

The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations

Walking
alongside
people
who believe
differently

*"Fresh and practical insights ...
a must-have guide."*

LEE STROBEL



Mary Schaller & John Crilly

Here are fresh and practical insights into how to engage people in spiritual discussions that are authentic and compelling. It's a must-have guide to becoming stronger salt and brighter light in the twenty-first century!

LEE STROBEL

Bestselling author of *The Case for Christ* and professor of Christian Thought at Houston Baptist University

“Go and make disciples.” That was one of the commands Jesus gave to his followers, but it often ranks low among American Christians’ priorities. That’s why churches, small groups, and those who consider themselves to be disciples of Jesus should read this book. *The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations* is an essential resource for accomplishing the mission Christ gave his church.

RICH STEARNS

President of World Vision US and author of *The Hole in Our Gospel* and *Unfinished*

The nine arts are a culmination of years of real-life stories. If you want tried-and-true concepts that will become reality for you and your friends, I highly recommend this unique resource.

HUGH HALTER

Author of *Flesh, Brimstone*, and *The Tangible Kingdom*

John and Mary present a compelling case for how to maximize moments for Kingdom good. This book will profoundly alter the way you engage with humanity. It's a must-read for anyone who is serious about having spiritual conversations!

STEVE CARTER

Teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church

When you can't put a book down, you know that you are on to something important. As I read *The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations*, I found myself simultaneously instructed,

challenged, inspired, and equipped. I was given hope that I could actually engage people in a way that could lovingly bring them to Jesus over time. The ministry of Young Life has popularized the phrase that we need to “earn the right to be heard.” This book puts flesh on that phrase like nothing else I have ever read.

GREG OGDEN

Writer, speaker, teacher on discipleship, and author of *Discipleship Essentials*

Fear of rejection and a lack of understanding on how to communicate the gospel has shut the mouths of many sincere Christians for too long. *The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations* is a shot of encouragement for all of us who want to *live* and *proclaim* a gospel that is truly good news!

CAESAR KALINOWSKI

Author of *Transformed* and *Small Is Big, Slow Is Fast*

For introverts like me, the first four arts (Noticing, Praying, Listening, and Asking Questions) are especially helpful. Gifted extroverts can help us with the other five! I am impressed with the vitality and deep faith of the authors: They really want to help us reach out for Christ, and they do so winsomely.

FREDERICK DALE BRUNER

Author of commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew (2004) and the Gospel of John (2012)

In *The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations*, John and Mary make the art of connecting with the people whom Jesus misses most doable, human, and fun. Put these arts to work in your church today and watch evangelism move from being a gift shared by only a few to a practice shared by everyone.

JIM HENDERSON

Author of *Jim and Casper Go to Church*, executive producer at Jim Henderson Presents

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Mary Schaller & John Crilly



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The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations: Walking Alongside People Who Believe Differently

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Table of Contents

Preface *ix*

Chapter 1 The Heart and Habits of Jesus *1*

Chapter 2 Rediscovering Nine Relational Practices of Jesus *17*

Part I: Getting Ready

Chapter 3 The Art of Noticing *41*

Chapter 4 The Art of Praying *57*

Chapter 5 The Art of Listening *79*

Part II: Getting Started

Chapter 6 The Art of Asking Questions *99*

Chapter 7 The Art of Loving *117*

Chapter 8 The Art of Welcoming *137*

Part III: Keeping It Going

Chapter 9 The Art of Facilitating *157*

Chapter 10 The Art of Serving Together *175*

Chapter 11 The Art of Sharing *195*

Part IV: Ongoing Spiritual Conversations

Chapter 12 Starting a Q Place *221*

Chapter 13 From Cups of Cold Water to Rivers of Living Water *243*

Acknowledgments *257*

Notes *263*

About the Authors *269*

Preface

NOW THAT YOU'VE PICKED UP THIS BOOK, you may have a burning question about the cover: Why the dinosaurs? Are we saying spiritual conversations are extinct?

When I (Crilly) think of dinosaurs, I immediately am taken back to a childhood memory of my grandma's home. My Grandmother Crilly was a child of the Depression. She grew up a fatherless immigrant and married very young, only to divorce her abusive first husband and marry my grandfather, a quiet and gentle man. My grandma was a neat freak, probably with an obsessive-compulsive disorder that manifested itself in cleanliness. She put paper towels between every plate in the cabinet. She was constantly concerned about bugs getting into her home. She had clear plastic covering her nice sofa and chairs.

Into this squeaky-clean environment entered my brother and I. We did not look forward to visiting her home because we had to be clean and quiet there—two very difficult tasks for young boys. In addition, Grandma did not keep many toys on hand, though she was thoughtful enough to store a few simple children's toys in a walnut-laminate cabinet in the living room. As I grabbed both handles and opened wide the cabinet doors, I could smell the waxy, plastic odor of the Mold-A-Rama models, remnants of a field trip

to the Museum of Natural History. There they were: *Tyrannosaurus rex* and *Triceratops*. From the museum's odd, bubble-topped molding machine, they had made their way to my grandma's toy cabinet and were about to be engaged in epic prehistoric battles of my imagination: T-rex vs. Triceratops. A fight to the death.

For many of us, that's how we view spiritual conversations as well. Somehow, we assume that any attempt to love and understand each other is bound to end in a battle: herbivores versus carnivores. When it comes to topics such as faith, religion, or God, we're afraid it's impossible to have a conversation with someone who believes differently without ending up in a standoff that would damage the relationship. We're convinced that followers of Jesus and people who believe differently will end up on opposite sides of any discussion, finding little common ground. And if we have the courage to broach the topic at all, we feel confined to a formula or series of steps. Then the flood of obstacles, fears, and expectations constrains us from winsomely living in the love of Christ and sharing that love with others.

Mary and I are here to say that it doesn't have to be this way. Meaningful, noncombative spiritual conversations are not extinct—they're possible for all of us.

When I was a boy, the dinosaurs invited me to a place of playfulness, free from the rigid expectations and rules of my grandma's sterile home. Mary and I hope this book will help you find joy, freedom, and pleasure in talking about God with people who believe differently. We also hope this book will provide simple tools for amateurs and experts alike to engage naturally in the Great Commission. So we, like Jesus, can be winsome and unashamed when we speak of the Kingdom.

Mary Schaller
John Crilly

CHAPTER 1

The Heart and Habits of Jesus

Whoever claims to live in [God] must live as Jesus did.

I JOHN 2:6

Our most serious failure today is the inability to provide effective practical guidance as to how to live the life of Jesus.

DALLAS WILLARD

MY (MARY'S) SISTER TERRY had a window seat in the second-to-last row of a full plane. A young man in his early twenties occupied the coach seat next to her. He was nicely dressed and had gotten out a Bible to read when he sat down. Curious, she asked if he was attending a Bible or divinity school. No, he said, he worked in a sawmill, but he was very involved in his church and loved the Bible. He said he read it a lot.

“Do you believe in Jesus?” he asked boldly in return. Terry said yes, but felt a little uncomfortable disclosing such personal information within the first minute of conversation with a stranger. He immediately followed up with an even more intrusive question: “When you pray, do you pray ‘with tears’ and ‘great anguish?’”

Shocked by the question, but trying to assume this discussion

was headed in a normal direction, she said she did pray, but typically not with that kind of passion. “If you are not praying *right* like that, God doesn’t hear,” the man exclaimed, raising his voice and spitting out the words with a mixture of excitement and judgment. If she didn’t “pray right,” he said, she wasn’t saved and would go to hell when she died.

The young man started leafing through his Bible, referencing passages that reinforced his claims. The plane was just taking off, and he was shouting all of this above the engine noise.

What have I unleashed? Terry thought, feeling trapped in the far back of the plane. For the next twenty minutes, she couldn’t get a word in edgewise as her seatmate zealously justified his position on prayer.

Finally, when Terry could no longer stand the lecture, she held up her hand and said, “STOP! Don’t tell me what to believe, and don’t judge me! He’s my God, too. I believe only God can judge people.” To her astonishment, the man immediately stopped his discourse, closed his book, bent over the tray table, and started to weep.

After about an hour, he finally sat up. Terry didn’t want to look at him; she was afraid he might start yelling again or even pull out a weapon. She thought it best not to make eye contact and pretended to ignore him for the rest of the trip, silently praying for him and for God’s protection. It seemed like the flight would last forever.

When they were finally exiting the plane, the young man helped her get her bag down and said he was sorry that she didn’t see things the same way he did. It didn’t feel like an authentic apology to Terry, but rather a halfhearted effort to make peace. She was just happy to be free of him.

When Terry called me later that day, she said, “The first thing that came to mind when I got off that plane was, ‘I can’t wait to tell my sister what happened.’ You’re in the spiritual conversation business, Mary, but I can tell you that I will think twice before I start another conversation with someone holding a Bible! Before

that incident, I would think, ‘Oh, they are Christians. So am I. It will be great to get to know them.’ Not anymore!”

With exasperation, Terry asked me, “When you talk to someone about God, shouldn’t it be give-and-take? It was completely one-sided, and his approach was totally wrong. He made me feel like I didn’t want to know the same God that he knows. Why couldn’t he portray God as loving rather than making it sound like he is condemning or hate filled? The whole time he was talking I was asking myself, ‘How can I end this conversation?’”

Beyond the misguided theology about prayer, this poor young man somehow thought that his aggressive approach of intimidation and Scripture quotations would persuade my sister to believe as he did. I am not sure who should be pitied more in this situation—my sister or him. Both were a little spiritually disoriented by the experience. Both walked away wounded from the encounter. Both would classify the interaction as anything but good news.

Sadly, we all know this is not an isolated incident. We’ve all heard or read stories like this from unsuspecting “victims” of Christ followers who wanted to share the Good News but lacked the sensitivity or timing to effectively represent Jesus.

Midlife Crisis

I must confess that I have occasionally been one of those well-intentioned Christians whose attempts to share the good news about Jesus ended with experiences that were simply *bad* news—though not nearly as extreme as the situation my sister encountered! Because Jesus had made such a huge difference in my life, I wanted to share about him with others. But I lacked the spiritual maturity, as well as the social skills, to talk about God in a way that was grace giving, winsome, and attractive with people who believed differently than I did. When I reached the age of fifty, this became part of an unusual midlife crisis.

This crisis didn't make any sense on a worldly level. I had been a successful entrepreneur, having started three high-tech companies, two of which had done well. I was still married to the same guy, Paul, with twenty-eight years of marriage behind us and the future looking good for continued marital bliss. We had three nearly grown children who had somehow survived our parenting. I had also recently decided to go into full-time ministry and had already served for three years in a large evangelical church in California before entering seminary to work toward a master's of divinity.

So what was the big crisis? It had to do with a short passage in the Bible that made me feel that I was missing something really important. The verses in question were Matthew 28:18-20, summarized briefly as "Go make disciples." In other words, Jesus told his followers, "You followed me for three years; now find others who are spiritually open and ready to commit to exploring who I am and following me. Pass on what I taught you so that they, too, can pass it on." Jesus said that he would be with all of us as we did this important work and that all authority in heaven and on earth was at his disposal to help us. I knew these verses well, as do most Christians. But did I really understand and obey them? Like many followers of Jesus, I knew in my heart that I didn't.

Even having been involved in many Christian ministries over the years, and having nurtured a lot of believers along in their faith, I had never made *one single new disciple of Jesus*. Not one! The prospects of doing so in the future seemed pretty grim given my track record, even though I was in seminary at the time and was now "in the business" of ministry as a paid professional. But in reality, I didn't know how.

Adequate knowledge of God and the Bible wasn't my biggest problem, though I was clearly no biblical scholar. My understanding of Jesus and how he lovingly related with those who believed differently seemed to be my leading challenge. I knew if I didn't figure out how to relate well to people with different views about God

and to walk alongside those who were being drawn toward Jesus, I'd go to my grave as a failure at the Great Commission. This was too important to disregard.

Over the years I had been taught two main ways to make new followers of Jesus. The first recommendation from church leaders was to invite people I knew to church so that the expert who was giving the sermon that day could *tell* them about Jesus and his life-giving promise of redemption. If they, drawn by the Spirit of God, found this attractive and compelling, they could keep coming to church and learning what it means to become a follower of Jesus. It was assumed that if they learned about Jesus, they would want to follow him too.

My church had great preaching and worship. This first approach should have been a slam dunk, but so far it hadn't worked well for me. Occasionally someone would come with me to church, but usually just once and that would be the end of the conversation. The one-hour lecture and sing-along wasn't compelling enough to them. Plus, people in northern California, where I lived at the time, were resistant to giving up their precious Sunday mornings, and many of them weren't actively seeking God.

The second recommendation I'd been given was that I *tell* everyone about Jesus ("present the gospel") during a one-time conversation and hope that they received the Good News with open arms, ideally saying a prayer to seal the deal. Then I could invite them to church and Sunday school classes so that someone else could keep teaching them more about Jesus.

Whether the initial gospel presentation came at church or from me, all the discipleship paths I knew basically relied on church programs to help people grow in their understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Love and relationships didn't seem to be predominant factors in either of these approaches, yet I noticed that Jesus was relational with his followers. In fact, so much of what his disciples learned was "caught" rather than "taught."

A Better *How*

In our increasingly secular Western culture, Christ followers have been stifled by a lack of direction on *how* to live out and share their faith in ways that are both biblical and magnetic. Yet Jesus showed us how. He modeled a more relational, conversational way of living and sharing the good news of the gospel.

John Crilly (from here on, we'll simply call him by his shorthand nickname, Crilly) and I have written this book because we believe that many Christians desire to share the good news about Jesus with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers but in a way that is natural rather than intrusive. We have seen, both from our own personal experiences and from the experiences of Christians who have begun to engage with people the way that Jesus did, how conversations about God can unfold naturally and powerfully.

At the time we wrote this book, Crilly and I were both part of Q Place, an organization that empowers ordinary Christians to engage in meaningful conversations about God with people who believe differently. The *Q* stands for *questions*, and a *Q Place* is a small group of two to twelve people in which the majority are not Christians. These people get together on a regular basis to discuss questions about life, God, and the Bible. The mission of Q Place is to mobilize Christians to facilitate group discussions with spiritual seekers so that those seekers can find God as he is revealed in the Bible.

Before joining the staff at Q Place, both Crilly and I led several small groups in which the majority of the participants were not Christians. As facilitators rather than teachers, we created safe havens where spiritually curious people could wrestle with their big questions about God, consider what the Bible says about those questions, and figure out what they believed. These groups relied heavily on an inductive learning approach, built on the premise that people learn best when they discover truth for themselves

through questions, discussion, and study, rather than through lectures by experts presenting information.

After twenty-three years in the business world, Crilly led our field operations at Q Place from 2011 to 2015. He brought leadership and project management expertise to the organization, as well as his experience as a writer and a certified professional life coach. Crilly's life had been transformed by Jesus Christ shortly after he completed engineering school at the University of Illinois. With a new heart and a passion for helping others discover God, Crilly directed his enthusiasm and energy into seeker small groups and sports ministry. He helped equip others in the seeker-small-group movement by training adults, church leaders, and university students.

As for me, I worked in the high-tech industry for most of my adult life before ending up in leadership at a large church. I also went back to school and earned a seminary degree, and by 2006 I was ready to go into full-time ministry. At the same time, I had been getting an unofficial seminary degree in my own living room. In 2002, in the midst of my midlife crisis, the thought had occurred to me that, if Jesus had invited a handful of ordinary people to explore God together during his earthly ministry, it might be worth trying to do the same thing in my own community of Portola Valley, California. What the heck! Given that all of my other evangelistic ventures had seemed to bomb most of the time, I figured I had nothing to lose.

Applying my entrepreneurial skills to this faith challenge, I invited two other Christian friends to start a small group with me that was primarily a place for people to figure out what they believed about God. We called it the "Tough Questions Group." I was amazed at the depth of relationships, stories, honesty, doubts, and faith that quickly emerged. This was the answer to my midlife crisis! Suddenly, many people were meeting Jesus for the first time and choosing to follow him through their involvement in this

group. What a privilege for me to be there when they made that decision.

This transformational experience started to creep naturally into my relationships with other friends and family members; more and more I found myself talking about God without a debate or argument. For example, my dad and I had decided long beforehand that we couldn't talk about God because it always ended badly. We had increasingly polar views about social issues, politics, and religion, and of course we both thought we were right. But I learned some important new skills in my Tough Questions Group that I hadn't had before. As I co-facilitated our group over time, I improved at genuinely *praying* for people who believed differently, *listening* to them tell stories about their faith journeys, and *asking* them questions to help me understand how they had arrived at their current beliefs.

As I put these skills into practice, God gradually gave me a heart-felt curiosity about my dad's faith journey. Rather than judging him and what he believed, I truly wanted to understand those beliefs. When he sensed that my curiosity was genuine, he started opening up both about what he really believed regarding God and all of the questions he had about the Bible. It turned out that no one had ever given him a safe place to air his own doubts and questions. Yet when he was seventy-nine years old, this became our favorite topic to discuss, rather than one to be avoided at all costs. That was the year he decided one day at my kitchen table to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and begin studying the Bible with me. What had changed?

Asking versus Telling

When I examined the core difference between my approach with my dad and the Tough Questions Group and my approach in earlier attempts to share my faith, I realized that I had made a subtle but significant shift from a *telling* approach to an *asking* approach.

In a telling approach, I do most of the talking, and I give you information that I believe is important and true. You are the passive listener receiving this information and deciding whether to believe it. You'll evaluate this information internally, based on what you already believe to be true, your openness to new information that contradicts what you believe, and my personal credibility with you. It's hierarchical: I, the teller, have most of the power over you; and you, the listener, have very little if any voice.

The telling approach is efficient. Because not much response is expected, the teller could be talking to one person or a thousand. Many people like the telling approach because it gives them a sense of control. Telling also tends to be transactional: I tell you something, and you decide whether to listen, believe it, reject it, or obey it. Putting two "tellers" with different views in the room causes conflict; they both want to talk, and each of them thinks he or she is right. Few of these conversations end well or continue productively. Two people with different beliefs who both want to *tell* the other what to believe is at best a recipe for getting stuck and at worst a relational crisis.

In an asking approach, on the other hand, I am curious about you, and my primary goal is to understand you, not just to give information. Our developing relationship is more valuable to me than any single moment of conversation. My respect for you and desire to know you takes precedence over my verbal content.

The asking approach can be messy. The initiator of the conversation is not in control of how it goes because he or she assumes that the other person also has something significant to share. There is give and take. It's a dialogue, not a monologue. Two essential ingredients are listening and asking good, open-ended questions that are not easily answered with one or two words. These practices require the other person to think in order to respond.

We see the asking approach in the first recorded conversation

between God and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God was walking through the Garden and wanted to talk with them. Since God is all-knowing, he obviously knew what had happened. And yet instead of *telling* Adam and Eve what they did, he *asked* a sequence of four questions: (1) Where are you? (2) Who told you that you were naked? (3) Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? (4) What is this you have done? (See Genesis 3:8-13.)

This has always puzzled me. If I had been God, I would have blasted Adam and Eve with the facts: "You could eat from any tree in the entire garden and yet you chose to eat from the one tree I said was off-limits! You shouldn't have listened to anyone who was contradicting me, and besides that, snakes are not supposed to talk." (Good thing I'm not God!)

Why did God ask questions? I think he wanted Adam and Eve to consider what they had done. To own their actions. To notice that they were now feeling ashamed in their nakedness. To see that they had chosen to disobey him. Perhaps he also wanted to approach them in a respectful way, to start a dialogue and continue the relationship. Whatever the reasons, I am overwhelmed at this loving response from God in spite of Adam and Eve's disobedience. This response is repeated throughout the Old Testament, as God continued to ask questions of his people.

Walk the Way of Jesus

Reading the New Testament, we see that Jesus also majored in asking much more than in telling. He asked questions, responded with questions, and filled his teaching with questions and parables that required people to puzzle through what he was saying. You can easily imagine people, long after Jesus' teaching was over,

continuing to discuss what he had said as they tried to get to the heart of his message.

Mark 8 provides one example of Jesus' tendency to ask questions. In just one chapter, Jesus asks sixteen questions, including the all-important one: "Who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29). We see the same scene in Matthew 16:15-16. When Jesus asks his disciples to voice their belief in their own words, Peter responds: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." We can imagine the thrill it must have been for Peter to hear Jesus' affirmation: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Because Peter had reached this conclusion on his own, his realization was much richer than if Jesus had directly told the disciples, "I am the Messiah."

Let's look beyond the questions to the bigger picture of what Jesus did to advance the Kingdom of God around him. Jesus made disciples by selecting a few people into whom he poured his life—just twelve ordinary men. The plan was that they would "be with him" for the majority of his earthly ministry (Mark 3:14). Jesus wanted to give his followers as clear a picture of God as he could. He wanted them to walk alongside him to ensure the lasting nature of his mission. I think Jesus knew that disciples could not be impersonally mass-produced but would be the product of intimate and personal investment. Could this be true of disciples today as well?

Evangelism or Discipleship?

Most Christians and non-Christians can agree on one thing: They don't like the "e" word—evangelism. Although *evangelism* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means "good news," the term has been hijacked by an approach that has not always delivered good news to its intended recipients, and it now elicits negative emotions from many.

It seems that the church at large has separated evangelism from discipleship so that there are two main buckets: everything *before* someone has a conversion experience with Jesus, which we call “evangelism,” and everything *after* that conversion experience, which we call “discipleship.”

Author Alan Hirsch has long been a prophetic voice to the church in the twenty-first century. If you haven’t read any of his books on evangelism and discipleship, I’d encourage you to explore his writings, starting with his best-known work, *The Forgotten Ways*. Hirsch talks a lot about “reframing evangelism” within the context of discipleship in his recently released digital download, *Disciplism*.

Hirsch explains that treating evangelism and discipleship as part of the same continuum makes space for long-term, loving, authentic relationships with people in our lives. It gives credibility to our message and meaning to our relationships. It forces us to think of evangelism as a process, not as a transaction where someone prays a prayer and then graduates to the next class called “discipleship.”

Reimagining evangelism through the lens of discipleship requires that we let go of seeing salvation as something we can deliver on demand, or when a person says a certain formulaic prayer. Rather, we need to reconceive discipleship as a process that includes pre-conversion discipleship and post-conversion discipleship. A person’s salvation really is God’s business, isn’t it? Our part in it is to simply devote meaningful time and commitment to making disciples of whoever wants to share the journey with us—as we go. We don’t need to rush to share the standard formulas in an unnatural, non-relational, forceful way. Surely, if we love our Lord Jesus and love the people we are investing in, we will get to share the Good News

of His saving impact on our lives in a less forced manner. And surely we believe that it is the Holy Spirit who awakens interest in those that He is calling into God's kingdom?¹

Maybe another “e” word is a better place to start with the people whom God is drawing to himself: *engagement*. What if simple times of engagement and respectful dialogue are what's needed to build relationships? What if they can serve as a bridge that is able to bear the weight of truth as people choose to explore Jesus? Perhaps we are becoming too preoccupied with what we label pre-evangelism, evangelism, and discipleship in the church today. If discipleship is helping those around us engage with God by engaging with them, that all starts the minute we choose to love them with his love—not just after their moment of salvation. Let's have conversations about God flow naturally from our interest in others and see whom God leads toward more intentional discipling and ongoing discussions about Jesus. We've made it harder than it needs to be.

Making New Disciples: Love Like Jesus

Author Francis Chan helps us understand what counts as good news: “God's definition of what matters is pretty straightforward. He measures our lives by how we love.”² Our mandate from Jesus in Matthew 22:36-39 is clear: Love God, love people. Could it be that simple? We may have complicated evangelism by separating this Great Commandment from the Great Commission. Loving God and loving others is the foundation of the Great Commission.

To make disciples of people outside of our church doors, we start by loving them, building authentic friendships based on ordinary life circumstances and proximity (our neighborhoods,

local coffee shops, workplaces, fitness classes, basketball courts, golf courses, or preschool play groups). These are the early stages of discipleship. The people we have identified may not all become followers of Jesus, but when we actively love them, we are in a better position to discern whom God might be drawing to himself.

One of our best snapshots of Jesus' love and compassion is found in Matthew 9:36: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (NLT). If we are honest with ourselves, do *we* have compassion on the people we see every day? It starts with that deep, unsettled, heartfelt sympathy for people whose lives are full of problems and who are living without hope, meaning, or a clear direction for their future.

Jesus is called "a friend of sinners." Through his life we see that making new disciples starts with love and compassion for those we want to point toward him. Greg Ogden, a well-known author on the topics of discipleship and leadership, reminds us that "the Bible teaches us not only the message of our faith but also the *method* by which that faith is to be passed on to future generations. *We are called to do God's work in God's way.* The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs up against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling."³

The apostle John reminds us, "Whoever claims to live in [God] must live as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6). Are we ready to walk the way of Jesus? What does that look like in day-to-day, 24/7 life?

In the remainder of this book, Crilly and I will present nine relational practices of Jesus that we see in the Gospels. These practices provide tangible skills (the "how") for those who want to walk in the way of Jesus—to develop relationships and use an asking approach to pursue vibrant, vital conversations about God. Walking in the way of Jesus is a tremendous privilege and an exciting adventure that we hope you will take seriously. It will enable

you to make disciples in a way that is natural and life giving. It will change your life and the lives of people around you.

In a recent book, missional leader Hugh Halter declares,

If the kingdom of God is good news, then the King of this kingdom is also good news. Here's some encouraging info that should give you more confidence to have a conversation. Almost everyone loves Jesus. . . . He set people free and gave them license to live again . . . , and He was constantly blessing, healing, protecting and saving people around Him. All of this was done way before He did his greatest act of going to the cross for our sins. Who wouldn't love a man like this? Who wouldn't love it if God was like this?⁴

How about you? Are you trying to walk in the steps of Jesus to set people free with his good news? Would you like to genuinely model the practices of Jesus, who blesses, heals, protects, and saves people? Putting it in the broadest terms, do you want to be loving and compassionate like Jesus in the way that you interact with those around you? If you desire to improve in how you relate to people who believe differently (and let's face it, we all believe slightly differently from one another), this book can equip you to bless others by talking about God in a way that is always good news.

Discover

1. What is your definition of discipleship? When do you think discipleship starts?
2. Have you ever been involved in making a new disciple of Christ? If so, what did you find to be an effective method?

THE 9 ARTS OF SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

3. How did you become a follower of Jesus? If you are not a Christ follower, what would be the most attractive way to explore the possibility?

Practice

1. Think about people you see on a regular basis at work, in your neighborhood, or wherever you spend time each week. Ask God to show you the people with whom he would like you to have a meaningful conversation about him, and write down a few names. We'll come back to this list in some future chapters.
2. Try using an asking approach rather than a telling approach in a conversation this week where there are differences of opinion. How did it work out?