

# Holy Conversations

Series: Holy Conversations: Talking about God in Everyday Life

Brad Bailey – Oct. 1, 2023

Intro

I first heard of how God had come to us in Christ ... early 1970s... through my HS and college years... there was **nothing unusual about believing in God...** and even accepting Christ as savior. For sure there was **the awkward tension some friends felt** about how it **might affect partying together** in the same ways... **but the general cultural mind wasn't loaded** with any **deep negative associations.**

I have felt **how notably that has changed.**

**My sense is that most of us feel like it's almost impossible to talk about our faith...** without a sense of **eliciting some strong reactions.**

It may be with family members... friends... co-workers.

- It may be **felt most consistently by those who are younger...** because there has been a **growing number of "cultural narratives"** and **negative associations** that have shaped the minds and hearts of so many in recent years.
- Most of us feel there is a **minefield of misconceptions and misgivings** that make it too difficult to discuss God with those who don't share our belief.
- We know that there are a **number of "issues"** that **might be triggered...** so if we speak of God... of identifying with the church... perhaps **you wait to see if you hear the click of a landmine being triggered.**
- It may be **as general as resentment** for the assumption that they are going to get preached at... because **"religious people" are self-righteous.**
- Or maybe they just show some fear that you **haven't accepted the cultural understanding** that there is no absolute truth... and that **you need to be reminded this can only be your truth...and only what is good for you.**
- Or maybe it's a reaction to the **associations with "Evangelical Christians" ... as a political force.**
- Or maybe it's the **scandal's and hypocrisy that seems so common amidst religious institutions and groups.** Many feel that organized religion doesn't just have problems amidst itself... it is a problem itself...and anything associated with it.

> **The one thing most of those who believe in Christ and those who don't yet believe have in common... is that we can have a hard time talking about God with people who don't share our belief.**

**Whether you are committed to Christ... or still exploring ...** I believe that **we have all lost something which should be as natural as anything in life...** which is the **ability to talk about the big questions of life... about spiritual beliefs.**

> I want to **encourage us to learn how to have healthy and holy conversations.**

**Consider this... the truth is that [1] ...**

***Many people may be more guarded...but they are not closed.***

You may think: no one believes in God any more. The truth is according to sociologists in 2022, ***The proportion of atheists in the US has held steady at only 3% to 4% for more than 80 years.***

You may think: there is a growing trend of people who simply aren't identifying with any religious affiliation... often labeled as "Nones"...because if given a list of religious affiliations... they respond by check the box that says "None." This has **indeed been a major trend...but..**

***The "nones" represent something unsettled... stories unfinished.***

The truth is there are stories of those who have departed from their faith... due to some conflict of ideas or experience...that need to be listened to... and explored.

And what we will find... is that the conflicts are not with Jesus.

You may think people have negative feeling about Christ. But the truth is that virtually no one is reacting to Jesus. [2]

***The majority of Americans view segments of Christian culture negatively...but have positive opinions about Jesus.***

***The truth is that every life has a spiritual nature and nearly all know there may be more to life than what they have known.***

***What those who don't yet know Christ need, is "not a sales pitch, argument, or information dump. Instead, they need caring, thoughtful conversation partners."***

So today... we are **beginning a series** entitled...

**Holy Conversations: Talking about God in Everyday Life**

***A "holy conversation" is where two or more lives engage openly and authentically... without coercion....and the reality of God's grace is revealed in such a way that one is drawn forward.***

**In this series we discover what Jesus shows us about how to enjoy "holy conversations" in everyday life.**

And we are going to **draw from one extended conversation** through these weeks... a conversation **between Jesus and a Samaritan woman.**

John 4:4-42.... **Longer passage**...but one that is **easy to follow** by way of imagining the scene and exchange.

**John 4:4-42**

<sup>4</sup> Now he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.<sup>[a]</sup>)

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

<sup>11</sup> "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

<sup>13</sup> Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

<sup>16</sup> He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

<sup>17</sup> "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. <sup>18</sup> The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

<sup>19</sup> “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

<sup>21</sup> “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

<sup>25</sup> The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

<sup>26</sup> Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

<sup>28</sup> Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, <sup>29</sup> “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” <sup>30</sup> They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

<sup>32</sup> But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

<sup>33</sup> Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

<sup>34</sup> “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. <sup>35</sup> Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. <sup>36</sup> Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. <sup>37</sup> Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

<sup>39</sup> Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. <sup>41</sup> And because of his words many more became believers.

<sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

## PRAY

There are a **lot of elements that may stand out** in this exchange... and that’s **why we will consider different elements** over the next few weeks.

What unfolds is beautiful...and **what is important not to miss is how it began.**

Began...

**John 4:4-5**

<sup>4</sup> **Now he had to go through Samaria.** <sup>5</sup> **So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.**

**“he had to go through Samaria.** So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar.”

We live in a time in which we might be waiting for some great sign and set up from heaven. And God will bring promptings. But **this conversation... arose simply because he had to go through Samaria.**

> What unfolds isn’t part of a specific **program** or **plan.**

**1. Holy Conversations can arise in EVERYDAY LIFE.**

For most of us, **sharing God's grace in Christ... is not about something we have to add to our busy lives...it's about how we engage those who are already in them.**

**Every one of us have some level of interactions with people we know...are getting to know... or simply engage as part of daily activity.**

> And what we find through Jesus...is that healthy and holy conversations don't arise from elaborate planning... and what we try to bring into them...but **in how we see the other person.**

**When we are operating out of guilt...** out of something we sense we are inescapably unable to do well and do enough of... being a witness **becomes just a project to try to complete....** Any sense of real relationship can be lost because it's not about the needs of others. [3]

Being witnesses of God isn't something we do to someone, it's learning to love as God loves."  
What we find is **learn to look...and listen.**

A recent large survey was done that explored what people of no faith hope to find in conversations with Christians. [4]

***What people of no faith hope to find in conversations with Christians is honesty, care and understanding.***

These qualities are **not easy for many** if not most of us. But through these weeks we are going to grow in our ability to enjoy holy conversations.

And along these lines, we should note something equally significant...

**John 4:6**

**Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.**

And he waits...until someone comes...so he can ask if they would draw water for him to drink.

**This would lead to sharing that he had that which could serve her thirst...but it began with his thirst.**

**And where was he? In her country.**

**He wasn't afraid to be the outsider....who is thirsty and has a need for water.**

## **2. Holy Conversations embrace our COMMON GROUND.**

Jesus doesn't see his need as position to avoid...but as a natural part of connecting.

And it's such a profound way in which God came to us...that we lose sight of.

**We can tend to think that we need to be different in the wrong ways... that we need to never be the one with needs... even when they are the same needs of human life.**

**What we can miss is that our common humanity is our common connection with everyone else.**

**When God wanted to restore relationship with us... when he wanted to restore us...what did He do? He became HUMAN.**

**John 1:14 (GW)**

**"The Word became human and lived among us."**

Jesus was HUMAN ! He reached human life by being human.

**We can also learn from Jesus that embracing a heart to serve with Christ... also allows one to be served by others.** The humility to serve will be the humility that allows us to be served... and to avoid any sense of superiority and separation. **Jesus was born dependent on a teenage mother...** ... taught by a young carpenter.... fed and housed by friends... and served by many including a Samaritan woman with a bad reputation. [5]

I remember not too long ago... on a night before trash day.... I was up late... remembered my own trash cans needed to get out because they pick up at dawn on our street... noticed neighbors... so I took theirs out as well. The mother of the household thanked me. The next week.... her young adult thanked me... and begged me not to tell his mother.... **AND HE BROUGHT MINE IN.**  
> It was then that we became more truly neighbors.

Paul... one of those religious leaders grasped this power of identifying.

**I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. - 1 Cor. 9:22 (NLT)**

**Common ground can include...**

- **life places** - Ex – just a couple night ago...dog to park...Derick and Lucy.... Dog... MV... life... ended with CC
- **life stages**
- **life work**
- **life interests**
- **life challenges**
- **life circumstances**
- **life longings (for meaning, transcendence, relationship, justice, beauty)**

**Consider the common ground you share** with lives you can bless... where you live... what you enjoy... where you work... what you struggle with.

We need to build relationships upon the common ground of life. [6]

***Those we relate to need to know that we inhabit the same world... because the truth is... Christians have something to share with others, not because they are different but precisely because they are no different. Their concerns and struggles are the same as other people's.***

I'm not saying that we're not to be different. What matters is HOW we are different. How was Jesus different? He lived in relationship with the Father... and that is the relationship that should make us different... and NOTHING ELSE.

***But there is something else Jesus brings into this exchange.***

What is the woman's first response to Jesus?

**John 4:9**

**The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)**

This is the **land of Samaria...** of a **people despised by the Israelites.**

The land of Samaria represented how one group of the Jewish people had settled into the land of Samaria and become enmeshed with the culture. Those who were to stay distinct as a people **intermarried...**and over time the **Samaritans added the God of Israel to their religious set of syncretic gods...** while the **Israelite Jews began to worship their pagan idols.** And as a result the Samaritans were despised as half breeds and heathens.

**So Jesus disciples** stopped only to get food nearby...and when they **returned they were surprised to find he was talking to a Samaritan and to a woman.**

**> There is a social boundary that his disciples understood... the woman understood... but Jesus crossed to reach her.**

Jesus affirms that salvation to the world will come through the Jews for they had enjoyed a history of revelation from God. But he goes on to say that what is coming will transcend the outward identity of nations and places of worship.

What's at hand is the culmination of what God is seeking... overcoming both the **IGNORANCE** of the Samaritans (... "truth") and the **EMPTINESS** of merely **OUTWARD RITUALS** which he saw in many of the Jewish people (... "spirit").

He refuses to let social identities define who is acceptable or not acceptable.

### **3. Holy Conversations will CROSS BOUNDARIES of separation and superiority.**

**We might not think** we have the **same type of social boundaries** today...but we do have our own versions.

There are things we are to not say...and people we are not to say them to.  
And some of these boundaries can keep us from what God has for others.

**This can involve crossing from the social position of superiority or inferiority.**

**Many people think they don't have the ability to speak to someone more educated... more financially successful...more socially successful...**

**When it comes to speaking blessing...** and sharing God's grace... everyone can bring it.

**The janitor** can bless the owner of the company and the owner can bless the janitor.

Parents can bless youth... and **youth can bless parents**

**And sometimes** we may **sense God's heart to ask a question** that reaches past social boundaries... because that is what care does.

- **When someone speaks anxiously of a loved one's health...it may be that love will lead us to ask about their fears.**
- **When someone speaks about an experience of wonder in nature...it may be that love will lead us to explore the experience of transcendence more deeply.**
- **When someone speaks about something big they are facing... health...it may be that love will lead us to ask if we can pray for them.**

**Jesus could have stayed within the social boundary** of this moment...she would have come and gone... **having never had her social comfort pierced... but having been left in it's prison.**

#### **CLOSING:**

One thing we have to **be sure we don't miss** in this scene... is that **this woman mattered to God.**  
Jesus went without a meal. Why? Because Jesus saw what mattered to God.

**He didn't see a religious responsibility...** a source of guilt to reluctantly try to alleviate.  
He saw a child of God who was wayward.

**He didn't see someone who was merely a functional necessity.** Nor did he see a mere inconvenience in his way.

He saw a child of God who was wayward.

As the famous writer C.S. Lewis described so profoundly,

**“It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. It is a serious thing... to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.**

**We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”**

**— C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"**

And he even explains that there is another type of satisfaction that he had just taken in...that of sharing the grace of God.

**This woman mattered to God.**

**And there's a woman at the well that will enter each of our lives.**

**Ask God to show you who that woman may be ...to lead you. Let him know you're willing to look...and listen... and love as he did.**

### **Closing: Prayer**

Possible additional introduction to:

**Spiritual Conversation Partner** - Here's a challenge that provides an opportunity to really grow in such conversations. Identify and ask someone you know who is not yet a Christian, to be a **Spiritual Conversation Partner** by meeting four times (if possible) to share about one another's beliefs. If that strikes you as sounding like an interesting proposal...don't let it go... take time today...this week to think of someone. And if in another week or so...you can't find some who doesn't share your faith...I would encourage doing this with someone who does.

### **Notes:**

1. For some of these stats, see: ["Measuring Religion in Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel"](#)

2. When we asked Americans whether they have a positive or negative opinion of Jesus, seven in 10 (71%) say they view him positively....

But when asked about Christianity... drops a bit (51%)...Evangelicals...drops quite a bit (26%)...and similarly lowest are celebrity pastors and worship groups). - See: ["Measuring Religion in Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel"](#)

BARNA - May 17, 2023 - Openness to Jesus Isn't the Problem—the Church Is

Here - <https://www.barna.com/research/openness-to-jesus/>

3. “As we seek to move toward God, we're always seeking to bring everyone we can along with us. In this sense, evangelism becomes something we are intentionally (and unintentionally) doing all the time with all the people around us. We no longer see it as an artificial program to pull out of our hats when we meet heathen sinners. It's for all sinners, including us!” - Irresistible Evangelism by Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, Doug Pollock, pp. 75-76

4. What Are People of No Faith Looking for in Faith Conversations? Jul 19, 2023;

<https://www.barna.com/research/no-faith-conversations/>

5. We see this common ground throughout Jesus ministry. He built relationships on the common ground of life.....eating meals with peasants and prostitutes ...which in early Jewish culture was the ultimate expression of fellowship.

When he first called the twelve disciples who he would prepare to carry his life and change the world... the first thing he did was take them to a wedding. Why? Simply because 'Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration.' John 2:2 (NLT) Jesus went to Zaccheus the tax collectors home for lunch.

He prayed for us... that we would no longer be OF this world... but equally that we would be IN this world... not removed but IN this world AS HE WAS IN THIS WORLD...just like him. (John 17:13-16)

"He did not invite people to come to places where he felt safe and they felt threatened. He went to the beach, to the market, to the city streets. And he did not set up evangelistic events when he got there. He was simply there, sharing in the life of whatever was happening—and listening."- - Complete Book of Everyday Christianity

6. Along the lines of common ground, I value Tim Keller's description of a missional church - Characteristics of a Missional Church - YouTube. 360mp4

And the thoughts of my friend Dave Andrews describes, we should introduce ourselves with our commonality, not our differences.

- To the Catholic, I'm a follower of Jesus
- To the Muslim or Jew, I'm believer in God
- To the agnostic or atheist, I'm student of Truth.
- In my neighborhood, I am a neighbor.

From Dave Andrews, p. 54-55