

- We are in week 4 of a new series called “Spiritual Development Practices”
 - These are practices that will make us better at life. Not in some vague, churchy kind of way. They are practices that change the day-to-day form of our lives for the better.
 - We call them practices because we are always growing in them. We never arrive.
 - We are practicing loving God. When we love God increasingly it shapes how we see our life. It helps us lean into our identity as loved and valued people. We looked at how prayer and Scripture are ways to grow in that.
 - We looked last week at the practice of loving each other. When we practice doing this well in line with what Jesus modeled and commanded, it leads to more life giving and fulfilling relationships. One of the ways to practice loving each other is to see conflict as an opportunity.
 - Today we are going to look at how we practice loving the world. By that I mean those around us that do not know Jesus. When we do these practices well, it allows us to participate in God’s mission, to bring about his kingdom, and to help us live for something bigger than ourselves in a way that brings great satisfaction.
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- I want to introduce a habit or practice that I would love to see everyone in our church engaging in on a regular basis.
 - The practice of having spiritual conversations. Specifically, having a spiritual conversation with someone who doesn’t know God or follow him.
 - Now, this begs two questions.
 - 1) Why is it important?
 - I don’t remember any commandment to do this. Is it something we are all supposed to do? What if I don’t know enough? Isn’t that why we pay a pastor? I will do this more when I know more.
 - 2) What is a spiritual conversation?
 - How do we do it? What does that look like? What image does this conjure up in your head?
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- There are different people in this room.
 - Some of you are really gifted at this. People are drawn to you. It doesn’t matter if you are at Wawa, at work, talking to a neighbor, conversations just seem to go down a spiritual path easily.
 - For others of you, this is terrifying. I wouldn’t know what to say. I’m not even sure who I would say something to. I just want to invite them to church and let someone else tell them the important stuff. What if I get it wrong? What if I look stupid?
 - What would I say? We’re just talking about football. How do I bring God into that?
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- My goal today is to encourage you to see your world around you as ripe for opportunities for these kinds of conversations and give you some ideas so that no matter what you do or what you are like, you can be confident in making this a regular practice in your life.
 - You, and only you, are in the exact position you are in, to impact the people in your life. You are the person that God has put where he has put you in order to have these spiritual conversations.
 - **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE.**
 - Your unique location, personality, gifts, viewpoints and style allows you to make a difference where you are in a way that no one else can.
 - Let’s break down these two questions in turn.

I. Are we all supposed to have spiritual conversations?

- Consider the situation. You have followed Jesus for three years. You became convinced that he is the Messiah. You have watched him interact with people, do amazing miracles and you believe he is going to bring his kingdom on earth.
- Then everything you believed got turned upside down. Jesus died. You are a group of followers had run away. One of your group who you thought you knew had betrayed Jesus to death and then had committed suicide.
- You saw it all. Your hopes were dashed. Your emotions were at their lowest. You were in despair. But then some strange things happen. You heard some women say they had seen Jesus. You couldn't believe it but then you saw it yourself. You spoke with him.
- Your emotions soared again even though part of you couldn't believe that this was even real. You were so mixed up and exhausted and jumbled. Hoping but unsure. Excited but doubting. Totally unsure as to what's next. Then Jesus tells you to meet him at a particular place at a particular time.

Matthew 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- Then he leaves. That's it. What am I supposed to do with that? How do we reach all nations. There are so few of us. We have no standing. The authorities hate us. We need more instructions Jesus.
- And so you do the only thing you know to do – you do what Jesus did. You live your life. You love those around you. You meet, you pray, you work, you worship, you deal with your family and you pray that God will bring his kingdom.
- As you do these things opportunities pop up to simply talk about why your life is different and you share what you know.
- And the entire world begins to change!
- Go and make disciples . . . ! You might say it is the predominant command Jesus gave us. It is our marching orders.
- A helpful way to view discipleship is to see it as a series of spiritual conversations within the context of an ongoing relationship.
- What is God up to in your neighborhood, workplace, local gym, dive bar, music venue, sports complex, park, and coffee shop? And how do you fit?
- Remember, **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE.**

II. What is a spiritual conversation?

- Is it telling people how to know Jesus? Is it some deep conversation about things that you are not sure you even know? We complicate it way too much.
- A spiritual conversation = **A conversation that touches on the deepest needs of a person's heart.**
- It is no more complicated than this. Like with some many things, Jesus was a master of doing this. His entire life seemed to be a record of spiritual conversations.
- A particular good example is when Jesus meets a woman when he was traveling and taking a break at the water fountain.

John 4:3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. 4 Now he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had

given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. 7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." 11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." 16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

- The conversation goes on for a while longer and the end result is that this lady is so enamored with the message of Jesus that she gets her friends and people of the town to come to see Jesus and many decide to follow him.
- It is so startling that the disciples return and are totally floored by what is happening.
- All Jesus did was meet this woman in the course of his daily life, and engaged her in a conversation that changed her life and the lives of those around her.
- This can be intimidating. After all, this is Jesus. I can't do this. And I'm not God by the way. But there is good news.
- First, most people have no issues talking about the things that matter to them. They want to talk about spiritual things, even if it is simply to espouse their beliefs for or against a particular view of God or faith.
- Second, **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE** and God did that intentionally, so you have everything you need to have these kind of conversations.
- How do we practice doing this? How do we do it even better than we are doing it now?

III. Having spiritual conversations.

- These are some things I see in Jesus example (thanks to Gino from a booklet he wrote on this topic)

A. Be Present.

- The only reason that this conversation that Jesus had ever happened was because he engaged with this woman. He didn't have to. In fact, social convention dictated he probably shouldn't.
- It might seem obvious, but in order to have spiritual conversations with people that don't know Jesus, we actually have to engage with people who don't know Jesus.
- Intentionally show up in someone's life. It is way to easy to go through life with your head down, on a mission, staying where you are comfortable. Being present is simply being aware of and intentionally engaging with people.
- We dare not see people as projects to "get fixed." **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE** for the purpose of loving them.
- Pull yourself out of your own world and ask Jesus to give you eyes to see and then be committed to be present with others. We never get to know others by accident.

- Who do you love and desire to see know Jesus? How might you be able to be present in their lives? What would it look like if you set aside your conversational agenda and met them where they are relationally?
- Being present is the first step. Be engaged.

B. Listen first.

- Jesus noted this woman coming to the well. He engaged by asking her for a drink. She immediately responded and Jesus listened to what she said. He did not start with what he knew. He already knew she had multiple failed relationships. He knew more but he engaged he in conversation and listened.
- When you listen to people, really listen, we learn their starting point. We see where they are, and what their beliefs and values are. We see what those deepest desires are.
- Being told you're a sinner and need a savior isn't important if you don't actually believe you need rescue!
- Your best tool to listen is to ask questions. Dig deeper. Be curious. Most people love to talk about themselves and want to share their struggles and frustrations and joys. It's why people will share their lives with bartenders, cashiers, or the person next to them on the airplane.
- **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE** and if you listen well, you might be the only person who has ever been present and interested enough to really hear what that person is saying.

C. Share yourself.

- Jesus responded to this woman's statement by telling her that she could have living water, the kind that satisfied her deepest longing. He connected it to who he was. "If you knew who was asking you, it would change your entire question."
- This is why listening is so important.
- Once someone has shared an aspect of their story with you, then you have the opportunity not to preach at them, but instead to share a part of your story that connects with their story.
- Your story will never be exactly like theirs, but you can share what God has shown and taught you in light of the topic on the table. This is where we share your common brokenness and shared need, and you can then introduce Jesus in a way that is meaningful.
- **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE** and that means your story will connect with their story.

D. Invite

- Once the woman at the well heard the good news from Jesus, he invited her into this new life. He invited her to experience something greater.
- This is often where we get tripped up. We are worried that if we invite people into something more, they might mess up the relationship. We fear rejection and hostility.
- Hear me, this is not necessarily inviting someone to come to church or asking Jesus into their life.
- "Within the North American church, evangelism is too often reduced to inviting someone to a church service in hopes that the preacher's message that day is engaging, states all the right ideas, and in the end leads to your friend walking an aisle, filling out a response card, or raising their hand. . . . If we are going to reach people where they are, we have to be bold enough to speak the gospel where they are and not wait on the 'professional' to do what every believer has been explicitly called to do." (Dustin Willis, Life on Mission)
- We are simply inviting them to go a little further. It might be simply an invitation to think on something more deeply. "Have you ever considered . . ." It might be speaking into their life

“I’m praying for you, can I pray right now?” It might be challenging them to something they haven’t before. “Why don’t you ask God for help?” It could be anything.

- You ask, how will I know? Don’t overthink it. Listen, share, invite. Don’t berate yourself. Don’t go home and get angry about what you “should have said.”
- Let me encourage you and me in this.
- While this all happened in one conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well, and this is certainly possible, for most of us this whole spiritual conversation is an ebb and flow. We build relationship. We have multiple conversations. We listen and share and listen and share. We invite and then go back to listening.
- **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE.** That means you can have these conversations where you are. You can be used in the exact situation you are in. With your level of experience and knowledge.
- You don’t have to “produce” anything. The Holy Spirit produces. We are responsible not for the outcome but for engaging in the practice of spiritual conversations.
- To be someone who makes disciples, simply look at every interaction as an opportunity to be present, to be engaged and connect with people.
- Make a practice of listening, of asking questions.
- Take the step of sharing your own life in light of how Jesus has helped you.
- Then, as God leads, invite them into their next step.
- If every person in our church have one spiritual conversation per month, do you realize that over the course of one year, at a minimum, there would be 1,500 conversations that point people towards hope in Jesus.
- **YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO IS WHERE YOU ARE.** I am the only person who is where I am.
- What an opportunity! What a responsibility. Let’s take it seriously. And when you have this conversations, whether they are small or large, tell someone about it. So that we might all learn and be encouraged together.