

Sharing the God Story – Building connection with outsiders

‘Exchanging Names – an offer of friendship’

Session #3

A source of wonder to me is that God in all his greatness wants to know me as a person. The one who made the galaxies and died for all people has a special place in his heart for me – and knows my name. Wow!

As we walk with Jesus and see strangers with fresh eyes, we are more motivated to know their names and to extend our friendship group to include people we wouldn't normally take notice of.



Practice #3 ‘Exchanging Names’

So, the third ‘practice’ on our journey is to offer to exchange names with someone who is responding.

This is a major step and has the potential to move the relationship beyond acquaintance towards friendship.

Recently my wife and I shared a pizza at a café with some friends. There weren't many customers that day so there was a chance to chat to the Nepali waiter. He was obviously enjoying our interest and hanging around our table, openly talking about his challenges. As we got up to leave, he wanted to exchange names, which I took as a signal that *he would like to be friends*.

The question that looms at this point is – ***Who am I willing to befriend for the sake of the gospel?***

- Am I willing to adjust my priorities to make a return visit to that café to explore what might happen?
- Is the Lord prompting me to take note of this person?

If I look at my own capacity, I will stumble at the first hurdle – but when energized by God's great love it's a different story.

Yesterday, we were driving through the city near where our ‘Indian friend’ Nidhi works at Harvey Normans. We hadn't seen Nidhi for some time, but she had responded warmly when we first met her at an Indian restaurant. We had reached a point in the relationship to exchange names and numbers.

I'm sure you can relate to the situation – we are driving home after a tiring day – more interested in a ‘glass of wine in front of the fire’ than another conversation along the way. Fortunately, the Lord prevailed and Nidhi was ‘thrilled’ that we made the effort to drop in. We parted with plans to catch up for a meal as soon as possible.

Nidhi is Hindu, but has a searching heart – can our small investment of time impact her eternity?

On top of that – we almost bought a vacuum cleaner.



I have found when I know a person by name, they stand out in my mind from other people I mix with:

- I am much more likely to pray for them.
- I am more ‘confident’ to approach them if I can greet them by name.

Remembering Names

Remembering the names of people we meet has a big impact as it shows we value them, but for most of us – remembering is hard. While people wish they could remember names, they ruefully declare their memory is poor, saying something like: *I'm too old, or I'm hopeless with names.*

Rather than giving up – let's ask the Lord to help us!

Here are 3 practical tips that you might find useful

1. Association:

When exchanging names try to focus on the person enough to associate their name with someone you already know, or something unusual about their name (linking them to something in your memory bank)

2. Verbalization:

As the conversation progresses – try to use their name once or twice. This verbalizing helps anchor the memory. So, instead of just saying *Nice to meet you!* say *Nice to meet you, Sasha!*

3. Visualization: (Write the name)

The act of writing is a 3rd layer of memory reinforcement which really helps.

Some days I walk away after a good conversation feeling confident that I'll remember, only to doubt my recollection shortly after.

When remembering is important - I always write things down soon after the conversation.

With unusual (foreign) names I will even ask the person to write it for me.

Of course, I can always ask someone to remind me when I forget – but let's not miss that chance to connect. *

Conclusion

Sam Chan makes a good observation in his book 'How to tell people about Jesus – without being *that* guy'. He works as a surgeon and tries to remember names of co-workers, but particularly the 'insignificant' team members (like the orderlies and junior nurses). He tells a poignant story of giving a gift of expensive whiskey to an Orderly to mark the birth of his child. Later when Sam asked him how he liked the whiskey, he responded: *"I've never received a gift from a doctor before – it's too special to drink and I'm keeping it on the mantelpiece"*

Like God, Sam doesn't just focus on the important people.

To my great relief, Jesus didn't just focus on 'good people' but was known as a 'friend of sinners'.

For the sake of the gospel, we may reach out to befriend people for whom we don't have a natural affinity and get to 'taste' God's greater love. His love takes us beyond our human limitations.



Kate Forrest 'Call people by name' (6 min video for those who are serious about this)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwRIHLBweoI>

* We have been speaking about our intention to remember names to build a sense of connection. There is always a chance that I have remembered their name, but they have forgotten mine. It's possible to slip your own name back into the conversation by saying something like: *"Hi Terry (it's Craig) – how are you?"*