

Acknowledgments

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Evangelism Ministries

USA/Canada Office

Church of the Nazarene

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Starting Spiritual Conversations

For more information go to :

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Preparation Checklist

The following information will help you prepare to instruct this module.

- ◇ Review the material and make notes of specific areas for special emphasis.
- ◇ Check to ensure the following materials are available:
 - ◇ PowerPoint presentations
 - ◇ Participant booklet (copy as needed)
- ◇ Gather the following materials:
 - ◇ Pens and/or pencils
 - ◇ Other material you want to use
- ◇ Make copies of the following material (one for each participant):
 - ◇ Participant booklet
 - ◇ Handouts (if used with this module)
- ◇ Check the classroom for:
 - ◇ Projector
 - ◇ Sufficient number of tables and chairs for the participants
- ⇒ Arrange the room so that each church team sits around an individual table and you have ample room to move among the teams.

MODULE AT A GLANCE

The **Module at a Glance** identifies each module section, the time allotted for each section, and a brief description of the section's objectives. When you are familiar with this module, you may want to teach from this page rather than the detailed information.

Section	Time	Page	Brief Description
I. Module Introduction	5 Minutes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce module, objectives, outline
II. Lecture	25 Minutes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitator presents Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman as an example of how to introduce spiritual matters into daily conversations and help participants become more confident in doing so.
III. Small group Exercise	20 Minutes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants work in teams to discuss opportunities to start spiritual conversations.
IV. Discussion	5 Minutes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants share thoughts about the information presented and insights about how the information will assist in their leadership.
V. Action Planning/ Reporting	20 Minutes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants begin preparing for their homework assignment: personally use the spiritual conversation starters at least three times; evaluate what they felt went well and what they would do differently; plan to share this information with others in their church.
VI. Module Wrap-up	5 Minutes		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close the module with your final comments regarding the topic and answer any questions from participants.

Total Module Time 80 Minutes

I. Module Introduction

Notes

(5 Minutes)

Distribute a copy of the participant guide to each person. Encourage participants to take notes if they wish. Remind them that notes will help them share the material with others in their churches.

The purpose of this module is to:

Teach participants to start spiritual conversations and build their confidence to do so.

The objectives for this module are:

- To understand how Jesus started spiritual conversations
- To practice and become more comfortable starting spiritual conversations
- To develop an action plan for starting spiritual conversations and sharing this material with your church

Review the plan for the module so participants know what to expect.

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II. Lecture

(25 minutes)

Notes

Spiritual conversations help us **begin** relationships with unbelievers so they may begin a relationship with Jesus.

The advantages to spiritual conversations include:

- The focus is on building and sustaining relationships with spiritually receptive people.
- Conversations by nature jump from one topic to another. This allows us to take advantage of conversational possibilities in pointing unsaved people to Jesus.

Research and experience point to the need to explain the Gospel a number of times in different ways.

Conversations about spiritual things allow us to listen to people's needs and show them how God wants to work in their lives. This module will help us learn new ways to start spiritual conversations and build our confidence to do so.

Jesus sets the example for us in spiritual conversations found in the Bible. As you prepare to read John 4:4-42, set up the story by noting that the disciples were not present when this conversation took place. They had gone to get something to eat. They returned and were surprised to find Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman. How did the disciples know about His conversation in order to record it in the Gospel? He told them about it afterwards—reviewing what was said. This was His method for teaching them. Like the disciples, we can learn about starting spiritual conversations by reviewing Jesus' interactions with the Samaritan woman.

Have participants read John 4:4-42 aloud. Since this is a longer passage, you may request several volunteers to read passages, or choose a portion of the scripture to read aloud. (You may use the slides in the PowerPoint to read from, or just skip them.)

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II. Lecture Cont.

Notes

Explain the important points about spiritual conversations from this passage:

- Jesus **takes** initiative: he starts the conversation (v. 7).
- He does so even though it isn't socially acceptable. He **crosses** some boundaries set by social custom (v. 9).
- He says things that are **intriguing** (v. 10).
- His comments **stir** curiosity and invite the woman into a deeper conversation (v. 11-12).
- He makes **promises** of what the future will be like (v. 14).
- He **responds** to her openness and moves closer to the heart of the issue (v. 16-18).
- He **invites** her to change (v. 21).
- He **refuses** to be drawn into religious talk about competing religious perspectives (v. 21-24).

Consider the way that this spiritual conversation impacted Samaria. In verse 39 and following, the Bible tells us that many believed because of the woman's testimony. Testimony is the story of our personal encounter with God—what we have seen, heard and experienced.

Our testimony **builds** a bridge to God so others can hear Him for themselves. Our spiritual conversations are God's bridges to direct conversation with the unbeliever. God uses us to build bridges for Him.

Spiritual conversations require us to be flexible, to expand our base of knowledge and to be genuinely interested in others. We show our genuine interest for others in how we **listen** and respond to what they say.

II. Lecture Cont.

Careful listening and understanding what a person is saying and feeling will help us know when the time is right to discuss spiritual matters, to move forward, or when to back off. Listening helps us focus on the person's spiritual needs.

Leading to and during a spiritual conversation we are to listen with our...

Ears: Listen to spoken words.

Eyes: Observe body language that conveys how the speaker is feeling.

Heart: Listen to feelings and emotions for greater understanding.

Notes

III. Small Group Exercise

(20 Minutes)

Notes

One way to start spiritual conversations with others is to watch carefully for a natural opportunity to bring up faith, God or spiritual matters.

Ask a participant to read the following scenario aloud, and then discuss with the group how to respond to this situation.

SCENARIO:

Claudia and Ann are neighbors who often chat at the curb. Today, Claudia is trying to make light of a family problem, so she says to Ann, “My daughter’s marriage is on the rocks, so I told her to go out and spend some money. Hey, it always makes me feel better!”

Ask participants for examples of appropriate responses to this situation. Many will want to respond by talking about shopping—about how spending money is not a path to happiness or won’t solve the problems in her daughter’s marriage. **Be prepared to redirect this conversation.** The woman in this story is hurting for her daughter. The careful listener (listening with the heart) will respond to her hurt—not to the shopping. How can you use this opportunity to tell this woman God wants to help her (and her daughter) through this difficult time?

Another way to start a spiritual conversation is to ask questions and open discussions about spiritual things. Jesus starts his conversation with the Samaritan woman by asking her, “Will you give me a drink?” (v. 7). Here are some questions that start spiritual conversations. Review these with the group. These are also printed in the participant’s guide.

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III. Small Group Exercise Cont.

Notes

Questions to Start Spiritual Conversations

(From *Evangelism in Everyday Life*, p. 42)

Do you give much thought to God and spiritual things?

Tell me about your church background.

Did you go to church as a child?

How do you feel about your upbringing and your awareness of spiritual things?

How would you describe your life with God now?

When did you feel closest to God?

What were the factors or influences that brought you near to God?

What would renew that sense of closeness?

Tell me about your most memorable spiritual experience.

What do you think is a person's greatest spiritual need?

How do you think a person begins a relationship with God?

The small group exercise is an opportunity for participants to practice responding to natural opportunities to open spiritual conversations and to become familiar with questions that can be used to start spiritual conversations. **Participants will break into pairs and complete the three activities on the participant guide.**

The following notes will help you respond to participants' questions about the activities as you circulate throughout the room. Your biggest challenge will be to direct participants to focus on the person and his or her spiritual need—not so much on the words that are being said.

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III. Small Group Exercise Cont.

Notes

Text *in italics* is from the participant's guide:

1. When Jackson stops for gas at the neighborhood convenience store, he makes a point of chatting with Marco, the store manager. Since both men like to play basketball, Jackson asks Marco to join his church's ball team. Amazed at the invitation, Marco says, "But I'm not a religious guy...and wouldn't you make me listen to a sermon before each game?"

For many, the first instinct is to reassure Marco he will not be forced to listen to a sermon. This is a defensive response. What Marco is truly saying is that he is uncomfortable around spiritually-minded people. A careful listener will pick up on his uneasiness, not become defensive. When he says, "I'm not a religious guy..." we could ask—how do you identify yourself? What are some of your thoughts about God? Focus on what Marco is saying—not defending the church basketball program.

2. Sarah and Glenda have been co-workers for several years. When Sarah invites Glenda to church, Glenda's response is a variation on this theme: "Oh, Sarah, you know how busy I am. Right now my Saturdays are crammed with shuttling my kids to ball games and practices, so Sunday is the only day I have to juggle housework and grocery shopping. Ask me again in a few years when my kids are all grown up!"

A careful listener will gather from this scenario that Glenda's greatest value in her life is her kids. The invitation to attend church is not an appeal to add one more thing to a busy schedule or an offer to help an overworked mom. The question is—since kids are so important to you, how do you value their relationship with God? Isn't it more important than other activities? Because her kids are of great concern to her, this is a wonderful opportunity to open a conversation about their spiritual growth and needs.

III. Small Group Exercise Cont.

Notes

3. Read through the list of questions (below, under discussion) and discuss which would be most natural for you to ask. Discuss opportunities when these questions might be useful for starting spiritual conversations.

This exercise uses the questions for starting spiritual conversation that you reviewed while introducing this activity. Encourage participants to choose the questions they would be most comfortable asking and to discuss opportunities when these questions would be of use to them. If there is time, encourage partners to practice asking each other questions from the list. This is a great opportunity for participants to practice listening with their ears, eyes and heart.

IV. Discussion

(5 Minutes)

Ask participants to share responses to the following questions:

- What is difficult about starting spiritual conversations?
- How do you plan to overcome these difficulties?
- Which questions were easiest for you to ask? Why?
- How will you use this information in the next few weeks?

V. Action Planning/Reporting

(20 Minutes)

Notes

This section gives the participants an opportunity to discuss their plans for using this information in their churches, as well as how they will share the information with others.

The homework assignment for this module is:

1. Personally start at least three spiritual conversations.
2. Document what went well and what you will do differently next time.

As a church team, develop a strategy for sharing this information with others in your church (e.g. Sunday School class or Bible study group).

Let's take about 20 minutes to discuss how you plan to use this information, both personally and as a church. In your participant guide, you have an Action Planning Chart to document your homework assignment. In your teams, discuss and document how you will complete this assignment before we meet again. You will want to continue this discussion when you return home.

Move among the groups to answer specific questions. Listen for discussions that are not focused on developing a plan and guide them into developing a plan. Let the groups know when there are five minutes remaining and ask them to begin concluding their discussions.

VI. Module Wrap-up

(5 Minutes)

Notes

This section provides an opportunity to close the module.

- Ask participants to share their thoughts about the module.
- Remind participants to record their results and be prepared to share their progress at the next session.
- Answer any questions and provide encouragement.

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