

# **Gospel Influence**

## **Conversational Transitions & Illustrations**

### **Transitions from Normal Conversations to Spiritual Conversations and Topics**

- Make it your goal to transition to spiritual topics with everyone you talk with. Listen for ways to move from a specific conversational topic to a related spiritual topic.
- Be curious and ask questions, but try not to interrogate. Don't assume anything. Ask!
- In the context of everyday conversation, I often mention something about church, a spiritual topic in the news, something that I've read in the Bible, or something I've been studying or thinking about. I look for anything that relates to the flow of the conversation. I don't avoid negative topics or news about Christians or the church. Anything can be a good transition.
- Direct transitions to spiritual topics can also be effective. Here are some examples:
  - Tell me about your spiritual or church background.
  - What was your experience with religion growing up?
  - What religion did your family practice when you were growing up?
  - To what extent do you practice the religion you grew up in?
  - Did religion play a part in your life growing up? If so, how? How is it different in your life today?
  - How did you celebrate the holidays (especially the major ones: i.e. Christmas, Easter, or other religions)?
  - What is the most influential thing in your life? Why is it the most influential?
  - Tell me about a time you made a pivotal decision that shaped your future.
  - What are your goals in life? What is your primary life goal?
- In a business context, people often ask from 12-5pm on Friday afternoon what you are doing over the weekend. In addition, they will ask from 8am-Noon on Monday morning what you did over the weekend. Have something prepared in your mind that connected a spiritual element of your life to those questions. You'll typically have just a few minutes to have a spiritual conversation. Be satisfied with short, impromptu conversations at work.
- When on the church campus, never assume that anyone you talk to has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Always have in mind to ask questions to see where the person is spiritually. Don't make it a spiritual interrogation, but a natural conversation.

### **Transitions from Spiritual Conversations to Sharing Your Story**

- Can I share briefly with you how I came into a relationship with God?
- That reminds me about a time when I started seeking God... (share your testimony)
- That reminds me about a time when I asked God to help me... (share your testimony)
- I used to struggle with \_\_\_\_\_, and God helped me through it (or met a need I had) in a very specific way.
- Have you ever had a time when you felt like you were close to God? Tell me about it.
- Have you ever had a time when you felt like you needed God and tried to connect with him or pray to him for help? Tell me about it.
- I made a decision when I was younger that has shaped who I am today. Do you mind if I share what that was with you?
- There is something that has given me hope in the worst moments of my life. Can I share that with you?

## Transitions from Spiritual Conversations to Sharing the Gospel

- Has anyone ever showed you how you can have a personal relationship with God? Let me take just a few minutes and draw it out for you. (share Bridge Illustration or Three Circles)
- Has anyone ever shared with you how you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
- Someone showed me an illustration that brought a lot of clarity to the overall message of the Bible. Would you like me to show you?
- There is a way we can be 100% confident that we will spend eternity with God. I'd like to show you how we can know for certain.
- Did you ever wonder why Jesus Christ is the center of the Christian faith?
- What do you think about Jesus Christ? Can I share with you what I think about him? (share Bridge Illustration or Three Circles)
- Have you ever wondered why the Bible is so important to the Christian faith?
- What do you think about the Bible? I'm impressed with the main theme of the Bible. (share Bridge Illustration or Three Circles)
- Can I share with you briefly the core beliefs of our church? (share the bridge illustration) Or if someone asks what your church believes, don't try to explain the core doctrine, just go straight to the gospel (Bridge Illustration or Three Circles) as a starting point.
- Here are some direct questions that open the door to transition directly to the gospel:
  - If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would be with God forever? How could anyone know for certain?
  - If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would have eternal life? How could anyone know for certain?
  - If you were to die tonight and stand before God, and he asked you why he should let you into his heaven, what would your answer be? Do you know what kind of answer God would look for?
  - If you were to die tonight, do you have any idea where you would end up? How can anyone get clarity on that?

## **Illustrations in Support of the Gospel**

### **Stairway to Heaven**

A child stands at the bottom of the stairs and his father stands at the top. The father wants the child to be at the top of the stairs with him. He tells the child to come up, but he cannot touch the stairs, the stair rail, the walls, or the ceiling. How does the child get to the father? The father walks down the stairs, picks up the child, and walks back up to the top.

*(This is what God has accomplished for us through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. God did something for us that we could never do for ourselves.)*

### **Would You Knowingly Drink Sewage?**

You are thirsty and I have a glass of ice-cold water. I give you the water, but tell you that I've put one very tiny drop of sewage in the water. I tell you that it's not really enough to hurt you. Most water we drink has some amount of impurities in it anyway. Would you drink the water?

*(What makes us think that a holy God would accept ANY impurities in us when we come before him? How can we have a relationship with a holy God unless he somehow takes our sins away completely? This is what Jesus' death on the cross does for us when we put our trust in him.)*

### **Hey, You Wrecked My Car!**

Suppose I back into your car. I admit it to you and say I'm sorry. I even go as far as asking you to forgive me. You say, "Of course I'll forgive you!" I thank you for forgiving me and start to walk away. You ask me why I'm walking away without discussing the car damages further. I remind you that you forgave me. Wouldn't you immediately ask me for my insurance information? Wouldn't you still expect me to pay for the damage to your car even though you forgave me for causing the damage?

*(Our sin causes damages when dealing with a holy God and other people. How are these damages dealt with? Who pays for them? Jesus' death on the cross pays for all the damages caused by our sin. God can forgive us ONLY because Jesus paid sin's penalties for us.)*

### **Hey, You Wrecked My House!**

Suppose I stayed at your house and had a giant party one night. The whole house is trashed by the end of the night and in the morning I clean up one room. You come home and are shocked that the house is trashed and ask who is going to clean up the mess. I apologize and say that I cleaned up the one room. Isn't that good enough?

*(This illustrates how we try to do a few good things to offset an ever-growing amount of sins. This is futile when dealing with a holy God.)*

### **The Swimming Competition**

You, Michael Phelps, and I decide we'll have a swimming competition. The three of us jump into the ocean at San Diego to see who can swim the fastest to Hawaii. The distance is 2,500 miles. I get eaten by a shark and die about a quarter of a mile away from the shore. You make it past the sharks, but it gets cold and you die of exposure after three hours. Michael Phelps wears his wet suit, gets several miles out from the coast, but eventually gets tired and he drowns, too. All three of us still had basically 2,500 miles to swim before reaching Hawaii.

*(This illustrates the futility of trying to work our way to a perfect and holy God. Each of us may try, but the distance is impossible for any of us to achieve on our own.)*

## **Let's Play Football**

Tom Brady and I decide we'll have a competition to see who can throw a football from Cedar Park to the Royal Memorial Stadium on the UT campus. I go first and throw the ball about 30 yards. Tom Brady tosses a perfect spiral, but it only goes 85 yards. There are still 20 miles between where Tom's pass lands and Royal Memorial Stadium.

*(We think we're better than what we really are when it comes to dealing with a perfect and holy God. This illustrates the futility of us trying to work our way to God. Each of us may try to "throw the ball" as far as we can, but the distance is too far for any of us to be successful because we are imperfect.)*

## **The Williamson County Judge**

Williamson County, Texas is known to be tough on crime. You are an upstanding citizen of Williamson County. You have a few drinks and decide to drive home. This is the FIRST time you've ever done this. As a matter of fact, this is the ONLY time you've broken ANY law in Williamson County as long as you've lived there. You have an accident and kill a child. You go before the judge and tell him this is the only time you've ever broken a law in the county. You tell him he is a righteous and fair judge and that he should have mercy on you and let you off without penalty. What do you think he will say to you? He would say something like, "How dare you come into my court and presume upon my sense of goodness and fairness and ask me to let you off without penalty! There is a law against drinking and driving! You broke the law and killed a child! The law states that a penalty must be paid! What kind of a judge would just let a lawbreaker off without paying the penalty according to the law?"

*(We think a holy God will somehow just dismiss our sins when we stand before his judgment seat. And we think that if we do enough good things, this holy God will just dismiss any other sins we commit.)*

## **The Judge and His Son**

A judge's son decided to shoplift some jeans. He was caught and he went before the judge (his father) for breaking the law. Everyone was wondering what the judge would do. In their minds, stealing one pair of jeans was really no big deal, but this is the son of the judge! You know the judge is a man of integrity and he loves his son, but his son broke the law. The law states that a penalty must be paid for the crime he committed! The judge finds himself in a severe dilemma. He loves his son, but his job is to uphold the law and judge righteously. What will he do? The judge then pronounces his son to be guilty of the crime and passes the sentence. He then takes off his official robes, steps down from the bench, and resigns his judgeship. Out of love for his son, he announces that he will serve his son's sentence in his son's place. He then declares his son free to go.

*(This is an illustration of how a holy God can save sinners from the penalty of sin and remain righteous. We were powerless to avoid the righteous judgment of God. God recognized this and did something for us we could never do for ourselves. He declared us guilty of sin, but sent his only Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty himself for all of our sin, so that we could be forgiven. Jesus died in our place for our sins. When we trust Jesus Christ alone to forgive our sins, we are freed to enjoy a relationship with God.)*

## **Adam and Eve Sinned Only Once**

When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them freedom to eat anything in their new environment except for one thing. The fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was “off limits.” God told Adam he would die if he ate that fruit. Eve came along and together, Adam and Eve decided to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree. Adam and Eve committed just ONE sin and several things happened. They suddenly realized they were naked and felt a need to hide from God and cover themselves up. This is the first record of spiritual separation from God. Adam lied to God about his part in the sin, blaming the whole thing on Eve. God killed an animal to cover them up. God drove them out of their perfect environment. They started the process of dying physically and both eventually passed away. Work became very tedious and painful for Adam. Childbearing became painful for Eve. Adam and Eve raised a son who eventually became a murderer. All of their family eventually died off and they passed the sinful nature on to all people who would be born in the future.

*(This shows the significance of just ONE sin. God is holy and because he is a righteous and perfect judge, he has to deal with each individual sin. James, in the New Testament, puts it this way, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” James 2:10. Take the 10 Commandments for example. One of the commandments says, “You shall not commit adultery.” You cannot break this law without breaking many, if not all, of the other nine commands. In order to commit adultery, you would at least have to put your own selfish desires before Almighty God, lie to your spouse, and covet someone else’s wife, along with committing the act of adultery.)*

## **Two Fatal Errors**

We all commit two fatal errors when dealing with a perfect and holy God:

1. We think we are better than we really are. We don’t see the seriousness of sin the way a holy God would see it. We downplay our own sin and judge others more severely than we judge ourselves for the same infractions. The root of this is not seeing God for who he is, and then comparing ourselves to other flawed people. This works to minimize the extent of our own evil in our own minds. The truth is that every time we break the smallest of God’s law or violate any aspect of his perfect character, we actually commit cosmic treason. Through our sin we tell God that his rules and character are not as important as our own desires. We think we know better than the God who created us. This elevates us above God himself and necessarily sets us up for sin against him.
2. We think God is less than he really is. We break God’s commands, commit sin, and destroy God’s order and peace in his world. Then we blame the whole mess on him, thereby bringing his perfect character into question. The results of our sin become his fault. It’s difficult for us to imagine and embrace what perfection and holiness are, so we constantly bring God and his character into question. We hide from God and blame the results of sin on him just like Adam did in the Garden of Eden. The root of all problems in the world is our faulty perspective of the God who put us here.

## **If God is so Powerful, Why Can’t He Just Eliminate Evil?**

If God just “did away” with evil, he would have to eliminate all of us. All of us have evil in us – in other words, we all sin. Sin is anything we think or do that is contrary to God’s will or character. *(This illustrates God’s incredible mercy he extends to us in spite of our sin. He is patient and is giving us chances to turn to him and experience his love.)*