



42

SECONDS



THE JESUS MODEL
FOR EVERYDAY
INTERACTIONS

CARL MEDEARIS

Jesus is the most disruptive person who ever lived, because he's always focused on growth, not on perpetuating the status quo. Likewise, my Jesus-loving friend Carl Medearis is one of the most disruptive people I've ever met—you'll see what I mean when you read *42 Seconds*. These short bursts of truth, at times hilarious and at times profound, will move you deeper into a lifestyle that produces fruit in others' lives. Listen and learn from Carl, and you'll leave the status quo behind for something like an epic adventure.

RICK LAWRENCE, author of *The Jesus-Centered Life*, general editor of the *Jesus-Centered Bible*, and host of the podcast *Paying Ridiculous Attention to Jesus*

I am a big fan of Carl Medearis. He's always fun yet challenging, provocative yet deeply biblical. In *42 Seconds*, he is no different. Exploring the art of getting to the point with people just like Jesus did is so necessary in our present cultural moment. You will be blessed and challenged by this book.

DANIEL FUSCO, pastor of Crossroads Community Church (Vancouver, WA, and Portland, OR) and author of *Upward, Inward, Outward* and *Honestly*

Carl Medearis does it again. He brings enormous ideas down to earth where we all live and helps us to see how—as Dallas Willard used to say—“We can live our lives the way Jesus would live our lives . . . if Jesus had our lives to live.” And Jesus is supposed to have our lives to live. Carl brings amazingly simple, insightful, and practical suggestions directly from the life of Jesus . . . and offers them to us to practice in our real, everyday lives.

BART TARMAN, speaker, artist, and former chaplain of Westmont College

It's amazing how often our words and actions can make the Good News Jesus proclaimed and embodied sound and look like Bad News. Our world is in desperate need of Jesus people to take seriously our invitation to speak, think, and act in ways reflective of the One we follow. In this book, Carl offers a relatable, thoughtful, and extremely tangible guide for how to not only say we believe in the Good News but also narrate it with our lives.

JON HUCKINS, pastor and coauthor of *Mending the Divides*

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INTRODUCTION

I WAS LEANING OVER THE BACKYARD FENCE, talking to my neighbor, when the idea lodged itself in my brain and refused to leave.

John was raking leaves. I was raking leaves. And I'm a personable guy, so when I saw him in his backyard, I called out, "Hey, John, how ya doing?"

In the usual way of introverts everywhere, he tried pretending I wasn't there for a bit. When that didn't work, he replied with something fairly profound and pithy: "Hey."

My first instinct was, of course, to simply move on to my next backyard chore, making sure to look incredibly busy, almost as if I hadn't noticed that he hadn't really noticed me. (Yep, I'm as insecure about all this as the next guy.)

I'm not sure why, but I suppressed that instinct and barely mustered up enough courage to stroll over to our common fence. I leaned over it nonchalantly, as if I didn't have a care in the world and wasn't thinking about all the things I could be doing instead of talking to this neighbor who was clearly

busier than I was and didn't want to talk to me anyway. It was a pretty darn good backyard-fence lean. I asked, "So, John, whatcha doin' there?"

He looked up, leaning on his leaf rake, and said, "Raking leaves."

Like most of my neighbors, John wondered what I did for a living. They had asked me probably hundreds of times (with tilted heads, squinty eyes, and slightly crinkled noses). Their impressions ranged from a *very important author* (okay, not really—I made that one up on their behalf) to *some kind of US spy to the Middle East*. All they knew was that I didn't have a real job. Sometimes I'd be in my PJs until noon, talking on the phone or writing on the front porch or working from my computer on our back deck. I was constantly leaving our cul-de-sac in a sudden rush or coming back home from somewhere with my little carry-on suitcase. My wife and I usually had a houseful of guests coming and going, and one of our daughters lived in Beirut. Not exactly the typical American family.

Anyway, after John said something about raking his leaves, I replied that the weather was nice, and then we talked Denver Broncos football and why the Rockies baseball team wouldn't be any good that year (again).

It was actually a fairly typical backyard across-the-fence conversation. It could have happened in the front yard while we were mowing our lawns or at our common cul-de-sac mailbox. Each of us had several of these ol' "Hey, how's it going?" conversations every day.

But what I did after I finished my conversation with John

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was a little unusual. I went downstairs and e-mailed my assistant, Jesse. I asked him to start looking at every conversation Jesus had with anyone about anything. Short or long. Deep and profound or simple and menial.

You see, I do that sort of thing. Whenever I think of almost anything in any situation, I relate it back to Jesus and how he did that same thing. It's an exercise that helps me think and act like him.

Poor Jesse. I had him read every single conversation Jesus had in the Gospels, write them out, list them, read them out loud, time them, and send me all his findings. I did the same thing.

And we found that the average length of Jesus' conversations as recorded in the Gospels was 42 seconds long. Of course, he had conversations that were longer and shorter than that. And I don't think that these are necessarily the full conversations or that what's recorded is in real time, to be read out loud the way Jesse and I did. But they're all we have. These conversations provide much of what we know of Jesus and how he related to people.

That brief, normal, everyday interaction with John made me obsessed with the short conversations Jesus had. Because, Jesus being Jesus, his conversations were typically anything but normal. And when I realized this—when I realized that Jesus managed to turn otherwise everyday conversations into something more profound—I knew I had to figure out how he did it. Maybe I'd find nothing earth-shattering, but I hoped it would move me just one step more toward Jesus.

I'm hoping it just might do the same for you, too.



Humans are hardwired for relationship. Relationship with God. Relationship with each other. And many churches and other organized groups of Jesus followers spend a lot of time and energy preparing us to connect those two types of relationships—to create deep and important moments when we get to lead someone to Jesus or explain the Trinity or have some other deep conversation about God, spirituality, and life.

But when was the last time you had one of those conversations? While many of us might long to talk with someone about spiritual things (and some of us dread it), those opportunities don't happen very often. Being prepared for those conversations is good and important, but we often miss the fundamental first step. Talking to someone about spiritual things doesn't happen out of nowhere. Those conversations emerge out of the countless connections we make every day. Are we ready for those interactions? Or do we write them off as insignificant?

Stop and think of all the people you interacted with yesterday. And by interacted with, I mean people you exchanged words with, verbal or written. The neighbor you ran into at the mailbox; the barista who made your jumbo extra-hot mocha cappuccino with skim milk and light whipped cream; the lady in the cubicle next to yours; the customer-service rep. How many can you remember? For most of us, by the time we get to the end of a day, those quick connections are just blurs.

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Our lives are full of these short interactions, but we seem to be under the impression that they're not overly significant. I'd like to challenge us to see them in a different light. After all, Jesus did.

Jesus was a master at making short interactions with people significant. And from my understanding of Scripture and my life experience, I genuinely believe that doing things the way he did them is the best way for every person in the world to live. Imitating Jesus is what it means to be his disciple, or life student. Disciples look at how Jesus lived and how he spoke with people, and they try every day to follow suit.

Contemporary Christian lingo has mistakenly, I believe, set up a dichotomy between *discipleship* and *evangelism*. Jesus had conversations all the time with those who thought they were close to God and those who deemed themselves lost and without hope. He invited all of them to come learn from him. So even though a good deal of this book has to do with helping people who are far away from Jesus follow him more closely, this is probably the last time I'll use the word *evangelism*.

This is good news for all of us. It frees us up to talk about the most important part of our lives in a way that's natural, meaningful, and helpful instead of staged, clumsy, and irrelevant. Anyone who has spent countless uncomfortable hours walking from house to house attempting to force awkward spiritual conversations knows exactly what I mean. I even moved across the world just to have frustrating conversations with the "heathen" about their wicked ways. Somewhere

along the line, I realized that it didn't get me anywhere and that it didn't get the heathen anywhere either.

I think I've found a better way, one that has been right in front of us all along: using the ordinary moments of our lives the way Jesus used similar moments in his. This book isn't written with the aim of turning your barber into a pastor in 42 seconds. (He's probably better at cutting hair than giving sermons anyway.) Rather, our goal is simply for Jesus to be a natural part of our lives and everyday interactions with people.



So how are we going to get there? It's fairly easy. And extraordinarily difficult.

In this book, we're going to work through four sections that progress in level of difficulty and cost. Learning how to truly, simply engage with people like Jesus isn't hard. At least not at first. But it's a process. We have to learn how to engage the everyday moments in simple ways before we can enter into the profound, life-giving implications.

This is why we start with kindness. We need to remind ourselves that it's important to be kind, and we'll do that in section 1. After all, Jesus was kind to people (well, except the religious people).

Then in section 2, we'll discuss the practice of being present. In our crazy-busy world, we find it harder and harder to be fully present. So we're going to take a look at some practical ways we can be honestly and genuinely *with* the person right in front of us.

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In order to have conversations like Jesus had, we need courage, which we'll talk about in section 3. We find talk of bravery and courage everywhere in present-day writing, both secular and Christian. (Brené Brown is a great example.) But we often forget that Jesus was brave, and that should propel us forward more than any inspirational quote we read. For most of us, it takes courage just to walk across the street and invite our neighbors over for a barbecue. Forget the Navy SEALs or the stuff we see in the movies—we just need to greet Sam and Beth at the mailbox.

Finally, in section 4, I encourage us to “be Jesus.” To have his mind and his heart. The first three sections of this book are about interacting with people the way Jesus interacted. Learning to be like him in our everyday conversations. The fourth section takes us a little deeper, calling us to a *knowing* of Jesus that brings transformation. He promised that he would be with us, that he would be in us. When we believe that to be true, we can actually be the presence of Jesus to people as we are transformed into his likeness.

Each section has five days of reading with a central theme. I'd encourage you to study this book over the period of one month, one section per week. And ideally, read and live it in community. There's value and accountability in doing this kind of thing together. We cheer each other on. We challenge each other. We get to see Jesus doing things in each other's lives and the lives of everyone we come across. To encourage this practice of togetherness, I've included “Dig Deeper & Discuss” questions in the “Final Word” of each section. (Of

course, you can go through this book on your own and still expect to benefit from it.)

We will spend most of our time looking at the life of Jesus—what he modeled for us in his short conversations. And I'll share my own stories along the way, as I've tried to live out this manner of interacting with other people. I'm going to share the great “wow” stories alongside the many times I've floundered, failed, or even royally blown it. If we're going to be serious about living in the way of Jesus, we're going to need the humility to understand that we're not always going to do it perfectly.

This journey we're about to take together will be practical and spiritually transformative if we let it. And I think we'll have some fun along the way.

It's time to learn to talk like Jesus. Are you ready?

1 Be Kind

A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees. AMELIA EARHART

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” . . . And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. JESUS, MARK 10:14, 16

Most of us have seen it somewhere: the painting, book illustration, or even felt-board diagram of smiling, laughing Jesus, surrounded by smiling, laughing children, each trying to find their place on his lap. The image might take us back to happy childhood Sunday school lessons. Or perhaps we’ve relegated the picture to the mental category of “overly simplistic thoughts about God.” But I’d suggest it’s time to take that image out, dust it off, and revel in the powerful and often overlooked truth that Jesus was kind. Simply kind.

Kindness has gotten a bad rap lately. Being nice to people sounds like you’re about to have some sort of liberal kumbaya moment or silly group hug while ignoring the less-than-kind world around you. Because in this world of ours, being kind

doesn't have much value. That goes for many Christians, too. A *whole lot* of people who say they follow Jesus have a hair-trigger temper, ready to jump down someone's throat at the slightest disagreement or wrongdoing. We rationalize it. We justify it. I even know some Christians who say things like "Jesus wasn't nice—he was right."

Of course, in saying that, we forget that kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. It's number five on Paul's list, right after "love, joy, peace, patience."¹ It's one of the top qualities we're to exhibit if we have the Spirit of Jesus in our lives.

So that's why, if we're going to be like Jesus in our everyday interactions, we have to go back to basics. Kindness 101. Encouragement to be nice to those around us. Basic human being sort of stuff. These are the things we sometimes miss in the busyness and craziness of life. Kindness is the foundation for everything else in this book. It's basically impossible to introduce our neighbors and coworkers to Jesus if we're not kind to them.

Kindness isn't hard, but it does take lifting our heads up and noticing the people around us. It takes being willing to set our selfishness aside to think about other people. Kindness can be transformative. It can affect the person you're talking to in ways you might not even see.

And it just might change you as well.

Say Hey

The Nonstarter: Fail to acknowledge someone.

The Opener: Say hello. Hi. Hey. Howdy.

JESUS WAS NICE TO PEOPLE.

Read that again. Almost sounds funny, right? Jesus was many things to people, but “nice” isn’t always the first one we think of. We think of the miracles, the teaching, the walk to the cross, and nice seems pretty far down the list of what was a big deal about Jesus. But he was, in fact, nice to people. I mean, he wasn’t particularly kind to religious people—at least not to those who used their religion to beat people up rather than share the Good News. He was also sometimes a bit hard on wealthy people and those who thought they had some sort of inherent power. But generally, to most people, most of the time, he was a pretty nice guy.

But let’s look a little closer at what “nice to people” meant according to Jesus.

Jesus incorporated greeting people into his basic theology of ministry. In both Matthew 10:12 and Luke 10:5, when he gave his disciples practical instructions on how to go out and share the Good News, he told them to greet those they interacted with. If the other person returned that greeting, the disciples were to stay and hang out there. If not, they were to say, “Yo, what’s up?” (my translation) and then just keep on moving.

Here’s my version of that: When I kindly say hello to someone and they say a nice hello back, then we’re off and running. It’s really that simple. Pastor John Wimber liked to say that 90 percent of all successful ministry was just getting out of bed in the morning. This is another version of that. You can’t be effective at whatever you’re trying to do if you don’t say a warm hello to people. That’s where it all begins.

Jesus greeted some fishermen, and they ended up giving their livelihood—and eventually their lives—to follow him.¹

Jesus greeted the Samaritan woman at the well and asked if she could give him a drink of water. And that led to one of the most powerful and often quoted stories in all the Bible.²

Jesus said hi to the children along the way, and they wouldn’t stop coming to him.³

Jesus said hey to the two guys walking on the road to Emmaus, and the next thing you know, he was eating dinner with them.⁴

It all starts with hello.

I live in a cul-de-sac, so it’s theoretically easy to say hello to my neighbors. Especially at around 7:00 a.m. or 6:00 p.m. on workdays, or really any time on the weekend. But I have

a garage-door opener in my car, and when I just don't feel like saying hi (knowing it might lead to a real conversation), I reach up and push that little black button of personal choice and freedom. My garage door rises like the door to my castle, and *bam*, I don't need to say hi to my neighbors.

But I try to resist that temptation. Or because it sort of makes sense to go ahead and pull my car into the garage, I'll walk back outside and say hi to whoever's around.

It looks like this. I pull the car in, then walk out front and look around until I see someone and yell, "Hey, John!" (or whatever the person's name is). That's pretty much it. They usually yell back something like "Hey, Carl, what's up?" And then we might be done. Or it might go somewhere like my asking back, "How are you doing?" And once you get to "How are you doing?" you'd better watch out, because every once in a while, people actually say how they're doing.

This week make the time to say hi to people. Everywhere. Almost always. Go out of your way, look them in the eye, and say hello. Often add the ever-so-dangerous "How are you?" And try to actually mean it—like Jesus did.

Just see what happens.

