

CoJourners.

We're all on a spiritual journey

By Keith Davy

CoJourners: Helping Others come to Jesus

But there is one thing you can be sure hasn't changed. Every person is still on a spiritual journey. We can't help it, God created us that way. Granted, some are moving toward God and others are moving away from Him. Some are in pursuit of other so-called gods, who are no God at all. Still others are stuck in a spiritual quagmire and aren't currently moving at all. There are those who are spiritually open, while others are closed. Some are spiritually involved, some are not. But in each case, they are on a spiritual journey. And this is where it gets exciting.

Because people are on a spiritual journey and because God is already at work in each person's life (whether they realize it or not), we get the privilege of entering into these journeys and becoming a part of what God is doing. The context has changed from campus to community, but the principles remain the same. You can still be a CoJourneyer, entering the journey of others and helping them come to Jesus. (By the way, the suffix "co" means "with" and "journer"—well, that's obvious.) So let me give you a glimpse of what it looks like to be CoJourneyer in the everyday post-college life.

Making the Most of Every Opportunity

But before unpacking the principles, it may be helpful to identify the potential opportunities you will have to share. The Apostle Paul exhorts us in Colossians 4:5 to, "be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." So what opportunities can you expect? Let me suggest three overlapping spheres of opportunity.

First, there will be individuals you know (or will get to know) for whom God gives you a *special burden* (a sense of *spiritual responsibility*). Keep an active and growing prayer list of these individuals. It takes nothing more than a special page in your quiet time notebook or a 3X5 card in your Bible. My current list has a mixture of neighbors and relatives on it. Yours will no doubt include co-workers (unless, like me, you work for a Christian organization and are surrounded by believers). With these individuals, you will be able to initiate appropriate conversations and extend invitations to walk on the spiritual path together. Also with these relationships, you will have the benefit of time and repeated contact. So if you do "coJourn" together, you can traverse great distances spiritually.

A second set of opportunities will arise as *divine appointments*. God will orchestrate circumstances so that you have an open door to enter into the lives and spiritual journeys of individuals with whom you didn't expect, or at times, even know. These may be people you have known casually (a doctor, hairdresser, neighbor or coworker) or people you meet in your travels. At times you will even experience divine appointments among long-term relationships (friends and relatives.) The difference between this and the first group is that these are opportunities that just arise, while the others are individuals for whom you are praying and seeking the opportunity.

Divine appointments can often be dramatic and exciting, as you see God clearly at work in lives and circumstances. They can occur anytime, and anywhere, even when you least expect them. My wife and I had such an experience not too long ago. It was the end of an ideal day as Nanci (my wife) and I were enjoying a hike in the Rocky Mountain

National Park. We had planned to be in Colorado Springs to visit three different families. But when all three engagements cancelled, we headed instead to the mountains. Hiking as far as we could safely go on our day trip, Nanci and I were among the last on the trails as dusk approached. Suddenly a back packer, hurrying down, overtook us.

A brief exchange on the trailside revealed that he had camped the night before, had climbed Long's Peak alone, and had intended to camp near some lakes above. But because of exhaustion, he had decided to come down our side of the mountain and head home for the night. So not only had our plans changed, but his had, as well. (Do you see God's hand at work?) His car was parked on the other side of the mountains (about a forty minute drive away). He went on ahead and as we reached the bottom of the trailhead, he was sleeping on the side of road. After offering to give him a ride to his car, we began a fascinating discussion. In it, we discovered he was not just back-packing. He, too, was on a spiritual journey.

Through our questions, we discovered a great deal of common ground (more evidence of God at work). He was from Nebraska originally — our home state. Though he first said he had no religious background, in high school he had some exposure to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. This is the very group through which I had come to know Christ. For the summer, he was living with his brother and sister-in-law. She was battling cancerous brain tumors, and that caused him to begin thinking deeply about life. A month before, I was diagnosed with cancer.

As our conversation progressed, I had the opportunity to share my testimony, including how my relationship with God was influencing my cancer journey. We discovered he had tried reading the Bible but quit reading because it wasn't making sense to him. As Nanci and I shared the gospel conversationally, he commented that it had never been explained so clearly to him before. It made sense and was what he desired. But he wasn't ready to receive Christ. This was a big decision and he needed time to think about it. A week later, he sent the following e-mail:

I have thought a lot about accepting Christ in my life, and I decided that life is too tough not to have someone in my corner. So I have accepted him in my life and have been walking around with a sense of "quiet confidence". I want to thank you for the ride and opening up to me and letting me open up to you. It wasn't just a coincidence we met on that trail.

Indeed, it wasn't a coincidence. It was a divine appointment.

A final group of opportunities can come through **intentional outreach**. As you become involved with your local church or other ministries, you may identify a group of people to help reach for Christ. This could be through an involvement with Priority Associates in reaching young business professionals, or a Moms-In-Touch group who prays for and reaches out to local public schools. It may be with your local church's outreach to the socially needy. The opportunities are endless for those who seek them.

CoJourney Roles

In whatever context the opportunities arise, you will find the principles stay the same. It is helpful if you understand the four primary roles that you can play in another person's spiritual journey. These are the roles of the CoJourneyer. They are not a formula—i.e. do this first, then that, etc. Rather they are roles that depend upon the relationship with and spiritual journey of the other.

The Explorer: Discovering Spiritual Journeys

Think of explorers throughout history. They entered into unknown territory to discover, learn and understand. There were, of course, different motivations at play (land, gold, fame, whatever.) But whatever compelled them, they became explorers. For us, love compels us to become spiritual explorers. We enter into the lives of others, exploring their spiritual journeys, to discover, learn and understand. Our personal interest demonstrates genuine concern, and people appreciate that.

Here is an example: I sat next to Robert, a French dentist on a flight. Where do you think he was spiritually—spiritually near or spiritually far? To know, I needed to explore. While asking questions and listening, I discovered

Robert considered himself a “French humanist.” Humanism, as a worldview with man at its center, isn’t generally considered near to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But there was more to discover. Robert considered the church of his land as irrelevant to the needs of society—not a good sign. But he had recently entered a bookstore to buy a Bible. That changes the outlook, doesn’t it? After showing him a gospel outline, he said he didn’t know if it was true or not. But he hoped his children would decide it was true. Why? He explained that if they would, they would experience a better life than if they didn’t. He really was spiritually open.

Notice how your view of Robert changed with each new piece of information—expecting him to be spiritually distant, perhaps resistant, only to discover genuine openness? That is what happens when we explore in others’ lives. The things we assume to be true are overturned by insights into their reality.

So how do you explore? Like with Robert, it is a matter of simply *asking questions* and *listening carefully*. There are no magical questions that always work. But there are good questions. Here are a few.

Try, “how are you?” I’m serious, it is a good question. Ask people how they are, only mean it. It’s common in our culture to ask the question. It’s just rare to find anyone really wants to know the answer. “Fine” (or some other one word answer) generally is the expected response. But if you mean it, and explore a bit, you will find many (perhaps the majority) will genuinely appreciate someone who cares enough to find out. The conversations that follow often reveal *windows of the soul*.

Recently I was visiting with Mike, a new neighbor who had moved onto our block. We were discussing our houses and the common structural problem they had. After covering the issue, I asked, “Besides the home, how is the rest of life going?” Mike responded, “It’s getting better.” Did you hear that? It’s a window to his soul—a comment that reveals what is on the other side, or rather, on the inside. All I needed to do was to ask him to “tell me more” and I began to discover what was going on in his life, much of which had spiritual connections. Listening with genuine interest, you will also hear *areas of common interest* and *unmet needs*. But the most valuable (and exciting) discoveries you will make are the *traces of the Spirit* at work in the lives of others. What do you suspect happened when Nanci and I discovered one of our neighbors had made his new year’s resolution to “get closer to God”?

Here is another great question to ask – “Can I pray for you about that?” This may surprise you, but the vast majority of people recognize the value of prayer (whether they practice it or even believe in it). They appreciate someone who cares enough to not only ask about them, but to pray for them. My not-yet-believing surgeon responded to my offer of prayer with, “Sure. I’ll take all the help I can get.”

But the question that I’ve found really begins to open doors of discovery is, “I’m curious. Do you have any religious or church background?” Or, “What was your religious background growing up?” People will tell you as much or as little as they are comfortable telling and through it you will begin to discover a lot about the spiritual journey they’ve been on. Honestly, I have found that if people feel safe relationally, most will respond openly. In fact, the last person I asked (just last week) responded, “I hate conversations like this.” When I gently asked why, he said, “I don’t want to force my views on anyone or have them force their views on me. Not that you are doing that, you just asked a question. So I will tell you my story...” Now this particular individual wasn’t open to going further in the conversation (that was obvious). But through the question I discovered where he was spiritually and no damage was done. Exploring, by itself, is a valuable step in helping others in their spiritual journey.

I could go on and list more questions. But you will find most arise naturally within the situation if you genuinely want to know the answers. Think of the power and relational appropriateness of this kind of exploring. Can you ask questions of neighbors? Absolutely! Will co-workers appreciate your attempts to know them and to understand who they are and where they are coming from? Most will. Even strangers generally respond to someone who takes a genuine interest in them. The discoveries you make will influence what other CoJourneyer roles you play in their lives.

The Guide: Showing the Way to Jesus

When through exploring you discover someone who is spiritually open, you can then become a guide. A guide, of course, is simply someone who shows another the way. Good guides will help the journeyer understand what is

being seen or experienced along the way. But ultimately, a guide will lead the other to the desired destination. Spiritually, of course, we don't lead people somewhere, but to Someone—that is, to Jesus.

As a guide for others, you have three powerful tools to assist you. First, is *Christian community*. Inviting others who are open to come with you to a Christ-filled church service or a special fellowship activity allows them to experience a “grace and truth” environment in which to continue their journey toward Christ. Listen to the spiritual stories of others and you will discover significant numbers who came to Christ by first coming into a Christian community. As a high school student, I attended a Christian fellowship for a year and a half, learning and processing truth, before a mini-crisis brought me to the turning point of placing my faith in Christ.

You also have *your life-story*. A good guide is someone who has first-hand knowledge of the journey ahead. If you know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, you qualify. (Even the Samaritan woman could serve as a guide for her village just moments after encountering Jesus. Read the account in John 4:28-30, 39-41.) What you will discover is that after you have genuinely explored the lives and experiences of others, they will be interested in your story. This happened to me again last week. While exploring the experiences and background of an individual I had just met, he asked, “So how did you get into all this?” That kind of response is fairly common. But if they don't inquire, it is still appropriate for you to ask, “Can I share a little bit of my story?” Just remember, it is a *little* bit of your story. Very few will want the blow-by-blow account of your whole life experience. In fact, try the Samaritan woman's model. She said it all in fifteen words (John 4:29). You may need a few more, but the point is, don't get carried away.

Finally, you have the *gospel* itself. Being able to communicate it clearly and simply is essential. That is where a simple outline, like the one found in the booklet, *Would You Like to Know God Personally?*, can be so helpful. It has everything you need for most spiritual journey-guiding conversations, including a clear explanation of why Jesus died for us and an invitation to respond in faith to receive him as Savior and Lord. Once you have explored and discovered the spiritual openness of the other person and have shared a bit of your own experience, simply ask, “Can I show you something that has really helped me understand this?” However, if you are in a setting where it's not appropriate to go through the booklet, simply add the key word “sometime.” It takes all the pressure off the moment. “Sometime, can I show you something that has really helped me understand this?” Then you can get together for lunch, coffee or some other preferred beverage and have a great conversation! You remember the fellow who asked me how I “got into all this?” After showing him the prayer in the booklet, I asked, “What do you think would happen if you sincerely prayed this prayer today?” He replied, “Well, let's find out.” And so we did.

The Builder: Providing Bridges Over Spiritual Obstacles

Not every conversation will be so open. In fact, many people are stuck on their spiritual journey. But think about it for a moment. If you are on a journey and you encounter an obstacle (like a river), what do you need to continue on? You need a bridge, of course. The same thing is true in spiritual journeys. The Builder provides a way over the obstacles that keep people from considering Christ.

There are many obstacles that keep people from coming to or even considering Jesus. When you are exploring, you will discover plenty. Some are intellectual questions. Others come from emotional baggage and bad experiences. While on the surface they can sound quite different, underneath they are all spiritual issues and must be dealt with using spiritually powerful means. Your two most important tools are *prayer* and *gentle persuasion*.

Never underestimate the power of prayer for those who are not-yet-believers. Tennyson said, “More things are wrought in prayer than this world ever dreams of.” You may offer a quick prayer asking God for wisdom on the spot for how to answer this issue (Colossians 4:6). Or you may labor in prayer for considerable time for the gospel to break through, bringing light and salvation to a loved one (Romans 10:1). We had a group of people in a prayer chain consistently praying for my father's salvation for three years before he came to personal faith in Christ.

Prayer is a powerful tool when speaking to God on behalf of the person who is spiritually dormant. With gentle persuasion is how we speak to them about God (2 Corinthians 5:20). It is not coming *against* them to win the debate or prove them wrong. It is coming *beside* them, to help them over the issue so they can continue on. Gentle

persuasion is a careful mixture of grace and truth. It is a tone with which we share the Word of God in a relationally safe and loving manner—often using personal experience, insightful questions and meaningful stories to help the person think differently about the issue.

Remember Robert, the French humanist who wanted his children to believe the gospel? I asked, “So what is it that keeps you from knowing this is true?” And then came THE OBSTACLE—the same obstacle that has plagued countless individuals who have thoughtfully grappled with life’s pain and suffering. Here’s basically how Robert expressed it, “Oh that is easy. It is suffering, but not just suffering in general. It is the suffering of the children in the world. How can there be a good and loving God, who is powerful and in control, when children suffer so much in this world?”

In my silence, I was busy talking to the Lord, “How can I possibly answer Robert on this?” Then it came to me. Here is the essence of what followed. “Robert, I don’t want to minimize this issue. It is a significant question that many have wrestled with. But as I have considered it, it has become one of the reasons I believe this is true.”

“Why is that?” he asked.

I responded, “Think about it. Why do children suffer in the world today? Children starve. But is that because there is not enough food? Or is it because people don’t distribute the food there is to those who need it most?”

“Oh, there’s enough food in the world,” he replied.

“And children suffer as the result of wars. But who fights the wars? It is people, right? And children suffer abuse in families, but who makes up those families? People. The list could go on. But whatever the truth is, it must adequately explain how people, who can at times be so good to one another, can also be so evil as to cause children to suffer so much. People are the cause of much of the problem. Robert, as I have considered religions and philosophy, the only explanation that I have found that adequately explains how you and I can be so good and yet at times be so evil is this” (referring back to the 2nd principle of the outline).

His response? “Can we talk more about this?” The obstacle was bridged and the conversation could go on to other matters.

The Mentor: Encouraging Spiritual Growth

Spiritual journeys do not end when people come to Jesus. In fact, in the most important sense, they are just beginning. What do people need when they have come to Jesus? Their two greatest needs are to connect with a community of believers that will help them grow and to learn the foundational truths of following Christ. You can think of them as *body-connections* and *life-concepts*.

There are three primary *body-connections* a new believer can make. They can develop a personal relationship with you or another believer who will encourage and guide them through the early stages of growth. That is, of course, the role of the Mentor. But wise Mentors won’t try to do it alone. They know the importance of the new believer developing a small group of believing friends, with whom he can grow and experience his new life. And, new believers need a community of believers to become a part of—to worship, learn, fellowship and pray with. These three *body-connections* provide a relationally rich environment for spiritual growth filled with grace and truth.

But there also *Life-Concepts* that provide a solid foundation for the growth of the new believer. These include: 1. assurance of salvation; 2. God’s love and forgiveness; 3. the filling of the Spirit; 4. walking in the Spirit; 5. prayer; 6. God’s word; 7. fellowship; and 8. witnessing. Helpful *Life-Concept* discussion guides from CruPress can provide the tracks for your mentoring to new believers.

But there is another group of believers you may discover in your exploring. These are the struggling believers. They have already come to Christ, but for what could be a variety of different reasons, they have become stuck and need help getting over the obstacles in their journey. The single most helpful tool I have found is the Satisfied? booklet.

As I explored Sean's life, I discovered he had grown up in a strong Christian home and church and had accepted Christ as his Savior as a child. But was he satisfied with his Christian life? No, not at all. As we spent 30-40 minutes talking through the contents of the *Satisfied?* booklet, he was at "The Turning Point" in his life. We prayed together as he surrendered his life to the Lord, asking God to fill him with His Spirit. Sean went on to become involved with a community of believers and was excited to be walking with the Lord.

The Adventure Continues

Well, there you have it—an overview of the CoJourney principles and how you can use the tools you have become familiar with in college to help others on their spiritual journey. As a CoJourneyer, you will discover that nothing is as rewarding as seeing God use you to help another come to Christ. At Thanksgiving, I received an e-mail from a software engineer. In it he wrote,

"I can't believe that it is almost Thanksgiving, and as the day approaches I look back on all the things I have to be thankful for this year. Tops on my list is the not so "chance meeting" we had on the airplane. I believe that God seated you next to me to let me know that the door was open to come back to Him and that Jesus' hand was always there to welcome me... I just want to say THANKS for helping to lead me back to Jesus."

God wants to use you in others' lives, as well. Your future community, neighborhood and workplace will be filled with people on a spiritual journey.

For additional CoJourney evangelism resources go to CruPress.com and after graduation consider joining CRU2 (CRU2.com) to connect, encourage and pray for others seeking to be Explorers, Guides, Builders and Mentors in the marketplace.

Reflection

1. Without even thinking about it what roles have you naturally assumed with your non-Christian friends?
2. What are the three easy questions you can ask as you seek to be an Explorer?
3. What are three powerful tools you have available to you as a Guide?
4. As a Builder you will be building bridges over potential obstacles. What are the two tools a Builder relies on?
5. Preparing in advance to deal with potential obstacles isn't a bad idea. What are the most common barriers to the gospel? How would you address these using gentle persuasion—what would you say?
6. As a Mentor your role is to communicate to a new believer some of the foundational truths of the faith. List the six topics that you think are the most critical for a new Christian to know.

Keith Davy is the Director of Research and Development for Campus Crusade for Christ. His Orlando-based ministry keeps him writing, speaking and consulting ministry leaders, especially in the area of evangelism. When given the opportunity, he loves to go camping with his family -- especially in the mountains of Colorado.