

# HOW TO START SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

JANUARY 30, 2022

## WORSHIP

Prepare the Way of the Lord, Reliably True, All Glorious

## WELCOME

Have you tried having spiritual conversations with people? What is the most challenging part of those conversations for you?

## WORD

### ACTS 17:24-31

<sup>24</sup> “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup> nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; <sup>26</sup> and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup> that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup> for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ <sup>29</sup> Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. <sup>30</sup> Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Have you ever wondered what are some simple tools to engage coworkers, friends, people online, in productive and genuine spiritual conversations? One reason why we don't have spiritual conversations is that we've had them in the past but they did not go well and harmed relationships. Another reason is we're afraid somebody's going to ask us a tough question and we don't have an answer to it. Let's look at Acts 17 to see how Paul engaged people practically in spiritual conversations.

### PAUL AT THESSALONICA (Acts 17:1-4)

In **vv. 1-4**, Paul had just left a jail in Philippi and then travels to Apollonia then to Thessalonica, a total of 95 miles (over 150 kilometers). Notice that when Paul shows up, he would first go to the synagogue and would reason with the Jews from Scriptures. Most people, if we approach them in the way they would want us to approach them, in the right time and the right attitude, are willing to have spiritual conversations. Paul also knew to keep the main thing the main thing. The goal is not to persuade somebody primarily to switch political parties or switch a view on a certain issue, but ultimately to come to Christ. That's what Paul does. He goes to the synagogue and he starts discussing and reasoning about the person of Jesus.

What's fascinating is that some Jews, some Greeks, and women were persuaded. Jews had a commitment to the Old Testament Scriptures. Greekzss have a totally different worldview. Women were looked down or at least had a lower status in that culture. This tells us that the Gospel is the most inclusive message that when understood can be embraced by all people from different walks of life. Anyone can respond to the Gospel.

When Paul preached this message in Thessalonica, many of them in jealousy formed a mob and ran Paul and Silas out of town. Their life were threatened. They had to flee Thessalonica.

### PAUL AT BEREIA (Acts 17:10-12)

Paul now goes to Berea, which is 45 miles (over 70 kilometers) from Thessalonica. Luke, the writer of Acts, compares and contrasts what happened in Thessalonica with what happened in Berea. The circumstances and the response are different. But we see Paul's pattern where he would first go to the synagogue and reason with the Jews (**v.10**).

He gets a very different reception. These people in Berea were eagerly examining the Scriptures before Paul even shows up. They read, discuss, and examine the Scriptures because they knew Scriptures came from God and are the key to love, life, freedom, and the good life. Luke is holding up these Jews in Berea as a model for all of us. They listened to his message and they would compare it to Scripture and see if it's right or wrong.

Here are some strategies: when speaking with a non-believer and they're willing to read something, always send them first to the Scriptures because it's the power of God (**Hebrews 4:12**). You can challenge people who are open to read the Gospel of John, too.

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### WORD

In Berea, Paul presents his message about Jesus and again three diverse social groups respond to the Gospel—Jews, Greeks, and women. One of the most common things we hear today is that the Gospel is anti-women and patriarchal. But the Gospel is the most empowering message for women. It's liberating to know that human beings are made in God's image, male and female. Jesus died for all of us and invites all of us into a relationship.

Though the reception in Berea was different, some agitators from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea and he had to flee again.

#### PAUL AT ATHENS (Acts 17:16-34)

This brings us to our final story at Mars Hill in Athens where we can learn some practical tips from Paul how to have spiritual conversations with non-believers. Athens is a city beaming with religious activity and Paul steps right into it. His life was not threatened but he was ridiculed. Yet he still shares the Gospel.

This was not just a missionary destination for Paul. Paul saw himself as a missionary—whether formally reaching out or waiting. All of us are called to have spiritual conversations and to engage people in evangelistic opportunities, wherever we are. It says Paul's spirit was provoked (**v.16**) by idols as he looked around and saw lies and false ideas about God and the gospel. He starts his reasoning in the synagogue and in the marketplace (**v.17**) and garnered listeners and critics (**vv.18-21**). Paul preached the resurrection (some thought Paul was preaching foreign deities).

Starting in **vv.22-23**, Paul gives his famous message on Mars Hill. He starts off with common ground. Then, he draws a powerful contrast between their pagan deities and between the One True God (**vv.24-29**). After that, he calls them to action and preaches the truth of the resurrection (**v.30-31**!).

We see different responses or groups of people in **v.32**: the mockers and those who were interested. How do we respond to mockers? Pray for them. Pray that God would soften their heart. Pray that God would soften our hearts to better love them. Don't mock back. Show kindness. How do we respond to those who are interested? We engage. We start by building relationships, gaining understanding, and furthering the conversation.

There were those who believed (**v.34**). Based on church history, one convert, Dionysius, shepherded many others and helped build the church in Athens!

These are suggested questions to ask when having spiritual conversations:

1. **What does the person believe?**
2. **Why do you believe it?**
3. **Where do we have common ground?**
4. **Where do we differ?**
5. **A call to action.**

All of us can do this. God can use you and me, just like He used Paul in Acts because the same Spirit working in Acts is working in us today!

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders: Please choose questions that are appropriate to the level of spiritual maturity of your members)

#### 1. Self-Check.

What is holding you back from having spiritual conversations?

#### 2. Setting It Right.

What habits can you build to prioritize quiet time or sharing the gospel?

#### 3. Living It Out.

How will you reach out to people in your circle of influence who may be open to knowing the Lord?

### WORKS

#### PRAY CARE SHARE IN ACTION

Pray that God would open doors of opportunities for spiritual conversations this week. Show you care by asking questions and listening. Get to know where the person is coming from. Share the gospel, help them see how relevant Christ is to their life context.

### WEEKLY PRAYER POINTS

#### I. Thanksgiving

Worship God for who He is, what He has done, and what He will do in our lives

#### II. Country and the World

Upright and moral governance of Public Servants  
A God-centered Philippines  
Repentance and Salvation

#### III. Church

That CCF Members would honor and love God and make disciples  
Elders, Pastors, Leaders, and Families  
Ministries and Churches worldwide

#### IV. CCF Facilities

Worship and Training Center  
Prayer Mountain

#### V. Personal Concerns

Deeper intimate relationship with God  
Righteous living  
Salvation of family and friends

### MEMORY VERSE

#### ACTS 17:30-31

<sup>30</sup> Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness...