



## Shepherding Tips and Ideas

Loving and leading conversations are an important part of discipleship. Here are some ideas as to how to navigate shepherding conversations.

### How to start a conversation:

#### 1. The “just checking in” approach

- Sometimes the best way to start a conversation that you know will likely lead to something more specific is to center it around a genuine desire to simply check in with them. Pray and ask God to give you His eyes and heart for the person.
- Example text - “Hey, Chris! Hope you and the family are doing well. You came to my mind today, and I wanted to reach out to see how you are doing in your walk with God during this busy season. Any chance you’re up for a phone call or breakfast this week?”

#### 2. The “not slipping through the cracks” approach

- If you are reaching out because of a report or data point that highlights a concern for an individual, this is a great approach.
- Example email - “Hey, Chris! Hope you’re having a great week. One of the things I do to try and make sure no one slips through the cracks at our church is check our group attendance occasionally. Often when someone’s group attendance decreases, it’s because of a life challenge. Sometimes, it’s even an opportunity for me and our church to provide care or encouragement. I noticed you have been somewhat in and out of group the last few months. I would love to connect and just hear more about that and see how we can best support and encourage you in this season. Let me know when you have some time to get together or talk on the phone.”

#### 3. The “I think I’ve noticed” approach

- At times, we find ourselves in situations where we *think* we haven’t seen someone around, but we’re not 100% sure. This approach doesn’t assume an issue but still creates an opportunity to express care and remind them that you see them.
- Example text - “Hey Chris! I may have just missed you the last few weeks, but I feel like I haven’t seen you at church recently. Have you been around? If you’ve been here, and I just haven’t seen you, I apologize, but I still wanted to reach out and check in. Hope you’re having a great day!”

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## How to dig deeper in the conversation:

Sometimes you find yourself in a conversation where you are able to *love* well but *leading* feels difficult. Here are a few ideas to generate conversation that leads to more fruitful leading conversations. They can sometimes be used in combination or as stand alone approaches.

### 1. Be radically honest about your hope and fears for the conversation

- Sometimes beginning the conversation by sharing exactly what you are hoping to talk about, what concerns you have, what challenges are present, etc., sets you up well. Don't be afraid to say, "To be honest, I've been nervous to have this conversation because it could be challenging, but I'm coming from a place of genuine care for you."

### 2. Ask "What do you believe the Bible says about \_\_\_\_?"

- Shepherding conversations can often feel like one view against another. If they are a believer, make the conversation clearly about the Biblical reality, not about how you feel about something. Asking this question reveals their Biblical worldview and quickly turns it into an obedience reality not just a "behavior" reality.

### 3. Hypothetical margin

- Ask: "If you had all the margin in the world and could fix your \_\_\_\_\_ (health, work, etc. situation) what would your [church participation/discipleship of your family/other topic] look like?" This answer gives you insight into what they wish would be true.

### 4. Ask "Why?"

- Ask the individual why they began attending church/a group, why it matters to them, why they want their kids to follow Jesus. Take the opportunity to remind them of the theological importance of their church participation and help them recognize their priorities may be out of order.

### 5. Let me put on my \_\_\_\_ hat.

- It can be hard to transition from small talk to a serious conversation. One way to do that is to simply say, "Alright, for a second, I want to put on my pastoral/ministry leader/brother/sister in Christ] hat". By saying this, you set the tone and help get the individual ready to hear what it is you feel led to say.

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**6. End with support/accountability wherever possible.**

- Be eager to support and follow up after the conversation. Your conversation is just one step in a larger journey, so provide accountability personally or through an appropriate person. Follow up and assistance towards action steps shows the individual that you are serious about helping them grow and move forward.