

Next edition...

we'll look at how to empower new believers to discover their own distinctive ways of following Jesus. This is where the rubber hits the road - the implications of their faith in their lives and communities. Stay tuned!

SHARING *Your Faith*

Part II

Walking and Talking

Making MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

In the last edition of Resonate we heard from Global Interaction team members about how they made initial connections with people in cross-cultural settings.¹ They wrote about finding common interests, offering hospitality and making efforts to begin friendships. Here, Susan Campbell talks with Global Consultant for Practical Evangelism Mark Holt about what happens next.

He's done the hard yards of moving the family to the other side of the world.

She's got the hang of the language and is navigating her way through understanding cultural differences.

He feels settled in his new home and is excited about friendships that are forming. She really likes the people around her and recognises that the desire of her heart, and God's, is that her friends come to know Jesus. The next phase is to take the conversations to the next level (not the next level up, but down, to the deeper issue of life). Mark describes three things to keep in mind in order to do this effectively.

Walk the Talk

We know it's good to practice what we preach, walk the talk and live lives of authenticity and integrity. It's part of the backbone of our faith. Yet this need seems to be even more apparent in a cross-cultural setting. New friends are watching closely, perhaps in interest, suspicion or curiosity. They observe what us Aussies do, what we eat, what we wear, how we treat our partners, how we talk to our kids and which bits of the culture we choose to accept or reject.

"It's so essential that we practice spiritual habits that evoke questions from those around us. These habits must be impacting in our context," Mark says. "It's not simply going to church on Sunday but engaging in things that line up with God's values and show evidence of a transformed life. Our actions, responses and behaviours will create curiosity and evoke questions."

A cross-cultural team member regularly meets with a few Muslim friends for a walk and occasionally stops at a street vendor for a bite to eat. One day, during the fasting month of Ramadan, his friends expected him to order pancakes as usual. They questioned him when he shook his head and walked on. He explained that out of respect for the culture and for God, he too was using the month to fast and pray. His intentional actions were noticed and a meaty (mind the pun) conversation ensued. Similar conversations are begun when people notice that cross-cultural workers don't eat pork and participate in community events. They may also pause during the call to prayer or set up a prayer mat in their homes using the cultural cues to worship Jesus. These small actions reveal to observers that the Aussies are actually deeply interested in their lives.

For those in an Aussie context, Mark recommends reading the short, free, eBook *The Five Habits of Highly Missional People*.² Author Michael Frost unpacks the why and how of living 'questionable lives'.

Know (and love) the Talk

Secondly, it's helpful - scrap that, it's imperative - that cross-cultural workers know their stuff when it comes to Jesus. "We are sometimes surprised at how easy it is to relate everyday experiences to the life and teaching of Jesus," says Mark. "I love that the Biblical texts are chock full of recounts of Jesus interacting with Average Joe people in domestic settings. The ancient stories and teachings of our faith are spoken in stories of families, homes, land, animals and food - so easy to resonate with."

When we sink in to the stories of Jesus, when the pages of our Bible are dog-eared from reading, when our waxy headphones run a stream of podcasts and messages about Scripture, when our minds and hearts are soaked with Jesus... it is easy, indeed delightful, to communicate those stories to others. When we know the stories well, and know how to share them in the context of the hearers, we'll have confidence and courage to communicate them. We live and breathe them.

A cross-cultural worker was having a conversation with a group of Muslim friends who were trying hard to keep the fast during Ramadan. They shared how God would be pleased with nothing short of perfection and were also embarrassed by their need to confess their failings. The cross-cultural worker casually told Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector going to the temple to pray. He contextualised the story, telling of two men going to the mosque to pray during Ramadan, one boasting of how he fulfilled the fast far better than the other man who was kneeling behind a pillar asking for God's mercy because he was failing so miserably. "Who do you think God heard?" asked the cross-cultural worker.

Reflect:

- **What things do you do (or don't do) that evoke questions from non Christian friends?**
- **How well do you know and love the stories of Jesus? What could you do to 'sink in' to them deeper?**
- **What does 'proclamation' look, sound and feel like in your context?**

Talk the Walk

Finally, we need to be ready to respond when questions arise. Sure, our actions and behaviour speak loudly about our values, morals and character. Yet, particularly in communities where Jesus is totally unknown and where opportunities to hear of him are as rare as drinkable tap water, there must be times for that uncool word 'proclamation'. Paul made it sound less scary when he wrote, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."⁴

We are invited to join in the centuries-old practice of speaking the truth into people's lives. Mark says, "In the places our teams work, proclamation doesn't mean street corner stuff, it doesn't even mean preaching, there are no altars, so no altar calls! It most often means conversations, one-on-one, sharing about the impact of Jesus on our lives and inviting hearers to explore it further for themselves."

A team member spent a few nights in the countryside with a local friend. Each night, she thought back through the interactions of the day, took out her journal and wrote down the topics of conversation. Doing this, she noticed potential points of connection and opportunity where she could ask deeper questions, relate something to her faith or weave a story about Jesus into the conversation. Over time this became a natural process that led to more meaningful relationships. Her intentionality and insight of the practice it takes was impressive.

Mark says that cross-cultural workers need to ensure that they have asked the questions of themselves, in anticipation of responding to the questions of others. "What does knowing Jesus mean to me? Why do I choose to live a life of faith? How do I know God loves me? What difference does being a follower of Jesus make? If these questions aren't asked and asked and asked again, they'll be like stunned mullets or floundering fakers when the situations arise."

Integral to all of these is a keen desire and willingness to be attentive to what God is already doing in the lives of others. These strategies are founded on the bedrock of belief that the Holy Spirit is alive and active and moving in people's hearts, drawing them towards God. Our role is to be looking and listening for the Holy Spirit, then accepting the invitation to be involved. Attentiveness is a key spiritual discipline of followers of Jesus. Get this and we're halfway there.

¹ If you missed it, catch up at globalinteraction.org.au/resonate

² my.exponential.org/ebooks/fivehabits

³ Luke 18:10-14

⁴ Colossians 4:5-6