

Talking of God

**A faith sharing
resource for
local churches**

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Introduction

Now is the time to talk of God

We live in a world that is both exciting and challenging. A world in which local Methodism encourages us to remain proactive within our village, town and city. A world that is shattered through natural disaster and military attack. But a world where people's compassion and care for one another remains unquenched.

Our calling as Christian disciples is to be able to talk about our faith in ways which build up our own confidence and which also encourage others on their own discovery and kindling of faith-talk.

Talking of God is a Methodist course for Methodist people. It is a unique contribution to the resources available to churches and church leaders.

Background

In 2005, the Conference report *Time to Talk of God* was written and produced by the Methodist Church. It was very well received, and stimulated plenty of conversations within congregations.

In 2008, a working party convened to discuss the possibility of producing a faith sharing resource for use within a local context, to help Christians become more confident in talking about their faith and discipleship.

In 2010, the Methodist Church began a five-year focus on whole-life discipleship. Part of this is to equip Methodist people in Britain to be life-long, whole-life, world-changing disciples who are confident and capable of joining others on their journey of discipleship.

Talking of God uses the framework of *Time to Talk of God*, as well as the further work developed by members of the working party. Alongside, there are other resources and further ideas available through the Methodist Church website (www.methodist.org.uk), including an outline of other courses on the market, and ideas of how to further develop your missional discipleship in the twenty-first century.

We hope that you find this resource a useful part of your own journey of discipleship.

"The Methodist Church will give particular attention to ... developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved."

Priorities for the Methodist Church, Methodist Conference 2004

"Methodist Christian discipleship is rooted and focused on Jesus Christ, resourced by the Spirit of God, is both life-long and whole-life, communal rather than solitary, committed to transforming and serving 'the world', locally, nationally and globally and so is lived out on a 'big map', all offered as worship to God as loving obedience."

Martyn Atkins, Discipleship... and the people called Methodists

Introduction

Acknowledgements

This course has been produced with the inspiration, aid and comment of a number of people. We would like to thank:

- the original working party of the *Time to Talk of God* report
- the Revd Graham Horsley and Mr Derrick Norton who set this project in motion, and who wrote much of the content for the original draft
- Deacon Eunice Attwood, vice-president of the Methodist Conference, who provided the opening prayers for each week.

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How to use the course

Purpose

Talking of God aims to:

- enable local churches to gain confidence in speaking about their faith in Jesus
- deepen the relationships between individuals within a church context
- encourage the church to recognise the opportunities already offered to them to share the good news of Jesus Christ

Who is *Talking of God* for?

Anyone of Christian faith.

Talking of God does not endorse a particular theological standpoint. Rather it offers the opportunity for each member of the group to share their faith in a manner which is appropriate to their own personality and the context in which they live and work. It relies on people being prepared to speak openly and share their perspectives, as well as affirming one another across theological and denominational boundaries. There is an expectation that group members will explore together ways of speaking about Jesus to the world in an honest manner without compromising the Church's foundational beliefs about Jesus and the need for all people to experience salvation in his name.

Talking of God is not an evangelistic programme for seekers, but a course designed to encourage Christians to gain confidence in conversing about their faith in the many contexts in which they find themselves.

How long will the course take?

Talking of God is made up of four sessions, which can be held over four weeks, or over the course of a whole day.

There is also a pre-amble and a concluding act of worship which frame the course.

It is also possible to take a single session on its own; should the need arise within a local setting.

How to use the course

Course outline

Talking of God is made up of four sessions:

- Starting the Conversation
- Conversation Stoppers
- Conversations in Context
- Living the Conversation

It is a flexible resource – in that it is not essential for a group to work through it in a specific order. (For ease of use, where material is referred to in a previous or subsequent session, the leader's guide assumes the sessions will follow the order above.) It may be helpful to tackle 'Living the Conversation' as a later session, as it encourages a life-long approach to both discipleship and conversation.

(There is also an opening preamble session and a closing act of worship that you are welcome to incorporate, or use on their own!

A leader's guide, notes for group members and PowerPoint slides for each session are available to download from www.methodist.org.uk/talkingofgod.

At the start of each session, there is an 'ingredients list' which outlines the equipment that will be needed.

Suggested meeting format

Each session follows the same broad outline.

Icons for the different sections and instructions will guide you (see page 8).

The timing in brackets is a suggested time scale. You may find that you have more material than the time in your sessions. It is the group leader's role to keep the course on track, but as long as the broad aim of the session is met, then diversions can sometimes be a helpful learning tool for a group.

How to use the course



Welcome and opening prayer
(🕒 5/15 mins)



Outline the ground rules for the group (🕒 2 mins)
Setting the scene – an opening activity and short conversation
(🕒 10 mins)



Teaching – input led by the group leader on the session's given topic (🕒 15 mins)



Conversations with Jesus of the Gospels – biblical input
(🕒 30 mins)



Acting the story – conversation and action based on the session's content (🕒 30 mins)



Closing Prayer – either the Examen or prayerful conversation
(🕒 10 mins)

“Now we are talking!” card

At the start of the first session, give each group member a copy of the “Now we are talking!” card. (Copies can be made using the template on page 51.) Explain that this can be waved at any time through the course.

When the card is waved, all conversation and/or input stops so that the whole group can answer the question: Where can I put this into practice this week?

This should only take five minutes. It is a chance for each group member to draw on their own experience (eg their life story, what works for them) and then to extend that (ie moving beyond where they are). So it grounds the learning and the conversation in everyday experience.

(Ideally, everyone plays the card once through the course.)

Jargon board

In each session, have a flipchart or large piece of paper available for people to write down any words and phrases that they are unsure of the meaning of. People can do this at any time. It is the group leader's job to make an initial attempt at 'de-jargoning' or explaining terms and language that is unhelpful. Those in the group can also try and help this process. Try and see if the group can come to a definition together at the start of the following session for any words of the previous week.

How to use the course

Venue

- A private home can be the most comfortable venue for conversation, but it is not always easy to break into small groups or to use the supporting technology. In a house, the temptation is to socialise rather than to have a focused and challenging conversation. There are, therefore, additional challenges for the group leader if *Talking of God* is to be held in the home of a participant.
- Some church venues are flexible and comfortable, others a little constrained. Make an effort to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere – think about the need for additional heating or ventilation. A circle of chairs will often allow people to speak more freely.

Refreshments

- Have some refreshments available, including snacks for people to eat during the session.
- It is not easy to act as both host and group leader – it may be an idea to separate these roles with the host laying out the venue and providing the refreshments, whilst the other leads the session.

Hints for group leaders

The overall aim is to make the conversation safe enough for all to feel able to contribute, but challenging enough to go beneath social niceties and leave everyone feeling stretched.

- Through the publicity, let people know the length of the course (ie number of sessions and the duration of each session) and what each session might include.
- For some people, the whole course will be demanding and difficult. For others it will be a fun and easy exercise. The role of the group leader is to enable each group member to be comfortable enough to share at a deep level, whilst respecting each others' contributions.
- It can be helpful, even in a small group, to split people into twos or threes. This can seem a little odd, but it does mean that people who are less confident in sharing, have an opportunity to do so.

How to use the course

- The 'ground rules' are there to enable conversation to be a process of speaking and listening. They will help the group to explore the issues raised in the session rather than making quick jumps to a conclusion.
- If conversations go off topic, it is the group leader's task either to keep the discussion going, or to make sure that people are brought back to the session. The broad aims of the session should be covered, but that there is enough flexibility for you to add your own illustrations or to let conversation continue for a particular activity (if it is in broad alignment with the overall session aims).
- One of the outcomes of the course is that people feel that they are much closer together as a group. At the start and end of each session, there is the option to express this by discussing and praying in smaller groups. These 'bands' are for the duration of the course and offer a safe space for reflection, accountability and prayer for one another throughout the time between the sessions. (Obviously, if this course is taught over a single day, then this is inappropriate.)
- People have strong feelings about faith-sharing and God-talk as well as opinions and experiences of faith as a journey or as a point of conversion. Be aware that within your group there may be people who have differing opinions held with passionate belief.

Some ground rules

A group feels much safer to explore issues at a deeper level with each other if some ground rules have been agreed before the session starts. Here are some common ones, but feel free to add any further suggestions that are important for your group.

- The group will start and finish on time.
- Everyone is committed to attending each session unless they are ill or are genuinely prevented from attending.
- We will listen to each other, and respect each other when one is speaking.
- We will not talk over each other.
- We will allow space for sharing personal experience and testimony.
- We will watch out for each other and invite others to speak rather than to dominate the conversation.
- A judgemental or hostile tone is not acceptable.
- Disagreement and searching questions are acceptable, but these expressed with respect.
- Personal information shared within the group is confidential and should not be passed on.

Preamble: Why the language of Conversation?

Slide 2

(Slide 1 is the title slide)

(This is to be used at the start of the first session – whichever session you are using first.)

Conversations are about:

- speaking
- listening
- mutuality
- respect
- relationship.

Conversations are important ways to communicate both meaning and action. They help us understand one another's intentions. This is why there is an action part to each session, and a whole session on living out life as a follower of Jesus.

In 1516, Erasmus produced his own translation of the New Testament into Latin, in which he translated “logos” from the prologue of John’s Gospel not as verbum (“Word”) but as sermo (“conversation”). Jesus is not just God’s word but represents the whole of God’s communication.

Slides 3 – 5

“It all started with a conversation at the heart of the Godhead and God was that conversation. God initiated that conversation within the Godhead and that conversation was the reason all things came into being and without it there would have been nothing.

In this conversation is life itself, the light of humanity, shining in a darkness which neither understood nor quenched its creativity.

There was a man sent by God, John he was called, who came to talk about the light so that all could see, so that all could believe through what they saw. John wasn’t what it was all about – no the true light which lit up everyone was on its way into the world. Indeed the conversation was here in the world but the world didn’t pick it up. It came to those who knew the language but they acted as if they didn’t hear.

Continued on next page

Preamble: Why the language of Conversation?

Continued from previous page

But those who did hear (who responded to the conversation itself), he gave them the power to become God's children, in a new way, a special way, in God's way.

The conversation became enfleshed and pitched its tent among us. We've seen for ourselves how deep that conversation is, as deep as God himself the only one, full of grace and truth."

(based on John 1:1-14, inspired by Clive Scott)

(You can read Clive Scott's John 1:1-14 revisited in Time to Talk of God, p. 81)



Slides 6 – 7



For Conversation

Conversations come out of relationships with people – relationships that respect one another and which are ground in our personal confidence in who we are in Christ. So:

- we listen and speak out of love and compassion
- we are able to identify, share and celebrate God's conversation with our lives and in the world
- we recognise that there are different ways to learn and express ourselves
- we encourage each other to be the people God has created us to be
- we are willing to be changed and challenged as others share their experiences with us
- words lead us to action, thus living out the conversation is as important as being involved, by grace, in God's conversation of love for the world.

For Conversation

God's conversation

- How do we respond to this paraphrase?
- How does this passage develop the idea of a conversation?

God's conversation amongst us in Jesus

- How does this affect our own conversations?
- How might God's conversation model conversation for us?

Our conversation

- What makes a good conversation? What are the values of conversation that we want to see through this course?

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

Slide 8

Ingredients

- variety of postcards and pictures of people's faces
- plain A4 paper
- pens, pencils etc
- Bibles
- computer with access to the internet and speakers loud enough for people to hear (optional)

Also

- "Now we are talking!" card for each group member
- Jargon board

Aim of session

Slide 9

- to recognise our role and responsibility in sharing our faith today, and to gain confidence in our personal story

Opening prayer

Slide 10

Loving God,
help us to begin.
Give us the courage to tell your story
and strength to speak of you
with confidence and gentleness,
passion and boldness
that our lives might proclaim your glory today and always.
Amen.

Will you witness, by word and deed, to the good news of God in Christ, and so bring glory to God?

With God's help I will.

(Promise made by the newly-confirmed)

Session 1: Starting the Conversation



Setting the scene



Slide 11



For Conversation

(If you are somewhere with wifi access, then you can stream these pieces of music from websites such as YouTube or Spotify. But if you are doing this, then only play a segment of the piece of music.)

This session encourages us to know and to tell our story. By thinking about our favourite piece of music, we are already talking about something that is important to us and something which has had a significant emotional impact upon our lives.



Time to talk

It is often quoted that Methodists are people who are great at creating environments in which people are able to speak about their faith, and feel comfortable enough to ask questions. But Methodists are also the best at fudging that opportunity.

Talking of God is not designed to make us feel guilty about not engaging people in conversation. Rather it is a chance for us to gain confidence in speaking about our faith journey in a natural way, so that the next time we are asked a question we are able to offer our insight and personal experience. You will not find all the answers here. But you will find the chance to ask your questions and to talk with other people about what you think and have experienced.

So, why do we need another faith-sharing course?
Don't we do this as a matter of course in our everyday lives?
Why do we need to be taught how to do it?

The reality is that for many Christians, talking about Jesus and the good news he brings does not come naturally, even in a church setting. Many of us can look back on moments during the day when we could have said something about our Christian faith but we either 'bottled it' or couldn't think how to put it and so remained silent.

For Conversation

- What is your favourite hymn/song and why?
- What is your favourite piece of non-religious music and why?

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

We can place a lot of responsibility on ourselves, believing that every Christian should be able to lead someone along their journey of faith into a mature disciple of Jesus almost singlehanded.

So at the start, it is good to recognise:

- the part we play in evangelism – we will do this by sharing our story and some of our responses to evangelism
- the part the wider church community plays in the process of evangelism – we will do this by thinking about different roles in faith sharing
- the part that God plays in the process of evangelism – we will do this by reading a famous parable.

People need to meet a different Christian people in a variety of situations, before they are able to make a personal commitment to Christ. This involves a number of people with a wide range of gifts to be part of the process.

Here are some possible roles.

- Inviter** – overcoming people's reservations about joining in, and making people feel at ease
- Befriender** – good at making initial contacts and getting on well with people
- Friend** – in for the long haul, always there for people
- Shoulder to cry on** – someone who is available and easy to talk to, whatever the situation
- Deal-clincher** – evangelist who leads people to a moment of commitment
- Intercessor** – supports others in prayer
- Counsellor** – someone giving wise counsel
- Servant** – helps in practical ways
- Chatterbox** – who is always talking
- Challenger** – who upsets the boat

(Some of these roles are deliberately provocative and may incur debate!)

 **Slide 12**

 **For Conversation**

For Conversation

- Which role best suits you?
- What roles, if any, do you think are missing?

(Why not ask someone who knows you well to tell you which they think you might be – tell the group next week!)

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

T What is your reaction?

Set out a variety of postcards and pictures of faces and people. You can find those in card shops, magazine adverts and in newspapers. You could even try googling for images of different emotions. But make sure there is a variety of emotions on display.

This is best laid out on the floor/table, with people sat around them in a circle. (If you do not have access to a variety of photos and postcards, then print out the pictures on page 52.)

When we begin to think about sharing our faith with people, we can have many reactions to even the thought of it!

In front of you are a variety of pictures of people. Look at them, and pick one which shows how you feel when you think about evangelism and talking about your faith.

Slide 13

For Conversation

All of us have different reactions to evangelism. Some of us are confident, whilst others are nervous and frightened.

The aim of *Talking of God* is to help us to gain confidence in speaking about our faith in the various places and situations in which we find ourselves.

Conversations with the Jesus of the Gospels

The Gospels are full of conversations – conversations that bring transformation and illumination. Through the Gospel accounts, the teaching that disciples throughout the centuries have received comes not only in the form of sermons or commandments, but also through stories and parables and conversations. There is relationship. There is humour, anger; irony and passion. Individuals have space to respond and to direct the next move and sentence. There is room for learning and transformation. We do not always catch a glimpse of what happened next, but we too are left to go and talk about Jesus ourselves and to work out what it all means for us, today.

For Conversation

- Share with the group which picture you chose and why.

Session 1: Starting the Conversation



Read Luke 8:1-15 (The Parable of the Sower).

Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that

'looking they may not perceive,
and listening they may not understand.'

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance." (NRSV)

Jesus told stories, but he did not always explore or explain them with the people that he was with. In this parable, it is only Jesus' closest friends who have the opportunity to listen to the meaning within the story.

This teaches us that we need to journey with Jesus to get to the explanation sometimes!

In our day to day lives, conversations don't always make sense. Sometimes people take forever to get to the point. Sometimes they fizzle out.

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

Sometimes we are preoccupied. But sometimes, however, just sometimes, we are able to give conversations just the right amount of time and attention that sees something brilliant begin to happen!



Slide 14



For Conversation

It is important to stress that the the mission of God is about what God is doing, and not about what we are doing

Things to pull out of the text include the following:

- Seed was sown arbitrarily. There is no telling what will happen as a result of conversation – what is important from the parable is that the ‘seed’ is liberally scattered.
- Evangelism can work as an intentional and organised campaign, but most of us, most of the time, are faced with everyday situations which require us to share faith naturally and spontaneously.
- Seeds need the right soil, so too do conversations. Conversations are also about relationship, integrity and authenticity. The people we are, the character we are nurturing through our discipleship and the friends we make are vital aspects to faith sharing.
- For good seed to flourish, it needs to be in the right conditions, otherwise growth is restricted. It is important to run courses which introduce people to the Christian faith in a relaxed, non-threatening way. Courses like *Alpha*, *Emmaus* and *Start* have the potential to provide this framework. The inclusion of a mealtime and table-based discussions are of immense importance in helping people to relax and share freely with one another.
- The seed does not grow because the farmer forces it to grow. So too, people’s faith does not happen because we force it to. We need to be able and willing to trust God for growth – and prepared to be surprised!
- The farmer, once he has sown the seed, does not go back to the field a week later and dig it up to see if the seeds are growing properly. Likewise we need to be prayerful and trusting as we continue to share our faith with people. God can do far more than we imagine.

For Conversation

- What are the key features of the Parable of the Sower?
- How might these features help us when we are thinking and talking about our faith with other people?

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

Of course, there will be other things that you are able to pull out of the parable. Please let the Evangelism, Spirituality and Discipleship Team in the Connexional Team know and we will add your learning and wisdom to this course! Our email is esdadmin@methodist.org.uk.



Acting the story

1. Either

- a. Using a line to represent your life so far, marking on it the points that are crucial in your development as a disciple of Jesus. (You may also want to add significant world events too that have had an impact on the people around you.)

or

- b. Draw a large tree shape, with trunk, roots and branches. If the trunk represents your life as a disciple, think about what is important. What are the things that root you in your discipleship? Write or draw these on the roots. On the branches, write down the people and things which are important in your life. From the branches, write down what you hope are some of the 'fruits' of your life.



Slide 15



For Conversation

So often we can think that our story is dull and boring, and that everyone else has experiences that are much more exciting. Hopefully through this exercise you are able to see that you have a story to tell, and that it is interesting! Now is the time for God-talk after all!

For Conversation

- Share with another group member (ie someone you did not arrive with) what you have drawn and what you have discovered, thought and felt through this.
- How did it feel to share your story with someone that you may not know very well?
- What was it like to hear someone else's story?

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

2. Either

a. Write your story in 50 words.

Try to remember:

- Why did you become a Christian?
- What happened?
- What difference has Jesus made in your life?
- Try to tell it so that it provokes more questions from the reader.

or

b. What difference does Jesus make in your life?
(Try and use 140 characters or less – the length of a tweet)



Slide 16



For Conversation

Conclusion



Slide 17

Each of us has a story to share, and gifts and graces that enable us to do just this!

Jesus has called each one of us to follow him, and gives us his Holy Spirit to encourage and equip us for the journey of discipleship before us.



Closing prayer

There are two options. You can select which one best suit the members of your group. (The details are also given at the end of the group member's notes.)



Prayer of review: the examen

This is a method of prayer associated with Ignatius Loyola. It is usually used at the end of a day, to look back at where God was active and in order to learn what God would have us see.

For Conversation

Share your story with a partner.

- Are there things you don't understand?
- Is there any jargon?
- What is exciting about the story?
- What questions do you want to ask?

Session 1: Starting the Conversation

Lead people through this slowly, leaving time between each section for people to engage with God.

- a. Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax, be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.
- b. Remember you are in the presence of God and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes as you look back at this session and the course.
- c. What are you most grateful for about the course? In what ways have you experienced God's love?
- d. What are you least grateful for about the course? Where was it hard to love or be loved?
- e. Talk to God about your insights. Ask God for what you need for the days ahead.
- f. Listen to what God might have to say to you.
- g. Reflect on something you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.
- h. When you are ready, open your eyes and join the rest of the group.



Prayerful conversations

Split the group in to prayer partners or prayer triplets.

This will be the person or people that you share your experiences between sessions with, and you will also pray together at the end of the session.

Include in your sharing something each of you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.

Agree together that the conversation shared in this conversation will be kept confidential.

Pray for each other through the week too, as you try to put what you have discovered into practice as you talk of God in your everyday lives.

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers



Slide 18



Ingredients

- print out of cards for 'Acting the Story' section (see page 53)
- Bible
- computer with access to the internet and speakers loud enough for people to hear (optional)

Also

- "Now we are talking!" card for each group member
- Jargon board



Aim of session



Slide 19

- to gain confidence amidst some concerns, prejudices and difficulties with sharing faith



Opening prayer



Slide 20

Compassionate God,
it seems so easy to talk about the weather,
yet we struggle to speak of our faith in you.
Forgive us for wanting to have all the answers.
Help us to rest with our questions and the searchings of others.
Be with us as we seek to live more courageously.
Help us to listen for your voice
that increasingly your story may be seen in our story.
Amen.

January 15, 1762

"Went to London on Friday to the meeting. Mr. M—d desired any to speak who had not before declared the goodness of God. I was convinced I ought to speak but feared I should bring a reproach upon the cause of my foolishness and was tempted to think... that I knew not how to order my speech aright. But the Lord said 'take no thought how or what you shall speak for in that hour it shall be given you ...'"

*Journal of Jane Cooper (1738-62),
an early Methodist laywoman*

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers



Setting the scene

Find out whether anyone has asked friends what role they find the group member plays in faith-sharing (see page 15 of leader's guide). Offer the chance for some brief sharing and reflection.



Slide 21



For Conversation

For example:

How are you?
Do you think I look tired?
Why do you ask that?
Am I yawning?

And so on ...



Slide 22



For Conversation

In conversations, it is important to create environments of curiosity. In this session, we are going to look at some of those things which stop us from confidently sharing our faith and talking about Jesus.



What can you say?



Read 1 Peter 3:15-16.

Always be ready to make your defence to everyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. (NRSV)

For Conversation

- Splitting into pairs, have a conversation with a difference. Each take turns to say a sentence – but each sentence has to be a question.

For Conversation

- How did you find this?

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers



Slide 23



For Conversation

Telling people outside of church the good news of the gospel can be a real pressure for some Christians. There are a number of reasons for this. For a start, a personal experience of God is not an easy thing to explain. Also, some people are more open to sharing matters of this kind than others. Personality types play a part in this. A new Christian can be enthusiastic about sharing their discoveries and can be passionate about talking about God. Older Christians can be a little more nervous about sharing their personal story, but may be better able to draw upon biblical knowledge and doctrine to help them share what is important to them. Faith sharing has to be worked upon and we need to be kind to ourselves, especially in the early stages.

So, we may find that whilst we are open to talking about our faith in a supportive environment, in the more challenging environment, we may struggle.



Slide 24



For Conversation



Conversations with the Jesus of the Gospels

The Gospels are full of conversations – conversations that bring transformation and illumination. Through the Gospel accounts, the teaching that disciples throughout the centuries have received comes not only in the form of sermons or commandments, but also through stories and parables and conversations. There is relationship. There is humour, anger; irony and passion. Individuals have space to respond and to direct the next move and sentence. There is room for learning and transformation. We do not always catch a glimpse of what happened next, but we too are left to go and talk about Jesus ourselves and to work out what it all means for us, today.

Either watch the video clip 'To be loved is to be known'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q49BbfgJbto

or read Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-30).

For Conversation

- Talking in pairs, how do you respond to this passage?
- What challenges you?
- What encourages you?

Be prepared to share your thoughts to the rest of the group.

For Conversation

- Talking in pairs, where are your supportive environments? What makes them supportive?
- What are the challenging places? Why do you find them so challenging?

You may want to share these reflections, but do not feel that you have to.

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” – although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized – he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink”. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

(NRSV)

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers



Slide 25



For Conversation



Acting the story

Spread the cut up cards (from page 52) on the table face up so that they are visible.

All of the cards include statements taken from section six of Time to Talk of God – “Current blocks to conversation within the Church”. You may find it helpful to have this section to hand, to aid the conversation if needed.

The cards contain the following statements:

- You cannot be a follower of Jesus without having a role in church leadership.
- The business of running a church keeps us too busy to have other conversations.
- Evangelism is for those who are paid to do it.
- I am not good enough.
- I don't fit into this community.
- Christians need to be nice.
- The Church fails to talk about tough issues.
- The church should not be the place where faith is discussed.
- Faith should only be discussed in private.
- Conversation means that we cannot disagree.
- Evangelism is only for those interested in Christian spirituality.
- I don't have the right answers.
- Friendship is too valuable to lose by sharing my faith.
- Discipleship is about doubt, so why should anyone else be interested.
- Religious tolerance means that I cannot share my faith in public.
- I don't know.
- ? (to include any other statements that might be raised)



Slide 26



For Conversation

For Conversation

- What is shocking about this conversation? In context, why should it not have taken place?
- What conversation stoppers are present in this conversation?
- What can you learn from Jesus' conversation here?
- What can you learn from the Samaritan woman's reaction to Jesus?

For Conversation

- In turn each group member chooses a card and poses the statement to the rest of the group.
- Together talk about what the statement might mean, and whether the group agrees or disagrees with it.

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers

Conclusion



Slide 27

Talking about our faith is not:

- just for the famous evangelists
- about winning an argument
- one-size fits all
- just about an event or crisis moment.

There are legitimate reasons why faith sharing can be difficult, and can be something that we feel uncomfortable with doing.

We should not be afraid to say honestly: I don't know. These words can open up and deepen conversation, as we are able to explore together what the answer might be. So space is created for the exchange of opinions and perspectives, which builds up relationship with the other person.

In this session we have also looked at Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. Having done this, Jesus shows us that even for his earthly ministry there were conventions and expectations that can be overcome through conversation.



Slide 28

Talking about our relationship with God is:

- infectious
- compassionate.

And as is said throughout *Talking of God*, it is also about God's action within the world. We are in partnership with God.



Closing prayer

There are two options. You can select which one best suit the members of your group. (The details are also given at the end of the group member's notes.)

Session 2: Conversation Stoppers



Prayer of review: the examen

This is a method of prayer associated with Ignatius Loyola. It is usually used at the end of a day, to look back at where God was active and in order to learn what God would have us see.

Lead people through this slowly, leaving time between each section for people to engage with God.

- a. Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax, be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.
- b. Remember you are in the presence of God and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes as you look back at this session and the course.
- c. What are you most grateful for about the course? In what ways have you experienced God's love?
- d. What are you least grateful for about the course? Where was it hard to love or be loved?
- e. Talk to God about your insights. Ask God for what you need for the days ahead.
- f. Listen to what God might have to say to you.
- g. Reflect on something you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.
- h. When you are ready, open your eyes and join the rest of the group.



Prayerful conversations

Split the group in to prayer partners or prayer triplets.

This will be the person or people that you share your experiences between sessions with, and you will also pray together at the end of the session.

Include in your sharing something each of you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.

Agree together that the conversation shared in this conversation will be kept confidential.

Pray for each other through the week too, as you try to put what you have discovered into practice as you talk of God in your everyday lives.

FOR ADVANCE PREPARATION

Group Leaders will need to decide on which issue the group will be tackling in the Conversations in Context session (see pages 34–38). It may be that you would like to ask your group which one they would like to focus on, in order to aid your preparation. If there are other issues you wish to look at, feel free.

Session 3: Conversations in Context



Slide 29



Ingredients

- newspapers and magazines (at least enough for one per participant)
- copies of the 'target' handout
- pens and pencils

Also

- "Now we are talking!" card for each group member
- Jargon board



Aim of session



Slide 30

- to examine life in twenty-first century British culture, which frames our conversations.



Opening prayer



Slide 31

*Living God, we ask 'who is our neighbour'
and so easily ignore your response.
Help us to hear the challenge of your words
to love our neighbours as ourselves.
Stir our hearts Lord,
give us love and compassion,
enabling us to reach out, nurturing relationships, building friendships,
sharing the life-giving, life-affirming good news of your love.
Amen.*

*To serve the present age,
my calling to fulfil;-
O may it all my powers engage
to do my Master's will!*

*Charles Wesley,
Hymns & Psalms 785, verse 2*

Session 3: Conversations in Context



Setting the scene

Arrange a selection of magazines and newspapers available for people to flick through.



Slide 32



For Conversation



Explaining our faith

Explaining our faith (apologetics) has been given a high priority by the Church as it has felt the need to make intellectual sense in the face of science and philosophy. People are interested in how we live and make sense of life more than what we believe. They need to see evidence of the outworking of a faith before they will be drawn to ask about the nature of that faith. The popularity of mind, body, spirit fairs, courses and literature shows that people are willing to pay for a wide range of spiritual experiences which have weak scientific or philosophical explanations. Think of popular magazines, TV shows, adverts etc – some of which we may have even looked at in the opening exercise. For some experience takes precedence over explanation.

One characteristic of growing churches and effective evangelism is an expectation that God can intervene in life-changing ways and a willingness to take all sorts of experiences seriously.

In his book *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*, Steve Croft quotes research that 76% of people have had a life-changing spiritual experience. Our task, then, is to explain people's experiences with God or with the 'supernatural'. We need to value other's experiences, identifying God at work there and so discovering God together.

You may be one of the 76% of people who have had a life changing spiritual experience. In fact, because you are taking this short course, you will probably have had an experience of God.



Slide 33



For Conversation

For Conversation

- Ask each person to find a picture or article that sums up for them:
 - this week
 - this year so far
 - the best of culture
 - the worst of culture.
- Share with the rest of the group, which pictures/articles you chose and why.

For Conversation

- Think of a time when God has been active in your life such as:
 - a blessing from God
 - an assurance from God
 - taking a stand at work or in a relationship
 - when God has given you clear direction about an issue
 - healing
 - comfort in tragedy or crisis
 - something totally different.
- Share this experience in two's or three's. Help each other to see how this conversation may fit into an everyday situation.

Session 3: Conversations in Context

T Social holiness

The phrase 'social holiness' has had a continuing appeal for Methodists even when it is misunderstood. It is not just that holiness must be out-worked in social action, but that the growth of personal holiness takes place within the loving social embrace of the church. In the business of praying, studying, worshipping, arguing, laughing, crying and above all encountering God together, Christians grow in grace and holiness and towards Christ and his likeness. This is the opposite of the individualism that we find all around us because the calling of a Christian disciple can only be lived alongside other people and in community together. Methodist membership and faithful discipleship must be registered and located in an actual local situation, among a particular group of flawed and hopeful fellow disciples.

This concept is in marked contrast with the prevailing enthusiasm for spiritual experiences. It is important that people are given the opportunity to explore what they believe (and what they don't). Discipleship is not something that is routine, sociable and undemanding.

We are to be stretched and challenged by each other and through that stretched to grow in God's grace towards Christ.

The requirement of Methodists is to discern our calling in community together, and to make places and spaces available in our diaries and in our local context to enable others to be stretched to grow in God's grace too.

Slide 34

For Conversation

T Where do we live?

Over recent years, a significant amount of research has been produced that suggests that people in Britain now broadly live their lives in three 'places'.

For Conversation

- When/where have you been stretched to grow in God's grace towards Christ?

Share this with the group (or in pairs).

"Methodist Christian discipleship is rooted and focused on Jesus Christ, resourced by the Spirit of God, is both life-long and whole-life, communal rather than solitary, committed to transforming and serving 'the world', locally, nationally and globally and so is lived out on a 'big map', all offered as worship to God as loving obedience."

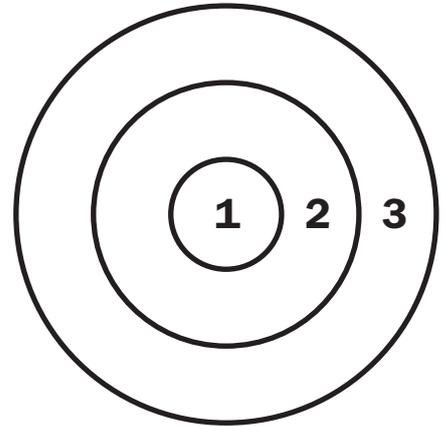
Martyn Atkins, Discipleship... and the people called Methodists

Session 3: Conversations in Context

Slide 35

- 1 The inner ring is the place we are most comfortable and most ourselves – our home.
- 2 The next ring is where we spend time at work.
- 3 The final ring is where we socialise or relax.

It does not follow that we share our faith more easily in one place or the other. We may find it difficult to talk about faith at home with the people who know us best. We can take comfort in the fact that this was the same for Jesus – he could do very little in his home town.



Slide 36

Think about the diagram in front of you. Where are your first, second and third places? Write them down.

Write down the names of the people with whom you are in conversation with in each ring of the diagram.

Take the diagram home and use it to help you pray for those who you are talking to. Ask God for more opportunities to share your faith with them.

Slide 37

For Conversation

Conversations with the Jesus of the Gospels

The Gospels are full of conversations – conversations that bring transformation and illumination. Through the Gospel accounts, the teaching that disciples throughout the centuries have received comes not only in the form of sermons or commandments, but also through stories and parables and conversations. There is relationship. There is humour, anger; irony and passion. Individuals have space to respond and to direct the next move and sentence. There is room for learning and transformation. We do not always catch a glimpse of what happened next, but we too are left to go and talk about Jesus ourselves and to work out what it all means for us, today.

For Conversation

“We need to provide safe and loving places in which to share honestly the deepest concerns and questions of our lives.”

Time to Talk of God, p. 23

- Do you agree?
- What might these places look like in your local community?

Session 3: Conversations in Context



Read Luke 14:1-14 – Jesus at the Pharisees' house.

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" And they could not reply to this.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place', and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (NRSV)

Jesus is really not on his best behaviour here!

But he is willing to challenge some of the contextual conventions of his time in order to offer hope, healing and demonstrations of the kingdom of God.

In the midst of this dinner party, Jesus offers a lesson in dinner party etiquette. One is not to invite people to dinner who are able to return the favour. Instead, Jesus tells the assembled crowd that the invitation should go to the poor, the crippled, lame and blind – the people who are normally ostracised from society and who would not normally receive an invitation to dinner.



Slide 38



For Conversation

For Conversation

- How do you think the Pharisees might have responded to this situation?
- How do you respond to Jesus' teaching here?

Session 3: Conversations in Context



Slides 39 – 40

The missional community *Small Boat, Big Sea*, has a rule of life for all its members. Each week they are to:

- bless three people every week – one from church, one friend or acquaintance and one from either – tell them why they are important/special to you
- eat with three people a week
- listen to God (once a week) particularly about when to engage with culture and when to resist it
- learn Jesus (once a week), reading the Bible, reading what others say about Jesus and letting him be the template of who you want to be.
- journal all the ways that you have been sent on mission
- be accountable.



Slide 41



For Conversation

Note: Some possibilities for other rules of life include monastic spirituality, Inspire Network, Methodist Diaconal Order, Wesley's banks, Danny Wallace's "Join Me".



Acting the story

This section offers reflections on a number of contemporary contextual 'issues'. As a group, decide on one issue, either that is provided here or write your own! If you do the latter, please send it to the Evangelism, Spirituality and Discipleship Office at Methodist Church House (email: esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk), and we will add your resources to this one. For each section, suggestions are made as to where further information can be found. This section may require more preparation than other sections in this course.

We are all part of the contemporary culture as well as being rooted in the Christian traditions of Britain and the world. We have to wrestle with integrity, honesty and humility with how and when we are to engage with contemporary culture, when we are called to be counter-cultural and when we may need to be a little more subversive.

For Conversation

- What do you like/dislike about this rule of life?
- What might be some principles of Methodist discipleship found in this rule?
- What other rules of life do you know about?

Try following this rule for the next week, remembering Jesus' teaching in this passage in Luke 14. Find out how each other got on at your next meeting!

Session 3: Conversations in Context

Sometimes discerning these three distinctions is not easy! In part this is because our context can be so comfortable and familiar that we are unable to discern difficulties. It may also be because we become so confined to our Christian sub-culture that we have forgotten how to engage and notice what is going on in our contemporary culture.

We need to have authentic conversations: conversations with Christians; conversations with colleagues; conversations on the bus, in the hairdresser, at the shop counter.

Together we can discern ways to be faithfully Christian and authentically culturally engaged participants in the twenty-first century.

“Christian people do not stand outside society, seeking to reform it; their characters are formed by the social structures they inhabit...there must be engagement with the thought forms of contemporary society.”

(Margaret Jones, “Growing in grace and holiness” in Unmasking Methodist Theology, p.156 (quoted in Time to Talk of God, p. 31))



Slide 42



For Conversation

For Conversation

- Do you agree/disagree with what Margaret Jones has written? Why?

The issues raise some common questions:

- Who is my neighbour in this context? Why does this matter?
- Who is God calling me to serve?
- What influence do I have and how do I use it?
- What influence do we have and how do we use it?
- Why is this issue important when it comes to a conversation about our faith?
- What conversations do I want to continue to have in light of thinking about our contemporary context?

These are included in the “For Conversation” box on each issue in the Group Member’s Notes.

Some conversations that we may find ourselves part of include:

Living globally

(See also *Time to Talk of God*, pp. 32-33 and the Methodist Church’s 2009 report *Hope in God’s Future*)

We are now intimately connected to the world in ways that we could only ever imagine a few years ago. We can talk with people around the world and we can instantly react to disaster and need. Yet at the same time, we are increasingly more isolated and lonely; unable to name the people who live near us in our street.

Session 3: Conversations in Context

We live, work and socialise in very separate environments and communities that have little or no overlap. Life can be segregated.

At the same time, we are sold a dramatic life through soap operas where everyone knows everyone else. For most of us, this is now a fairy tale or distant memory.



Slide 43



For Conversation

Work/life balance

(See also Mark Greene, *Supporting Christians at Work and Time to Talk of God*, pp. 34-35)

Life now moves at an increasingly fast pace. Working hours extend far beyond the 9-5 of contracts. Weekends are no longer the protectorate of relaxation and recreation – but instead full of busy schedules and meetings.

It has been argued that overwork and consumerism go hand in hand. At the same time, we are told to pamper ourselves in order to compensate for tiredness and stress.

Within Christian circles, there is an increased awareness of the need for rhythms and routines and rules in life. There is an increased desire for people to attend retreats and to invest in silence and meditation. When Christian spirituality appears not to offer this, people search for space and meditation in other spiritual explorations.



Slide 44



For Conversation

For Conversation

- How do we live in a global economy whilst at the same time becoming increasingly personally isolated?

For Conversation

- Do you have a healthy work/life balance? If you were not in public would your answer be the same?
- What do you think are the results of an unhealthy work/life balance?
- What might be a Christian response? How might you support your leaders to do this too?

Session 3: Conversations in Context

Pick-and-mix spirituality

(See also *Time to Talk of God*, pp. 36-37, *Essence and Mission Shaped Evangelism*, Steve Hollinghurst)

There are many conversations in contemporary society, which demonstrate an interest in all things spiritual. This is shown not least in the thriving market in publications, alternative therapies and retreats that address spirituality.

In turn, we live in a world where fundamental religion is seen to be a discipline to be revered or to be frightened of. The impact of terrorism also needs to be considered when we are looking at the wider spiritual and religious conversation that is happening within our society.

On the whole, the doctrines, disciplines and membership to any group are not, for the most part, seen to be attractive.

Even as Christians we are confronted with the communication of certainty that other faith groups communicate. Some Christian and other faith groups can appear to be disciplined, have distinct boundaries and are certain of their faith and articulate in communicating their doctrine.



Slide 45



For Conversation

Moral codes and ethics

(See also *Time to Talk of God*, pp. 38)

Over the years, the Church has had to shift its position on certain moral codes. Slavery, the employment of minors, the place of women, sexual politics – all of these are moral codes that have been re-coded in a contextual way.



Slide 46



For Conversation

For Conversation

- What traditions can we learn from as Christians? Are there traditions that we cannot/should not learn from? Why?
- How might we be able to connect our own story into a conversation about spirituality?

For Conversation

- Is morality a good place to start a conversation about faith/spirituality? Why?
- What are the important things for your own moral code? How do you communicate these?

Session 3: Conversations in Context

Social media and the rise in technology

(See also www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ0wFqNfu7A)

According to the YouTube clip, Facebook, if it were a country, would be the fourth largest in the world.

The world of social media connects people across the world in ways that are technologically advanced and yet entirely user friendly. The developments are happening so fast that it can feel like an entirely different world if one is not actively using and engaging with the technology before us.

Those who are unable/do not engage in social media are left to feel isolated and left out of an international movement.

The internet is not always a safe place to be. It is a place to hide and to groom, to purchase and to promote – in ways that would be unethical or illegal in an offline world.



Slide 47



For Conversation

Conclusion



Slide 48

We live in a world with so many messages being communicated in so many different ways. This session has looked at some of these, and encouraged us to investigate how we may be a conversation partner to the cultural messages around and about us.



Closing prayer

There are two options. You can select which one best suit the members of your group. (The details are also given at the end of the group member's notes.)



Prayer of review: the examen

For Conversation

- To what extent do you engage in social media? Why?
- What might it look like to be authentically Christian online as well as offline?

Session 3: Conversations in Context

This is a method of prayer associated with Ignatius Loyola. It is usually used at the end of a day, to look back at where God was active and in order to learn what God would have us see.

Lead people through this slowly, leaving time between each section for people to engage with God.

- a. Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax, be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.
- b. Remember you are in the presence of God and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes as you look back at this session and the course.
- c. What are you most grateful for about the course? In what ways have you experienced God's love?
- d. What are you least grateful for about the course? Where was it hard to love or be loved?
- e. Talk to God about your insights. Ask God for what you need for the days ahead.
- f. Listen to what God might have to say to you.
- g. Reflect on something you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.
- h. When you are ready, open your eyes and join the rest of the group.



Prayerful conversations

Split the group in to prayer partners or prayer triplets.

This will be the person or people that you share your experiences between sessions with, and you will also pray together at the end of the session.

Include in your sharing something each of you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.

Agree together that the conversation shared in this conversation will be kept confidential.

Pray for each other through the week too, as you try to put what you have discovered into practice as you talk of God in your everyday lives.

Session 4: Living the Conversation



Slide 49



Ingredients

- picture of the 'I found Jesus' merchandise
- computer and speakers loud enough for people to hear, speakers

Also

- "Now we are talking!" card for each participant
- Jargon board



Aim of session



Slide 50

- to see the power of an authentic life lived in an honest engagement with others, the world and the stories that are told.



Opening prayer



Slide 51

*Generous God, in Christ your word became flesh and dwelt among us:
forgive us for so often turning flesh back into words,
and our preference for speech that avoids action.
Renew us by the power of your Holy Spirit
and may we live faithful lives that offer a glimpse of your love.*

Amen.



Setting the scene

Find out how people got on in living a rule of life (see page 34). Offer the chance for some brief sharing and reflection.

"This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper, and word, and work of yours, may have an influence on them also."

*Sermon 21- Upon Our Lord's
Sermon on the Mount
(Discourse 4) John Wesley
'Sermons on Several Occasions'*

Session 4: Living the Conversation

Slide 52

For conversation

T The journey to faith

If you are able, show the “I’ve found Jesus: he’s behind the sofa all along” tee-shirt www.davidandgoliathtees.com/men/i-found-jesus-he-was-behind-the-couch-mens-tee.html

And show the cartoon, which is also slide 53.

Slide 53



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When we think about evangelism, we can often assume that evangelism has been executed as a sales deal to be closed, or a cold call.

Rick Richardson in *Reimagining Evangelism* (Bletchley, Scripture Union, 2007) suggests that a more loving and Christlike way to share our faith is to see ourselves as travel guides, escorting others on a journey that we ourselves have embarked on. We must remember though, that each of us has a different journey and so escorting each person we will also encounter new places.

The journey may take a significant time. Faith sharing and talking of God is therefore more likely to be a marathon than a sprint.

In sharing a long journey with someone, it is difficult not to build a significant relationship with our travel companion.

“[We need to] provide safe and loving spaces in which to share honestly the deepest concerns and questions of our lives, to become vulnerable to one another, supportive of one another and challenging of one another.”

(from an account of a Methodist Council conversation, included in the report Priorities for the Methodist Church (Conference 2004 Agenda, p. 127) quoted in Time to Talk of God, p. 25)

For Conversation

- Where are your places of comfort, safety and love?
- Who are the people you talk with there?

“Do not try to call [people] back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as it may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.”

Vincent Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered (Norwich, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2001)

Session 4: Living the Conversation



Conversations with the Jesus of the Gospels

The Gospels are full of conversations – conversations that bring transformation and illumination. Through the Gospel accounts, the teaching that disciples throughout the centuries have received comes not only in the form of sermons or commandments, but also through stories and parables and conversations. There is relationship. There is humour, anger; irony and passion. Individuals have space to respond and to direct the next move and sentence. There is room for learning and transformation. We do not always catch a glimpse of what happened next, but we too are left to go and talk about Jesus ourselves and to work out what it all means for us, today.



Read Luke 24:13-35 (the road to Emmaus).

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Continued on next page

Session 4: Living the Conversation

Continued from previous page

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

(NRSV)

For Conversation

- This is a really familiar story – what sticks out for you on reading this?
- What conversations are there in the story?
- Who do you identify with in the story?
- Who are the people who accompany you on your journey?



Slide 54



For Conversation



Acting the story



Slide 55



For Conversation

(You may find the table on the next page useful.)

For Conversation

- How does Jesus engage with people through the Gospels?
- How might we use the same/different methods today?

Use the table on page 27 of the Group Member's Notes to write down your ideas.

Session 4: Living the Conversation

Jesus	Today	Some ideas
Storytelling / Parables		Storytelling/Testimony/Godly Play Finding connections with known stories (eg www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/showbiz/tv/x_factor/3258006/Simon-Cowell-is-just-like-Jesus-says-Christian-magazine.html)
Healing		Healing Service in <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i> , pp. 407-421
Conversation with people		Conversations/Testimony
Teaching disciples/in synagogue		Preaching
Challenged those in power		Challenge/lobby for change (eg Joint Public Issues Team campaigns, Tearfund, Christian Aid)
Prophetic action such as turning over the tables		Prophetic Actions (eg Archbishop John Sentamu cutting up his collar to protest about Zimbabwe's leadership, Shane Claiborne and the Wall Street giveaway (Irresistible Revolution, Shane Claiborne)) www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ETBMhEzYKU&feature=player_embedded
Prepared to die in assurance of resurrection		Martyrdom/Persecution Martyrdom -being prepared to die for one's faith in the hope of eternal life (eg Release International, CSW)
Prayer		Prayer (eg Jackie Pullinger Chasing the Dragon, SPEAK, 24-7 prayer meetings)
Miracles		Miracles
Meeting people's needs (eg feeding 5,000)		Meeting people's needs www.hopetogether.org.uk/Groups/132486/HOPE_Together/Stories/Local_Stories/Local_Stories.aspx
Set people free from oppression		
Loved people no matter what		Adopt a child - Compassion
Invested in people (eg disciples, Nicodemus)		Coaching and mentoring
Blessed people		Anonymous gifts on people's doorsteps
Accepted gifts (eg woman's perfume)		Accept gifts
Orchestrated hospitality of Zaccheus		Small Boat, Big Sea rule of life

Session 4: Living the Conversation

Slide 56

For Conversation

Conclusion

A person with a vision can change the world.

They can unite people across the world and bring transformation and hope.

For example, in 2008, Matt Harding had an idea. The YouTube video shows what happened when his dream became reality.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlFkdbWwruY

We are called to follow the dance of the Holy Spirit as God's mission is unfolding all across the world. We are called to follow Jesus, as his good news brings hope and transformation.

Slide 57

“When you run out of words to say, you show me Jesus through the words on your face.” *(African proverb)*

Conversations that we share and people whose lives interweave with ours are not just verbal conversations – they are the conversations of actions, of silence, of prayer and of justice. They are the conversations of journey and the investment of relationship.

Closing Prayer

There are two options. You can select which one best suit the members of your group. (The details are also given at the end of the group member's notes.)

Prayer of review: the examen

This is a method of prayer associated with Ignatius Loyola. It is usually used

For Conversation

- How do these methods compare and contrast with the 'roles' of evangelism in the 'Starting the conversation' section (see page 15)?
- How can/do you move from action to conversation and from conversation to action?
- Do you think there are times when this is more/less important? When?

Session 4: Living the Conversation

at the end of a day, to look back at where God was active and in order to learn what God would have us see.

Lead people through this slowly, leaving time between each section for people to engage with God.

- a. Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax, be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.
- b. Remember you are in the presence of God and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes as you look back at this session and the course.
- c. What are you most grateful for about the course? In what ways have you experienced God's love?
- d. What are you least grateful for about the course? Where was it hard to love or be loved?
- e. Talk to God about your insights. Ask God for what you need for the days ahead.
- f. Listen to what God might have to say to you.
- g. Reflect on something you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.
- h. When you are ready, open your eyes and join the rest of the group.



Prayerful conversations

Split the group in to prayer partners or prayer triplets.

This will be the person or people that you share your experiences between sessions with, and you will also pray together at the end of the session.

Include in your sharing something each of you will try to put into practice from what you have discovered from this session.

Agree together that the conversation shared in this conversation will be kept confidential.

Pray for each other through the week too, as you try to put what you have discovered into practice as you talk of God in your everyday lives.

Concluding Worship and Reflection



Slide 58

A love feast

A good way to end a course on faith-sharing is to do something! And a good way to end a course on faith sharing for Methodists is to do something in the context of a love feast, John Wesley's revival of the early Christian 'Agape' and central to the nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist revival.

In a circle, 'plain cake and water' (or fruit juice if preferred!) is passed around.

So, gather around.

Share cake and juice.

Perhaps sing one of the favourite hymns from the 'Starting the Conversation' setting the scene exercise (page 14).



Slide 59



For Conversation

Pray together, thanking God for all the stories that have been shared and for the opportunity to learn together.

"The love-feast is both begun and ended by singing and a prayer ... The time is chiefly taken up in relating Christian experience. Any person may speak who chooses. They are generally very agreeable, edifying and refreshing seasons. They tend to promote piety, mutual affection and zeal."

'A true and complete portraiture of Methodism or The History of the Wesleyan Methodists',
Jonathan Crowther (pub. 1813), p. 239

For Conversation

Tell each other your story of faith. Use these prompts if they are helpful:

- What have you found the most important about the course?
- What have you discovered about yourself?
- Where has God been in your life?
- Where is God for you today?
- What have you discovered about your faith through this course?

Continuing the Conversation: Further Resources

One of the aims of *Talking of God* is to give people within the Methodist Church some tools to become more confident in speaking of their faith in the contexts and relationships they are already in.

There are plenty of ways to follow up this short course in terms of further evangelism tools and programmes. Here are just a few ideas and pointers in the right direction.

For further information you can talk to your district evangelism enabler, director of mission, district mission development officer or district mission enabler.

Alternatively you can contact the Evangelism, Spirituality and Discipleship Office at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR (email: esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk)

MSI/MSM course

(www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedintro or www.missionshapedministry.org)

Mission Shaped Introduction (MSI) and Mission Shaped Ministry (MSM) are two courses designed to help individuals and churches discover ways of engaging in mission in local contexts.

For more information speak to your district evangelism enabler.

LICC

LICC (the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity) equips Christians and churches for whole-life discipleship in the world. It offers a biblical framework, practical resources and models to engage biblically, relevantly and vigorously with issues in modern life. Its website www.licc.org.uk gives details of its work with the Bible, today's culture, the workplace and youth as well as books, DVDs and training material.

More than Gold (www.morethangold.org.uk)

More than Gold exists to enable British churches to engage with the 2012 Olympic Games. All too often churches can be seen negatively, as out of touch and only interested in themselves. But by playing their part in the programmes of outreach, hospitality and service every church can help tell a different story. More than Gold offers suggestions, advice and resources so that through the Olympic Games communities can discover more about God and faith.

Hope Together www.hopetogether.org.uk

HOPE's purpose is to support and facilitate more mission, mission together and mission through word and action - sharing the love of Jesus with others. It aims to see long lasting spiritual change in the lives of individuals and whole communities transformed.

Hope Together was born out of Hope 2008, when thousands of young people volunteered their time to spread the good news in word and through action, in unity with other Christians. During that time many people came to faith, local people were impacted and significant crime was reduced.

Share Jesus International

(www.sharejesusinternational.com)

SJI is passionate about communicating the good news about Jesus in our ever-changing times. It is committed to helping people to find their place in God's plans; assisting local churches as they communicate the gospel relevantly and powerfully; proclaiming a gospel that challenges injustice and encourages the church to serve the poor and the marginalised. Their website gives details of their current faith-sharing projects and resources.

Inspire Network (www.inspire-network.org.uk)

Inspire is developing a network of small groups, called fellowship bands, committed to following a 'way of life' that is rooted in accountable discipleship, spiritual growth and evangelistic mission.

Continuing the Conversation: Further Resources

Martyn Atkins, *Discipleship... and the People called Methodists*

(Peterborough, Methodist Publishing, 2010)

Martyn Atkins (general secretary of the Methodist Church and former president of Conference) writes about Christian discipleship from a Methodist perspective. Suitable for group study, the booklet has multiple stopping points for reflection and discussion. The booklet is also available as an e-book and downloadable pdf from www.deepeningdiscipleship.org.uk.

Essence (Kingsway/CPAS, 2002)

Essence is a six-part course providing an experiential introduction to the Christian faith in a culturally relevant way. The overriding objective is to help people who may view themselves as 'spiritual' to journey towards the Christian faith. The course seeks to start where people are, so the concepts explored are all recognisable to those familiar with New Age spirituality. Essence seeks to help participants look at these concepts and issues from a Christian perspective. Although out-of-print it can be downloaded free from www.sharejesusinternational.com/resources/essence.

Steve Croft, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*

(London, Church House Publishing, 2005)

This book takes a detailed look at the spirituality of people beyond the fringe of the Church and offers insightful responses to how the Church might address the issue of evangelism in the twenty-first century.

Hope in God's Future

(Peterborough, Methodist Publishing, 2009)

An attractively-presented study guide to help individuals and local groups understand the position of the Methodist Church on climate change, become aware of vital connections between climate change and the Christian faith, transform lifestyles through studying, praying and acting on the issues and inspire others in the community to live in harmony with the whole of Creation. It also includes questions to get you thinking, ideas for creative activities, inspirational prayers and worship, and suggestions for group sessions.

John Pritchard, *How to Explain your Faith*

(London, SPCK, 2006)

This user-friendly book will help the reader talk more confidently about their faith and belief. Each chapter begins with a 'What they say' section. Pritchard then identifies the key issue, before suggesting (in reassuring detail) ways to respond. All through the book there are stories, as well as inspiring, poignant and witty quotes to work into conversations whenever the opportunity may arise!

David Flavell, *A Love Feast*

(Stowmarket, Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2007)

Written by a Methodist minister, this book leads the reader through the Love Feast, from its origins to its reintroduction in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as how to re-enact it effectively today. Included are many resource opportunities, much detail in the readings and prayers, an effective 'how to' prepare for the actual service and meal, music, books to read, songs to sing.

Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism*

(Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2010)

This book emphasises that Christians must recognise that "lifestyle is far more important than dogma" in the 21st century. The early Christian Church spread the gospel across the known world by involving itself in other cultures, and Steve Hollinghurst argues that a similar approach is required today.

Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*

(Bletchley, Scripture Union, 2007)

This book is for individuals and groups and includes exercises and discussion pointers to help people invite their friends on a spiritual journey, where doubts and questions are taken seriously. It explores potential obstacles and opportunities for evangelism in everyday situations, using stories that capture the heart of every chapter.

Continuing the Conversation: Further Resources

Mark Greene, *Supporting Christians at Work*

(London, Administry/LICC, 2001)

Available from www.licc.org.uk this small booklet helps ministers encourage and envision workers in their congregation. It offers a simple refocusing of Church mission strategy by making the case for workplace ministry, discussing the theological issues which have blocked workplace ministry, offering ideas on how ministers and their communities can practically support the workers.

Time to Talk of God

(Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 2005)

Subtitled 'Recovering Christian conversation as a way to nurturing discipleship', *Time of Talk of God* addresses one of Methodism's key priorities. Highly readable, this Conference report is presented in a lively way for use by small groups, with engaging images, telling quotes and questions to get people talking at depth about what matters most.

“Now we are talking!” Card

“Now WE are talking!”

When you wave this card, all **CONVERSATION/INPUT** stops.

The whole group then spends the next five  minutes answering the question:

Where can I put this into practice this week?

(This grounds the learning and the conversation in everyday experience.)

When the five  minutes are up, the group returns to what it was doing before.

EACH person can only use this card once in the course.

“Now WE are talking!”

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Images of Emotions

See page 17



Blocks to Conversation within the Church

You cannot be a follower of Jesus without having a role in church leadership.	The church should not be the place where faith is discussed.
The business of running a church keeps us too busy to have other conversations.	Faith should only be discussed in private.
Evangelism is for those who are paid to do it.	Conversation means that we cannot disagree.
I am not good enough.	Evangelism is only for those interested in Christian spirituality.
I don't fit into this community.	I don't have the right answers.
Christians need to be nice.	Friendship is too valuable to lose by sharing my faith.
The Church fails to talk about tough issues.	Discipleship is about doubt, so why should anyone else be interested.
Religious tolerance means that I cannot share my faith in public.	I don't know.
?	

Acknowledgements

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Further copies are free to download from www.methodist.org.uk/talkingofgod



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