

# CONVERSATIONS

Turn Your Everyday Discussions  
Into Life-Giving Moments



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## **Who Should Read This Book?**

Do you want to help others around you grow and develop? Do you have people around you that you believe in, and you want to play a role in developing them — as a parent, a mentor, a leader, a friend, or some other role you have in their lives? Then this book is for you.

When it comes to helping others grow, your ability to have meaningful conversations with the people you care about is by far the most powerful tool in your toolbox. Your conversations are at least as powerful as any training, event, tools, or even people's personal experiences. Because the single most powerful component that fills in the gaps and draws all those other elements together...is conversation.

# Introduction

Jerry Hurley, Ginger Ward, and I (Jeff Galley) first presented these ideas in a half-day training event that we hosted for a handful of our staff at the Central offices of LifeChurch.tv. That small event went so well that we decided we should offer it to other teams at additional LifeChurch.tv locations. The feedback from those sessions turned out to be overwhelmingly positive as well, with staff members even asking for the content in a format they could use to equip the various influencers across their ministries: parents, mentors, teachers, small group leaders, etc. This book is our first attempt at packaging these ideas for that purpose.

It's a small book: just four chapters. That's because the ideas we're presenting are simple and straightforward. But more than that, it's because the only way you can become skilled at directing conversations that result in growth is **by actually having conversations**...not by reading a book about it.

Think of it like learning to ride a bicycle. If you read a book about riding a bike, how many pages would it take to explain how to get up on the seat? How many pages to grip the handlebars? And then how many to begin turning the pedals? Not very many! The only way to learn it is to actually get out there and start riding the bike. That's where everything will all come together, where you truly learn the nuances.

You can take the ideas in this book as far as you'd like. You may be just a casual bike rider, occasionally integrating an idea here and there into daily conversations. But you may also choose to get serious about your bike riding and decide to enter races, so to speak, by working hard to become skilled at developing others.

Here's what you can expect from this book:

**Chapter 1: What “Meaningful Conversation” Means.** We'll explain why some conversations seem to matter so much more than others, including the three elements it takes to elevate a conversation from ordinary to life-changing.

**Chapter 2: How People Grow.** Most people who have been through LifeChurch.tv's training on this topic are surprised to discover how much simpler this process is than they imagined. You'll learn the handful of foundational principles you'll need to become a sound “people-developer.”

**Chapter 3: How Conversations Work.** We'll demystify the give-and-take dynamics that take place naturally in every conversation. More importantly, we'll give you practical tips that you can begin using immediately to positively influence the lives of the people around you.

**Chapter 4: How to Lead a Conversation.** We'll explain a specific, strategic framework you can use to transform everyday, real-world conversations into launching pads for growth — on the fly, even as they're still unfolding. This same concept works just as well for group conversations as it does for one-on-one interactions.

**Development Toolkit.** We'll list and describe several practical tools you can employ in your conversations, including real-world examples that can help you identify which approaches might work best in various situations you're likely to encounter. This book will teach you how to use the everyday, seemingly mundane conversations you have all the time with the people you know and love to help them grow into all that God created them to be. The truth is, there is nothing mundane about your conversations. Your conversations are the greatest tool you have as you carry out your mission of helping those around you grow. It's true. Your conversations have the potential to change a life, one small step at a time.

Let's get started...with you.

# Chapter 1:

## What “Meaningful Conversation” Means

Have you ever had one of those conversations that, even though you may not have realized it was happening at the time, later, upon reflection, you recognized it as a lifechanging, “a-ha!” moment for you? We’ve all had them: talks that somehow dramatically changed the way we see the world...

That long discussion with a friend or parent when, somewhere during the course of your time together, you worked up the courage to make a marriage proposal.  
Running through the pros and cons of something important you had lost — a job, a friend, a loved one — you found peace, the strength to move on.  
That visit over coffee with a person you trusted, a wise friend, who helped you finally commit to a definitive direction on an important decision.

## Coffee and Change

Years ago I had a conversation like this myself. I first met Dick Wynn in April 1999 through a mutual friend. Even though I knew Dick was a seasoned business leader in an organization with global reach, I took a chance and asked him if he’d be willing to meet with me and give me some advice. I wasn’t sure if Dick would make time for me, but he graciously agreed, and a few days later, we met for breakfast at LePeeps restaurant in Denver, where I lived at the time.

That particular meeting has achieved mythic status in my mind. The sage advice Dick expounded to me that morning left such an indelible imprint that I can even recall specific details not just about our talk, but even about our surroundings. On a wall nearby hung an Impressionist piece of art. A black coffee thermos was on the table between us. Dick had a gold nugget ring on one finger. I ordered a Spanish omelet. (It was good, but not as spicy as I like.) Even today, I’m confident that I could take you to that restaurant and show you the exact table where we sat!

Fortunately for me, that was just the first of many such meetings. Over the next couple of years, Dick became a supremely helpful mentor to me. In fact, it would not be overstating to say that my relationship with him changed the direction of my life. Dick passed away a few years ago, but I’ll never forget him.

I could tell you about many other conversations that I’m sure I’ll remember for the rest of my life, too: with my parents around the dinner table, some real and vulnerable moments in a small group, and a handful of other significant conversations that each led either to a big decision or to a key shift in my thinking.

What about you? What conversations do you remember? Conversations that shaped the person you became? Conversations that, when you recall them now, still bring up the same emotions you felt at the time — even if they took place five, ten, or perhaps twenty years ago? Were they conversations with your parents? A coach? A best friend? A teacher? Your pastor? If you were to list all the conversations you’ve had over the years, these would be the pivotal ones you’d come back to again and again, highlighting and underlining and printing them in bold — because they were the ones that most shaped the person you’ve become.

But is it really true that these “pivotal” conversations are what shape us?

## Pivotal Conversations Are Overrated

Wait...what? Yes, you read that right. It's our natural tendency to overrate pivotal conversations. The reason we catch ourselves referring back to these particular conversations over and over is because they're ingrained so deeply in our minds — most likely because of the emotions they sparked within us, whether as they were happening or in hindsight. And when we think back, when we delve into our memory banks for those moments that stand out as most important, these are the ones that keep coming up.

*our everyday conversations are what have most shaped us into who we are... but perhaps more importantly, it is these same everyday conversations that will shape us into who we become*

It is absolutely true that that first conversation I had with Dick Wynn at that LePeeps all those years ago was important. After all, that was the talk that established our relationship on a solid foundation. But, I actually ended up working with Dick for a couple of years sometime after that. And it was the ten, twenty, or maybe even a hundred small conversations that Dick and I had together over the years that actually shaped me the most: three minutes in a hallway between meetings, a quick visit when he would pop into my office to follow up on some task, or one of the many scheduled times we met to discuss things over breakfast, or even just coffee.

It's the ordinary conversations that truly change us, even if they're casual, not intentional. Our behaviors find their shape in the day-to-day. And just as that's been how you have experienced dramatic change in your life over time, it's those ordinary, everyday conversations that you have with others that will benefit their development the most.

Why do conversations matter so much?

## Where Growth Happens

You know that old saying, "Experience is the best teacher"? That's true, but it's incomplete. There's no doubt that day-to-day life affords us the most fertile opportunities to learn, develop, and grow. All of us have experienced those "Eureka!" moments that happen when we gain insight that can only result from firsthand experience. Experience is how you learn to be a better spouse, parent, or professional in your chosen field. Experience gifts us with new skills, like driving a car, baking a favorite recipe, giving a speech, or taking a breathtaking photograph.

It's also through our day-to-day experiences that we learn to live out our faith in Christ and to increase in our devotion to following Him.

*God uses the mundane, everyday experiences of our lives to mature our character, shepherding us from pride toward courage, from selfishness toward generosity, from laziness toward self-control*

But for all that experience has to offer us, experience by itself isn't enough. The sweet spot for powerful change is right in the center of where our experiences converge with relevant tools and meaningful conversations:

**Experience.** As our kids grew into their teenage years, one of the goals my wife Christy and I set for them was to help each one learn to manage money on their own. Since we believed that experience would be the best teacher, we made a simple rule: if you want a car, you have to save up enough money to buy one for yourself. And because each of our kids was motivated to buy a car, they found ways to generate income.

**Meaningful Conversations.** Pretty quickly, each of them also learned that money can disappear just as fast as comes in (especially when you impulse-spend it on things like movies and new clothes). When they realized they weren't saving money as fast as they'd hoped, they came to us ready to talk, filled with questions born out of their recent experiences.

**Relevant Tools.** Throughout those conversations (and in subsequent follow-ups), Christy and I equipped them with general money management principles, budgeting strategies, and new skills, like how to establish personal values and goals. Because all of these were methods we had tested in our own experiences, we were confident the same things would help them make better spending decisions.

And it worked. By diligently applying all they had learned, our first two kids each saved enough money to purchase their own cars — for cash. (Our youngest is well on his way toward accomplishing this same goal.)

To see effective growth, you have to apply all three elements. If a person has experiences and tools, but not conversations, then they're trying to develop in isolation. Sure, you may be able to make some gains by working to figure things out on your own, but that's inefficient. Imagine having another person you could turn to, someone who would help you look at your situation from multiple angles, including several you might not have considered before. Experience and tools require the "glue" of conversation to bind them together.

## Word to the Wise

So far, we've been talking about development primarily from the angle of you asking for help. But what about what you have to offer others? Maybe you don't believe you could ever lead that kind of conversation with another person. Maybe you think it's only Yodatypes who can direct a life-changing conversation, like Solomon drawing up sage advice and profound wisdom out of his bottomless well of insight. Is that what it takes to develop others? That you feed them precisely the correct nuggets of wisdom, and in exactly the proper sequence, that your genius changes their lives in a moment...and leaves them in awe?

No. Just...no.

Listen, any person can leverage a conversation in a way that helps others grow. That's so important you need to read it again: absolutely any person — and that includes you — can conduct a conversation in a way that helps someone else grow. You only need to do three things:

1. Care about people.
2. Adopt the proper mindset.
3. Put into practice a few basic skills.

Regardless of your personality style, you can learn to be good at it. You — again, you — can become good at catalyzing growth through conversation.

*even if you don't hold any formal position that requires you to, you can absolutely learn to help others grow*

Of course, this begs the question: why would you want to? The answer is simple: because developing people is important to God.

Developing People Matters to God

One of my favorite passages of scripture is from the first chapter of Genesis:

*God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature  
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,  
the birds in the air, the cattle,  
And, yes, Earth itself,  
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."  
God created human beings;  
he created them godlike,  
Reflecting God's nature.  
He created them male and female.  
God blessed them:  
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!  
Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,  
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."  
Then God said, "I've given you  
every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth  
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,  
given them to you for food.  
To all animals and all birds,  
everything that moves and breathes,  
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food."  
And there it was.  
(Genesis 1:26-30, MSG)*

When God created us (mankind, I mean), he gave us a mandate to shape and create culture. He has entrusted us with the great responsibility to make the most of the natural world (through farming, building buildings, engineering bridges, conducting science and medicine, and so on) and to make the most of the social world (families, schools, churches, governments, social work, development, and so on).

We know that sin entered the world and, as a result, many aspects of God's creation were broken — including each of us as individuals. But God restores us when we surrender our lives to Him! And as he does, he also calls us back to that mandate: to work toward restoring the natural and social world back to the condition he originally intended.

Obviously, the way this happens...is through people. At creation, God chose to work through humanity. Through us. And as he is restoring the world, he continues to do that work through us.

*God is working to restore us...  
and he's working through us as we  
help restore others to all he intended*

Your challenge, then, is to take up that mandate, and — whether as a parent, mentor, manager, small group leader, friend, or whatever role you play — make the most of the opportunities you have to develop others. When you do, God is glorified, people are restored, and God's creation becomes a bit more like he intended it to be!

# Chapter 2:

## How People Grow

Several years ago a young woman named Allison was working for me. She poked her head into my office one day and said, “Hey Jeff, can I schedule some time with you? There’s some stuff I’d like to talk through with you. And, well, just to be honest, it’s probably going to be pretty heavy.”

Allison had always been an exemplary team member, capable of handling any work situation that presented itself, no matter how complicated. I could tell she was genuinely concerned, and of course I wanted to address whatever was on her mind. We blocked out some time to meet and put it on the calendar.

I don’t know that anything could have prepared me for all that Allison needed to tell me that day. She began by explaining that while she liked me personally, and that there was no problem between us as friends, what she was wrestling with was that she didn’t enjoy working for me. As delicately as she could, Allison revealed to me how difficult I was as a boss. While somehow managing to be humble and gracious, Allison offered me specific examples that clearly demonstrated that I was regularly communicating unrealistic expectations. My never-ending drive for more growth, more results, had burdened her everyday work life. Basically, I was never satisfied, even with wins.

As difficult as it was for me to hear these things — which were all perfectly true, by the way — the worst part was learning that my overbearing demeanor had given Allison the impression that I didn’t care about her very much. I never imagined that anyone — much less someone I worked with every day — might not understand my true heart. I was genuinely surprised that Allison felt I cared more about the tasks I wanted us to accomplish than about the people doing the work. But she did such a great job helping me see things from her perspective that I was really able to take the things she said to heart. I thanked her for being honest with me, and I tried to assure her that I would review her feedback and try to become a better boss.

As you might imagine, processing something as personal as that was emotionally challenging. I had to be very intentional not to become defensive, not to simply start outlining excuses for each of the examples Allison had offered. I took some time over the next few hours to mull everything over. And the more honest I was with myself, it really sunk in that she was absolutely right. These were not isolated instances; they represented ongoing patterns of behavior. Whether we were talking about my expectations, about weaknesses in my communication, about how I came across in personal interactions, or any number of other leadership skills, it was clear:

*I had several things I needed to change*

## Friends and Mentors

I tried to think about who I knew who was good at the kinds of things I needed help with. My thoughts settled on my friend John, a really successful organizational leader who’s had a lot more experience leading people and working with teams than I have. Although John worked in our same organization, for many years before that, he had already had a successful career leading large teams, managing in complex environments, and navigating through all sorts of complicated situations.

I called John and told him about the things Allison had helped me see. He listened quietly, only asking me short questions every now and then, promptings that helped me organize my thoughts. When I had finished telling him everything, I said, “I know that’s a lot, but what do you think? Can you help me?”

John is the kind of guy whose smile you can hear, shining through his rich South African accent, even over the phone. He said, “Listen, you know what I think, Jeff? I think this is actually great news. I think that if you can stick with it, if you can do the hard work — and I believe you can — then you’re gonna come out on the other side of this not just as a better boss, but as a better person. And of course I’d be happy to help you.”

Right off the top of his head, John told me about a book he’d read that addressed many of the issues I needed to work on. He asked if I’d be willing to read it and talk it over with him after each chapter or two. I wanted to start right away. Over the next several weeks, I’d read for a while, then hop on the phone to visit with John about what I was learning. Those conversations helped me learn, one small step at a time, how I could communicate better with the people I was leading, both personally and about what tasks I felt we needed to perform — and why. Gradually I learned how to balance my natural drive for results with the learnable skills of caring for others, coaching their development, and helping them feel successful.

I am grateful to my friend John for investing his time and wisdom in me. And just as much (maybe even more), I am so grateful to Allison; her courage to tell me the truth about how she felt was a conversation that sparked a growth process in my life that I truly needed.

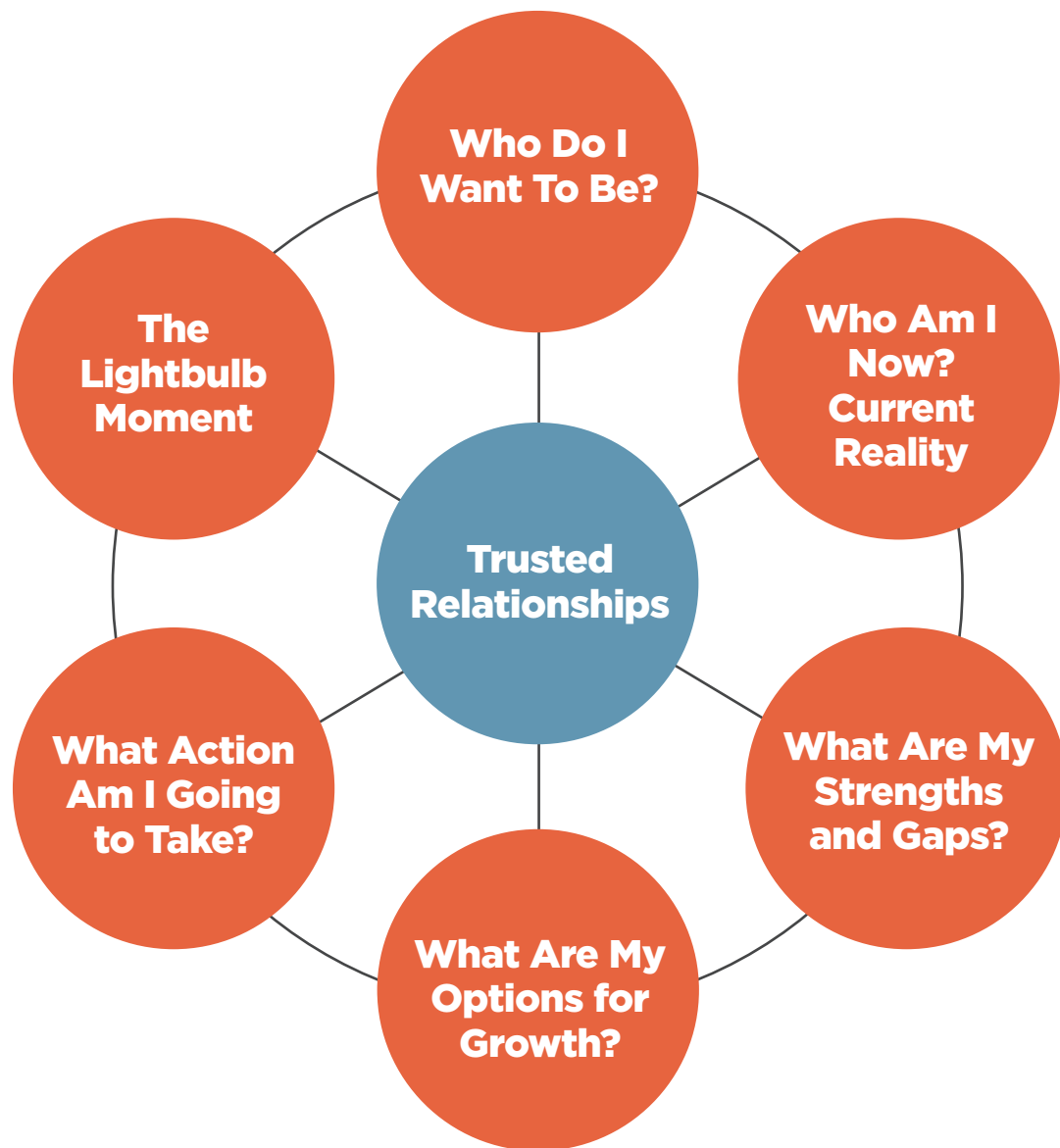
*I wouldn't be who I am today without both of these people*

#### Growth is a Predictable Process

In their book, *Primal Leadership*, authors Goleman and Boyatzis introduce a predictable framework that illustrates how people grow and develop. We adapted a variation on their ideas that we use at LifeChurch.tv to help people visualize their own growth process. I’ll use the example I shared with you of my experience with Allison and John to illustrate each part.

As the lines and clustering indicate, no part happens in isolation. These are not orderly steps, per se; they’re all interrelated and interdependent. But notice the single element that each one has in common:

*each step of personal growth only takes place in the context of trusted relationships*



## Trusted Relationships

This could probably go without saying, but trusted relationships are all of those interactions and exchanges we enjoy with others. No matter which aspect of personal growth we happen to be working on, relationships with other people we trust are the one mandatory element for each. In most cases, these will be give-and-take relationships, where we mutually benefit from knowing each other.

*people you trust can help you become more self-aware when you make it safe for them to give you honest feedback*

This is what Allison did for me; we had worked together long enough that she had banked enough trust with me that she felt she could tell me the truth about myself. People who are better at something than you are inspire you to reach for something greater. Mentors and friends can help you come up with ideas you can try, action steps you can take. John was able to do both of these things for me; I knew he already possessed the skills I needed to learn. I was fortunate enough that John also happened to be a willing (and excellent) teacher!

*friends will hold you accountable to follow through, and they'll encourage you*

Both John and Allison did that for me

## **The Light Bulb Moment**

This is some significant event, a single “Catalytic Moment” that marks a new level of self-awareness, the “a-ha!” when a person realizes they want some aspect of themselves to be different — that is, “better.” Most people will be willing to acknowledge that they’re going to have to do some work to change. Ideally, their light bulb moment makes them actually want to grow and improve. For me, this was that one tough, meaningful conversation I had with Allison.

## **Who Am I Now?**

When presented with the need for change, that new self-awareness forces a person to take a hard look in the mirror. They may see several things they need to change, or just one. This is what happened to me during the hours following my meeting with Allison, when I reflected back on the truth of all she had said. This is a good place to be open to asking others to help you see yourself the way they do.

## **Who Do I Want to Be?**

A significant part of what makes us want to change is that we have something we can compare to, something better to aspire to. We may see this in another person who’s already doing that thing particularly well, but it may also be that we simply recognize we’re not getting the results we want. I had actually observed John modeling a much more positive brand of leadership in previous situations than I could see in myself in the examples Allison showed me. Not only did people who worked for John accomplish the results he wanted, they were actually happy about doing it! John knew how to describe the future he wanted in a way that others could find ownership in it. He was great both at casting vision and at delegating responsibility.

## **What Are My Strengths and Gaps?**

Once again, this is another area where we need honest feedback from others. Even if you think you’re great at something, it’s possible none of the other stakeholders would agree with you! On the other hand, you may take certain elements of your personality for granted that other people wish came so easily to them. Allison helped me see bad habits I had that I needed to eliminate. John helped me learn good habits I could develop that would ultimately replace those.

## **What Are My Options for Growth?**

Even when we know where we want to end up, we may not be able to visualize a path that can take us there from where we are. We need ideas, coaching, and encouragement. A good mentor (again, someone like John) can help us come up with all kinds of realistic alternatives we could try.

## **What Action Am I Going to Take?**

This is where the rubber meets the road. You could do everything else, but if you fail to choose a direction — and act — then nothing will change. Mentors and friends can help you brainstorm options, and they can hold you accountable, but ultimately you have to own both the final decision and the action that follows it. It’s okay when actions we choose don’t work (something I can guarantee is going to happen), as long as we’re willing to make adjustments and keep trying.

## Look Back to See Forward

the best way to understand how people develop is to reflect on your own journey of personal growth... looking back on your experiences, you'll see patterns you can apply toward helping others

Let's do that now. Take a moment now to think back on your life. Try to remember a specific period of your life when you grew in some specific area. It could be anything: you decided once and for all to get control over your temper, you accepted responsibility for your finances, you had a particular breakthrough that turned you into a better parent — just anything in any area. For the period of change you're picturing, try to remember:

1. What was your **Light Bulb Moment**, the event that triggered your desire to change? Was there a **Trusted Relationship** involved in that realization? If so, who?
2. What was the process for you to take a good, hard look at **Who You Were?**
3. **Who Did You Want to Be?** Did you know someone who was already good at the area where you wanted to improve? Were you able to initiate a **Trusted Relationship** with that person?
4. Did a **Trusted Relationship** help you find your **Strengths and Gaps?** What did you discover about yourself?
5. Did a **Trusted Relationship** help you explore some of your **Options for Growth?** Was it the same person, or someone else? If you can remember, what were some of the options you considered?
6. Which one(s) did you ultimately choose? **What Action Did You Take?** Did a **Trusted Relationship** hold you accountable to follow through? Again, was it the same person, or someone else?

Hopefully you can see now how this growth process typically plays out in all our lives. Sometimes the process happens quickly. Other times it may take longer — perhaps even much longer.

*whether it's fast or slow, the process of growth is predictable*

And just as it was for you, just as it was for me, you can expect that a similar process will take place in those around you: your kids, the people you lead, others you're mentoring, your friends, and so on.

### Reliable Indicators for Growth

Just as the process of growth is completely predictable, here are four principles of personal growth that you can take to the bank. When you're engaging in helping others grow, keep an eye out to make sure all four are present. If these things aren't happening, growth's not going to happen either.

#### **1. Growth only happens when we're in the game.**

Simply reading a book or taking a class won't cause change. It was only because Allison and I had already been working together for a long time that her insights carried enough weight with me that I was challenged to grow. You can expect that to be true in your life most of the time.

*everyday life is where we discover possibilities for growth, pursue self-awareness, choose action steps, learn, practice, fail, adjust ...and see growth*

Perhaps the greatest example we have is Jesus, the best people-developer of all time. Jesus developed each of his disciples while they were in the process of living life. We find one example in Luke chapter 10, where Mary and Martha, who were sisters, had welcomed Jesus into their home as a guest. Mary wanted only to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him, while Martha busied herself trying to be a good host. Martha eventually grew angry enough with her sister that she asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her. Jesus turned their tension into a teachable moment, sharing an observation about choosing priorities. Through that experience, Martha learned something a person can't learn in a classroom. And that's exactly how Jesus developed all of his followers. There was no "how to be a follower of Jesus" class; Jesus simply taught them as they were in the natural process of experiencing life together, talking and asking them questions as things happened that they didn't understand.

## **2. Growth only happens when we take ownership of it.**

No one can make me grow. External forces can't impose growth on me, can't force it to happen. I have to choose to actively pursue growth for myself. My motivation has to come from inside, and I have to do the work to develop myself toward the outcomes I want to see.

If John had just called me one day out of the blue and said, "Hey Jeff, let's read a book together!" that would not have motivated me. Because I looked up to John, and because he's a friend, I probably would have agreed to do it out of obligation. But that doesn't mean I would have had the initiative (or the energy!) to allow it to make changes in my life. There's a wide gap between simply discussing a book with a friend and actively pursuing opportunities to change my behavior.

But of course that's not how it happened. I was internally motivated. I already wanted change. I was actively reaching out for help. So when John suggested a book, not only was I eager to read it, that actually sounded like a pretty easy way to start! In Luke 10, Jesus sends out seventy-two of his followers, tasking them with preparing surrounding communities in advance of his visits there. Even if you're familiar with this passage, I'd like you to go back and have another look; specifically, I want you to notice the approach Jesus has his disciples use. Beginning in verse 5, he essentially tells them to focus their efforts only on those who seem interested in hearing what they have to say. Then in verse 10, he tells them not to waste their time on communities that aren't open to their message, and just move on to the next place. Why would he tell them this? Because Jesus knew this foundational principle:

*people only grow when they own their own growth*

It's important to make clear that Jesus wasn't "giving up" on people who rejected his message; he was merely being practical and honest: if people aren't ready for change, then it's better to just pass on by at that time. Change is only going to happen when people are internally motivated to begin seeing things differently.

## **3. Growth begins with self-awareness.**

Self-awareness is like a springboard toward personal growth and development. That first conversation I had with Allison was like a good, hard look in the mirror. I had to come to grips with the reality that the way I perceived myself was different than the way she perceived me. And I can tell you: that motivated me to change. It also clearly identified for me some specific things I needed to change.

The primary approach Jesus used for teaching truth, whether it was to his followers or to the crowds gathering to hear him, were parables. But don't let a word you don't hear in everyday conversation overcomplicate what it actually is; we would call them stories. A parable is simply a story that helps make a point.

In Matthew 13:10, Jesus' disciples ask him directly why he uses so many stories. In their experience, most teachers of their day would instead outline rules, then list the positive outcomes that would happen if people obeyed...and the negative consequences if they didn't. Jesus explains that he tells stories to create readiness and to nudge people to be receptive to new insights about truth and life. He goes on to explain that people can hear speeches day in and day out, but that won't change their lives. Jesus recognized it was critical for a person to first imagine themselves in a different light; once they could do that, it opened the door to growth and life change for them.

We can see this same principle at work in how Jesus responds to Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus was one of many leaders of a Jewish religious group called the Sanhedrin, but it wasn't until Nicodemus saw himself in a new light that he became aware of how God truly wanted to transform his life. He had to reach his **Light Bulb Moment** before change could occur.

Just think about this: isn't that same thing also true of you? You see yourself how you really are, usually in a specific area of your life (health, self-discipline, finances, generosity, and so on). Then you picture a different you in the future, a you that you think you would like better, a you that you could be in that area.

*your objective for the people you want to help develop is to help them discover those same 'Eureka!' moments for themselves*

#### **4. It is nearly impossible to grow without trusted relationships.**

We've already seen how important trusted relationships are throughout the predictable growth model. We need others in our lives who can give us both perspective and support — friends and mentors who will challenge us to imagine a better way.

As we might expect, this is exactly the way Jesus interacted with his disciples. He spent time getting to know them. He built credibility with them through his consistent behavior. The disciples knew they could count on Jesus and that he ultimately had their best interests at heart. That trust changed their lives, which of course led them to change the world. And that same approach still works today: one relationship at a time.

John was one of my most trusted relationships. Because we were already good friends, I knew I could trust him, so I was willing to really spill my guts, not just about what was happening, but how I felt about it. John responded first by asking me great questions and challenging me. He also encouraged me over time.

Once I saw the things I needed to change, I could have tried to sort through the problem on my own. I could have tried to guess which paths might lead me where I thought I wanted to go. But John's experience and perspective shortened that difficult cycle, even as his insight was helping maximize my results. Trusted relationships make all the difference.

Even if you're watching for those opportunities to help others develop, and even if you can tell that these four indicators are present, those are only part of the equation. A lot of other pieces already need to be in place: How do you develop that trust in the first place? How do you make conversations a safe place where people can be open with you? How do you keep from judging people as they're telling you their deeply personal struggles? How do you grow yourself into a consistent encourager? In short:

*how can we follow the example of Jesus in the way he cultivated trust with the people around him?*

# Taking Your Trustworthiness Temperature

When my son Brenton was learning to drive, we were out practicing one afternoon in my old Jeep. Brenton was driving, I was in the passenger's seat, and Brenton's younger sister Breanna was in the back. Brenton was having a hard time keeping the Jeep in a straight line, weaving slightly back and forth in his lane. Breanna made some wisecrack about it, but Brenton told her, "It's not my fault. The steering just isn't tight enough to keep it right in the middle."

A while later, when we switched drivers to head back home, Bre made sure Brenton realized Dad didn't seem to have any trouble keeping the Jeep centered. At first Brenton was at a loss, but ultimately he had to admit it must not have been the Jeep — it had to be the driver!

All of us can fall victim to that same tendency in our relationships, to shift blame when admitting the real truth may be difficult: that the thing that needs adjusting isn't the Jeep; it's us. Trust is vital. It's only in a comfortable, encouraging environment of trust where we can admit hard truths. We've put together a series of questions to help you think your way through how you can work to build genuine trust in the lives of others you want to help.

### 1. What are my (real) motives?

Why do you want other people to grow? Look deep within yourself for the answer to this question. Is it possible that the idea of being perceived as the expert appeals to you? Or perhaps you want to be the hero? If you're helping others because doing so benefits you in some way, people will sense that, and it will absolutely erode trust between you. Fortunately, the opposite is also true: if you genuinely care for people — if you sincerely want to help them build the best life they can, to aspire to more, to discover their own vision, and then to actually achieve goals that will carry them in that direction — they'll be able to tell that, too. And they'll be far more likely to entrust you with their dreams.

### 2. Am I genuinely curious?

Curiosity is a fundamental characteristic of being good at developing people. More than just running through some checklist of prepackaged questions, you have to actually want to understand the world from this other person's point of view. You also need to (a) be aware of your own biases and (b) be capable of setting those biases aside. Can you leverage your imagination? Can you actually put yourself in their shoes? Can you feel the barriers, frustrations, and challenges they're facing as though they were your own? To be able to help them find the mind of a true overcomer for themselves, you need to be able to join in their battles together with them.

### 3. Do others perceive me as consistent?

In most cases, the people we want to help develop also just happen to be people we interact with on a regular basis, possibly even day-to-day. Make no mistake about this: people are watching you, trying to piece together how you're living your everyday life. If people can see that character and integrity are imperative to you — and that you live that way consistently — then they'll be more inclined to open up to you and to trust you.

### 4. Am I authentic in my interactions with other people?

Even though people are watching, that doesn't (necessarily) mean they're expecting you to be perfect. No, what they're primarily looking for is honesty and transparency. When you're willing to openly share your own struggles, challenges, and problems, even as you're encouraging others to trust you that they can safely do that with you, that's what "doing life together" means. But if you take yourself too seriously, if you try to elevate your position in the eyes of others, it's going to be difficult for people to trust you.

### **5. Do I freely connect people with who (and what) they need?**

The people who tend to be the best at helping others grow are consistently good connectors. When you're actively participating in the lives of several people at once, God's Spirit tends to present you with opportunities to put those people together. You'll recognize natural moments, where you realize that one contact you have could, with little effort or difficulty on their part, become a priceless resource to the person you're helping. Maybe they have a particular skill they're really good at teaching. Maybe they can open some door of opportunity that would otherwise be closed to this person. Maybe they simply possess a unique perspective that this person could benefit from. The great reasons to introduce two people to each other are literally endless!

Good people developers also connect the people they're helping with tools and resources. For example, each of the books John recommended to me, he had already read. He'd already suffered through the hard questions himself, and he graciously shared the benefit of that with me. If some tool or resource helped you, your everyday interactions will present you with opportune moments where you can share those same things to benefit others.

### **6. Am I straightforward?**

Being good at helping people grow often requires needing to ask questions that might be...difficult — questions that may make them feel challenged or uncomfortable. If they sense that you may be asking them these things because you have some hidden agenda, or that you want to make them squirm — or even just that you're nosy — then obviously that's going to have a chilling effect on trust between you. But if you've taken the time to carefully cultivate that relationship, if you've demonstrated that you truly, genuinely are only seeking the best possible outcome for them, then even these uncomfortable interactions can build and deepen trust between you.

### **7. How do I make people feel?**

When we're exploring all the practicalities involved in life change, it can be easy to overlook the value — and the validity — of feelings. But feelings are just as real as thoughts. Feelings are literally chemical reactions happening inside a person's body, occurring right there in the physical world with you. As people are talking with you, complicated connections are forming between you, shaped by and colored by and wrapped up in feelings, both yours and theirs. When you're leaving a conversation, how does that other person feel? Valued? Encouraged? Accepted? Appreciated? Admired? Energized? Inspired? If their overall feelings toward you are positive, that will translate directly into trust.

## **It's About Them... Not You**

Do you notice what all of those things have in common? If you truly want to become a developer of people, it can't be about you. You're not the center of the relationship; the other person is. You may not even get the credit for helping them grow. (In fact, most likely you won't.) That can't be why you're doing it. You have to do it for them.

If you're thinking that you hope one day to be "the wise one," always ready with some answer or solution, then you're already starting from a deficit. The ripples of genuine life change can only radiate out from a center of humility. Only if you're willing to invest yourself into another person's life will you be able to develop them. If you can authentically earn their trust, and on the terms that they need, only then will you be in a position where they'll be willing to learn from you.

If you've wanted to be a better developer of people in the past, but you've struggled to get good at it, be encouraged: you can do this. Maybe all you need is to turn over a new leaf: learn to make the other person the center of attention, and to help them discover how to pursue becoming the person God made them to be.

Anytime we're not sure where to start, it's always a good idea to look to Jesus. In Matthew 20, Jesus set the example for how we can make others the center of attention. In verse 20, the mother of James and John comes to Jesus and, kneeling down, asks a favor of him:

*"What is it you want?" he asked.*

*She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."*

*"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"*

*"We can," they answered.*

*Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."*

*When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

(Matthew 20:20-28, NIV)

She was asking for something that would elevate her sons to a position higher than that of Jesus' other disciples. Now let's look at how Jesus responds. First, he checks in with them to see if they'd even be willing to do what it would take to get there. Would they be willing to suffer equally with him? Self-sacrifice? They say that they would. Then Jesus acknowledges that they would, essentially validating that their motives are right. But then Jesus takes a sharp turn. He explains that even though that kind of influence is possible, it isn't achieved in the ways that we might expect: through power, authority, knowledge, and other means we might consider more "conventional." No, he says that instead, influence results from helping others. He says that those who want to be servants. He then takes that further — "whoever wants to be first must be your slave" — indicating that there are actually degrees of servanthood.

This gets right to the heart of what our mindset should be as people-developers.

*the degree of our influence in a person's life  
is directly tied to how much we help them*

Influence in another person's life is not about you, not about your agenda, not about your wisdom. It's about them. You simply need to be committed to helping others be all that God made them to be.

Each of us has several roles that we play in the lives of others:

- As parents, fostering growth in our kids is not about asserting our authority or being viewed as great parents; it's about enabling our kids to become who God made them to be.
- As leaders, fostering growth is not about our authority or position; it's about how well we empower our charges to succeed in their role and become who God made them to be.

- As mentors, fostering growth isn't about building our reputation as the local Solomon; it's about equipping others to think for themselves, to choose to act, and to discover more confidence and self-awareness.
- As small group leaders, fostering growth isn't about convincing others to think of us as great teachers or even facilitators; it's about fostering group discussion that leads each person in the group to accept responsibility, become more self-aware, and choose steps that will lead them toward growth.

Instead of me trying to think of even more ways to tell you how very important all of this is, let's just leave this topic with some really wise words from Paul:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something  
to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant...  
(Philippians 2:3-7a, NIV)*

# Chapter 3:

## How Conversations Work

Conversations that help us develop have a few things in common. Think back about a conversation you've had with someone who really helped you develop, maybe with a friend, a mentor, a spouse. What was it about that particular conversation that was helpful to you?

We believe you'll find the answer to that question in one of these five principles:

1. It's not what you **know**. It's what you **ask**.
2. Buy-in is **the** game-changer.
3. People don't change until they **decide** to change.
4. It's always safe to assume **you don't fully understand**.
5. Just because it's on your mind **doesn't mean you have to say it**.

Let's break each of these down in detail, one at a time.

### 1. It's Not What You *Know* — It's What You *Ask*

Most leaders assume that helping others grow means telling them what you think they need to hear. And the best leaders, in the process of exploring alternatives, are certainly accustomed to proactively asking key players and other decision-makers their opinions. But think about this: even the best advice — even when you were actively seeking it out— is rarely that singular, profound idea that's going to stop you in your tracks. On the contrary:

*most of the time, the one thing that really makes you stop and think... is a well-timed, well-phrased question*

A single, thoughtful question is usually more than enough to challenge us to start thinking differently about our assumptions and our paradigms, to help us break through into new insight. But why are questions so powerful?

Brain research is teaching us more all the time about how we process information, make decisions, and respond to people around us. One recent breakthrough from Dr. David Rock, founder of the NeuroLeadership Group, seems to indicate that when another person offers you advice — or even simply shares an opinion with you — your brain tends to interpret that as a threat to your own ideas. Conversely, your brain typically responds to a question in exactly the opposite manner. Rather than viewing a question as a threat, your brain actually embraces it, almost as a reward. Pondering a question kicks off a process inside your brain where your synapses begin firing rapidly, making all sorts of new connections.

*questions are powerful because they help us stop and think without feeling threatened*

Questions cause you to go inside yourself, re-evaluating your assumptions and opinions to formulate a response that appropriately addresses new information. Questions make your brain work in a way that no other form of communication does. I would even go so far as to say that questions help us learn in the way that most takes advantage of how God designed us physiologically to:

1. Receive input.
2. Process new information, and
3. Adapt our behaviors to reflect the new values which result.

Looking back through history, it's easy to see question-driven teaching techniques shaping the course of learning across the centuries. As just one example, the Socratic Method (named after the Greek philosopher Socrates) is an educational process based almost entirely on the art of asking questions. In fact, the Socratic Method still shapes many of the most influential learning institutions in the world. Even today, the Socratic Method forces students to wrestle with ideas, imagine potential outcomes, solve problems, process various concepts, and ultimately, to form their opinions.

I've read before that Jesus asks more than 300 questions in the New Testament. While I've never counted them myself to arrive at a precise number, even a casual read through the Gospels makes clear that questions are a key part of Jesus' communication.

*in almost every instance where Jesus asks a question, it also seems clear that his intent with questions was to challenge people to grow spiritually*

Now, here are a few numbers that I have looked up: Jesus was asked 183 questions in the New Testament. How many of those questions do you suppose he answered directly? Three! All other 180 times, Jesus answered the asker's question...with another question!

*learning how to ask great questions will put you in great company*

Of course, encouraging you simply to ask more questions is easier said than done. Honestly, it's much simpler (and faster!) just to tell people what you think they need to know. But if you can make the switch from "Instructor" to "Inquisitor," you'll soon notice your conversations beginning to evolve into growth incubators. So how do you develop the skill of asking meaningful questions?

#### **A) Change Your Perspective**

The path to becoming a good Inquisitor begins with recognizing that your value as a people-developer is less about what you already know and more about being a flexible navigator. The best way to truly help others is to join them on their journey and then lead them in thinking through and processing their own ideas. And how that happens is by wrestling with good questions. Remember, as we've already said: it's about them...not you.

#### **B) Discover Your "Go-To" Questions**

For years now, I've been able to rely on combinations of these three simple questions to help me open up one great conversation after another:

1. What's going well for you right now? What isn't? What's something you're feeling frustrated about?
2. Where are you feeling stuck? What's something you've learned recently that you're excited about?
3. What would you like to be different in a month? In a year? Two years?

*develop your own "go-to" questions based out of your personality and leadership style*

It's okay for you to start with questions like mine as a jumping-off point, but you need to evolve your questions so that they uniquely reflect you. For example, if you tend towards helping other people figure out how to solve their problems, then your go-to questions will probably lean in that direction. But if you're better at helping people make tough decisions, then that's what your questions will be about. If you enjoy helping people explore new possibilities or ideas, then that's what your questions will be tailored to accomplish.

### **C) Learn to Ask Open-Ended Questions**

A closed question is one that can be answered with a simple response, like yes or no. For example: “Did you ever talk to Mark?”

you want to ask open-ended questions, questions that require some processing to answer

Your aim should be to really get people thinking, leading them with questions that force them to go deep inside and reflect before they’re able to respond. Often, it’s even possible to open up a closed question simply by phrasing it differently: “Say, when you talked to Mark, how did that conversation go?”

### **D) Ask Follow-Up Questions**

Begin with broad questions, but then pursue your curiosity through follow-up questions. Remember: you’re on a journey of discovery together with the person you’re helping. Keep digging into an issue, as many levels deep as it takes to get down to its roots. Let your curiosity guide you.

*questions can do all  
the heavy lifting...  
so let them*

My oldest son is working his way through college managing a restaurant. He called one night just to visit, and we ended up talking about his frustration with some recurring problems in his kitchen. They were struggling to find a balance between getting orders out the door quickly and the quality of the food. No hungry customer wants to wait. And when the food they’ve been waiting for finally does show up — and it’s cold — that makes them really angry!

Of course, I’ve never even worked in a restaurant, so I don’t know the first thing about that business. But I was genuinely curious about how all of the moving pieces in a restaurant work together. So I started asking him questions, one after another, really just trying to understand all the dynamics. Each time he answered one of my questions, that made me think of something else I wanted to know.

He was being very patient with me, navigating his way through my ignorance, methodically explaining each part of their process. And then, all of a sudden, he recognized right where their breakdown was happening! In that moment, even the tone of his voice changed, first from frustration to relief, and then to excitement, as he began thinking aloud through all the changes he was going to try.

I didn’t need to offer him any advice. In fact, as I hope you can see from this example, I couldn’t have, even if I had wanted to. I didn’t have any idea how to fix his problem!

### **E) Follow the Trail of Emotions**

When you’re in a conversation, each time you pick up on an emotion, stop and give it your full attention. Emotion is perfectly natural for human beings, so it should never surprise us when we see it coming out in everyday interactions. When someone you care about begins displaying anger, excitement, frustration, anticipation — to name just a few — start directing your questions toward that emotion. If something beneath the surface is generating an emotional response, then there’s probably something down there that’s worth exploring through discussion.

*as important as trust is in all aspects of  
developing people, where emotions become  
involved is where this becomes most critical*

Carefully read each unique situation, exercising your own best judgment and common sense. While it can be natural for someone you're helping to begin to feel uncomfortable, that's something you should only approach strategically. Don't just randomly push a person's buttons to try to elicit a reaction. If you sense you're approaching a sensitive area, it's appropriate to stop and ask them if it's okay to continue. In fact, these kinds of moments present ideal opportunities to reinforce the very reason you're there in the first place: to help them...because you care about them.

*let the person you're helping decide on their own terms  
how willing they are to talk openly about their feelings*

Another thing you need to be sensitive to is having a healthy self-awareness of your own limitations. When you're asking a person to unpack their emotions, it's not uncommon to start uncovering past issues they need to resolve. If you see issues like this starting to come out in the course of a conversation, you should be prepared to connect them with a trained counselor, a qualified professional who actually knows what they're doing. (And of course, if you've been trained as a counselor, you can go down that road at your own discretion.)

### **F) Pay Attention to Assumptions**

Too often we're trapped by ideas we assume are true...that actually are not. When you're trying to help someone form an opinion or arrive at a decision, it's important to ask them questions that can reveal whatever assumptions they may be basing that on — especially assumptions which may be incorrect.

Not too long ago, I was talking with a guy who was thinking about applying for an open position at LifeChurch.tv. When I sensed he might be putting off applying, I asked him about it. He said, "Well, I doubt they'd even consider me. I mean, I've never worked at a church before, so I don't really have any experience with that." He assumed that the team hiring for the position would not consider his work experience relevant since he didn't get it at another church. But he was mistaken. People who work at LifeChurch.tv come from all sorts of backgrounds — many of them distinctly not from church environments. He had a false assumption that was holding him back from taking his next, most reasonable step: something as simple as filling out an application form!

When you notice someone making a statement that you think they might be basing on an inaccurate assumption, simply ask them something like, "Really? What makes you think that?" That simple question should lead them to consider where they've been getting their information.

*once they've identified their assumptions, it's a  
pretty natural next step to evaluate whether  
those assumptions are in fact true*

### **G) Consider Both Thinking and Feeling**

Powerful questions generally tend to focus on either facts (thinking) or on emotions (feeling). But both of these are important. They're two sides of the same coin. Both help a person become more self-aware, which will help them make more effective decisions.

Most people tend to lean more toward one type of question than the other. I'm more of a thinker than a feeler, so my first questions are usually along the lines of, "What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_?" I have to be really intentional to also help people explore how they're feeling about something. But you may not be like that. You may be more likely to lead with emotion: "How do you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?"

Because I know I lean toward thinking, when I'm asking for help on something, it's actually really important for me to remember to also talk about my feelings. Whether I realize it or not, my emotions are affecting both my decisions and my actions. And not only do my emotions matter, but they matter very much to the people around me! (Even when I might not recognize that they're in play.)  
When you're helping someone to develop, take care to intentionally explore both sides: thinking and feeling. Honestly, the hardest thing about this is probably remembering to ask them about the side you're weaker on!

*get yourself in the habit of asking both  
"what do you think..." questions and  
"how do you feel..." questions*

## 2. Buy-In is the Game Changer

When it comes to developing people, we simply cannot underestimate the power of ownership. Why does this matter so much? Because when I arrive at the conclusion myself that I want to do something, it's far more likely that I will actually follow through than if someone outside has been trying to impose their will on me. At least where my own life is concerned, I'm much more likely to try out my own bad idea than I am to try someone else's good idea! And the truth is:

*even an implemented mediocre idea is better  
than the best idea left on the shelf*

In their book *The Extraordinary Coach: How the Best Leaders Help Others Grow*, authors John Zenger and Kathleen Stinnett illustrate the power of buy-in with a simple formula:

$$\text{Quality} \times \text{Commitment} = \text{Results}$$

Let's say I'm working with a friend to help him figure out how to solve a particular problem he has. I might have an idea that I think will solve his problem. Furthermore, based on my own personal experiences, I might even have a pretty high level of confidence that my approach will work particularly well.

Now let's say my friend also has his own idea for his problem. However, again, based on my own experience, I already know that his idea probably won't work as well as mine would. For the sake of this illustration, let's say that on a **Quality** scale of 1-10, my idea is an **8**, and his idea is a **5**.

But Quality is only one part of the equation. Even if my idea really is higher quality, because my friend didn't come up with my idea himself, he's going to be less committed to it. So again, just for this illustration, let's say that on a 1-10 **Commitment** scale, his commitment to my idea is a **4**, while his commitment to his own idea is a **9**.

Here's how these two different equations would play out:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{My Idea: } & 8 \times 4 = 32 \\ \text{His Idea: } & 5 \times 9 = 45 \end{aligned}$$

His idea ends up with the higher number, which means it will actually achieve a better Result for him than mine would! Why? Because of the power of buy-in.

*when a person believes something's  
going to work, that thing is far more likely  
to work for them — even if their  
solution isn't the best one*

The inverse is just as true: if the only reason they're trying something is because you told them they should, that solution is far less likely to work for them.

This really shouldn't surprise us. After all, this is just the way God relates to us: we always have a choice. All throughout the Scriptures, people choose what they're going to do...and what they aren't. God doesn't force us to do anything, does he? All the way from the Garden until today, God has been allowing us to make our own choices, choices that affect us not just today, but well into our future.

That's why buy-in is so important. Buy-in is a fundamental aspect of helping people develop, whether it's your kids, the people you lead or manage, or someone you're mentoring.

*the more successful you can become at leading people toward real choices — realistic options that they can make and then commit to for themselves — the more successful you'll be at helping people grow and develop*

## **Truth and Consequence**

What happens if someone you're leading decides to try something...and then fails at it? Obviously, there's a limit to what people are going to buy into. Most of us tend to err on the side of caution; that is, we're overprotective of them. When you care about someone, it's only natural to want to spare them the pain of failure. But the hard truth is, that's usually where the best changes happen. As leaders, mentors, teachers, and parents, we're not doing people any favors when we coddle them too much. The sweet spot is to lead people to a place where they can experience mistakes, but the stakes are still low enough that they can realistically manage the consequences. Remember, we learn in the game.

Here's what I mean about consequences: there are plenty of times when intervening is appropriate. If you see someone on fire, you don't say, "Hmm. I feel like I'm seeing some flames here. Are you seeing them too? What are some things you might try to extinguish them? What would you say is your next step?"

That's ridiculous! No, you grab them, throw them to the ground, get them rolling, and you get that fire out! By all means, if you see someone about to make a choice that you know will have destructive consequences, do something about it.

*God gives us the freedom to make our own choices... and he also gives us friends to protect us from walking off cliffs*

Another time that you should intervene directly is when you've tasked someone with doing something they've never done before, such as hiring them for a role that's new to them. On a person's first day on the job, it wouldn't be right (let alone productive) to start asking them questions about what they want to do. Set them on the right course by filling them in on all the expectations of the job and providing them with whatever initial training they need. In specific cases where it makes sense, it's okay to provide specific direction to orient people in the right direction.

But these are exceptions. Most of the time, for genuine long-term growth, backing off and allowing a person to make their own decisions will be more effective than trying to tell them what to do. Even if they stumble and make a poor choice at first, that's a learning opportunity. If they'll stick with it, continuing to go back and try again, eventually they'll figure it out. Don't underestimate the power of buy-in.

### 3. People Don't Change Until They Decide to Change

When I was a young man in college, I was in great shape. I played college baseball, and I worked out pretty much every day. But after college, my schedule grew busier, my priorities changed, and I didn't stick with it. When I was 30 years old, I looked down one day and noticed that I was 40 pounds overweight! (At least, that's what it seemed like.) Of course, it wasn't really sudden. I had let it to sneak up on me, about 3 or 4 pounds a year, over several years.

At the time, I was also in the process of starting my own business, so I was on the road a lot. We had three young kids at home, so I tried to be very intentional about spending lots of time with them when I was home. I knew I probably should start trying to get back in shape, but I convinced myself I was just too busy, clinging to the excuse that I simply didn't have time to work out.

*I was well aware the problem existed;  
I just wasn't willing to do anything about it... yet*

I'm a big believer in learning from historical leaders, so I enjoy reading biographies. One day I was in a bookstore, looking for my next read, when I came across a book about George W. Bush, then-President of the United States. As I thumbed through it, I came across a page that outlined a typical day in President Bush's life.

One thing immediately jumped out at me. Right in the middle of his day — every day — at 2:00 PM, President Bush took an hour to work out. I remember thinking, "If the President of the United States can make time to work out every day, who am I to say that I can't?" With my motivation changed, I went to work solving the problem. And over the course of the next year, I whipped myself back into shape...losing 40 pounds in the process.

If someone had tried to convince me I needed to get into shape, that wouldn't have changed anything. I already knew the problem existed. It was even already bothering me! But the difference was that I wasn't internally motivated. Once that domino fell, it kicked me into gear, and then I did something about it.

### Change is a Process, Not an Event

Research indicates that up to 80% of people aren't ready to make a change — even when they know one is necessary. So where does that leave us, those who want to help others develop? Do we just give up and wait for them to come around? Like so many things, that depends.

Listed below are the stages of change.[1] They're essentially universal; they apply to everyone equally, whether the individual is resistant to change or open and receptive to it:

- Stage 1:** Not ready to change
- Stage 2:** Thinking about making a change
- Stage 3:** Ready to make a change
- Stage 4:** Taking action to change
- Stage 5:** Maintaining the change

Sometimes we move through the stages quickly. Other times, it may take us longer. Most of us tend to be able to change quickly in some areas of our lives, while other areas demand more of our time, concentration, and determination to move forward.

*no matter what the particulars happen to be, all  
life change takes place somewhat predictably,  
in these stages, and in this order*

Whether you're acting as a parent, mentor, small group leader, manager, etc., your role is to lead people a bit further down the road, one step a time, toward their next stage. It's vital that you regularly consider which stage they're on and match your conversations to that level. It's also important for you to keep your own expectations realistic because each person is only going to take action once they've found their own internal motivation — no matter how much we really want them to move forward.

## Four Ways You Can Help

### **a. Ask them: “Are you ready to change?”**

Could it really be that simple? Yes! The more you can help a person...

- Take stock of where they are today
- Imagine where they want to be, and
- Visualize the things that may be standing in their way...

The more likely they'll begin taking steps forward. Not only is there nothing wrong with being straightforward, but doing so also builds trust. Just be prepared for them to say no! If someone's not ready, they're simply not ready. But that should never affect your willingness to support them.

### **b. Help them see: “Both changing and not changing are painful.”**

Sure, change and growth are hard work. But what's the alternative? Staying in the same place (and dealing with its consequences) will always hurt more in the long run. Change — deliberate, calculated, forward motion — is the cure. Often, simply growing sick and tired of the status quo is the best catalyst for trying something different.

### **c. Encourage them: “You can do this!”**

And they can! Sometimes people just feel defeated, beaten down because no one has ever taught them how to learn from their mistakes. But if you can...

- Convince them that they do have the capacity to grow and learn
- Help them recognize how much support they already have...

The more likely they'll be to start working their way through the stages. Another thing most people have never been taught is how to see all the opportunities they have every day to build a network of strong, authentic relationships. Equip them with eyes to see the great cloud of witnesses already surrounding them. That's often plenty of fuel to help them to begin trying.

### **d. Offer them: “Together, let's imagine some practical steps you could take.”**

Even when someone's ready to change, that doesn't necessarily mean they automatically have ideas about what they should do next. And for most people, the scariest thing about taking the path into their future is that it's unknown. Helping them visualize their options can reduce — or even eliminate — their fears. Walk them through figuring out a few small, achievable steps they can take to get them moving in the right direction.

Followers of Christ have a unique advantage for life change that others simply don't. We don't have to rely on our own ability to come up with good ideas. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is alive in us. God is at work in the hearts of our kids, of those we lead, and of those we're mentoring. If they're willing to allow that Spirit to just do what He does, all we have to do is stand back and watch the process unfold.

*you've seen it before: God can catalyze change in a person faster than we could even ask, think, or imagine*

In Colossians, Paul writes something about Christ that is immensely relevant to those of us who desire to see others change and grow:

*“He was supreme in the beginning and — leading the resurrection parade — he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe — people and things, animals and atoms — get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.”*

(Colossians 1:18-20, MSG, emphasis mine)

The very reason Christ became human, why he chose to live on the earth was so that every person (and in fact all of creation) could be restored. So where change may seem impossible to us, with Christ at the helm, it becomes possible.

*this simple truth — that Christ has the power to transform any of us — is the single most important dimension of any conversation that takes place during the development process*

#### **4. It’s Always Safe to Assume You Don’t Fully Understand**

Never underestimate how much influence your own assumptions and ideas have over you. Your own experiences have led you to form a perspective on the world around you that you now use to filter everything. As a result, you can never simply assume that the conclusions you’re drawing from all the things you see and hear are the same conclusions that others are coming to.

Let me show you what I mean, with a simple exercise from Zenger and Folkman’s book, *The Extraordinary Coach*. Complete these sayings:

- A penny saved is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Laugh, and the world laughs with you. Cry, and you \_\_\_\_\_.
- Children should be seen and not \_\_\_\_\_.
- You get out of something only what you \_\_\_\_\_.
- If at first you don’t succeed, \_\_\_\_\_.

Chances are, if you’re over a certain age, you recognize each of these, and you had no trouble completing them. But when a kindergarten teacher asked her students to do this same exercise, here’s what they came up with:

- A penny saved is not much.
- Laugh, and the world laughs with you. Cry, and you have to blow your nose.
- Children should be seen and not spanked or grounded.
- You get out of something only what you see in the picture on the box.
- If at first you don’t succeed, get new batteries!

Why are these so funny? Because we know the “correct” answers, it’s easy for us to see where these kindergarteners went “wrong.”

Everyone has assumptions. We assume most other people would know these sayings just as well as we do. But hopefully you know more than a kindergartener. (At least in this case!) More at the heart of this issue, though, is that we all have experiences that are different from each other. One is not wrong and the other right; they’re simply different. And these experiences are what have shaped us into the people that we are today.

Most of us tend to filter all of our inputs through the lens of our own experiences — both us, and the people we're trying to help. As you're leading someone in a conversation, you need to consciously work not to judge that person's decisions. You may actually be the one lacking perspective, precisely because of your own experiences.

*your constant task is to get yourself out of the way enough to truly listen, so you can begin to see the world from the other person's perspective*

The book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom about how important it is to listen, but these particular verses may be two of my favorites. Both are extremely powerful, just because they're so simple:

*“Answering before listening is both stupid and rude...  
“Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights.”  
(Proverbs 18:13 and 18:15, MSG)*

growth conversations are characterized more by listening than by speaking

Do you truly want to understand another person's perspective? Do you honestly want to help them process by asking them just the right questions? Then you have to learn how to listen well. You won't be able to offer meaningful feedback and insight if you don't really understand what their situation looks and feels like — from their point of view. Be curious. Care genuinely about them. Your ability to listen...and understand — far more than anything you think you already know — are the learnable skills that will allow you to bring wisdom into any situation.

*most of the time, people already have it somewhere inside them what would be their best course of action*

The problem is usually that they have a hard time quieting all the outside influences and just slowing down long enough to really think things through. Your job as a developer is to help them find that space, so they can just draw out the wisdom they already possess. When you focus on just listening, that means the other person is talking. The more space you can give them to talk through their situation, the clearer their choices will become to them. And bonus: this builds trust.

*“The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint...  
“Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.”  
(Proverbs 17:27, 28, NIV)*

Fortunately, becoming a good listener isn't rocket science. However, unfortunately:

*learning the basic habits for good listening is pretty straightforward... the true challenge is actually putting those into practice*

Being perfectly honest, I'm not telling you these things as though I've somehow magically mastered them myself. On the contrary, being a good listener doesn't come naturally to me. I'm constantly struggling to keep my mouth shut. But I've picked up several tricks over the years. Here are four you might find helpful:

**a. Pay attention to nonverbal cues.**

People communicate in all sorts of ways beyond simply speaking. Try to start thinking of "listening" as more than just hearing words. What are they really trying to tell you? What are they really trying not to tell you? What are they feeling? Excitement? Anxiety? Frustration? Cultivating the skill of picking up on subtle clues can help you decide which direction you need to move a conversation.

But just as you shouldn't assume others are drawing the same conclusions you are, you also can't assume you're reading their emotions accurately. Be upfront with the non-verbal cues you think you're seeing. The person you're helping may not even be aware they're doing it. Tell them what their non-verbal cues are communicating to you, and ask them if they think that's accurate. When you do this, guess what happens? It builds trust between you.

**b. Repeat back to them what you hear them saying.**

During natural breaks in the conversation, use phrases like, "What I hear you saying is..." and then try to paraphrase back to them what they've said. Consciously doing this keeps you dialed into what they're saying...instead of constantly trying to think of the next thing you want to say. Again:

*curiosity in the other person, interest in them  
and in understanding them are key*

Be very careful not to add anything to what they've said; simply summarize. Your goal here is simply to understand — not to interject. Getting into this habit does several things for the relationship. It:

- Demonstrates to them that you are in fact "really" listening (which builds trust).
- Reveals places to them where they may not be communicating clearly, and
- Gives them the opportunity to clarify their ideas, both for you and for themselves.

**c. Practice laser-phrasing.**

"Laser phrasing" is what leadership expert Terry Walling calls the practice of distilling a central underlying problem, idea, or assumption down into a single phrase, stating it simply and clearly, using as few words as you possibly can. While you might combine this technique with the previous one — repeating back what you've heard — they're not the same thing. When you repeat back, you may be summarizing slightly, but you're not trying to reduce or remove anything they've said.

*laser phrasing is collaborative —  
its purpose is to help them really focus in  
on just one very specific thing at a time*

I remember a specific conversation I was having with my son Brenton, where he was telling me about a problem he was trying to solve at work. The tone of his voice and how quickly he was talking both communicated to me that he was feeling a lot of emotion about it. I tried to listen very carefully, offering only short verbal cues every so often, just to let him know I was still tracking with him ("Uh-huh," "Hm," "Right," etc.). Occasionally, only when it felt natural to do so, I'd ask him a question. I sensed he had covered everything he was trying to, so I asked him, "May I offer an observation?"

He said, “Of course. I’d love to hear your thoughts.”

I said, “Well, what I heard you saying was...” and I briefly summarized two or three specific things he said had happened. “Do I have that right?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Well,” I went on, “it sounds to me like maybe you’re not using the right equipment.”

Brenton was quiet for a minute, obviously thinking. “Hm,” he said simply, and he started imagining how his situation might play out differently if he just had different equipment to work with. Keep in mind: I didn’t even know if other kinds of equipment might be available for what he had been describing! But Brenton did. Laser-phrasing his problem led him straight to a workable solution. Most important, that solution was entirely his. He owned it, and he was fully equipped to see it through.

#### **d. Learn to embrace those “awkward silences.”**

Long-term, one of the main ways you’re going to equip another person is by helping them learn how to slow down long enough to visualize possible alternatives with all of the information they already have. For that to work, people need the space to think.

Sometimes they’re just a few seconds away from an A-ha! moment. Other times, they may need several minutes, turning something over and over in their mind. When you’re sitting across the table watching — or worse, persevering through that awful, dead silence on the other end of a phone call — it can feel like torture! But hang in there.

*resist your natural urge to fill silences*

There’s a balance here, a sensitivity that you have to develop over time. You need to keep all of the skills you’ve been cultivating in play. For example, you may be picking up on nonverbal cues that they need a gentle push. So maybe you repeat back to them what they’ve said so far. Or maybe you ask them another question. Maybe you ask them to try to rephrase what they think is the core problem, in as few words as possible.

*And then you take a long, deliberate sip of your coffee...*

*and you give them a wide open, silent space...*

*for as long as they need...*

*where they can really process.*

## **5. Just Because It’s on Your Mind Doesn’t Mean You Have to Say It**

I purposely saved this one for last. If you’re anything like me, when you think about what it might be like to develop another person, you probably picture yourself simply telling someone all of the things you think they ought to do. You could be forgiven for assuming that helping others develop is more or less synonymous with offering them good advice.

As we’ve been talking about, of course, that’s not the case. In fact, I’d even say it’s possible to play a key role in another person’s development — even over an extended period of time — without ever offering them any advice. That may sound counterintuitive, but it’s true.

*true development isn’t about giving advice;  
it’s about helping a person become more self-aware  
and leading them to make their own decisions  
about next steps they can take*

In his book *Coaching for Performance*, John Whitmore tells the story of a mountain resort that hired ski instructors to fill in for tennis coaches one season when their resort was shorthanded. The only stipulation the resort placed on these fill-in instructors was that they were not allowed to pick up a tennis racket (lest they blow their cover). At the end of the tennis season, the tennis students who had been coached by the ski instructors outperformed the ones coached by tennis instructors!

How could this happen? Because the ski instructors didn't have any specific feedback to offer. They were able simply to draw out the best in their students. That's just as true for those of us who want to develop others, whether it's as parents, mentors, or leaders.

*what matters most is that we lead others to discover the best within themselves, not that we share with them our opinion of what steps we think they should take*

Now, that being said, you might have life experiences that the person you're talking with could really benefit from hearing about. Or you may have relevant knowledge — say of a specific tool or resource — that the other person doesn't have access to. Or you might be friends with another key person who could really help them, and you could introduce them to each other. You might even have watched that key person in action before, and you can share your perspective about things you observed.

If you do choose to offer feedback, keep it minimal; don't overwhelm. Your objective should always be simply to facilitate them with enough questions that they can successfully arrive at their own answers. Even if they ask you for your opinion, say something like, "Sure, I'll give you my opinion. But first I'd like to hear what you think about it. Then I'll ask you a few questions that might help you think your way through."

It's helpful to actually ask the other person for permission to share your perspective if they haven't asked you to do so. Most likely, they'll be comfortable with you doing so, but just the fact that you asked communicates to them that you respect their buy-in, and that their opinion is what will carry the most weight in their life.

When you do share your feedback or perspective, do it in small doses. Don't back up your dump truck and just unload everything you've ever wanted to say on the topic. Be mindful and selective to share small doses in a very specific way. Remember, your goal is to give feedback and perspective, not to convince or compel the other person to do what you want them to do.

*"The Golden Rule of Feedback":  
if you said everything you wanted to say...  
you probably said too much*

It's a good idea to leave a conversation feeling like there's much more that you'd like to say. Typically you can expect that this is an indication that you landed in about the right place and that you shared the appropriate amount of information!

# Chapter 4:

## How to Lead a Conversation

You may have heard Pastor Craig Groeschel say before, “Everyone ends up somewhere, but few people end up somewhere on purpose.” Conversations are like that. Every conversation is going to go down some path. When you’re aware of this fact — and when your primary objective is to continually grow and develop — you can be intentional about helping guide conversations in that positive direction.

In this chapter, we’ll teach you a specific technique that you can use to help you approach with intentionality those conversations where you hope to help others grow and develop by uncovering the following three outcomes:

- 1. More Self-Awareness.** As you probably recall from Chapter 1, self-awareness is the springboard to growth. Every growth conversation should lead a person to more insight about themselves.
- 2. Better Decisions.** A purposeful conversation should help the person consider their situation from several different angles, which will in turn help them to make better decisions, no matter whether those decisions are large and far-reaching, or simply more common, day-to-day decisions.
- 3. Next Steps.** For most of us, we already know practical things we should be doing; we simply don’t do them (eat healthy foods and exercise, live beneath our means, etc.). Development happens when we lead people to actually take that next step that they already know they should.

*growth conversations lead people to decide on their next steps, then commit to taking those steps — one after another*

Clearly, these things don’t “just happen” in a typical conversation. But we’re going to share with you a helpful tool, a kind of mindset that you can use, that will help you guide your conversations in a purposeful way, whether they happen one-on-one or in groups (such as in a book study group or LifeGroup).

## The Inner Game: the Power of Simplicity

In his youth, Tim Gallwey had been a nationally ranked tennis player, and even served as the captain of his tennis team at Harvard. Some years later, as an adult in the early 70’s, while Gallwey was taking a sabbatical from his career as a college administrator, he decided to try his hand at coaching tennis. He began with standard coaching techniques, the same methods his instructors had used to teach him to play. But, after soldiering through months of unsatisfying results with his students, Gallwey decided that the standard methods were too complicated.

*new players were simply overwhelmed with too many variables; they needed something simpler*

Conventional wisdom at the time was to instruct students, “always keep your eye on the ball.” Gallwey instead encouraged his students to focus on just two things: “Each time the ball hits the ground, say ‘bounce,’ and each time you strike the ball with your racket, say ‘hit.’” And that was it. Two things. Almost immediately, Gallwey’s players’ games improved. The more layers he stripped away, the more convinced he became that the most important thing for new players to learn was what he called “the moment of discovery” — that precise moment when the ball hit the ground on its way to them.

Next, Gallwey extended this principle even further: what if every player could discover for themselves each area of their game where they needed to improve, rather than being told? To try it out, he stopped giving instructions, focusing instead on asking leading questions. His students' dramatic results confirmed what Gallwey already suspected: his methodical questioning had led him to a breakthrough coaching technique. Gallwey organized his system and published it in a book he called *The Inner Game of Tennis*.<sup>2</sup>

## The GROW Framework

Within a few years, other researchers studying human performance were applying Gallwey's approach to their respective fields as well. Based in large part on Gallwey's experience, Sir John Whitmore developed a technique he called "the GROW Framework," designed specifically to help people develop themselves. Whitmore first published this system in his book, *Coaching for Performance*. GROW is an acronym for the four elements that you incorporate into growth-oriented conversations:

**G - Goal.** Begin by asking the other person, "What — specifically — would you like to get out of this conversation?" If they need direction, it's okay to offer them some examples, as long as you keep them generic: To solve a problem? To make a decision? To determine what your next action step should be?

**R - Reality.** Be curious about what's truly happening in the person's present life. Ask as many questions as you need to help them fill in the most complete picture they can. Ensure that they have an honest, realistic perspective, first about what's actually happening now, and then about what outcomes might legitimately be possible, given their circumstances and abilities.

**O - Options.** You're still being curious with your questions in this phase, but you're shifting gears a little: what you want now is to really explore the future. Using the Reality you already established as a jumping-off point, ask them about realistic, viable options they might take that could move them in the direction they want to go.

**W - Way Forward.** Exploring their options will help them land on some concrete actions, things they could realistically do that will ultimately lead to positive change in their life. Ask them what they think they should do, who they will ask to hold them accountable (someone besides you), and when they will begin.

*(We'll discuss each of these four parts below in much more detail below.)*

As part of our leadership training culture at LifeChurch.tv, we've been teaching the GROW Framework to staff, leaders, mentors, parents, and small group leaders for a couple of years now. And based on the feedback we've received over that time, this approach to development-oriented conversations simply works. One major advantage is that the person you're talking with does not need any prerequisite understanding of the technique. As long as you remain curious about who they are as a person, committed to guiding them toward God-honoring outcomes, and intentional about asking them questions that will help them discover the direction and focus they need, they will absolutely benefit from development-oriented conversations. Download a PDF overview of the GROW conversation model at [resources.lifechurch.tv/conversations](https://resources.lifechurch.tv/conversations).

### G - Start with the GOAL

You may have heard that old saying, "Begin with the end in mind." Gallwey would kick off a tennis lesson by asking the student what area of their game they wanted to focus on improving. If a player said she wanted to work on her serve, he would ask leading questions to help narrow the scope of what she should practice. For example, he might ask something like, "How many serves out of ten would you like to see hit within bounds?"

A carefully framed question offers three things to the person you're helping:

1. Acknowledges that they are in control of defining what they want to address.
2. Helps them define what is reasonably achievable for their abilities.
3. Helps them identify a specific, quantifiable target — that is, something measurable enough that they will be able to tell when they've achieved it.

### **One-on-One**

When my daughter Breanna was seventeen, she came to me in frustration about her restaurant job. For weeks, she had been asking for her hours to be increased, and her manager had agreed to give her more. But then, for the third week in a row, when the schedule came out, Breanna still had the same hours. And she was angry!  
control your impulses

Just being completely honest, my initial feeling was that she was probably overreacting. My instinct was to tell her to “just relax,” and then to try to help her see things from her manager’s perspective. I figured her manager was probably overworked and stressed at trying to balance all the conflicting schedule requests from a host of employees. But then, fortunately... I remembered the GROW framework.

#### *facilitate emotional release when necessary*

Instead of just giving Breanna a brain dump of everything I was thinking, I paused and took a deep breath to get my own impatience in check. I acknowledged her frustration, expressed my empathy, and offered her the opportunity to formulate an end goal. “I can tell you’re really upset. I probably would be, too. I know how hard you work. You’ve wanted more hours for a while now, and I feel like you’ve made that really clear to them. Is there anything else you could do? And is there anything I can do that would help you?”

#### *help keep the end in mind*

As she began talking I could tell this must have been building inside her for a while, and that she needed a few more minutes to vent, to let some of that emotion out. Again, my instinct was to interrupt her, to “correct” her. But I held my tongue and listened some more, really trying to feel her pain. When I could sense that she was looping back around, about to start repeating herself, I gently reminded her that I was there for her. “Well... like I said, is there anything I can do to help you?”

#### *let the other person fill in their own gaps*

She got quiet, and as she collected her thoughts for a minute or so, I resisted my impulse to fill that silence. Finally, Breanna heaved a deep sigh and said, “You know what? I think I may be ready to look for another job.”

I absolutely did not see that coming! But it opened the door to an excellent conversation that followed, where I learned that Breanna had actually already been thinking about this for some time. She had been processing whether a different job might be better for her anyway, because she could probably get better hours, and maybe even a schedule that would work better around her school commitments. By the end of our chat, Breanna had decided that what she really wanted was to just apply for a different job. (Which she did — and which she got.)

Now, what if I had tried to “play the parent” and simply taken over that conversation? Honestly, I would most likely have taken it in a very different direction. But asking Breanna a question to help bring some focus flipped our conversation from being directive (me telling her what to do) to growth (me helping her make better decisions).

And this is exactly why a framework like GROW is so helpful. When you’re talking one-on-one with someone, it’s so easy to default into trying to “give them direction,” into trying to “help them solve their problem.” But a tool like GROW gives you a powerful, meaningful, proven structure, one that you know will work. The hardest part is always slowing yourself down long enough to think:

*“What is this person’s goal  
— and not mine —  
for this conversation?”*

Leading Questions for One-on-One Conversations. When you’re helping another person define their GOAL, don’t feel like you always need to ask all of these questions, or that you need to phrase them exactly as they appear here. Apply common sense and your own best judgment. The key is to keep things simple. Your goal should always be to help the other person get laser-focused on the outcome they want:

- What’s on your mind?
- What’s the most important thing you’d like to focus on?
- How can I be helpful to you in this situation?
- What would you like to take away from this conversation?

### **Group Settings**

Hopefully you can see by now the many advantages that the GROW framework offers for conversations with individuals. Well, great news: this technique can work equally well for groups. The only two caveats are that the group must be small enough that each individual has the opportunity to contribute their own thoughts to the conversation, and that the group must have sufficient trust among its members that every person can be completely honest about what they want to get out of their time together.

Specifically, we’re talking about groups where conversation is going to be centered around personal or spiritual growth. Examples might include a small group at your church, a book reading group, or even a family discussion around the dinner table. As long as it’s a group of like-minded people with a singular goal, the GROW framework will apply.

*a well-facilitated small group discussion where  
trust is present is a powerful environment  
for personal and spiritual growth*

Whether a group is short-term, meant to last only a few weeks, or a group meets regularly for years, amazing things happen when people committed to growth form strong relationships and talk about things that matter. Small groups have life-changing power.

*agree to an agenda —  
in advance*

Before your group meets, specify what you'll discuss: a chapter (or two) in a book, a live or recorded teaching or sermon, a passage of Scripture, a specific article, etc. Group conversations are most productive when you've agreed in advance what you'll be discussing... and when each person shows up prepared, having already read or watched the material, and ready to talk.

*when you meet:  
first space, followed by focus*

Once everyone has arrived for the group to meet, allow some time for small talk and personal conversation. But then after a few minutes of warm-up, it's your responsibility as the facilitator to take the reins and begin to lead toward group conversation. And this is where the first step in the GROW framework enters the picture:

Leading Questions for Group Conversations. Allow each person to individually express what their personal GOAL is, based on how they individually want to respond to what everyone was supposed to read, watch, or study:

- What most got your attention (from the reading, teaching, etc.)?
- What stood out as really relevant to you right now?
- If you had to pick just one quote to remember from the study, what would it be?
- What is one area where you'd like to grow (from the reading, teaching, etc.)?

*every person needs a GOAL*

Remember: as facilitator, your role is not to teach the group, but to lead each person to decide where they want to grow as an individual. If you have eight people in the conversation, there might be eight different GOALS for the conversation — because each person was inspired by something unique to them. And that's perfectly fine. As long as each person identified their own personal GOAL to take away, that meeting was a success.

## **R - Examine REALITY from several angles**

Remember, this all began with a coach helping people improve their tennis game. After Gallwey helped a student set her goal (better serves), he would ask her to take a few practice serves to establish a quantifiable (measurable) starting point. For example, he might have her serve ten balls and count how many of those landed in bounds. Once she had that number, that gave her something specific she could work on: hitting fewer balls out of bounds in each set of ten.

Next, he would have her begin exploring variables. He'd ask her to serve over and over, and to examine with each serve what might be happening differently to balls that landed in bounds compared to the ones that didn't. In no time at all, the student could see clearly what things she needed to change in order to serve better.

don't tell them the truth about themselves —  
help them discover it on their own

Keep in mind that any improvements she made would take place without Gallwey ever having offered her any instructions. By leading his student to make her own observations, he was activating a part of her brain that would not have engaged if he simply shared his own observations. Asking questions (rather than offering suggestions) led his student toward greater self-awareness: about her own true skill level, and about why her serves were (or were not) landing in bounds.

help them construct a worldview

Leading Questions for Recognizing Reality. Now let's apply this same principle to a conversation. Instead of giving your advice right from the start, resist that urge, and instead guide the other person to look at the situation from a variety of angles:

- What are you already doing in this area that's working well for you (if anything)?
- What things have you tried that are not working well?
- What might account for some of the differences between the things that are working and the things that aren't?
- What will happen if you continue to do the same thing in this area?
- What challenges should you expect to face if you want to grow in this area?
- What is the root cause of this problem you want to work on?

Just as with setting the goal for a conversation, these are only a few examples of questions, intended to help get you started. You'll need to use your own discretion. Your objective is to help lead the other person toward greater self-awareness.

*the more precisely they can see what needs to change — and understand why — the greater their chances for improving themselves*

I was recently visiting with a friend who was considering leaving his job as a selfemployed entrepreneur to take a job with a large non-profit. He'd been starting and growing his own businesses for more than ten years, so transitioning into a mature, established organization — and one where he wouldn't be in charge — represented a significant change. Although he was really excited about the possibilities of the organization, and he was attracted in particular to their mission and culture, still he just didn't feel comfortable about making the leap.

*let your curiosity about the other person guide you*

I realized that I didn't fully understand what it was about running his own businesses that had motivated him to start doing that in the first place. So I asked him, "Do you have any non-negotiables? What I mean is, are there some things about how you work now that you wouldn't be willing to give up, no matter what the tradeoff?"

That single question really seemed to break things loose for him. Without even having to think about it, he quickly rattled off several things in his work life that he knew he'd be miserable without. We talked for a while longer, and as our conversation wrapped up, he decided he was going to take his list of "nonnegotiables" to the organization and see how they felt about those things. His new awareness gave him a clear action he could take immediately, one that would help both him and his potential employer realistically determine if they'd be happy with each other.

*the best group discussions happen when every individual feels comfortable sharing how the things you're discussing are challenging them personally*

In the same way that trust is crucial for one-on-one relationships, it's equally necessary in a group setting. People can only talk openly where they feel it's safe to be vulnerable and to share things that may make them (or others) feel uncomfortable. Of course, some people don't have any problem laying bare their deepest, darkest thoughts and feelings. But for most of the rest of us, it's simply not that easy. For that reason, it's worth the extra effort on your part as the facilitator to help the group establish a firm foundation of trust, where that kind of openness is not only possible, but safe.

*the best way to help others become comfortable with being vulnerable is to model it yourself*

In almost every setting we've discussed so far, we've encouraged you to closely guard your perspective and instead draw out other people's thoughts through questions. If there's any exception to that rule, this would be it. If you can share how what you're discussing is challenging you personally — and perhaps even offer examples showing how you may have struggled with this topic in the past — then you're making it safer for the other people in the group to do the same.

The more often a group can get together as friends and pursue deep relationships, the more likely each individual will feel safe, which means they'll be more likely to be vulnerable, to truly open up. You can lead the way as the facilitator by setting (and modeling) that expectation... and then by getting out of the way. The people in your group will generally rise to the level of your expectation, especially if you can show them what that looks like.

## **O - Explore all the OPTIONS**

Gallwey would next ask his student to think about various ways she could work on her serve on her own, even between lessons. He challenged her to invent drills and exercises she could do to improve without him being present. After hearing her ideas, he might add a few suggestions of his own, but not unless he really felt it was important.

I want you to notice something here: Gallwey still has yet to offer any advice. Even this far along, he hasn't told his student anything he thinks they should do. Do you see that? Isn't that amazing? It seems almost counterintuitive to our nature, doesn't it? It altogether redefines our classic perception of what a coach should be. The coach no longer has to be the person in the relationship with all the knowledge and expertise.

*the coach is simply a person who can help another person improve by asking the right questions*

Although it's unlikely the people you'll be having conversations with will call you "coach," you can certainly leverage this approach. All it takes is asking them to come up with ideas for things they could do to solve a problem, accomplish a goal, or whatever it is they want to talk about.

Leading Questions to Discover Options. Whether you're in a one-on-one conversation or facilitating a group discussion, it's easy to help people examine their options with questions like these:

- What do you think you should do?
- What would you like to see happen?
- What are a few options or ideas that would help you grow in this area?
- What tools, resources, or training might be helpful to you?

This book you're reading is the result of a conversation I had with a good friend of mine, Terry Walling. I mentioned earlier in this book that we created a training event to teach these ideas at LifeChurch.tv. During a phone conversation with Terry, I was telling him that the training seemed to be helpful to our team. In fact, many of the people who went through the training started asking if we were planning to repackage the same information in some format that others could learn from without having to attend the event. (We weren't.) Honestly, the very idea of it seemed daunting.

Terry asked me to make a list of possible ways I could get this information out to more people. I mean, he literally made me do it while we were still on the phone. One idea on that list was to write out what we presented in the training as some kind of eBook. Terry asked me if I could commit to any of the things on my list. And here you are, reading it... thanks to Terry's question.

Now, maybe you think turning our training into an eBook was just common sense. And I guess that's true. In fact, I had already thought about it as an option once or twice. But I hadn't taken any action to make that happen. And isn't that just the way it is with most things we know we need to do? It's not that our options are too hard or too complicated. Sometimes we just need someone else to help us slow down long enough to think through how we might do it, to help us organize our thoughts.

*being able to see the future more clearly helps bias us toward action*

## **W - Ask them to commit to a WAY FORWARD**

Coach Gallwey's final step was simple: he would ask his student to commit to the specific drills she would do, and to tell him how and when she would work on them during the week. Notice that he left her in the driver's seat with regard to how much time and effort she was committing to. (Remember the "Quality x Commitment = Results" equation from Chapter 3?) He put the ball in her court to decide her action and her follow through. (Yes, that pun was intended.) Whatever she decided, she would either reap the benefits of her commitment (by improving her skills) or she would suffer the consequences of not doing the work.

Sometimes the person you're talking with may not yet be ready to take action. (Remember the stages of change from Chapter 3?) When you reach this point in your conversation, all you need to ask is something like, "Are you ready to take action and move forward?"

If they answer yes, that they are ready to decide on what action to take, ask them to pick what they're willing to commit to doing, with a question like one of the following:

- What one next step do you know you need to take?
- What's one way that you can apply what we've learned or discussed this week?
- When will you do it?
- How will you know you've followed through?
- Who is someone you know who can hold you accountable?

Research indicates that the more clearly a person can define their next steps, the more likely they are to actually follow through on completing them. One of the easiest tools for setting clear goals is a technique called the SMART criteria<sup>[3]</sup>. It's really simple. SMART is an acronym you apply to the next steps you set to make sure that each one is:

**S - Specific.** Vague next steps often fall by the wayside. Fear of the unknown commonly paralyzes people. Being specific helps the person identify exactly what they need to do, eliminating any mystery or uncertainty.

**M - Measurable.** If I say I want to spend more time with my kids, how I define "more time" might be different than how other people define it. But if I commit to spend three uninterrupted evenings per week with my family, that's measurable: it's easy to determine if I'm actually doing it.

**A: Attainable.** When people feel inspired to change their lives, that excitement often translates into unrealistic ambition. You can't lose 100 lbs. — and maintain it — by stopping eating for three weeks. But you can absolutely do it by reducing your meal portion sizes by 25% (measurable) for a year. Growth occurs through realistic, small changes maintained consistently over time, not in a one-time, massive leap.

**R: Relevant.** Next steps need to focus only on things that will directly address the desired issue. Remember Gallwey’s student who wanted to improve her serve? If she consistently performed drills that addressed her backhand — and even if she flawlessly executed those exercises — doing so would not correct her serve!

**T: Time Bound.** Ask them to commit to a deadline: when, specifically, will they actually complete this particular next step? It needs to be a clear date staring back at them from their calendar, daring them to take the plunge.

*follow-through is always their responsibility, never yours*

If you’ve walked with a person or group through a conversation using the GROW framework, it’s all too common for you to feel some sense of obligation to make sure they follow through on their next steps. Just as with filling silences, resist that urge. Your diligence won’t change their life — only theirs will. You did your part when you asked the questions. Now it’s time for them to own the consequences, whether good or bad, of choosing to act — or choosing not to act.

Don’t misunderstand: it’s fine to touch base with them to see how they’re doing. You’re personally invested. You actually care about this person. You genuinely want them to grow. But the whole point of having them identify their own next steps was to leverage the power of the Commitment variable in the “Quality x Commitment = Results” equation. Now you need to let that play out.

## The GROW Framework is a Guide, Not a Script

Some people express concern that the GROW framework seems technical and therefore somehow artificial. And sometimes we hear questions like these at our training events:

- Shouldn’t conversations just be natural?
- Doesn’t it stifle creativity to try to impose order onto conversations I’m going to be having anyway with someone, a person I already have a relationship with?
- Can some formula allow enough flexibility for the complexities of real-life situations?

Certainly if you think of the GROW framework as some kind of script you’re “supposed to” follow, then these are legitimate concerns. And trying to use it in that way would absolutely make conversations seem forced and overly structured. But that’s not what the GROW framework is for. Think of it more like a guide, a roadmap, intended as a tool to help you gently direct another person towards greater self-awareness, better decisions, and tangible, realistic next steps.

*if you’ll consistently practice applying GROW framework principles, over time they become second nature*

In the meantime, you should find that being intentional to think about them will help guide you toward better and better conversational habits.

Even in those times when you’re simply engaged in casual conversation with another person — a mentee, a friend, or even your child — the GROW framework can give you a convenient frame of reference that will prevent you from slipping into default “let me tell you what to do” mode. It will help you remember that slowing down long enough to gently guide them through a process of discovery will actually yield more positive, longer-term results — not to mention nurturing that relationship with positive feelings.

And of course, when you plan a sit-down conversation with another person, you can easily use the GROW framework to help guide a 30-60 minute conversation. For example, 30 minutes might break down something like this:

- 3-5 minutes: help them articulate the goal of the conversation
- 5-10 minutes: help them establish their current reality
- 5-10 minutes: explore a few possible options (and, if time permits — and it feels appropriate — you might consider sharing your perspective)
- 3-5 minutes: help them think through a few achievable next steps

Now, having broken this down for you — and we cannot overemphasize this enough — do not attempt to use the GROW framework as some kind of formula. This is merely an example to help you visualize the approach.

Another great benefit of the GROW framework is that it can give you a common thread that will span naturally across several conversations with the same person. This actually fits very well with how most of our interactions happen in the real world. You run into someone you want to talk to, you visit for a few minutes, and then you have to tell each other, “see you later” because you both have other commitments. Later, you’ll inevitably cross paths again and chat for a few more minutes. And this same pattern will just repeat over and over.

If you can learn to apply the GROW framework, then for each of those individual interactions, you can keep essentially the same conversation going, just breaking it across multiple, perfectly natural “chapters,” each time simply picking up right where you last left off.

*your authentic interest in this person is  
what binds the pieces together —  
your curiosity in what’s happening in  
their life each time you see them*

In the next and final section, we’ll tell you about several tools you can use to help you lead others, including a series of videos that demonstrate how to apply the GROW framework to real-world conversations.

## A Final Word

Jesus' final command during his time on earth was all about developing people:

*Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally. Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."*

(Matthew 28:17-20, MSG)

God has called us — all of us — to make disciples. God has placed you — deliberately, with intentionality — in proximity to people He is seeking to restore to Himself, people He wants to be developed to their full potential, so they can take part in His plans for the world around them.

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

(Ephesians 4:11-13)

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. That's us. That's you and me. Christ gave us as a gift to His body (the church). For what purpose? So that we could equip His people. That's also us — and more importantly, the people that He places in our lives. So that together we can find unity in our faith, in our knowledge of Him and of His Son. So that together we can attain the fullness He desires.

Your primary objective in leading another person, the main tools with which you want to equip them, are the long-term skills they'll need to identify the problems they want to solve in their lives, followed by solid principles for how they can continue working with others to constantly come up with realistic solutions. In short, you want to help this person become a disciple... who is able to make other disciples.

And what's the best "disciple-making" tool we have? Our everyday conversations. There's no such thing as an "ordinary" conversation. At least, there doesn't have to be. Whether you're a leader, a mentor, a parent, or a small group leader, every conversation you have has the potential to help someone grow. When you approach conversations with intentionality, when you recognize every interaction as another opportunity to help point someone toward Christ, the power is present every time to change a life.

## Development Toolkit

Collecting and mastering the proper tools equips us to accelerate the growth of the people around us. In this section, we'll give you a brief overview of the tools LifeChurch.tv has assembled for this purpose. Familiarizing yourself with these resources will help you as a developer of people.

Talking about these tools with the people you're leading is a great way to initiate development conversations. As you'll see, the very purpose of some of these tools is to help people uncover those areas within themselves where they could most benefit from personal growth. And once they're equipped with that information, that actually feeds the process; it gives them that first piece they need: "What is my primary GOAL for this conversation we're about to have?"

*sharing these tools with the people you lead is one way you can equip them to embrace ownership of their next steps*

## resources.life.church

On this website, you'll find books, assessments, videos, curriculum — and much more — on a wide variety of topics. You can use these in group settings or with an individual to help them focus on a particular area where they want to grow in areas such as:

- Leadership
- Self-awareness tools
- Personal growth resources specifically tailored for different people: men, women, parents, families, etc.
- Topics such as spiritual growth, financial growth, relationship growth, etc.

## tryPACE.com

PACE is a free feedback tool that helps individuals collect perspectives from the people who know them best, like friends, family, and coworkers. This is great information to have when a person is working toward establishing their current reality: What am I really like? What's actually going on with me? Not, "Who do I think I am?" But, "How do others perceive me?" PACE can reveal possible areas for growth, as well as help an individual begin to adjust those inner conversations we all have (self-talk) into healthier patterns, which will then also help them proactively modify their behavior in a positive direction.

## coachingtopics.life.church

This is a simple form that you can email to someone you're working with in advance of your time together. This focusing tool helps them really think through what areas they want to single out for their personal development, then send you the results of that thinking before you meet. It's a great tool for mentors and leaders who meet with people on a regular basis for developmental conversations.

## Emotional Intelligence 2.0

Emotional Intelligence 2.0 is a book that comes with an assessment tool designed to provide you with a step-by-step program that will help you increase your EQ (Emotional Quotient, also known as emotional intelligence) through four core skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

## PersonalityType.com

Based on the most widely-used, well-respected model of Personality Type in the world, the PersonalityType.com Assessment(tm) helps you quickly and accurately identify your Personality Type, usually in less than five minutes. Although obviously every individual is unique, people of the same personality type tend to have a remarkable amount in common. One particularly useful feature of this tool is its comprehensive lists of possible careers where each personality type might seek success and satisfaction.

## GROW Conversation Model Overview

The GROW overview can be printed as a reference card to refresh your memory and give you questions to ask as you put the GROW model into practice in both one-on-one and group conversations. Download the overview PDF at [resources.life.church/conversations](https://resources.life.church/conversations).

## See the GROW Framework in Action

One of the most direct ways you can learn how to use the GROW framework is to actually see someone do it in a real-world conversation. LifeChurch.tv recorded several “sample” conversations for just this reason. Each example is a real conversation between two people who were discussing a real issue. There are no actors, and we didn’t script what would be said. When opportunities for typical growth conversations presented themselves, we simply asked if we could schedule and record them. The resulting playlist of videos is available online for free here:

## [go2.lc/sampleconversations](https://go2.lc/sampleconversations)

- JoeAnna asks for advice on dealing with a family member with a gambling problem.
- Adam would like direction on how he can get unstuck in his career.
- Tasha is trying to decide whether the time might be right to have more children.
- Jenna asks if someone can help her decide whether she should start her own business.
- Joe needs help resolving some issues he’s having in his LifeGroup.
- Stacy is conflicted about whether she should downsize to a smaller house.

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## Endnotes

[1] The “Stages of Change” concept was originally developed and published by James Prochaska of University of Rhode Island in 1977, but it has been modified and used in many different settings over the past several decades. It is arguably the dominant model of behavioral change.

[2] <http://theinnergame.com/about-tim-gallwey/history-of-the-inner-game/>

[3] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART\\_criteria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria)

