

We have come to the end of our book. Today is the last lesson on how to talk about God in everyday life; how to have a Holy Conversation. What do you think? Has it changed your mind about “sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the community?” You now understand it’s not about standing on the street corner, or having some sort of monologue or speech to give. But, it’s simply a conversation.

Let’s say you’ve had that conversation with a friend over the course of the last several weeks and he’s interested. He wants to become a follower of Jesus Christ. What do you say?

You might say, it’s a matter of believing, turning away from other stuff, and beginning a new life as a follower of Jesus. It means we enter into a commitment. What should we do to “declare our colors,” as Richard Peace puts it? What does it mean to be in relationship with another? (99) Is there some kind of ritual?

How do you say “yes” to Jesus?

God gives us many pictures that point to our relationship with Him. It’s helpful to look at some of those “pictures.” For instance, Paul says the church is the “bride of Christ.” So we should look at marriage. The Bible says the foundation of all love is God (1 Jn 3:7-8). And marriage certainly has to do with love. We know that. Why else would we sing love songs? Like the one you just heard. Listen for God in the words –

*“The union of your spirits here has caused Him to remain;
For wherever two or more of you are gathered in His name,
There is love.
Well then what's to be the reason for becoming man and wife?
Is it love that brings you here or love that brings you life?
For if loving is the answer, then who's the giving for?
Do you believe in something that you've never seen before?
Oh there is Love, there is Love.” (The Wedding Song by Paul Stookey)*

One way God teaches us about how to love God is through marriage. Knowing God, committing to Jesus Christ is like marriage. So what does God say about marriage? Paul writes about it in 1 Corinthians. Let’s read it. 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 (The Message)

If marriage is a picture of our relationship with Christ, let’s start at the beginning. What does it mean to begin a relationship with someone? Richard Peace calls them the steps of commitment. We’re going to look at those steps in a fun way, a way we understand. In love, the first step is: Desire for that person

(SONG 1: “The More I See You,” Nat King Cole) –
*The more I see you, the more I want you.
Somehow this feeling just grows and grows.
With every sigh I become more mad about you,
More lost without you, and so it goes.
Can you imagine how much I'll love you*

*the more I see you as years go by?
I know the only one for me can only be you.
My arms won't free you; my heart won't try.*

So, applying that feeling to God, the first thing we experience is this draw toward God; we want a relationship with God because we feel that God can fill that emptiness inside; that inner longing. That's the first step of love.

Then, you become a little more familiar with God because someone points you to Jesus, and tells you stories about Him. It's like getting to know someone and being really attracted to them. You just really begin to like them. I'm sure you know what I mean:

(SONG 2: "Unforgettable" by Irving Gordon, sung by Nat King Cole)

*Unforgettable that's what you are . . . Unforgettable though near or far . . .
Like a song of love that clings to me how the thought of you does things to me
never before has someone been more. . . Unforgettable in every way . . .
and forever more (and forever more)
that's how you'll stay (that's how you'll stay)
that's why darling its incredible
that someone so unforgettable
thinks that I am unforgettable too*

So step two of love is attraction, and step three of love is – you want to spend time with them, to hang out with them, get to know them. I remember dating Dean and he would talk to me until very late at night – until we got married and he began going to bed early. I thought, what happened? But it's like that at first. Above all else, you just want to spend time together:

(SONG 3: "Close to You," Carpenters)

*On the day that you were born
The angels got together
And decided to create a dream come true
So they sprinkled moon dust in your hair of gold
And starlight in your eyes of blue*

*That is why all the girls in town
Follow you all around
Just like me, they long to be
Close to you*

That's how it is in a relationship with God. You want to learn all you can about God and God's love for you. That stage of love leads you to want to talk to others about the one you love. You kind of worship that person. My children had a kindergarten teacher who was married to the district superintendent. She talked about him all the time – John this and John that. I thought, he doesn't look that great to me, but to her – they are obnoxiously in love:

(SONG 4: "My Girl," The Temptations)

*I've got sunshine on a cloudy day.
When it's cold outside, I've got the month of May.
Well, I guess you'll say what can make me feel this way?
My girl. (My girl, my girl) . . . Talkin' 'bout my girl (My girl)*

See, it's just totally obsessive; love is unreasonable; it's all consuming. You just can't get enough of it. The Bible suggests that's how we are to be about God. That's how Jesus is about you. God feels that way about you. That's why Scripture says, God sings about you. That's why we love in the same way. That love is from God and is the way God loves.

Let's look at this passage of Scripture. Paul writes about marriage and sexuality because the Corinthian culture was sexually confused; there was sexual disorder¹. They thought spiritual life affected only the soul so they either denied themselves of sex in marriage or overindulged their sexual appetites with prostitutes. Paul said this is not the normal Christian life. God is not confused about sex and marriage. The two go together, exclusively. That's Scripture's mandate.

Is there sexual disorder in 2009? This passage is relevant now. The Bible says sex represents that love is exclusive and its expression should be reserved for marriage. When we honor that, we restore the true partnership between men and women that God planned from the beginning. Marriage is a safe place for sex because in marriage both partners pledge to forsake all others, providing a place where they are naked and unashamed.

Paul says marriage is about

- giving to each other, mutuality

Twelve times Paul calls for mutuality between men and women – men, put her needs before yours; women put his needs before yours. It's like what Paul says in Galatians, "there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ (3:28). The barriers that divide and create a hierarchy between the sexes to block women from significant leadership in the church have been broken down.

Marriage is about

- not depriving one another

In marriage a good attitude is "I owe you," not "you owe me." That's an attitude of love. You don't withhold yourself, you give.

Marriage is about

- Sacredness and exclusivity

We have lost this in 2009. But, if you are young, you can avoid a mound of hurt by seeing sex in that way. Paul affirms sexuality, but confines it to marriage. We can rely on these biblical guidelines.

¹Eugene Peterson's term in *The Message*.

Paul was equally as satisfied with his celibate life. Paul teaches both marriage and celibacy are gifts. He believed others would find that the single life was satisfying too. In fact, he says the single lifestyle is simpler!

But back to the original question – how does marriage represent believing in Jesus? Marriage teaches us that there's a give and take between us and our Savior and intimacy is to be enjoyed. It's an exclusive, committed, forever relationship where we are naked and not ashamed. With Jesus, our shame is overcome, and we can be who we really are and He loves us.

But, to be a Christian you have to do more than just say you believe.

- You decide that this is a relationship you wish to sustain forever.
- To do that, it takes commitment.

Once I shared about Jesus with a homeless man in Los Angeles. We prayed together, and he accepted Christ, but he didn't want to change. He wanted to keep the same lifestyle and the same addictions. That's not commitment; that's lip service. It's not getting to know Him, withholding time, tithe, and talent, from Him, and not being exclusive – having other loves before Him. Commitment means you walk away from the old and begin the new, not perfectly, but as Paul says, pressing on toward God. Not to do so would be like getting married, but never leaving your parents; getting married and never moving in together.

If you never let Jesus touch your heart and change your life, if you never let Him move in, your faith will not change you that much. Your faith won't impact others because people want to know what it's like to be in love with God and be loved in return. Only when you give yourself wholly to loving God and accepting the love of Jesus, will it burst forth in you to others.

But it's worth it to let Him move in. Commitment changes everything. It changes the world.

It's Thanksgiving. When our nation was founded, when the colonists wrote the Declaration of Independence, those 56 men were so convinced about forming their own nation that they wrote, *"We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."*

They meant that with all their hearts. Their signatures on that document instantly made them traitors to Britain and subject to a death sentence. Yet they were determined to stand together. Most of them suffered substantial loss for signing it.

Are you glad they signed? Or do you think they were fools? Do you respect their commitment? They might have left of legacy of wealth or fame but none of them did. Their legacy is a nation.

What will your legacy be? Will it be a legacy of faith and commitment? Have you let Jesus touch your heart and move in? That's the kind of relationship that's irresistible, about which you will find yourself having many Holy Conversations. Will you make this commitment? We're in this together; this is our legacy; this is our love.

(SONG 5: “We’ve Only Just Begun,” Carpenters)

*We've only just begun . . . To live
White lace and promises, A kiss for luck and we're on our way
Before the rising sun . . . We fly
So many roads to choose . . . We start out walking and learn to run
And yes we've only just begun²*

²Paul Williams/ Roger Nichols