

A Present-Day Path to Jesus: 5 Thresholds to Overcome

Adapted from *Once Was Lost* by Don Everts and Doug Schaupp

Threshold 1 - Trusting a Christian

"I wasn't the least bit interested in anything that came out of your mouth."

Our Five Knee-Jerk Reactions to Distrust:

1. Defend - we become defensive
2. Bruise - we get offended and indignant
3. Avoid - we try to live our lives in such a way as to avoid "those people"
4. Judge - we lash out with a condescending attitude
5. Argue - we get challenged, so we'll prove we're right!

Our Five Kingdom Habits to Build Trust:

1. Pray
2. Learn - where does their distrust come from? What's their story?
3. Bond - express interest in their world
4. Affirm - do not affirm sin, but do honor what is honorable. A critical mind is always looking for Jesus, but a critical spirit is always looking for what's wrong. Recognize that often their character flaws are strengths applied in the wrong area.
5. Welcome - practice hospitality inviting them into your lives. Love and laughter plow the hardest hearts. Life Groups are *life together*. They can begin being part of your Life Group circle of friends without yet going to the Life Group meeting, Thursday Night Worship, or church. You may find that they have to be loved before they become lovable.

Threshold 2 - Becoming Curious

"I liked you and liked that you were different from most Christians, but I've just never been interested in religious stuff. Ever."

3 Levels of Curiosity Intensity:

1. Awareness - may be caused by sudden life or circumstance change
2. Engagement - awareness moves to action, perhaps asking a Christian a question or reading one of the Gospels
3. Exchange - ideas are offered, questions are asked, opinions are discussed

How to Provoke Curiosity:

1. Encourage questions - Jesus is asked ~183 questions in the Gospels and answers just a few...and asks ~307 questions back! A few sample questions to ask the curious:
 - 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?

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- What do you think life is about? Do you think you have a destiny/purpose?
 - What is the most significant thing that has happened to you in the last month?
 - When was the last time God spoke to you? What did God say?
2. Use parables - tell stories to share elements of The Story. Use the [*Feed Them Faith Conversations*](#) resource.
 3. Live curiously - what box do your non-Christian family members and co-workers have you in? What do they expect a "nice Christian" to do or to say in different circumstances? How can your life mirror Jesus' life in being provocative?
 4. Keep the focus on Jesus.

Threshold 3 - Opening Up to Change

"It is clear to me that you have purpose in life and I don't. What am I missing?"

This is the hardest threshold to cross, because it often means confronting what they do not like, what is horrible, and what hits the deepest in their lives. It is beautiful, but hard. It means answering questions they've purposefully ignored.

The rich, young ruler of Mark 10 got here and couldn't cross this threshold. He obviously trusted Jesus and was curious, but it required too much change.

How can we help?

- Be patient as the journey unfolds. There will be starts and stops. Replace "you just need to believe" with "What if this God thing is for real?"
- Practice enduring prayer. This is a spiritual battle unfolding for a soul! Jesus' blood has power to transform!
- Challenge as Jesus challenged. We don't stay silent. We humbly challenge like Jesus did. We ask probing questions.
 - *Touch their pain and brokenness with your story* of Jesus walking you through your current pain and brokenness (where you wish you were, where you are, but what Jesus is doing).
 - *Mobilize them against self-pity and fear* ("You should ask God for a sign. He loves to give signs to those pursuing Him."; "Let me pray with you for 10 minutes a day over the next week. I'm confident God will show up. Are you willing?"; "Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? I'm going to feed the homeless next week. Will you come with me?").
 - *Connect the dots for them when they're confused.* Help them interpret what's happening - "I don't think these are random events in your life. I think God is pursuing you and trying to get your attention."

Threshold 4 - Seeking After God

"I wanted something to happen for me spiritually, but I was waiting for someone to come and show me."

True seekers are on a quest. Like you, they also feel urgency and purpose in their search.

1. Seekers seek Jesus, not just God.

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2. Seekers count the cost.
3. Seekers spend time with Christians.

If they are standing at this threshold, they may need a clear challenge otherwise they may stagnate in their path to faith.

What can we do to help?

- *Live out the Kingdom in front of them.*
 1. Show them how to build their lives on Jesus' words. Study and apply the Gospels together. Go through *The 7 Commands of Christ* resource booklet together.
 2. Open up your prayer life to them. If they ever ask, "How do you pray? Can I watch?", say, "Yes!!" Offer this to them.
 3. Provide satisfying answers to their initial questions. They want personal, real, and grounded in real-life experience.
 - Affirm - appreciate verbally that they asked you.
 - Translate - don't use Christian-ese. Speak in their language to communicate what God is doing. Don't talk about what you read in a book, but experienced in real life.
 - Transparent - be confessional and honest. Share overcoming and failures along the way. Remember to abandon all masks.
 - Insert yourself in a case study - pick a struggle from your life and look at what Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism has to say about that.
 - Challenge - after you answer the question, bring it back to them. "What about you? What are you looking for? Where do you need a touch from a loving God?"
 4. Model seeking. Your journey is not over. Invite them to look over your shoulder of continuing to seek God.
- *Create safe places for people to seek.*
 - Is your Life Group (& Thursday Night Worship service) designed with seekers in mind?
 - Are your expectations clear of them?
 - Is Scripture central to what was planned? What you think is nice, but what Jesus says is nicer.

Threshold 5 - Entering the Kingdom

"I just had this sense that I couldn't keep this up forever...I needed to make a decision or just drop the whole thing."

- *Get ready to party.* At this point, we're essentially calling for decision and commitment, followed by our intense celebrating.
- *Be appropriately urgent.* Eventually a decision needs to be made. The search can't last forever. The ripeness of the fruit deserves our attention.
 - Ask them, explicitly and simply, to enter the kingdom.
 - If they say no to a call to commitment, ask them why they are saying no. Find out what their questions are, what their blocks are.
 - Honestly help them either resolve or set aside the blocks that are keeping them from following Jesus.

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- Help them focus on Jesus and the central issues, setting aside non-essential doctrinal issues (the resurrection is essential, the Crusades of the Middle Ages are not).
- Help them see how they are responding, or not responding, to Jesus Himself.
- Study passages from the Gospels with them that deal with salvation and lostness in honest language (e.g., Rich, Young Ruler; Parable of Prodigal Son; Woman caught in Adultery; Woman at the Well; Nicodemus).
- Encourage new believers to be telling their stories of journeying to faith, to help seekers see how seeking can end.
- Before asking them to commit, warm them up to the fact that a decision opportunity lies ahead ("At the end of time together tonight, I'm going to offer you an opportunity to commit your life to Jesus.").
- REMEMBER, spiritual warfare is heightened here - we're at the point of destiny change!
- *Be clear, but don't oversimplify.* Following are ideas to help communicate this.
 - Reiterate God's Big Story. "We were designed for good. We were damaged by evil. This evil prevents us from being reconciled to God and used to bless this world. Jesus restores us for better. We get sent together with others to bring healing to this world."
 - Think wedding vows. "You're done dating. Now you're saying, 'I do'. We can't offer a (future) spouse partial vows, but complete commitment."
 - Sports teams. "In coming to Jesus you're joining a team. Jesus is the coach...and we never get traded. How much do you need the other teammates? Utterly."
 - Revolution. "Jesus is throwing a revolution that will overthrow everything that destroys people. Today you have a choice to join His revolution. Those who humble are exalted, those who exalt themselves get humbled. If you try to get everyone to serve you, you will be last, but if you serve everyone, you will become great in the Kingdom."

Beyond the Thresholds - Living in the Kingdom

"I didn't know what it meant to have Jesus in my life or how that would feel. Now I know - and it's awesome!"

Remember, the experience of coming to Christ is amazingly beautiful. But often the cost of living in the kingdom can be experienced in many ways by this new child of God:

- The sudden realization of how much their past sins had hurt others - they suddenly realize that to break a law is to break a heart (God's & other's).
- The new attention from a growing crowd of Christian friends.
- The confusion of transformation, for example, not knowing how to pray, a new sense of guilt for lashing out at others, and sudden questions of "is this real? How did you know it was real?"
- The flak from non-Christian friends. Entire circles of friends or family may abandon the new believer, sometimes with tremendous pain.
- Integrating into Christian culture. There are so many new words. The Bible is nothing like a typical book - even in how it is organized (it's 66 books with a bunch of different authors written over a period of more than 1,000 years). They have no

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historical experiences (VBS, Kid's Camp, Youth Group, Sunday School, who Noah is vs. Moses vs. Jesus vs. Joseph, Fall Advance, Winter Retreat).

- Not clearly understanding what needs to change. "Should I stop looking at porn? Can I still live with my boyfriend? Is it still ok to cheat on tests or my taxes? What about cussing?" Recall that true repentance is a change of mind, heart and direction, and that genuine love of Jesus means immediate obedience to Jesus.

What do they need?

1. They need you! They need you to commit to them...to stay with them during this first year.
2. They need your Life Group. They need you to be there with them and to process the material together outside of the meeting time. And
3. They need you mentoring them on the 3 Reals - Devo Life, Community, Responsibility.
 1. Get them praying, as well as seeking for the Holy Spirit.
 2. Get them studying Scripture.
 3. Get them connected to community, both in your Life Group and Sunday morning church (they're going to graduate at some point).
 4. Get them to tell their story.
 5. Get them serving in some way...best if it's beside you in your Life Group, on a mission trip, and/or at contact table, etc., and to look around at their circle of influence.
4. They need you to believe in them that what God has done in them He wants to do through them. Begin with the end in mind. You want them to ultimately become a soul winner and disciple-maker as well. As that first year in the faith is coming to a close they need you to help them step up to become a Life Group leader, with support and on-going mentoring from their Resource Group leaders (& the folks in their Resource Group), so that they start investing in others as well. Your relationship will morph from mentor-follower to co-laborers with Christ. In some ways that's when your Real Community will get even more real!