

Bringing Christ into our Conversations

As with anything we are seeking to do for God we need to approach it with the right attitude:

- Are we trying to win people over to our way or thinking?
- Are we trying to prove that we're the most effective evangelist on the team?
- Are we motivated by guilt or afraid of God's judgement if we don't?
- Or do we want to see God glorified as people come to love and trust him?
- Do we really love the internationals and want what's best for them or are we just seeing them as evangelistic targets?

And we need to do it trusting in God's wisdom and strength not our own!

So the place to start is in prayer – praying for right attitudes, for opportunities and for wisdom to use them well. COLOSSIANS 4:3-4 – if Paul needed to pray for opportunities, we certainly do!

There are different reasons why we might want to speak with someone about Christ, ranging from someone who has shown no interest in Christian things to someone who seems to be on the verge of becoming a Christian but is holding back. How we approach the situation depends on who they are and what point they're at. Often it will involve questions – either we ask them or they ask us!

Asking questions – getting conversation started: testing the water

What questions can we ask to find out what someone believes and if they've had any previous contact with Christ or any interest in Christianity?

- Do you have a religion? Do your parents have a religion?
- Have you been to church in England? Would you like to visit a church and see what a service is like?
- Do you go to church in your own country?
- Do you have any Christian friends at home?

Not in the first five minutes, but when it connects with the previous conversation in a natural way. ('That's a nice table...')

Asking questions – getting conversation started: finding a way in

What questions can we ask to get people thinking about deeper issues that might lead on to opportunities to talk about Christ?

- What is the most important thing in your life?
- What are your hopes for the future?
- What are you afraid of?
- Who do you most admire?
- How do you make big decisions?

If they ask you the same questions, speak honestly about how you see these things as a Christian.

How can we respond?

a) How would you respond to the following?

b) What would be an unhelpful way to talk about Christ in these situations?

- My mother is very ill. I'm very worried about her.
- I'm afraid of dying.
- I just want to get a better job so I can make more money.
- I'm worried about my English exam – I need to pass it so I can study at university.
- I think the most important thing in life is being a good person – especially caring for your family.

Asking questions – taking things further

What questions can we ask to get Christ into the conversation when we know someone one is interested in the Bible or Christian faith?

- What did you learn at the Bible study/Visa course/church?
- What have you read in the Bible recently? What did you think about it?
- Do you know why we celebrate Christmas/Easter?
- What do you think you've learnt about Jesus while you've been in England?
- Does your family know you've been studying the Bible/coming to church? What do they think?
- What would your family think if you became a Christian?
- How do you think your life would change if you became a Christian?

Responding to what they say

Offer to pray for them if they mention some problem or difficulty.

Sharing yourself

Talk openly about what you do with your spare time – church, books you're reading etc.

Use testimony – how/why you became a Christian, specific situations where God has helped you, how being a Christian has changed your life, how you have changed since you became a Christian.

Be honest about your hopes and fears, problems and struggles and speak naturally about how you view those things as a Christian – how God helps you in your difficulties, what you learn about God through your struggles. We don't need to be embarrassed about this, in a friendship it is normal to speak about your personal lives and your feelings so don't be afraid to include your spiritual life in this.

Provoking response – living the gospel

If people can really see the difference Jesus makes in our lives it will often attract them to him and prompt them to ask us questions. Sometimes this comes as we speak to them about the

difference he makes in our lives, but often as they observe the way we behave, the way we love them, the joy we have. They may ask questions like ‘Why are Christians so kind?’

Don't Force it!

Many cultures are more willing to talk about religion than we are, but don't abuse this – many people will feel pressurised if we talk with them about Christian faith, especially if they think we're strongly suggesting they should think about it for themselves, or if we don't talk about anything else or if we don't have a genuine friendship with them.

One Japanese girl commented that she had been talking to various European students who had said they felt threatened by Christians, especially when we talk about our faith, and especially when we say “*the Bible says...*” because they have no idea what is in the Bible so they can't respond to what we say or test whether we are speaking the truth.

We should be like Jesus who told people the truth straight but didn't persuade or coerce or keep going on about it – importance of not manipulating people or pressurising.

(“The Jesus I never knew” chapter 4)

Pray for opportunities, look for them, test the water, try to find a way in, but don't force them!

Know when to stop!

Give them the Gospel a bit at a time as it comes up naturally in conversation rather than all at once.

Change the topic of conversation away from Christian issues if you sense they're getting uncomfortable, or if the conversation has been going on a long time.

(Know and tell the Gospel p128)

References

The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey, Bill Richards (ISBN: 9781491521748)

Know and Tell the Gospel by John Chapman (ISBN: 9781876326029)