

CoJourners

Start the Journey

This study is the first of a 5-part series focussed on equipping you as a believer to be an effective witness in the midst of our 21st century culture. CoJourners teaches believers to conversationally enter the spiritual journey of others, helping them come to Christ. Let's get started!

Discuss together: What have you seen in the lives of others that demonstrate that everyone is on a spiritual journey? What evidence was present in your life before you accepted Christ?

Every person is on a spiritual journey. We can't help it, God created us as spiritual beings. 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. You can be a CoJourner, entering into the journey of others and helping them come to Jesus.

What does the Bible say?

Read together an example from the Bible where Jesus and his disciples come alongside a woman on her spiritual journey.

Read John 4:8, 27, 31-33, 35: Spend some time meditating on the passage in question, helping yourself with the questions that follow.

⁸ For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I

have food to eat that you do not know about.”³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”³⁵ Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.

Samaritans were despised by the Jews for a lot of cultural and historical baggage. In fact, when traveling between Galilee and Judea, many Jews would cross the Jordan twice rather than pass through Samaria, so it’s not surprising that the disciples run into town and don’t think much about the woman in front of them. After all, what business did they have talking about spirituality with a Samaritan? But Jesus had a different perspective. Spend some time making observations about the passage with the discussion questions below.

[4:8] The disciples are sent into town to get lunch. What might they have been thinking? Feeling? What would they have thought about the people of Sychar?
[4:27] Why were the disciples surprised at Jesus’ conversation with the woman?

[4:31] After the woman left, the disciples turn their attention to lunch. But Jesus is fully conscious of something the disciples were completely unaware of– they were in the midst of a spiritual harvest. Already the Samaritan village is on its way to meet Jesus [4:30], with many believing in him because of the woman’s testimony [4:39]

Why did the disciples miss the reality that the Samaritans were spiritually open to Jesus?

Why are we so unaware of the spiritual journeys of those around us? Why do we miss so many spiritual opportunities?

Obstacles to Sharing our Faith:

Discuss together: What keeps you from sharing your faith?

There are many obstacles that stand the way of sharing our faith. Five of these common obstacles are:

- Desire– we don’t really want to
- Fear– we are afraid of being rejected or turning someone off

- Know-how- we are not sure what to do
- Busyness- we are busy doing other things, many times good things
- Relational disconnectedness- We don't have the connections to individuals with whom we could share

Discuss together: Do you share any of these common obstacles?

If so, how do you think you could overcome them? Remember that we have an incredible Helper in our weakness: the Holy Spirit! Spend some time praying for one another and ask God to help you overcome these obstacles.

The CoJourners Paradigm

Ok, so you want to help others in their spiritual journey towards Christ. But how? The illustration below outlines the four primary roles you can play as a CoJourner. In the coming weeks will will explore each of these roles more fully and look at examples in the Bible as well as in our lives. This time, read through the different roles and make some observations together by answering the questions that correspond to each role.

The Explorer: The first role is that of the Explorer. In the ordinary world, what does an Explorer do?

The same is true in the spiritual arena, except we enter into people's lives, not undiscovered land. Spiritually, we want to help others discover their location on their journey, to understand where they've been, where they're at, and where they're headed in order to help point them towards Christ.

The Guide: We know that we want to help others come to Christ, that is the role of the Guide! What does a guide do?

A guide is someone who joins with you on a journey, helping show you the way. But a good guide will explain things as you go, helping you understand as they lead you on. That is the essence of being a witness- showing the way to Jesus, helping someone understand how they may come to Him.

The Builder: When a person is on a journey and comes to an obstacle, say a river, what do they need to continue on?

There are all kinds of obstacles that keep people from coming to Jesus—intellectual issues, emotional baggage, competing desires, etc. A Builder helps to build bridges over these obstacles, helping to deal with the issue through gentle persuasion and a lot of prayer.

The Mentor: When a person comes to Christ, their spiritual journey is not over—rather it is just beginning. What might a person need in his or her life to help them walk with Jesus for a lifetime? Among other things they need help and encouragement to continue to follow Christ. That is the role of a Mentor. The Mentor encourages the new believer in their spiritual journey both by helping them become grounded in their faith and helping them to become connected to the Body of Christ and Christian community.

Let's get practical: who is around you?

On a separate piece of paper draw a visual representation of your life, your relational network of friends and acquaintances. Who are the groups of people to whom you relate to regularly? (Your family, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, social activities, doctors, hairdressers, etc).

Discuss together: Where do you see evidence that those around you are on a spiritual journey?

Spend some time praying together for those around you to come to know Christ.

What is one things you've learned that you want to remember?

CoJourners 2

Explorer

Last time we learned that everyone around us is on a spiritual journey. We discovered that we can be a CoJourner, entering into the journeys of others and helping them come to Jesus. We also learned that we can play 4 roles in the lives of those around us: the Explorer, the Guide, the Bridge Builder, and the Mentor. This week we will look at the role of the Explorer more closely. We will learn how to discover where someone has been and where they currently are on their journey. Before beginning with the CoJourner model, let's first look together at two examples from Jesus' ministry.

What does the Bible say?

Let's explore the stories of two different people with whom Jesus interacted:

Read the story of Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and answer the following questions:

- If all you knew was that Nicodemus was a Jewish teacher of the Law, what would you assume about him spiritually? Why?
- What was actually true of Nicodemus spiritually?
- What did he not understand about Jesus?

Read the story about the woman at the well (John 4:1-26) and answer the following questions:

- If all you knew was that the woman was a Samaritan, ostracized from the Jewish community for immorality, what would you assume about her spiritually? Why?
- What was actually true of the woman at the well spiritually?

Discuss together: In your life, who are the most intimidating people with which to enter into a spiritual conversation? Why?

Have you ever tried to figure out where a family member or friend is spiritually? If not, what holds you back in asking about their spiritual journey?

The Key Principle: Explorers don't assume, they enter and discover.

Our lives are filled with people who are unknown to us- we have no idea where they are spiritually. We often make assumptions but might be surprised to discover who is truly spiritually open. Sometimes those who we assume are the farthest away, are the most open.

As we explore further we discover that people can be all over the map spiritually:

- **Christians**- some who are connected to a community of believers and some who are not.
- **Seekers**- those who are searching for God on their spiritual journey
- **Open people**- those who are not actively seeking God but are generally open to talking about spiritual things if approached appropriately in a safe environment
- **Indifferent people**- those who don't have spiritual things even on their radar screen. They aren't thinking much about spiritual things because they seem irrelevant to their everyday lives.
- **Resistant people**- those who don't accept the gospel because it conflicts from their worldview and beliefs.
- **Hostile people**- those whose hostility flow out of strong beliefs that conflict with the gospel, but at times it could be from an emotional issue or bad experiences from their past

All of them need others to enter into their journeys to help them along, to help discover where they are.

Discuss together:

Before you became a Christian, did you identify with one or more of these groups of people? Who has helped you explore what you believed about God and how did they enter into your journey?

How do we explore?

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.

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?"

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.

Getting Practical

What are three simple questions that you could use as an Explorer?

Prayerfully identify one or two people in your relational network that you made the last time and ask them a question about their spiritual background or beliefs.

What is one thing you've learned that you want to remember?

CoJourners

The Guide

Last time we learned that everyone around us is on a spiritual journey and discovered how we can enter into the lives of those around us as an Explorer. This time we will look at the role of the Guide, leading those around us to Jesus. Before beginning with the CoJourneyer model, let's first look together at an examples from Jesus' ministry.

What does the Bible say?

Compare and contrast three guides: Andrew, the first follower of Jesus to be identified by name in Scripture, Philip, a disciple of Jesus with a deep understanding of the Old Testament prophecy and the coming of the Messiah, and the woman from Samaria who we studied during the introduction study of CoJourners. Read each passage and answer the following questions:

Andrew (John 1:40–42)

Philip (John 1:45–46)

The woman from Samaria (John 4:28–29)

- What do they have in common?
- What was different?
- What did each say?
- What did each do?

The Key Principle: Guides lead people to Jesus.

Power of Permission

Sometimes when someone is trying to guide someone to Christ they want to tell them everything that they know, giving them a 5 course meal, when they're only ready for an aperitivo. The key of being a savvy guide is whetting someone's appetite to want to know more about the gospel and your spiritual

experience. More often, the path through the barrier of general spiritual conversation to the gospel is found in asking permission.

**Can I show you something that has really helped me?
Can I explain what has really made sense to me about this?**

Discuss together: What does asking permission do?

Sometime

In on-going relationships where you will have opportunity to talk in the future, the key word in seeking permission is “SOMETIME”.

“SOMETIME, can I show you something about this that has really helped me? It’s a short outline that gives the essence of what the Bible says about this.” This takes the pressure of the moment. Most often, people will respond in the affirmative. Then all that is needed is to make an appointment or plan an engagement (over coffee, etc.) When you get together to talk, the purpose is clear and atmosphere open.

The Primary Tools

There are three primary tools that a Guide will use to help another come to Christ.

1. Christian Community – Gospel Environments

By simply inviting others to a gathering of believers (whether that is a formal meeting, like a Bible study or weekly gathering, or an informal gathering, like a party or get-together), the not-yet-believing are exposed to the embodied love and truth of the gospel. Many people become involved with believers, experiencing the gospel community before they place their personal trust in Christ. It is an ideal environment to journey toward Christ.

2. Life Stories – Gospel Illustrations

Your experience with Christ can be a powerful communication of Gospel truth.

3. Presentations – Gospel Explanations

Simple clear presentations of the Gospel, like Would You Like To Know God Personally?, can be powerful tools to help a person understand the gospel or cross the threshold the decision of faith.

Discuss together: Which one of these tools comes most naturally to you? Which one seems the most difficult? What steps would you want to take to grow in this area?

Let's get practical

Take some time to get better acquainted with the booklet “Conoscere Dio Personalmente”. Practice sharing it with your coach and ask for feedback.

This week prepare a two-sentence statement of your experience with Jesus. Prayerfully identify 1–2 people in your relational network that you made last time and ask them about their spiritual background and beliefs. Then briefly share your encounter with Christ and what He is doing in your life now. If God opens the conversation, take a step of faith to share the gospel.

What is one thing you've learned that you want to remember from this study?

CoJourners

Bridge Builder

Last time we learned what it looks like to be a guide. As a review, what's the purpose of a Guide?

This week we will be looking at the role of the Bridge Builder. When we are sharing with someone and discover they are stuck because of some kind of issue, we don't give up and check out of their spiritual journey. Rather we seek to deal with the issue, that is, we provide a bridge over that issue so they can continue to move toward Christ.

Discuss together: In Italy, what do you think are some of the obstacles or issues for others to understand the gospel or want to have relationship with God? A functioning bridge starts at the point in which you find the interested person and ends with Jesus. It connects these two points in an effective way. If you are building a street and you encounter an obstacle you can remove it or build a bridge over it. Two tools that the Builder can use with both of these actions are prayer and the Word of God.

What does the Bible say?

Read the following passage: Acts 17:16–34

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this

inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." ²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

How did Paul begin to address these people? [22–23]

How did Paul end his address to these people? [31]

How did Paul connect their religious and cultural beliefs to show them who the true and living God was? [24–30]

What were the different responses of the people to what Paul said? [32–34]

The Key Principle

An effective bridge begins where the person is, ends with Jesus, and connects the two effectively.

If you are building a road and you come to an obstacle, you either remove it or build a bridge over it. Some tools that a bridge builder can use to do either one of these are Prayer and God's Word.

1. Prayer

Prayer is essential because no matter what the issue looks like on the surface, it is ultimately a spiritual obstacle, used by the enemy to blind the eyes and keep in bondage [2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:1-3; 2.]

Discuss Together: Share an example of someone coming to Christ after a time of being prayed for by someone. (It could be your story. If this person is a new believer, have the leader share their story.)

2. God's Word

In gentle persuasion, we also use God's Word to build a bridge. The picture is not of victory (winning a debate or argument), but of influence (urging a change.) It is attractive (sweet) not offensive. People on spiritual journeys need gentle persuasion. They need us to come beside them, understanding where they are, helping them over the issue or obstacle.

The most powerful bridge building includes:

- The **Bible:** Share a verse and explain its implications to the issue.
- Your **Experience:** What has helped you related to this issue.
- **Questions:** Can you help them think differently about the issue?
- **Stories:** Is there a story they could relate with or an illustration they could understand?

Discuss Together: Before you became a Christian, what were some of the obstacles that kept you from believing in Christ? Who entered into your life to help you with these obstacles?

Let's get practical

Looking at the people on your Relational Network Map, what do you think are some of their obstacles to the gospel? How can you help build a bridge to Christ?

What is one thing you've learned that you want to remember from this study?

CoJourners

The Mentor

As we enter into the spiritual journeys of others we have the privilege of influencing those who have come to Christ. When a person puts their trust in Christ as Savior, their journey isn't over. In many ways it has just begun. But on this side of eternity, the journey isn't easy. In fact, it can at times be down-right hard and dangerous.

Discuss together: What are the needs of a new believer?

What does the Bible say?

In the book of 1 Thessalonians, there are at least five different ways that Paul sought to establish the new believers in their faith. Let's look at them together:

1. Prayed for them consistently. (1 Thess 3:10, 11-13).
2. He spent time with them, encouraging them on. (1 Thess 2:6-12).
3. He wrote to them. (1 & 2 Thessalonians were follow-up letters from Paul).
4. He encouraged their relationships in community with each other. (1 Thess 4:9-10; 5:11-15)
5. He sent another believer to build into them when he couldn't be there himself. 1 Thess 3:1, 2)

Discuss together: If you've had a mentor, how have they helped to establish you in the faith?

As a mentor yourself, how would you like to help establish new believers in their faith?

Like Paul, we seek to provide an environment of growth for the new believer, where he or she can experience the work of God in the context of community.

The Key Principle

The growth environment is one characterized by grace (or love) and truth (especially God's word) with time to grow.

Relationships with other believers are essential to spiritual growth

Along with the relationship with the Lord, there are three other relational contexts or priority relationships in which the believer experiences love and grace. They are:

- 1. A relationship with a more mature believer who can encourage and guide.**
- 2. A relationship with a small group of believing friends with whom they can do life.**
- 3. A relationship with a larger believing community that provides a fuller experience of God's grace and truth.**

A believer with all three is in an ideal growth environment. Two out of the three should sustain healthy growth over time [no matter which two it is.] Only one relational connection is normally not enough to sustain growth for long. Lacking all three is a dangerous situation, spiritually depriving the new believer of essential relational connections.

The Key Principle

Help the new believer make at least one other relational connection beyond your influence.

As a mentor, we want to encourage new believers to get involved in each of the three types of relationships above, but it's essential that we ourselves are pursuing the same thing.

Discuss: Evaluate your own life. Describe what each of these three areas look like for you..

The truth of God's word is essential to spiritual growth

An easy paradigm to use to communicate each truth is:

Start with our struggles

Explore a key scripture providing God's solution to the problem

- Assurance (1 John 5:11-13)
- Forgiveness (1 John 1:5-2:2)
- Spirit Empowering (1 Corinthians 2:9-3:3)
- Spirit Led (Galatians 5:16-26)
- Growth (Acts 2:24-2)

Take steps of practical application

Discuss Together: Think of something you struggle with in your life. Let's look at the Word to see what God says about this area.

Let's pray that God will use us as mentors in others' lives. Pray.

What is one thing you've learned that you want to remember from this study?