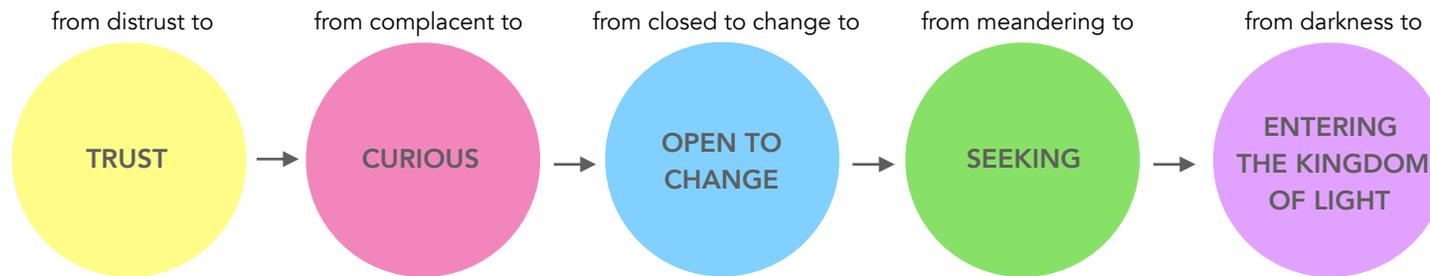


THE FIVE THRESHOLDS OF CONVERSION



FROM DISTRUST TO TRUST - non-believers often have valid personal reasons not to trust a Christian. But, they may also have preconceptions or prejudice against Christians from how they are portrayed in media or history.

FROM COMPLACENT TO CURIOUS - Our friends are willing to talk and to answer questions we might have for them, even on spiritual topics, but show no interest in reciprocating by asking questions or listening to what we might think.

FROM CLOSED TO CHANGE TO OPEN TO CHANGE - This seems like the hardest threshold to overcome. It is possible for someone to be curious and to love to ask questions and talk about deep things, but have no intention to change themselves.

FROM MEANDERING TO SEEKING - Even if our friends are curious and open to change, it is natural for them to meander before they begin to actively and purposefully seek God.

FROM DARKNESS TO ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT - The final threshold to cross is into the kingdom of God itself. This decision is the culmination of belief, repentance and devoting their lives to Jesus.

5 Thresholds to Postmodern Conversion

1 From distrust to trust.

Non-believers often have valid personal reasons not to trust Christians, but they also might have preconceptions or prejudice against Christians from how they are portrayed in media or history.

- Does your friend trust Christians?
- Does he or she trust your motives in your efforts to become friends?
- What invitation could you make to your friend to build trust?

2 From complacent to curious.

Sometimes our friends are quite willing to talk, and to answer questions we might have for them, even on spiritual topics, but show no interest in reciprocating by asking questions, or listening to what we might think.

- Is your friend at all curious about Jesus? Or “spirituality”? Or your values?
- What can you do to elicit curiosity, to help your friend emerge from complacency?
- What invitation could you make to your friend to build curiosity?

3 From closed to change to open to change.

This seems to be the hardest threshold to cross. It is, of course, possible to be curious and to love asking questions about and talking about deep and spiritual things, but have no intention to change what seems like a pretty good, satisfying life.

- Is your friend aware of a need in his or her life that would require change to address?
- Have you seen your friend make other changes in his or her life?
- What could you do to help your friend to grow in openness to change?

4 From meandering to seeking.

Even when our friends become curious about Jesus and even open to change in their life, it didn't necessarily follow that they begin actively, purposefully seeking God. It is more natural for them to meander. They say yes to our invitations the way someone might go to the movies - “I'm free this week” - rather than, “I'll commit to purposeful inquiry by coming regularly.”

- Has your friend been willing to say yes to an invitation from you, then to follow through on that “yes”?
- Does your friend view himself or herself in a process of seeking?
- What invitation could you make to your friend to increase a desire purposefully to seek God?

5 From darkness to entering the kingdom of light.

Finally, each of our friends has one more threshold to cross. They need to cross the threshold of the kingdom itself. They needed to repent and believe and give their lives to Jesus. Many people who journey well along the path to faith, learning to trust a Christian, becoming curious about Jesus, becoming open to personal change, even seeking after answers... never become Christians.

- Have you a sense that your friend might be ready to be invited to become a Christian? What are clues that might indicate readiness?
- Would you be ready to invite your friends to become Christians? How would you put that invitation? What do they need to understand about the faith before they embrace it?

Threshold 1: From distrust to trust

Destroying Trust



Building Trust

To move from destroying trust to building trust,
recognize your weaknesses and pray for help to change.

Destroying Trust

1. Defend

When someone assumes negative things about us, we get defensive. It actually causes us to close our heart to the person who mistrusts us.

2. Bruise

When we are not trusted, we feel personally offended. *"Why would you not trust me?"* Our ego is bruised and we become reluctant to put our heart on the line again.

3. Avoid

When people act weird when they find out we are a Christian, we distance ourselves. We become numb and indifferent. We stop caring.

4. Judge

Out of feelings of hurt, and out of pride, some lash back with a condescending attitude.

5. Argue

When others react to the fact that we are a Christian, we receive their distrust as a challenge. We get into a competitive mindset and don't want to lose. We think we are actually serving them, helping them towards Jesus, but often this actually works to derail their journey of faith.

Building Trust

1. Pray for them

When we catch ourselves getting defensive, we can silently ask God to soften our hearts and we can pray for them.

2. Learn from them

Instead of cringing and feeling bruised by their mistrust, we must lean into them and learn. Be present with people and listen to them, seeking to understand their uniqueness.

3. Bond with them in love

Spend intentional time with them. Instead of avoiding, we can take purposeful kingdom steps forward to be with them. Jesus displaced himself for us, we can do the same for others.

4. Affirm them for their value

Looking for real good in the other and affirm it. We can combat our tendency to judge others by looking for good in people and affirming it.

5. Welcome them into deeper experience

"Come and see" is one of the most authentic, transparent gifts we can give. Our lives become transparent to those we invite in to join us.

Threshold 2: From complacent to curious

Curiosity blossoms over time - 3 Levels of intensity

Awareness

Awareness of more options, more paths to life, is often the first baby step out of complacency. As people hear about Jesus, their old pictures of God may become inadequate and they begin to be curious of other options.

Engagement

As people trust their Christian friend they may join a bible study, read the bible on their own and/or go to a Christian event.

Exchange

An intense form of curiosity that means being so curious that you want to exchange ideas, ask questions and offer your own opinions. A type of give-and-take conversation when our friends are more than just passive hearers.

It is wonderful to see someone grow curious about Jesus! Is it possible to help our friends move from complacency to curiosity?

~
Often the Spirit uses regular folks to help people get across this significant threshold.

FOCUS ON JESUS AND HIS KINGDOM

Provoking Curiosity

1. Encourage questions

Jesus used questions not to elicit information from people but rather to stir within them some thought or emotion. Sometimes when someone asks us a question, an answer is the last thing they need. Instead a good question in return can spark curiosity as they seek the answer.

2. Use parables/stories

Jesus often told simple stories to those around him that left images in the hearers' minds. Once stuck, these seemingly innocent images haunted: they begged further inquiry, further thought, further questions. Parables can be found all around us today: news, movies, sports, books, etc.

3. Live curiously

Jesus was surprising - doing things that were countercultural and caused those around him to pause. Kingdom oriented, countercultural action, when lived out in our daily lives can help our friends cross this threshold into curiosity.

4. Practicing Christian community

There are many kingdom realities that are seen only through relationships and community. Let your friends watch you do life together with your small group and they will see forgiveness in action, reconciliation, people who speak truth in love to each other, building each other up, caring for the poor, the power of prayer.

Sample Starter Questions:

- Have you ever had a spiritual experience? Would you like to have one?
- Have you ever felt like you received a sign from God? What would you do if God gave you a sign?
- What is your take on this whole God question? What do you think God is like?
- Why do so many people hide behind religion? What do you think is wrong with Christians today?
- What do you think life is about? Do you think you have a destiny?
- Do you think that people are more spiritually interested today than they were five years ago?
- What is the most significant thing that has happened to you in the last month?

Threshold 3: From closed to change to open to change

Helping our friends become open to change

Be patiently praying.

Being patient gives the gift of space and permission to explore. Allowing our friends to know that we are their friend regardless of what they decide. Our friends are making profound decisions about life, direction and faith and facing a very real enemy. Our ongoing prayers for our friends need to be redoubled at this part of the journey.

Challenge as Jesus challenged.

Jesus challenged people in a way that made sense for who they were and where they were. We need to figure out what our friend needs in order to be challenged towards openness.

- *Jesus touches the pain of the broken and honest.* [John 4]

He offers gentle affirmation and gentle honesty. We need to learn to ask good questions, listen compassionately and speak honestly about our own struggle with change.

- *Jesus mobilized the self-pitying and fearful.* [John 5]

Our friends may be paralyzed by fear of change. We can lovingly nudge our friends to take courage and take action.

- *Jesus agitated the complacent and glib.* [John 3]

Our friends may be articulate and very thoughtful and it might be tempting to enter into a debate mode. Instead, we can jostle them out of their complacency and call them on how they are afraid of change.

- *Jesus connected the dots for the confused and befuddled.* [John 5]

We can help our friends interpret and connect the dots of what they have observed about God and Christians and help them see the truth.

Exodus 17:8-13
[Practicing Enduring Prayer]

- ➔ Do not stop.
- ➔ Do not grow weary.
- ➔ Enlist other people to uphold us as we pray.

Becoming genuinely open to change is often the most difficult threshold to overcome.

Change is both beautiful and horrific.

Change has always been hard. Real change is just plain difficult.

In the end, it is only God's Spirit that is able to overcome the human hesitancy to change.

Threshold 4: From meandering to seeking.

Tangible ways to live out the kingdom in front of our meandering friends:

Show them how to build their lives' on Jesus' words.

As God speaks to you through your devotions or through a sermon at church, tell your seeker friends how God is challenging or leading you. Your friends will come to believe in a God who speaks today, to issues in our everyday lives.

Open up your prayer life to them.

It's not only OK to allow our non-Christian friends to see our public display of affection with God; it's actually quite helpful. It can be a little unnerving, but it is beautiful to let non-believers learn to talk to God by watching us interact with Jesus directly.

Provide satisfying answers to their initial questions.

Often the most satisfying answer is when you share God's work in your personal life instead of memorized clichés. Show them how the gospel is at work in your own life. Honesty on your part catalyzes honesty on their part.

ATTIC - instead of knee-jerk responses, here are some ways to keep the conversation going:

- **Affirm** - be wildly enthusiastic that your friend is asking questions.
- **Translate** - think about what you believe to be the answer to the question asked, but bring that point down into your own life.
- **Transparent** - let your answer be a confessional, let your answer reveal that you are still a work in progress
- **Insert yourself as a case study** - apply your answer to your life to show how your belief affects you.
- **Challenge** - after answering a question, always bring it back to your friend, "What about you?" "What are you looking for?"

Model Seeking

Every believer, as they follow Jesus, gets to model actively seeking after Jesus. Seeking after Jesus is at the core of who we are as believers and it can be very helpful to do that seeking in front of our seeking friends.

Sharing Testimonies

There's nothing quite like having believers tell the story of their journey to faith. It models what it looked like for us to begin seeking God with vigor.

Seeker Events - A few important questions to ask before hosting an event:

1. **Is this event designed with real seekers in mind?** Make sure you clarify which threshold(s) you are actually trying to help people step through before planning the event.
2. **Are the expectations clear?** Setting clear expectations for people creates clarity and safety for folks. People can be held accountable to being open, honest and allows for growth.
3. **Is scripture central to what is planned?** Ultimately, Scripture is where the answers are. People need to hear what the Gospels say about Jesus.
4. **Are we guiding seekers or shielding them?** Come alongside our friends as they experience an event and help translate for them what is going on.

Our friends become seekers when they realize they need to make a decision about Jesus.

Seekers seek Jesus, not just God.

- They have a clear object of intrigue: Jesus. Can he be trusted?

Seekers count the costs.

- Is the life that Jesus calls believers to live, worth it?

Seekers spend time with Christians.

- They trust their believing friends and attend bible studies, church and other social events with believers.

Threshold 5: From darkness to entering the kingdom of light.

Decision time

Be appropriately urgent when we sense that our friends are ripe and need to make a decision:

- Ask them, explicitly and simply, to enter the kingdom.
- If they say no, ask them why.
- Help them either resolve or set aside their blocks that keep them from Jesus.
- Help them focus on Jesus.
- Help them see how they are responding to Jesus.
- Study passages from Scripture that deal with salvation and lostness.
- Encourage new believers to share their story.
- Before asking them to commit, warm them up to the fact that a decision opportunity is near.

Be clear, but don't oversimplify

- What does Jesus call people to and what does it mean to become one of his.
- Talk about doing a U-turn - utter transformation. It's more than praying a simple prayer - it is choosing to follow Jesus the rest of their lives.

Ideas for clear invitation, without oversimplifying

The BIG Story Image

Designed for good
Damaged by evil
Restored for better
Sent together to heal

For resources and videos on this Gospel Outline including an app for your phone, go to: <http://www.jameschoung.net/resources/big-story/>

Wedding Vows

Just like when a couple makes wedding vows, it is a commitment to seek to love at all times - not just some of the time. We can't offer Jesus partial vows, he deserves full vows - all of us, all of our decisions are given to Jesus.

Sports Team

When you enter the kingdom of God, you are joining a team. Jesus is in charge, he's the coach. You grow together as a team.

Revolution

Jesus is throwing a revolution and you are invited to join him: those exalted will be humbled, those who are humbled will be lifted up.

Beyond the Thresholds: Citizens of God's kingdom forever

The first year after conversion can be a year of both tremendous blessings and often terrible difficulty.

Questions our friends are asking themselves:

How do I live now? How do I relate with my boyfriend now? Do I keep cheating on tests? What about cussing?

Opposition our friends might face:

I can't believe how my old friends are treating me.

My mom and Grandma think I'm in a cult!

My family is offended by my faith in Jesus.

Doubts and confusion our friends might face:

I wonder if there's someone really there or not when I pray.

The bible is hard to read and I'm not sure how it applies to me.

OUR FRIENDS DESPERATELY NEED US TO HELP GUIDE THEM BEYOND THE THRESHOLDS

Commit yourself to help them.

Once our friend enters the kingdom, we often assume that the hard part is over and let ourselves relax. Actually they need us in this tough part of life as well. It's a season of many joys and also a season of difficult questions, deep confusions and spiritual warfare.

Mentor a new believer closely for the first 8 weeks.

Not a class for growth or teaching, but someone to walk alongside them. Interact with them a few times a week, teach them how to pray, celebrate victories, explain new things they are experiencing in church or reading the bible. Set clear guidelines: The relationship will be more intense for 8 weeks and then the relationship will shift to less intense.

Three phases of mentorship

- 1. Helping your friend secure their decision.** Help them understand what has happened and answer doubts they may have.
- 2. Help them develop key kingdom habits.**
 - Teach them to pray.
 - Teach them to study Scripture.
 - Connect them with a Christian community.
 - Help them share their story.
 - Help them find ways to serve.
- 3. The handoff - guiding our friend to a community of believers to continue discipleship.** We can continue to mentor and be a part of their lives, but it is healthy for all if there is a broader community of believers to be a part of.

"What was most helpful were folks who shared their own stories and were honest about their own struggles."

PRAY for your friend!

Some of those you mentor will break your heart with their choices, others will grow. Pray for God to be faithful to continue what he has begun in the new believers you are privileged to mentor.