

4 CONVERSATIONS

...for friends seeking to TRANSFORM lives with Christ

~Ask 2 or 3 Christ-followers to meet with you 4 times
~At a coffeehouse or home...for 1 hour
~ Read the “selections” for the conversation of the day
~Then just talk openly...let His Spirit guide

1

Thought Provoking Examples

...which “speaks” to your life right now? (pages 1-3)

2

HIS Power + Nothing Else

...which verse “reads” you?
(page 4)

3

Who does God already have “hungry”

... for what you have to give (page 5-7)

4

How Transformation Happens

Stan: I was “saved” twice as a kid, but now I’m a
Christ-follower
...what is he revealing?
(pages 8-10)

Transforming Lives with Christ + NOTHING ELSE

...just God, you, prayer and relationships...
...NO money, NO advertising, NO big events, NO special equipment

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END EACH CONVERSATION

by choosing one of these questions to “carry” with you through the week

1. Are there friends or groups that come to mind as you reflect on these ideas?
2. Has God’s Spirit made you hungry to start or be part of something like one of these examples?
3. How might God have you reshape one of these ideas for the group of overlooked friends HE has pressed to your heart?
4. What’s holding you back from taking the first step?
5. Who might partner with you in developing one of these ideas with a group of overlooked friends?

I. Thought Provoking Examples...which one “speaks” to your life right now?

A. Almolongo

I first heard of what God was doing in Almolongo, Guatemala in 2008. It was passed to me by word of mouth and it blessed me tremendously because I could see God doing there what I was asking Him to do in Treasure Valley and in the nation of Venezuela. In every mass movement of God, He works in multiple ways and simultaneously with a variety of servants. I first heard of a humble farmer who God gave a tremendous burden for his valley of residence. As he worked the fields of produce in primitive ways, he wept and prayed over those he loved and his entire valley. He asked God to show himself in powerful ways that the people of Almolongo and the surrounding valley would see the Savior clearly and embrace him fully. He prayed this way for a long time; then his harvest of produce began to multiply. His poor family and neighbors saw the increase and inquired as to the reason. The humble farmer pointed to the power of God and the simple but powerful ways of Christ. People began to call on the Lord and trust Him fully. They gathered to invoke the transforming power of God on their community in simple family sized groups. The strongholds of evil began to fall but not without significant difficulty. Over time in this Guatemalan valley of approximately 19,000 residents about 18,000 came to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The entire Valley was **transformed**. Jails closed. House churches and other evangelical churches overflowed their walls into the streets of the central city of Almolongo in celebration of the King of Kings. Their produce co-op changed. They grew from shipping 4 truckloads of produce per month to shipping 40 truckloads per week. (from Gail Graves, Idaho)

B. Austin

Around eighteen months ago, the Lord showed us prophetically that we were to start a church in one of the low-income housing projects about twenty minutes from our home. So we gathered together a team to pray for the area, and for several months, it was a prayer project. From time to time we would actually go and walk the area claiming it for the Kingdom, but most of our praying was done on an individual basis.

One day, Tony and I happened to be driving by, and on impulse, decided to stop and prayer walk again. Tony was specifically asking the Lord that we would meet our ‘person of peace.’ A torrential downpour surprised us and we ran to take shelter under a balcony with two Hispanic ladies who turned out to be sisters. Conversation started, and they inquired what we were doing there. (We obviously did not fit the local profile!) We explained to them that we were praying for their neighborhood, and as the conversation went on, asked if we could come by occasionally to pray about the needs in their family. They immediately agreed, and so for the next few weeks, once or twice a week we would drop in and pray for them, staying just fifteen minutes or so. It was not long before we were seeing very specific answers to prayer.

One of the sisters, Rosa, turned out to be our person of peace. (She has a heart as big as Texas - everyone is welcomed and loved by her.) Our next step was to ask if she would bring some of her friends and family members together, and so a weekly meeting time was set up at her home. **She very quickly became a Christian, and this led to many of her family members also doing the same.** We have touched several other homes in the complex, too. Now a year later, her apartment is crowded out every week with 30 to 40 people jammed in, sitting on the stairs, on the floor, kids everywhere. Neighbors are telling us that the project has begun to change; there is less violence and some of the drug dealers are moving out. We have started a church in the home of another family member in a different housing project as well.

(Excerpt from Getting Started, by Felicity Dale, page 100 and 102, used by permission.)

C. "Stan"...Christ-formed through a food box

Stan, a middle-aged medical supply rep, had gone to church some as a kid, but had completely separated himself from it in his teens. He says he was burned and disappointed in some of his experiences with church so he washed his hands of it.

But after 40 years of shunning church he experienced this group, and God used it to begin chipping away at his heart. His wife had started participating in the "green" church on the parking lot. She heard about it through her mother's participation (who heard about it through her garage door repair man). Her sporadic presence soon became regular and she began to tell Stan about the weekly food box, the monthly cash given to persons in crisis, and the outdoorsy environment. He finally came with her on Mother's Day, but he was careful to remain aloof. Again at Christmas, Stan was with his wife, but he always sat at the edge of the group and just looked away during prayers or worship. He was polite, but distant.

Then he came one Sunday when there was a particularly touching report from the recipients of the food box the week before. He asked if he could deliver the box to an elderly lady on his medical route during the coming week because he knew she was having trouble financially. According to plan, he loaded the box on his truck Monday morning with the intention of dropping it off about midday. But before he left the warehouse, a supervisor brought a new trainee over to ride with Stan and learn the "job". As they rode together, and got to know each other, the trainee asked about the box of groceries and Stan told him about the green church and how they gave everything away. After a quiet pause, the trainee opened up a little deeper...he said he'd been out of work for several months and things were really tight at home...he asked if Stan thought the church would allow him to have the food box in order to

feed his three kids. Stan could barely talk by then but okayed that idea wholeheartedly. Immediately the trainee called his wife, welling up with tears, to tell her what he was bringing home to three hungry mouths!

Stan became a Christ-follower soon after that encounter! Not only was he at the gathering every week, he began to share openly during the Bible time about his own journey. He prayed. He sang. He went out of his way to help people in his path during each day. He served others in the gathering. He shared his encouragement and thoughts in this group with a Christ-like wisdom. He began to talk with his grown children about his new way of life (they had already noticed of course), and they began to show up at the gathering.

Life **transformation** became a reality for Stan, without anybody saying those words or planning a complex “strategy” of discipleship. The “green” church just lived it out! (www.greenchurch.info)

D. PRAYER plan instead of ACTIVITY plan

Begin using a “Prayer Plan” instead of an “Activity Plan” as you seek God’s guidance & power to (a) help you connect with an unreached group, and (b) help you plant a faithgroup or church in their midst. Don’t substitute an event/activity/advertisement for the Spirit’s preparation of hearts and for God-arranged encounters with those same “prepared hearts”.

Try weekly “prayerwalking” wherever this group lives or “hangs out.” As you walk, silently ask God to bless each person and show them concrete proof of His love & provision in their lives..... ask God to cross your path with someone He has made ready for your mission!

This method puts “flesh” out of power because you are depending on God to arrange the right relationship connections. Be faithful and watch God work!

a. Pray for pockets of lostness where God is already at work in person’s lives preparing them for His Good News.

b. Pray for a “person-of-peace” in each unreached group who will be receptive to your mission, and who will open the door to his/her whole network of relationships. Pray for God to lead you to a connection with this exact person.

c. Pray for a “Timothy” (an intern) to rise to the surface from within the group that you connect with (many Christ-followers pray Luke 10:2b as they go through each day)....seek this person whom God is shaping to become the group shepherd eventually...your best work will be to disciple/mentor them as a leader (2 Tim.2:2). Then move on to another unreached group as soon as they can take full responsibility. (from Kenny Moore, Colorado)

II. HIS Power + Nothing Else...which verse “reads” you today?

- Zech. 4:6B – Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.
- (NASB)
- Ps. 44:3 – For by their own sword they did not possess the land;
And their own arm did not save them:
By Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy presence
Thou didst favor them. (NASB)
- Ps. 81:11-12 – But My people did not listen to My voice;
And Israel did not obey Me.
So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk in their own devices. (NASB)
- Ps. 146:3-5 – Mere humans don’t have what it takes;
When they die their projects die with them.
Instead, get help from the God of Jacob,
put your hope in God and know real blessing. (Message)
- Ps. 147:10-11 – He’s not impressed with horsepower;
The size of our muscles means little to Him.
Those who fear God get God’s attention;
they can depend on His strength. (Message)
- John 15:5B – for apart from Me you can do nothing. (NASB)
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- Acts 3:6-- But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” (NASB)
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- Acts 16:7—and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them. (NASB)
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- Ephesians 1:17-18-- I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing Him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is He is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life He has for Christians...(Message)

III. Finding the person God has made “hungry”Acts 16:6-15 Bible Study

What portion of this example “grabs your attention” in regard to connecting with spiritually hungry persons? Note the influence of four distinct factors in this passage:

1. The Holy Spirit guiding leaders to unlikely persons/groups and preparing those specific hearts for a spiritual beginning
2. Prayer as a point of connection with not-yet-believers
3. Relationship ties quickly drawing family and friends into new elemental church bodies
4. The absence of money and facilities

Please read the ten verses from Acts before you reflect on (or discuss with friends) the following thoughts:

Paul was just beginning his 2nd missionary journey here, and was obviously seeking the Spirit’s guidance to the right places and people. He was sensitive enough to God’s leading that he refused to go into an area if the Spirit redirected him. How refreshing. It’s not uncommon today for Christian leaders to plan a great endeavor “for” God, and then proceed whether the Spirit affirms the idea or not! **God knows what you want Him to do, but what does HE want you to do?**

So, don’t just race ahead with the plans that you have in mind, even if your motives are good. Rather, seek God’s definite direction and go to that group of people, even if you have to keep praying and waiting until HE makes the path clear. God already sees a person (or persons) whose heart and life He has been working in...someone He has been making “hungry” for His love, forgiveness, and Lordship...**let Him guide you to that person!**

As one church planter says, we should have a “prayer plan” for finding persons and starting churches, rather than an “activity plan!” God has a way of guiding us to the persons HE has made hungry for the Gospel when we take time to seek and wait on His leading.

I hear practical examples of this wise counsel from all over. A former missionary to Africa says his team quit going into villages and showing the Jesus film because too many who responded were only curious and didn’t stick with their profession of faith. Instead they began to pray that God would lead them to a “person-of-peace” (Luke 10:1-9)...a person God had made ready for their message or their mission....a person who opened the door to his/her circle of relationships. Sometimes it took 14 months, and sometimes 5 minutes to “encounter” this person....but prayer was the key. The believers and churches started in this manner flourished.

Still another example comes from Alabama. A pastor planted 52 churches in five years in low income apartments, primarily by prayer-walking in the apartment complexes...seeking the person(s) God had made hungry!

And how about Austin, Texas....a missionary kid, now grown, began to prayer-walk in a “rough” apartment complex and after several months encountered two ladies who were open to prayer for their families needs. He started going by weekly to pray with them and soon one trusted Christ with her life. More family and friends began to join the weekly prayer time at her invitation. Within several weeks the “missionary” suggested they begin a church together in her apartment. She wholeheartedly agreed, along with 30-40 of her friends who started coming!

If prayer is the key to “connecting” with the person(s) God has made spiritually hungry...in the Book of Acts, and in Africa, and in Alabama, and in Austin.....well, you get the idea!!!

Obviously prayer is more effective than events, activities, and advertising...and costs nothing except our time with God.

So, what factors cause us to often catch ourselves praying a bit then quickly forging ahead with our humanly limited “outreach strategies?”

As soon as Paul got clear guidance from God he went immediately to that place/that group of people. But, even then he held off on proclaiming the Good News for a few days. It seems he was still waiting, praying, actively seeking, and watching for the person (or persons) God had made hungry for new life in Christ. If I had been there with Paul, I would have probably suggested that we gather a crowd, post some signs, or even have a drawing for one of Paul’s well made goat skin tents! But Paul was looking only for a God-arranged encounter with the right person...he searched, but waited on God to connect him to that person.

Finally, down at the riverbank, a place commonly used for prayer in that culture, Paul found a group of women. How many? Probably only a handful. No great crowd here. And, of course, women in this era were not considered equal to men. But Paul began a conversation with this tiny group of “God-searchers”, and sure enough Lydia’s heart was ripe to hear God’s truth for her life. She was a worshiper of God, but not yet a Christian. How long had God been working in her life? What circumstances had made her want to know more about HIM?

The same God who saw Paul trying to go the wrong direction (to Bithynia) also saw Lydia’s heart and readiness to hear Paul’s message, though she lived in Philippi. God redirected Paul and brought the two together!

Lydia quickly invited Paul to speak to her household...her family, servants, and close friends...her circle of close relationships. Almost certainly she became the crowd-drawer, not some big advertised event. It was all tied together by prayer, God’s connections, and relationships...no money was needed!

Her family and friends also believed and were baptized. This hints that Paul was starting a church right in Lydia's home.....how wonderfully simple.....how God-dependent.....how contagious it all was!

In Acts 16:22-34, God intersects Paul's life with the local jailer at a time when both were in a life-crisis. God used that crisis to make the jailer "hungry" for something deeper in life, and this tough guy both trusted Christ and opened the door to his network of relationships, his household. I'm sure the family saw a big change in their jailer husband/dad/friend. The jailer became the crowd-drawer and many were baptized upon hearing his story and Paul's message. So, within days a second church was started in this previously overlooked circle of family and friends.

Why was the jailer not at the riverbank with Lydia? They lived in completely different social segments of the city. They worked at different times, went different places, and had totally different lifestyles. Even as new believers their daily lives clearly did not mesh.

Would her homechurch and his join together now? Probably not. Though both groups would learn to worship, grow as believers, share, and minister to their community, they almost surely would do it in different ways.

Summary:

- The Holy Spirit led Paul to two groups he would never have picked out with his own wisdom: a woman and her household, and a jailer and his household.
- Prayer became the bridge between Paul's heart to share the Gospel and Lydia's heart to hear it.
- Both Lydia and the jailer had an impact on their families and friends, their circles of influence. These new church plants crystallized around the relationships, not around events/activities/ programs. What God is doing in one life profoundly touches others who are close to that person.
- **All of this happened at a riverbank, a prison, and two homes that were adequate, relational, and cost free.**

IV. How TRANSFORMATION Happens

...which example, B or C, would you choose to try out with a friend or two? Why?

A. Stan: I was “saved” twice as a kid, but now I’m a **Christ-follower**.....what is he revealing?
(This is the man who was “transformed” after being encouraged to deliver a food box in Christ’s Name... page 2)

B. Guiding a group to be HIS Heart, Hands, Voice, & Compassion in their circle of relationships:

The Romans 16:3-5 example: what does this elemental example crystallize for you?

When Paul wrote “*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,...also greet the church that is in their house,*” he (and God through him) was obviously calling this little band of believers a church, the Body of Christ, in their tiny slice of the world.

How enlightening it is to mentally picture this church in their 1st Century environment. Obviously they had no pulpit or pews. There was no separate classroom for the teens or children. Much of the New Testament had not been written yet and nobody had gone to Bible College! So, how did they live-out the elemental basics of church life together?

~ How did Prisca & Aquila make a living? (Acts 18:3)

~How big was their house? What was the furniture like? How many people fit in their home?

~ How did they Worship? Disciple people? Evangelize? Do Ministry for others? Have Community together? ...all very basic and elemental, but still a simple expression of church!

~ Did anyone prepare, train, or “certify” their leader other than Paul? (2 Tim. 2:2, Acts 18:2-3)

~Who gave them permission to **transform** their neighborhood by planting a simple but sincere expression of church there?

~ How much did the gathering cost? How long did this specific expression of church-life last in this location? How much good did it do?

We don’t know the detailed answers to these questions but the simplicity of that church is both apparent & somehow refreshing!

This same simple elemental style of church has changed lives throughout 2000 years in every culture, sub-group, social class, and political environment imaginable.....home churches in China, riverbank churches in Argentina, apartment churches in urban centers world-wide, and how about those early Christians driven to gather in the catacombs!

C. “the meal” ... it’s church for the rest of us!

...how might this example be refined to fit a group of your overlooked friends?

Christian Friends in any group (and their network of unchurched relationships) can become simple relational churches. Each cluster can become an “elemental” Body of Christ by living out these 5 basics (or rhythms) of church life:

m...mentor each person toward bringing his/her own friends and expressing his/her own God-journey with the group...(life-involvement evangelism)

e...eat, share life concerns, and pray for each other around the table...(supportive friendships)

a...apply a Bible passage to how you live, as a group dialogue...(obedience-based discipleship)...the leader needs to choose a practical passage and guide, but not control the sharing. What does each verse reveal about: God, self, others, life...let all share openly!

I...love the Lord with all your heart, and others as yourself...(worship, and servanthood)

Many passionate Christians are making the choice to birth relevant church-bodies that totally transform overlooked groups of friends (who have mentally distanced themselves from the regular church). They support themselves entirely by a personal career as part of a revolutionary movement to follow Christ.

*“Ben” radiates as he shares about the church-body of young adults and families that gather in his home. They begin to arrive about 10AM and sometimes stay well past the noon fellowship meal. During their few hours together they enjoy life-sharing fellowship, Bible discussion, prayer, worship, and ministry projects...usually in a different sequence each week...often taking a snack or play break with the kids. He says it is the most engaging church they have ever experienced. **It is easy to bring friends** to such a group. Everyone has time to listen, to laugh, and to encourage one another. Not only are people coming to know Christ and maturing in their faith, it is transforming how they live! **Ben challenges them regularly to grow spiritually to the point of beginning such a church in their own homes.***

How to Begin a “meal” group:

1. Ask God to arrange encounters between you and the friends/acquaintances/strangers in whom He has been stirring up a deep spiritual yearning. Keep praying, seeking, watching, waiting, and sharing until some are ready to journey with you in this church...it only takes a few. Trust His Spirit to connect you to the right ones, and to have their hearts open.

2. Please don't settle for a cozy club of "just us" Christ-followers...always be seeking/loving/including those who are still searching for HIM! Some who begin with you may not yet be Christians. **Don't begin until HE guides you to the person or group whose heart(s) HE has been preparing.**
3. Plan the meal to be easy and casual...it may be just snacks ...**focus on God and relationships**, not food/cooking/eating.
4. Gather at a home, apartment, park, café, etc. Use the "m.e.a.l." idea just to guide you in carrying out the **five basics** of the church: life-involvement evangelism, supportive friendships, obedience-based discipleship, servanthood, and simple but sincere worship.

At every gathering ask God to continue arranging encounters between participants and people in whom He has created a heart hunger for the person of Christ. Always be authentic, never false, in caring for another person. Be sensitive to their needs. Bring them to the meal with you. Never manipulate. Include and value each one.

5. Personally pray for God to raise up an "intern" who will work with you and reproduce the "meal" church in another group. Seek to "refocus" and multiply about every 6 months!
6. Including not-yet-Christians in the meal allows them to experience how Christ is working in the lives of believers...and be drawn to Him themselves. 1 Cor. 14:24-26
7. As you eat take time to share what's really going on in your life and journey with God. Pray for, encourage, and stand by each other in the ups and downs of life.
8. Worship through any combination of shared heart-song, scripture, sharing how you have seen God at work during the week, silence/awe/nature.....you get the idea.
9. Practice Servanthood by meeting the needs of...friends in crisis, the homeless/hungry/orphaned/powerless/neglected/abused/imprisoned, those who thirst for water or "living water". Take an offering as an act of worship...a gift to God...then decide as a group how to give it all away!

The most life-changing ministry we can humanly pursue with a group of overlooked friends is a simple Body of Christ, a Church, planted among them, to be His Hands, His Heart, His Voice, His Compassion in their circle of relationships!...it contagiously changes how they live.

More ideas, powerpoints, and videos are available freely at:

www.greenchurch.info www.coffeehousechurches.com www.everywherechurch.com

You are free to print, email, share and pass the 4 CONVERSATIONS on to others as His Spirit impresses you....see you in Heaven!

(Please continue to credit any portions of this material that include a person's name or book...they have graciously allowed us to use their writing, experiences, or ideas.)