

## ENGAGING WITH APATHY:

*what do we do when people just aren't bothered about God?*

### Three kinds of 'apathetic' about God:

- They don't know *you* care
- They don't want to talk about it
- They genuinely don't care
  - Belief: God is irrelevant or we can't know the truth about him
  - Feeling: I'm not bothered about it
    - Belief in God is *contestable* and *diverse*
    - Our lives are *comfortable* and *distracted*

### What we can do (zoomed out):

- Pray!
  - Isaiah 44:16-23 – the tragedy of idolatry where “no one stops to think”
  - (Isaiah 55 – God's glorious invitation)
    - It's easy to be sucked into our own apathy
    - We need to honestly lament to God, and keep asking him to work
- Introduce apathetic people to Christian community
  - Why?
    - John 17:20-23 – people will see the reality behind our faith through our relationships with each other
    - Can make it easier for conversations about God to emerge
    - It might help to meet a range of very different Christians
  - How?
    - What things that you do with Christians might you invite a non-Christian friend (or a few) to join you for? And vice versa?
    - What occasions might be natural ones to bring people together?
- Cultivate situations where deeper conversation is natural
  - Longer time, less people, more private setting
  - Dinner? The pub? Walks?
  - Intentionally tech free? Intentionally child free?
  - Inviting to events that provide the setting for you
    - [lifeintheround.org](http://lifeintheround.org) – film nights on 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> August
- Be their “de-facto chaplain” and be patient and prepared

## What we can do (zoomed in):

- Ask good questions (or, apply the golden rule!)
  - How?
    - What gets them up in the morning? What are they passionate about?
      - Value? Belief? Interest? Aspect of life?
    - **How** is it going? **How** do they feel about it?
    - **When** did it become so important to them?
    - **What** are their hopes for the future?
      - **Why** do you think this is so important?
      - **Where** do you think our passion for X comes from?
  - Why?
    - It's an act of love
    - It gently invites them to a deeper friendship of understanding and trust
    - It helps you understand them and reflect on how God and the good news might speak to them personally
    - It might enable them to feel comfortable to ask questions back
    - Or you may have opportunity to show the relevance of faith in the conversation itself
  - "I really respect that because as a Christian..."

- *How does Christianity provide rich and powerful reasons to value or care about the thing they're talking about?*
- *How does the thing they're talking about echo an aspect of the gospel message?*
- *Can you ask them about how this relates to what they believe about the big questions of life? (Why are we here? Where are we going?)*

- Can you give them a scent of sizzling bacon, or put a pebble in their shoe?

- *Scent of sizzling bacon:* glimpse of something precious/powerful for you about knowing Jesus
- *Pebble in their shoe:* prompt for them to question their own beliefs

### Some ideas for when they **don't know you care about God**:

- It's very obvious, but pray for opportunities to **simply mention your faith** – including church in what you did at the weekend, talking about a friend from church, whatever it might be
- **Offer to pray for people.** If someone tells you about something that's going on in their life, why not simply add to your response, "I'll pray for you about that!", or if you prefer, "I try to pray each day for people I know who are going through difficult stuff, would it be alright if I prayed for you about that?" I usually then pray for someone as soon as I get a chance so that I don't forget!
  - This communicates several things at once: that we actually care about them; that we actually pray and believe that matters; and that we're not ashamed or embarrassed to talk about our faith.
- **Consider whether there are ways you could be more distinctive or surprising.** Take some time to think about the context you're in with them and ask, what would Jesus be like in that context? Is there something you could do that would be surprising and wouldn't make sense unless Jesus was real to you?

### Some ideas for when they **don't want to talk about it**:

- **Do everything you can to show love.** Naturally if someone is politely hostile to Christians we want to really try to show them that we love them, perhaps contradicting prior negative experiences and building up trust.
- **Share stuff about faith that they can look at without telling you!** This is something social media is good for – can you share something they could look at and hear more about your faith without having to tell you they'd done so? Something you've seen or read online that resonated with you? A video of a talk from something at church? Or even better, something you've written yourself?

### Some other **general ideas**:

- For some people, **stories can take conversations deeper.** You could go to the cinema and get a drink afterwards, or watch a thoughtful TV show together, or recommend a book and then chat about it. Often good stories naturally raise deep questions about life.
- **With family where it's hard to ever talk about faith, consider asking directly.** I really struggle to talk about God with my family. Randy Newman recommends in some relationships just asking someone, "Would you ever be up for talking about God and all that?" It can be very difficult to just find a moment and dive in without doing something like this that gives them a chance to explicitly say no (and then have to justify that to themselves afterwards) or actually give you permission to find a good time to talk more about it.
- **With family you don't see that often and struggle to speak about faith, consider writing a letter.** If you don't often get one on one time with someone, it might be helpful to combine this with the previous idea and write them a letter expressing something of your care for them, why Jesus is so important to you, and explaining that you'd love to hear more about what they think and how they feel about these things, and asking if they'd be happy to talk more about it.

## Helpful resources:

- A brilliant book in general on sharing your faith in normal life that expands on some of the main ideas here is:  
**How To Talk About Jesus (without being THAT guy)** by Sam Chan.  
I would heartily recommend it.

### For ideas on connecting things people care about to faith:

- **Have You Ever Wondered?** Andrew Bannister & Gavin Matthews – this is a fun book with very short chapters on all sorts of things just raising questions and beginning to point to Jesus – happiness, stories, black lives matter, music, justice, money...
- **The Air We Breathe**, Glen Scrivener – a brilliant book that shows how 7 of the deepest values of our culture are actually rooted in Jesus and the Bible, trying to show people that they already have faith in these things and we're just offering them some solid ground to stand on!
- [www.solas-cpc.org](http://www.solas-cpc.org) is an interesting website that has a bunch of "Short/Answers" videos that you can search by topic
- **Evangelical Alliance 'Cross Section' podcast** – a regular podcast discussing current affairs and things in the news from a Christian perspective, which might give you some helpful thoughts for everyday conversations.
- **LICC 'Connecting With Culture' blog** – these are very short articles taking something current in culture and exploring the connection to Christianity – you can either subscribe for regular emails or look through the previous blogs, [licc.org.uk/ourresources/connectingwithculture/](http://licc.org.uk/ourresources/connectingwithculture/)
- **God of All Things**, Andrew Wilson – for a slightly different angle, this is a fascinating and highly enjoyable book that explores the biblical symbolism of everyday things, especially in the natural world: the sea, the sun, honey, bread, the wind, clothes, pigs... Who knows, you may find that an interesting connection comes to mind in conversation!

### From the Eden bookstall:

- **Are You 100% Sure You Want To Be An Agnostic?** Andrew Sach and Jonathan Gemmell – this is a very short, very cheap but very engaging little book that might give you some helpful ideas for thoughts and questions to put some pebbles in the shoes of friends who are settled in uncertainty about God and 'all that'.
- **Storybearer**, Phil Knox – this is just a great, encouraging book about growing in confidence in sharing Jesus, especially by sharing something of our own story, which is an avenue of possibility this Engage could have gone down but hasn't!