

Gospel bites

answering the unbelieving enquirer

1. Introduction – our role in God's mission

2. 'Speaking' as gospel promotion

i)

ii)

Colossians 4:6	1 Peter 3:15
“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer (Greek <i>apokrinomai</i>) everyone.”	“Always be prepared to give an answer (Greek <i>apologia</i>) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

3. The 'Gospel Bites' method¹

A 'gospel bite' is a brief retelling of an episode from Jesus' life (a conversation, a miracle, etc.) that bears directly upon a question, comment or criticism raised by an unbeliever.

There are three parts to this method:

- i) **A topic of conversation:** A 'gospel bite' begins in response to a question or comment that *relates to Christianity*. Trying to move from a question about tax reform to a story about Jesus meeting a tax collector might be pushing the model too far. If you are on the look out, however, (which is really the first step) you might be surprised how often comments and queries at work, home, university, etc., 'flirt' with spiritual ideas.

¹ The following section is taken from *The Great Giveaway*.

- ii) **A story about Jesus:** The second part of a 'gospel bite' involves retelling an episode from the Gospels. In doing this, you are not attempting an exposition of the text or a full theological commentary. You are simply recounting one of the events or conversations from Jesus' life. You need do so only in the same way you might relate to a friend a conversation you had with someone, or a joke you heard, or a TV show you watched or a life-experience from the past. Thus, in retelling the Jesus-episode you need not include every element of the story, just those points which are pertinent to the situation. The rule is simple: *know the stories well; tell them freely.*
- iii) **A life application:** Each 'gospel bite' ends with a brief attempt to apply the story of Jesus to your hearer's particular situation. This should not be a 'pressuring' comment, but something that throws the ball back into their court. It may be as simple as: "Have you ever looked into the life of Christ?"; "What's your impression of Jesus?"; "Do you have your own kind of faith?"

NB: The 'gospel bite' method is not appropriate for every situation. Not every spiritual question relates naturally to the life of Jesus. For instance, the issue of whether science discredits religion will need to be answered in its own right without forcing the conversation around to Jesus.

4. Exercise (turn over).

Exercise

(taken from *The Great Giveaway*)

- 1) In small groups (2-4), choose one of the conversation starters (listed below) and its relevant gospel story. Read through the passage carefully, discussing its central ideas;
- 2) Discuss how you would relate the story to the person whose comment you selected;
- 3) Choose 2 people to have a conversation in which the topic/question is raised and the story of Jesus retold as way of challenging the interested (not antagonistic) questioner. The rest of the group should help out. If you feel awkward with this role-play method, simply discuss together how you would proceed.
- 4) Debrief about how the conversation went and what could be done better. Then try another one.

CONVERSATION STARTER	GOSPEL STORY	HINT
<p>1) "It's great that you've got a faith, but I'm just not the religious type."</p> <p>2) "Religion just seems so exclusive. I have a more embracing and accepting outlook."</p>	<p>Matthew 8:5-13 Jesus and the centurion</p>	<p>As a Roman leader, the centurion was the archetypal 'pagan', an outsider to the faith of Israel and of Jesus. Yet Jesus' kindness to him and insistence that he will be saved illustrates why and for whom Jesus came – the religious and unreligious alike. His attitude was to embrace, not to exclude.</p>
<p>3) "I've done too many bad things to be a Christian."</p> <p>4) "Religion seems so judgmental."</p> <p>5) "I wish there were some way to wipe out the past and start afresh."</p>	<p>a) Luke 7:36-50 Jesus and the 'sinful woman'</p> <p>b) Luke 19:1-10 Jesus welcomes a tax collector</p>	<p>Clearly, these individuals were anything but 'good' people. Jesus' response to them tells us about his mission to include sinners.</p>
<p>6) "Religion is so corrupt today, I wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole."</p> <p>7) "There is such hypocrisy in the Church today."</p>	<p>John 2:12-17 Jesus' rage in the Temple</p>	<p>Jesus' rage against such greed and deceit in the name of religion resonates with how many non-Christians feel about the church. Use this to urge the questioner to investigate Jesus' life and teachings regardless of how 'religion' may have erred.</p>
<p>8) "I just can't bring myself to believe that God is willing to forgive people, just like that."</p> <p>9) "I hate the way religion says you have to follow all these rules and rituals to be a Christian."</p>	<p>Luke 23:32-46 The thief on the cross</p>	<p>This is one of the clearest examples of 'grace' in the Bible. The criminal is rescued not by works or 'religion' but by Christ's mercy.</p>
<p>10) "I might not be perfect but I'm a pretty decent person."</p> <p>11) "As long as your honest and good to people, I don't think God minds whether or not we get religious."</p>	<p>Mark 12:28-34 Two great commandments</p>	<p>Our society often defines being a 'good person' simply as being kind to other people. However, Jesus insisted this was only half the matter. It was about loving our neighbours AND God. On Jesus' definition of 'good' how many of our non-Christian friends measure up?</p>
<p>12) "There are so many religions in the world: how could you ever know which version is the right one?"</p> <p>13) "What makes you think you're right and all the other religions are wrong?"</p>	<p>John 14:8-9 Jesus as God 'in the flesh'</p>	<p>There are many religious claims in the world but only Jesus claimed to offer a personal revelation/snap-shot of God. It's worth at least starting one's investigation with this most bold of claims. Christians don't think <i>their</i> way of thinking is the right one; they just can't bring themselves to believe Jesus was lying when he said "If you've seen me you've see the Father."</p>

ACTIONS

- 1) Listen out for topics of conversation this week that have 'spiritual' significance. Write them down. Towards the end of the week work out some 'gospel bites' that would be appropriate for each topic;
- 2) Begin reading one of the Gospels with this single question in mind: how could I use these stories/episodes to answer the questions/criticisms of those who don't yet believe?