

The Christian Man

Sharing My Faith: Having Authentic Spiritual Conversations with My Friends

Rough Transcript

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Good morning, men. Earlier this month, I did a kayak trip down the Rock Springs Run. Some of you may know that. It's eight and a half miles. Start at King's Landing, end up at Wekiva Island. Rain was projected. I had my phone set to the radar screen. When I got far enough down the river, it was pretty clear that rain was imminent, 20 or 30 minutes away. I pulled my kayak over to the side of the river at one of the camps. Camp Otter, if you know that place. There was a very kind and courteous guy who invited me. He was quite a camper. He's very experienced outdoorsman. He was 29 years of age. He invited me to come under his tarp. He had a tarp set up over his insulated hammock. It was very cold too.

I took him up on that offer and we started to talk. I asked him to tell me a little bit about himself. He got off. He was the nicest, kindest guy you could possibly imagine and yet, at the same time, he was the most cynical person that I've met in a long, long time. He went off on hunters, rednecks, all of them. If any of you are hunters, you're a redneck. Those dogs that you have that you run through the campsite, he said, "They have no manners. They just come right through the middle of your camp. They drive their truck right through the middle of your campsite," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

We got on, somehow, to politics. "I don't care if you're a Republican or if you're a Democrat, if you're independent. You're a crook. You're a fraud. They're all a bunch of frauds." I'm thinking, it's raining out there. I've got to stay here and listen to this. I got around to my question, "Where are you on your spiritual journey? Are you a spiritual person?" To show how low his EQ was, it didn't occur to him that I might've been asking that question because I might be interested in spiritual things, but he went off on religion. "200 million people being killed and all this hypocrisy and all this" blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So low was his situational awareness and self-awareness, that after 45 minutes he had not asked me a single personal question, not one question. My feelings were getting hurt at this point.

I decided to volunteer something. When he finally came to a lull, I said, "The reason I'm out here on the river today is, I'm doing recon for a camping trip for our son and me one year from now." I said, "For the last three years, we've done annual camping trips. Our son and me have been on these camping trips." I told him a little bit about how the first year we'd done ATVs. The next year we'd done the Canyon Lines, zip line up in Ocala. I said, "This year, thanks to a recommendation from Dan Fey, we went bass fishing." Bass fishing with a guide, a paid guide. "I'm out here on the river today just doing the recon for that." His demeanor completely changed, completely changed. He said, "You know, that really sounds like fun." He said, "I wish I had a father."

The men that you meet today, no matter how brash and brazen they are almost to a man, they are bruised reeds. That's what we're going to talk about today, sharing our faith and having authentic spiritual conversations with people. Before we get to that, we're going to do a couple of shout outs. Today, we have a number of area directors in town for training. We're going to do a shout out to all those men who are here this time. I'm going to ask each of you to stand when I call your name. Hold your applause and we'll give them a shout out at the end. Greg Allen from Texas. Petru Amarei from Chicago area. Rob Bussard from Colorado. Jerry Canupp from Texas. Brent Hosier from Tennessee. Sam Jones, also the Chicago area. Bill Lindsey from Kansas City area. Thomas McMillan, Connecticut. Mike Rapp, South Carolina, Chris Rondeau, also South Carolina and Tim Vester from over here in Polk City, right? Polk City.

In addition, we have some of the men who are helping train these leaders this time. Peter Hone, he's the regional director for Florida and also the main trainer. Braden Randall, our development director from Colorado is in town helping. Ronn Read, our chaplain for the entire field team. Dale Redder, vice president here in the home office. I wonder, why don't you join me in giving these men a very warm welcome to Man in the Mirror. One, two, three.

Hooah. Welcome. You can sit down. Thank you guys for being here today. Guys, we also do a weekly shout out to a group of guys like us somewhere around the world who are meeting. They may be studying right along with us or they may be doing another series sometimes. Anyway, "God's Army Ministries" in Fort Wayne, Indiana led by elder, Donald Howell. Eight guys have just started meeting. I think they've met one time, so far, on Mondays at 8:00 p.m. They're meeting at the Hoosier Inn hotel in Fort Wayne. Their vision is to become disciples of Christ. Let's give these guys a nice warm welcome too. One, two, three.

Hooah. Men, welcome. We're honored to have you as part of our Bible study. This is the topic today, sharing my faith, authentic spiritual conversations with my friends or having authentic spiritual conversations with my friends. Now, this is the last chapter in the book, *The Christian Man*. I've written 21 books. I was thinking about this this morning. Most of what I write about is how to improve your life, but this particular chapter is ... I'll put it this way. I've never, in my view, written a chapter that is more important than this particular chapter because most of the chapters are about improving the short 80 years of life that you have here on earth. This chapter is not about improved life. This chapter is about eternal life. This is something that's going to matter 10,000 years from now, not just 10 years from now.

THE MISSION: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS, WHY IT'S HARD, WHAT TO DO

With that said, first up, let's talk about the mission of sharing my faith, sharing faith, having authentic conversation. What it is? Why does it matter? Why is it hard? What do you do? If you would ... I forgot to have you turn in your Bibles to ... but you can do it now to Matthew Chapter 28 Verse 18. This is the great commission. This is why we share our faith. What is sharing our faith? Well, it's evangelism. The word, "evangelism." We find evangelism in a number of different places throughout scripture and its kin. The great commission in Matthew 28 Verses 18 to 20, how many of you know this? This is called the great commission and parlance of a lot of people. How many of you know this passage by heart? I'm not going to ask you to say it. How many know this by heart? A number of you know this by heart.

In terms of building culture, that would be something that would be very valuable. Protecting the environment, whatever it is, building communities, protecting people with ... All of these things are very good. This is about that culture building. This is about kingdom building. This is something that lasts

forever. Jesus in his last or near last words said in this passage, Matthew 28, "Therefore, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make what?"

Disciples of all nations and teaching them, baptizing them in the name of the father, the son, the Holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you and I will be with you always." Now, to Acts Chapter one Verse eight and these two passages are the last recorded words of Jesus. Acts Chapter one Verse eight. Jesus says, "But when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will receive dunamis." You will receive power. Dunamis is the word from which dynamite comes from. You will receive power and you will be my witnesses. The word witnesses, by the way, is *martos*, the Greek word *martos*. M-a-r-t-u-s, *martos*. What other word do you think might have derived from *martos*?

Martyr. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my martyrs. You'll be my witnesses and here, there and everywhere. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We're talking about, what is sharing faith? It's evangelism. It's the great commission. It's making disciples. It's being witnesses for Jesus especially with the power of the Holy Spirit. In Romans Chapter one Verse 16, Paul says, "I am not ashamed" ... Usually, when I read this, I put a lot of oomph into because that's how I feel, but I want to read it in a more sober-minded way to you. "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Now, the way I would orally say, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes," and that too, whichever way is best for you to receive.

Second Corinthians Chapter five Verse 11. There is a subscript here. It's not part of the text but above in my Bible it says, "The ministry of reconciliation." Verse 11 says, "Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord. We try to persuade others." We're talking about what is the mission? What it is. What it is, the mission. This mission of sharing our faith and having authentic conversations. It's evangelism. It's the great commission. It's making disciples. It's being witnesses. It's martyring ourselves. It's feeling compelled to persuade people. Then if you drop down to Verse 14, "For Christ's love compels us." The more we have experienced the fullness of the gospel, Jesus, in our own lives, the more we have experienced the love of Christ in our own lives, then the more we feel compelled to tell others about that great thing. Just like if you've been to the greatest restaurant in town, you want to tell everybody about it.

"For Christ's love compels us," because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore, all died. Verse 16, "So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view." When we're out at the gym, when we're out on the job, when we are at home, when we're at the shopping mall, when we look at people, we don't regard them from a worldly point of view. Rather, what we do is, we see somebody who says, "You know, that sounds like fun. I wish I had a father." We see the bruised reeds. Verse 17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new has come." That was the theme verse for the very first chapter on identity.

Verse 18 says, "All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." The mission. What it is? It's evangelism. It's making disciples. It's the great commission. It's persuading people. It's being witnesses. It's being martyrs. It's the ministry of reconciliation. 19, "That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. We have been given the message of reconciliation. Verse 20, the last verse for the day, "We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors." What was the analogy I was thinking of earlier today for an ambassador? I forgot.

Anyway, we are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. What is sharing my faith? It's all these things. It's the ministry of reconciliation. I like reconciliation and I like the message in the ministry of reconciliation because I like that particular word, "reconciliation" just because of how damaged men are these days, how bruised they are, how sensitive and fragile men are today, in particular, and everybody in general, but especially men. The need is not for them to see a big sign on the street corner with a guy that needs a bath in a shouting repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand. What he needs is, he needs somebody to love and care for him to. In the spirit of reconciliation, we are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God.

We're talking about the mission. That's what the mission is. Why does it matter? Why does it matter? Well, we've already talked about heaven and eternity. Another good reason that it matters is that ... In seminary and a class called apologetics, which is a class to teach seminary students how to defend the faith and provide the proofs for Christianity and so forth, I had the greatest professor ever. His name was Ron Nash. During the course of the semester, he taught us all the arguments that can prove or help to prove the existence of God. The cosmological argument, the ontological argument, the epistemological argument, the argument for miracles, solving the problem of gratuitous evil and a couple of others.

On the last day of class, he said, "We've had a good class. I've taught you all of the traditional arguments that can prove the existence of God, but I would be doing you a disservice. If I did not, on this last day, tell you that greater than all of those arguments combined in my own personal experience by far and away the most persuasive argument for the truth of Christianity is a changed life." He's given to us. He's making his appeal through us. It's your life. It's the way you live your life. It's the way I live my life. That appeals to people. There's been so much written on it. In fact, I've got a lot of this stuff is persuasively, if I might say so myself written in this chapter, I want to encourage you to dive into that a little bit more, but the bottom line is it matters. Because people need a guide. They need an ambassador. They need someone who will love them.

Why is it hard? Well, I think we've talked already a lot about why it's hard. It's hard because the people that we want to talk to are bruised reeds. They're suspicious. They're lacking in trust. We'll talk about this a little bit more in a minute, but we do live in an era and a culture in which the idea that there are absolute truths is really just not connecting, all right? That doesn't mean we're saying that they're not absolute truth. We believe that there are, but in the culture, generally speaking, they don't. By the way, some of that spills over and there are Christians who don't believe in absolute truth, but that's another talk for another time. The other reason it's hard is that, let's face it, it's intimidating. You think that you have the secret of eternal life, and you have somebody who is going off on religion and going off on politics and going off on redneck hunters. How do you communicate that? It's intimidating.

All right. What do we do? Well, here's the Big Idea for the day. It's a pretty liberating idea. **We are not trying to trick people into becoming Christians. Evangelism is simply taking someone as far as they want to go towards Jesus at that particular moment.** We're not trying to trick people into becoming Christians. We're just simply sharing what's going on back and forth in an authentic relationship with people and then helping them to go as far as they want to go toward Jesus at that particular moment. My friend on the river. At the end, it was quite clear that words about Christianity were not appropriate. It would have been a complete violation of the process of relationships. There was no earned trust. There was no connection. There was no nothing.

What did I do? I wanted to do something. At the end, I said, "Well, I write books for men. I write them out of a Christian worldview." I did say that much. I gave him my business card. I said, "I would love to send you one of my books and to see if we could continue to have some connection. If you would be interested, send me an email and give me a mailing address and I'll send you a book." Never heard from him. It's been three weeks. I'm probably not going hear from him, right? Maybe I will. Maybe I won't. Maybe I will, but the point is that I was doing Evangelism. I was simply taking him as far as he wanted to go toward Jesus at that particular moment, which was nowhere. I left the door open in a way that did not violate the process of relationships. All right. That's the mission.

THE MINDSET: THE MESSAGE NEVER CHANGES BUT OUR METHODS NEED TO ADAPT

Now, what about the mindset? This is going to be short, a little short piece of the message today, but here's the idea. The message never changes. Really, there's a very complete and full treatment of this in the book with sources. I was reading it again this morning. I read it twice. I read it earlier in the week and then I read it again this morning. Honestly, I don't think anybody could read this and find any fault with it whatsoever. Kidding, kidding, kidding. The point here is to have the mindset that the message never changes. The story of the birth life, death, resurrection, Ascension of Jesus, these are the historical facts that we have to work with. We tell that story. That's the message. Our methods need to adapt.

Here's the bottom line. Let's see if I can find the sentence in here that's worth reading. I can't believe I said, "Can I find the sentence in my own book that's worth reading?" I take that back. I take that back. There must be something in here that would just summarize this. All right. Well, here's the point. The point is that every one of us have grown up in an education system that has promoted the concept that truth is relative. If you're 80 years of age or younger, you have been brought up in an educational system that has taught the truth is relative. Everybody that we talk to has been brought up in a system, has been educated to think that there are no absolute truths.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that Christians don't believe that there are some things that are absolutely true. We do. What I am saying is that that is not a good starting point to have a conversation with somebody. It just doesn't connect. If you say, "I want to talk to you about the truth of Christianity." It just doesn't connect but what does connect is to talk to people about this idea of what is ... Let me tell you about something that's real. Let's talk about something that is authentic. The authenticity of what's going on in your life. Just talking about your life, helping them see the reality. As my apologetics professor would say, "The power of a change life, that is a method that will work." There's a lot more in here on that.

The point is that truth claims are simply not going to resonate with the person who doesn't believe that absolute truth is even knowable. You get it? You get it?

How can we convince a new generation of people that Christianity is true when they do not believe in absolute truth? We need a new starting point. We need this new starting point. Frankly, Francis Schaeffer came up with it way back in the 70s, 80s. You can read that in the book. Short version for this generation. A more resonant starting point is not that Christianity is true, but that it's real. If you haven't thought about that before, I realized, that's not as black and white to use it as to me, but I encourage you to think about that. All right. Well, that's enough on that for now.

This is the ethos or the mindset. The mission and the mindset of sharing it. Well, the Big Idea, again, we're not trying to trick them. Okay. We're just trying to take them as far as they want to go toward

Jesus at that particular moment, and then the methods. The mission, the mindset, the method. One thing to have a mindset, it's a different thing to have actual skills that you can use, right?

THE METHOD: STEP-BY-STEP WITHOUT VIOLATING THE PROCESS OF RELATIONSHIPS

The five steps that I want you to just be alerted to are written right down here. You have take a screenshot of that if you want to, but also, they're in the book. Actually, in the coaching guy, which I hope all of you have downloaded. As you know, it's free. I think we handed them out here locally as well.

All of these steps are in there along with a worksheet for you to develop, for example, your three-minute elevator speech. But the first step in this process and doing it in a way that it doesn't violate the process of relationships, just ask the question that I asked the man out on the river. "Where are you on your spiritual journey? Are you a spiritual person?" Just see where that wants to go. Then secondly, sharing your story after they tell their story. By the way, I have literally asked thousands of men that question. Everybody except that guy I met on the river wants to talk about it. It's the golden question that can start a spiritual conversation and then sharing your story.

Well, when somebody shares their story in the process of relationships, what's the next normal thing? Hopefully, they're smart enough or have enough EQ. Well, tell me about yourself. If they don't, then you say, "I love hearing your story. Let me tell you a bit about my story." You see? You move on to the next step. What do you talk about? Well, you talk about your three-minute elevator speech that you have prepared in advance. You remain vigilant. You stay intentional. You're on a mission. You're wanting to share your own spiritual journey. You're going to take what they've said. You let that work into your brain. You're going to contextualize what you say, but you're going to make sure that you don't go off on a rabbit trail like I could easily do here. If I didn't have some tracks that I'm running on, I do. When you're sharing your story, you can easily go off on a rabbit trail too.

In the coaching guide on pages 30 and 31 is a worksheet for you to develop a three-minute elevator speech. Next idea is that once you've both shared your stories, then it's time to tell them about the gospel of Jesus. Three simple ideas; God loves you very much, Jesus died for your sins and to give you eternal life, but we also need to personally confess our sins and ask Jesus to come into our life. That's in the book too. The platinum question, this is if the golden question is, "Where are you on your journey?" The platinum question is, "Have you ever confessed your sins and received Jesus as your savior and lord?" Do you know that, right now, today, there are tens of thousands of people in this community. There are millions of people in this state and around this country, millions of people who are aching to have this relationship with Jesus Christ. All they need to do is have you ask them.

The final piece is to do with them a prayer of faith. There's one in here. There's one in the book. You can take a look at those. These are the important steps and the step by step process that support the Big Idea for the day. That is: **We're not trying to trick people into becoming Christians. Evangelism is simply taking someone as far as they want to go towards Jesus at any particular moment.** Make sense?

All right. Let us pray. Our dearest father, thank you for giving us in your word truth about how to lead an improved life, but then also, how to have eternal life. Not only that, how you would have us help others have eternal life. Lord, help us to parse this truth, these three ideas, so that we understand the gravitas of your great commission to us to be ambassadors compelled by your love to persuade others that

looking at people from a worldly point of view any longer, bringing them, however, the ministry and the message of reconciliation so that they too might be with us 10,000 years from now. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.