

*Towards Belief
Table Hosts Training*

We want to thank you for being willing to serve as Table Hosts for our Towards Belief community outreach. We are excited about the potential that working together for the Gospel has for our community under God's hand.

Philosophy of Towards Belief

It is important as we seek to prepare to use the Towards Belief material that we understand the thinking behind it.

How do we engage a post Christian culture that sees Christianity as irrelevant, outdated, illogical and irrational? Towards Belief is a tool that seeks to meet these commonly held ideas and to address belief blockers that ordinary Australians have identified in current research.

This in itself is not evangelism (sharing the Gospel and calling for a response) – rather, this is part of the pathway towards gaining a hearing for the Gospel, by seeking to address, grapple with and hopefully remove the blockers people commonly have.

Our goals

In running this Towards Belief campaign we are working together to:

- Engage our local community in addressing commonly held belief blockers
- Break down barriers to the gospel
- Model unity and cross denominational affiliation
- Open up the conversation about spiritual things, leading people towards Jesus.
- Build on existing relationships and conversations and create new ones.

We recognise that for most unchurched Australians, coming to trust Jesus will mostly be a slow and gradual process in the context of meaningful and loving relationships with genuine believers who are intentional in sharing their faith. This might look something like this over many years:

Raising awareness > initial contact > removing blockers > building trust > growing relationship > sharing the gospel > integrating into church life > nurturing and growing in maturity...

Tips for Table Discussion

The goal of the table discussion after the DVD is to respond to the material that was presented. As we expect (and hope) there will be people from a wide range of world views, it is important that we don't treat this time as our regular home group bible study where we would assume most people are believers already.

Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind as you facilitate the conversation after the DVD.

- Gentleness and respect are to guide the tone of our discussion
 - 1 Peter 3:15, Colossians 4: 6
- We want to create an environment where Christians and non-Christians both feel free to offer their point of view in terms of their personal belief or experiences. Given that Christians may be more familiar or comfortable with talking about their beliefs, be aware not to let Christians dominate the discussion but to leave room for alternative points of view to be heard.

- It is important that we don't "jump on" and "correct" an alternative point of view as this will have the effect of *shutting down* the conversation and hindering others from speaking up. Rather, we need to be willing to respectfully hear from everyone. Beware of Christians on a soapbox – they have the potential to derail a good conversation.
- The Table Host's job is to help kick off and guide the flow of conversation.

There will be the Handout Sheets (*see Resources section of the Towards Belief website to download*) on the table with quotes from the presentation to prompt discussion. You can also use the questions in the Towards Belief Discussion Guide which accompanies the DVD.

Some facilitating basics regarding FLOW

"Yes, and...." Creates strong Flow

"No, but...." Creates weak Flow

"Yes, but ..." Creates weak Block

"No, and" Creates strong Block

- The Table Host is not there to preach, but is encouraged to ask open questions that throw to the group like:
 - *"I'm interested to hear what people made of..."*
 - *"I thought it was curious that....what did others think?"*
- If someone tends to dominate, extend or guide the conversation to the rest of the group by bouncing off one comment with:
 - *"What could others say about that...?"*
 - *"Bill, I see you have been listening pretty carefully.... What strikes you as the most persuasive argument."*
 - *"I wonder if we can go back to what Bob said in relation to..."*
- Don't be quick to answer questions. Throw it back to them. Aim to let the unbeliever articulate what they believe. Where else does the average Aussie get to articulate their own beliefs? In doing so they are able to compare their own beliefs to what they have heard, question the basis of own beliefs, see holes in own belief. Discussion is not teaching time.
- Other Christians should let the Table Host call the shots. Defer to their sensitivity and discernment on when / how to engage with unbelievers except for the person who brought them and knows them well.
- It may become clear that someone on your table would benefit from having some one on one conversation or possibly prayer together over a more personal issue.

The Table Host can either progress with that themselves OR they can be directed to one of the “Chaplains” for the night. All trained ministry staff will be available as Chaplains. Bear this in mind particularly when looking at the episodes on Suffering and Church Abuse.

- Use of story rather than ‘doctrine dump’ engages conversation better. Better for Christians to discuss using personal story and application. Rather than preaching “at” the table, reflect on the difference Jesus / the Gospel makes in your own life. Eg, coping with suffering etc in personal terms.
- Trust there is a process in evangelism and the sovereignty of God at work. You don’t need to say it all at once. You don’t need to lock it all down in one conversation. The 1 Cor 3:6 principle.
- If it becomes clear that someone would like to know more and would benefit from personal follow up, there are a number of ways forward:
 - Encourage them to attend the next week
 - Provide copies of a Gospel such as Luke and invite them to take a copy. You could offer to read with them or check back in a few weeks with them if they have questions.
 - Offer to follow them with them personally - take contact details.
 - Let them know that many churches offer courses which explore Christianity for enquirers. Help them connect with the church near them – via their friend or yourself.
 - Offer to pray with them if needed.
 - Commit to praying for them.

NOTE: Thank you to Wendy Potts (www.gospel.org.au) and the combined churches of the Illawarra area who prepared these notes for their Towards Belief outreach campaign held in a local club.