

# Session 1: Opening the Conversation

Why are some subjects harder to talk about than others?

We begin the course by taking an honest look at how we feel about sharing our faith.

We find that many people share the same anxieties, but that getting started can be easier than we might think.

## Leader's Notes

**Needed:** Drinks, sticky name badges (if desired), Session Sheets and pens, Takeaway Sheets, post-it notes for Creative prayer (optional)

### Welcome *(approx. 15 minutes)*

- Drinks, notices
- Some material in the session needs to be read aloud. Identify one or two people who are happy to do this.

### Opener *(approx. 15 minutes)*

- Write name badge *(if desired)*.
- INTRODUCTION: The group leader introduces themselves by saying their first name, plus an adjective which begins with the same letter as their name ('I'm Mike and I'm marvellous!'). The person to their right repeats the leader's information and adds their own ('He's Mike and he's marvellous; I'm Susan and I'm smiley.'). The next person repeats both of the previous people's information then adds their own, and so on. Help each other out if necessary.
- ICEBREAKER *(go round whole group, starting with yourself as leader)*: Ask each member of the group to talk briefly about a photograph that means a lot to them. This could be old or recent, a family heirloom or a snap on their phone.

### Main Session *(approx. 1 hour)*

- Hand out Session Sheets.
- EXPLAIN *(read out)*: We now move to the main part of the session. Throughout the course it's important that we can be honest with each other, without fear of criticism or judgement. This



means everything that is shared remains confidential.

- Tell the group they are going to watch a video. In it, the writer Peter Graystone tells the story of a conversation he overheard on a bus.
- VIDEO
- DISCUSS (*in pairs*): Allow a few minutes to discuss the following questions:
  - What is your reaction to the story Peter told?
  - What would your reaction be if a friend asked you about your faith, or wanted to know why you go to church?
- ON SHEET: Ask the group to look at *Conversation starters and stoppers*. Ask people to indicate by ticking on the lines how hard or easy they'd find it to chat to a new friend or a work colleague about each of the issues. For example:

A favourite food/recipe	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span>very hard</span> <span>quite hard</span> <span>neutral</span> <span>quite easy</span> <span>very easy</span> </div>
A favourite food/recipe	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
My family	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
Politics	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
A recent holiday or trip	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
A TV show I enjoyed	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
My job/voluntary work	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
The church I go to	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>
My faith	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 0;"> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> <span></span> </div>

- DISCUSS (*in pairs*): Which of these subjects would you find it easiest to talk about? Which would be hardest? Why?
- ON SHEET: Explain that many people find it hard to talk about their faith. Some of the reasons for this are summarised on the sheet.

Ask the group to read quietly through *Some reasons people find it hard to talk about faith* and circle any reasons that are true for them. Allow a couple of minutes for this.

- 1) Blush (it's too personal or private)
- 2) Hush (I wouldn't really know what to say)
- 3) Rush (I would struggle to find the time)

- 4) Push (I don't have a right to force my faith on anybody else)
- 5) Gush (I wouldn't feel able to speak intelligently about my faith)
- 6) Mush (my own faith feels confused or unclear)
- 7) Crush (I'm worried or scared how people might respond)

When people have finished, read out each of the reasons again one by one.  
After each reason, ask group members to raise a hand if it applies to them.

- DISCUSS (*whole group*): What was the most common reason within the group?  
Did the results surprise people? Can anybody think of any other reasons?  
(Note: these don't have to end in '-ush'!)
- ON SHEET: Ask somebody to read out *It's entirely natural*:  
Most people experience all these problems at some point when thinking about sharing their faith. It can feel as if there's a lot at stake. We can feel nervous about saying the wrong thing, or getting into a discussion where we feel out of our depth.
- DISCUSS (*in different pairs*): Look back at the list of *Conversation starters and stoppers*. Think about the group's reaction to these. Why are some things easy to talk about, and why are some harder?
- Still got time? ... DISCUSS (*whole group*): Do you know anybody who can chat naturally and openly about their faith? What do you admire in the way they do this?
- ON SHEET: Ask somebody to read out *Looking forward*:  
In the rest of the course we'll learn to feel more comfortable about sharing our faith. We'll start to think about what we might say – and gather a few props, hints, clues and reminders that might give us a way in when we feel hesitant or unsure. We'll also find that God goes ahead of us and we don't need to be afraid.

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## Ending *(approx. 15 minutes)*

- Invite the group to join in either the Creative prayer or Quiet prayer (as decided by the leader before the session). Then end by praying the Closing prayer out loud:
  - 1) Creative prayer:  
Each person in the group is given two post-it notes (ideally of different colours).
    - On the first note, each person writes down what makes it difficult for them personally to talk about their faith. These are then stuck in a cluster on a door, wall, board or other surface.

- On the second note, each person writes one characteristic of Jesus in the Gospels that they value and find inspiring. These are stuck in a cluster on another surface.

Ask somebody to read aloud all the words on the second group of notes. Take some time in prayer to thank God for the things which inspire us about the life and work of Jesus.

- 2) Quiet prayer, a time of silent prayer ending with the Lord's Prayer:  
(Theme: for God's help in overcoming obstacles to talking about my faith journey)

*(Modern Version)*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive  
those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but  
deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

*(Traditional Version)*

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive  
those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

- Closing prayer (*read aloud*):

Lord God, we thank you for who you are. We thank you that you're creator of all things, author and sustainer of all life, and yet you still care for every single one of us. We thank you for this opportunity to spend time exploring our personal journeys of faith. Thank you that you're with us on this journey, every step of the way. In our anxiety, bring peace; when we falter, bring courage; and when we can't see the road ahead, bring hope. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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## Takeaway

- Hand out the *Takeaway Sheets* and ask people to be prepared to share their answer to the question by next session:

If you were a household appliance, what would you be?