

V. L.E.A.D. in Biblical Perspective  
*Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship*  
“Building Bridges—#1: Conversational Evangelism”  
I Corinthians 9:19–23  
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We will look at a couple of passages in this study. We are learning things about prayer as we go through this series. God’s people have not because they ask not. James 4:3a says [3] *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly...* We want to pray Biblically, engaging in Biblical prayer and I am convinced because of what He says in His Word that nothing would delight the Lord more than to answer our prayers concerning a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship.

In this study we will look at the first bridge but before I do that I want to give a qualification. This bridge is running through all of the bridges that I will be doing which conversational evangelism or Gospel conversations or conversations that are then moved with the Gospel and are able to embrace the Gospel. There will be seven bridges that we will look at in this series but this first one will deal with having conversations that can communicate the Gospel that opened up the doors to share the Gospel and that could be called Gospel conversations.

I love it when Jesus says in Mark 1:17, [17] *And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”* There are times as we seek to be fishers of men that the Gospel net goes out and the Lord brings in a large catch. In Acts 2 we see that 3,000 are brought in and that’s just counting the men. A couple of chapters later 5,000 are brought in and that’s just counting the men. So the Lord loves those big catches and does them but don’t forget how Acts 2 ends. Acts 2:47b says [47b] *And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* Everybody evangelizing everyone everywhere every day and the Lord adding day by day through all of His people so you not only cast a big net when you go fishing and bring in a big catch but you can also throw in a line and pull them in fish by fish. This is personal evangelism as well as proclamation evangelism.

It is that lifestyle we are looking at in this series so let’s start by looking at some passages of Scripture. First we will look at some basic principles of conversation through which you can make Gospel conversations through redemptive conversation/communication. Ephesians 4:29 says [29] *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear* (ESV). This is the New American Standard version of this verse; [29] *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

Do you see the drastic difference when a believer has conversation and the world has conversation? The world’s motivation in their conversation is ‘I have something I need to tell you.’ ‘Maybe I don’t need to hear it.’ Or ‘I have something I have to get off my chest...’ ‘Well, maybe I don’t need it on mine.’ Believers have a ‘other person’ focus in their conversation. They want their conversation to be a means of grace in the life of the other person. Paul goes on to say in Ephesians that we learn to speak truth in love – ‘trudging’ with love and loving with truth. That means we don’t choose unwholesome words, words that pollute the heart and soul of those whom we are talking to.

I am not saying that you don't need to deal with difficult issues. I am not saying that believers shouldn't confront sin in their own life and in the lives of others in an appropriate way but the way we do it is always to win them and not just the argument. There are times the argument needs to be won for the sake of others but we're aiming to win them. I want to have a vocabulary that doesn't poison. One of my favorite passages on conversation is in the book of Proverbs; well-chosen words are like apples of gold in the setting of silver (25:11). Imagine a banquet table of beautiful silver and in the middle is a silver bowl with golden apples. Those apples that would set off that table setting are well-chosen words.

We are not to speak unwholesome words but only words good for edification and are timely according to the need of the moment. If you go look at what Job's friends said to him in the book of Job there is a lot of good stuff that they said but their timing was terrible and their purpose was terrible. Then we want to give grace to the people who hear us. We want our language and conversation to be a conduit of grace into their life. So to sum this up, in Christian conversation we want to say the right words, at the right time, for the right reason, in the right way.

Do you know how important tone is particularly in the English language? Our language vocabulary is pretty paltry compared to many languages of the world. We are so reliant on picking up what someone is saying not by the word only that they chose, but the tone that they deliver it in. That tone means so much. I can say to my wife 'is that a new dress?' and depending on my tone it could be taken as a compliment or it could be taken as 'I don't like that dress.' It is the same sentence but with just a different emphasis with tone. We have to learn to use our tone. Now let me give you a companion verse to Ephesians 4:29 and that's in Colossians 4. Here Paul gives a series of exhortations and we will find one in verse 6.

Colossians 4:6 says [6] *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* Lord, season my speech with salt. What does salt do? Salt purifies, penetrates and produces thirst. For our Sunday night meal we have popcorn and my wife like organic popcorn. I call it popcorn on steroids and it's amazing the seasoning my wife comes up with. If our speech is a means of grace and seasoned with salt, it can not only be an instrument to purify others, penetrate their life but our speech can be an instrument to create a thirst in the person we're speaking to, to want to know more. It can actually create a thirst in them to know more.

Now let's look at a third text in James 1. These studies are going to be very practical in things I want to share with you with scriptural foundations about these seven bridges with this first one being conversational. James 1:19–21 says [19] *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

The book of James is full of exhortations concerning our conversations. It talks about how the tongue is like a flame that sets on the fire of hell and that the tongue needs to be bridled by the grace of God. I chose these verses in James because I believe it has something that will be particularly helpful in Gospel conversational bridge building.

The first is be slow to speak. The problem we have is that we know we're supposed to share the Gospel, be passionate, compassionate and persuasive so the tendency to do that is that we have to tell and sell. While I believe in telling and selling I believe the first step is asking and listening. Don't immediately go to telling and selling. It's not be quick to speak and slow to

hear but be slow to speak and quick to hear. The text does not say to be silent. We need to speak but it does say to be slow to speak. Listen first.

One of the things that will help you be patient and persistent in listening through asking and then be able to speak appropriately and at the right time in the right way, is we must see to it that our hearts are being filled with the Word of God, because ultimately what comes out of your mouth comes from our hearts. So we want our hearts to speak but we want the ability to be patient and thoughtful in this and that means we need to listen to God's Word preached, in God's Word regularly so that the Word is implanted into our heart and soul. This is absolutely crucial in this entire endeavor.

Let's look at one conversational moment in the life of Jesus from the Gospel of John. Jesus has already had one conversation in John 3 with a teacher named Nicodemus. That tells us that there are some times for some sharp conversations. I love how Jesus responds to Nicodemus throughout their conversation because it is a pretty sharp conversation all the way through. I am going to date myself significantly here by what I'm about to share. When I was a kid starting to shave there were two aftershave commercials advertising products I wanted and so I asked my dad for these. One was Old Spice because I could just see myself grabbing the mask and sailing the seas and the other one was Mennen Skin Bracer. In this commercial a woman slaps him across the side of the face and the man says 'thanks, I needed that.' I thought that would be a lot of fun for that to happen if I wore that. Slap, slap, I needed that, well Jesus just did a little Mennen Skin Bracer conversation with Nicodemus and it was because Nicodemus needed that.

Let's see what Jesus does with the women at the well in John 4. This starts out with Jesus being vulnerable with a manifestation of his full humanity for He is thirsty. John 4:7-19 says [7] *A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."* [8] *(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)* [9] *The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"* *(For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)* (There are three reasons why the woman would say 'why are you asking me for a drink' and one will be unspoken with the other two being obvious. One has to do with the fact that she is a woman and Jesus is a man. Two, she is a woman of Samaria and Jesus is a Jew. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. The third unspoken reason has to do with why a woman would come to the well at the heat of the day. It was because she was ostracized due to her reputation. She couldn't come in the morning or evening when the other women came. Yet Jesus does not ostracize her. He speaks to her and there is no one that He will not speak to. He speaks to her with a question about a drink.)

[10] *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* [11] *The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"* [12] *Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."* [13] *Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* [15] *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."*

[16] *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."* [17] *The woman answered him, "I have no husband."* *Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.*

*What you have said is true.” [19] The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”*

We could go further in this text for many reasons with one being it's a great theological discussion about worship but I want to stop here simply to point out what has taken place. Jesus has entered into a conversation. Here is personal evangelism. Will He do proclamation evangelism? Yes. Will there be big catches? Yes. Here He threw the line in the water. This is a personal conversation that is full of questions, started with vulnerability, seeking information but this conversation ultimately gets to the issues of the Gospel. That is, we are sinners, we need a Redeemer and Jesus is the Redeemer.

Give me a drink. If you knew who it was who was asking you would ask Me and I would give you water that wells up inside of you where you will never thirst again. Give me that water so I won't have to come back *here* and drink. Go call your husband. I don't have one. Yes, you have had five and the one you're with now is not your husband. Here He is exposing for her the well she has been drinking from. If I allow my sexual abilities to be used then that will make me somebody. She has been to five of those wells and is now with another well drinking from that one. He is about to show her that if she comes to His well to drink then she won't go back to the one she has been going to and He will give her the water of life. Eventually she embraces and understands what He is saying and she then goes to tell all the people in Sychar what He has done for her.

The text is a little ambiguous in that the text could be read that the people of Sychar are coming back but it also could be read that the men of Sychar would be coming back. Have you ever noticed that when someone becomes a Christian they start telling their friends about Jesus? So what people would this woman at the well know? She would know the men of Sychar. She tells them of the One who knew her sins who would give her the Water of Life. When she tells them what He has done she is giving her testimony but that's not the Gospel. But it does throw the line in the water. Now we're not going to get a line that just draws in one fish but we're going to get a lot of fish for now the Gospel net goes out. As she is telling them her testimony of what Jesus has done for her, Jesus is telling His Disciples that the fields are white for harvest at the same time the white robed men of Sychar are on their way out to meet Him. He may have been looking at the field around Jacob's well but He also could have been looking at those men who were coming out saying 'Here's your harvest, right there.'

They pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the harvest and then they come out and Jesus shares Good News with them. Then they say 'we came here because of what you said (meaning the woman's testimony) but now we've heard Him and we believe in Him.' So here you see the singular personal evangelism that then leads to a testimony and then a testimony draws others for a catch of evangelism, a large group that is then brought in with that moment. So we see Jesus having conversational evangelism, and a woman then goes to give her testimony that brings others to another bridge of event evangelism which is the meeting at the well. Then Jesus brings the Gospel to them because of her testimony and then they believe in Him which results in the catch that takes place.

So when you are having a conversation with someone and asking them questions that has to do with their favorite subject and that is themselves. When you begin person to person evangelism with the Person of Holy Spirit to bring them to Christ and you ask the right questions they will give you their opinion and they are convinced that you deserve to hear it. All you have to do is ask for it. So what kind of questions would you ask? Look for things that you have in common because that will be a bridge to conversation through which the Gospel can eventually

be shared. Here Jesus was at a well drinking water and that became an enormous opportunity to talk to this woman and ask her questions. Questions might be around hobbies, interests or various things that are happening around you.

I have about three questions that I like to ask people. Sometimes I like to ask those EE questions like ‘if you were to die tonight do you know where you would spend eternity’ after we have had some conversations. I tend to ask permission to ask a question and then I’ll ask that question. Another is ‘if you were to stand before God and He said ‘why should I let you into heaven’ what would you answer.’ In this paganized culture I have found it’s really better to go another level lower in the conversation so I love to ask people after talking with them ‘do you think there’s a heaven?’ I have never had anyone tell me answer ‘no’ to that question in their initial answer. The reason is in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that says *[11] He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*

My second question is ‘can I ask you another question’ and notice I’m not telling and selling yet. I’m asking and listening. When they answer ‘yes’ to the heaven question which all of them have, I then ask ‘How do you think you get to that heaven?’ I will actually repeat what they say so I can be sure it’s on record. Then I try to get to a third question which goes like this, ‘that question really laid on my heart for a long time and I came to a conclusion about this that the answer didn’t come from me but it actually came from God, so would you give me 10 minutes to share with you one verse in the Bible that answers that question and I’d love to hear what you think about it?’ So these are the questions I generally try to get to after having genuine conversations with the person by asking what do you do, where are you from, what’s your hobbies etc. Sometimes I can’t get there with those starters so I’ll use my testimony.

So I want to encourage you to have three testimonies ready to share. I call it the elevator testimony, the office testimony, and the dinner testimony. The elevator testimony is a testimony you can give to someone between floors 2 and 5, basically within about 3 minutes. I particularly talk to students about this because with their athletics or academics they are going to get an opportunity to give a three minute testimony to someone they encounter. They will know how to turn every question that comes to them to that testimony. The office testimony has to do with the time you might have for a coffee break, generally about a five minute testimony. Then there is the glorious dinner testimony where you are getting the opportunity to sit down and have a meal with someone and share it.

Again the testimony is not the Gospel. The testimony is the result of the Gospel that was shared with you in your testimony. It’s like the woman at the well who said to the men of Sychar ‘come and talk to the Man who told me everything I ever did’ and that was her testimony. That drew them to Him where He then would share the Gospel with them. So these are ways you can use your testimony.

Here are a couple of things I want you to be aware of. When you are having a conversation with someone where they are the center of your conversation and not you, because you want to find out where they are so you can bring them to the bridge to life as you build a bridge into their life conversationally, this is a way you can help them see you are not being judgmental. A recent survey has shown that 70 percent of people think Christians are judgmental. You will never get away from that because the Gospel is judgmental but it’s one thing for the Gospel to be judgmental but it’s another thing for us to think that we can take the place of the Judge. We don’t take the place of the judge. We take the place of the instrument that the Judge who gave His Son to save those under condemnation to bring them to reconciliation,

will use with the dignity and respect that people made in the image of God ought to have and with the passion that we ought to have that they will not fall into the hands of God and His judgment but that they can be delivered by His grace.

Also, in your conversation you ought to be praying for wisdom before, during, after, in the middle of it and all the time saying something like 'God, please help me. Please give me wisdom in this. Show me the door that's open for the testimony. Show me the door that's open to begin to share the Gospel. Show me the door that's open to ask the questions that will then lead to the privilege of sharing the Gospel.' Learn to follow questions with more questions.

Finally, when you're sharing the Gospel through conversations and you're asking questions, don't be afraid of silence. Learn to live with silence. Extroverts like me, hate it. I know it's uncomfortable and we're ready to fill in the gaps right there. Just live with it and give them every opportunity to speak and don't rescue them until they speak. When they come back with 'I don't know' then maybe you can come back with another question like 'if you did know, what do you think you would say?' But always keep them at the center and not you, in order to bring them to Christ who will become the Center, the Sum, the Circumference and the Substance of their life as Lord and Savior.

If you really get into this, it can actually become a lot of fun to start conversations that treat people with dignity yet create a bridge to bring them to the Bridge to Life. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You we could be together in Your Word. We now want to pray about this bridge and other bridges that we can build into people's lives for personal evangelism that may lead to big catches but if nothing else Lord, and gloriously would lead us into meaningful Gospel conversations with others. Would You O God please guide us even as we come now in these closing moments to sing Your praise and to ask You to use us, speak through us, persuade others through us, may they hear You through us and may they hear us as those who not only love You but we really love those who we are talking to? They are not targets. They are people. Rescue the perishing, in Jesus' Name, Amen.