



EQUIPPER

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Dear bringer of good news:



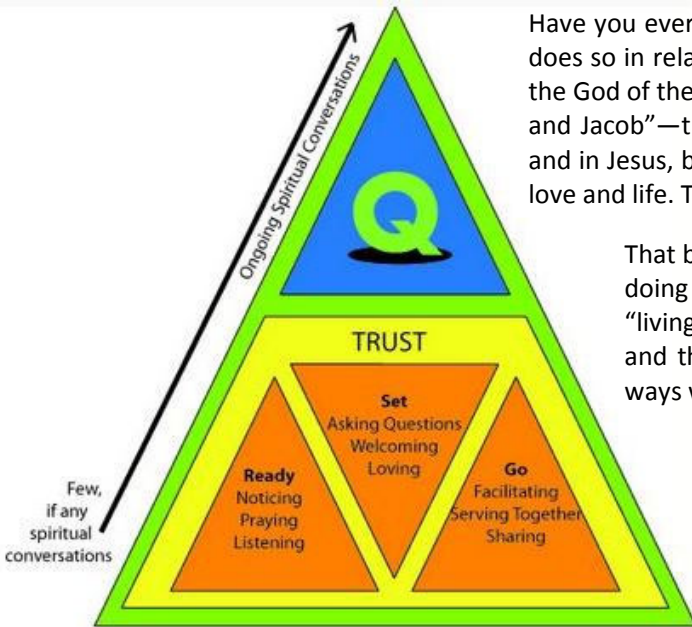
This issue continues the discussion about evangelism begun last month. I know this topic makes some of us uncomfortable. But let me encourage us all by noting that evangelism is not a burdensome work we “do for God,” as though he waits impatiently for us to evangelize folks so he can save them. No, evangelism is God’s own work through Jesus, the great Evangelist who, by the Spirit, is drawing all people to himself. And that’s “good news” (for us and all people). The word *evangelism* comes from the Greek noun *euaggelion*, meaning “good news.” The related verb, *euaggelizo*, means “to bring good news.” Paul used it in Romans 10:14-15 (NRSV):

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news [*euaggelizo*]!”

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Jesus is both the bringer of the good news and the good news itself—both the giver and the gift. He sends the Holy Spirit to bring people to himself, and the Spirit forms the church to participate in that bringing. But what does that participation look like? We often hear the term, “relational evangelism,” which, I suppose, implies there is a “non-relational” form. But all true evangelism is relational, for evangelism is about helping people relate to the relational, tri-personal God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Have you ever noticed in Scripture that when God declares who he is, he usually does so in relational terms? He doesn’t say, “I’m the God of the Temple” or, “I’m the God of the Ten Commandments.” No, he says, “I’m the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”—the God not of concepts or precepts, but of relationships. Through and in Jesus, by the Spirit, God relates to all humanity—including all people in his love and life. That’s relational. And that’s the gospel.

That brings us to our part in evangelism, which is to share in what Jesus is doing to make that relationship known. As our GCI motto says, it’s about “living and sharing the gospel.” That involves first relating with God, in and through Jesus; and then, with Jesus, relating with people. In those ways we join Jesus in his continuing gospel work of evangelism.

May I suggest a step in that direction? Add to your prayer list a non-believing friend or two. Talk to God about them, then ask God to give you opportunities to talk with them about God. For help in holding spiritual conversations like that, see the diagram at left and the article and resource recommendations on page two of this issue. I hope you find these resources helpful.

Living and sharing the gospel with Jesus and with you,
Ted Johnston, *Equipper* editor

spiritual conversations



Here are excerpts from a Barna Group interview with Q Place president Mary Schaller concerning “the arts of spiritual conversations.” You can read the full interview at <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/621-the-art-of-spiritual-conversation-in-a-changing-culture#.U8wH4fldUml>. For related resources, see the Q Place website at <http://www.qplace.com/> and also GCI’s Faith Talk website at <http://faithtalkgroups.blogspot.com/>. [Note: the picture at left and the diagram on page one are from the Q Place website.]

Barna Group: Why do you think [the] invitational model [of evangelism] isn’t working?

Mary Schaller: There are a number of reasons...

First, not all Christians have relationships with non-Christians. Many...surround themselves with other believers and form few deep relationships with people outside of church. Second, even when they do develop these friendships, many Christians lack practical conversational skills for talking about God. Christians often don’t have the skills or confidence to have even low-depth spiritual conversations with people who have different beliefs. So we’re asking them to make an invitation that does not have the relational foundation—it’s like kissing before the first date. It’s unnatural and awkward for all parties involved...

In our increasingly post-modern culture, people exploring faith want to discuss their questions about God on their own turf with people they know and trust, who will respect and listen to them. They really aren’t interested in going outside of their comfort zone to a church setting where they will simply listen to a presentation that isn’t likely to give them the opportunity to work through their own spiritual questions.

Barna: So what is the alternative? What can Christians do differently?

Schaller: The majority of Christians and non-Christians alike can agree on one thing: They are uncomfortable with the “E” word—evangelism. It’s one of the highest church values, and the least practiced. Perhaps there is a different “E” word that fills the need in this secular culture and lays essential groundwork for the Gospel—engagement. The key is to figure out how to empower Christians to engage in meaningful conversations about God with those who believe differently. This is...something anyone can do on any day of the week.... If our conversations can build trust and prove that we care, then relationships grow, and disciples are made over time. We should strive to create spaces for safe and open spiritual conversations that pave the way for people to discover God for themselves at their own pace.

Barna: What can Christians learn from Jesus’ conversation style in Scripture?

Schaller: The small stuff really seems to count for Jesus. Mustard seed faith; a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread; the widow’s mite. The small things, the ordinary things, really count. Jesus used the small things to engage with people and demonstrate his love. Jesus noticed people. He prayed for them. He listened. He asked questions. He loved them. He welcomed. He facilitated good conversations. He served with people with him. And he shared the good news about the kingdom of God. Christians can follow Jesus in engaging people where they are with those nine simple, everyday conversational practices....

Barna: What practical ways can Christians intentionally detach themselves from the conventional church language, or “Christian-ese,” when conversing with their unchurched friends, to meet them where they are?

Schaller: Simple. Talk less and listen more! Many people are really looking for someone to listen to them, not to hear an uninvited apologetic argument.... When we approach people with the intent to tell them what we know, yet don’t really try to understand where they’re coming from, they will put up defenses. When we demonstrate that we are truly seeking to understand people and not change their point of view, we create a safe environment for them to open up at a deeper level. As they feel genuinely understood, they also begin to better understand themselves.... In a society full of people who would rather talk than listen, people are starved for someone who is willing to move into their life as a listener and learner. It communicates love.