THE DAILY BREAD

The Mission of the Apostles



Conversations That Open Doors

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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Conversations That Open Doors

The Craft of Talking About Faith

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A Daily Bread Formation Book

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INTRODUCTION

The Door That a Word Opens

At a well in the heat of the day, tired from his journey, Jesus began the most famous evangelistic conversation in history not with a declaration but with a request: Give me a drink. From that small, disarming opening, a conversation unfolded that moved from a drink of water to living water, from the woman's own life to her deepest thirst, from her evasions to her recognition of the Messiah, until she ran back to her town and brought it out to meet him. It is a master class in the craft of a conversation that opens doors, and it reveals that the sharing of faith is far more often a matter of conversation than of proclamation, of the back-and-forth of real talk between two people than of a prepared speech delivered at someone.

This book is about that craft, the actual skill of conversations that open doors to faith. Most Christians who want to share their faith imagine the task as one of speaking, of finding the right things to say, and they freeze because they do not feel eloquent or informed enough. But the conversations that actually reach people are built far more on listening than on speaking, on good questions more than good answers, on reading the person more than reciting the content, and these are skills that any man can learn. The aim is to put in a man's hands the practical craft of spiritual conversation, so that he can talk about faith in a way that opens doors rather than closing them, and draw people, as Jesus drew the woman at the well, from the surface of their lives toward the living water they are thirsting for.

Jesus said to her, Give me a drink. — John 4:7

We will begin with listening, the foundation of every conversation that opens doors. We will take up the art of the good question, which draws people out as nothing else can. We will learn to read the person we are talking with, discerning where they actually are. We will consider how to handle objections and defensiveness without the conversation collapsing. We will study the right word at the right time, the gracious and well-timed thing that lands. We will see how to keep a door open rather than forcing it shut. And we will close with the truth that the conversation is finally God's work, and that our part is to be a faithful and skillful instrument, not to produce the result.

CHAPTER ONE

The Power of Listening

Why the Ears Open Doors

The single most important skill in a conversation that opens doors is not speaking but listening, the genuine, attentive hearing of another person that most would-be evangelists entirely neglect in their eagerness to talk. It is a hard truth for men who want to share their faith, but the ears open more doors than the mouth, and the conversation that reaches a person is built far more on listening to them than on talking at them. Learning to truly listen is therefore the foundation of the whole craft, the first skill to master and the one that makes all the others possible.

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. — Proverbs 18:13

Listening Before Speaking

Scripture bluntly calls it folly and shame to answer before one has listened, and this is precisely the error of the eager evangelist who launches into his message before he has heard the person in front of him. The man who talks before he listens answers questions no one asked, addresses an imagined person rather than the real one, and signals that he cares more about delivering his content than about the person he is delivering it to, all of which close doors rather than opening them. Listening before speaking reverses this: the man who first listens, really hears the person, understands where they actually are before he says anything, both honors the person and earns the right to be heard, and can then speak to the real person rather than a stereotype. This is not merely good manners but the foundation of effective conversation, for the word that opens a door is the word spoken to a person actually heard, and the man who speaks before listening is almost guaranteed to miss. Listening before speaking, hearing the person fully before offering anything, is the first discipline of a conversation that opens doors, reversing the eager evangelist's folly of answering before he has heard and laying the foundation on which every effective word is built.

Listening Earns Trust

Genuine listening does something no amount of talking can do: it earns the trust and openness of the other person, who feels heard and valued and therefore becomes willing to hear in return. People can tell when they are genuinely being listened to, and the experience of being truly heard, which is increasingly rare, opens a person's heart and disposes them to receive what the listener eventually offers, for we are willing to hear those who have first heard us. The man who listens genuinely communicates that he cares about the person, not merely about converting them, and this experienced care is what opens the door; the man who only talks, by contrast, communicates that he cares about his message more than the person, and this closes it. Listening therefore earns the

trust and openness without which no conversation about faith can succeed, creating the relational conditions in which the deeper things can be shared and received. Listening earns trust, opening the person's heart through the rare experience of being genuinely heard, and the man who listens well earns the openness and trust that make a person willing, in turn, to hear what he has to share, which no amount of talking could ever win.

Listening Reveals the Real Need

Listening also reveals the real person and the real need, the actual questions, struggles, and longings that lie beneath the surface, so that the listener comes to understand what is truly going on with this particular person rather than guessing. Every person's relationship to faith is particular, shaped by their own history, wounds, and longings, and only genuine listening reveals what is actually there, the real obstacle keeping this person from faith, the real longing drawing them toward it, the actual question beneath their words. The man who listens deeply discovers the real need, and can then speak to it, addressing what is actually going on rather than delivering generic answers to an imagined person; the man who does not listen addresses a stereotype and misses the real person entirely. This revealing of the real need is one of the great gifts of listening, for it allows the eventual word to land where it matters, at the actual heart of this particular person's relationship to faith. Listening reveals the real need, uncovering the actual questions, struggles, and longings beneath the surface, so that the listener can eventually speak to what is truly there rather than to an imagined stereotype, and the word he offers can land at the real heart of the person's relationship to faith.

CHAPTER TWO

The Art of the Question

Drawing People Out

If listening is the foundation, the good question is the primary tool, for a well-asked question draws a person out, opens a conversation toward the depths, and engages the other person in a way that no statement can. Scripture observes that the purposes of a person's heart are like deep water, which a man of understanding draws out, and the instrument of that drawing is the question. Learning the art of the good question, the kind that opens people up and moves a conversation toward the things that matter, is among the most valuable skills in the whole craft of spiritual conversation.

The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out. — Proverbs 20:5

Questions Open, Statements Close

A fundamental principle of conversation is that questions tend to open while statements tend to close, for a question invites the other person to share and engage, while a statement, especially an assertion about faith, often invites resistance or ends the exchange. When a man makes an assertion about the faith, he presents something to be agreed with or argued against, and the other person, especially if skeptical, tends to resist or to disengage; when he asks a genuine question, he invites the other person to think, to share, to participate, opening the conversation rather than closing it. This is why the skilled evangelist relies far more on questions than on assertions, drawing the person out with questions rather than confronting them with statements, and so keeping the conversation open and engaged rather than provoking the resistance that assertions invite. The habit of asking rather than asserting, of posing questions rather than making declarations, keeps a conversation open and moving toward depth, while the habit of asserting tends to close it. Questions open and statements close, and the skilled evangelist therefore relies on questions to draw the person out and keep the conversation open, rather than on assertions that invite resistance and tend to close the exchange.

The Questions That Go Deep

Beyond merely keeping a conversation open, the right questions draw it toward the depths, inviting a person to share their real thoughts about life, meaning, and the things that matter, and so moving the conversation from the surface toward the significant. The questions that go deep are those that invite a person to reflect on and share their deeper experience, the questions about what they really think happens after death, what gives their life meaning, what they long for, what they make of the big questions, asked with genuine interest rather than as a trap. Such questions, asked sincerely, invite a person to open up about the deepest matters, often matters they rarely get to discuss, and many people are glad of the rare chance to think and talk about what truly matters, so that a good deep question can open a rich conversation. The art lies in asking these deep questions naturally, as the genuine interest of one person in another, rather than as a contrived evangelistic technique, so that the person feels invited rather than interrogated. The questions that go deep, inviting a person to share their real thoughts about life, meaning, and the ultimate matters, move a conversation from the surface toward the significant, and the skilled evangelist learns to ask them naturally, opening rich conversations about what truly matters with people glad of the rare chance to discuss it.

Questions That Make Them Think

Some questions do more than draw a person out; they gently make the person think, raising a consideration they had not weighed, opening a crack in a settled position, prompting a reconsideration, all without the confrontation that an assertion would provoke. A well-crafted question can accomplish what no argument can, leading a person to question their own assumptions, to notice a tension in their position, to consider something new, precisely because the person reaches the thought themselves rather than having it forced on them. The skilled evangelist learns to ask such questions, the gentle question that opens a crack, that invites the person to reconsider, that raises a consideration they had not weighed, trusting that a thought a person reaches himself goes deeper than one he is argued into. This use of questions to prompt reflection, to open cracks in settled positions, is a subtle and powerful tool, far more effective than direct assertion at moving a person's thinking, for it respects their freedom and lets them reach the conclusion themselves. Questions that make them think, gently raising considerations and opening cracks in settled positions, accomplish what argument cannot, leading a person to reconsider their own assumptions and reach new thoughts themselves, and the skilled evangelist learns to ask them as a subtle and powerful means of moving a person's thinking without the confrontation that provokes resistance.

CHAPTER THREE

Reading the Person

Meeting People Where They Are

A conversation that opens doors is tailored to the actual person, and so a central skill is reading the person one is talking with, discerning where they really are so that one can meet them there rather than delivering a one-size-fits-all message. Jesus, walking with the discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus, did not begin by correcting them but asked what they were discussing and listened to their disappointment, meeting them exactly where they were before leading them further. Learning to read the person, to discern their actual spiritual condition and starting point, allows a man to meet each person where they are and to tailor the conversation to the real individual before him.

And he said to them, What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? — Luke 24:17

Everyone Is at a Different Place

The first thing to grasp is that every person is at a different place in their relationship to faith, and that an effective conversation must meet each one where they actually are

rather than treating all alike. One person is a hostile skeptic, another a wounded former believer, another a searching agnostic, another a nominal Christian, another someone who has simply never thought about it, and each of these requires a different approach, a different starting point, a different conversation. The man who delivers the same message to everyone, ignoring where each person actually is, will reach few, for he addresses a generic audience rather than the real individual; the man who discerns where each person is and meets them there speaks to the real person and has a far better chance of reaching them. Recognizing that everyone is at a different place, and that the conversation must be tailored to each person's actual starting point, is the foundation of reading the person, for only the man who knows that people differ will bother to discern where each one actually is. Everyone is at a different place in their relationship to faith, and an effective conversation meets each person where they actually are rather than treating all alike, so that the skilled evangelist discerns each person's real starting point and tailors the conversation to the individual before him.

Discerning Where They Are

Reading the person means actively discerning, through listening and gentle questions, where a person actually stands, what their real relationship to faith is, what lies beneath their words, so that one can respond to the real person rather than a guess. This discernment is the fruit of the listening and questioning already described, applied to understanding the person's actual spiritual condition: Are they hostile or open? Wounded or merely indifferent? Searching or settled? What is their real objection or their real longing? The skilled evangelist attends to these questions, reading the person through what they say and how they say it, discerning their actual starting point and condition rather than assuming or projecting. This reading allows a man to respond to the real person, to meet them where they actually are, to address their actual condition rather than an imagined one, which is essential to a conversation that opens doors. Discerning where they are, actively reading the person's actual relationship to faith through listening and gentle questioning, allows the evangelist to respond to the real individual rather than a guess, meeting the person where they truly are and tailoring the conversation to their actual spiritual condition and starting point.

Meeting Them There

Having discerned where a person is, the skilled evangelist meets them there, beginning from their actual starting point and leading gently from there, rather than ignoring where they are and starting from where he wishes they were. Jesus met the Emmaus disciples in their disappointment before leading them to understanding, and the skilled evangelist likewise begins from the person's actual condition, the skeptic's doubt, the wounded

person's hurt, the searcher's question, meeting them in their real situation and leading gently from there toward faith. This meeting people where they are, rather than demanding they first come to where one wishes them to be, is essential to a conversation that opens doors, for a person can only be led forward from where they actually are, not from where one imagines them to be. The evangelist who meets a person in their real condition, beginning from their actual starting point and leading gently forward, opens a door that the evangelist who ignores where the person is and starts from his own wished-for point will never open. Meeting them there, beginning from the person's actual starting point and leading gently forward, is how the skilled evangelist tailors the conversation to the real person, meeting each one in their actual condition as Jesus met the Emmaus disciples in their disappointment, and leading them forward from where they truly are.

CHAPTER FOUR

When It Gets Difficult

Handling Objections and Defensiveness

Conversations about faith often turn difficult, encountering objections, hostility, or defensiveness, and how a man handles these difficult moments largely determines whether the door stays open or slams shut. The untrained evangelist, meeting an objection or a flash of hostility, tends to respond in ways that escalate and close the conversation, while the skilled one knows how to handle difficulty in a way that keeps the door open. Learning to handle objections and defensiveness gracefully, so that a difficult moment does not end the conversation, is an essential skill, for the conversations that matter most are often the ones that get hard.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. — Proverbs 15:1

The Soft Answer

The foundational principle for difficult moments is the soft answer, the gentle, non-defensive, non-escalating response that, as Scripture says, turns away wrath, in contrast to the harsh word that stirs up anger and closes the conversation. When a conversation turns hostile or an objection is thrown down with heat, the natural response is to meet force with force, to answer the sharp word with a sharp word, but this escalates the conflict and slams the door; the soft answer does the opposite, responding to heat with calm, to hostility with gentleness, and so defusing the tension and keeping the conversation open. This soft answer is not weakness or capitulation but a deliberate

refusal to escalate, a calm and gentle response that absorbs the other person's heat without returning it, and it is remarkably effective at turning away wrath and keeping a difficult conversation from collapsing. The skilled evangelist therefore cultivates the soft answer, the habit of responding to difficulty with calm gentleness rather than defensive heat, knowing that the soft answer turns away wrath while the harsh word stirs up anger and closes the door. The soft answer, the gentle and non-escalating response to difficulty, turns away wrath and keeps a hard conversation open, and the skilled evangelist cultivates it as his fundamental response to objections and hostility, refusing to meet heat with heat and so keeping the door from slamming shut.

Objections as Openings

The skilled evangelist learns to treat objections not as attacks to be repelled but as openings to be explored, for an objection often reveals a genuine question, wound, or obstacle beneath it, and exploring that beneath rather than merely rebutting the surface can open the conversation further. When a person raises an objection to the faith, the untrained response is to argue against the objection, but the skilled evangelist is curious about what lies beneath it, often a real question, a past hurt, a genuine difficulty, which, if explored with interest rather than merely rebutted, opens the conversation to the deeper matter. Rather than treating an objection as an attack to win against, the skilled evangelist treats it as an opening, asking about it, exploring what lies beneath it, taking it seriously, and so turning a moment of conflict into an opportunity for deeper conversation. This reframing of objections as openings rather than attacks transforms the difficult moments of a conversation from occasions of conflict into opportunities for depth, and it keeps the door open where mere rebuttal would close it. Objections as openings, explored with curiosity rather than merely rebutted, reveal the genuine questions and wounds beneath them and turn moments of conflict into opportunities for deeper conversation, and the skilled evangelist learns to treat objections not as attacks to repel but as doors to explore.

You Don't Have to Win

A liberating principle for difficult conversations is that one does not have to win, that the goal is never to defeat the other person but to keep the door open, and that the willingness to not win is often what keeps the conversation alive. The instinct in a difficult conversation is to win, to have the last word, to defeat the objection and prevail, but this instinct closes doors, for a person defeated in argument is hardened rather than converted, and the drive to win sacrifices the relationship for the sake of a hollow victory. The skilled evangelist is freed from the need to win, content to leave points unmade, arguments unwon, last words unspoken, for the sake of keeping the door open and the

person drawn rather than defeated. This willingness to not win is often precisely what keeps a difficult conversation alive, for the person who is not being defeated remains open, while the person being beaten in argument closes. You do not have to win, and the skilled evangelist, freed from the need to prevail, keeps the door open by his willingness to leave arguments unwon and last words unspoken, caring more about keeping the person drawn than about winning the exchange, for the drive to win closes doors while the willingness to not win keeps them open.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Right Word at the Right Time

What to Say and When to Say It

There comes, in a conversation that opens doors, a moment for the right word, the well-chosen and well-timed thing that lands and moves the person, and the skilled evangelist learns both what to say and when to say it. Scripture compares a word fitly spoken to apples of gold in settings of silver, prizing the rightly chosen and rightly timed word, and much of the craft of conversation lies in this fitness, saying the right thing at the right moment rather than the wrong thing or the right thing at the wrong time. Understanding what makes a word fit, and how to discern the right moment for it, equips a man to speak words that land and open doors.

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. — Proverbs 25:11

The Timing of the Word

Much of the fitness of a word lies in its timing, in being spoken at the right moment, when the person is ready to hear it, rather than too soon, when they are not, so that the discernment of timing is central to speaking words that land. A word that would land powerfully at the right moment falls flat or even repels if spoken too soon, before the person is ready, before the conversation has prepared the ground, and the skilled evangelist learns to discern the ripe moment, to wait for the opening, to speak the deeper word only when the person is ready to receive it. This discernment of timing, the sense of when a person is ready to hear and when they are not, is a central skill, for the same word that opens a door at the right moment closes it at the wrong one, and much of the craft lies in patient waiting for the ripe moment rather than rushing the word. The skilled evangelist therefore attends to timing, holding the deeper word until the person is ready, speaking it when the moment is ripe rather than forcing it prematurely, for the fitness of a word depends greatly on when it is spoken. The timing of the word, speaking it at the

ripe moment when the person is ready to hear rather than prematurely, is central to speaking words that land, and the skilled evangelist learns to discern the right moment and to wait for it patiently, knowing that the same word opens a door at the right time and closes it at the wrong one.

Less Is Often More

A word fitly spoken is often a brief one, for in matters of faith less is frequently more, and the single well-chosen word or thought, left to work, often accomplishes more than a flood of words that overwhelms and repels. The eager evangelist tends to say too much, to pour out explanations and arguments, to fill every silence, but this flood often overwhelms the person and closes the door, while a single well-placed word or thought, spoken and then left to work, respects the person and often lands more deeply. The skilled evangelist learns the power of saying less, of speaking the one fitting thing and then stopping, of leaving space for the word to work rather than burying it under more words, trusting that a single good thought, well placed and left to resonate, often does more than a torrent. This restraint, this willingness to say less and leave space, is a mark of skill, for it respects the person, avoids overwhelming them, and lets the fitting word do its work. Less is often more, and the skilled evangelist learns to speak the one well-chosen word and then to stop, leaving space for it to work rather than burying it under a flood of words, trusting that a single fitting thought, well placed and left to resonate, accomplishes more than a torrent that overwhelms and closes the door.

Speaking From Your Own Experience

Among the most fitting words a man can speak is the word of his own experience, the simple testimony of what faith has meant in his own life, which is both the most natural thing to say and the hardest for the other person to dismiss. When the moment comes to say something of the faith, the most fitting and effective word is often not an argument but the personal word, the honest sharing of what the man himself has found, the peace, meaning, or hope his faith has given him, spoken simply as his own experience. This personal word is fitting because it is natural, requiring no special expertise, and powerful because it cannot be argued with, for while a person may dispute doctrines, they cannot refute another's genuine experience, honestly shared. The skilled evangelist therefore keeps his own experience ready as a fitting word, able at the right moment to share simply and honestly what his faith has meant to him, trusting that this personal testimony is both natural to speak and hard to dismiss. Speaking from your own experience, the simple honest sharing of what faith has meant in your own life, is among the most fitting words a man can speak, natural to offer and hard to dismiss, and the

skilled evangelist keeps it ready as a fitting word for the right moment, trusting the power of genuine personal testimony that no argument can refute.

CHAPTER SIX

Leaving the Door Open

The Long Game of Many Conversations

A conversation that opens doors rarely accomplishes everything at once, and one of the most important skills is leaving the door open at the end, concluding each conversation in a way that allows the next one, rather than forcing a premature conclusion that closes the door for good. People usually come to faith not through a single decisive conversation but through many conversations over time, and so the skilled evangelist plays the long game, aiming not to finish the matter in one encounter but to keep the door open for the ongoing conversation. Understanding how to leave the door open, and to play the long game of many conversations, is essential to a craft whose fruit usually comes gradually.

Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. — Proverbs 16:24

Don't Force a Conclusion

The skilled evangelist resists the temptation to force a conclusion, to push the conversation to a decision or a resolution it is not ready for, knowing that forcing a premature conclusion usually hardens the person and closes the door. There is a strong temptation, especially in a conversation that has gone well, to push for a conclusion, to press the person toward a decision, to try to close the matter, but this forcing usually backfires, pressuring a person before they are ready and provoking the resistance that closes the door. The skilled evangelist resists this temptation, content to let a conversation end without resolution, to leave the matter open, to not push for a conclusion the person is not ready to reach, trusting that the unforced conversation keeps the door open for the next one. This restraint, this refusal to force a conclusion, is essential to the long game, for the forced conclusion closes the door while the unforced ending keeps it open. Don't force a conclusion, resisting the temptation to push a conversation to a premature decision, and the skilled evangelist keeps the door open by letting conversations end unforced, trusting that the unpressured person remains open while the one pushed toward a premature conclusion hardens and closes.

Leave Them Wanting More

The best conversations end in a way that leaves the person wanting more, curious, drawn, glad of the exchange and open to continuing it, rather than exhausted, pressured, or closed, and the skilled evangelist aims at this kind of ending. A conversation that leaves a person intrigued, that has been genuinely enjoyable and thought-provoking, that has raised interesting questions without resolving them, leaves the door open and even inviting, so that the person is glad to continue the conversation another time. This is the opposite of the conversation that exhausts or pressures a person, which closes the door and makes them avoid the subject in future; the skilled evangelist aims to leave people wanting more, drawn and curious rather than drained and defensive. Gracious, enjoyable, thought-provoking conversation, like the honeycomb Scripture praises, leaves a sweetness that draws a person back, and the skilled evangelist aims to leave this sweetness rather than the bitterness of a conversation that pressured or exhausted. Leave them wanting more, ending conversations in a way that leaves the person intrigued and drawn rather than exhausted and pressured, and the skilled evangelist keeps the door not only open but inviting, leaving the sweetness that draws a person back for the next conversation.

The Fruit of Many Conversations

Finally, the skilled evangelist understands that a person usually comes to faith through the cumulative effect of many conversations over time, not through a single decisive encounter, and so he values each conversation as one contribution to a long process rather than demanding that any one of them accomplish everything. Rarely does a person come to faith through one conversation; far more often faith comes through the accumulation of many conversations over months or years, each one contributing something, planting a seed, opening a crack, drawing the person a little further, until at last, often through someone else entirely, the person comes to faith. This understanding frees the evangelist from the pressure of making any single conversation decisive, letting him value each one as a contribution to a long process, content to do his part in a conversation and leave the rest to the many conversations that will follow. The fruit of many conversations is usually how a person actually comes to faith, and the skilled evangelist plays this long game, valuing each conversation as one part of a cumulative process rather than demanding that it accomplish everything. The fruit of many conversations, the cumulative effect of many exchanges over time, is usually how a person comes to faith, and the skilled evangelist plays this long game, valuing each conversation as one contribution to a long process and freed from the pressure of making any single one decisive.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Let the Spirit Carry It

The Conversation That Is Finally God's

For all the craft a man can learn, a conversation that truly opens a door to faith is finally God's work, not the evangelist's, and the deepest skill of all is to be a faithful and available instrument while leaving the real work to the Holy Spirit. The woman at the well was reached not merely by Jesus's conversational skill but by the grace that worked through it, and every conversation that bears fruit does so because God is at work in it. Understanding that the conversation is finally God's, and that our part is to be a faithful instrument rather than to produce the result, both frees the evangelist and keeps his craft in its proper place.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. — 1 Corinthians 3:7

You Are an Instrument, Not the Cause

The liberating truth at the foundation of all spiritual conversation is that the evangelist is an instrument, not the cause, that it is God who opens hearts and gives faith, while the evangelist's conversation is merely an instrument God may use. No conversation, however skillful, can itself produce faith, for faith is a gift of God's grace given to a free heart, and the evangelist's part is to be a skillful and faithful instrument that God may use, not to accomplish the conversion himself. This recognition frees the evangelist from an impossible burden, the burden of producing a result that is not finally in his power, and lets him do what he actually can, which is to converse skillfully and faithfully and leave the result to God. The skilled evangelist therefore holds his craft humbly, as an instrument God may use rather than a technique that produces conversions, knowing that he plants or waters while God alone gives the growth. You are an instrument, not the cause, and the evangelist's craft, however skillful, is merely an instrument God may use to open a heart that only his grace can open, which frees the evangelist from the impossible burden of producing a result beyond his power and lets him converse faithfully while leaving the growth to God.

Pray Your Way Through

Because the conversation is finally God's work, the skilled evangelist prays his way through it, asking the Holy Spirit for guidance, for the right words, for the opening of the other person's heart, relying on grace rather than on his own skill alone. Prayer is not

separate from the craft of conversation but woven through it, the evangelist silently asking God's help as he listens, questions, and speaks, relying on the Spirit to guide the conversation and to do the work that his own skill cannot. This praying through the conversation keeps the evangelist dependent on God rather than on his own technique, opens him to the Spirit's guidance in the moment, and invokes the grace that alone can open the other person's heart. The skilled evangelist therefore prays his way through every spiritual conversation, relying on the Holy Spirit for guidance and grace, knowing that the conversation is finally God's work and that his own skill must be joined to prayer and grace to bear fruit. Pray your way through, asking the Spirit's guidance and grace throughout the conversation, and the skilled evangelist joins his craft to dependence on God, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide the conversation and to open the heart, knowing that the real work is God's and that his own skill must be joined to prayer to bear fruit.

Freed to Love, Not to Produce

Finally, the recognition that the conversation is God's work frees the evangelist from the pressure of producing conversions and leaves him simply to love the person and converse faithfully, which is both the happiest way to evangelize and the most effective. When a man no longer carries the burden of producing a result, when he has genuinely left the outcome to God, he is freed from the anxious pressure that makes evangelism grasping and is left simply to love the person in front of him and to converse honestly and skillfully, trusting God with the rest. This freedom is itself attractive, for people sense the difference between the evangelist who is working them toward a conversion he needs to produce and the one who simply loves them and shares his faith with no anxious agenda, and they are drawn to the latter. So the evangelist, freed to love rather than to produce, both evangelizes more happily and reaches people more effectively, loving them genuinely and conversing faithfully while leaving the fruit to God. Freed to love, not to produce, the evangelist who has left the outcome to God is released from anxious pressure to simply love the person and converse faithfully, which is both the happiest and the most effective way to evangelize, drawing people through genuine love rather than the grasping agenda of one who must produce a result, and trusting the fruit to the God whose work the conversation finally is.

CONCLUSION

Open the Door, and Let Him In

At a well, with a tired request for a drink, Jesus opened a conversation that opened a soul, and this book has been about that craft, the practical skill of conversations that

open doors to faith. We have seen that listening is the foundation; that the good question draws people out; that reading the person lets us meet them where they are; that difficult moments are handled by the soft answer and the willingness not to win; that the right word at the right time lands and moves; that leaving the door open serves the long game of many conversations; and that the conversation is finally God's work, freeing us to love rather than to produce.

None of this requires eloquence, expertise, or a special gift, for the craft of conversation is built far more on listening, questioning, and loving than on speaking well, and these are skills any man can learn and grow in. The man who has freed himself from the notion that sharing his faith means delivering a speech, and has taken up instead the humble craft of conversation, finds that he can talk about faith naturally and effectively in the ordinary course of his life, opening doors that no amount of eloquence could open.

So learn the craft, and practice it. Listen more than you speak; ask good questions that draw people out and make them think; read the person and meet them where they are; handle difficulty with the soft answer and the freedom not to win; speak the right word at the right time, and often less rather than more; leave every door open for the next conversation; and through it all, pray, relying on the Spirit and leaving the fruit to God. Do this, and your ordinary conversations will become, like the conversation at the well, doors through which people are drawn toward the living water they are thirsting for, and you will have learned the quiet art of opening the door and letting him in.

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Conversations That Open Doors: The Craft of Talking About Faith is part of The Daily Bread Library.