

## Speaking of Jesus: Everyday Practices for Sharing Gospel Hope

### Part Three: Hospitality and Listening

Hospitality was a big deal in the ancient world. It's still a big deal, and for very good reason. The word for hospitality in the Greek language, that the New Testament of the Bible is written in, is "philoxenia." That's a two-part word, where *philos* means "love", particularly "brotherly love" or "friendship love" and *xenos* means "the other" or "the stranger". Put it together, and the idea of hospitality is about love for the stranger, or to be a "friend to the stranger."

To be 'hospitable' then includes far more than having someone over for coffee or a meal, though it may very well include that. It is a posture of openness and generosity to others. It can be expressed in simply recognizing a person with a smile or other kind gesture. Hospitality is demonstrated, to use Jesus' example, through a "cup of cold water" given in his name (Matthew 10:42), and to opening our lives, to drawing in someone who was once a stranger and making them a friend, as Jesus does for us (John 15:15).

The posture and practice of hospitality are at the heart of a lifestyle on mission with God, the One who opened his life to embrace us, even at the cost of his own life. And a central way to demonstrate the hospitable love of God for others is to listen well to their stories and to the hearts.

#### Open Up

1. What, in your view, are some of the key ingredients in a good conversation?
2. Describe what it like to have someone listen really well to you? How did it make you feel about the relationship?
3. Why do you think listening is such an important part of providing a space for deeper conversation and building relational trust?

#### Dig In

Read the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well in **John 4:4-30; 39-42**.

1. What is the first thing Jesus does in this interaction (v.7)?
2. What was this woman's reaction in v.9? Notice the similar response by Jesus' disciples in v.27. What was surprising to them about Jesus' interaction with this woman?
3. Both the woman herself and the disciples' reaction to Jesus demonstrates the social/cultural barriers that Jesus was breaking by entering this conversation. She was a Samaritan, and a woman. Speaking to her was a social taboo. No one, including the

woman, would expect Jesus to show her this kind of honour and respect. However, by the way Jesus engaging with her, Jesus honours her. She's not a 'project' but a person, and he wants to serve her true and deepest needs by the conversation they have. How can we show respect and gentleness to people we are sharing the Gospel with?

## **Practice It**

In this "Practice It" section we will look at the levels of conversation (part one) and then asking good questions and listening (part two). You will read the section through, then use the discussion questions to help reflect on each.

### ***Part One: Conversation Levels***

In his book, Sam Chan describes how a conversation generally fits in one of three 'levels' and then connects them to the spaces of hospitality where these conversations might best develop. These include:

#### **Interests (*Coffee*) – Values (*Dinner*) – Worldviews (*Gospel*)**

1. **Interests:** This level of conversation is what we often call "small talk"; when we discuss things that are simply 'descriptive' – things like the weather ("Sure is cold out...") or sports ("Can you believe it, the Leafs aren't going to be in the finals again this year? Weird, right?"), or asks questions like: "What TV shows are you watching?" or "What did you do this past weekend?"

Chan connects this level of conversation with ***inviting someone for coffee***. This is a safe invitation, since it happens in a public space where you and your friend can engage in asking 'interest level' questions for 20-45 minutes or so (unless the conversation runs longer and into more of the 'values' level). This is a place of building relational interest and trust on a basic level.

2. **Values:** This level is about our preferences (things we like), what we believe is right and wrong (ethics), and what we find beautiful (aesthetics). Values statements might include things like: "Chocolate is better than vanilla", "I like action movies better than rom-coms." This would also include more important issues like why we send our kids to a specific school, or school them at home, or about why we voted in a specific way. This is a level of engagement where there is a high chance of disagreement.

Chan says this level of conversation is often where we might arrive at during ***dinner***. Dinner is more private than a coffee invite, and the time commitment is likely 2-hours.

This level of conversation is our opportunity for making sure, those we are connecting with feel safe sharing those deeper level thoughts with us and deepening relationship and trust. We show our guests, at this level, that they can be vulnerable because we are listening well and demonstrate that we are not trying to 'win' a debate or argument but

are aimed at simply understanding. That doesn't mean we won't also share our thoughts, but how we do so ought to build connection rather than disrupt it.

3. **Worldviews:** This final level of dives into the deepest questions of life: Where do we come from? What does it mean to be human? What's wrong with the world? Why do we hurt? What's the solution? Where is history going? What happens after we die? These worldview level questions are where faith commitments come into play: whether that be to atheism, secular humanism, agnosticism, one of the major world religions, New Age spirituality, or Christianity. Here is the place not only for disagreement about the details, but even over how we claim to 'know' and make decisions.

Though Chan does not specify a physical space for this kind of conversation to happen, this sort of conversation moves from what many would see as the 'secular' realm to the sacred; to a place where the news of Jesus, the Gospel, can be shared (more on that next session).

This may very well happen over coffee, over dinner, or out for a walk or on a camping trip. So, the 'hospitality' piece is not about physical place so much as our posture of 'hosting' the other and hosting the conversation in a way that creates a safe, non-threatening space for our friends to be honest about their views and ideas. It is often the case that after being heard and respected that our friends will ask what we believe – how we answer these questions. And it is here that we will have opportunity to gently and helpfully "give the reason for the hope" we have in Christ (1 Peter 3:15-16).

In this sort of conversation, we have the opportunity to ask good questions, and listen to the views of our friends, seeking to understand where they are coming from and why.

#### **Discuss:**

1. What do you find often stands in the way of moving a conversation from one level to the next? What do you think you could do to address this? (Note: We'll talk more about the questions we ask below).
2. In the second level – values – we see the potential for disagreement in a conversation. We ourselves will "feel" our values very strongly and may want to clearly distinguish and defend our values when in a conversation with someone who differs from us. However, when thinking about missional fruitfulness – how we can best prepare for sharing the gospel (level three). Why is it important not to be defensive or feel the need to express all your views and opinions on the topic, but instead be committed to listening well and seeking to understand?

## ***Part Two: On Asking Good Questions and Listening***

During a conversation, oftentimes people will ‘drop hints’ that they want to move the conversation to a deeper level. For example, if someone shares something in the realm of ultimate questions that depends on worldviews, like speaking of the death of a loved one, this invites us to ask a very simple question like: “How do you feel about that?” That may offer a moment to listen with a caring heart. It may even lead to further questions about what you believe down the road.

In his book, Sam Chan talks about “Nudge” questions – these are questions that can help nudge a conversation from the world of interests and values to the most significant questions of all – the ones that are ultimately in and through Jesus.

Here are some examples of “nudge” questions that Chan offers:

- What are you looking for in life?
- Why is this important to you?
- What is the one thing you absolutely must have in this life?
- What happens if you don’t find what you’re looking for?
- What do you think it all means?
- What do you believe about God?
- What do you think God wants from you?
- Do you have a faith? Tell me more about it.
- What religion did your parents raise you with?
- Do you pray? Tell me more about it.
- What’s the best thing about being a Muslim/Secular Humanist/Atheist/Buddhist?
- Tell me about some traditions, festivals or celebrations that are important to you?
- What do people get wrong about Islam/Atheism/Secular Humanism/Buddhism?

### **Discuss:**

1. How do you think these kinds of ‘nudge questions’ would make your friends feel, if you simply listened to their responses?
2. Why is it so important to ask the right questions? And to ask them at the right time?
3. What are the benefits to active listening?

### **Prayer:**

Take time to pray with your Life Group or family. Continue to pray for those 3 or 4 people you are committed to – and do it together as a group. Pray for the wisdom and courage to put what we are learning into practice in your workplace, neighbourhood, or community group. Give thanks to God for his initial moves toward you.