



### **The Explorer**

Engage in significant conversations to discover and understand the spiritual journeys of others. Being an explorer involves active listening and asking questions. *See page 2.*



### **The Guide**

Show the way to faith in Christ. Being a guide involves sharing your life-story and articulating the gospel in conversationally appropriate ways. *See page 4.*



### **The Builder**

Build bridges over and beyond the issues and obstacles that hinder others in their journey to Christ. Being a bridge building involves prayer and gentle persuasion. *See page 5.*



### **The Mentor**

Encourage others to follow Christ. Being a mentor involves helping others make relational connections to other believers and imparting foundational concepts for Christian living. *See page 6.*

# CoJourners

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Everyone is 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 pursue gods who aren't God at all. Others are stuck in a spiritual quagmire and are not going anywhere. There are those who are spiritually open, while others are closed. Some are spiritually involved; some are not. But in each and every case, they are on a spiritual journey.

Here is a second fact you can count on—God is already at work in people's lives, whether they ever glance heavenward or not. He is not a passive observer or a shut-in desperately hoping for visitors. No, he is an active and almighty participant: the Lord of the Harvest who sends workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:37-38); the God who created all people and nations determining "the times set for them and the exact places where they should live...that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (Acts 17:26-27). His Spirit is at work in the lives of people today (John 16:7-11) and he's given us the privilege of being his "fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9) by entering the spiritual journeys of others and helping them come to Jesus.

There is one more foundational insight—people like to travel together. It's true on road trips and on cross-country flights. Even climbing Mt. Everest, you want to take a Sherpa or two along. And I'm convinced it's true on spiritual journeys as well. Now, obviously most people don't think of spiritual journeys as a social endeavor. We've been raised to obey the eleventh commandment, "Keep thy



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religious views to thyself—thank you very much." But here's the key—while spiritual journeys are personal, they're not private. We are designed as spiritual and relational beings. That means even a spiritual journey will be enhanced in relationship. Always has been, always will be—ducks quack, dogs bark, people talk. The inescapable correlative of all this is rather simple: people need people in their

spiritual journeys. There is also a surprise in this. Listen carefully—despite public opinion, relationships can often be enhanced by spiritual conversation. But more on that later.

Let's put it all together: Everyone is on a spiritual journey and God is already at work. We are given the privilege of entering into those journeys and becoming a part of what God is doing. People not only need

us, many will want us to join them—if we do so appropriately. And that, my friends, is why it is important that we become CoJourners. “Hey, wait,” you say, “that’s not a word.” Right you are. But it is a compound expressing what no single English word adequately conveys. The prefix “co” means “with” and “journer”—well, that’s obvious. Put them together and you get the idea that we are joining others in their spiritual journeys, CoJourners. It could be with someone you’ve known for a long time or someone you’ve just met. The context may be students on a campus or adults in a community. Or it may involve moving from one culture to another. It doesn’t matter. The principles of being a CoJourneyer always remain the same—anybody, anytime, anywhere.

## Four Roles

There are four primary roles that you can play in another person’s spiritual journey. They are not a formula: do this first, then that. Rather, they are roles that depend upon your relationship and the

other person’s spiritual journey. The roles are explorer, guide, builder, and mentor.

## The Explorer Discovering Spiritual Journeys

Think of explorers throughout history. They entered un-known territory to discover, learn, and understand. (For historical accuracy we might also mention “plunder,” but that’s not the connection we’re looking for here.) Whatever their motivation, they embarked on journeys of discovery. In a similar way, we become spiritual explorers on journeys of discovery in the lives of others. Love compels us to engage conversationally, seeking to discover, learn and understand who they are and where they are going spiritually.

## What’s Their Story?

The Steven Spielberg film *Amistad* chronicles the true story of a group of enslaved Africans, who in the spring of 1839, revolted aboard the Spanish slave ship *La Amistad*. Having over-taken their captors, they attempted to return to their beloved homeland. Given their absence of sailing experience, they fail miserably, and the ship was seized off the eastern seaboard of the United States. The captives were brought into the U.S. where they were charged with murder and awaited their fate in prison.

An enthralling court battle ensued that captured the attention

of the entire nation, confronting the very foundation of the American legal system.

But for the men and women on trial, it was a fight for the basic right of all mankind...freedom. (By the way, this summary was adapted from promotional materials for *Amistad* and the book. Let's give credit where credit is due.)

A turning point in the movie occurs during a conversation between the elderly and eccentric ex-president, John Quincy Adams, and Mr. Theodore Joadson, a former African slave, now working for the abolition of slavery in America. Joadson seeks advice from Adams on how to try the case.

Adams responds, *"When I was an attorney a long time ago, I learned by trial and error, that whoever tells the best story wins. I offer that scrap of wisdom free of charge."*

Joadson appears disappointed with the counsel and turns to leave, when Adams speaks again. *"What is their story?"*

The dialogue continues:

*"Why, they are from West Africa."*

*"No, what is their story? Mr. Joadson, you are from where originally?" "Why, Georgia, sir." "Georgia?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Is that pretty much what you are, your story? No. You're an ex-slave who has devoted his life to the abolition of slavery and overcoming great obstacles and hardships along the way, I*

*imagine. That's your story. Isn't it? Hah. You and this young, so-called lawyer have proven you know what they are. They are Africans. Congratulations! What you don't know, and as far as I can tell, haven't bothered in the least to discover, is who they are. Right?"*

Did you hear those words? *"...you know what they are... What you don't know, and as far as I can tell, haven't bothered in the least to discover, is who they are."*

How often do we get to the end of an evangelistic presentation and discover "what they are," unbelievers. But we don't know "who they are." We don't know their story.

That's the role of the explorer—to discover who they are and what their story is. This discovery will determine how we help them on their journey.

Here is an example: I sat next to Robert on a flight. What do you know about Robert spiritually? Unless you are speed reading this section without thinking, you probably answered, "Nothing." But there is one thing you do know, right? Fact number 1: He is on a spiritual journey.

So let me give you another clue. He's French—a French dentist, as a matter of fact. Now what do you think? Is he spiritually near or spiritually far? More clues: he considers himself a French humanist. Hmm... Humanism is a man-centered worldview and not the path you

normally think of as leading to Christ. So probably spiritually far, right?

As I continued to explore Robert's experiences and opinions, I discovered that he considered the church in his own country as irrelevant to the needs of society—not a good sign. Here we have a French humanist disillusioned by the church. It's sounding more and more distant.

But when Robert discovered my interest in spiritual matters, he revealed that he had tried to buy a Bible in a U.S. bookstore. (Whoa, that changes our view, doesn't it?) After showing him a brief explanation of the gospel, he responded that he didn't know if it was true or not, but (catch this, now) he hoped his children would decide it was. Why? Because if they believed it was true, he knew that they would experience a better life than if they didn't. Robert was spiritually open, after all.

Notice how your view of Robert changed with each new piece of information—initially assuming him to be spiritually distant, perhaps resistant because of his worldview, only to discover his genuine openness. This is what happens when we explore the lives of others—our assumptions are overturned as we gain insights into their story. You can't guess where people are spiritually. You have to discover it.

## The Art of Exploring

So, how do you explore? Like with Robert, it is a matter of *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 really mean it. It's common in our culture to ask the question; it's rare to find anyone really wants to know the answer. “Fine” (or some other one-word response) is generally expected. But if you mean it, and explore a bit, you will find that many (and perhaps the majority) will genuinely appreciate someone who cares enough to find out how they are doing. The conversations that follow often provide revealing *windows of the soul*.

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I was visiting with Mike, a neighbor who had recently moved onto our block. We discussed our houses and the common structural problem they had (a leaky window above the garage.) After

comparing notes, I asked Mike, “Besides the home, how is the rest of life going?” “It’s getting better,” Mike responded. Did you hear that? That is a *window of the soul*—a comment

that provides a view of what is true on the inside. All I needed to do was to invite him to “tell me more” and I began discovering what was going on in his life—the work issues that were leading to financial problems, which were the root of marital tensions which were negatively affecting the kids. All of these insights came in on our first real conversation together. Are you beginning to see why I said earlier that relationships can often be enhanced by spiritual conversations? Exploring is a way to get to know people better.

Listening with genuine interest, you will often discover areas of *common ground* (like leaky windows) and *unmet needs* (with Mike: occupational, financial, marital, parental issues—ooh, life can be hard.) But the most valuable (and exciting) discoveries you will make are the *traces of the Spirit*—those places where God is at work in the lives of others. What do you suspect happened when Nanci, my wife, and I discovered that another of our neighbors had made a New Year’s resolution to get closer to God? Yep, an opportunity to “cojourn”!

## Charting Spiritual Journeys

One last perspective to help you explore: Remember journeys always have a past, present and future. You can talk about where you’ve been, figure out where you

are and determine where you’re going. In the same way, spiritual journeys also have a past, present and future. That means you can explore their past experiences, their present attitudes and their future direction. There are no right questions for every situation. But here are some starters for you:

Exploring the Past: *What was your religious background as a child? What have you tried in your spiritual journey since?*

Exploring the Present: *How has your search left you feeling? Where are you now in your spiritual journey?*

Exploring the Future: *What do you desire most spiritually? Do you think you are moving toward God, away from God, or staying about the same?*

I could go on and list more questions. But if you know a few, the rest will arise naturally within the situation if you have a genuine interest in discovering who they are and what their story is.

Think of the power and relational appropriateness of exploring. Can you ask questions of neighbors? Absolutely! Will coworkers appreciate your attempts 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. Of course, you will need to be sensitive to their openness, not prying if they are uncomfortable sharing. But most people will respond positively and the discoveries you make will influence the other roles you will play in their lives.