

“Art of Conversation” Week 1

Workshop Introduction

Over the next few weeks, we will be focusing on how we can engage people in meaningful conversations, whether neighbors, friends, co-workers or whomever.

Two key Bible passages will shape our discussions:

1 Peter 3:15-16: *“In your hearts set apart 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.”*

Colossians 4:5-6: *“Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”*

Throughout these midweek conversations, you might experience some level of tension that is related to a balance we’re trying to strike. On the one hand, we don’t ever want to try to manipulate conversations or move them to some predetermined spiritual destination. Our neighbors, co-workers, and friends aren’t projects to be fixed or souls to be converted, but rather people to be loved and cared for and listened to. We want to treat them with the same open-handed and open-hearted posture with which we’d want them to treat us.

On the other hand, we do want to be faithful to Scripture’s call to *“be prepared to give an answer”* (1 Pt 3:15) and to *“make the most of every opportunity”* (Col 4:5). That requires some thoughtful and prayerful preparation, so that when opportunities present themselves, we are equipped to engage in meaningful spiritual conversations. These aren’t to be a set of “canned” responses or “formulas” that you apply to conversations, but rather to have a set of tools and thoughtful perspectives that you can access in the moment as the *Spirit* leads you and as is appropriate to the situation.

“Cultivating Curiosity”

Tonight's Focus

Tonight's discussion focuses on the role of asking thoughtful questions when we're in conversations with others. Two Sundays ago, we were encouraged to be ***“interested rather than interesting.”*** Our love for other people begins with a sincere interest in who they are and a genuine curiosity about their lives. While sometimes we can “speak our way into spiritual conversations” by sharing our own lives and perspectives with others, more often than not a better approach is to “listen our way into spiritual conversations.” That is, simply by asking thoughtful and genuine questions of others, we get to know them better and we find ourselves quickly involved in significant conversations that touch on the issues of life in all its joys and challenges. While we might assume that our non-Christian friends are closed off to faith, most people are actually quite hungry to engage in meaningful and even spiritual conversations with people with whom they feel safe.

Tonight, we have provided a set of questions (page 4) that you might ask someone in a conversation. While some of us are naturally gifted in the moment to ask good questions, others of us can use a little help with generating thoughtful questions. As you'll see, some of these questions will feel more “spiritual” in nature and some will feel quite “ordinary.” Some will resonate with you, and some will not. And, of course, none of these questions are intended to be the single question you ask in a conversation. There is an art in allowing one good question to lead into another good question that only experience and a genuine curiosity in other people can provide.

Cultivating Curiosity

Spend 5-10 minutes alone with the questions on the following page. During that time, please do the following:

- Identify/check a couple of questions from each category that you appreciate most.
- Identify/check one or two questions in the list that you would really appreciate being asked by someone who is trying to get to know you better.
- At the bottom, identify some other questions you can come up with on your own that are not included in the list. To do this, it might be helpful to think of actual people in your life and things you're genuinely curious about and would want to ask them if the situation presented itself.

Group: Share with the group along the following lines:

- Share which question(s) you'd appreciate someone asking you and why.
- Share 1 question you created on your own.
- Can you think of a time when a thoughtful question led to a really rich discussion with someone who wasn't a Christian? The question may have been "spiritual" in nature or just something you were genuinely curious about. Share your experience with the group.

Solo Reflection.

List several people in your life who are not Christians who have come to mind during this outreach series. Take a moment and consider 1 & 2 questions that you are most curious about for each person and that you could see yourself asking the next time the context would be appropriate.

Name of person:
Question(s) you'd like to ask:

Name of person:
Question(s) you'd like to ask:

Name of person
Question(s) you'd like to ask:

Name of person
Question(s) you'd like to ask:

Conversation Questions

Surface Questions

- How do you like to spend your weekends?
- What are you reading these days? What are you watching these days?
- Where did you grow up?
- What do you love most about your job?
- What prompted you to pursue your career?
- If you were to choose a different career path over again, what would you choose?
- What do you like to do with your free time?
- What's your favorite thing to research?
- Are you reading any interesting books right now?
- What's your favorite movie and why?
- What's your ideal vacation?
- How did you meet your spouse? What drew you to each other?

Serious Questions

- What are you passionate about? What gets you up in the morning?
- What's something that would probably surprise most people about you?
- Who's been the biggest influence in your life?
- How do you maintain balance in life?
- How do you cope with stress? How do you handle pressure?
- If money was no object, what would you do with your life?
- What was your family like growing up?
- How would you describe your father/mother and their impact on your life?
- What have you learned about yourself through marriage?
- How has being a parent changed your perspective on life?
- What have you learned about yourself through being a parent?
- What does a successful life look like to you?
- What's your picture of the good life?
- What would you want your legacy to be?
- Bring up a current event: "How have you been processing the recent . . ."

Spiritual Questions

- What kind of spiritual/religious background did you grow up in?
- Would you consider yourself a spiritual or religious person?
- Do you still believe what you were brought up with?
- Has anything ever happened to you that made you think there might be a God or spiritual realm?
- What has been your experience of Christians/the church?
- What are your thoughts about good and evil?
- What do you think about Jesus?
- What do you think is the purpose of life?

Other: