

TEACHING NOTES



JOINING OTHERS IN THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



By Keith Davey

Table of Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>EVERYONE IS ON A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>THE FOUR ROLES</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>THE EXPLORER – PART 1: ASK GOOD QUESTIONS</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>THE EXPLORER – PART 2: DISCOVER THROUGH LISTENING</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>THE GUIDE - PART 1: SHOWING THE WAY TO JESUS</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>THE GUIDE – PART 2: MORE PATHS TO THE MASTER</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>THE BUILDER – PART 1: PRAYING OVER SPIRITUAL OBSTACLES</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>THE BUILDER – PART 2: BUILDING BRIDGES OVER SPIRITUAL OBSTACLES</u>	<u>48</u>
<u>THE MENTOR – PART 1: ENCOURAGING SPIRITUAL GROWTH</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>THE MENTOR – PART 2: RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS & LIFE CONCEPTS</u>	<u>60</u>

CoJourners:

Introduction

INTERACT: When you think about sharing your faith, what comes to mind?

- (Joy, Good News, Important, Faith-Stretching)
- (Scary, Awkward, Difficult)

SHARING YOUR FAITH CAN BE AMONG THE MOST TERRIFYING, YET REWARDING EXPERIENCES AS A CHRISTIAN.

Sharing our faith can be intimidating. **INTERACT:** Why?

OUR POSITIVE MOTIVATIONS FOR WANTING TO SHARE OUR FAITH INCLUDE:

As people who love the gospel, we ultimately want to share it. The desire to connect others to the life-changing message of Jesus is there. It's a natural overflow of someone who has experienced the life of Jesus flowing in them. It's a natural overflow. But also, a responsibility.

What is the greatest thing that ever happened to you? What is the greatest thing you can do for someone else?

When I first came to Christ, the first to introduce me to the heart of Jesus was John in 10:10. Life – this is what He came to give! There is a life that you actually thirst for, that only Jesus can give you. This is the core of what we are about a relationship with Him that gives life and changes you from scarce to abundant.

Anything that does not contribute to this is a distraction, an interference. Where do we declare victory? Attendance. Building. Good meetings. Getting more in community groups. Good stuff, but we might we be declaring victory where it does not matter at all!

The source of the living water is Jesus – the headwaters of life. That is what we are about. Conversation/relationships are the way we connect people to the source of life. **Ps 25:13, 14** says those who have a friendship w/ the Lord – their “souls abide in well-being.” No one can experience the well-being they were created for – w/o connecting them to the Gospel.

- Our genuine love for Christ (Acts 4:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- Our genuine love for others (Matthew 9:35-38; Romans 1:16; 10:1, 17)
- Our calling as Christ-followers (Matthew 4:19; 28:18-20)
- Our responsibility as his ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20)

- Our power to be his witnesses as given by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)
- Our privilege to be God's fellow-worker in the lives of others (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)
- The Gospel is the POWER of God for salvation: 1 Thes 2:13 and Romans 1:16

READ: Acts 4:20; 2 Cor 5:14, 15 // READ Romans 1:14-17. Act 1:8. Matt 4:19.

BUT... the how of sharing is difficult. As our culture becomes distant from its Judeo-Christian roots, old forms of evangelism can create an obstacle to the gospel. Although the word “evangelism” polarizes, it remains as one of the highest priorities of any gospel city movement or church.

THE COUNTER FORCES WORKING AGAINST OUR DESIRE TO SHARE OUR FAITH INCLUDE:

- Our fears of relational risk, potentially damaging a relationship or our reputation
- Our uncertainty about what to do or how to do it well
- Our lack of relational involvement or connection with those outside the faith
- Our busyness in life
- The cultural values of relativism, pluralism, and tolerance
- The negative cultural perceptions of Christians today

Even if we’re motivated & ready, we crash into a reality we must confront. Barriers exist between non-believers & believers. **5 Personal Barriers**

1. **Lack of Desire:** Sadly, too many Christians have lost their vision to share the Gospel for fear of being labeled narrow-minded.
2. **Fear** - tied to relational risk. We don’t want to offend someone. We don’t want to be rejected. We don’t want to feel uncomfortable.
3. **Lack of Know-how:** We are often unprepared and lack confidence. We don’t know what to say or how to say it. We fear being asked questions we can’t answer.
4. **Few friendships/associations w/ non-believers:** we don’t have many friendships outside the faith.
5. **Business:** our schedules get packed – lifestyle habits develop ruts that keep us from sharing our faith.

INTERACT: Look over the list, and number them in order for you. #1 is most true, #5 is least true of you.

Now add this! Outside of these personal barriers there are cultural ones¹.

1. **the failure of reason & loss of belief in truth** Our day is very suspicious of reason - human reason is considered inadequate to lead us to the truth. Objective truth is beyond our reach. Truth is only personal – “You have your truth. I have mine.” We are surrounded with diverse religious expressions, ethnicities and cultures. And so, post-modernism declares that pluralism is the way things should be. It goes beyond being tolerant and respectful, declaring that there is no truth that is applicable to all or describes ultimate reality.
2. **Pan-tolerance is the rule of the day** – the belief that all thoughts, ideas and opinions are equally valid and none can claim truth with any sense of confidence no matter what – and if you do, you’re power hungry and trying to manipulate others.
3. A 3rd barrier is **the loss of authority**. If there is no ultimate truth, then there is no book (like the Bible) or group (like the Church) that can command my respect, submission or commitment.
4. **Moral relativism** - morals & values are self-determined.
5. **Christians are perceived negatively**.

All of this means that it is difficult to talk graciously & calmly as we claim that absolute truth exists in the Gospel of Jesus. We need to converse w/ understanding, patience & wisdom.

However, there is a path forward. There are ways to appropriately engage others in significant gospel conversations, while navigating cultural resistance & dealing w/ these barriers. And people are OPEN!

THE REALITY DEMONSTRATED BY RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE

- People are more spiritually open than we think
 - Genuine care and relationally appropriate approaches to engage in the journeys of others will open the door to many significant spiritual and gospel conversations
- 73% of unchurched Americans between 20-29 consider themselves spiritual and want to know more about a higher being or God.
 - 89% say they would listen to someone’s beliefs about Christianity in a conversational way
 - 63% say, if it relates to my life now, I’d listen to a message in a church
 - 58% say if they experience care, would attend a church

¹ Adapted from *The Heart of Evangelism* by Jerram Barrs, Crossway

In this seven-week course, our focus is on engaging effectively with those with whom we rub shoulders.

1. We will introduce *CoJourners* - an equipping paradigm for conversational evangelism – and take a good look at practical tools.

COJOURNERS WILL HELP YOU ENGAGE IN THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS OF OTHERS THROUGH THE ROLES OF:

- **The Explorer:** discovering where people are in their spiritual journey
 - **The Guide:** showing the way to Jesus
 - **The Builder:** constructing ways over and beyond their issues and obstacles
 - **The Mentor:** helping people continue to follow Jesus
2. We will hear from each other re: our best practices.
 3. We will focus on comprehensive leadership regarding evangelism's role in our city.

CoJourners: Chapter 1

EVERYONE IS ON A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

STORY and INTRO

Let me begin by telling you a story.

Travis – when I met him, he was loaded down with failure, guilt & shame (morality, relationships, partying, no good job, wondering what to do as an artist). I did not know that. But when I met him, I asked: Travis, tell me about your journey & how you wind up here. That led to coffee, sleep overs, bible study, books... came to faith, in study, mission trip to Haiti. // There are three participants in this divine drama, each illustrating a foundational principle for our framework.

The 1st participant is **Travis**, the Bar Tender. He was clearly on a spiritual journey. But **everyone is on a spiritual journey**. They can't help it, because God has created them as spiritual beings. Some may be moving toward God and some away from God. Others may be stuck. But all are on a spiritual journey. We don't start their spiritual journeys; God did that. We just enter into it, just like I did w/ Travis.

The second actor in the divine drama is God Himself. **God is already at work**. He is the Lord of the Harvest, the Master who orchestrates circumstances in each person's journey, bringing conviction and power by his Spirit. Evangelism is always first and foremost a work of God.

Which brings us to the 3rd participant. There I am, just an ordinary believer a church, but alert to the opportunities w/ other people & how God wanted to use me. **God wants to use us** in the lives of others who we intersect in the everyday of life.

INTERACTION: What evidence have you seen lately of God at work in the spiritual journeys of others in your life?

What I experienced as a **CoJourneyer** w/ Travis is what we want our people to experience over and over again: Engaging in significant conversations in which they discover where others are in their spiritual journey & how God wants to use them.

That is the fulfillment of what Paul exhorts us toward in Colossians 4:5-6: ⁵ **Be wise** in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of **every opportunity**. ⁶ Let your **conversation** be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know **how to answer everyone**.

CoJourners is a compound expressing what no single English word adequately conveys. The prefix “co” means “with” and “journer”. Put them together and you get the idea that we are joining others in their spiritual journeys, CoJourners.

A COJOURNER'S THREE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES:

1. Everyone is on a spiritual journey

2. God is already at work in the lives of others

- He is the Lord of the Harvest who sends out laborers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:37-38)
- His desire is for all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9).
- It was he who created all people and nations and who has "determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live," doing so in order "that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (Acts 17:26-27 NIV).
- His Spirit is at work in the lives of people today (John 16:7-11).
- He has given us the privilege of being "fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9) with him.

3. God desires to use you

- We are often like the disciples, failing to recognize the spiritual harvest that is all around us (John 4:27-39).

YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER:

1. Jesus promised to give us power to be his witnesses by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8).

2. We can experience the Spirit's filling and power through understanding these truths:

- **The Promise:** Jesus promised that God's Holy Spirit would satisfy the thirst-or deepest longings-of all who believe in him (John 7:37-39).
- **The Divine Gift:** God has given us his Spirit so that we can experience intimacy with him and enjoy all he has for us (John 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 2:12).
- **The Present Danger:** We cannot experience intimacy with God and enjoy all he has for us if we fail to depend on his Spirit (Galatians 3:3; 5:17; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
- **The Intimate Journey:** By walking in the Spirit we increasingly experience intimacy with God and enjoy all he has for us (Galatians 5:16-25).
- **The Empowering Presence:** We are filled with the Spirit by faith, enabling us to experience intimacy with God and enjoy all he has for us (Ephesians 3:16-17; 5:18; 1 John 5:14-15).
- **The Turning Point:** We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith alone. Sincere prayer is one way of expressing our faith.

3. The Spirit's power doesn't eliminate our fear. It gives us the power to speak despite our fears (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

TAKE A STEP page 27 of book :: Take a moment now to pray and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. This can be the first step in a lifestyle of depending on God's Spirit moment by moment in your life and witness.

[Story of Laurence at First Fridays.](#)

My point in telling this story is that God's Spirit will lead us as we are sensitive to His promptings, and fill us and our message with His power. 1 Cor 2:1-5 is an example of this.

TAKE A STEP page 28 -30 of book

Write a quick summary of the spiritual journeys of three people (close, a good friend, acquaintance)

Teal – asks for prayer, used to go to church, hurt by many, proud, loves her kids,

Walt & how I met him. This is his friend Phil. Phil & I worked together as reading tutors in a public school this summer. I mentioned once that I'd like to hear of his spiritual journey sometime. He longed to tell me so I invited him to lunch. He brought Walt. He is a confident, responsible & creative young man. But his circumstances are very challenging. He's raising two siblings because both his mom & dad are in prison on drug and obstruction of justice charges. When I met him, he was loaded down with questions about God be/c his mom became a Christian in prison. I did not know that. But when I met him, I asked: Walt, tell me about your journey & how you wind up here. That led to two long conversations...he told me last Friday he was going to put his faith in Christ. He said, *"If my mom knew we were having this conversation, she'd never stop weeping for joy. Maybe we are meeting because of her prayers."*

There are three participants in this divine drama, each illustrating a foundational principle for our framework. The 1st participant is **Walt**, the LINC worker. He was clearly on a sp. But **everyone is on a spiritual journey**. They can't help it, be/c God has created them as spiritual beings. Some may be moving toward God & some away from God. Others may be stuck. But all are on a sp. journey. We don't start their spiritual journeys; God did that. We just enter into it, just like I did w/ Walt.

The second actor in the divine drama is God Himself. **God is already at work**. He is the Lord of the Harvest, the Master who orchestrates circumstances in each person's journey, bringing conviction and power by his Spirit. Evangelism is always first and foremost a work of God.

Which brings us to the 3rd participant. There I am, at lunch w/ two new friends I volunteered with – alert to the opportunities w/ other people & how God wanted to use me. **God wants to use us** in the lives of others who we intersect in the everyday of life.

What I experienced as a CoJourneyer w/ Walt is what we want our people to experience over and over again: Engaging in significant conversations in which they discover where others are in their spiritual journey & how God wants to use them.

CoJourners: Chapter 2

THE FOUR ROLES

In the first chapter I introduced you to the newly coined term, “CoJourneyer.” “CoJourneyer” is really more of a word-picture than a word. It calls to mind the image of our joining others in their spiritual journeys, of traveling together as spiritual companions.

Reflection: What are the implications of thinking about evangelism as joining others’ in their spiritual journeys? How does that change the images often associated with evangelism?

The Apostle Paul employed a similar technique in 2 Timothy 2:3-7. His young disciple Timothy found himself in difficult circumstances. To strengthen his resolve and impress upon him the truth that the reward is always “worth it in the end”, Paul used the images and occupations of the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. Each word picture is pregnant with implications for perseverance.

Seeking to strengthen Timothy’s resolve in the midst of hardship, the apostle Paul summons to mind the images and occupations of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer—each word-picture highlighting a unique aspect of perseverance:

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Notice what Paul says in that last line of the passage: “Think over what I say.” He’s telling Timothy to “ponder these images, meditate on them, and think deeply on the role of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer. Allow these images to inform your thoughts, shape your behavior and motivate you to action.”

2 Timothy 2:3-4 is a good example of the way I hope the CoJourneyer word pictures will inform us: The Explorer, Guide, Builder, and Mentor. Thinking in terms of these roles will help us think well about our part in evangelism, with guiding principles rather than scripted responses. The roles help us to know how to relate to another person and their unique journey and how we can be valuable companions with them in the process. The roles enable us to do our part while depending on God to do his. Like Paul’s images, they are simple to understand, yet packed with insights and implications.

As a CoJourneyer we can assume one or more of these four roles—Explorer, Guide, Builder, Mentor—with just about anyone, because everyone is on a spiritual journey.

There are four roles that we can play in the spiritual journeys of others:

1. **Explorer:** Enter the unknown to learn, discover and understand

INTERACTION: If you think about the great explorers of history, what were they really good at?

Neil Armstrong, Sir, Earnest Shackleton, Marco Polo, Lewis & Clark, Christopher Columbus

They were brave, bold, inquisitive, and resourceful. They entered unknown territory *to discover, learn, and understand*.

This is an Explorer, and it's the role you and I assume when we enter into the lives of others, exploring their spiritual journeys through *listening* and *asking good questions*—each question going a little deeper, a little closer to the heart.

- Through asking good questions
- Through listening

EXAMPLE:

SomeTime is a CoJourneyers experience —dedicated to exploring the backstories of our friends. During this experience, you will be asking friends, *“Sometime, I’d like to hear about your spiritual journey... would you be up for that?”* You ask if you can meet to hear his or her story.

2. **Guide:** Show the way to Jesus

A Guide is the second role of a CoJourneyer, and unlike an Explorer who simply looks to discover, a Guide leads others to a specific destination. A Guide *shows the way*. This implies that a Guide knows where they are going, knows how to get there, and is able to lead others on the journey with them.

As a Guide we are always aware of the destination, that is, we are always seeking to lead the person—and so the conversation—to Jesus. Sometimes the conversation never gets that far;

sometimes we merely get to Explore. That's okay, wherever the conversation goes, and for however long it continues and how often it occurs, our awareness of being a Guide will serve as a compass, moving the questions, discussion and relationship in a Jesus-ward direction (and go ahead and add Jesus-ward to our list of newly coined words).

It may be surprising but even first-time conversations can lead to talking about Jesus. You'll find that Exploring will often reveal that God has already been at work, preparing that person for the very conversation you're having. This was Philip's experience with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), Ananias' experience with Saul (Acts 9:10-19), Peter's experience with Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) and there are many more such experiences in Scripture and in life today. In those experiences a guide leads others toward Jesus, using their own *life story* and *gospel explanations*.

- Through your life-story (or testimony)
- Through a gospel explanation

INTERACTION: What is necessary for someone to come to faith – the essence of the Gospel?

3. **Builder:** Construct bridges over obstacles and issues in spiritual journeys

What do bridges do? They span obstacles and obstructions. To be a Builder alongside someone's spiritual journey is to recognize the obstacle(s) standing between them and Jesus, and to set about building a way over and beyond it.

As you explore someone's life, what you'll often uncover is a place where they've gotten spiritually stuck: mired down by some issue or obstacle that keeps them from moving closer to God. Perhaps they're struggling with the hypocrisy they've seen in Christians or why God allows suffering: whatever it is, it's a barrier and they need a bridge over it.

To be a Builder doesn't mean you have the answer to every spiritual question a person might have. In fact, sometimes the best answer is "I don't know" or "I struggle with that too." Sometimes just listening and empathizing with a question or conflict can begin building a bridge. But together with God, we seek to help them across their issues and obstacles through *prayer* and *gentle persuasion*.

- Through prayer
- Through gentle persuasion

Prayer is important because no matter what the issue is, the enemy seeks to use it as a way of blinding them & keeping them in spiritual bondage. Prayer unleashes God's power. But our part is

through **gentle persuasion**—not coming at them as if we have to win an argument, but coming beside them & helping them get beyond the issue.

4. **Mentor:** Encourage them on in the spiritual journey

It's around the year AD 67. The apostle Paul is in prison in Rome, and while he hasn't reached the end of his life, he can certainly see it from there. He's old and though he's bounced in and out of prison for decades, that's not what he's anticipating this time. Paul is expecting to die. Sitting in the dungeon, cold (4:21), lonely (4:10, 16) his heart turns to Timothy, his dear "son" in the faith (1:4), and he writes, asking Timothy to visit before winter (4:21), bringing with him a warm coat and some books and parchments (4:13). Here's what else Paul says to Timothy (2 Tim 1:3, 13; 3:10, 14)

I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith (2Tim. 1:3). Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me (1:13). You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings (3:10,11). Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it (3:14).

These are the words of a mentor. The biographical strands found in the Pastoral Epistles tell of an enduring and endearing relationship, where Paul taught and modeled the Faith, as well as trained Timothy for the work of ministry. This is what Mentors do.

This is the fourth role of a CoJourneyer, the Mentor, of which the Apostle Paul is a compelling example. Spiritual journeys do not end when people come to Jesus; in the most important sense, they are just beginning. As a Mentor we come alongside a new or young believer and help establish them in their faith, setting them on a course toward growth and maturity, and preparing them to be CoJourneyers with others. We do so by helping the develop **relational connections** with other believers and learn key **life concepts** from the Bible.

Reflection: For which of the four roles—Explorer, Guide, Builder, Mentor—do you feel most confident and comfortable? For which do you feel you need the most help and equipping?

- Through relational connections
- Through life concepts

The roles aren't sequential. They are situational. You play the role that is needed.

YOU BEGIN AS AN EXPLORER, discovering where a person is and their level of openness. But what role you play next is determined by what you discover. Is this person open to hearing about your spiritual journey and Jesus? Then become a Guide. Do they have issues and obstacles in their journey? Be a Builder. Do they need encouragement and help to continue on? Become their Mentor.

PUTTING THE PICTURES TOGETHER

These are the four word-pictures, the four roles that make up a CoJourneyer. You begin as an Explorer asking questions, listening to the answers, and discovering where that person is on their spiritual journey. Where the conversation goes from there, and what role you assume next depends entirely on the context.



In some conversations the next role you will assume is that of a Guide. You may do that by sharing your own life-story or by explaining the gospel.

Many times, when you begin to explore someone’s life, you discover they’re spiritually stuck, and so you become a Builder, providing a bridge over the obstacle. Through prayer and gentle persuasion, you make it possible for them to move over and beyond the issue. It’s only safely on the other side of the obstacle, that you can move back into the role of Guide, leading them to Christ.

At other times you be a Builder before you can be a Mentor helping them learn how to walk with Jesus.

Each person's journey is unique. This isn't a formula or carefully scripted pattern. But seeing and understanding these roles will allow you to engage appropriately in anyone's spiritual journey.

TAKE A STEP

Explorer, Guide, Builder and Mentor: the four roles of a CoJourneyer. Easy to remember? It will be if you do this simple exercise. Sit down with another Believer and try to explain the four roles.

CoJourners: Chapter 3

THE EXPLORER – Part 1: Ask Good Questions

One thing is for sure. The more you grow in Christ-likeness, the more your love for people will issue forth in questions—exploring questions, probing questions, exposing questions. After all, read through the Gospels. You will find Jesus was always asking questions. “Do you still not understand?” (Matthew 16:9) “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13) “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15) “What is it you want?” (Matthew 20:21) “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46) “Where is your faith?” (Luke 8:25) “What is your name?” (Luke 8:30) “Do you love me?” (John 21:17) I don’t know exactly how many of Jesus’ questions were recorded, but it more than 135 and that is a lot when you consider how much of Jesus’ words we have recorded. So, master the art of asking good questions. You will find you not only become effective as an explorer, you will be more like the loving Lord you follow!

In the next couple chapters, we’ll look at the role of an Explorer. The focus of this chapter will be on asking good questions and we’ll address listening in the next. So, let me begin with a story about Exploring.

WE CAN'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SOMEONE'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY; WE HAVE TO DISCOVER THEIR REALITIES.

I was flying on a plane and I found myself sitting next to a guy named Robert. So, what do we know about Robert?

Other than that Robert is a guy on a plane, you probably answered, “Nothing.” But there is one thing you do know, right? Lesson 1: Robert is on a spiritual journey.

So, let me give you a clue. He is French—a French dentist. Now what do you think? Would you guess his spiritually near or spiritually far away from God? Most people would guess (based on their perceptions of France, not dentists) that Robert was spiritually distant.

So, here’s another clue: He considered himself a French humanist. Hmm... Humanism is a man-centered worldview. Not normally the path leading to Christ, is it? In fact, feeling a bit more spiritually distant.

As I continued to explore, asking questions and listening, I discovered Robert considered the church of his country to be irrelevant to the needs of society—this is not looking good, not looking

good at all: a French humanist disillusioned by the church—Robert’s sounding more and more distant by the moment.

But when he recognized my interest in spiritual matters, he shared that he had recently entered a U.S. bookstore to try to buy an English Bible. Whoa, now that changes your outlook, doesn’t it? Something is going on with Robert. God is at work. By the way, he didn’t buy the Bible because the English was too difficult to understand. I’m guessing he picked up an old King James Version.

I asked Robert anyone had ever shown him a simple explanation of the Bible’s main message and if I could. He agreed. After he read through a gospel outline, I said to him, “Robert, a question you need to answer for yourself is, ‘Is this true? Is what you just read the truth.’” After a long pause, he said, “I don’t know if it is true or not, but I hope my children decide it is.” Whoa? He wanted his children to believe something he still wasn’t sure about? “Why?” I asked. He explained that if they would, he knew they would experience a better life than if they didn’t. He saw the implications of the gospel. He really was spiritually open, after all.

Think back over how your view of Robert changed with each new piece of information—initially expecting him to be spiritually distant, perhaps resistant, only to later discover genuine openness. That is what happens when we explore in others’ lives. The things we assume to be true are overturned by insights into their reality.

We can’t guess where people are spiritually; we can only discover it. Let me say that again, because that was profound, and I don’t often say profound things. ***We can’t guess where people are spiritually; we can only discover it.***

Reflection: *Think about the people around you—at work, at school, in your neighborhood. What are you assuming about their spiritual interest and openness? What are you discovering to be true?*

Let me make another observation, not as profound, but important none-the-less. We tend to see people as either spiritually open or closed, with little in-between. In reality most people fall somewhere between those extremes. To see this clearer let’s, consider some additional categories.

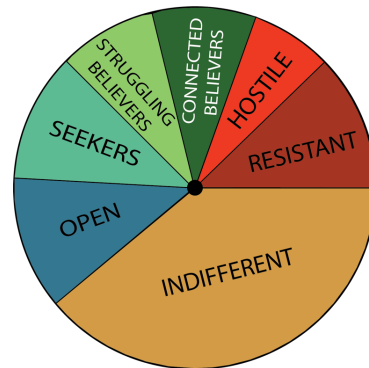
DIVIDING THE SPIRITUAL PIE

Our lives are filled with people who are spiritually “unknowns” to us —we simply have no idea where they are, where they have been or where they are going, spiritually speaking. As we begin to explore, we’ll discover people all over the spiritual map. Or instead of a map, let’s think in terms of a spiritual pie.

Let the pie represent all the people on your campus or in your community. Each slice represents a different group, clustered by their spiritual journeys. While the sizes of each slice will vary from

place to place and culture to culture, the spiritual pie can help you begin to think about the spiritual journeys of others.

THE SPECTRUM OF SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS (OR, THE SPIRITUAL PIE DIAGRAM):



A couple of slices (top, left) are already believers—some of whom are **Growing** in their faith and connected to a community of believers. Others are **Struggling** and unconnected. They are in need of help to get turned back around, to follow Christ and reengage with other believers.

The next group of people is the **Seekers**, those searching for God or something spiritually. They're active and looking for answers. These are often the exciting ones to talk with, especially when you have the privilege of becoming the Guide in their journey showing the way to Jesus.

A fourth slice includes the spiritually **Open**. These are not actively seeking God, but if they are approached in an appropriate manner and in a safe environment, they will be open to talk and engage, to consider and reflect. They just need someone to take the initiative with them.

Perhaps the largest slice will be **Indifferent**. Spiritual life is not something they give a whole lot of thought. It is irrelevant to how they live and what they live for—or so they think. Conversations will have to be related to an area of interest or need in their life for them to be open to consider the gospel.

The last two groups include the **Resistant** and the **Hostile**. Resistance is often rooted in world-views and belief systems that conflict with the gospel. Religion (even Christian versions of it) can have a hardening effect when it is void of genuine reverence or relationship with God. While hostility may flow from a strong belief system in conflict with the gospel, quite often it is rooted in emotional issues like painful experiences from the past.

The point of the pie is not to reduce people to a profile—that's the last thing a pie would ever do. Rather the point is to recognize the range of spiritual journeys and help us move away from seeing

people as either open or closed. Where are in this spectrum will influence the roles, we can play in their journey.

TAKE A STEP

Draw your own pie, making each slice the size you would expect for those in your community. Try putting the initials of people you know within each slice. Circle the ones you know and that you've confirmed through conversation. Remember, the un-circled are merely assumptions.

Everyone you know, everyone you meet, lies somewhere along this spectrum, and we can't guess where people are spiritually; we can only discover it. That is the job of the Explorer and the great tool of discovery is the well-asked question.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS:

- "How are you?" Take a genuine interest in people's lives.
- **GOOD QUESTION**
- Let's be clear from the start. There are no magical questions that always work, no set question to ask in every situation. But there are good questions, questions that can be used frequently, depending on the context of the conversation.
- This may shock you, but "How are you?" may be the most useful, all-purpose question, when it's asked with this subtle nuance: YOU HAVE TO MEAN IT! People hear that question a lot but it's rarely asked with much genuine interest or sincerity. So, when it is, it's inviting. Just this morning, I paused on my jog to ask Paul, a dog-walking neighbor. While it wouldn't appropriate here, could tell you all about his discouraging health challenges. People open up to people who care enough to ask and listen. Of course, there are all manner of derivatives: "So what's been going on in your life?" "How is work going?" "How is your family doing?" These are all common, general questions, but they can be asked with uncommon interest.
- The aim of these questions is to begin discovery, moving the conversation to a deeper level, not too deep, but closer to the heart. This is a significant step in a conversation, and if you take it, you ought to feel pretty good about yourself—you're officially an Explorer!

Reflection: When was the last time you asked someone, "How are you?" and taken the time to find out the real answer?

EXPLORE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

With the conversation somewhat more personal you can ask a spiritual question without it being awkward. For example, if a person opens up about something difficult going on in their life, you

might ask, “Can I pray for you about that?” It may surprise you, but the vast majority of people recognize the value of prayer. Research has shown nearly 80% of Americans believe it can make a difference. (Fox News Poll, September 7, 2011). So, people appreciate someone who cares enough to not only ask about their lives, but to pray for needs. My not-yet-believing surgeon responded to my offer of prayer with, “Sure. I’ll take all the help I can get.” He now knows me not just as a patient, but also as someone who genuinely cares about him as a person. So, on my last follow-up appointment, he was openly sharing with me about his recent divorce and the pain associated with it. That’s not the normal conversation you expect in a doctor’s office. But people respond to genuine interest and care.

So here comes another profound thought: ***Exploring with genuine interest and concern doesn’t threaten relationships; it deepens them!*** Think about it for a moment. What are the greatest fears people have in sharing their faith? They are the fears of doing relational damage, of being offensive or rejected. Yet being a genuinely interested and caring Explorer has the opposite effect. It fosters deeper relationships.

A question I’ve found that can really open the doors of *spiritual* discovery is, “I’m curious. Do you have any kind church or religious background?” Or, “What was your religious background growing up?” People will tell you as much or as little as they are comfortable telling you, and as they do, you’ll start to discover insights into the spiritual journey they’ve been on.

Honestly, I have found that if people feel you are genuinely interested and relationally safe, most will respond openly. There was one man I recently asked who responded, “I hate conversations like this.” When I gently asked why, he said, “I don’t want to force my views on anyone or have them force their views on me. Not that you are doing that, you just asked a question. So, I will tell you my story...” This fellow wasn’t open to going further in the conversation (that was obvious.) But through the question I discovered where he was spiritually, his lack of openness and no damage was done.

Explore past experiences: where they've been

SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Spiritual Journeys have a past, present, and future, and our questions can help fill in the story. Typically, I’ll begin by asking questions about someone’s past experiences (where they’ve been). That is what they generally most comfortable sharing. Then based on what I discover about their openness and experiences, I can begin to explore their present attitudes (where they are) and their future desires (where they are going.). This gives me a fuller picture of their journey. Again, there are no right questions for every situation, but here are some that I use:

- What was your religious background as a child?

- What have you tried in your spiritual journey since?

Explore present attitudes: where they are

- How has your search left you feeling?
- Where are you now in your spiritual journey?

Explore future direction: where they are going

- What do you desire most spiritually?
- Do you think you are moving toward God, away from God, or staying about the same?

Look again at some of those questions: you could ask these of just about anyone couldn't you? A friend, neighbor, classmate, coworker, brother, sister ... you'll find even strangers respond to such questions when asked with heart-felt interest. This is just a sampling of questions you could use. What questions you actually use will be determined by the situation and by the leading of God's Spirit, as you rely on him in the conversation.

TAKE A STEP

Whether a question sounds natural depends on who's asking it (and the context of the conversation.) A question I might ask may seem out of place or out of date to you. Below is a lengthy list of Explorer questions. Read each one and imagine using it in a conversation. Try it on and see if it fits. Then go back over the list and put a check by the questions you liked.

- What was your religious background as a child?
- Was the experience positive, neutral, or negative?
- Where are you now in your spiritual journey?
- Do you have a spiritual belief of any kind?
- What words would you use to describe your life spiritually?
- Have you ever been involved with a church or community of faith?
- Have you had a negative experience or been turned off by Christian people?
- What would you say is most important to you in life?
- How would you describe your belief in God?
- Has anything dramatic happened in your life that has convinced you that God is real?
- Do you find yourself moving toward God, away from God or staying about the same?
- Are you satisfied with where you are spiritually?
- Who is Jesus to you?
- If you could ask God one question, what would it be?
- If a close friend asked you how to become a Christian, what would you tell them?

- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your desire to know God personally?
- What do you think is most important to God? Why?
- If you were to die tonight, how sure are you that you would have eternal life?
- If God asked you why he should let you into his heaven, what would you say?
- If you were wrong about what you believe, would you want to know?

Pick one or two of them and try to use them this week with friends and acquaintances. Simply tell them what you are doing and ask permission: "Hey, I'm asking people I know a couple of questions about spiritual matters and seeing what they think. Could I ask you the questions?"

Keep a journal of the conversations that occur, remembering to pray for those whose journeys you have begun to explore. You will find some pages for your journal in the back of this book.

NEXT WEEK IN EXPLORER 2:

LISTEN FOR:

- Common ground
- Windows to the soul
- Unmet needs
- Traces of the Spirit

LISTEN WITH:

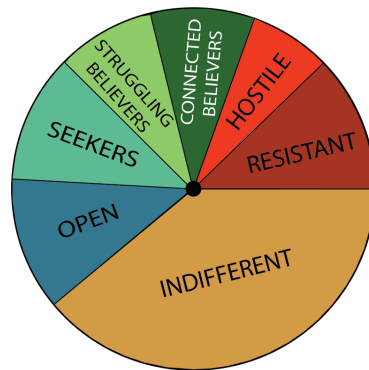
- Focused Attention
- Invite More - "Tell me more..."
- Give Feedback - "What I hear you saying is..."
- Ask Permission - "Can I ask you about...?"

CoJourners: Chapter 4

THE EXPLORER – Part 2: Discover Through Listening

{TEACHER, Assume Chapter 3, Part 1 of Explorer role was covered until teaching notes begin again below.}

WE CAN'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SOMEONE'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY; WE HAVE TO DISCOVER THEIR REALITIES. THE SPECTRUM OF SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS (OR, THE SPIRITUAL PIE DIAGRAM):



ASK GOOD QUESTIONS:

- "How are you?" Take a genuine interest in people's lives.

EXPLORE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

Explore past experiences: where they've been

- What was your religious background as a child?
- What have you tried in your spiritual journey since?

Explore present attitudes: where they are

- How has your search left you feeling?
- Where are you now in your spiritual journey?

Explore future direction: where they are going

- What do you desire most spiritually?

- Do you think you are moving toward God, away from God, or staying about the same?

Introduction:

The Steven Spielberg film *Amistad* chronicles the true story of a group of enslaved Africans who in the spring of 1839, revolted aboard the Spanish slave ship *La Amistad*. Having overtaken their captors, they attempted to return to their beloved homeland. The ship was seized off the Eastern Seaboard and the captives were brought to the United States where they were charged with murder, and held in prison to await what was sure to be a death sentence. But what ensued was a legal battle that captured the attention of the entire nation, and confronted the very foundation of the American judicial system. For the men and women on trial, however, it was simply a fight for the basic right of all mankind...freedom. (I wish I could summarize this well, but I borrowed liberally from promotional materials for the film.)

In the movie, the turning point occurs during a conversation between the elderly, eccentric, ex-president of the United States, John Quincy Adams, and Mr. Theodore Joadson, a former African slave, now working for the abolition of slavery in America. Joadson seeks advice from Adams on how to try the case.

Adams responds, "When I was an attorney a long time ago, I learned by trial and error, that whoever tells the best story wins. I offer that scrap of wisdom free of charge."

Joadson appears disappointed with this counsel and turns to leave, when Adams speaks again. "What is their story?"

The dialogue continues:

"Why, they are from West Africa." "Where originally?"

"No, what is their story? Mr. Joadson, you are from

"Why, Georgia, sir."

"Georgia?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that pretty much what you are, your story? No. You're an ex-slave who has devoted his life to the abolition of slavery and overcoming great obstacles and hardships along the way, I imagine. That's your story. Isn't it? Hah. You and this young, so-called lawyer have proven you know what they are. They are Africans. Congratulations! What you don't know, and as far as I can tell, haven't bothered in the least to discover, is who they are. Right?"

Did you hear those words? "...you know **what** they are... What you don't know, and as far as I can tell, haven't bothered in the least to discover, is **who** they are."

That rings true, doesn't it? How often do we get to the end of a spiritual conversation and we have discovered "**what** they are" (an unbeliever, a skeptic, or whatever), yet we don't know "**who** they are?" What is their story?

Most of us have conversations every day with people who don't have a desire to get beyond the niceties, and really get to know us. Listening is rare even between friends. So, few things communicate genuine care like our undivided attention. Listening, as Jesus notes, is the measure of attentiveness: "be careful how you listen" (Luke 8:18), and "consider carefully what you hear" (Mark 4:24).

When you ask good questions as an Explorer, and prayerfully listen to the response, you'll often hear more than just the answer. Getting to know a neighbor who had recently moved to our block, we began discussing our homes and their similar lack of structural integrity. (We both had the same leaky windows above the garage.) After comparing notes, I asked Mike, "Besides the home, how is the rest of life going?"

"It's getting better," he responded.

Did you hear that? "It's getting better." That is a *window into his soul*—a comment that provided a view into what was true on the inside, in the interior of his life. All I needed to do was move closer relationally and invite him to "tell me more". The next thing I knew I was discovering what was going on in his world—the work issues that were leading to financial problems, which were the root of marital tensions, which were negatively affecting the kids. All of these insights came in our first real conversation together, from asking a simple question, but really listening to the answer and noticing a window to his soul.

If you think about it, this is the principle that governs a scavenger hunt: you'll find a man wearing a red baseball cap because you're looking for a man wearing a red baseball cap. When you listen for someone's spiritual journey, you'll discover insights into their spiritual journey and often you will be amazed at what you hear, amazed by what God shows you.

MAKING DISCOVERIES

LISTEN FOR:

- Common ground
- Windows to the soul
- Unmet needs
- Traces of the Spirit

As an explorer, what are you listening for? What are the insights that will help you know if you are to assume another role in their spiritual journey and, if so, which one? To get you started, let me give you four things you can be listening for.

COMMON GROUND

In Acts 17, as Paul explains the gospel message to Athens, notice how he looks—and finds—common ground with his audience:

“So, Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.’” (Acts 17:22-23)

We have something in common with everyone. If nothing else, we’re all human, giving us the same nature, same needs, and many of the same capacities. That is why we can carry on conversations with one another. It’s also why we know that the gospel is relevant to every person. We don’t need to make the gospel relevant. We need to help others understand its relevance. That’s what Paul was doing in Athens—helping them see the relevance.

But beyond the universal things we all share, there are other, more personal, points of common ground. These can often provide the subject for conversational explorations. For example, being a parent, a student with a major, financial challenges, job problems, boss conflicts, health issues, relationship matters . . . being from the same planet, there’s much we can find to talk about.

WINDOWS TO THE SOUL

A second set of discoveries we have already introduced. They can be called *windows to the soul*. What does a window do? Among other things, it lets you see what’s on the other side. Conversations are often laced with windows of the soul—comments that allow you to glimpse what’s true on the other side, or in this case, the inside, the heart and soul. According to the laws of physics, optical engineering, and common sense, the closer you get to a window, the more you can see. The same thing happens with conversations: a person makes a comment suggestive of what is going on inside, and you can stay back and be satisfied with that glimpse, or you can move closer conversationally and see even more. Simply invite them to, “Tell me more about that.”

UNMET NEEDS

Created things (like cars, planes, etc.) work best when used for their intended purpose and according to their original design: cars don’t make good flying objects and planes don’t do well on highways. Likewise, people are the product of an intelligent designer and so life works best when lived by his design. When life is not lived according to God’s design, it doesn’t work so well. My point is this: if you and I (who are trying to live according to God’s design) have our share of needs

and struggles, imagine what must be true for those who aren't even trying. I guarantee you, there are unmet needs in everyone's life.

Here is the key: *unmet needs can open closed minds*. Indifference to the gospel is often tied to a perceived irrelevance of the gospel. But when you identify cracks in the heart, broken parts of the soul, areas of frustration and shortcoming, you have discovered conversational paths that lead to our ultimate need—forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God—and suddenly the gospel is very, very relevant.

TRACES OF THE SPIRIT

A last area to observe is evidence of where God is already at work. Where are the traces of the Spirit's fingerprints in their lives? In a conversation with another of our neighbors, my wife, Nanci, and I asked a few exploring questions only to discover that he had recently made a New Year's resolution to get closer to God! And his girlfriend, also involved in the conversation, had been "praying for a sign" and concluded that we were that sign! When you discover where God has been at work, things really get exciting! You can imagine the amazing conversation that followed with our neighbors.

So, as you listen, these are things you want to be listening for: Common ground, Windows of the soul, Unmet needs, and Traces of the Spirit. And remember, you're not on your own. As you are in a conversation, keep in conversation with God: "Lord, give me insight," "Lord, where you are at work in this person's life." Trust him to guide you in the conversation. He will.

Reflection: When was the last time you said a prayer for give you wisdom while in a conversation with another person? Have you ever done this in an Exploring conversation?

LOOK ALIVE

One last thought on listening and it may sound obvious, but it's often overlooked: look like you're paying attention. Now I'm not saying to look like you're paying attention when you're really not, I'm saying that verbal and non-verbal feedback is important to communicate your care and attentiveness. How you listen will make a difference and there are basics to listening well. Here are some things to keep in mind:

LISTEN WITH:

- Focused Attention
- Invite More - "Tell me more..."
- Give Feedback - "What I hear you saying is..."
- Ask Permission - "Can I ask you about...?"

Focused Attention

Give your undivided attention to the other person. Despite your advanced abilities at multi-tasking, listening isn't the place to use them.

Invite More

Three of the most powerful words are, "Tell me more..." That little phrase opens up conversations, moves them to a deeper level and draws out additional insights. Use them!

Give Feedback

People want to know you actually heard them. You can affirm them, "I appreciate you saying..." or, clarify, "What I hear you saying is..."

Ask Permission

The safe way to go deeper in a conversational is to ask permission. "Can I ask you about...?" That communicates respect and allows them to express their openness or interest.

TAKE A STEP

In conversations this week try to be attentive to these four different clues: Common ground, Windows of the soul, Unmet needs, and Traces of the Spirit. Try talking to God, in the midst of your conversations, asking him to give you insight into that person's spiritual journey. And when you hear a clue, go exploring: "Tell me more..."

CoJourners: Chapter 5

THE GUIDE - Part 1: Showing the Way to Jesus

Remember the first CoJourney principle? That's right. Everyone is on a spiritual journey. That is true of everyone, including those who are, well, traveling on other journeys—like flights. That can lead to some interesting encounters.

Coming back on flight from Hungary my wife, Nanci, and I found ourselves sitting next to a very thick, very well-built man. (Actually, I was sitting next to him, which means I was in for a long flight in the middle seat.) From the moment he sat down, he had headphones on and was playing with a flight simulator on his iPad. Using my keen powers of perception, I concluded that this wasn't the time to start a conversation. But before we took off, I noticed something odd about him: every few minutes he'd reach into his pocket, pull out a phone, look at it, put it back, reach into his other pocket, pull out another phone, look at it, put it back ... odd.

When the first meal was served, he took off the headphones and we finally started up a conversation. We visited about jobs (he claimed to work in airport security), family (had had a couple of teenage kids), the military (both he and my son had served) and fishing (he really, really liked talking about fishing!) As we talked, I asked one of my favorite Explorer questions: did he have any kind of religious background. "No," he told me. "I'm not really religious at all, but my wife is; she's Roman Catholic. But when I ask her questions about it, she can't answer me."

This got us talking on all kinds of things: Tsunamis and why God allows suffering, other world religions ... really sincere questions. Eventually I asked if I could show him a diagram, we use to explain the essence of the Bible's message. He agreed, and so I began drawing a simple sketch of the gospel. As we walked through it together, he was totally engaged and when we got to the end, he said this was exactly what he needed and wanted. It wasn't the right time or place to pray together, but he indicated he would when he returned home.

As I pulled my business card out of my briefcase (and, yes, I know the word briefcase dates me), I saw a photo of my wife, Nanci, and I. I felt prompted (by the Spirit?) to offer it to him as something to remember our conversation by. He eagerly took it from me, saying, "I'm going to frame this and keep it where I'll see it every day to remind me of the commitment I am making today." Isn't that amazing?

Since I had given him my business card, I asked if I could have his, and the first awkward moment of the conversation occurred. "No, I can't give it to you." Pause. "It's a job thing." Pause. "Oh, I

understand.” (Security, I thought.) He then reached down into his backpack and pulled out two lapel pins for Nanci and I. I thought that was strange, but I thanked him and tucked them into my bag. Afterward he asked me, “Did you look closely at the pins I gave you.” I admitted I hadn’t, and grabbed one for a closer look.

In the center of the pin, in tiny, miniscule type it said, U.S. Air Marshal.

I looked at him and pointed and he smiled and nodded. “Oh, you’re working now?” I said. Again, he just smiled and nodded. Everyone is on a spiritual journey, even U.S. Air Marshals.

As you explore the spiritual journeys of others, you’ll meet plenty of people like the Air Marshal. When you discover spiritual openness and receptivity, you change roles: you become a Guide.

As a CoJourneyer, the role of a Guide is like any other guide—it is to lead someone to a destination, except we are not leading people to somewhere but to Someone, to “our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” As Guides, we have the honor and privilege to introduce others to Jesus. At times, that can happen in an initial conversation, if God has already been at work and the gospel comes with great power and the Holy Spirit like it did in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, or with the Air Marshal. At other times we may help someone move a step or two closer to Christ; or perhaps reintroduce them to Christ. Whatever part we play in their journey, it is an exciting privilege when we get to be a Guide.

Now I know what you’re thinking, that you need to be some kind bible scholar to explain the gospel. But nothing—and I mean nothing—could be further from the truth. In fact, if you think about it, who are some of the best guides in the world? Kids. Take a small child to a park or a beach or a store and they’ll tow you around knowing exactly where they want to go and the best way to get you there. It’s the same with spiritual journeys: you don’t need to know a lot to be a Guide, just a child-like faith and a desire to lead someone to Jesus.

Think of some biblical examples. Here are three brand new followers of Jesus, all of which were effective in leading family, friends and neighbors (of sorts) to the Lord. Andrew brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus after his first encounter (John 1:40-42.) Philip did the same with his friend, Nathaniel (John 1:45-46). Even the Samaritan woman could effectively lead her whole village to Jesus with a simple seventeen-word testimony— “Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29) As a result, John tells us that, “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony” (John 4:39). If God could use her one-sentence, one-question testimony, he most certainly can use yours!

Reflection: *Have you had the privilege of helping lead someone to Christ? If so, reflect back on how you saw God at work in that situation. Tell God thanks for using you.*

After all, what is the prerequisite for being a Guide? It's first-hand experience, right? You don't want a Guide who has never been where you're going. You want someone who has personal knowledge of the journey ahead. Think of the implication of this. If you know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, if you have come to him in faith, then you qualify as a Guide.

But you may need a little help in communicating effectively, so here goes...

CHANGING ROLES: ASK PERMISSION

One of the most common concerns is how to get into a gospel conversation. It seems like there is an invisible sound barrier that we need to break through to begin to talk about Christ. Yet here are where the interplay of the roles is so helpful. As you explore the life and experience of others (an Explorer), they will quite naturally want to know something about yours (and, thus, an opportunity to be a Guide). Often, they will ask. After exploring the life and work of a Muslim nephrologist (that means I was learning a lot about kidneys and medicine), he turned the conversation to ask about me about my life and work. That led into two long and fascinating conversations about our faith journeys, the Bible, prophets and, of course, Jesus. On another occasion, an exploring question or two turned the "talk" button on for a twenty-something who shared extensively about his life and journey. Honestly, I was beginning to wonder if I would ever reenter the conversation with a word or two, when he suddenly looked at me and said, "So what's your story?"

But what if they don't ask? It is still quite natural and appropriate for you to gently knock, asking permission with a question like, "Can I share a little bit of my story?" Or, maybe better, "Can I share a little bit of my experience?" Asking permission opens the door without forcing your story into the conversation. It also communicates respect to the other person, continuing to foster an open and positive encounter.

YOUR STORY: SHARE IT BRIEFLY

What is the prerequisite for being a Guide? It's first-hand experience of the route, right? You don't want a Guide who has never been where you're going. No, you want someone who has personal knowledge of the journey ahead. Think of the implication of this. If you know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, if you have come to him in faith, then you qualify as a Guide. This "instant qualification" can be seen clearly in the story of The Woman at the Well, found in *John's Gospel*. Just moments after encountering Jesus, this Samaritan woman serves as a Guide to her entire village:

So, the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" John 4:28,29

As a result of her testimony, John tells us that, “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony” (John 4:39). If God could use her one-sentence testimony, he most certainly can use yours!

A couple of months ago, I had another fascinating conversation while flying home into Orlando. (I travel a lot, so I meet a lot of interesting people on planes.) I began to ask a couple of exploring questions and soon was hearing a most fascinating story. My fellow traveler (a man of approximately 60 years) had been adopted as an infant through San Diego agency. Now as he approached his senior years, his doctors had advised him for medical reasons to see if any information re: his birth parents was available. A long story shortened, he discovered that his birth mom had become pregnant by her high school boyfriend, had put him up for adoption and then later married his father. They had now been married 65 years. He knew about them, but they still did not know about him. He was struggling over whether to reach out or not? He then asked about me. I said, “Well, my story revolves around three phrases: The search for significance, a surprise encounter and ultimate satisfaction.” I then unpacked those phrases for him, briefly sharing my testimony.

As we exited the plane, I discovered for the first time that his wife was also on the plane but seated in a different section. He wanted to introduce me to her and did so saying, “Honey, I want you to meet Keith. He has the most fascinating story that I’ll want to tell you later.” I laughed and said to her, “Your husband has the more fascinating story and I’ll be sharing it with my wife in a few minutes.”

That is the power of life stories. When we take a genuine interest in another person’s story and we have the opportunity to share a little of ours (the transition to a Guide), the conversation has moved to a whole new level—a spiritual conversation now seeded with a little gospel truth.

But remember, it’s a little bit of your story. Few will want the full cinematic version. It took you a lifetime to live it; don’t make it feel like it’s taking a lifetime for you to tell it. Two or three minutes will be about right for most people’s attention span. But to do that effectively will probably require some prayerful preparation.

Try the Samaritan woman’s model. She said it all with a sentence and an intriguing question: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” Can you do that? You may need to share a little more, but you get the point. How about my example of using three descriptive words or phrases?

TAKE A STEP

You’d probably rehearse if you had an important speech to give, and it’s certainly not a stretch to think of telling your spiritual story as an important speech. So, try writing out a simple version of it. This may help: think about your story in terms of three key words or phrases.

Come up with **one descriptive word or phrase** that summarizes your life before you met Christ (aimless, addicted, insecure, manipulative, etc.). Then, think of a **second word or phrase** that describes how you came to know Christ (friend, Bible, church, etc.). Last, a **third word or phrase** that describes your life now, after coming to know Christ (caring, forgiving, approachable, hopeful, etc.). Remember mine? “The search for significance, a surprise encounter and ultimate satisfaction.”

Once you have your three words or phrases, come up with a one or two sentence explanation for each.

Try writing it one more time, but with this additional: in your description of the **second** word, include a phrase that summarizes the essence of the gospel. Here are some examples:

A friend explained to me that Jesus forgave all my sins—past, present, and future.

After years of wondering, I was now *certain* that I had eternal life, because of Christ’s death on the cross.

A friend explained that it’s not what we “do” for God that’s important, but what he has “done” for us, in sending his Son to die for our sins.

Okay, here is mine: “It was through these coaches that I first understood that being Christian was more than just thinking what Christians think or doing what Christians do, but that it involved having a personal relationship with Christ, where he enters our life, forgives our sins and changes us from the inside out.”

THE GOSPEL PLAIN & SIMPLE

Your life story is an essential piece of Guide equipment, but it the gospel itself that is the real power tool. In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul says that “the gospel” is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,” and it truly is. Learning how to communicate it clearly and conversationally is an important skill to master. But it’s not as hard as it sounds. You’re not convinced? You think I’m being overly optimistic. Fair enough. Let me show you how simple it is, or rather, how simple the gospel message is.

The gospel is the good news about the person and work of Jesus Christ. But think about that for a moment and you’ll recognize a real challenge in communication. There is so much good news that could be said about Jesus—good news about who he is and what he has done. In fact, the apostle John noted that Jesus did so many things that “if every one of them were written down . . . the whole world would not have room for the books” (John 21:25). And this is the wonder of our four Gospels (Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John). In them we can read a divine selection and summary of what otherwise couldn’t fit into a world of books. So how much more challenging is it to know what fits into our conversations?

But here is where God’s Word itself comes to our aid. It provides us with summary passages that distill the person and work of Jesus Christ down to an irreducible essence. For instance, we see the essence of the gospel in a passage like 1 Corinthians 15:1-10. Here, the apostle Paul boils it all down to these five elements:

Who is Jesus? The Christ

What has he done? Died on the cross and rose from the dead

Why did he do it? For the forgiveness of our sins

How do we know? According to the Old Testament Scriptures and the eyewitnesses of the resurrection

How do we respond? Our faith/belief

Paul’s summary of the gospel, parallels Jesus’ summary in Luke 24:46-48: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Do you recognize the same elements?

Who is Jesus? The Christ

What has he done? Suffered and rose from the dead on the third day

Why? The forgiveness of sins

How do we know? “Thus, it is written” (that is, in the Old Testament Scriptures) and “You are witnesses” (of the resurrection appearances)

How do we respond? Repentance (which is the other side of the “faith” coin)

There is more that could be said, a lot more, and in conversations you will find other aspects of the good news that will be relevant to the situation. But this is the essence of the gospel. This is what we want to make sure is clear in our communication.

Reflection: How was the gospel communicated when you first understood and believed? Do you remember the gospel message shared with you? What was the means of communication?

A SIMPLE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Of all the gospel summaries found in the New Testament, one of the clearest and simplest is Romans 6:23 which states, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The essence of gospel is packed in that statement, isn’t it?

I’d encourage you to memorize Romans 6:23. You can do it. It’s only twenty-one words. But when you do, you will always be ready to explain the essence of the gospel simply and clearly. Here’s how: Write out the Romans 6:23, separating it into three phrases like I have below. Then, write Problem over the first phrase, Provision over the second, and Person over the third. The words Problem, Provision, and Person create a simple gospel outline: Our *problem* is sin and its consequences; God’s *provision* is the free gift of eternal life; that provision is giving in the *person* and work of Jesus Christ, who we receive as our Savior and Lord. You can expand further on each point (especially explaining why Jesus died in our place in order to pay the penalty for our sin). But this simple outline will keep you on track.

Problem

For the wages of sin is death...

Provision

but the free gift of God is eternal life...

Person

in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Can you memorize Romans 6:23? You bet. Can you write out? Of course, you can. Can you remember “Problem, Provision, Person?” Absolutely. So, there you go—you’re ready to be a Guide!

TAKE A STEP

It's time to practice. Write out Romans 6:23 with the labels: Problem, Provision, and Person. Maybe do it a couple times to help master it.

CoJourners: Chapter 6

THE GUIDE – Part 2:

More Paths to the Master

Three hundred and fifty-five glorious miles. That is how many miles of trails there are to explore in Rocky Mountain National Park, near Estes Park, Colorado. That's what makes it one of Nanci's and my favorite spots on the earth. We haven't done them all, but we have done of bunch. Every *paying* hiker going into the park gets a map marking the main trails with the location of each trailhead. One of the helpful features of the map is a listing of the approximate distance, a difficulty rating and the estimated time of duration for each hike. That's helpful. If it looks like rain you don't want to take the trail marked 9.65 miles. Trust me, you don't. But if you have the time and the legs, the more scenic the trail is, the better it is. The point of all this is that there are a lot of different trails in the park that you can choose.

In a similar way, there are a lot of different trails you might take in leading someone to Jesus. Like the trails in the Rocky Mountain National Park, they vary in distance, difficulty and duration. It's the starting point, the circumstances and your experience as a Guide that will determine the best path for any given conversation. For people you know well, you might take a longer, more scenic route, while in other situations (like a conversation on an airplane) time and opportunity may be limited. As a Guide, these are the sorts of assessments you'll make. Now, let me show you some trails...

AN EVEN EASIER GOSPEL PRESENTATION

It's hard to imagine an easier way to share the essence of the gospel than using Romans 6:23. But there is actually an easier way. You can read a gospel outline conversationally. The essence of the gospel is clearly communicated in popular booklets like, *Would You Like to Know God Personally?* (Cru). When you use a booklet, you have a number of advantages.

- You don't have to remember anything; you just read it conversationally.
- The booklet guides the conversation, so you are able to focus on the other person, not what you are going to say next.
- A booklet states things clearly, more fully and includes Bible references.
- The listener's understanding is increased as they not only hear the gospel explained, but are able to read along with you, discussing key points or questions.

- You can give it to someone to read or re-read on their own.
- And, perhaps most helpful, the booklet asks key questions that help the listener process and respond to the gospel.

Below are the main points of *Would You Like to Know God Personally?* You'll notice that it frames the essence of the gospel (that is, it provides the answers to who is Jesus, what has he done and why) in a logical progression that taps into a person's desire to know God personally and experience his plan for his life.

- God loves you and created you to know him personally. He offers a wonderful plan for your life.
- People are sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know him personally or experience his love and plan.
- Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. Through him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love and plan.
- We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know God personally and experience his love and plan.

The outline in the booklet also includes key verses, brief explanations, diagrams and questions, making it a pretty complete conversational package. That is what makes it easy to use. It's up to you to make it personal and conversational by asking questions along the way ("Is this making sense?" "Why do you think Jesus had to die?" etc.), giving brief explanations and making transitions between main points. But you can handle that.

Is it effective? Earlier this week, my wife, Nanci took a new Cru staff member out for coffee. The young woman had recently graduated from a school in the northwest and was now at her initial staff training. She had been in a session the day before in which I had led a discussion of various approaches to outreach and evangelism. After listening to it all, she said to my wife, "I don't know much about these other tools or approaches. I just get together with women individually and share with them the *Knowing God Personally* booklet." As a student she had seen 19 women on her campus (mostly from the sororities) receive Christ. Hmm... Easy, simple, but also effective! Why? Because God's Spirit will empower the gospel message when someone "takes the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to God."

So, whether the gospel is summarized in its essence through a brief booklet or expounded in its fullness like Paul's theologically rich letter to the Romans, it is the transforming message through which we encounter Jesus Christ our Lord. In the gospel, we find Christ to be the only solution for our fallen condition—our brokenness, sin and shame. In the gospel, we discover Christ to be our

life and, through his Spirit, to be the power we need to live that life. Jesus transforms us and he does so with his gospel. And you now know two different ways to share this gospel!

TAKE A STEP

By way of review, write out in your own words the essence of the gospel.

MORE GUIDE TIPS: BEST PRACTICES

We said at the beginning that there are many different paths one can use to lead another person to Christ. Over time you will want to explore more of them, adding different tools and resources to your toolbox. Here are a few more to help you get started.

- 1. Send them something to read.

There are a lot of options available to you: websites, articles, books, and pamphlets. You might say something like this:

Well, we probably don't have time for a long, spiritual discussion right now, but would it be okay if I emailed you something—an article I found very helpful in explaining and answering some of these questions of faith.

Notice first that you're asking permission? That respectful gesture will garner more favor than you might imagine. The next thing is, you are offering to send an explanation of the gospel to them rather than trying to explain it right then and there. Of course, you'll need to look online and find a good "gospel/apologetic article". A great place to do that is at everystudent.com. Don't let the "student" throw you. Even adults love these articles.

Another option is to write out your own gospel explanation including illustrations or examples from your own testimony—how you came to Christ. Write it once and save it for use and reuse. Then, send the article by email or Facebook or whatever, with a note referencing your conversation: "I really enjoyed our conversation last week. Here's that article I mentioned; I hope you find it helpful." That's all there is to it.

2. Send them a video link to watch.

This is similar to suggestion above, except you are using a different form of media. Consider sending an online link to “#Falling Plates” from YouTube, or one of the life-stories from iamsecond.com.

3. Have them download the Jesus Film Media app on their mobile device.

This app contains the Jesus Film in hundreds of languages (great for individuals who come from non-English speaking backgrounds). It also contains *Magdalena*, a version of the Jesus film especially produced for women. (My wife, Nanci, used *Magdalena* to lead the masseuse at her chiropractors to Christ earlier this year.) The app also contains a host of short films, which are great for spiritual conversation.

4. Download the *GodTools* app on your mobile device.

As long as we are talking digital downloads, take a moment and download *GodTools*. In it you will find versions of *The Four Spiritual Laws*, *Would You Like to Know God Personally* and *Satisfied?* Now you will always be ready to share the gospel with someone, as long as you don't lose your phone.

5. Set up a second conversation to share the gospel using a “Sometime” invitation

Notice the small difference in this transition to the gospel:

Well, we probably don't have time for a long, spiritual discussion right now, but do you want to grab coffee sometime next week? I'd love to hear more of your thoughts and share with you something that has really help me in my spiritual journey.

You're taking a bigger step here than giving them something to read or watch. But it's not too big. You are not sharing the gospel right then and there, but setting things up for a future conversation. This takes a lot of pressure off. You don't have to find a way to squeeze the gospel into the current conversation. Not only that, you've now established (if they are willing to meet) the expectation that the next conversation will be a spiritual conversation in which you will share something that has helped you, that is, the gospel. So, there are no surprises. It sets the stage for a very natural time to meet, talk, explore, and share the gospel.

For a brief season (a couple of weeks), I was working regularly in a coffee shop in a small town away from home. The place was run by a man who fit my “stereo-type” of a barista—young, male, long pony tail, energetic and conversational. We'll call him Casey (not his real name, but close enough.) My regular presence became noticeable after the first couple of days, so we began to

strike up a conversation. I was the only customer in one afternoon, so I started to ask Casey some exploratory questions, to which he responded, “I’m glad to talk. But there are two things I don’t discuss—politics and religion.” That was a pretty clear signal of his openness, or lack thereof.

I responded simply saying, “That’s fine. But sometime I’d love to get to hear your story.” Not a profound of a response, just a genuine interest in another person’s life. Casey, stopped in his tracks, spun a chair around at my table and plopped down, saying, “Okay, let’s talk.”

Over the next few minutes I learned that he had only had two exposures to church or Christianity—neither positive. One was being dropped off at a children’s program that he found so boring that he tries to hide behind the building rather than go in. The other was a fistfight in his front yard between a parent and the relatives who attempted to take him to church. Those two experiences don’t do much to foster interest or understanding in a young child’s spiritual life. Now Casey considered himself “enlightened” by Norse religion, which seemed to fill the vacuum left in his heart.

As our conversation continued over the next few days, I offered the second “sometime” opportunity— “**Sometime**, I would love to show you how your story weaves together with the Bible’s story-line, and see what you think of it. Would you be up for that sometime?” Without hesitation, he accepted my offer and we set-up the next conversation—a true gospel conversation.

“Sometime” is a powerful word to use in setting up spiritual and gospel conversations. Use it often, but be sure to follow-up and have the second and third conversations.

6. Finally, this takes a bit of courage, but often the very best thing to do is to ask permission to explain the gospel right then and there.

Really! Many people will say, “Yes,” especially if they have sensed your genuine care and interest in them as a person.

There are different ways to ask. You could say something like, “*Can I show you something that’s been very helpful to me in understanding and explaining my faith?*”

Depending on what we have already been talking about, I commonly ask, “*Has anyone ever shown you a simple explanation of the Bible’s main message? Could I take a couple of minutes and do that?*”

When they say yes, you can write out Romans 6:23 like we did in the last chapter. Or you could simply read through the *Knowing God Personally?* (You have it on your phone now, remember?)

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: INVITE THEM IN

There is one last very important item for you as a Guide. Listen to the stories of those who have come to Christ. You'll notice that for many, Christian community was the trail taken. A healthy Christian community can have a profound influence on a person's journey to Christ. A Christ-filled church service, a retreat, community activity, or a small group Bible study can allow a person to experience an environment filled with love and truth and that's what most people are looking for, isn't it?

This is what happened in my spiritual journey. As a high school athlete, I attended a Christian fellowship for a year and a half. It was through these times of fellowship that I first understood what it meant to have a personal relationship with Christ. I was either slow to learn or slow to turn. Either way, after processing the truth for months, a mini-crisis brought me to my turning point and I placed my faith in Christ.

In his book, *Save Me From Myself*, heavy metal guitarist, Brian Welch, tells the story of his coming to Faith, and do you know what the turning point was? When his realtor invited him to church:

So, we went to the service. And the music came on and all these people went up to the front and started praying. And I was like, that is just weird. But I was drawn, I felt something going on. He [The Minister] said, "Does anybody want to accept Christ?" And I did.

Brian's realtor didn't personally explain the gospel to him. Instead he took Brian to a place where he would hear and experience it. God, as you may be aware, has since used Brian's testimony to reach countless people with the good news of Jesus Christ.

You can serve as a Guide by simply inviting someone to come with you into fellowship. It's as easy as, "Hey, I'm going to _____. I really enjoy it because of _____. Would you like to come along?" (But don't forget to fill in the blanks.)

Reflection: *Did you become involved with a community of believers on your path to Christ? If so, how did end up there? Did someone invite you?*

Christian community, your personal testimony, and the essence of the gospel: with a modest amount of preparation and effort you can serve as a Guide to anyone, leading them to Jesus. But what happens when along this journey to Jesus, a person raises questions or concerns they have with God, or the Bible, or Christianity? Well, you could turn and run away. There's always that option. But a better response would be to change roles, to remove your mild-mannered Clark Kent glasses, and become . . . The Builder.

CoJourners: Chapter 7

THE BUILDER – Part 1: Praying Over Spiritual Obstacles

Suppose you are on a journey and you encounter a river. What do you need to get you to the other side? (No, you can't wade across; the waters too deep. And you can't swim; the current is too strong and dangerous. Besides you don't want to get your clothes wet, do you? A boat could work, but in this scenario, none are available.) So, what do you need? You need a bridge, right? And that's what people on spiritual journeys need who have run into obstacles along their way. You might be the one to build that bridge for them, helping get over and beyond the issue. That's the role of the Builder and as a Builder, you have two main resources or tools to help remove obstacles and build bridges—prayer and gentle persuasion.

Think about the wide variety of issues and obstacles that keep people from coming to Christ or, for that matter, even considering him. Many are intellectual obstacles— “How can a good God allow evil?”, or, “What about other religions?” “Isn't the Bible full of errors?” “Hasn't science disproven the Bible?” Others involve emotional baggage and bad experiences— “I had religion crammed down my throat as a child” “I've been turned off by those hypocritical Christians,” “Why are Christians so judgmental?” Still other issues are more volitional or involve matters of the will— “I don't want to change,” “I don't give-up control of my life.” “I'm a good person. I don't need Christ.” On the surface these may sound different, but underneath they are all spiritual issues: the enemy of our souls uses them to blind (2 Corinthians 4:4), bind (Ephesians 2:1-3) and battle over the lives of the unbelieving (Ephesians 6:12).

These realities may cause us to shrink back, uncertain that we know enough to deal adequately with the obstacles that we may encounter in others' lives. But God has given us what we need to help others and it begins with prayer. Prayer has the power to address the problem at its root—in the heart, mind and will of the individual, giving light to blind eyes and setting the captive free.

Reflection: *Who was praying for you before you believed in Jesus?*

The Apostle Paul wrote these words, “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Prayer applies God's power to the root of the issue. But it also enables us to experience the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. In prayer we seek the wisdom we need to know how we “ought to

answer each person” (Colossians 4:2-6). God’s Spirit can give us just the right words to say, as we prayerfully depend on him. (Consider the implications of Matthew 10:18-20, when compared to Acts 4:5-14.) Along with wisdom, prayer secures for us the promised power of the Spirit, enabling our words to be energized with God’s power (Acts 1:8). Prayer does all this and more.

PRAYER OPENS DOORS AND HEARTS

I was on a flight to Dallas when a young man in his 20’s plopped down next to me. His name was Michael and we began to visit. Since he seemed open, I began to ask some Exploring questions that gave me a fascinating snapshot into his spiritual journey. He had grown up Catholic but became an atheist. Yet now he now found himself becoming more and more spiritual, drinking from the fountain of pop culture (a spirituality that is definitely not Christian). I asked at one point if he thought he had ever experienced God. No, he didn’t think he had; but he had experienced the devil. (That was an interesting segment of the conversation.) After hearing a good deal about his story, I assumed the role of a Guide and asked if anyone had ever shown him the essence of the Bible’s storyline and if I could. He readily granted permission.

Taking my Bible, I briefly walked him through the seven themes of Backstory (a Cru publication and another great tool for Guides): Intimacy (or creation), Betrayal (the fall), Anticipation (the Old Testament promise of a Savior), Pursuit (the life of Christ), Sacrifice (his death and resurrection), Invitation (the present opportunity to come to Christ) and Reunion (the Age to Come). As I concluded, I said to him, “Michael, one question you need to answer for yourself is, “Is this true?”” He responded, “From the moment you began to read from the Bible, I knew in my heart it was true. I’ve always had questions, but I’ve never known who to ask them to.”

Michael was on a spiritual journey. God was at work and he gave me the privilege of being used in Michael’s life. (Remember those three foundational principles of being a CoJourneyer from chapter 1?)

To make a long story short, we prayed together and he invited Christ into his life. When we were done praying, Michael looked at me and said, “Do you get into these kinds of conversations a lot?” I told him, “Well, whenever I fly, my wife and kids pray for the person I’ll be sitting next to on the flight. So, yes, I guess I do end up in quite a few of these conversations.” Later, as we were standing in the aisle waiting to get off the plane, Michael turned around and said to me, “Hey, tell your wife and kids, ‘Thanks for praying for me.’”

You can never underestimate the power of prayer in the lives of those who are not yet believers. Tennyson said, “More things are wrought in prayer than this world ever dreams of.” You may offer a brief silent prayer on the spot asking God to give you wisdom to respond to an issue (Colossians 4:6). Or you may spend extended periods of time laboring in prayer for a gospel breakthrough to

bring light and salvation to a loved one (Romans 10:1). A student prayer chain consistently prayed for my father's salvation for three years before he came to faith in Christ.

The Builder brings God's resources to bear on spiritual resistance through prayerful reliance in the midst of spiritual conversations, and through dedicated times of prayer for those we know, love, and meet along our journey.

DEDICATED PRAYER

Few things are more telling about the pulse and passion of our heart than the focus of our prayers. What do you learn about the apostle Paul by observing some of his prayers?

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions...This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. (Romans 10:1)

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains" (Colossians 4:3).

Clearly Paul's heart's desire and his prayer were that his people, the Israelites, would be saved. In fact, his desire was so great that he experienced sorrow and anguish over their spiritual condition. He also prayed diligently for those who were not yet believers, and he prayed—and enlisted others to pray—that God would open doors and give clear words to share the good news about Christ.

I don't think I know any Christian who doesn't feel some measure of conviction or inadequacy when looking at the example of Paul's prayer life and his heart for the lost. He certainly sets the bar high, and if our goal were reaching that bar, well, that would be daunting. But our goal, and God's desire for us, is simply to grow in our life of prayer. And our prayer life grows as it extends outward: our hearts stretching to reach the spiritually lost, and those we long to see come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is something everyone can do.

TAKE A STEP

Builders keep lists: running tallies of lumber, lunch orders, roofing nails and the like. A CoJourneyer does the same in their role as a Builder. Whether it's a written list or a mental one, we want to pray by name for those God has carefully placed in our life who don't yet know him. It's a list we can always add-to and update as we explore the lives of our friends and acquaintances. A list of 10 is a good place to start, but if only 7 or 8 come to mind, then start there. Pray and ask God to show you who to include on your list and write them in the spaces below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

If you can, try to pray for them daily. Maybe keep the list in your Bible, or in your prayer journal if you keep one. Try modeling your prayers on the apostle Paul's, asking God to: prepare their hearts to believe the gospel (Romans 10:1); open doors for significant spiritual conversations with you (Colossians 4:3); and give you the words to speak clearly as you engage with them in spiritual conversations (Colossians 4:4).

PRAYERFUL RELIANCE: THE NEVER-ENDING CONVERSATION

From his written prayers, we can see that Paul dedicated time to praying for the lost: for the many individuals he knew as well as for churches and people groups. And likewise, we just began our own prayer list. A second aspect of praying for the lost is that calm, quiet conversation that goes on between you and God as you engage in a spiritual conversation.

The human heart is unimaginably complex: people often don't know themselves what is the true source of their resistance to God and the gospel. But God knows. He knows exactly where they're hurt or hardened or deceived and so we pray: that God would work in their lives to remove the obstacles and prepare their hearts; that God would give us insight into the true nature of these barriers; and we pray for wisdom to address the issues sensitively and appropriately. We talk to God about people even as we talk to people about God.

TAKE A STEP

As you find yourself in conversations this week, try talking to God, amidst the conversation. Ask God to show you how you should be praying for this person; ask him to show you windows into their soul, felt needs or areas of hurt or hardness even in the words they speak; ask him to give you a good question to ask; and ask for wisdom before you speak. See how you can be in conversation with God, while in conversation with someone else.

CoJourners: Chapter 8

THE BUILDER – Part 2: Building Bridges Over Spiritual Obstacles

Think of your favorite dessert. What is it? Strawberry shortcake? Cherry pie a la mode? Death by chocolate? Whatever the dessert, it seems irresistible, doesn't it? In fact, this is probably making you hungry just to think about it. That is what gentle persuasion is like. The root of the word persuasion comes from *per* (thoroughly) and *suadere* (to urge) and is related to the Latin word for sweet (*suavis*). So genuine persuasion is not a victory or conquest (like winning a debate or argument). Rather it is an influence and an attraction (sweetly urging a change.)

In prayer we speak to God about a person and the obstacles in their journey. But then we speak to the person about God with gentle persuasion, as "Christ's ambassador, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). We don't come against him or her trying to win a debate or prove them wrong; we come beside them to help them get over and beyond the issue. Gentle persuasion involves a careful mix of grace and truth. It is an appealing tone with which we share God's word (truth) in a safe and loving manner (grace), often using personal experiences, insightful questions, meaningful stories and the Bible itself to help a person think differently about the issues they are stuck on.

Let's go back to our main metaphor—building bridges. There is a basic design to a bridge. Bridges always have a starting point and an ending point, with the structure that connects the two. So, it is with spiritual bridge building—you always begin where there the person is at by understanding and identifying with their issue, you ultimately lead toward Jesus (the destination), and you make the connection between the two (the bridge).

The Apostle Paul provides an excellent model as a master Builder while sharing Christ in Athens (Acts 17:16-34.) Think about the obstacles in the Athenians spiritual lives: rampant idolatry (16), humanistic philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism (18), idle talk and speculation (21), religiosity (22), ignorance (23) to name a few. Sounds intimidating, doesn't it?

But notice how Paul proceeds. He begins right where they are; he affirms their interest in religion and identifies their gap in understanding. *"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with*

this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (22-23).

He wants to proclaim Christ, his ultimate desire, and so his ending themes will be, *"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (31).*

But how does he connect the two? What does he use to build the bridge? He relates God's nature and intentions in creation (the Biblical storyline) to quotes from their own poets (*"In him we live and move and have our being"* from Epimenides of Crete and *"For we are indeed his offspring"* from Aratus). Hmm.... Interesting. That would be like us relating the storyline of the Bible to lyrics from Bob Dylan or Aerosmith.

The Athenian response is instructive as well—some sneered, others wanted to hear more and a few believed (32-34). If that was the response Paul received, we can expect similar results to our efforts to build bridges. We'll see some who reject our best attempts to help them, others who will listen and consider, and a few who will place their faith in Christ. But whatever the response, remember this principle: *we take the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God.*

So, let me review. The key to building bridges is to always start where they are—that is, with their issue, obstacle or question. Listen to understand and identify with the issue. Try to understand the issue from their point of view. This is where genuine concern for the person and empathy come in. It isn't simply a matter of being clever and coming up with the right response; it is genuinely caring for and helping another person. Remember where are we trying to help them go—this is about Jesus. It is not about church, Christians or some other secondary matter. We ultimately want to help them move toward Jesus. Now it is a matter of connecting the two.

There are four primary powerful connections that you might use.

- Your experience: What has helped you related to this issue?
- Questions: Can you reframe the issue and help them think differently about it?
- Stories: Is there a story they could relate with or an illustration they could understand?
- The Bible: Share a verse and explain its implications to the issue.

Reflection: *Were they questions or issues that were obstacles in your journey to Christ? If so, what were they? What helped you get over and beyond them?*

Rather than explaining how to use each of these four connectors to build bridges, let me instead share a few stories. This will allow me to do two things at one (a definite challenge to my multi-tasking skills.) First, I hope to give you some pictures of gentle persuasion—that careful mix of grace and truth. Second, I want to provide you with simple ways to address some of the more common places people get stuck. At the end I suggest some resources to help you continue to develop your skills as an effective bridge Builder.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Remember Robert, the French humanist who wanted his children to believe the gospel? I asked him, “So, what is it that keeps you from knowing this is true?” He revealed his obstacle—the same obstacle that has plagued countless individuals who have grappled with life’s pain and suffering. Robert expressed it this way, “Oh that is easy. It is suffering, but not suffering in general. It is the suffering of the children in the world. How can there be a good and loving God, who is powerful and in control, when children suffer so much in this world?”

In silence I prayed, asking the Lord, “How do I best answer Robert on this?” (Remember, prayer is our first response as a Builder.) Then the thought came to me. It’s our sin. It’s the second point of the gospel outline he had just read. Here is the essence of the conversation that followed.

“Robert, I don’t want to minimize this issue. It is a significant question that many have wrestled with throughout the centuries. But I would say that the suffering of children is one of the reasons I believe this is true.”

“Why is that?” he asked surprised.

I responded, “Think about it. Why do children suffer in the world today? Children starve. But is that because there is not enough food in the world? Or is there enough food but people don’t distribute it to those who need it most?”

“Oh, there’s enough food in the world,” he replied.

“And children suffer as the result of wars. But who fights these wars? It’s people, right? And children suffer abuse in families, but who makes up those families? People. The list could go on. But whatever the truth is, it must adequately explain how people, who can at times be so good to one another, can also be so evil as to cause children to suffer. Robert, as I have considered religions and philosophy, the only explanation I have ever found that adequately explains how you and I can be so good and yet at times so evil is this message.”

His response? “Can we talk more about this?” The obstacle was bridged and the conversation moved on. How? By asking questions that helped reframe the issue in his mind.

RELIGIONS: MANY PATHS TO GOD

Another common obstacle is the view that all religions are basically the same, a kind of religious pluralism. That was Jason's view. As we discussed life, belief, and religion, Jason expressed it this way, "I don't know if there's a god or not. But if there is, I'm sure all religions would ultimately lead to him. They are all basically the same."

Here is how I responded, "Jason, you're saying that since all religions are basically the same, so choosing one is a matter of personal preference. Ultimately it doesn't matter; in the end they all lead to the same place. Right?"

"Yes," he confirmed.

Trying to help Jason think through the implications of this, I said, "I'm not sure you really believe that. Can I show you why?"

"Okay."

"Take Christianity, for instance. I'm a Christian, but I don't think that all forms of Christianity are equally good. Think about it. Wouldn't you say there are forms of Christianity that are positive, leading to good works and benefit others? But there are also some forms that are abusive and actually do more harm than good? There are extremists and cults, right?"

"Oh yes," Jason replied. Then he went on, "But you don't have to limit it to Christianity. The same is true with Islam. Look at what is happening in the Middle East, with the violence and bombings."

"So," I continued, "You really do believe that there are good religions and bad religions, that it makes a difference which religion you choose, because what you believe will lead to good or bad results. The question is then how do you sort out the good from the bad? Or even more to the point, how do you determine the true from the false?"

Jason responded, "I hadn't thought of it like that." Of course, this didn't convince Jason that there was a God. But it did enable the conversation to continue on without the "obstacle" of religious pluralism—all religions will lead you to God.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

Something you maybe noticed from my conversations is that I don't give long, exhaustive answers. A Builder doesn't have to provide the definitive answer to any particular question, just a helpful one. What you want is for the person to see that the issue they're wrestling with doesn't need to stand between them and Jesus. You're supplying a possible or plausible solution to their problem, and often that's enough.

Keeping my answers brief allows me to listen more, pray more, talk less, and it also limits the potential for detours. In John 4, as Jesus' words cut to the heart of the Samaritan woman, she raised an ongoing source of controversy between Jews and Samaritans in hopes of derailing the conversation:

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. (John 4:19-20, NIV)

Jesus doesn't follow the diversion. He answers briefly and continues in the flow of the conversation:

You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews [that answers that]. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit . . .

If a person is looking for a reason or excuse not to consider Christ, then no answer will satisfy them. But if their questions arise from a sincere heart than a short, honest answer can often serve as a sufficient bridge. A good friend of mine was having a spiritual conversation with a college student, when the student said to him: "I'm not sure I believe in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament." Here's what my friend said to him:

That's something a lot of people struggle with. For me, the main issue was deciding about Jesus. The things he said and did convinced me that he was who he claimed to be—the Son of God. But I noticed, Jesus treated the Old Testament as the Word of God, and so I started trusting the Bible because I trusted Jesus, and maybe that's a good place for you to start—with Jesus. What do believe about him? Everything else really flows from that.

What I love about this answer is not that it's a compelling argument (in truth it's a bit circular), but that it's honest, brief, and adequate to allow the conversation to continue to other matters—more importantly, to Jesus. If this person continues in their faith journey and comes to Christ, that bridge might need some shoring up, but that's a building project for another day.

CHRISTIANS ARE HYPOCRITES

Christians have an image problem in today's world and it seems to come up in a lot of spiritual conversations. Here the Bible itself is a great bridge to connect their concerns to Jesus. When someone brings up Christian hypocrisy, first listen to understand. Try to discern whether this comes from a general attitude toward Christians, or if this reflects emotional pain from a bad experience.

If it is a general disdain for hypocrisy, you can say, "I agree with you. But have you ever seen what Jesus himself thought about hypocrisy?" Then show them Matthew 23 and the "woes" Jesus pronounced on the hypocrites among the Pharisees and scribes.

If their obstacle is stemming from emotional pain, you will first want to listen carefully to understand what they have experienced, identify with the pain, perhaps offer a sincere apology (“I am so sorry that is what you experienced”), before talking about what Jesus would say or think of the situation.

HASN'T SCIENCE DISPROVEN THE BIBLE

Another very common obstacle is science. Well, it's not science itself, it is the assumptions people make about science. Aren't science and the Bible in conflict? Hasn't science disproven the Bible?

Now I'm no scientist myself. But I have known some scientists and that is the key to how I help build this bridge over this obstacle. I have often said something like this:

“I used to wonder about this myself. But when I was in college, the two leading microbiology professors at my university were both strong Christians. Then in grad school, I heard Dr. Richard Bube speak, the former head of Stanford's Material Science and Electrical Engineering department, and he was strong believer. A couple years ago, I got have dinner with Dr. Francis Collins, the physician-geneticist who now is the head of the National Institute of Health, and he is a strong believer. He, by the way, was the head of the Human Genome project. The reason I mention all these is that I realized that if these men can all be leading scientists in their fields and yet also men of strong Christian faith, then there must be ways to understand the Bible as “complimentary” to science and not in “conflict” to science. If science isn't a problem for them, it doesn't need to be a problem for me.”

There is a lot more that could be said about science and the Bible, but I often find that is enough. All I done is shared a bit of my personal experience, that is, what has helped me with the issue. If you don't know any believing scientists, it's time to do a little research. (By the way, you don't need to know them personally. You just need to know they exist.)

OUR FEARS

Of all the fears that hold us back from initiating spiritual conversations, the fear of being stumped or speechless in the face of a question rises pretty high. This may sound overly optimistic but there really is nothing to be scared of, and here's why:

- You can simply say “I'm not sure I have a good answer for that.” Such an honest admission only increases your credibility—who admits to such a thing? “I don't know,” is a great answer.
- You can offer to send them a “helpful article” on the issue. This allows you time to find a great answer to their question, and it provides another point of contact with them, “What's

your email? I'll send it to you." Where will you find such an article? Again, try everystudent.com. It is filled with thoughtful answers to many of questions and issues people will ask you.

- With few exceptions, you'll often hear the same objections: How can you believe the Bible? How can Jesus be the only way to God? Why is there suffering and evil? Why are Christians such hypocrites? Hasn't science disproven the Bible? Having a brief, thoughtful answer to each of these is preparation enough for most people.

- You're not alone. God is with you, and you can talk to him all the while you're Building.

It's through Building that God makes us better Builders. Each new question, each new obstacle, sends us digging for an answer, and as our knowledge and experience grows so does our confidence.

TAKE A STEP

Throughout the chapter you've seen how I answer those questions that everyone seems to ask. Hopefully you haven't been judging me because it's your turn now. You can use my answers, think of your own, or do some research by Googling "Christian Apologetics" (For starters, I'd recommend Stand to Reason str.org; Everystudent.com; or Ravi Zacharias rzim.org). This should help you as you write out your own short answer to these common questions.

If God loves us, why is there so much suffering in the world?

What about all the wars (bigotry, slavery, etc.) that have gone on in the name of Christianity?

How can I trust what's in Bible?

How can you say that Jesus is the only way to God?

Hasn't science disproven the Bible?

Builder Resources

Websites to Explore

- Everystudent.com
- Stand to Reason - str.org;
- Ravi Zacharias International Ministries - rzim.org

Books to Read

- Torrey, *How to Bring Them to Christ* [Using Scripture]
- Newman. *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. Kregel Publications, 2004.
- Geisler & Geisler. *Conversational Evangelism: How to Listen and Speak so You Can Be Heard*. Harvest House Publishers, 2009.
- Moreland & Muehlhoff. *The God Conversation: Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith*. IVP, 2007.
- Pollard. *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult: How to Interest People Who Aren't Interested*. IVP, 1997.
- Sire. *Why Good Arguments Often Fail*. IVP, 2006.
- Pollock, Doug. *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*. Group, 2009.
- Richardson. *ReImagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. IVP, 2006.

Books to Loan or Give-away

(Note: It is normally better to loan something, than to give something. If you loan it, there is an expectation that they will read and return it. If you give it, they throw it on a shelf with good intentions, but it often goes unread.)

- New Testaments
- James, *Jesus Without Religion*
- McDowell, *More than a Carpenter*
- Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough?*
- Strobel, *The Case for Faith & The Case for Christ*

CoJourners: Chapter 9

THE MENTOR – Part 1: Encouraging Spiritual Growth

Spiritual journeys are, well, journeys, not simply intersections along the way. That implies motion, time and process. There may be critical moments or conversations on the journey. But the journey itself progresses over time. That is true in coming to Christ and its true in following Christ. To keep on keeping on, people need help and encouragement. That is the role of the Mentor.

There is a chance that you read Homer's *Odyssey* in high school. There is a slim chance that you now remember it. But if you do, you might remember a character named Mentor. He was that fellow entrusted with the care and teaching of Odysseus' son, Telemachus, while dad was away on his adventures. Over the years, Mentor's name evolved into a descriptive term for anyone who serves another as a trusted advisor, mature friend, and teacher. Mentoring occurs when someone invests time, energy and personal know-how into another person's life and growth.

As a CoJourneyer, mentoring can occur on both sides of the cross, that is, in helping another person come to Christ and in helping them continue on after they do. Since all our previous chapters have focused on the former, what follows from here will focus on the later.

Spiritual journeys do not end when people come to Jesus. In the most important sense, they are just beginning, and what a young believer needs most is: (1) to connect with a community of believers who will help them grow; (2) to learn the foundational truths of following Christ. You can think of these as *Relational Connections* and *Life Concepts*, and it's the role of a Mentor to ensure they get both.

Reflection: *Who did God use to help you begin to grow in your Christian life?*

Let me illustrate with a story—not one from Greek Mythology, nor even one of my own. Rather, let me share one of my wife's, Nanci's. Even as I am typing these very words, she is with a woman she is "mentoring" at our local dry cleaners. Here is the backstory.

A number of months ago, Nanci took one of our suits into the dry cleaners. No one was in the shop that day except the woman working behind the counter. After greeting her in her naturally cheerful way, Nanci asked the woman if she ever gets bored working in there. (Note a question to begin the role of the Explorer.)

"No, I just watch movies on my phone all day," she responded.

“Would you ever be interested in watching a movie about Jesus?” Nanci asked.

“Why, yes, I would,” she replied. The woman went on to relate how she and her live-in boyfriend of 18 plus years wanted to start going to church so they could officially get married.

Nanci proceeded to show her how she could download the Jesus Film Media app on her mobile phone and watch the film from there. She also gave her an English/Spanish version for the gospel outline, *The Four Spiritual Laws*, which she gladly received. During the next conversation when Nanci went to pick up the clothes, she was able to conversationally read through *The Four Spiritual Laws* and the woman prayed to receive Christ. (Note now the role of the Guide.) Since she lives in another part of Orlando, a considerable distance away, the only chance they have to talk is while she is working at the dry cleaners. So, over the months that have followed, Nanci has been taking in one item at a time to get cleaned so they can work through *Life Concepts* together, that is, the foundational truths of Christian living. (Note now the role of the Mentor. And, yes, our clothes are being kept cleaner now than they have ever been!) Because of where the young woman lives, it isn't practical for her to attend our church, so Nanci is trying to help her locate a Spanish-speaking fellowship on her side of town—a fellowship where she can form Relational Connections with other believers.

Proposing Mentorship

Let's first touch on that all-important initial meeting between you, the Mentor, and your potential mentee. Mentee is an odd word; protégé is more common and impressive. But in the Bible, they would use the word, “disciple,” so let's go with that. This initial meeting sets the stage for what could be a long-term mentoring or discipleship relationship. It's here that you'll propose getting together on a somewhat regular basis for the purpose of spiritual growth and encouragement. The Greek words for Starbucks and Panera are *anakeimai* and *katakeimai*. Not really, but sort of. These are the New Testament words for “recline” and you may have noticed in reading the Gospels that Jesus and his disciples don't usually sit for their meals, they recline: “a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so, he went in and *reclined at table* (Luke 11:37).” There's a whole Greco-Roman history behind this idiom “to recline at table” but in short it entails much more than eating in a slouched position. “To recline at table” had all of the connotations of “hanging out,” or “I'll meet you at Starbucks.”

We all do a lot of this kind of “hanging out,” but not so much with the purpose of coming alongside a young or new believer in their walk with God. And this is a critical aspect of mentorship or discipleship because it provides a venue for these important times of fellowship and conversation.

As you encounter new or younger believers simply initiate such a time. You might say something like “Hey do you want to get together some time? I'd love to hear what God is doing in your life—

what you're learning, what he's teaching you." It's a little like asking someone out on a date, but rejection isn't as painful.

Then, get together. Just have a normal conversation—weather, sports, movies, school, people, etc. At some point, you want to transition the conversation to spiritual issues. You want to find out where they're at in their walk with God. Here are a few questions you can ask to transition the conversation:

- What has God been teaching you?
- What have you been reading in the Bible?
- What are some things I can be praying for you?
- What's is most difficult or challenging to your faith right now?

And, as they share, you share. This should be an encouraging time for both of you. But now here's the big question, as your hang out time comes to a close, you need to decide is this a person who is interested in growing in their faith. If you sense there's interest, before your reclining time comes to an end, you want to propose getting together on some kind of regular or semi-regular basis. But how do you do this without it seeming weird? Just say something like, "I don't know if you would be up for it, but I would love to get together like this on a more regular basis—hang out, talk, pray. I have a short, five-week Bible study called Life Concepts we could go through together. I think you would find it really helpful."

You probably don't want to call it "Mentoring" or "Discipleship Time" and you certainly don't want to call it "Reclining at Table," but that's what it is. Now you'll need to decide in a month or so, if your times are fruitful enough to continue meeting regularly. Obviously, you'll keep connected but there are an awful lot of new and young believers who need someone to come alongside them, so at some point you'll need to be wise in the way Paul instructs Timothy—investing in "faithful" disciples.

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Assuming the role of a Mentor and initiating the relationship is really that simple. In the next chapter we'll come back to those two things I mentioned earlier, *Relational Connections* and *Life Concepts*, because these provide the direction and content for your mentoring time.

TAKE A STEP

Look for the opportunity this week to practice these two important skills of a mentor: *initiate* a "reclining" get-together with another believer; *transition* the conversation to spiritual things using one or several of the questions I listed above.

It will help if you make a short list of potential mentees, no protégés, no disciples. That’s right, we are going with potential disciples:

CoJourners: Chapter 10

THE MENTOR – Part 2: Relational Connections & Life Concepts

Remember how we said that the major tools of a Builder were *prayer* and *gentle persuasion*? And the tools of an Explorer we're asking *questions* and *active listening*? And the Guide's? Well the two major tools of a Mentor are *Relational Connections* and *Life Concepts*. What a young believer needs to grow in their relationship with Christ are solid relational connections with others in the body of Christ and a strong foundation of biblical truth.

RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Again, we turn to the Apostle Paul to provide a great example of what a Mentor looks like. Paul had had the privilege of leading a group of Thessalonians to faith in Christ. The book of 1 Thessalonians is actually a follow-up letter, in which this wise Mentor is investing in the growth and well-being of this community of new believers. In the letter we see at least five different ways that Paul sought to establish the new believers in their faith.

1. He prayed for them consistently. (1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3; 3:10, 11-13).
2. He spent time with them, encouraging them on. (1 Thessalonians 2:6-12).
3. He wrote them letters while he was away. (1 & 2 Thessalonians are both follow-up letters from Paul).
4. He encouraged them to foster their relationships in community with each other. (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6; 4:9, 10; 5:11, 12-15, 26-27)
5. He sent another mature believer to build into them when he couldn't be there himself. (1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2)

Disc-skype-leship: The Apostle Paul had to write his letters on parchment and send them with a courier on a boat—not a very quick, nor convenient, means of communication. But it was worth the effort because it was important for the new believers. Moments ago, I received a call (actually FaceTime) on which I heard a story of Disc-skype-leship: a student in California is mentoring a new young believer in Florida through using Skype. The young believer in Florida has now led family members in New Zealand to Christ. Hmm... It's a lot easier to keep relationally connected and communicating now than it was in the first century. A whole lot easier!

Like Paul, we want to be proactive in providing an environment of growth for a young believer, where he or she can experience the work of God in the context of community. Like a plant nurtured by sun and soil, the ideal environment for spiritual growth is one of grace (or love), truth (especially God's word), with a healthy allowance of time to grow. You can easily remember that as the Growth Formula = Grace + Truth over Time.

Just like children grow and develop in the context of healthy family relationships, so also new believers grow and develop in the context of God's family or Christian community. Along with their relationship with the Lord, there are three other relational contexts or priority relationships in which the believer experiences love and grace.

ONE-ON-ONE

The first is a one-on-one dynamic, and when you assume the role of a Mentor you are filling this vital need in a young believer's life. And as I described above, this is simply a regular time to connect relationally and spiritually, acting as a big brother or big sister (or better yet, as a Mentor) in that person's spiritual life.

SMALL GROUP

The second relational connection a young Christian needs is with a small group of believing friends with whom they can grow and experience their new life in Christ.

A human cell is really a body in miniature, having all the DNA needed to create another you, should you decide to clone yourself. That's a good way to picture a small group: it's a living cell (not as cloning) within the body of Christ, carrying the DNA of the church in miniature. The miniature part is important because in a large group, like a church service, you might enjoy the worship and the teaching but you really can't get to know people —not well anyway.

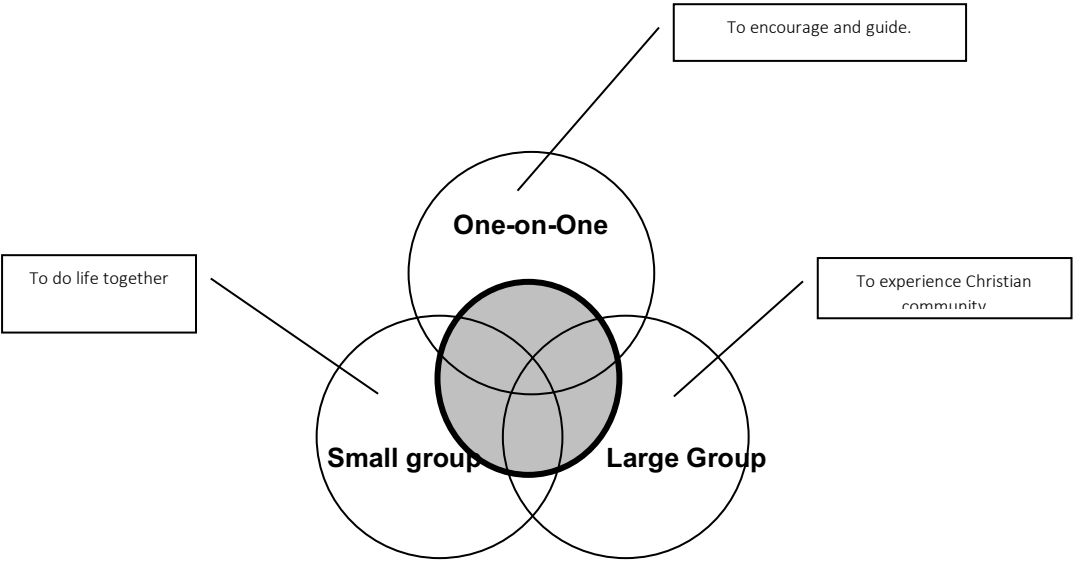
It's in a Small group that deep, sustaining relationships are built, and so as a Mentor it's super important to get them into this nurturing environment as soon as you can.

LARGE GROUP

Last, new believers need the support of a larger community of faith: a place to worship, learn, fellowship, and pray. In Acts 4 we see the description of such a community. Listen to this ...

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-37)

This kind of environment is a spiritual greenhouse that accelerates, supports, and sustains growth: it produces what cannot be accomplished in even the best one-on-one mentoring.



These are the three primary body connections. A believer with all three is in an ideal growth environment. But sometimes all three aren't available. For example, joining a local church may not be an option for a young believer living in the Muslim countries of North Africa. That can be okay as generally two of the three can sustain healthy growth, no matter which two it is. On the other hand, having only one relational connection is normally not enough to sustain growth and lacking all three is a dangerous situation, spiritually depriving the new believer of essential relational connections.

As a Mentor your major goal is to *help the new believer make at least one other relational connection beyond your influence.*

Reflection: How is your growth environment? Which of the three relational dynamics are you experiencing? How healthy are they?

LIFE CONCEPTS

So, we addressed that all-important first meeting, where the goal was to informally-formally establish a regular meeting/mentoring time. Check. We addressed the critical role of a Mentor in establishing a young believer in the community and relationships essential for continued growth. Check. Last, we want to talk about the content of the mentoring relationship, answering the question: what are those key biblical concepts a young believer needs to know in order to grow and mature in their relationship with God?

Let's begin to answer that question with an exercise to get us thinking in the right direction...

TAKE A STEP

If you had only 10 things (10 lessons or messages) you could impart to a new or young believer before they were taken away to a Siberian work camp, never to be around another Christian again, what would those 10 lessons be? What do they absolutely have to know?

It's a helpful exercise isn't it? It forces you to think through what concepts are most foundational to living the Christian life. Did you know that many scholars believe that the apostle Paul only spent a month or so in Thessalonica when he planted the church there? It's interesting to read 1 and 2 Thessalonians from this perspective imagining he went through a similar process of prioritizing.

While there is no universally agreed-upon order of priority, certain biblical truths and teaching are so central to growing in our relationship with Christ, that they are clearly prior to others in their teaching. For almost two decades now, tens of thousands have used the Life Concepts series, to help establish young believers in their faith. I would invite you to try them out.

Here are the topics:

- *Stepping from Uncertainty to Confidence: Assurance of Salvation* (1 John 5:9-13)
- *Stepping from Feelings of Unworthiness to Forgiveness: Forgiveness of the Believer* (1 John 1:5-2:2)
- *Stepping from Being Unable to Empowered: Filling of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:9-3:4)
- *Stepping from Being Unprepared to Equipped: Walking in the Spirit* (Galatians 5:16-26)
- *Stepping from Being Undeveloped to Maturity: Spiritual Growth* (Acts 2:40-47)

You can find each of these studies in the appendix as well as a general Leaders Guide to help you in sharing them with someone. Each one follows the same format or template:

- They begin with exploring the **STORY** (or experience) of the other person
- They identify a common **STRUGGLE** in the Christian life

- They lead to discovery of the **SOLUTION** in a key passage of Bible
- They provide a **SKETCH** to help increase comprehension and memory
- They end by taking a **STEP** in application

Having the guides printed makes them very easy to use. But if you simply remember the common struggle and what passage from the Bible provides a solution to it (or, if you will just write that in a short list in the inside cover of your Bible, or on a note in your phone), you can be ready at any time, any place to share with others the foundational truths of Christian living, with just your Bible in hand.

To be clear, this is not everything a growing believer should know but it does provide a foundation, which is the goal. You can use these Life Concepts to ground any new or young believer in the essentials of walking with Jesus.

ADVANCED MENTORING

As a Mentor our role is to connect new and young believers to relationships with others in the body of Christ, and to ground them in the foundational truths that will help them walk with Christ for a lifetime.

This isn't mission impossible, and so it's quite likely that after a month or two we will have accomplished both of these things in the life of the person we're mentoring. This is certainly cause for celebration as well as a point of transition. Having come alongside this young believer for a time, it may be time to pull back and allow them to grow in the new relational connections and support you've helped establish. As there is such a need for godly mentors, it may be time for you to come alongside someone else:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Matthew 9:36-38

However, if the person you're mentoring has a strong desire to grow and to minister to others, your role may continue, becoming a mature Mentor-disciple relationship. It's here that you'll help them deepen their Christian experience, discussing more advanced biblical concepts, as well doing ministry together. This is what Jesus did with his disciples, isn't it? Having mentored them, he sent them out to mentor (or disciple) others:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Now that you know how to be a CoJourneyer, you can teach them to be a CoJourneyer, serving as an Explorer, a Guide, a Builder, and Mentor to others. And you can start by giving them this book, except you've written it. So, I guess you will have to start by buying them one.

Enjoy the journey!