

How to Transition from Small Talk to Spiritual Talk

Asking questions and being a good listener is the best route to change small talk to spiritual talk. Ask appropriate and creative questions to steer a conversation. Also, good questions will often prompt your friend to ask the same questions back. For instance, if you ask your friend, “What do you consider to be two major turning points in your life?” they will often ask you the same question in return. Then you can share your spiritual story! But be ready to share your story effectively in less than 3 minutes! (See article, “How To Write and Print Your Faith Story.”)

Here are great questions to insert into a conversation.

Four Quick Questions

These four questions are fun and fast. This practice is useful in making a connection with someone you care about, but don't know how to get the conversation going with. It takes about 60 seconds.

1. *What is the difference between spirituality and religion?*
2. *Which spiritual person do you most admire?*
3. *What would you say to Christians if they would listen?*
4. *Has anyone ever tried to “save” you?*

A Story

“One day in a restaurant, my friend Jon and I asked Katy, our waitress, if she had 60 seconds to answer these four questions with no strings attached. Here are Katy's answers:

1. *What's the difference between spirituality and religion? Religion is about rules; spirituality is personal.*
2. *Which spiritual person do you most admire? Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa.*
3. *What would you say to Christians if you thought they would listen? Practice what you preach.*
4. *Has anyone ever tried to “save” you? Yes, one of my closest friends.*

Here's how we responded: “Thanks, Katy. That was really helpful. See ya.”

A few minutes later Katy refilled our coffees and asked, “What are you guys into?”

“We're just trying to figure out what people know about Christian stuff,” Jon responded.

“Why?”

“Well, we want to help Christians learn how not to be jerks,” at which point she laughed with that knowing laugh and said, “Yeah, that would be helpful.”

As with Katy and the woman at the well, evangelizing with our ears is often more effective than using words when it comes to getting through to others.”

Additional Questions to Start a Spiritual Conversation

Easy Questions

1. What's your spiritual background? Were you taught a particular religious perspective as you grew up? Did you attend church?
2. I know you just moved into the area—have you found a good church?
3. What gives most meaning to your life?
4. What, or who, are your sources of daily strength?
5. When you have problems or crises, how do you manage to get through them?
6. We've been friends for quite some time now, and I've never really talked to you about the most important thing in my life. May I take a few moments and do so?
7. Most people in America say they believe in God. What does believing in God mean to you?
8. What have you found to be the best way of absorbing disappointment, rejection, distress and discouragement?

9. If you were to inherit a million dollars today, and couldn't spend it on your own enterprise or keep it for yourself, what would you do with it and why?
10. What do you consider to be two major turning points in your life?
11. What is something you consider to be a great personal success? Why was it so significant?
12. What are you living for? What do you value most?
13. What are some joys you are experiencing in your life right now?
Most people would love to share about the good things in their lives, but they are afraid that others won't care. Just by asking and listening, you open the door for great interaction. Also, if there are clear signs that God is blessing their life, you could open the door for conversation about the source of all good things.
14. How do you handle pressure? When the pressure is really on, what do you need from your friends?
15. Has anything ever happened to you that was dramatic, personal or spectacular enough to cause you to be certain there is a God who is both infinite and personally caring?
16. Tell me about two of your life-long friends and why they have such an impact on your life. What made you choose them?

Harder Questions

1. What do you think happens to people when they die?
2. What do you think a real Christian is?
3. In your opinion, who was Jesus Christ?
4. So what about the baby in the manger—do you buy into the idea that he was the Son of God?
5. Is religion or God important to you?
 - In what ways?
 - If not, is there any particular reason why not?
6. Does God (or a Higher Power) seem personal to you?
7. Do you feel close to or far away from God?
8. What do you imagine that God is like?
9. Are you comfortable with what you understand to be God's guidelines and laws for living?
10. Do you feel there are barriers of some type separating you from God?
11. Have you ever been mad or upset with God?
12. Do you understand the way to forgiveness and what it means?
13. Do you think God has a plan for each person's life?
14. What would it take for you to live up to what God expects of you?
15. What do you think is a person's greatest spiritual need?
16. How do you think a person begins a personal relationship with God?
17. When did you feel closest to God?
 - What factors or influences brought you nearer to God?
 - What would renew that sense of closeness?
18. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being closest to God), where do you see yourself in relationship with God?
 - Where do you want to be?
 - How do you see yourself moving closer to God?
 - How can I encourage you to get to where you would like to be?
19. What is your concept of God? Do you view Him positively or negatively?
20. Have you ever come to a point in your life where you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, or do you think that is something you're still moving toward? May I share with you how I came to that point?
21. If you could be sure there is a God, would you want to know Him? Or if you could know God personally, would you want to?
22. Before I came to know Christ personally, God was a vague concept that I could not relate to or grasp. How would you describe your view of God? Jesus? Is He a reality to you or more of a vague concept?

23. If you were to die tonight are you sure you'd go to heaven? Has anyone ever explained how you can know for sure?
24. What challenges and struggles are you facing?
People will share their pains and hurts with someone who truly cares about them and takes the time to listen. As they share, you may find that it becomes an opportunity to minister to them.
25. What is your personal history when it comes to faith and God?
This question is not so much about what people believe as it is about their personal histories. A person might say, "I have no history when it comes to religion," or "I grew up going to Mass every week and my parents are quite devout," or "I have always been very spiritual and I still read my horoscope daily and do a lot of meditation." No matter what answer they give, you end up learning something about their journey that may allow you to move the conversation to a deeper level.
26. What do you believe about God?
With this question, we move into more personal convictions and beliefs. Again, no matter how they answer, remember that you are learning and already going deeper than a typical conversation. Some Christians feel pressured to correct "wrong thinking" or "errant theology" in their conversations with nonbelievers. Try not to do this. Just listen and learn where they are; then you'll gain a sense of where they still need to go on their journey toward Jesus.
27. What is your perception of Christians?
Or put a different way, "What is your perception of Christianity or of the Christian church?" It takes courage to ask this question, listen, and not get defensive. But I have found that it can be an open door to deeper conversations.
28. In your opinion, who was/is Jesus Christ?
29. If you could know God personally, would you be interested?
30. If Christ was who He claimed to be, how would that affect your life?

Additional Resource

How To Start Spiritual Conversations with Unbelievers by Ken Johnson
http://www.gccweb.org/conferences/faithwalkers/midwest/2011_teachings