

Steps to Engage Non-Believers in Biblical Conversation

(Developed by Dave Shuping and Cam Abell)

1. Establish a Trust Relationship – God has placed us in relationship with people. We have family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, fellow hobbyists, etc. With some family members and long-time friends, we already have a trust relationship. With others, it will take time to develop a trust relationship. Think of your closest relationships; how long did it take to develop that feeling of trust? To engage in transparent, meaningful conversations about faith, God, salvation, Jesus, afterlife, and personal barriers to belief, taking time to develop trust is critical.
2. Rely on God's Timing – Trust is gained by your behavior (not just your words) over an extended period. Although we would like to quickly bring a non-believer to Christ, our conversation should be natural, not forced. God will provide opportunities for faith discussions and, when He does, it will feel natural to you and to your friend. Although you need to be intentional about engaging with people, you can't force the issue. God brings people to himself; we are simply instruments He can use. Intentionality is important. We shouldn't use "in God's time" as an excuse not to engage.
3. Be ready with your knowledge of the Word – We don't convict people of the truth through our words. The Holy Spirit convicts people of the truth through God's word. Although scripturally founded apologetics is useful in conversation, God's word should be delivered in love, not as an "argument". Remember, our words can be feeble, but God's word will never return void.

While God's word is your most effective tool, be careful about quoting chapter and verse. Christian language may not make sense to people who have not read the bible. When we say, "In Romans 10:9 it says" or "Ephesians 2:8-9 says" they don't know what we mean by Romans and Ephesians, and they don't understand our chapter and verse references. Seek to express scriptural truth in terms they can understand. Perhaps start your sentence with "In the Bible" or "the Bible says". You may even want to convey biblical principles without quoting the source, especially with members of other faith communities and religions.

4. Ask questions that invite the person to go deeper – Relationships can remain social without ever addressing important questions. There are many ways to ask the person to move one step farther in their spiritual journey. As you sense receptivity and God working in their heart you might ask questions like: "Would you like to discuss that further?" or "Would you like to know more about what the bible says about that?" or "God invites us into a faith relationship with Him; is there anything keeping you from placing your faith in Christ?" In God's timing, ask the question and be ready to help them with the Word and prayer.
5. Trust God with the results – Although God's word never returns void, we may never see the results of our evangelistic efforts or God's conviction in someone's life. Don't feel guilty if you don't see results. Another person's ultimate salvation is not on you. We can't give our family members and friends our faith. Each individual must make repeated decisions to keep pursuing the knowledge of the Lord or not. If they seek Him earnestly, He will reveal Himself to them! Simply be obedient to your role in the process of making disciples for Jesus Christ, trust God with the results, and may God Bless your efforts.

*Note: Prayer is critical in all phases – prayer for people, and prayer for discernment.
Before you talk to people about God, be sure to talk to God about those people!*