

SHARING *Your Faith*

Part III

Crunch Time

CREATING CONNECTIONS *that Lead to Christ*

If you're a *Resonate* regular, you've been waiting with bated breath for Part 3 of the series. Wait no longer! Take the two dog-eared, coffee-stained past editions from your bookshelf or click your Bookmarks tab and recap. First, initiate and create connections with people. Next, make those connections meaningful, moving beyond chitchat to deep sharing. Finally (unless you tell us you want more⁴ and the mini-series may become a whole season!), Susan Campbell looks at what happens when your friends are open to knowing Jesus.

You've been doing the relationship gig for a while. You have a few buddies who trust you, know how you like your coffee, arrive wearing trackies to watch 'The Voice' and see themselves out as the credits roll. They know you're a follower of Jesus and they're cool with that. You'd love to see them come to faith and have been praying for God to draw them closer to Himself.

So, what next?... Stealthily slide some Bible verses into their back pocket when they reach for the Tim-Tams? Casually ask if they want to give their life to Jesus in an ad break? Ask them to critique your testimony?

Ah, hmm, perhaps we should get some tips from the Global Interaction cross-cultural workers, seeing that sharing faith is one of their favourite things to do.

Dema and his teammates in Thailand had been building relationships with people for a while. They were at a point where a good level trust was established and friendship was formed with a few people. They decided it would be appropriate to invite their friends to join together to discuss the Bible. They prayed a lot, chose a date and plucked up the courage. They believed their relationships were robust enough for the Ethnic Thai people to say 'no' yet the friendships to still continue. But they said yes!

The first discussion group in Dema's village was on in April 2013 and it's been going ever since. Every Friday, in someone's home, a group of people are sitting on the floor with their thongs at the door, eating stir fry and rice, drinking tea and Coke, discussing Bible stories and sharing experiences of Jesus.

4. Go on, you know you want to! Text 'more Resonate!' 0402 464 154 or email resonate@globalinteraction.org.au

Tobias, a team member in Mozambique says,

“For the Yao people, the stories of Jesus are strong concepts that they can grasp. Hearing how Jesus calmed the storm or healed a man from blindness is mind blowing. So, I incorporate stories into conversation. A lot of people are hungry for more and will ask questions. Some people show more than a cursory interest in Jesus.

So, back to your buddies. Do you dare consider what getting to know Jesus might look like for them? Ready? First, consider one of your friends. Name them. Think about what you know of their lives, personality, communication style, struggles and hopes.

Next, consider what it is about Jesus that may resonate with them. What might they love about Him? What might inspire them? Which Bible stories, Psalms or passages might be encouraging to them? Where might there be a point of connection?

Are you still with me?

Now, imagine which situations might be best for them to explore this stuff, remembering that the most effective evangelism strategies will involve you, their friend, communicating in genuine ways. (Your friends won't feel particularly valued if you outsource when it comes to the crunch.)

Can stories be easily woven into conversation, like Tobias' in Mozambique?

Could you invite them to your home with a couple of friends to explore the Bible together, like Dema's community in Thailand?

If they communicate more openly through social media, perhaps initiate deeper conversations through Facebook Messenger?

Google 'Alpha' or 'Intro to Christianity' courses in your area or ask your church to host one and go along with them.

If they are avid readers, buy them a great book, perhaps with your thoughts and ideas on sticky notes throughout?

Or invite them to read some of your writing, poems, drawings or songs that express your faith...

... the opportunities are endless!

YOU'RE BUZZING WITH EXCITEMENT ABOUT HOW GOD IS MOVING AND YOU ARE JUMPING OUT OF YOUR SKIN TO TELL THEM EVERYTHING ABOUT BEING A CHRISTIAN.

Choose one. Go on...

Now, imagine that in a few months' time, they are beginning to know Jesus. You're buzzing with excitement about how God is moving and you are jumping out of your skin to tell them everything about being a Christian. You pull out a box of your dusty prayer journals for them to scour through. Send them Facebook invites to every Christian event you can find (don't forget the camps). Bombard them with text messages of Bible verses, every day. Sign them up for a Koorong membership, subscribe them to Christian podcasts. And lend them your treasured (slightly stinky) T-shirt you won at church youth camp 10 years ago for reciting the memory verse backwards with a mouth full of Weetbix!

Whoa there, hold on. There's a slight (or gigantic) difference between orienting them to Jesus and swallowing them up with the stuff that surrounds Him.

Let's go back to our cross-cultural workers - what do they do when people come to faith?

Dema in Thailand explains,

“Some people in our Friday group have come to faith, others have been baptised in the local river, new people have joined and others have left. We worship together in a natural, culturally relevant Thai way, complete with chanting, lots of conversation and Thai stories. We don't push people to implement certain ways of life but rather help them along the way to understand Jesus better and follow Him in their daily lives, allowing the Holy Spirit to prompt and transform. Once people feel a sense of belonging, they share their suggestions of how to worship God. They come up with ideas that help them to develop their own culturally distinctive ways of following Jesus.

Over in Mozambique, Tobias says,

“A Yao friend looks to me a lot for help when it comes to life issues. The reality is that I can't make decisions for him, even if I wanted to so I engage him in what the Bible says and encourage him to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance to work it out. I might have an opinion on what he should do but often I don't need to say it before he figures it out for himself. I want to focus on what the Bible says about a situation, not on sprouting propositions or instructions on how they should behave or what they should think. I would almost always miss something in the cultural nuance and end up giving bad advice. Better to encourage prayer and let God speak.

Ah, now there's some wise advice. These guys admit they are still learning but they seem to be on the right track. Beats the verse-in-the-pocket stealth operation.

What would it take for us to adopt the same posture as these cross-cultural workers?

First, it takes trust that the Holy Spirit will always be working in people's lives (with or without us).

Second, it takes humility to sit back, shut up and let go of our preconceived ideas of what someone should and shouldn't do.

Third, it takes discernment to help them navigate the Scriptures, answer their questions and consider what resources from Koorong's bulging shelves and the internet's heavy cloud are actually helpful, and what can be left aside, for now (or forever!).

And finally, it takes a heart that is grateful and humble, giving glory to God for his continuing work of bringing people to Himself.