

CD 702 Working with People  
Christina Deleveaux  
February 9, 2023  
Interview of an Irreligious Person

On a Tuesday evening in February, I interviewed an irreligious person at Grand Central Station in Manhattan. Michael is a middle-aged, Caucasian man who self-identified as irreligious. When I encountered Michael, he was standing against a wall, waiting for his friend to arrive. As I approached him, I smiled and said, "May I ask you a question about religion?" He responded by saying, "I'm not religious." Then I replied "That's exactly what I hoped you would say." Then I asked him the question: "If I were to speak to you or your family about God, how would you like me to represent Him?" Michael gave open and sincere answers to that question.

First, Michael said he wanted me to describe God as "benevolent, kind, and beautiful."

He said he wanted to describe God as being "Nothing like him. The stranger the better." Michael said that "Jesus was supposedly God in human form; and the Roman deities were the same. He said that he thinks it is unnecessary for God to be in the form of a human.

Next Michael said he wanted me to describe God as "understanding, meeting him where he is. Non-judgmental." Michael noted that people just want to be understood. So, he wanted God to be described as someone who could relate to anyone but an entity that no one could relate to. He reiterated that all deities have human attributes but that is unnecessary. He noted that it was Jesus' similarity to humans that appealed to people." But he doesn't think that a God who is similar to humans is necessary. He remarked: "Why would someone want to hear from a God with the same experiences that people have. How would people learn from that?" he asked rhetorically. I nodded quietly to encourage him as he spoke.

Then I asked Michael to tell me more about the level of involvement that this God has in the earth's activities. Michael said that the God that I should describe is completely uninvolved in the mundane, day-to-day of life. This surprised me, so I asked him to explain. He said that God should not be described as being always present. He reasoned that "if God was constantly present then God could disappoint you like humans or family." I nodded and asked him to tell me more about the way that he would like me to represent God to his family. Michael said that he wanted God to be described as a quiet presence. "Whatever this force is it would let me know that it is within me. He inhabits me. So that I can be him/her."

Michael was very engaged during the interview. As we spoke, he commented that the topic of God was a very deep subject and he hasn't thought about it in this way before. Michael also said that if he knew he could have such interesting conversations at Grand Central, he would have come more often. He said that he has been in where I am before, having to ask people questions, so he understands why I need to interview him. I was curious about what interviewing he has done of others, but I didn't want to veer off the topic of our interview.

As I reflect on this interview with Michael, he emerges as more than just an irreligious person. He is someone's son, friend, and more importantly, he is someone who God loves. This interview was a new and different conversation for me, and it required me to ask different kinds of questions than I have asked before. This assignment allowed me to practice my ability to be a good listener by using my body language and facial expressions to convey empathy. This interview also forced me to listen between the lines, to hear what was unspoken. After my interview with Michael, he smiled and shook my hand. Later that night, after I got home, I thought about this interview and I said a prayer for Michael.