Ashleigh Weaver
CD702: Working with People
Dr. Sanders, Prof. Park
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LE6 - Interview with an irreligious person

I met Shelly about 9 years ago when I started serving in my first part-time “paid” on-staff Worship Leader position. The church was a new church plant that had regularly had Sunday services for about 12 months before I joined the leadership team. Shelly was married with two children and her family had been a part of the church since the beginning. Shelly served as the media/communications director, went to a private Christian school, and grew up in a home of believers in Jesus. Shelly’s husband (Andy) struggled with his faith, when I started at the church they had been married for a few years and had two children however, Andy was a practicing Jew. Shelly accepted his beliefs which I was always curious about considering they would attend church together and were raising kids together but Shelly didn’t speak much of it. About 6 months after I had been at the church Andy put his faith in Jesus and they both become active in the ministry of the church.

Fast forward 9 years later and Shelly is divorced, in a same-sex relationship, and considers herself an irreligious, indifferent to religion person. During these 9 years obviously, a lot happened in Shelly’s life. Shelly was a dream church volunteer, regularly attending and serving the church in various ways, praying over her husband, leading, and celebrating as her husband came to faith. After about 4-5 years of knowing Shelly was

hired full-time as a youth director for a large church and moved her family 3 hours to a new city to be on staff full time, then only a few short years later she end up walking away from her faith and her marriage, and entering into a same-sex relationship.

Shelly and I have maintained a good relationship over the years, although she has been hurt by many Christians I have tried to be someone within the body of Christ to stay connected with her, let her know I respect her, I love her, I care for her, and am always here. Shelly is aware I started seminary last semester and this interview assignment felt like a great opportunity to hear her heart. When I text Shelly to see if she would be interested in having a conversation with me for my class she responded “I read your text” but she didn’t answer my question. I knew what that meant, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to. I told Shelly I wanted to ask her one question, and she would simply give me one answer and that was it. Shelly expressed she didn’t feel like a deep conversation, I told her I respected her and if she would be okay with it I would stick with the one question, listen to the response and that was it. No more discussion. She agreed.

I asked Shelly, “If I were to speak to you or your family about God, how would you like me to represent Him?”. Shelly grew up going to church, went to Christian school, and went to Bible studies/small groups her entire life. She prayed over her husband for years and got to be a part of baptizing him once he came to faith. Shelly knows the Gospel, and knows the word better than most who would consider themselves “irreligious”. Shelly

initially responded and said, “I honestly don’t even know how to answer that question”. Shelly and I got a laugh out of her response because we both know she is never someone to be at a loss for words. You see, Shelly is the type of person to join the rally and protest on the street, hold up signs for justice, and rally people together to start a petition for what she believes. She had a hard time responding, not because she didn’t know how to respond but because of her experiences with those who represent God.

Do you know what Shelly wants from me as I speak to her as a representative of God? She wants me to be honest, she wants me to stand firm on what I believe and represent Christ as he should be represented (based on the Word of God). She doesn’t want me to water down what I believe or shy from my beliefs because of hers. She wants to be a part of my life, and she wants me to be a part of hers regardless if we don’t agree on our beliefs in God. Shelly was once heavily involved in the Christian community and had many believers in her life, since she has changed her beliefs in God many (almost all) in the body of Christ (who she felt like were her friends/family) have shied away from her, no longer invite her to their social gatherings, removed themselves from her social media pages, etc… She feels these things have been done without conversations, without justification, and have been very hurtful. Shelly believes if there is a God, this isn’t the way he should be represented. Wow, I agree with Shelly.

After reflecting on Shelly’s life, her extreme life change in a short period of time, and how most of the Christians she felt closest to are no

longer involved in her life it broke me! I want to represent God as a God who pursues, a God who forgives, a God who loves, a God who redeems, and a God who re-writes and restores stories just like Shelly. Shelly's response was short, but it was just enough to make me evaluate myself as a representative and follower of Christ. How am I representing God to those who don’t believe what I believe? Do I shy away from time spent with those who oppose my beliefs? Do I invite irreligious into my circle? Do I pursue these types of friendships?

I got to practice my listening skills with Shelly for this interview, and I believe she felt respected, loved, and heard. I will stay connected with Shelly and do my best to remember her thoughts on representing God respectfully to those who believe differently than I do while staying true to my faith.