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Act 37: Seek Out

by Mez McConnell

If we're honest, as Christians it's easy to develop blind spots for people who don't fit our categories. One example is people who've left the faith. How often do we find ourselves being generous to those who don't share in our beliefs any more? Find a way to make someone feel loved without holding back the truth of what we believe.

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

(1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

If you're a believer, you probably have that friend you look up to in the faith, that person who is your go-to for all things spiritual, who reads every John Piper book and has a heavily used Bible on each night stand and coffee table. Well, your friend may not read Piper or be a bibliophile, but mine was. However, after the death of my friend's mother and only sibling, things changed. The disintegration of their faith didn't happen overnight; it was a slow erosion. Pent-up anger and sadness ate away over months and, before too long, Jesus was an unmentionable and Sunday was just another day to have a lie in.

I was devastated as I watched the death of a vibrant faith despite my attempts to resuscitate it for them. I remember wondering if this meant that I had to annul our friendship since they had annulled their faith. Is that how it's supposed to work? It was a terrifying thought but doesn't the Bible say 'with such a one do not even eat' (1 Corinthians 5:11 JUB)?

How very wrong I was. I had confused the meaning of that verse and how to help someone walking away from the Lord. In dealing with my friend, I'm reminded of Paul in Romans 9:2–3, for I feel the same: 'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people...'

We don't know what God's great plan for our lives is and that goes for our friends too. We can pray, love and support, knowing that while we can't make those we love fall in love with Jesus, we can show them his love by continually sharing "the hope that [we] have... with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15) and continually praying that they will return home to the Father.



Mez McConnell is the senior pastor of Niddrie Community Church. He is the director of 20Schemes, a church planting and revitalisation initiative in Scotland. He is also co-director of the Acts 29 initiative Church in Hard Places. Mez is the author of *Preparing for Baptism: A Personal Diary* (Grace Publications Trust) and *Is There Anybody Out There? A Journey from Despair to Hope* (Christian Focus). He's married to Miriam and has two daughters.

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GREEN OPTION:

Get coffee with an old friend who isn't in church any more – and hang out with no strings attached.



YELLOW OPTION:

Ask that person to tell their story, and just sit and listen.



RED OPTION:

Don't shy away from talking about Jesus, even if it's awkward.

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