

# Why the journey is needed

“God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”

**Acts 17:27 (NIV)**

## Outline of talk by Rico Tice

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*Below is an outline of what the talk covers. Please see the corresponding session guide for more guidance on structuring the rest of the training session.*

### God’s plan for your journey

- God is the Creator, Sustainer and Ruler (Acts 17:24-27)
- He makes us, sustains us, and rules us in order that we would meet Jesus!
- The reason your neighbour lives on your street is so that they can be reached by the gospel. It’s no accident that God has brought these people across your path. This transforms how I see my life - it means that every encounter is a divine appointment that God has already written into my schedule.

### Why do people need Christians in their journey to Jesus?

- The culture we live in is defined by tolerance and permissiveness and is far removed from biblical Christianity. Jesus simply hasn’t been on the agenda at all and people generally don’t think about why they disagree with your beliefs; and if they ever do, they put it in the “It’s fine for you, but it’s not for me” box in their head.
- Statistics show that the majority of people who come to faith, do so through the positive influence of a Christian, who was their link to Christianity and helped them take steps towards faith in Jesus.

### Four steps that guide our thinking, prayer and interaction with the people placed around us

- Know them - They are uniquely made in God’s image. Gen 1:27 and Psalm 130
- Serve them - Win them over by acts of kindness. 1 Peter 2:11,12
- Ask a spiritual question - Principles to help you think of what to ask - Explore, Explain and Encourage
- Exit - They shut up, you shut up. Matt 10:14. Don’t assume you know who is spiritually hungry.

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## Transcript of talk by Rico Tice

*You are free to use and adapt the content of this talk to suit your context.*

Who am I? Where have I come from? And where am I going? These are huge questions that everyone asks either consciously or subconsciously, and one of the core aspects of A Passion for Life, and one of the things that we're going to pick up in this module is thinking about what journey I'm on, and what journey those around me are on, the people whom God has put in my life. And we want to take the good news of Jesus all the way from the creator God who made us, to the streets that we live on. We long for people to link their story with his. One of my favourite passages for training on evangelism, which boosts my confidence as I draw alongside others to share my faith is Acts 17, verses 24 to 27.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he's not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man, he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth. And he marked out for them, their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he's not far from any one of us."

So first question, how does this passage tell us to think about God? Can you see how God is described in verse 24? How is he described in verse 25 and verse 26? What we see is that God is the creator in verse 24. He made the world and everything in it. He's the sustainer in verse 25. He himself gives life and breath and everything else. So just breathe in and out and realize that breath, each breath is a gift, not a given. And thirdly, he is the ruler who made all the nations and who then decides our appointed times in history and the boundaries of our lands. In other words, he decides where we live and how long we live. What is the creator, sustainer, and ruler doing in history? That's the question. What's he doing? What's his aim for the world? Well, that comes in verse 27. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us. God makes us, sustains us and rules us in order that we would meet Jesus.

That is what's happening in history. And he has decided not only that I live on the street, I live on here in central London, but that my neighbours live here as well. They think they're here because of choices they've made. And of course they have made real choices, but that does not stop God from being God. My neighbours live on my street because God has put them there. Your colleague at work sits next to you because God has sat him or her there. Every person and family is where they are because God has ordained it. God's sovereign control of history is profoundly depicted in the book of Acts, where we read about one of the first prayer meetings of the early church. Peter and John have just been released from that trial before the Sanhedrin, they've been told to be quiet, to stop speaking, chapter 4, verse 17. But when they come to pray in verse 27, 28, they tell us how to think about God.

"Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you appointed." Acts 4, verse 27. We then read of the sin of Herod, the sin of Pontius Pilate, the sin of the Romans and the sin of the people who conspired together to crucify Jesus. And then, now hold onto your seats. We read this. "They did

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what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." Acts 4:28. So you have to be very, very powerful to have your enemies, do your bidding while acting against you. But that's exactly how we're to think about God.

Returning to my street, it tells me that every neighbour, despite the fact that they perhaps suppress all knowledge of God, has been placed here for what reason? To meet me because I know Jesus. What's going on in history is that God is reaching out to people so that they'll meet him. The reason your neighbour lives on your street is so that they can be reached by the gospel. It's no accident that God has brought these people across your path. And to see this is life transforming. It means that every encounter is a divine appointment that God has already written into my schedule and into their schedule. It transforms my energy and optimism because every time I see a neighbour or colleague, I know that the God who is in charge on Good Friday is in charge today. And so I can say to myself with all humility, I'm the most important person they know because I know Jesus and the creator, sustainer and ruler insists that life is about encountering his Son. As I teach this truth as an evangelist, it's such a privilege because I literally watch people's confidence being transformed by it.

But this also raises our next question. If God is ruling like this in history, why does he use Christians to journey with non-Christians towards faith in Jesus? Well, amazingly he chooses you to be his ambassador and how you're needed. As we know, the culture we live in is defined by tolerance and permissiveness, and is far removed from biblical Christianity. Jesus simply hasn't been on the agenda at all for years and people generally don't think about why they disagree with your beliefs. And if they do, they put it in the, "it's fine for you, but not for me" box. That's what's going on in their head. Our job, and what a privilege it is, is to introduce them to Jesus, having been placed in their lives as we journey with them through life.

So how do people become Christians in this climate? Well, statistics show that the majority of people who come to faith do so through the positive influence of a Christian, who was their link to Christianity and helped them to take steps towards faith in Jesus. As I think about my personal relationships and journey with people, I have four steps in mind, four steps that guide my thinking, prayer and interaction with the people that God has placed around me.

Step one, know them. The first thing I want to do is know them. They're made in God's image, Genesis 1, verse 27. They're the pinnacle of creation and God has sent me to meet them. Now, what does that mean? It means that to get to know them, I take the time to speak with them and ask friendly questions. David tells us in Psalm 139 verse 14 that they're fearfully and wonderfully made. So how thrilling it is that God has put them into my life and nothing has happened by accident. God made them with their skills, temperament, intellect, and experience. He uniquely wired them. And evangelism begins here in being thrilled with the fact that God has made this person opposite me, alongside me. He's put me in their life. He sent Christ to die for them and he's put me in their life to meet them. Oh, may they see the excitement in my eyes as I realize the big story we're in together, it's so thrilling.

Step two, serve them. We don't just want to get to know people. We also want to serve them. In one Peter two, we're urged to live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. The people we meet may be hostile to Christianity. Certainly in Peter's day, there were tiny pockets of faith

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surrounded by great oceans of paganism. Following the Emperor Nero's lead, vast parts of the country were persecuting Christians. And yet as people saw their good deeds, they were so often won over by the lives of these Christians. Observers, at the time, noted that the Christians walked in all humility and kindness. There was no falsehood among them and they loved one another. They cared for widows and orphans and gave generously to those in need.

So strangers were welcomed and shown hospitality. The grieving were supported in practical ways. And those imprisoned for their faith were cared for. There was real sacrifice made for others, including fasting from food for several days so that they may supply the needy. So as I interact with the neighbour God has put in my life, I need to constantly be looking out to do random acts of kindness. When someone arrives on the street, knock on the door with recycling bags and a box of chocolates. When you see them, make sure you stop and let them know you care by asking how they are. Get to know their stories. If there's a local fair, get the street together to go. If someone's had a success, celebrate it. For example, one of my neighbours wrote a book. As a way of celebrating and serving them, my other neighbours and I organized for those that could to go to the launch. It's a small thing, but it meant a lot to the people who came. And of course, to the guy who wrote the book.

Third step, cross the pain line and ask spiritual questions. This will always be a bit nerve wracking so make sure your identity is in the grace of God. So that whether they accept or reject you doesn't make you more valuable. What makes you valuable is Christ died for you. Get that in place. But something you might find helpful is to preface what you say with perhaps a comment like this. "Our friendship is really important so I'm a little bit nervous about saying this because some people can be offended, but can I ask you, what do you think about spiritual things?" "Do you ever think about spiritual things?" "What do you think about the person of Christ?" "Do you celebrate Christmas?" "What do you make of Easter?" In the recent Coronavirus pandemic, I found myself asking this question of people. In the midst of the pandemic with all the death tolls on the telly each night, "do you have a hope for a time like this? Is there a place of hope you've got?"

Let's remember in the gospels, Jesus asks over 300 questions. And as a minority in the country, we've got to get better at asking questions that help people reflect on their worldviews. What have they absorbed? How are they thinking? What is their core thinking? So with an individual I'll often use three key words to help me work out what might be the right question for them.

First, explore - listen, listen, listen, what are they thinking? What do they love? What are their concerns? What are their hopes and fears?

Secondly, explain. What's the next thing I'd love to say to them about the Christian faith? What truth about Jesus would I love them to understand? What is it about creation, fall, redemption, consummation, those four great planks of the Christian worldview that I'd love them to know?

Thirdly, encourage. What from my life as I share my story brings that truth to light? So for example, during the Coronavirus lockdowns, I kept saying to people, these death tolls remind me of how I felt 40 years ago when my godfather was suddenly killed in a cliff fall. I realized I needed hope in the face of death. I woke up to that. It's like the same feeling now.

And that leads to the fourth step, know when to exit. In Matthew 10 verse 14. Jesus says, "That if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust

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off your feet." So what does this mean? Well, I think it means that if they shut up, you shut up. But if they start talking and discussing the spiritual issues you've raised, then you keep asking questions and engaging with them. Now it might be that they don't want to talk about this area at all. In which case go back to knowing and serving them. But it might be that this is someone in whom God is creating a spiritual hunger. And that has led them to this conversation with you so that you may offer them the only thing that will satisfy them: the Lord Jesus. Don't make the assumption you know who's hungry, who is ready to trust in Jesus and who isn't. Get to know people, serve them, ask questions, and God will show you who he's calling to himself through you.

This is the journey I'm seeking to go on with everyone God has placed on my street and elsewhere in my life. My confidence comes from the fact that the sovereign Lord has placed me where I am and my neighbours, where they are. It's all a divine appointment that God has written into our schedules. When I think of these things, they give me energy and optimism. They make me ready to speak. They make every walk down the street so exciting and it makes me thankful to God. And it means that my next job is to think about or write down the names of the people living around me and start praying for them. With my confidence, absolutely rock solid in God's plan for me, for them and his world, I can pray that I would know them, serve them and speak with them about Jesus.

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The training video is available for anyone to watch at [apassionforlife.org.uk/ibd1-view](https://apassionforlife.org.uk/ibd1-view)