

How to Have a God Talk

Post-Christian Relational Evangelism

By Steve Hughes, SRCFC Board Member

Think of the friend you would call at 2:00am in a crisis; think of the teacher who inspired and challenged you; think of the parent/mentor who told you “No” to save you and has become wiser in your eyes over the years.

Did the importance and relevance of those relationships happen because they approached you and gave a 10 minute bullet point description of their positive qualities? Did these people require an immediate response from you to make a lifelong commitment to a relationship? Did they expect you to accept without question every aspect of who they were before they would accept you as a friend? Ridiculous, right? Many churches and Christians use this approach in their efforts to introduce Jesus to their friends and strangers; i.e. “witnessing for Jesus”.

Scripture gives us an incomplete picture of Jesus’ relationship with his disciples, men and women. Peter didn’t just one day decide to quit his career and follow Jesus the first day they met. I would love to have been there on the shore of Lake Galilee hearing Jesus tell the revolutionary truth of God’s unconditional love and forgiveness. It would’ve been great to see Peter cleaning his fishing nets and hear the words of Jesus float across the water. As these words of truth came to Peter’s ears, the message actually began to change his heart. After hearing Jesus teach a few times and talking with friends and family who were following Jesus, Peter came to a place to where he actually believed he was hearing “God talk”.

When you’re at the belay station with a friend, can your friend hear God Talk? Can a friend hear God Talk while kick-stepping up a snowfield? Does pizza and beer after a day of climbing in a warm sun become a place to hear God Talk? You bet. I have had the joy of having these great experiences on the walls of Yosemite Valley, the slopes of Mt. Rainer and at a shaded street café in Boulder. I’d like to share with you some of the “God Talk” stuff I have taught college and seminary students over the years.

For some perspective, in some areas of America the unchurched segment of the population is close to 90% or more. For some Christian groups like Baptists, only about 10% of their church membership believes in the foundational truths of Christianity. For many of the unchurched what they know about Jesus is from watching South Park and what their other unchurched friends believe. You can meet many Christians, raised in the church, attending church now, who think that Jesus was little different than Gandhi, a spiritually-enlightened person.

God Talk Topo

NOTE: This is NOT a linear process. It is more fractal in nature.

Pray At All Times – No, not just the bowed head, on-your-knees thing. Listen to God throughout the day: when you read scripture, when your boss treats you like crap, when your co-worker tells an offensive joke, when your neighbor shares that he and his girlfriend are having troubles. And yes, find that time when you quietly connect with God to intercede for others and praise Him.

Be Intentional dad-gummit – You work 40, 60+ hours a week. You have a family, possibly. Making time for that after-work-climb, coffee at Starbucks. or the weekend trip to Moab with a friend requires being intentional. Asking a friend about his or her spiritual beliefs or about a personal crisis takes awareness on your part, praying specifically for the moment to begin this spiritual friendship. What’s cool is that many times your friend will be asking you first about spirituality.

Friendship & Dialogue/Not a Debate – In a God Talk make sure you’re talking “with” your friend, not “at” them. You know in your soul the difference between hearing a rehearsed line or talking point and having a caring and open conversation. Your friend will know when they are being “preached at.” Make a point of just hanging out with your friend and not bringing up the God thing every time you see each other.

Assume Nothing & Expect Everything – Assume *nothing* about your friend’s spiritual beliefs, background, lifestyle, family, experience with the church, etc!! How about asking a question and listening; you’ll be surprised what you’ll discover. Expect the best for your friend – expect everything that God desires for them in life and relationship.

Discover, Clarify, Reason - Initially you should only talk about 20% of the time and let your friend do all the rest. Ask open-ended questions and listen! **Discover** what your friend believes about spiritual things, God, Jesus, and his or her main question or problem with Christianity. Language and perception can be misleading, so **clarify**. When your friend says something, ask “When you said this...are you saying then...?” “Can you explain to me more what you meant when you said...?” This is a continual process. After you discover and clarify, then ask about the **reason** for his or her belief. What experiences or teaching brought your friend to this place of belief?

Tell a Jesus Story, Share Truth – Remember most of your friends, unchurched and dechurched don’t know crap about Jesus’ life, what he taught and the interactions he had with others. It is truly amazing to see a friend’s eyes light up or jaw drop when you tell them a relevant story of Jesus and his life. A Jesus story is a paraphrase of an event in Jesus’ life. The story must be told explaining the historical and cultural context of the story. Focus on the real life emotions and

relationships that occur within the story. Do not speak in Christianese. Also, please remember you are not trying to convince someone of some doctrinal belief of your church! You are sharing Jesus. The truth of God's love, forgiveness and salvation is found within the life and teaching of Jesus.

Disciple a friend to Jesus – Your God talks and living life with your friend is the model Jesus used with his followers during the day. But a great tool we have today is books. Ask your friend to read a book that will help him or her process and discover the reality and truth Jesus can bring to your friend's life. Never give a friend a book that you have not read. Make sure you explain that as with all books, you are not in agreement with everything the author writes. The purpose is to engage our mind and heart so we can formulate our own beliefs. Ask your friend to write down questions or thoughts he or she has while reading so you can discuss them next time you talk. This is a hit-and-miss kind of deal. If a book is not to your friend's taste, try another book. When it's right, have your friend begin reading scripture. Make sure you use a translation or paraphrase that your friend can clearly understand (no KJV, please!!). Don't let your friend begin reading in Genesis! Start with a Gospel. It is amazing the questions your friend will have. It will be great seeing the Spirit of Christ move in that person's life by reading the message of God. (On the other hand, be ready for some people to read scripture and for them to say it had no meaning for them, whatsoever.)

Community – It's important that your friend hang out and get to know your Christ-following friends. Climbing, of course, can engender a close community setting. They need to hear and see that Christ-followers are real people that can joke around, eat too much pizza, and be someone they can trust. A warning – encourage your Jesus buds to be themselves but also not to say anything stupid and offensive; some Christians are just not used to socializing with someone outside their church. Inviting a friend to your gathering or worship can be a positive step for your friend in faith. What they hear and who they talk with may be exactly what the Spirit needs to speak into their life. Going to "church" can also be an extremely dangerous place for them in following Christ. Ask yourself; How would you feel going to a mosque for services? What could your preacher say that morning that might confirm every negative stereotype your friend believes about Christians? Knowing your friend, decide when and what is best for them in attending a gathering of your church. Something powerful God can use to speak to your friend is to have them join you on a mission trip to serve a poor or disadvantaged group of people.

Reality Check – Life is about choices and the outcomes in our lives from those decisions. Being a friend, loving someone, can be difficult and painful at times. A friendship also brings great meaning and happiness to life. Seeing a friend make the choices to become a Follower of Christ is a great joy! Whatever spiritual and life decisions your friend makes, we must focus on what Jesus told us to do, to love God and love those around us.

If you would like more resources or information on sharing Christ in a post-Christian world and telling Jesus stories contact Pastor Steve Hughes, the Tribe of Jesus, at www.tribeofjesus.org or steve@tribeofjesus.org.