

Mission Made Possible
(Second Edition)

Fr. Jon Bielawski, Michele Thompson, and Michael Dopp



MISSION OF THE **REDEEMER**
MINISTRIES



genesismission.co.uk

Chapter 5

Part A

Maxim: Get over yourself! - Explained

- The only thing blocking you is yourself.
- Let go and let God.

“Only when a seed falls to the ground and dies does it become fruitful” (John 12:24). Dying to ourselves, our ego, and our pride is difficult. But if we embrace the Gospel message, we realize that for the sake of souls and to fulfill our role as missionary disciples, we must have the courage to take a risk. When we realize that we have allowed ourselves to be controlled by what others think of us, we must step out of our comfort zone in order to experience the liberation Christ has for us.

St. Paul tells us that to become wise, we must first be fools for Christ (see 1 Cor 3:18-19). What a seemingly strange paradox. What does it mean for us?

It is normal to want to fit in and be well thought of. We like having our good deeds, acts of kindness, and exceptional qualities noticed and recognized. We rightly fear being ridiculed or rejected. When we witness to Jesus, we risk these things. In reality, what is at stake here? Just one thing: pride. We need to get over ourselves. Our insecurities and fragile ego must not hold us back.

Pride convinces us that we are more important than God Himself. Pride will wrap us in the chains of inhibition and keep us from the fullness of life that Jesus promises. Pride will blind us to situations where God has placed us precisely to proclaim Him. Pride will paralyze us, keep our world small, and our pews vacant.

Maxim: Get over yourself! - Encounter I

The first time I shared my faith was with a lifelong friend. We were work colleagues and spent most of our leisure time together too. We had a lot in common, except that I attended Mass and she did not. I often talked in very general terms about the Church and God, but I had probably never mentioned Jesus as a person. As the years passed, my faith was deepening, and God was working on me. I agonized for a long time about how

to tell her what was going on. I thought she would be curious and ask questions. My biggest fear was that I would not be able to answer and that I'd look like an idiot.

One day we were out for coffee. Like a newborn foal testing her legs, I tentatively told my friend that Jesus was real and alive and that I was thinking about Him even when I was sleeping. Her reaction? She sprayed out her mouthful of coffee as she fell about laughing!

I was hurt, embarrassed, disappointed, and a bit angry. When she had stopped laughing and realized I was serious, she too was embarrassed. She attempted some conciliatory words, but the laughter bubbled up again. We ended up laughing together as good friends will do, but we both knew something big had happened.

After this, I continued to share with my friend, and gradually she came to see and appreciate the vibrancy of my faith. She would occasionally attend Mass with me and began to ask many questions. I have since moved to another county and rarely see her, but I pray that God sends another disciple to nurture the little seeds that are taking root in her heart.

Over the years, I have reflected many times on that incident. Confessing my faith to my friend was not easy, but as the weeks and months went on, we enjoyed new levels of honesty and deep conversations that we had not previously experienced. I did not die of embarrassment (nobody does), and I realized it was good for me. I was prompted to look at my pride and resolved that given the opportunity to do it again, I would.

When I am concerned about how I will be perceived and am caught up in my own importance, I remember what Jesus has done for me and how vital it is that all people should have the opportunity to hear and accept the Gospel. I sit with the thought that He was entirely exposed on that Cross, and I realize that is how He wanted it: nothing hidden. He wanted to show us that the power of God needs no defence. Truth simply needs to be plainly and confidently proclaimed. When we have gotten ourselves out of the way, humbly vacated our throne that rightfully belongs to Him, then we will become His workers.

Each time we step out humbly, in faith, aware of our smallness, we grow. In getting smaller, dumping our self-importance and swallowing our pride, we get bigger. The space within us from which the debilitating rubbish has been cleared is filled by grace and virtue. The Holy Spirit takes residence, and the shackling chains of inhibition are gradually severed as we take on a new life.

Maxim: Get over yourself! - Encounter II

There was a large cross-stitch of the Last Supper that needed to be removed from our parish and taken to a charity shop. I had the job of taking it. It was fairly sizeable, so I tucked it under my arm like a surfboard and took off across town.

As I went, I attended prayerfully to the Spirit's promptings. It seemed to go like this:

Holy Spirit (my first nudge): Michele, turn the picture around so that people might see what it is!

Me: Sure, I can do that. Thanks for the nudge!

I walk on, but no one seems to notice the masterpiece under my arm.

Holy Spirit: Michele, you have a great conversation piece right there. You cannot possibly just go and drop it off. Stop someone and ask them about it!

Me: Aw, really?

(Can you believe I was such a reluctant disciple?)

Me: OK, but only once.

I turn to a lady who is walking behind me.

Me: Um, hi! I am taking this to the charity shop, and I just thought I would do a random survey on the way by asking a few people if they know what it is and whether it has any significance to them?

Lady: Don't you know what it is? It's the last supper!

There is disdain in her voice.

Me: Are you a Christian?

(Oops! Don't ask closed questions during encounters)

Lady (sounding even more insulted): Yes, of course I'm a Christian!

Me: Does it have any significance in your life?

Lady (looking at me as if I am completely stupid): Obviously!

She then stalks off. I try not to judge her. (How did I get it so wrong?)

Holy Spirit: Try again!

Me: YES I WILL!

Now three ladies approach, so I walk up to them with my best smile and explain again what I'm doing. This time I'm ready.

Me: Ladies, this is a pretty famous picture. Can you tell me what you know about it?

Me: (Imaginary air punching!!)

Ladies (with one voice): Oh, yeah. That's the Last Supper, isn't it?

Me: Tell me, what does it mean to you?

Lady #1: Nothing really, I think seeing is believing, and I can't see God.

I'm feeling delighted and ready to explore. I start to pray: Okay, Holy Spirit, here we go. Your call now. Step in, please..

But before I can ask another question:

Lady #1: You should talk to her on the end; she's the religious one.

Lady #2: Leave off, Sandra, I am not religious!

I notice, however, she is staring at the picture and is visibly moved.

Me (gently): What are you seeing?

Lady #2: I don't think I am religious, but I used to have a picture of the Virgin Mary on the wall opposite my bed. I loved that picture, and I used to say a little prayer every night, but my husband made me throw it out. This picture has brought it all back to me.

Me: Would you be able to put this picture up now?

She nods.

Me: Please take it and put it where you will see it and start your little prayers again.

She looks stunned and offers me money.

Me: I know it's hard to believe something you can't see, but God loves you more than you could know. He has been working in your lives from the very beginning.

They get quiet, and I think they have acknowledged something.

Maxim: The power of human encounter - Explained

- Never underestimate the power of human encounter.
- One to one contact is the most effective and natural way to communicate.
- Never forget to ... Connect! Connect! Connect!

When God wanted to communicate Himself to the world, He could have used any method He desired. He could have showered down leaflets from heaven, or inspired the internet a couple of centuries earlier. But He didn't. The Father sent the Son, Jesus, to be incarnated, walk among His people, touch human suffering, and encourage repentance. Jesus listened to others and, if their hearts were sincere, He worked miracles.

We live in a technological age that claims to have made communication easier. As the use of computers, mobile phones, and social media increases, so does our *disconnection* with each other. Consequently, loneliness and accompanying mental health problems have never been higher. Our young people often live in an isolation bubble, carefully constructed to promote the best “version of themselves.”

The problem with *a version* is that it is not the genuine article. It is not real but instead is an illusion or façade.

The most popular photos these days are selfies. According to Samsung, the average millennial in their lifetime will take 25,000 selfies. Each is carefully contrived to display them at their personal best: beautiful, laughing, surrounded by friends, living the dream. Yet research by Dove in 2017 showed that 61% of 10–17 year-old girls in the UK have low self-esteem, and according to the office for national statistics in 2018, the UK male suicide rate has significantly increased year on year.

As disciples, we are called to love others in the same way that Jesus did. Many groups within the Church take care of the poor and needy who need help with daily challenges. This is vital work. As the Church, though, our first priority should be to look more long-term and minister to souls by introducing them to Jesus.

Each person has the right to hear of the God who loves them unconditionally, who can heal their wounds, wipe away every tear, and bring them to eternal life. We can help them by learning to connect and listen to as many people as possible, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and by sharing the Gospel to effect transformation in people's lives.

Maxim: The power of human encounter – Encounter

I was in my hometown and noticed a used clothing shop that supported a children's cancer charity. I had my usual little prayer going on inwardly (“Come, Holy Spirit”).

Volunteers usually staff these shops, and the thought popped into my head that whoever worked there might have a special connection to the cause. I have learned through experience that such “random” thoughts are often challenging promptings from the Holy Spirit. They mustn't be dismissed.

There was a lady behind the counter who appeared to be in her forties. I first made some small talk as I browsed. I then asked her how long she had worked there and whether she enjoyed the job. After a few minutes like this, I asked her my burning question: Did she have a connection to the cause? She looked a bit shocked. “Yes. I lost my son at the age of seven. We found a lump on his hip, a malignant tumor. While we treated it, it was very aggressive, and within six months, he was dead.” She continued, “In fact, my other son, Andrew, who was nine when Sam died, is leaving home to start university in Bristol tomorrow, and I have been sitting here all afternoon feeling wretched. It is like a second bereavement.”

I could see and almost feel this lady's pain, and although I was stunned by what she had said, I knew at that moment that I was meant to be there. I knew that the Holy Spirit had arranged it. A million thoughts went through my mind as I grappled for words of comfort, and I knew it was time to hand it over completely. So I restarted my silent prayer: “Holy Spirit, You brought me here; now take over. Give me the words.”

A brief spell of silence ensued. Sometimes a short silence can seem like eternity, but actually, it plays an essential role in the conversation. When you are profoundly listening to someone, you create an open space for them to talk that's almost palpable. Good listeners know how to do this, and it can be learned. It's an openness that you transmit through nonverbal means. When another person has a decision to make, a problem to solve or simply a need to express themselves, silence can often provide the opportunity for them to have time to talk, reflect and decide without outside pressure. Sometimes silence can make us feel awkward, but it is a vital component of building trust and enabling conversations to go deeper.

I said, “I cannot imagine your suffering. How did you cope with losing Sam?”

I hoped she'd mention faith, but instead replied, “Family and friends got me through it.”

It seemed natural now to mention God, so I simply asked, “Do you believe in God?”

She replied, “I have friends who pray for me, and I believe in something, and I did go to church years ago, but I kind of lost my way with it. I visited a spiritualist, which I found comforting. She told me that Sam is with me all the time.”

I felt concerned about her mention of a spiritualist, but I knew it wasn't the time to critique it, so I decided to acknowledge her experience without endorsing it. Thus, in essence, I shared, “In that respect, she is right; there's a thin veil between the living and those who have passed. But thankfully, the truth is much more specific than that. You know, here's the thing, and I think it will help you. God is love, and He wants only good for us. All that comes from Him is good. It is hard to understand this with a loss like yours, but Jesus is the key. In Jesus, God came to us to demonstrate His love for us. When Jesus died and resurrected from the dead, He conquered death, and that means it's not the end for us. It means Sam will be with you again. It means Sam is perfect and whole, and you can let your heart be filled with that knowledge. God doesn't promise that life will be easy, but He does promise that He will be with us every step and that He will wipe away every tear. My advice would be to go to your friends and pray *with them*. Go to church with them because through Jesus you will be with Sam again.”

This lady became very emotional, so I asked her if she would like me to pray for her and Andrew and Sam. She responded eagerly and asked me to pray that Andrew would be safe and that she would be with Sam again.

After this, she looked at me full of tears but brighter, and I could see that something had been healed. I could see something restored in her and that she had new strength. She thanked me and said, "I haven't talked like this for a very long time. I think an angel must have brought you here today."

Maxim: Explicit Intention – Explained

- Always carry an *explicit intention* in your heart – then you will speak with direction
- You are encouraging an encounter with the living God.

An explicit intention gives rise to purpose, mission, and commitment to action. Our intention as disciples is to be attentive to the Spirit's promptings and be alert to an opportunity which, without vigilance, can pass by unnoticed. God intends that every person come to know Him through Jesus. As disciples, we too should have an urgency

and deep desire that compels us to explore every situation. Our mission, with practice, will become a natural part of our life, seamlessly woven into each day. The joy of the Gospel becomes a life-giving energy that seeks to reach out to every person that crosses our path, intending to introduce them to Jesus or deepen their faith in Him.

Carrying an explicit intention means that all of our words and actions become purposeful and directed to that particular goal. Our spiritual antennae become tuned to recognize opportunities; the whole of our lives become a field of mission every day. We learn to start each day with this prayer: “Lord, bring me someone today with whom I can share you.” This essential step is an invitation that works to open us up, fortify us, and reinforce our intention.

Maxim: Explicit Intention – Encounter I

It was one of those unexpected beautiful crisp sunny mornings that we sometimes get in the middle of winter. The thought that I hadn't had an encounter for a couple of weeks was nibbling away at me. I felt saddened and sorry that perhaps through my inattentiveness, there could be souls suffering who might have otherwise been introduced to the healing power of Jesus. Filled with remorse and with a plea to the Holy Spirit, I committed to doing something about it.

First, and with some guilt, I wanted to make the most of the weather with a run along the spectacular Plymouth waterfront. Running alone is unlikely to provide an opportunity. Running with headphones reduces the chances even more, so I resolved to make it a short one. With hindsight, I can see that these elements were all part of His plan. God can use anything; all He needs is a willing heart.

A mile from home the water comes into view, and that morning it was truly breathtaking: a deep sparkling blue, the sun already quite high in the sky, the other coastline visible across the bay. I was filled with it, musing on how anyone could believe that all this beauty just randomly appeared and that there is no evidence for God!

I noticed a woman leaning on the sea wall, admiring the view. I don't remember deciding to stop, but I remember wanting to share what I was feeling. Before I knew it, my headphones were off, and I was next to her, saying, “Isn't it beautiful! I have been running along thanking God for being so good!”

She smiled in a friendly way but didn't respond. I assumed it was because I mentioned

God, so I continued in a new direction. “I haven't lived here long and only just discovered that my house is only about a mile from this beautiful scene. I feel so blessed because I have been living in Cornwall and could run beside the water every day. I am still getting to know the area. What about you? Are you local?”

She told me she had lived here all her life and went on to point out all the visible landmarks. She became very chatty and enjoyed sharing her local knowledge. I had detected an Irish accent, which she confirmed as Dublin. This was my second nudge from the Holy Spirit (the first being that I stop and make a fairly bold statement).

I have yet to meet a Dubliner without a Catholic heritage. She went on to tell me lots about her children and grandchildren. (It was hard to get a word in!) I had been with her for about fifteen minutes and was just planning my escape when it flashed through my mind, “This conversation is quite prolonged; there must be some intention in it.” So I started to pray inwardly, which I should have done ten minutes earlier. “Okay, Holy Spirit, show me a way in.”

I gently interrupted her and asked, “Do you know the old Catholic Abbey about forty minutes’ drive from here in Looe?”

She replied, “Oh, yes—Sclerder Abbey. I went there for midnight Mass!”

Honestly, you could have knocked me down with a feather, and I was laughing inside at the games the Holy Spirit was playing with me. There ensued a beautiful encounter as I encouraged her to tell me her Catholic history and to dig deep to verbalize what her faith means to her. We parted having shared a moment (or two!) with the Lord, and I prayed that she might share some of the conversation with somebody else.

Maxim: Explicit Intention – Encounter II

One morning I headed on foot to noon Mass. At the pedestrian crossing, I became aware of a uniformed soldier with a red beret and splendid array of medals. I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me, saying, “Speak to him.” I checked the time and it was 11:57. The lights changed and he took off. I decided there was no time (plus I wasn't in the mood).

A minute later, I was at the foot of the church steps and the soldier was walking past. Again the Holy Spirit prompted me: “Speak to him!”

“Excuse me, sir,” I called out. He turned as I added, “Can I ask you about the medals?” I was then encouraged by his smile as he told me of his service in Bosnia and Afghanistan. I asked him what age he signed up and whether he had expected to see active service. Answer? “Twenty-one, and no.”

I then asked him how it impacted his life view. He explained that as a doctor, he saw things no person should ever see and that his work continues to this day at the local hospitals.

It was now 11:59, and my heart was thumping. “And where is God in all this for you, sir?” I asked.

With sincerity that deeply touched me, he revealed, “God upholds and supports me every day of my life. Without God, I would not have made it this far.”

With my hand on my heart, I said, “The world needs faith, doesn't it, sir?”

“Oh yes, it certainly does, young lady.”

“God bless you,” I said as he departed.

“He does,” was his final reply.

This was an encounter arranged by God Himself. Later I asked myself though, why didn't I invite him to Mass?

Part B

Maxim: Soul Listening - Explained

- Listen not just with your ears but with your soul and all your senses.

Soul listening is foundational to the Genesis Method. Relational evangelizing cannot be done without it. How can we share a message that is appropriate with someone if we don't first understand their world view and frame of reference?

Listening builds trust and shows that we care about another person's experiences and opinions. Listening helps us to step into their world and respond with empathy. Soul listening assists in identifying the real needs of a person. We look to what is behind the words because often what they are not saying is the issue. For example, someone who

says they cannot believe in a God that would allow suffering likely has some personal experience that has put a barrier between themselves and God. This kind of comment should elicit an immediate but gentle response: “Do you have a personal experience?” Asked in the right way, people will quickly open up and share the reason for their comments. Compassionate listening and empathy is healing in itself but also paves the way for us to share the God of mercy and consolation.

There are other clues. With practice, we can read body language and note a repeated sentence or a change in tone. All of these can be indications of where to explore. During encounters, we are listening simultaneously to the Holy Spirit, who prompts us with questions so that we may uncover ways to share the Gospel in words that flow directly from the experience of the other person.

Maxim: Soul Listening – Encounter

One pleasant summer morning, after celebrating Mass, Fr. Jon headed off to find a coffee. En route, he noticed a lady (let’s call her Catherine) selling lottery tickets to aid a charity. Being an amicable type and seeking an encounter, he stopped and asked her about the cause. Catherine told him that her mother and two sisters had died of cancer and that she had undergone a precautionary mastectomy. Fr. Jon sympathized with her loss and praised her courage. When he asked if she had faith, she responded that she never really thought about it.

Catherine was a small lady with a large personality and a strong northern England accent. Fr. Jon asked her what had brought her to their city. She explained that she had met her partner, who was a local, but also that things had “changed considerably” in her home town, so while she missed the north, she wouldn't go back.

At the final comment, Fr. Jon noted a change in her demeanour. He felt the first nudge from the Holy Spirit, but instead decided to ask about her partner's work. In the telling of his job, Catherine made another notable remark: “Things are changing here too.”

With this repeated phrase, Fr. Jon knew there was an underlying issue. “Tell me what you mean by ‘things are changing,’” he said.

“Lots of foreigners moved in, so I was glad to move here, but it's happening here too.”

Fr. Jon started to feel uncomfortable with the racist tone and was tempted to steer the conversation in another direction, but something told him to dig deeper.

Catherine was slowly shaking her head. “I will never trust them,” she said, and then went on to refer to a recent national news story in which her friend’s daughter was a victim of violence perpetrated by members of an ethnic group.

Fr. Jon then knew that her personal experience had caused her to fear this ethnic group. While he listened and sympathized, he was keen to help her overcome her aversion. But then she opened up about a horrific personal experience. While visiting a home for work, three men from the same ethnic group had trapped her and tried to rape her. She fought for her life and managed to escape, bruised but otherwise physically unharmed. The incident, however, caused long-term psychological trauma. She eventually had to leave her job as she couldn’t cope with the recurring memories.

Catherine had opened her heart and revealed immense suffering that was hidden behind her veiled statements. Although she loved her hometown, she moved to escape from what she saw as a continued threat, and now she felt that same danger in the south. Fear was dominating her life.

She had said she was not a person of faith, but Fr. Jon knew that he must help her. While praising her courage, he brought to light the pervasive fear that was keeping her as a victim of her experience. She was listening attentively. Aware of the deep spiritual wound that had been revealed, Fr. Jon took the plunge and asked if he could pray with her. Slightly surprised and restating her lack of belief, she still consented to a prayer.

Recalling all that had been told him, he prayed that Jesus would heal her memories and help her regain her confidence, openness, and friendly attitude, and that she would be able to live her life without fear. After the prayer, she seemed to have a sense of relief and lightness about her.

By chance, later that same day, a lady from the parish also stopped to chat with Catherine. Catherine told her that she had had an unusual day because a priest had said a prayer with her. “I don't know if there's anything in it because I'm not really a believer!”

The parishioner asked her, “Well, how did you feel after the prayer?”

“Do you know, I really felt great!” she said.

“Perhaps there is something in it, then,” the parishioner replied.

“Yeah, maybe there is,” Catherine said as she beamed from ear to ear.

Maxim: Living Apprenticeship: Explained

- We learn by doing. This is "on-the-job" training.
- Every day is full of opportunities to learn.
- Our mission field is our life.

Scripture and experience reveal that God teaches us as we go. “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” (1 Cor. 1:27), St. Paul tells us. It is often said that God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Moses is a great example. He came up with some classic excuses that we still use today: What if they won't listen to me? I don't know enough! Nobody is interested! I am slow of speech and tongue. I am not eloquent or clever enough! Choose someone else (see Exodus 4:1-13). Of course, Moses' complete devotion to God won through, and God provided him with everything he needed to play his part in saving God's people and ultimately paving the way for Jesus' coming.

The same applies to us. If we are willing to step out in faith, the Holy Spirit takes over. With every effort we make, visibly fruitful or otherwise, He teaches us, kindly, step by step, preparing us gradually for greater and greater challenges and opportunities. God encourages us and helps us grow in ways we would never have known or imagined were possible.

With each effort, we become a little more confident in ourselves and the message, more resourceful, and more innovative. Our faith becomes a living thing, vibrant and exciting as we experience the power of the Holy Spirit working through us and see His effect on those we encounter. Each time we reach out, we grow in faith and closeness to the Lord.

Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, “To evangelize is to learn the art of living” (Address given to Jubilee of Catechists VC 2000). But this takes practice, practice, and more practice. Evangelizing can be likened to learning to swim: the only way to learn is by doing. You just have to start in the shallow end.

In the early days, mission means moving beyond your comfort zone, being vigilant for an opportunity, getting over yourself, and having a go when fear suggests you stop. To grow means to embrace change and be willing at times to take a risk. But with time, prayer, and complete trust, it gets easier.

It is said that the way to spell faith is R-I-S-K. We have to be prepared for the challenge.

In the course of evangelizing, we may be rejected or mocked. Some people will think we are weird. We will undoubtedly make mistakes in our approach and miss opportunities, but it is these seemingly negative experiences that give us the most significant lessons. By reflecting on our encounters, we learn. What went well, and what didn't? What do I wish I had said? What was this person really saying? What did I miss? These questions equip us for the next opportunity and are a vital part of our progress as evangelizers. Life itself becomes an apprenticeship.

Here are a few encounters that taught me a lot but didn't go the way I had hoped!

Blooper 1

I was buying a rug for the sitting room and a young employee was helping me with sizes. I browsed the range he had shown me for a good while but found nothing suitable.

“Do you have any others?” I asked.

He led me to the other side of the room and pulled out a selection of mats about the size of a dishcloth.

“We have these, and I think they are prayer mats.”

“Oh, thank you,” I said, “but they are far too small.”

As I walked toward the exit, I slapped my forehead... hard!

Reflection: What opportunity did I miss? How might I have turned this into an encounter?

Blooper 2 (borrowed from a fellow disciple)

Joan has a neighbour who is a Jehovah's Witness. One day the neighbour came to the door with a bucket asking for water since their supply was temporarily cut off. Joan invited her in, filled up her bucket, and sent her on her way with God's blessing, inviting her to come back if she needed any more.

Reflection: What opportunity did she miss? How might she have turned this into an encounter (think of John 4:10)? Think about the Woman at the Well and the gift of Living Water!

Blooper 3

On my way through town, I noticed an elderly man who was leaning heavily on a table outside of a cafe. He was quite thin and his shirt buttoned up wrong so that only one side of it was tucked in. I could see his eyes were rheumy and that he had a drippy nose. I believed that a man like that could do with a cup of coffee and was certain someone of his age might have a good story to tell. I introduced myself to him.

George, I learned, was an 83 year old local. The staff were on a first-name-basis with him, which struck me because this was an expensive cafe and the string holding his pants up didn't speak of opulence. I sat down, resisting the urge to offer him a tissue.

Me: What can I get you, George?

George: A latte and one of them there crumpets with butter and jam.

He spoke in local dialect, and he was hungry for an English delicacy. There was nothing wrong with his eyesight. I wondered if his order would fit in my meagre budget.

Me: So George, tell me, you must have seen a lot of changes to this town over the years?

George silently munched his crumpet.

Me: What about your family?

George: They're dead.

Yes, pretty dumb question. He was 83.

Me: What about your parents? When they were alive, what did they do?

George: Father was a blacksmith. Mother was just at home.

Me: Did they take you to church?

George (rolling his eyes): Oh, flipping heck, you're not one of them God-botherers, are you? I suppose you're gonna start going on and on now.

Me (laughing): Well, George, I can think of worse things to be, and I've got to be truthful. I love Jesus, but I'm not gonna go on and on. I promise. I would rather hear about you.

We got a bit of cheeky banter going on then. George told me he used to go to the Baptist church with his parents but not for long.

George: All a waste of time!

Me: Well, what did you do with all that time you saved George?

George: Bit o' this. Bit o' that.

This was becoming hard work. I implored the Holy Spirit to help me out. Thinking I might find a way to join the dots on some "God-incidences" without going *on and on*, as he seemed to fear, I thought of a question.

Me: Tell me the most amazing thing that's happened to you in your 83 years.

George: I slept with 5 women.

Oh my goodness, I thought. I presume he didn't have the nose problem back then.

Me: George! I am shocked. Surely not all at once?

George: Sadly not.

Me: Seriously George. You're 83. Is that the best you can come up with?

George: It was great!

Me: George, you need to meet Jesus before time runs out.

This was met with another eye roll.

George: Talking of that, I should be getting back. Do you think you would have time to come back to my house?

Oh, the poor old chap, I thought, perhaps he can't manage the stairs. Maybe his helpers don't come until later, or perhaps he can't make himself his dinner.

But for the first time in the conversation, I got the Holy Spirit's nudge, and asked a question.

Me (taking a last mouthful of coffee): George, what did you want me to come back for?

George: Well, I thought we could have a bit of slap and tickle.

Me (literally spraying coffee across the table): George, I can't believe you said that! I think I will get you a taxi.

It turned out George was in that cafe often. Every day someone would take pity and buy him a coffee and a crumpet.

Reflection: I try not think about it!