

God Space: Where spiritual conversations happen naturally
Doug Pollock (July 2009)

OVERVIEW by Denny Williams (6/7/2013)

GOD SPACE is a practical book on developing the skill of talking about faith and God with others who do not yet know Christ. Doug has years of experience in working with Athletes in Action, and the action steps and reflection questions at the end of each chapter are quite helpful. The book gets better and better with each chapter, and ends with some good resources in developing the skill of talking to others about their faith. One of the credits in front of the books says, "If you apply the teaching of this book, you will never need to attend another evangelism training program. Guaranteed!" I think the reviewer of the book was right. Below is a "Cliff Notes" version of the book by me...hope this gets you started.

- Chpt 1 – Creating God Space (places to talk about God & faith)*
- Chpt 2 – Spiritual Conversation Killers*
- Chpt 3 – Noticing Your Way into Spiritual Conversations*
- Chpt 4 – Serving Your Way into Spiritual Conversations*
- Chpt 5 – Listening Your Way into Spiritual Conversations*
- Chpt 6 – Wondering Your Way into Spiritual Conversations*
- Chpt 7 – God’s Teeter-Tooter (When to listen, when to converse)*
- Chpt 8 – Spiritual Appetizers*
- Chpt 9 – Bringing the Bible into Spiritual Conversations*
- Chpt 10 – Reclaiming Missed Opportunities and Rebuilding Bridges*
- Chpt 11 – Where the Rubber Meets the Road (Practical Suggestions)*

Chapter 1 – Creating God Space (pg 10-22)

Making the “invisible” Kingdom “visible”

- Don’t be part of the “silent majority” who keep their faith to themselves. (pg 11) **DENNY THOUGHT** – We have such wonderful news, such hope! Share it! 1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, *that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*
- I firmly believe that if the American church doesn’t grasp the implication of this need for Christians to move out of their comfort zones (and step out to build relationships with those who do not yet know Christ in their comfort zones), in 25 years we’ll be in the same spiritual state as Europe and Canada. (pg 14)
- **What is “God Space”** (pg 20-21)
 - God is felt and encountered in tangible ways that address the longings and cries of the heart.
 - We come to the end of our own finite resources and experience the infinite resources of God.
 - The natural gives way to the supernatural.
 - Seeds of faith are planted, watered, and nurtured.
 - Gentleness and respect are present, judgment is absent, and the divine dialogue flows naturally because trust has been established.
 - The invisible principles of God’s kingdom are made visible in ways people can see, touch and feel.
 - The topic of God can be explored freely without agendas, biases, and personal convictions getting in the way.
 - Cynics, skeptics, scoffers, and spiritually curious people alike can raise their questions, share their doubts, voice their concerns, and even vent their anger toward God and the church.

- The “unworthy” feel safe enough to bring their real selves out into the light, and to journey, one step at a time, toward the magnetic pull they sense deep in their souls.
- Spiritual curiosity is aroused, and the message of the hope that is in Christ becomes plausible.
- If we’re going to make God’s “invisible kingdom” become visible, then Christ’s heart needs to be formed in us. (pg 21)
- **Pg 22 – 10 questions to measure how well you relate to those who do not yet know Christ.**
 1. Can you overlook un-Christlike attitudes and lifestyles in your efforts to connect with others?
 2. Are you able to suspend your judgment for long periods of time around those who do not yet know Christ?
 3. Do you seek to understand those who do not yet know Christ before seeking to be understood by them?
 4. Are you patient enough to wait for those who do not yet know Christ to ask your opinion?
 5. Be honest: Do you like people who are far from God?
 6. Do people that are far from God like you? For example, are you invited to their parties?
 7. Does your body language communicate an open-hearted acceptance of those who do not yet know Christ?
 8. Are you able to communicate acceptance to those who do not yet know Christ without endorsing their life-styles?
 9. In your relationships with those who do not yet know Christ, do you typically offer kindness rather than “rightness”?
 10. Is your heart consistently broken and filled with compassion for those who do not yet know Christ?

Chapter 2 – Spiritual Conversation Killers (pg 23-33)

- Lord, open my eyes to ways I may be hindering opportunities for spiritual conversations in my everyday life. (pg 24)
 - God usually wants to do something **IN** us before He wants to do something **THROUGH** us. He wants us to be transformed into the very message He wants us to share with others. (pg 24)
 - Identify and eliminate spiritual conversation killers in your life. (pg 24)
- Colossians 4:5-6** – Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Top 10 list of spiritual conversation killers...

1. **Unbelief (pg 24)** – Believe that people have all sorts of desire to talk about spiritual things in their heart, and that God is already at work in them to draw their hearts to Christ. God has placed eternity in **EVERYONE’S** heart! Eccl 3:11
KEY – Do I believe that all of life is orchestrated by God to draw us to the Lord? Everyone has a spiritual story; it may just take time and trust and a safe venue/relationship to draw it out.

2. **Pre-conversation history (pg 25)** – Experiences the person has had with so called “Christians” or “church”. KEY – Get out of this “Christian box” as quickly as possible if you are going to have real conversations! Reflectively listen to what others have to say, and it will calm their heart. We can’t ignore the pre-conversation history of others if we are going to have quality spiritual conversations with them!
KEY – When you own your own mistakes, and call them what they are (wrong), spiritual conversations come! (You are only two confessions away from having great spiritual conversations)
3. **Awkward transitions (pg 27)** – KEY is using questions and listening. “Those who ask questions find doors opening for them.” KEY is difference between dialogue (relationship), discussion (topic) and debate (convincing/defeating). You don’t want others to feel you are trying to “take the conversation” somewhere else. Ask permission to change the direction of the conversation if it is appropriate, but don’t try to steer the conversation to somewhere where it is not naturally going.
4. **Our language, not theirs (pg 28)** – Don’t speak “Christianese”. Don’t make people have to use our terms if they are going to have a spiritual conversation with us. KEY – Learn to translate spiritual truths into the everyday vernacular of the people we converse with.
5. **Disrespect (pg 29)** – James 1:19 – Be quick to hear, slow to speak. Don’t be “condescending” or “parental”. KEYS – Don’t exceed the speed limit, don’t run stop signs, don’t hijack the conversation!
6. **Agendas (pg 29)** – Let your conversations take their natural course, rather than trying to “direct them” to a desired end. “As soon as you lay your hands on a conversation to steer it, it’s not a conversation anymore; it’s a pitch. And you’re not a human being; you’re a marking rep!” Make “spiritual conversations” your ultimate motive, not your ulterior motive. Good example of this is the movie *The Big Kahuna*.
7. **Control (pg 30)** – Be careful not to seize conversations and dominate them with your worldview. Is your “conversation” simply a canned presentation you’ve practiced, or are you really having a relationship with the person?
8. **Judgment (pg 31)** – The message we send is that we don’t endorse your point of view, and we don’t accept you either. Lack of acceptance crushes opportunities for spiritual conversations. Acceptance does not mean endorsement. Radical acceptance!
9. **Combativeness (pg 31)** – Move into the culture with “compassion” and check our “Onward Christian Soldiers” mind-sets at the door.
10. **It’s all about ME (pg 32)** – Keep the spotlight on what they believe and think. Keep the spotlight on Jesus and what He said, not on what I believe or think.

IDEA – Ask those who do not yet know Christ to describe what they experience when conversations turn to spiritual matters. Seek to understand their feelings by probing into what prompts them to feel that way. (pg 33)

Chapter 3 – Noticing your way into Conversations – Learn to notice (pg 34-42)

- How we see others in the world is a strong indicator if we have 20/20 spiritual vision, like Matthew 9:36-39. (pg 35)
- 2 Cor 5:16 – We no longer see others from a worldly point of view.
- KEY – It is easy to miss something when you are not looking for it!
- Luke 10:30-37 – The good Samaritan NOTICED the man and was moved to compassion; the other didn't. His eyes were connected to his heart.
- Compassion melts away hardness in our hearts. Callousness is replaced with genuine concern.
- “My-opia” disease – Cure: “Lord, as I interact with others today, cause me to see them as you see them.”
- Listen with our eyes, see with our ears, respond with our hearts.
- Noticing creates God-space in our relational encounters.
- Noticing is a pre-requisite to caring and serving others.
- Noticing builds natural bridges to spiritual conversations. Notice your way into spiritual conversations.
- Noticing others will change your life. It will plant people firmly in your heart!
- What we cherish most, we notice most!
- When Christians begin to see people the way Jesus sees them, the Holy Spirit produces the love and compassion that make reaching out to others irresistible!
- Good website – doableevangelism.com

Chapter 4 – Serving your way into Conversations (pg 43-52)

- Kindness is a language that the dumb can speak, and the deaf can hear and understand.
- More people have been brought to Christ by the kindness of those who know Christ, than by theological arguments. No one is immune to love. (DENNY THOUGHT – The author uses the phrase “brought into the church” but that is not what we are out to do in an institutional way. We are out to bring people to know Christ, which then brings them into the family of God, the “ecclesia” (the people of God) in the world. Using the word “church” can lead others off track since that word is loaded with wrong meanings and bad experiences for many.)
- Deeds of love allow us to sneak into the hearts of those we serve.
- Good deeds create good will which opens hearts to good news! (pg 46)
- Kindness, serving, caring – Even skeptics and cynics take note of something they intuitively know is not of this world! Intrigue gives way to wanting to know more (pg 47)
- Live such a good life that people want to ask questions!
- Serve your way into spiritual conversations that happen naturally.
- Some people need to be worn down by one act of kindness at a time.
- Let good deeds create a road on which good news can travel.
- God never intended to have good deeds and good news an either/or proposition. They go hand-in-hand.
- Gospel demonstrations and Gospel declarations go hand-in-hand.
- Good deeds are not enough on their own to bring someone to Christ, but they do create phone lines for transmitting the spoken message.
- When we combine service and prayer, God space is almost always created instantaneously.

Chapter 5 – Listening your way into Spiritual Conversations (pg 53-64)

- Hijacking the conversation – If I do all the talking, I’ll have no idea of their needs or what God is doing in their lives. The most important evangelistic tool we need to know is how to listen. People used to “listen their way into the kingdom. Today they are more apt to observe and talk their way into the kingdom.” (pg 54)
- Exceeding the speed limit – If we oversupply people with spiritual truth, we can kill the demand for it!
- Failing to observe the signal – “Sometimes I proceed when I should have stopped, stopped when it was time to go, or recklessly moved ahead when I should have proceeded with caution. There is a proper time and procedure for every matter.”
- Spirit-led listening – Nothing creates God space faster than Spirit-led listening. Listening communicates “I accept and respect you.” DENNY THOUGHT – When was the last time you were listened to in a nonjudgmental, agenda-free, compassionate way?
 - **How well do you listen? Self-evaluation assessment on pg 57 – 16 questions**
- **Key principles...**
 1. Go – Get out of your comfort zone and into the world among those who do not yet know Christ. Move towards people in your life.
 2. Significant spiritual conversations usually occur when you least feel like having them.
 3. God will use all of our experiences to create God space.
 4. Good questions create great opportunities for listening.
 5. Get lost in order to get found (you don’t have to have the answers).
 6. Validate before moving on (**9 statements that validate what a person is saying – pg 61**)
 7. When God space is created, be prepared for people to share their deepest hearts.
 8. **When you are invited to speak, be brief.** Keep the spotlight on others, and what they want to talk about. Meaningful conversations happen when we accept where people are in their relationship with God.
 9. One way to tell if you’ve really connected heart-to-heart is to see if you are invited back! If you are willing to take the initiative to listen, people will invite you back.
- Faith experiment – Try using some of these questions with those you meet (pg 63) – It will help you understand how you are being perceived!
- DO – Develop skills for connecting deeply with friends, family, neighbors and co-workers to naturally encourage fruitful spiritual conversations. Good resources (pg 64) – equippingministries.org

Chapter 6 – Wondering your way into Spiritual Conversations (pg 65-74)

- Questions help to peel back the layers of people’s hearts and expose the things that stand between them and God. (pg 66)
- The Power of Good Questions (pg 66) – Good questions create an arena where we can ponder life and mysteries together.
- Questions are usually more important than answers in conversations, because in most conversations, people aren’t ready for the answers we’d like to share. (pg 66)
- Cultivate emotions like wonder, awe, admiration, fascination, surprise, astonishment, amazement, curiosity, joy, excitement, imagination, inquisitiveness. (pg 67)
- “Wondering” opens up all types of great conversations! (pg 69)
- All good “wondering” questions ultimately lead to God. (pg 72)
- Pg 69-72 – Two great stories on “wondering” questions.
- “I’m wondering” is a great phrase to start open-ended, listening, safe conversations.

Chapter 7 – God’s Teeter-Totter (pg 75-79)

- Have a good balance of listening and wondering (asking questions)
- Develop skill of being both a good listener and a good question asker. The goal is to plant good seed thoughts in people’s minds. (pg 79)

Chapter 8 – Spiritual Appetizers (pg 80-86)

- Door closer – Small inquiries get supersized answers! (pg 80)
- Best spiritual conversations start where people are in their relationship with God, not where we’d like them to be. (pg 80)
- Faith stories can be a “one size fits all” approach and not be helpful in spiritual conversations. (pg 81)
- Spiritual appetizers – Real stories from your life – Ask permission to share it, keep it short so they will want more. (pg 81)
- Practice to eliminate the jargon, refine our thoughts, and ensure that we truly offer an appetizer rather than a sermon. (pg 82)
- Crafting your stories that can be Spiritual Appetizers – **15 good questions to ponder on pages 83-85.**
- **Maybe people aren’t saying NO to Jesus as much as we think they are. Instead, they might be saying NO to the unappetizing ways we’ve been presenting him.** (pg 86)

Chapter 9 – Bringing the Bible into the Conversation (pg 87-99)

- Choose to invest your life rather than spend it! (pg 88)
- **Find a back-door approach to the gospel when the front door is heavily guarded.** (pg 90)
- “I hate religion. Religion is a bunch of man-made rituals and traditions designed to change you from the outside in. I’m talking about true spirituality, where God takes up residence inside of you and changes you from the inside out.” (pg 90)
- For most people, the process of repentance is not one big decision, but a series of mini-decisions. Good questions create a dissonance that compels people to change their thinking. (pg 91)
- Key is introducing the Bible at the right time with specific verses that are applicable to the conversation. (pg 95)
- Ask permission. Have them read the passage if possible. Keep the focus on the passage.
- God’s FEDEX team – Men & Women who can move quickly to distribute appropriate resources when a need has been identified in a conversation. (pg 96)
- In most cases, less is more! (pg 96)
- **DENNY THOUGHT** – Most people are ready for the Gospel of Restoration (Luke 4:18-21/ Isaiah 61:1-4) but not everyone is ready for the Gospel of Salvation from sin as we typically present it. They do not yet see the connection between sin and the brokenness in their lives and the world. Creation – Fall/Brokenness – Redemption – Restoration – Shalom
- Jesus approaches to sharing the good news were as varied as the people He encountered. (pg 97)
- When the head and the hearts are bowed toward God in humility that comes from brokenness, it’s time for the Gospel. (pg 98)
- **If you throw people the Gospel rope before they have come to the end of their rope, they might be annoyed and might even disdain it. On the other hand, they will thank you profusely when they’ve come to the point of realizing that they need God’s lifeline.** (pg 98)
- Signs that a person is becoming ready for the Gospel, ready to open their lives to Christ (List on page 98)

- “I’d like to believe what you believe, if you could just help me resolve this one issue.” At this point, take on the role of spiritual midwife. Help them get over the obstacle so that the birthing process can continue. (pg 98)
- God has called us to be good news people in a world dominated by bad news. (pg 98)
- Be a tour guide, rather than a teacher or a preacher. Let the Bible passage speak for itself. (pg 99)

Chapter 10 – Reclaiming Missed Opportunities and Rebuilding Bridges (pg 100-106)

- The truth is, you will fail again and again as you endeavor to apply the big ideas in this book. The sooner you come to grips with this reality, the sooner you can move on to reclaim missed opportunities and rebuild your burned bridges. (pg 100)
- **Great story of reclaiming a missed opportunity.** (pg 100-104)
- Resource to look at – *The 3:16 Promises* – Max Lucado (64 page booklet)
- Rely on God’s grace, and learn from your failures. (pg 104)
- **DENNY THOUGHT** – If you don’t know what to say, keep ask “wondering” questions. I’ve found that usually within 3-4 questions, each following up on the response to the previous, a door opens up.
- Rebuilding bridges others have burned... (pg 104)
- Do you come across as one who has an “agenda” in the relationship (like a salesmen) or do you truly enjoy the person? (pg 105)
- Movie – <http://lordsaveusthemovie.com/>
- Help others understand the difference between religion and true spirituality! (pg 105)

Chapter 11 – Where the Rubber Meets the Road (pg 107-124)

- So far we have discussed...
 - **Ways to create conversations (God space) with those who do not yet know Christ where we can address the longings and cries of the heart.**
 - The importance of balance between listening and wondering – God’s teeter-totter.
 - How to introduce our God story and God’s Word into the conversation.
 - How to deal with failures along the way.
- **Resources**
 - 99 Wondering Questions (pg 108-112)
 - 20 Questions to stir your wonder in another culture (pg 114)
 - Frequently asked questions – Things I stumble over in sharing the Good News of Christ. (pg 115-122)
- **“Over a period of several months, God’s Word, combined with Ed’s conversations, moved me toward God, one conversation at a time.”**