

“Holy Conversations”: Sharing Jesus Christ with the People in Our Lives Session One

*Based on “Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life” by Richard Peace
(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2006)*

Outline

1. People on a Spiritual Pilgrimage; Stories in the Presence of God
2. Really Good News; Talking about Jesus
3. Talking about Need; Talking about Sin
4. Talking about Repentance; Talking about Confession
5. Talking about Believing; Talking about Believing in Jesus
6. Talking about Commitment; Holy Conversation

Conversation Partners

People on a Spiritual Pilgrimage (chap 1)

“Everybody is on a spiritual pilgrimage” (p 27-30) – *Hebrews 11*

- ~ every person we meet is on a spiritual journey
- ~ we are also on a spiritual journey
- ~ different people are at different places and each person has their own issues to address
- ~ three parts: quest – explore question of God; commitment – commit ourselves as disciples of Jesus; formation – grow in faith over time

“The task of evangelism is to help others come to the place in their spiritual pilgrimage so that they are able to hear Jesus’ call to become his disciples” (p 30)

Evangelism – comes from the Greek *euangelion*, which means “good news, glad tidings, the Gospel” (BDAG), “The beginning of the good news (*euangelion*) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1)

The Great Commission(s) – *Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; John 20:21-23*

Conversion is a process – Paul and the Twelve, Punctiliar and Gradual, Encounter and Process – “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance,” *Martin Luther, Thesis 1 of The Ninety-Five Theses*

Bounded and Centered Sets – “*Conversion, Culture, and Cognitive Categories*” by Paul Hiebert

Small Group Discussion – “What was your pilgrimage to God like? Consider the phases you went through in your pilgrimage of faith. What or who helped move you toward God?” (p 28)

Spiritual Autobiography

Stories in the Presence of God (chap 2)

“In order to engage in holy conversation we need to learn to tell our own stories of God. We need to recall various incidents, both large and small, in which we experienced the aliveness of God. Then we need to craft these into good stories that will fit into our ordinary conversation” (p 36)

A Good Story – *what makes a good story?*

Stories of Experiencing God

- ~ Paul, *Acts 9:1-9*, ca 64
- ~ Martin Luther, *Preface to the First Volume of His Latin Writings*, ca 1512
- ~ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Sept 1931

Our Experience of God – identify three or four experiences in your past in which God was alive for you (p 36)

Small Group Discussion – share one of these experiences with another person

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Really Good News (chap 3)

“Holy conversation revolves around the gospel, so it is crucial that we have a good understanding of the content of the gospel and that we can talk about it in non-theological terms. The central focus of the gospel is Jesus. We need to learn to talk about him.” (p 42)

“Communication is about what gets transmitted to other people” (p 37)

Defining the Gospel

- ~ Jesus – Mark 1:14-15, Matt 3:17, Luke 4:16-21
- ~ Peter – Acts 2:22-24
- ~ Paul – 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Content of the Gospel – what we’re talking about (p 44-46)

Objective Witness

“There are three major facts of the gospel that need to be touched upon”

- Jesus
 - *Who Jesus is* – biblical narrative, communal experience, popular perception
 - *What Jesus has done* – his life, death, and resurrection, and ours
- People
 - *Human nature* – God’s beloved children in rebellion against him – sin
 - *Human need* – “lostness,” existential questions, experiential distress
- Commitment
 - *Repentance* – turning to God
 - *Faith* – trust in Christ
 - *Discipleship* – seeking to live as Jesus lives

Subjective Witness

“We need to talk about our experience of Jesus”

- *A vocabulary* that communicates to those who are unfamiliar with theological language – translate language of Scripture into words, images, metaphors, stories that connect
- *An awareness* of God’s presence in our lives – in nature, events, needs and in Scripture, prayer, worship – whether we notice or not
- *A willingness* to talk about God – “Christian witness is being honest in our lives and in our conversations about our ongoing experience of God”

Sharing the Gospel – a few examples

- Jesus – “The Kingdom of God is like...” (e.g., Matt 13:3-9)
- The ABCs of Salvation
- Life in Christ

Small Group Discussion – “What word in ‘The ABCs’ stood out to you and why? What does the word mean to you? How might you talk about the concept the word conveys in casual conversation?”

Talking About Jesus (chap 4)

“The gospel is about Jesus. Jesus is the heart of our message. Jesus *is* our message. Jesus is the one to whom people are converted. So we need to learn to tell stories about Jesus taken from Gospel accounts. This will involve us in going back to the familiar stories, studying them in detail, paraphrasing them, and then trying them on our friends with the hope that they will want to read the stories for themselves” (p 54-55)

Small Group Discussion – tell your conversation partner(s) one biblical story about Jesus and the impact this story has had on you

Telling Stories About Jesus (p 53)

“Basically, we just need to paraphrase Gospel stories” – with the hope people will then also go and read the stories, learn more about Jesus, be open to work of the Spirit in their lives

Good Stories

- ~ include detail, so we need to know the history and context and content
- ~ have an intriguing beginning
- ~ move smoothly from point to point
- ~ have an appropriate ending
- ~ fit the context of the conversation

“This means we need to understand the Jesus stories well enough to put them in our own words. We need to learn to tell a few good stories about Jesus. We need to practice telling these stories to one another”

Which stories?

Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (p 54)

- ~ a great teacher – healing the man with leprosy (1:40-45); *defining the Sabbath* (2:23-28)
- ~ a powerful prophet – healing of the man possessed by demons (5:1-20)
- ~ the Messiah – Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-33); *what does this mean?*
- ~ the Son of Man – Jesus explains on his way to Jerusalem (10:32-42)
- ~ the Son of David – the cleansing of the Temple (11:15-19)
- ~ the Son of God – the death of Jesus reveals who he is (15:33-39)

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Session Three**

Talking About Need (chap 5)

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you” – St. Augustine, “Confessions”

“Whereas it is often difficult to talk about our faults and failings, it is much easier to discuss our hopes and aspirations. These longings come from God and direct us back to God. So we need to develop sensitivity to such longings in others and in ourselves. And we need to know how to name these longings and how they are rooted and fulfilled in God, beginning by sharing our own needs and longings” (p 61)

Longings take many forms (p 60)

- ~ be more and do more
- ~ make a contribution
- ~ find one’s true destiny and place in the universe
- ~ make peace with oneself and the world
- ~ make a difference
- ~ know God directly
- ~ be a good person
- ~ real hope for life after death

Ephesians 3:14-21 – “filled with all the fullness of God”

Small Group Discussion – what is one desire, longing, need that have shaped your life – or the life of someone with whom you are close? how has God used this desire, fulfilled this longing, responded to this need?

Brene Brown, TED Talk, *“The Power or Vulnerability”*

“Whole-hearted people” – sense of worthiness, love, and belonging

- courage – willing to tell their story from the heart
- compassion – for themselves and others
- connection – as a result of authenticity, willing to be who they were

Talking About Sin (chap 6)

“In order to talk about the gospel, we need to talk about sin, but since that word is so misunderstood we have to use other words to get at its true meaning. But understanding the concept of sin is not the real problem; it is understanding that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The best we can do to help others get to this insight is be open about our own failures and need of grace, and then pray that the Holy Spirit brings conviction” (p 67)

“Christ died for our sins” (I Cor 15:3) – “save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21), “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 2:29), “reconciled” us to God (2 Cor 5:18-19), “justified” us (Rom 5:8-10), “bring you to God” 1 Peter 3:18, “atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:7-11, also Rom 3:21-26)

Small Group Discussion – when you think about the word “sin,” what comes to mind? what other understandings of “sin” have you heard, personally or in public media, expressed? (p 65)

Defining “Sin”

- “original sin” – Genesis 3:1-24, the Fall
- personal sin and corporate sin – individuals and ‘powers and principalities’ (Eph 6:12)
- “sins of commission” and “sins of omission” – doing evil and not doing good, Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- the image of “transgression” and the image of “shortcoming”
 - ~ “transgression” – Greek, *parabasis*, “deviating from an established boundary or norm” (BDAG), trespass, disobey the law, break the rules (Rom 5:14)
 - ~ “shortcoming” – Greek, *harmatia*, “a departure from human or divine standards of uprightness,” miss the mark, fall short, fail to live as God intends for us to live, “...since all have *sinned* and fall short of the glory of God...” (Rom 3:23)
- sin as failure to love, failing short of the Greatest Commandment to love God with the whole of our being and love our neighbors as ourselves – *incurvatus in se*, ‘the heart curved in on itself,’ seeking “all things, even God, for its own sake” (Luther, Lectures on Romans) – the breakdown of relationships

Defining “Salvation”

Jesus Christ saves us from sin – “...they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24)

Theories of atonement

- ~ *Christus Victor*, “Christ the Victor,” ‘ransom theory’ (prominent until about 1000 AD) – since the Fall, humans captured by the devil and captive to sin and death; Christ defeated the devil and freed us from captivity to sin and death

- ~ St. Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Become Human,” ‘satisfaction theory’ (1100 AD) – human sin is a disgrace to God’s honor and so creates a debt we owe to God, a debt we cannot pay, but God can, so he came in Christ to pay our debt for sin– ‘substitutionary atonement,’ God had to punish someone, so he punished his Son instead of us
- ~ Peter Abailard, ‘moral influence theory’ (1100 AD) – the example of Christ’s love so inspires us that we become like him
- ~ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” ‘the joyous or blessed exchange’ (1500s) – God in Christ joins with us in our humanity, takes our sin and death as his own, gives us his salvation and life
- ~ Richard Rohr, “At-one-ment” (current, views of Franciscan John Duns Scotus, 13th century) – Jesus Christ is the embodiment and revelation of God’s love for us and the whole creation, undoes systems of sacrifice with his own, undoes an economy of debt with one of grace

Small Group Discussion – which of these understandings resonate most with you? or do you have a different understanding? what understanding might resonate with others as you discuss sin and salvation with them?

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Session Four**

Talking About Repentance (chap 7)

Repentance – Greek, *metanoia*, ‘change one’s mind [and heart], turn around, be converted’

- ~ “To repent is to change your mind about how you are living in relationship to God” (p 73),
and others
- ~ “The human experience of choosing a new way because it leads to new life is a powerful witness” – tell our own stories of repentance (p 74)
- ~ The Holy Spirit working in our hearts and minds (p 71)

Mark 1:14-20 – repenting and following Jesus

“Insight into our relationship with God – or better still, our lack of relationship with God – is the first step in the process of conversion. But knowing is not enough. We need to act on our insight. We need to repent, that is, to decide to stop walking away from God and start following Jesus. Usually people begin to think about the need to repent by hearing the story of how others came to themselves and decided to go a new way. So again, transparency is key to holy conversation” (p 74)

Insight comes from – the comment of a friend, a book or movie, the negative examples of others, inner longings to be better or different, dissatisfaction with the status quo... (p 73)

Small Group Discussion – give an example in your life of repentance; how have you faced a hard truth about yourself and made a decision to go a better way (p 72)

Talking About Confession (chap 8)

Confession – ‘to concede, admit, acknowledge something, ordinarily in public’

- ~ *confess* Jesus is Lord – Romans 10:8-11
- ~ *confess* our sins – 1 John 1:8-9, James 5:16, Psalm 51

Confession and Forgiveness – Luther’s Small Catechism

- 1) confession has two parts – confess our sins and receive “the absolution, that is, forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself” and believe we are forgiven
- 2) acknowledge all sins before God, known and unknown, and those sins before a pastor “of which we have knowledge and which trouble us”
- 3) “reflect on your place in life in light of the Ten Commandments”

“...The Holy Spirit gives us the power to confess our sins to God and others, and to ask God for forgiveness and new life. When we experience other people who are open and willing to confess their issues, this gives us the freedom and the strength to do likewise. We need to be open, honest people in our holy conversation” (p 80)

Naming the sin, issue, problem – the example of Alcoholics Anonymous, “we admitted we were powerless over alcohol” (p 77)

Denying the sin, issue, problem – minimizing, blaming, avoiding, rationalizing, excusing, accusing, comparing, hiding (p 83-84)

Small Group Discussion – what role, if any, does confession (of sin, need, longing) play in your own following of Christ? (p 78)

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Session Five**

Talking About Believing (chap 9)

*“But these are written so that you may come to **believe** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through **believing** you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31) – John 1:12, 3:16, 11:25-27, 14:1-14, Acts 16:31, Romans 1:16-17, Galatians 3:6-7, Hebrews 11:6*

Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” (John 18:38)

Defining “*Belief*”

➤ Greek

- ~ *pisteou* (verb) – ‘believe; to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust; to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence’ (BDAG)
- ~ *pistos* (noun) – ‘faith; that which evokes trust and faith; state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted’ (BDAG)

➤ Belief / Faith

- ~ not (merely) intellectual assent – “...even the demons *believe* and shudder” (James 2:19)
- ~ not “a tentative conviction not always in line with the facts” (p 89)

➤ Three aspects of Faith (p 96-97)

- ~ cognitive, knowledge, ‘head’ – understand something is true, $2+2=4$
- ~ affective, trust, ‘heart’ – becomes part of our lived experience, *I trust you*
- ~ behavioral, commitment, [‘body’] – speak and act differently, *love one other*

“Faith in Jesus is meant to engage us on all levels of our being, including our mind, our heart and our obedience” (p 89) – *knowledge, trust, commitment* (p 88-89)

- “New Testament faith begins with knowledge...Our minds are convinced that certain things are true (even if we do not fully understand these things)”
- “But then our conviction turns into trust”
- “Because we trust, we act” – make a commitment to actively follow Jesus Christ – “...the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love” (Galatians 5:6)

“Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace so sure and certain that believers would stake their lives on it a thousand times over” – Martin Luther

“Mostly we have to realize that we can never convince anyone about Jesus. Only God the Holy Spirit can bring inner conviction. What we can do is talk about *plausibility* (what helps convince us), and *experience* (how we ourselves know God)” (p 87)

Small Group Discussion – what fosters your faith in Christ? what makes it hard for people to have faith? (p 87)

Talking About Believing in Jesus (chap 10)

“Belief is at the very heart of conversion. But this isn’t generalized belief. It’s belief in Jesus. It’s belief that he died for our sins and rose to give us new life. It’s belief that by turning to him we can be forgiven our sins and will experience new life. Belief in Jesus is quite different from belief in anything or anyone else” (p 94)

What does it mean to have faith in Jesus? (p 93-94)

- “Jesus is worth believing in” – Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, he reveals God to us, he is true and can be trusted
- “Jesus is worth trusting” – in his life, death, and resurrection, he forgives our sins, frees us from death, and gives us life now and forever
- “Jesus is worth following” – “by following Jesus we discover life at its fullest”

Small Group Discussion – what does it mean to believe in Jesus? how is this different from believing in anyone or anything else? (p 94)

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Session Six**

Talking About Commitment (chap 11)

How does a person actually become a follower of Jesus? – the next step on the spiritual pilgrimage... (p 99-100)

- ~ sense your need for God, insight
- ~ turn to Jesus Christ, repentance
- ~ admit to God and others, confess
- ~ trust Jesus, faith
- ~ *and then...*

“...we need a way of talking about commitment. The metaphor of marriage or the story of the prodigal child can function in this way. We also need rituals by which to mark out such commitment so that what is private becomes public. In this way we are called on to name our new allegiance to Jesus and thus begin actively to follow his way” (p 101)

Talking about commitment to Jesus Christ in relational terms – getting married & coming home, Luke 15:11-32 (p 103-105)

Rituals that mark our commitment to Jesus Christ (p 101)

- ~ baptism
- ~ confirmation
- ~ coming forward
- ~ joining a church

***Small Group Discussion** – at what point did you know, or how did you know, that you had become a follower of Jesus? (p 99)*

Putting It All Together (chap 12)

“Holy conversation consists of good conversation skills coupled with content focused on the gospel. The rules of good conversation connect people together in love and respect and keep the conversation going over time. The content of holy conversation keeps that conversation focused on Jesus in all his many aspects. Our goal is to be competent and knowledgeable conversationalists even as we trust God to work in the lives of our friends as well as in our own life” (p 112)

- *Holy* – about “the meaning of life, the nature of reality and the existence of God,” conversation with a focus on Jesus Christ: “who he is, what he has done, how he brings us back to God, how to connect with Jesus” (p 111)

- *Conversation* – between people who know and respect each other, over time, sharing experience and insight – “rules of conversation” (p 111)
 - ~ be kind and generous
 - ~ enjoy dialogue
 - ~ expect differing views
 - ~ be clear in what you say
 - ~ be honest
 - ~ know that conversion takes place over time
 - ~ try to be compelling in what you say about Jesus, but not manipulative
 - ~ tell stories – lots of stories: stories about Jesus, God, yourself
- Remember
 - ~ the Holy Spirit converts people, not us – trust God with the results
 - ~ we’re not in this alone – invite people into church community
 - ~ holy conversation is ongoing – “If God is real to you, then you will talk about that reality” (p 112)

***Small Group Discussion** – what has this experience of holy conversation been like for you and your friends? and what are your goals in the days ahead for holy conversation?*