

HOW TO HAVE GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

The purpose of a Gospel Conversation is to encourage, exhort, and love one another with the truth of the gospel as it applies to specific situations in our lives. Sometimes sharing the gospel with each other is delightful and other times it can be very tense or even awkward. The good news is that the gospel always leads us toward greater redemption and restoration in our lives. The flow of a small group Gospel Conversation is different than the regular back and forth dynamic of a typical group conversation. In group Gospel Conversations, the group focuses on one member at a time, rather than jumping back and forth to different people. The goal is for each person to have an uninterrupted opportunity (anywhere from 10-20 minutes) to thoughtfully work through an area in need of redemption in his or her life.

ROLES

In a small group, there are three specific roles that help facilitate Gospel Conversations: **leaders/facilitators, group members, and the focus person.**

LEADERS/FACILITATORS

Co-leaders will typically meet ahead of time to pray, talk, and ask the Lord for his direction for following up with various people in the group. It is their job to help guide the general direction of the conversations for the day. If the discussion starts to veer away from being a Gospel Conversation or from what the facilitators discern as the Spirit's direction, they may interrupt and redirect the conversation. Don't worry, redirection is a normal and typical part of small group dynamics of this type.

GROUP MEMBERS

Below is the vision and some of the finer details of implementing small group Gospel Conversations:

- **Pursue One Person at a Time** – Rather than jumping around from person to person as conversations typically go, the group will focus on one person at a time for an extended discussion. This could mean focusing on one person for 10, 20 or even 30 minutes.
- **Follow Up from Past Discussions** – Each time we return to a person to focus on we want to follow up on the last discussion we had with him/her to see what the Lord has been doing in his/her heart.
- **Listen + Observe Well** – Two of the most important skills in this type of conversation are observing and listening – to the person of focus, to the other group members and co-leaders, and to the Holy Spirit. The idea is to discern the direction of the Spirit and align with one another in that.
- **Slow Down + Give Space** – Gospel Conversations are slow, reflective conversations. We want each person to own his/her process of growth and revelation. In order for this to happen, as group members we need to allow quietness and time for the focus person to reflect and think without hammering him/her with question after question.
- **Ask Strategic Questions** – Because we want each person to own his/her process of growth in the Lord, we will be asking strategic, Gospel-oriented questions. Below are a few examples:
 - What would redemption be for you?
 - What does the Word of God say about that situation?
 - What is preventing that redemption?
 - How does the gospel apply to this situation?
 - What is your sin in the situation?
 - What would repentance look like for you?
 - What is the sin behind the sin?
 - What does it look like for you to pursue unity with your spouse in the midst of this situation?
 - How does that make you feel?
 - What lie are you believing?
- **Expect and Allow Tense/Uncomfortable Conversations** – It is important to understand that tension, awkwardness and sometimes even conflict can be a part of Gospel Conversations and deepening community. As we grow in friendship with one another, authentic communication will become increasingly natural.

- **Take Risks** – We are often uncomfortable when the need to discuss sin is apparent. Although we often recognize sin in one another, we frequently avoid addressing it because of fear of offense or loss of friendship. If we are to have biblical friendships based upon the gospel, our relationships must go much deeper than this. Begin taking risks within these Gospel Conversations in order to talk about things and ask questions that you normally wouldn't.
- **Stop to Pray** - It is *often* extremely valuable to give the focus person an opportunity to speak directly to the Lord about his/her situation. This may include prayers of repentance, forgiveness, asking for help, thanksgiving, etc.
- **What to Avoid**
 - *Advice Giving* – As stated above, we want each person to own his/her process of growth. We don't want to simply give him/her a list of advice. Advice giving will probably only account for about 5-10% of this type of discussion.
 - *Lengthy Comments* – Avoid sharing everything that comes to mind in the midst of a discussion. Typically, brief and strategic comments and questions are much better than long-drawn out comments. The person of focus should be doing the majority of the talking.
 - *Personal Stories That Interrupt* – Often when another person is sharing his/her difficulties, we are tempted to identify with this person through sharing a similar story. Unfortunately, in a Gospel Conversation this often interrupts the flow of what the Spirit is doing in the other person. Fight your instinct to focus on yourself and save such stories for another time.

FOCUS PERSON

- **Avoid Shallow Sharing** – Avoid simply sharing how your week went. We seek for our discussions to go much deeper than the temporary status of a person's week; we want to dig into long-standing issues, wounds, and sins of the heart. If your day/week applies to these deeper issues, then they obviously become a valuable part of the discussion.
- **Pursue Personal Awareness vs. "Right" Answers** – Don't simply say what you know in your head to be the "right" answer. We often deceive ourselves thinking that we believe the truth when we really do not. Ask the Lord to reveal your *heart* to you (not your head) so that you can process and connect deeply with the Lord on a heart level.
- **Slow Down.** Personal examination and awareness does not happen well in conversations that have a quick pace. Avoid quick replies and dialogue and slow down to reflect and listen to the Lord in the midst of the conversation.
- **Press In to Transparency & Confession of Sin** – Although the idea of transparency can be intimidating at first, when embraced in the midst of safe, trustworthy relationships, it is the pathway to freedom. As we are accepted and loved in spite of our sin (by others who also have sin of their own), we begin to realize the beauty and freedom of confession and authenticity. Learn to take risks in being real about the struggles and sin in your life - we are all on a journey.
- **Allow Emotions** – Emotions typically reveal what we truly believe and are valuable sign posts to help us understand our own hearts and live. We are not here to stir up emotions, but we do want to allow freedom for the fullness of a person's emotions to be expressed.
- **Take Risks** - What does it look like for you to take relational risks with your group? It could mean being vulnerable in sharing a story, allowing yourself to express certain emotions, or even being willing to spend time with people outside of the actual meeting itself. Push yourself to take risks as you seek to grow as a disciple of Christ.
- **Persevere in the Group** – There may be times where you feel offended by a person/the group or times where you are tempted to be complacent or apathetic regarding your spiritual growth in community. And yet, above all other places, it is in deep, authentic community that we can find a sense of acceptance, family, purpose, and love. We encourage you to work through offense or passivity, persevere in community, and enjoy the journey the Lord has you on with the others in this group.