

How Many People Have You Converted?

On Amodou's cross — and the power of a relationship with no result yet

The Story: How Many People Have You Evangelized?

As a missionary, this is a question I hear often — but it's difficult for me to answer. I don't recall ever making a special effort to proselytize anyone. I have always said that my calling is to become a neighbor to others. Of course, that could also be seen as an excuse.

In August 2005, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance sent me to Niger to assist with famine relief work, responding to a request from Lutheran World Relief. For about four weeks, I worked alongside Nigerian staff to organize and train them on the food distribution system, finances, and statistical reporting. Fluent in French, experience in Africa, vaccinations complete, able to depart immediately — I was one of very few who met all the requirements.

Though we called it system design, those of us on the ground — myself included — were attempting organized food distribution for the first time. We lived together in harsh rural conditions, working toward fair and adequate distribution for everyone who needed it.

The First Farewell

After four weeks, Amodou — the transport officer who drove me to the airport for my return to the US — asked:

"Simon, our country is Muslim. All the staff we work with, all the people in the villages we help — they are all Muslim. Why do you and your Christian colleagues endure such hardship to help us? We spent weeks together, and I still don't understand."

"Amodou, no matter how I try to explain it, I don't think I can make you understand. But I'm certain that if you keep asking that question, someday you will meet my Savior, Jesus."

And we parted ways.

Six Months Later

Six months later, I returned for a week to check whether the system was operating properly. After completing site visits, system reviews, and modifications, Amodou spoke in the car heading back to the airport.

"I still think about our conversation sometimes. I haven't met the Jesus you speak of yet. But I wanted to remember our time together — so I'm giving you this cross, made by the nomads of our desert."

It didn't look particularly well-made. But this gift, filled with Amodou's sincerity, stands as the closest thing to an evangelistic event during my entire ministry.

Small Group Discussion Guide — Church Community

This story quietly questions the culture of measuring evangelism by numbers. Dr. Park did not try to evangelize Amodou — he simply lived alongside him for four weeks. That life generated a question in Amodou, and Amodou gave a cross in response to something he had not yet understood. The power of a relationship with no result yet — that is the heart of this story.

Young Adults (20s–35)

Opening (5 min)

- Have you ever shared your faith with someone — or had someone share with you? What approach was used, and how did it feel?

Discussion (20 min)

- Dr. Park says he has no memory of making a special effort to evangelize anyone. Does that sound like a failure as a missionary — or like something else?
- Amodou gave Dr. Park a cross while saying he had not yet met Jesus. What does that act mean? What had actually happened between them?
- "No matter how I try to explain it, I don't think I can make you understand" — but Dr. Park does say something. How does that answer work? What gives it its weight?
- Has there been a time when someone's life — not their words — created a question in you? Or when your own life may have done that for someone else?

Scripture (10 min)

1 Peter 3:15 — "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

Amodou asked first. The life came before the explanation. How does this story connect to what Peter describes — and does it change how you read the verse?

Application (5 min)

- What kind of questions is your life creating in the people around you?

Adults (36–60)

Opening (5 min)

- "How many people have you evangelized?" — when you hear that question, what do you feel?

Discussion (20 min)

- What do you make of the culture of measuring evangelism by numbers? What is right about it, and what is missing?
- The presence of Christians working through hardship in a Muslim country created a question in Amodou that he couldn't shake for six months. What kind of questions is your faith community's presence creating in those around it?
- Amodou gave the cross without yet understanding. Dr. Park calls this the closest thing to an evangelistic event in his whole ministry. What does that say about what evangelism actually is?

- **"The relationship with no result yet" — do you have relationships like that? What sustains them?**

Scripture (10 min)

John 13:35 — "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Not argument but way of life as witness. How is that being lived out — or not — in your community?

Application (5 min)

- **Is there someone in your life who, like Amodou, is still holding the question? How do you maintain that relationship — without forcing a result?**

Seniors (60+)

Opening (5 min)

- **Looking back over a long life: has there been a time when presence — just being with someone — left something more lasting than words could have?**

Discussion (20 min)

- **Dr. Park spent four weeks simply living and working alongside Amodou. What did that time leave in Amodou — and what does it say about how faith is transmitted?**
- **Amodou said honestly: "I haven't met the Jesus you speak of yet" — and then gave the cross. Why is that honesty part of what makes this story beautiful?**
- **How would you explain evangelism to a younger generation — from what you have learned and lived?**

Application (5 min)

- **What is the one thing from today's story that stays with you most?**

Small Group Discussion Guide — Community Groups

This guide requires no faith background. The story asks questions that belong to everyone: What moves people — explanation or example? Can you be genuinely close to someone across a deep religious or cultural difference? And what does it mean to stay in a relationship where you still don't fully understand each other?

Young Adults (20s–35)

Getting In (5 min)

- Has there been a time — with no religious dimension at all — when someone's actions moved you before you understood why? What happened?

Discussion (20 min)

- Amodou gave the cross without having understood what it meant. Can you be genuinely moved by something you don't yet understand? Has that happened to you?
- Have you ever worked closely with someone from a very different religious or cultural background? What did you learn — or find difficult?
- "No matter how I try to explain it, I don't think I can make you understand" — what kinds of things resist explanation and require experience instead?

One Step (5 min)

- Is there a relationship in your life where time together matters more than words? What would it take to invest more in it?

Adults (36–60)

Getting In (5 min)

- Have you worked alongside someone whose beliefs or values were very different from yours — and found genuine respect, even friendship? What made that possible?

Discussion (20 min)

- Amodou's question — "Why do you endure such hardship to help us?" — arose from watching, not from a conversation. What does that say about how people actually form the questions that matter most to them?
- Different ideologies, religions, cultures — what is the basis for genuine collaboration across those differences? Is it possible to work together and remain honest about the differences at the same time?
- Maintaining a relationship when the outcome is unknown — what sustains that? What makes it feel worthwhile?

One Step (5 min)

- What was the most striking thing from today's discussion — in one sentence?

Seniors (60+)

Getting In (5 min)

- **Over a long life:** has there been a time when you were genuinely moved or grateful for something you didn't fully understand? What was it like?

Discussion (20 min)

- **People from very different religious and cultural backgrounds working closely together —** how do you think that's possible? What does it require?
- **Amodou gave a handmade cross. Have you ever received a gift like that — from someone who gave it out of sincerity rather than understanding? What did it mean?**

One Step (5 min)

- **Share the one thing from today's story that stays with you most.**

Leader's Guide

For Church Groups and Community Groups

In Dr. Park's Own Words

"I did not evangelize Amodou. I simply lived alongside him for four weeks. Knowing that he had not yet met Jesus, he gave me the cross. That sincerity — to me — was the gift. Whether 'how many people have you evangelized' is the wrong question, or whether I am the one who is wrong, I still can't say for certain."

Reflection questions from Dr. Park:

- Does "I have no memory of making a special effort to evangelize" sound like a failure — or like something else?
- Amodou gave the cross without yet having met Jesus. What does that act say?
- Has someone's life — not their words — ever created a question in you? Or has yours done that for someone else?
- What sustains a relationship whose outcome is still unknown?

What This Story Is Really About

The story has four layers:

- Evangelism and how it works — explanation versus embodied life
- Unmeasurable results — the relationship that resists being counted
- Genuine neighboring across religious difference — mutual respect without erasing the difference
- The beauty of incompleteness — Amodou has not yet met Jesus, and the story does not rush that

How to Open the Session

For church groups, begin before reading with:

"Have you ever shared your faith with someone — or had someone share with you? What approach was taken, and how did it feel?"

For community groups, begin with:

"Has someone's actions — not their words — ever moved you before you understood why?"

Watch for These Three Risks

Risk 1: The story becomes a debate about evangelism methods

What it looks like: Discussion divides into "life witness vs. verbal proclamation" as competing methods, with each side defending its approach.

Why it matters: Dr. Park used words too — he answered Amodou directly. What gave those words their weight was the four weeks of life that preceded them. The story is not arguing for one method over another.

Redirect: "Dr. Park did say something to Amodou — he gave a real answer. What made that answer land the way it did?"

Risk 2: Amodou's not yet believing is read as failure

What it looks like: "So the evangelism didn't actually work" — the story is received as a story about a mission that fell short.

Why it matters: Dr. Park explicitly calls this the closest thing to an evangelistic event in his entire ministry. He is not calling it a failure. The story ends with a cross given in sincerity, a question still held, a relationship still open.

Redirect: "Dr. Park calls this the closest thing to an evangelistic event in his whole ministry. Why would he say that about a story where Amodou has not yet believed?"

Risk 3: Bias toward or against Islam displaces the focus on Amodou

What it looks like: The discussion moves toward views on Islam as a religion, rather than staying with Amodou as a specific person whose specific honesty and generosity is the story's center.

Why it matters: Amodou's giving of a cross while saying "I haven't met your Jesus yet" is an act of remarkable integrity and warmth — that is what the story is inviting us to see.

Redirect: "Let's stay with Amodou's specific act for a moment. He said he hadn't understood yet — and then gave the cross. What do you make of that particular moment?"

Closing the Session

- **Life-as-witness reflection: Ask each person to sit quietly and ask themselves: what kind of questions is my life creating in the people around me? This need not be shared aloud.**
- **The open relationship: Invite each person to think of someone in their life who is still holding the question — and to commit to staying in that relationship without forcing a result.**
- **Church groups: Close by meditating together on Amodou's cross — a handmade, imperfect cross given in sincerity before understanding. What does your own life offer that is like that?**

"I haven't met the Jesus you speak of yet."

"But I wanted to remember our time together."

The relationship had no result yet. It had something better: it was still open.