



Common Ground

by Doug Franck

Editor's Note: This new department is an outreach training tool you can copy and use in a small group, ministry team meeting or individually.

An estimated 80% of Christians today don't have close relationships with non-Christians. Do you? Chances are, you *want* to reach out to the non-Christians in your life, but aren't sure where to start.

In today's world, outreach requires us to be proactive in our bridge-building, rather than reactive. In his book, *Finding Common Ground* (Moody), Tim Downs reminds us of the forgotten biblical art of sowing—what he calls “the behind-the-scenes, slow process of preparing the ground for a person to eventually hear and believe the Gospel.”

The entry point to a connection with our unbelieving neighbors or co-workers can be as simple as learning to share common experiences or taking an interest in their world.

Where are you right now? Do you know basic facts about your non-Christian neighbors or co-workers? Think of four non-Christian neighbors or co-workers you hope to reach and answer the questions below:

1. List their first and last names.
2. What are their children's names?
3. Do you know what your neighbor does for a living?
4. What are their hobbies, favorite sports?
5. When are their birthdays or wedding anniversaries?
6. What is their religious background?

Where do you want to begin? Think of the non-believers you regularly come in contact with and identify three to six commonalities (sports, hobbies, married, children, single) you share with each person. Searching for common ground means we take the spotlight off ourselves and shine it on others to discover what really makes them tick. Get to know their likes and dislikes, their dreams, struggles, spiritual experiences and what they're excited about.

List 2 to 4 non-Christians you want to know better.

How will you get there? What can you do to help cultivate a relationship with each one? First, pray for specific opportunities to talk to them. Start thinking about your common interests. What questions could you ask to find a connection?

This week. Be proactive and visit your neighbor's house or a co-worker's office. Observe what magazines and books he or she reads. Look at the photos and plaques on the walls. Items like these tell you about a person's interests and priorities. Ask a question about a specific item (such as “Where was this photo taken?”) and start a conversation based on your common interests and experiences.

At the beginning of your next small group meeting, discuss the results. What happened when you took an interest in your non-believing neighbor or co-worker? Where did you find common ground? What questions did you ask? What was the most challenging part? What surprised you most? Where did the conversation lead?

GOING DEEPER

Finding Common Ground
(Moody) by Tim Downs

Irresistible Evangelism
(Group) by Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping
and Doug Pollock

Conspiracy of Kindness
(Vine) by Steve Sjogren

*The Complete Book of Questions: 1001
Conversation Starters for Any Occasion*
(Zondervan) by Garry Poole

Seeker Small Groups
(Zondervan) by Garry Poole

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