into receiving this help, such as through faith
4. Some of the benefits received by faith

(See paragraph 17 for Bible examples.)

2. GOSPEL POWER

Of these four areas, area two is called “the Gospel” by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Our hope is that our friend will hear the gospel, because Paul writes in Romans 1:16 that “the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.” The purpose of this article’s “conversational approach” is to assist you in bringing the gospel to your friend. Since it is a “conversational” approach, it assumes you already know the person well enough to engage in a conversation.

3. BRINGING UP THE YOUR INSIGHT

When the conversation with your friend touches on one of these four areas, you provide your insight about it. A sentence or two is enough, because you want the other person to respond and keep the conversation going. Your goal is that eventually the person will grasp something about each of the four, but you are not under pressure to bring up all four in a single conversation.

4. HOW TO GRASP THE OPEN DOOR

You then make it known that you agree with the value of the topic. For example, if the person says, “I wish I had more peace,” you, recognizing that by bringing up “peace,” the person has brought the conversation to the fourth of the four areas listed above, you could say, “Yes, I agree, peace is really important to me too.” Another example: If the person says “I am really worried about ___,” that means the person has opened the door to area one, human need. In the midst of comforting and advising the person, you can also bring the conversation into a conversation about salvation by saying something like “I also am sometimes filled with worries.”

5. HOW TO GO THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR

To continue, you could ask a “permission question,” such as, “May I tell you what I do when I feel a lack of peace?” The person may or may not grant permission. If the person does say “OK,” you share a few sentences about how Jesus brings you peace, then pause or ask for a response. If the person says “no,” you respect that decision and let the conversation continue, in the faith that God will open another door later in the conversation.

6. CONTINUING ON

Once you have said a few things about the area, your hope is that the conversation will permit you to go on to another area. Your goal is that your friend will hear about all four areas. Although it may not

always happen that you get to talk about all four areas during one conversation (since the other person controls 50% of the conversation), you are ready to talk about all four.

7. GOING FROM AREA TO AREA

No matter which door you entered first, you will want to go from there to area one, our need for God, because it lays the groundwork for moving on to area two, the way Jesus has met this need.

8. TRANSITIONING TO AREA ONE

For example, if you have been conversing about peace (area four), you might say something like “the amazing thing is that Jesus promises to give this peace to me even though I do not deserve it.” Your friend may respond in a way that allows you to continue, or you may have to say something like “May I tell you what I mean?” If your friend agrees, he has given you an open door to talk about area one, and you will typically do this by saying something about YOUR OWN SINFULNESS.

9. TRANSITIONING FROM AREA ONE TO AREA TWO

Talking about sinfulness is of course unpleasant, but it is necessary if area two is to make sense. You might transition by saying something like, “even though I know I am sinful and deserve punishment from God, yet I know for certain that God will welcome me into heaven (or, has accepted me as one of His people). May I tell you why I am so sure?” If your friend assents, he has given you permission to talk about area two -- Jesus and how he paid the penalty for your sins on the cross.

10. THE REST OF THE MESSAGE

In a similar way, the conversation may continue through to area three, faith, and area four, forgiveness and other benefits.

11. CHECKING FOR RESPONSE

When you know your friend has heard about all four area, you could ask “Does that make sense to you?” If your friend says yes, you would proceed as in paragraph 16 below. If your friend says no, you would continue as in paragraph 29.

12. THE ATMOSPHERE FOR TALKING ABOUT THE MESSAGE

It is ideal to wait for a time when there are no distractions, and when others are not listening (so that it will not be embarrassing for the person to respond). Sometimes there are months of conversations before a door opens, but that is not a waste of time, because building the relationship has value in and of itself. There are suggestions for relationship-building in paragraph 28. If the Holy Spirit should bring the person to become a Christian, your relationship allows you to help the person grow in faith. If the person does not become a Christian, you have still responded to what is called the “great command,” that is, to love God and love your neighbor. This loving relationship provides the context within which God may also give you the opportunity to pursue the “great commission,” that is, to make disciples.

13. MAKING DISCIPLES

The command given to us in Matthew 28:19 is to “make disciples.” All three parts described above are part of the process of making disciples: the relationship-building, the sharing of the salvation message,

and the growth after one has accepted the salvation message. Another web page in this series provides ideas for “nurturing a new Christian.”

14. WHOM TO TALK TO ABOUT THE MESSAGE

Christians can build up one another in the faith by sharing their insights in these areas, and in this way can disciple one another. If someone is not a Christian, the Holy Spirit can bring people to become Christians on the basis of hearing these concepts. See paragraph for a Bible example. The suggestions on these pages are for sharing the faith with someone who is not yet a Christian.

15. HOW TO RECOGNIZE AN OPEN DOOR

If you have been praying for your friend, and in particular if you have been asking God to give you an open door to talk about Jesus, you are probably more likely to see the door when it opens. Also, the more familiar you are with the four areas of the salvation message, the more likely you are to see it when your friend brings up something that relates to one of them.

16. INVOLVING YOUR PASTOR

If your friend indicates agreement with the message, you could then bring up each of the four areas, asking such questions as this: “Do you believe you yourself are a sinner?” So you believe Jesus is God who became a man? Do you believe his death on the cross has taken the punishment for your sin? Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead? Do you believe in Jesus as your Lord and savior? Do you believe that through faith you have forgiveness and eternal life? If the person should make a positive statement about these areas, this amounts to a profession of faith, for Romans 10:1 says “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. You will then want to bring the person to meet your pastor and talk about arrangements for baptism. Your pastor may have a procedure he follows with people who are preparing for baptism. It would typically include the subject matter that is in the creed.

17. BIBLE EXAMPLES OF THE FOUR AREAS

Each box shows you what Peter or Paul said about each category.

Bible verse:	Acts 2:22-38	Acts 3:18	Acts 5:30	Acts 10:36-43	Acts 13:
PROBLEM	Killing Jesus	Sins	Sins, killing Jesus	Sins, killing Jesus	Sins, killing Jesus
ANSWER	Jesus rose Jesus is Lord Jesus is Messiah	Jesus is Christ Jesus suffered	Jesus rose at God’s right side Jesus is savior	Jesus is Lord Jesus rose	Jesus rose
RECEIVING	Repent be baptized	repent	Repent	Through faith	believes
BENEFITS	Forgiveness power of H, Sp.	Sins wiped away	forgiveness	Peace forgiveness	Set free forgiveness

All four areas are also presented in Colossians 1:21-23. Romans 3:22-25. Titus 3:3-7.

18. HOW MUCH TIME?

Notice that Peter and Paul were able to tell the complete salvation message in under 15 seconds. For the conversational method, you more likely would stop for reactions after each of the four parts. You also sometimes would find that you do not get to all four parts in a single conversation, but you yourself know which parts your friend hasn't heard yet, and you watch for open doors to bring out those parts in future conversations. Following are other verses that give insight into one or more of the four areas:

19. VERSES ABOUT THE HUMAN PROBLEM. Some verses give insight into the "nature" of sin, by listing laws we may have broken. Some verses give insight into the "symptoms" of sin, such as "guilt." Some give insight into the "results" of sin, such as separation from God. Ephesians 2:1, 12-13. Titus 3:3. Romans 3:23. Romans 6:23. 1 John 3:4.

20. VERSES ABOUT CHRIST AS THE ANSWER. Some verses explain who Jesus is, and others explain about what He did. Both are important: the reason Jesus' death was able to have an effect on our sins is because He is God in the flesh. If He were only God but not human, he could not have died for us. If he were only human but not God, his death would not have any benefit for us.

21. VERSES ABOUT WHO JESUS IS. Colossians 1:15 and 19. Mark 2:7. Matthew 28:17. John 20:28.

22. WHAT JESUS DID ---BY HIS OBEDIENT LIFE: Romans 5:19

23. WHAT JESUS DID --- BY DYING ON THE CROSS:

- a. He was our substitute, 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- b. He was our sacrifice for sin, Hebrews 9:26.
- c. He made atonement, 1 John 4:10.
- d. He ransomed us 1 Timothy 2:5-6
- e. He purchased us, Revelation 5:9.
- f. He defeated Satan, Hebrews 2:14-15.

24. WHAT JESUS DID ---BY RISING FROM THE DEAD:

- a. He was shown to be the Son of God, Romans 1:4.
- b. He showed he'd completed that task of salvation, Romans 4:25.
- c. He proved he also can make us rise, 1 Corinthians 15:20, and John 14:19.
- d. He gives new life, 1 Peter 1:3
- e. He dwells in believers, Ephesians 3:17
- f. He sends us the Holy Spirit, John 16:7

25. VERSES ABOUT RECEIVING. Note that Peter and Paul explained what "receiving" would entail, but whether or not an individual received the message is always a miracle brought about by the Holy Spirit. Read Romans 10:9-13. Romans 5:22. Ephesians 2:8-9. Galatians 3:27, Colossians 1:28.

26. VERSES ABOUT BENEFITS. Note how many of the benefits correspond to the problems that surface in area one. For example, one of our problems is "guilt," and the corresponding benefit is "forgiveness."

As you read about the benefits, see whether the corresponding problem comes to mind. Read: Romans 6:23. Ephesians 2:13. Romans 5:1.

27. THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

Acts 10,44 records that the Holy Spirit fell as Peter was talking to a crowd. Peter however was not talking about the Holy Spirit, nor about his personal transformation, nor about arguments concerning faith concepts Peter was talking about Jesus, and consequently the Holy Spirit fell. You can talk about Jesus with the same expectation.

28. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Even if someone is not responsive to our offer to explain our faith, there are many things we can do to build up a good relationship. Pray for them, love them, care for them, be good listeners. We can introduce them to other Christians. We can invite them to church events outside of public worship. We can tell a short "testimony" – by that I mean, an experience we had that caused us to say "Thank you, God." Since telling this story does not put them on the spot to accept or reject, it is not threatening. The expectation is that as you continue loving, caring, and listening, God will open a door for the message.

29. WHEN THERE ARE OBJECTIONS

If your friend does not agree with the message, and you ask "which of those ideas do you not accept," you can continue the conversation centering on those areas. You cannot know what the person does or does not accept unless the person tells you. For example, the person may believe in the reality of sin, but may not believe that Jesus would actually be willing to forgive his particular sins. You can only help the person to the extent that the person is willing to tell you what he does or does not agree with. And even then you cannot argue the person into accepting, but you can be thankful for the opportunity to give your input. You do not need to know everything about the area under question, but you can always say why that area is not a problem for you.

30. DEALING WITH INTERRUPTIONS

If the objection comes up as an interruption that would prevent you from moving from people being sinners to Jesus being the answer, you will want to handle it briefly and get back to the subject of Jesus. For example, you might say, "Even though I do not deserve it, I have the assurance that God will welcome me into heaven --- may I tell you why?" At that point, instead of saying yes or no, your friend might say, "I am against the organized church." That is important, but it is off the topic. You could respond something like this: "It is true that many people do not like the organized church, and I would like to talk with you about the ways that the church could be improved. My desire right now is not to talk about the church, but about how we as individuals can have assurance that we have forgiveness and eternal life. May I tell you why I think so?" At this point the person may still want to talk about the organized church, and you would need to go ahead and do so at length. But perhaps the person will let you finish your introduction to Jesus first, and when you say "what do you think," the conversation may move to Jesus, and the issue of church may be forgotten for now.

31. MEETING OBJECTIONS

After you have finished all four parts of the salvation message, and there are still objection, you then

have time to talk about them at length. If the person becomes angry and ends the discussion, you still have the comfort of knowing that the person had heard the gospel message. Here are some suggestions:

- a. Do not regard your friend as an “opponent.” Look at yourselves as seeking the truth together.
- b. Find a way to agree with some aspect of what they say, or to show that you understand.
- c. Even if you do not know a “thorough” answer to the particular objection, you can still acknowledge the objection and share why the existence of that objection has not caused you to stop believing in God.
- d. You do not need to win the argument, because the person will not necessarily become a Christian based on how well you answer the question. The Holy Spirit makes people into Christians as they hear the message of the gospel. It is sometimes enough just for the person to know that you have thought about their objection, and it has not prevented you from becoming a Christian.
- e. Sometimes people will set aside the objection just knowing that another way to look at their objection exists, and that you are living proof that there is someone who has dealt with the objection. That is, the person may not be totally satisfied with your answer, but that may not keep the person from responding to the gospel.
- f. There is a limit to the number of ways you can respond to an objection. You can quote the scripture. You can use illustrations that clarify the scriptural teachings. You can tell your reasons for believing as you do. You can encourage the person to believe. That is all you can do.
- g. Don't be frustrated if you cannot convince the person to become a Christian. Christianity is supernatural, which means it is beyond reason, so there is no basis for thinking that you can “reason” someone into it.

32. YOUR PERSONALITY

Do not suppose that you have to become a different kind of person before you can share your faith. God has made you just the way you are, and God needs people of all types to reach others.

33. SUCCESS IN WITNESSING

Do not blame yourself if the other person does not believe. It is not part of your job description to make them believe --- that is in g\God's job description. Your job description is simply to introduce the salvation message and answer questions to avoid misunderstandings. If you have done that, you have fulfilled your job description completely, even if the person rejects the message.

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