

A LITTLE HINTING AROUND OPENS UP DOORS

Using these ideas may help you to find a way to share your faith.

by Mark Littleton

Sometimes it's not possible to develop a relationship with someone before we share the gospel. We come in contact with people every day we may never see again—a waitress at the restaurant, a fellow traveler on the plane, the mother waiting with her child to see the doctor. A casual conversation can turn into an eternal encounter. Consider this conversation I recently had with a young woman on an airplane.

We got down to the usual questions as we waited for the plane to take off. "Where are you from?" "Do you live in Kansas City?" (the city we were flying to). "Were you in Michigan on business?" I gave simple, non-profound answers to the first two questions until she asked me if I had been in Michigan on business. **I dropped the first hint.** "Yeah, I was visiting one of my publishers to discuss a project." I didn't say yet that the project was to work on a devotional Bible. But experience has taught me that mentioning personal information like my career usually draws out more questions. Those questions can lead to conversations about one's calling.

"Oh, so you're a writer?"

"Yes."

"What do you write?"

Now **for hint number two.** "I write mostly Christian books, books for people of faith, both adults and children."

Silence. This is a point at which a hint either hooks a prospective fish or puts them off. The key thing here is to wait. See what they have to say about this. See if they have a comeback. See if they just kind of go, "Oh, that's nice," and then disappear into a magazine.

I could have followed up with "Do you have any particular beliefs when it comes to religion?" or something like that, but it seemed the Holy Spirit was prodding me to let what I'd already told her sit and percolate. She came back at me after a thoughtful silence. "My boyfriend's parents are both involved in Christian churches."

"Oh," I said, now trying to fully engage her. "What kind of church do they go to?"

Hint number three, the probing kind. This one would give me some indication of what she knew about Christianity and Christ.

"I think they're Methodist," she said. "But they went through a divorce a few years ago. So they're in two different churches."

Now I had to do a little steering. Did I probe this subject further, or turn things in a new direction. I thought I'd plant a little seed with another hint.

"I grew up in the Methodist church," I said. "I was in the youth group and everything. But I wasn't really a Christian 'til I was 21."

Uh'oh, now you've done it, Littleton, I thought. You've made her realize someone might be able to be in the church and not be a Christian. Where from here? She threw me a twist, "Let me ask you something," she said. "My boyfriend grew up in the church. But a few years ago he decided he didn't believe any of it. My question is this: do you think he'll ever come back to it?"

I decided I needed to know more about where she was coming from, so I asked, "Are you concerned that he might not come back to his roots?" "Well, no," she said. "But I know his parents are broken up about it. And they don't understand it. I just want to have a good relationship with them since we're dating. I'll be in Kansas City to visit his mother this weekend. At the same time he'll be visiting with my father back home."

I thought I should say exactly what I thought, theologically and biblically, about her boyfriend's faith, or lack of it. "There are many reasons people leave the church. But probably the main one is that they'd never really made a connection with God. Many people grow up in the church who never really know God personally. I was one of them myself." She was getting enthusiastic about the discussion and to my delight asked, "Well, what happened to you?"

It was at that point that I launched into my testimony punctuated by her thoughtful questions about various aspects of my journey to faith. In my testimony I spoke about knowing God personally and how I had ultimately turned from drugs, drinking and an illicit lifestyle to being a committed Christian. I told her about my experience of finding God and asking Jesus to be Lord of my life. "This is amazing," she kept saying. "I wish my boyfriend could hear this."

Now things were winding down. We were nearing our destination. She would flutter off to visit her boyfriend's mother, and I would probably never see her again.

"It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me," I added. "It's the greatest thing that can happen to anyone. Knowing God answers a lot of questions about life—where you're going, what happens when you die, and everything else. All my life I wanted to know what happened when you died. In Jesus I found the answer."

She shook her head. "That's really something. What you're saying is that people have to admit their need for God. That they can't get to heaven on their own."

"That's exactly it," I said.

"That's why I don't think my boyfriend will come back right now. He doesn't feel any need."

"God has a way of changing that for people."

She smiled. "Yeah, I bet you're right."

I shared more information with her, including telling her that accepting Christ was a matter of admitting your need for a Savior—of forgiveness, hope, eternal life—and trusting Him through prayer. I explained that it is all as simple as ABC—accepting, believing and confessing. She listened but wanted to think more about it. I felt disappointed, but I knew the seed had been planted. As we got ready to depart the airplane, I encouraged her again to seek God in Christ. "You'll never regret it," I said. "If you don't know what to do, just spend time in prayer asking Him to reveal Himself to you through his Word. Read the Bible, especially the book of John or Matthew. They're amazing in what they reveal about Jesus. He was a gutsy, tough-minded, but loving and gentle person, the kind of person I'd always wanted in my life to follow." I offered to send her some books that might help answer some other questions.

She responded, "I'm going to talk to my boyfriend's mother about it. This has really been a great conversation. Thanks. I'll never forget it."

She got off the plane, and I haven't seen her since. But I believe God was working on her that afternoon on the plane, and I pray He'll bring other Christians into her life to water and harvest the seed that was planted that day.

Opening Doors

"Feeling out" a person with little hints is, I think, a great way to open a door for Christ. It's tactful and friendly, and it gets the job done without alienating anyone.

I'd encourage you in all your conversations to ask God how you can drop hints about your faith, about the Bible, or anything else. Here are several tips for success.

1. Pray that God will give you ideas while you're in conversation with people.
2. Learn to value silence and give people a chance to respond to your hint without your blathering all over it.
3. Go cautiously and gently. Many people today don't like to be pushed.
4. If you don't get very far with your hints, you can always be a bit more direct. But even then be gentle and friendly. And always leave the door open.

5. Listen carefully and be ready to stop hinting and share the gospel when the door opens.
6. If you share Christ with someone who doesn't make a decision right away, try to get some contact information so you can talk again or at least send some material that will keep your listener asking questions and wanting more.
7. If someone does accept Christ, find a way to continue discipling the new believer or connecting him or her with a local church.

Subtle hints are just one of the effective ways I've found to open up conversations about the gospel. Try it; you might like it.

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