


## EMPOWERING GOD'S PEOPLE

### SHARING


We're in a series on **EMPOWERING GOD'S PEOPLE**. We looked at habit number one last week — that we're going to develop relationships with people far from God.

**Three Dimensions in Jesus' Life**

1. **UP** Intimacy with the Father.
2. **IN** Loving relationships with other believers.
3. **OUT** Influencing people in the world around.



If you were with us last week, you know that we said there are 3 dimensions in Jesus' life: Up, In, and Out. Up refers to relationship with God the Father, IN is our relationships with other believers, and OUT is about serving people in the world around us and sharing the truth of Jesus' forgiveness, and hope with them.



*"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If **someone who promotes** **peace** is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.*

Luke 10:5-7

And Jesus instructs us, in our relationships with people around us, to look for a **Person of Peace**. That is, someone who is receptive to starting a relationship of faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Jesus, also spoke about this with the picture of a farmer scattering seed in a farm field. The seed is planted *everywhere*, but only *SOME* of it will grow because it lands in good soil that is receptive to the seed and to young growing plants.

And so we all received an assignment to do — that each of us will invite 1 person or a few people closer. That we will strive to just further establish the relationship that we've begun with them.

Today we're going to talk about the second habit which has to do with starting conversations about spiritual matters -- explaining the gospel to somebody, telling people how it is that they can become a Christian.

I don't think there's any exhilaration in the whole world quite like the feeling that comes for a Christ-follower when you actually help another human understand their need for God and His gift of grace. It's a great feeling to help somebody who was far from God, be brought into a relationship with Jesus. That's like spiritual adrenaline.

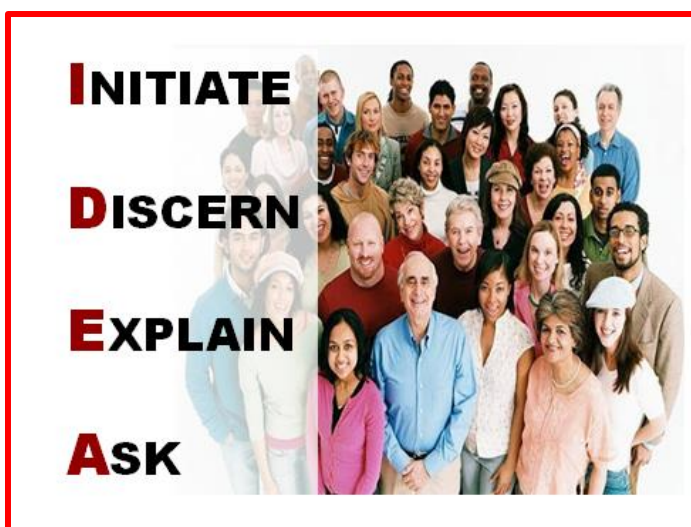
Now some of you have the ability to do this — to share a verbal witness, to explain the gospel. Some of you have the ability to do this with creativity and ease and confidence.

Those of you that do, keep cultivating that ability; develop that ability so you use it on a regular basis. This church needs you to just run as far with that ability as God enables you.

But many of you in this room, this is not a strong area of natural giftedness. Sharing faith is much more like the experience I have when I argue. It's often not until I wake up at 2:00 in the morning do I think of the perfect thing I wished I would have said.

Yet, do you know what? You may develop relationships with unchurched people. But if you don't engage people far from God in significant, spiritual conversations, if you don't give them a chance to question and probe the gospel in a one-on-one setting, sooner or later they're going to miss out on the greatest gift you could give to them. Sooner or later, your relationship will change, or one of you moves, and you won't be able to share with them the message of God's love that can change their eternal destiny. Hopefully some other believer will, but there are no guarantees that will happen. So if you really care about that person and their eternity, you will want to at least share with them the hope for this life and the way to heaven that God has given through Jesus. And His love is available for all people. Yes, the stakes really ARE that high! And so it is important that we master this habit that we talk about today, the habit of starting spiritual conversations.

So I want to get really practical. We're going to talk about this business of sharing a verbal witness, of explaining the gospel. And I'll give you one word for each of the steps. If you want to write them down, I invite you to do that.



If you take the first letter of each one of these words, they spell the word "idea." So, maybe that'll help you to remember it. But the first word is the word **INITIATE**. Look for opportunities to steer the conversation towards spiritual topics. As you're relaying to people who are far from God, look for opportunities to steer the conversation towards spiritual topics.

Now the single most effective way I know how to do this is to ask questions. In the course of getting to know people, the most natural thing we do is ask questions. "What do you do for a living?" "Where are you from?" "Tell me about your family." As you do this, you can ask, "Tell me about your spiritual background." Or, "What do you think about spirituality?" Or, "When you were growing up, what did you learn about God?"

Now, if the other person is not a Christian, you don't have to jump in and correct them right away because this is just the beginning of the process. But when you ask questions like that, very often they'll return the favor. They'll ask you about your spiritual commitment. That will give you a chance to tell your story.

There's another way to initiate spiritual conversations. Look for opportunities around certain topics. For example, this may not have occurred to you before. One topic people love to talk about that offers a lot of chances to turn very naturally to spiritual subjects is the news. Right now the top news story is, of course, the covid19 pandemic. There are over 6 million cases in the United States, and we are soon to have 200,000 deaths from covid. Just think of that: 200,000 lives have been cut short by this virus in just this year. People are talking about this. Everyone has an opinion. And you might ask: "What do you think really happens to people when they die?" "What do you think is going to happen to you?" And "Why do you believe that?"

Another way to start spiritual conversations is to talk about movies and TV. Did you know that the most watched show on TV right now is called "Lucifer." I haven't seen it. The story line of the show is that Lucifer, after becoming bored with his life in hell, abandoned his throne for five years, moved to L.A., becomes a civilian consultant for the Los Angeles Police Department while running his own high-end nightclub called "Lux". You could ask somebody who has seen it, "Do you think there really is a Lucifer? / a Hell?" "What do you think of the power of evil? How strong is it? What about the forces of Good in this universe? Who do you think is behind that?"

You may be talking about parenting. You can ask another person, "What kind of spiritual influences do you want your children to have?" People are real concerned about their kids these days.

Sometimes you're talking with somebody who's in a crisis. People will often open up to the gospel in a time of crisis. And then you might ask them, "Do you have anything by way of spiritual support in your life?"

Maybe the other person brings up their marriage or relationships. As you can share struggles that you have had in marriage, you might say, "My wife and I had a hard time communicating. Let me tell you what we really found out." And then talk about a time when you found help through the church, through God's community.

People talk about "Black Lives Matter" a lot lately. You might ask, "Do you think that people's lives matter? That they have value?" "Where do you think that value comes from?" And you share how you believe every life is precious because each person is made by God – belong to Him. He considers each person so valuable He gave His Son's life for them.

Holidays offer an opportunity to get into spiritual conversations. At Christmastime you might ask somebody, "What do you really think about Christmas? Do you really think that baby born in a manger was really God?"

You can be creative. The main thing that I want to see on this initiating business is that you open yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit what you should do and say, search your heart a moment, and follow your leading. Allow the Spirit to whisper to you because the Spirit really will guide you, really will bring to your mind His guidance. And when that happens, you obey and take the risk.

That's the first word — initiate.

Then the second word is the word "**DISCERN**." Discern what the other person's level of interest is. This is similar to the law of supply and demand. I need to engage the other person at their demand level. What's the level of interest this other person is showing in spiritual things? Then I need to adjust the supply — how much I say — to fit the level of demand that that seeking person has.

It's like the story of a preacher who came to a small town out West. He put up signs that he was going to hold a church service in the town movie theater. The day came, the preacher was ready, and only 1 person – a simple ranch hand -- showed up for the church service.

The preacher didn't know what to do. Only 1 person came. Should he go ahead with the church service or not? So he asked the rancher what he thought. The rancher said, "Well, preacher, I ain't studied much, and I'm not too bright. But I do know that when I go to feed the cattle if only one cow shows up, I feed it." The rancher was right, the preacher thought. So he went into the whole church service, the whole sermon – he gave it the works!

After it was all over, the preacher asked the rancher what he thought. He replied, "Well, preacher, I'm only a simple ranch-hand, but I do know that if only 1 cow shows up at the feed trough, I don't dump the whole load of hay on it." There's an appropriate level of supply to meet the level of demand.

You've got to discern the level of interest, and if it's low, back off. Let me get painfully clear on this. Some of you aren't real sure how to read cues. If while you're talking the other person's eyes are growing glazed and their pupils get fixed and dilated; if you find that you have grabbed their arm with your hand, and you're physically restraining them from walking away while you're talking, that could be a clue that their interest might be flagging in what it is you're saying.

If the level of demand there is not high yet, and it's going to take time for that person, that's okay. Now on the other hand, sometimes the other person IS really motivated. They really ARE interested. On those occasions, keep providing opportunities for discussion. Keep putting more fuel on the fire, answer questions. Tell them you'll get back to them about things they don't know.

Think about a person you know who does not trust in Jesus as Savior. Got that person in your mind? What is their demand level? Now think: what changes in their life, what transitions are they coping with where they need strength? Is their demand level low? Is it medium? Or is it high? And adjust accordingly. Okay, so that's initiate and discern.

And then the next part of this habit is **EXPLAIN**. Sometimes there will come a moment when the other person is ready to hear the gospel. Sometimes that moment will come, and you must be ready. In 1 Peter 3:15, the writer says, ***"Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that lies within you."*** Be prepared always.

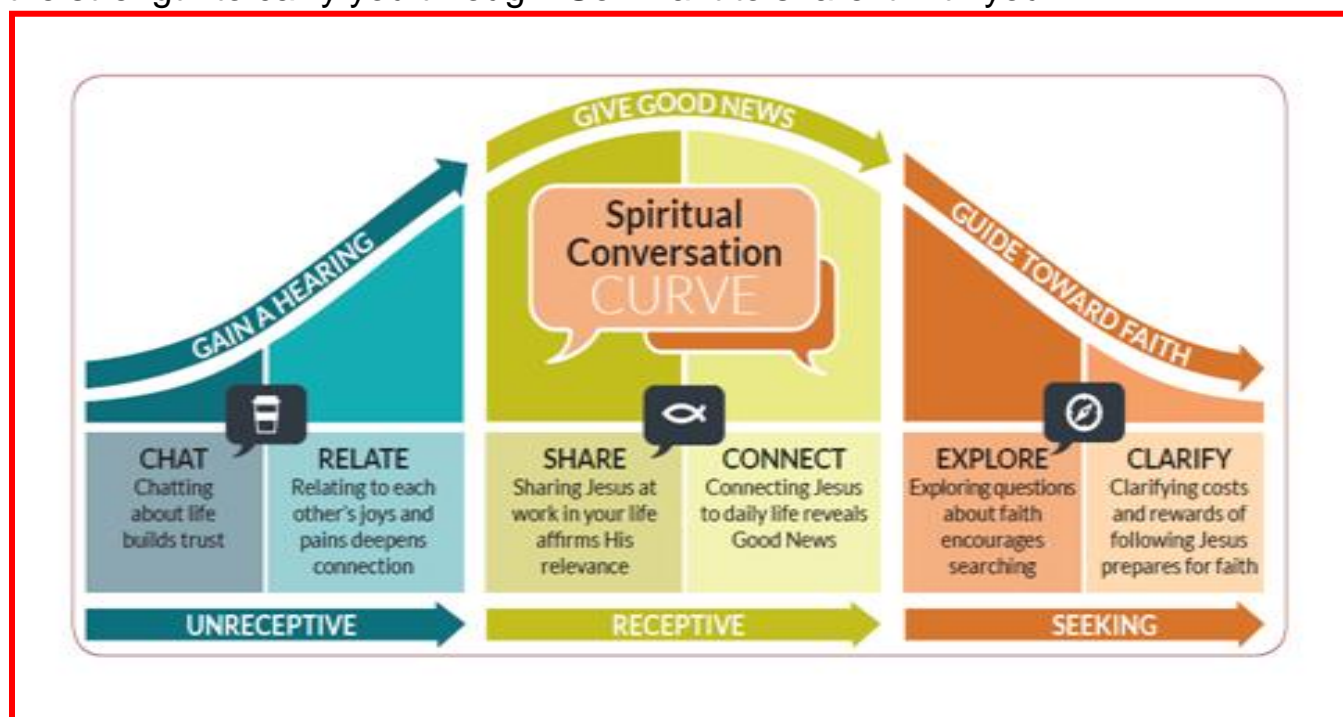
Paul says in Romans 10, ***"Every one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call if they haven't believed? And how can they believe if they haven't heard? And how can they hear if no one has proclaimed?"*** If no one has explained, if no one has taught? You must be prepared.

You've been getting to know somebody that's far from God, praying for them, and there comes a moment when their heart opens up a little bit. A heart that's been full of sin and closed to God is open to hear the gospel.

Maybe you're sitting in a restaurant. Maybe you're talking over a back fence. Maybe you're having a cup of coffee in your living room. You think about the drama of this moment. Someone who was bound for hell and the Evil One wants desperately to keep them from God, their heart opens up a little bit, and they want to hear the gospel. That's a holy moment. Only God does that to the human heart. So you want to be prepared.

Ken Blanchard, who writes a lot about leadership. He says this sometimes when he's with people. He asks himself the question, "**Do I love them enough to tell them the very best I know?**" Do I love this person enough to tell him or her the very best I know? Will you let that question stay in your mind when you're with a seeking person? And that moment comes.

"Do I love this person enough to tell them the very best I know?" Because this story, this gospel story, is the very best that you know. This is a story of your redemption, your future, the story of your hope, your purpose in life, the story of the strength to carry you through. So I want to share it with you.



When you came in today, we received a pamphlet we reproduced for you, called "**How to Talk About Your Faith.**" Would you take that in hand now? On page 2 you will see a picture that looks like this. Would you turn to this?

The Lutheran Hour recently did this big, big study to find out How can Christians talk to others about Jesus now that we live in this digital age? Our



world has changed so much since the 1990's, so how does this affect the way we share the truth of Jesus with people? What they found they call this "Spiritual Conversation Curve."

The first part of the curve, in blue, is all about gaining a hearing. Last week we talked about deepening or growing the relationships you have with unbelieving people in your life. And today we talked about the "I" – Initiate a conversation. You can see the symbol there, the coffee cup. You get the idea.

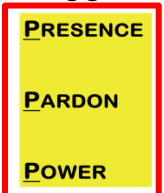
After the "I" for "initiate," is "D", which is "Discern." If you discern the person is interested and wanting more, then you move the conversation into the yellow part of the curve. This is "Giving the Good News." In our "I.D.E.A." (idea) framework, this is the "E" we just talked about, where you begin to "Explain."

In the yellow part of the curve, notice that "Share" and "Connect" are all about talking about what your faith in Christ means in your life.

In other words, this next part, is not a theological presentation. It's not a debate about them being wrong and you being right.

This is not like teaching the Catechism. Sharing and Connecting is about you, naturally talking about how Jesus has made a difference in your life.

Talking about your real struggles and how God has helped you through those struggles.

 At the beginning of last year – the beginning of '19 – the Sunday Bible study – we used the words "**Presence**," "**Pardon**," and "**Power**" to talk about this. 3 "P"s to help us remember: Presence, Pardon, Power.

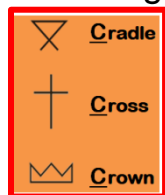
Presence is sharing a personal story about when you were all alone or frightened, and God's presence comforted you.

Pardon is a personal experience of really screwing up. You felt guilty. Maybe you got fired from marriage, or fired from work. Maybe you messed up morally, or got in trouble with the law, and you really found Jesus' forgiveness meant *everything* to you. His Pardon enabled you to keep going.

Power is sharing a time in your life when you couldn't go on, if it were not for the power of God. You were crushed in grief, or trapped in drug addiction, or you didn't think you had the strength to leave an abusive relationship, but only by the power of God were you able to go on.

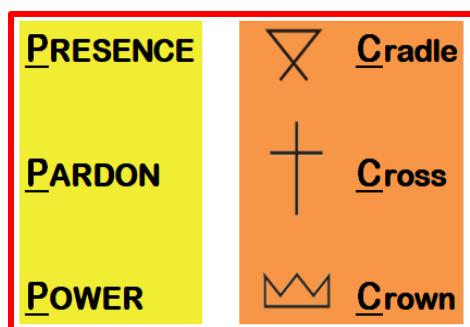
So this yellow part of the spiritual conversation curve is sharing Jesus at work in your life. Connecting your faith in Jesus to your everyday life. And you can find those amazing stories in your life when you think of 3 "P"s – God's Presence, His Pardon, and His Power.

Now the Orange part of the Spiritual Conversation Curve is a shift in the conversation. After you talk about your everyday life and the difference Jesus has made for you, if the person is seeking, he or she will ask questions. So the orange part is all about exploring and clarifying.



This is the part where questions are asked, and you, to the best of your ability, share honestly what you know to be true. This is a time to share who Jesus is and what He has done for everyone.

The beginning of last year, we used 3 “C” words and 3 simple line drawings. “**Cradle**”, “**Cross**”, and “**Crown**.” Cradle, Cross, and Crown tell the story of Jesus’ life. He was born – cradle – becoming one of us. He died on the Cross, paying for your sins, to forgive you. Jesus rose again – crown – and He rules in heaven.



You’ll notice how Jesus’ birth in the cradle means He is Present in your life.

And His death on the Cross means you have Pardon for your wrongs.

And Jesus’ resurrection means the Power of God is at work in your life.

They all tie together.

Okay, that is a LOT to give you in a little time. But it’s really as simple as that. Because it’s very important that when that holy moment comes, you’re ready for it, that you’re able to do this without faltering. You can explain the gospel in a way that’s real clear.

You initiate spiritual discussions; you discern the person’s level of interest. When that holy moment comes and they’re ready, you be prepared to explain the gospel.

Then sometimes people will reach a point where they understand. They’ve thought and they’ve researched as they need to, and it’s time. Then you **ASK**. Sometimes you are the one to ask another human being if they’re ready to receive Jesus’ love and forgiveness.

Often nobody asks people. Well, that can be you. You can say, "Are you ready now to receive Christ as the forgiver and leader of your life? Whether they say, “yes,” or “not yet,” -- it’s all good. The outcome isn’t in your hands. It’s in God’s hands. Either way, it’s all good, because you get to be there to help a person and coach a person closer to trusting in Jesus. And friends, there’s nothing better! It’s so significant. This makes a difference for all eternity. Amen.