

“Art of Conversation” Week 3

“Cooperating With The Spirit” Introduction

Tonight, we continue our theme of how to engage with other people in meaningful conversations. So far, we have talked about asking people thoughtful questions and sharing the stories of how God has worked in our own lives. We begin tonight by acknowledging the primary role of the Holy Spirit in revealing God to other people, and we consider how we might cooperate with the Spirit in that process.

Author Gary Tyra reminds us that the Holy Spirit is “*a missionary Spirit*” and that, “God’s Spirit has a penchant for using God’s people to accomplish God’s purposes. One of the primary ways the Holy Spirit does this is by prompting Christ’s followers to speak and act toward others on behalf of him, in ways designed to evangelize, edify and equip.” (from *The Holy Spirit in Mission*). Again and again, in the book of Acts we see God’s Spirit filling believers and empowering them towards speech that bears spiritual fruit in other people’s lives (see *Acts 2:2; 4:8, 31; 7:55-56; 10:44-46; 13:9-10*).

Tonight, we want to grab a hold of this truth. When we engage in conversation with other people, we want to always be aware of two things:

- 1) the Holy Spirit may be moving in that person through our conversation in ways we would not anticipate and
- 2) the Holy Spirit may be moving in us and prompting us to say a particular thing that will bear fruit in that person’s heart and mind.

That means when we are engaged in a conversation with someone, we are actually having **two conversations** at the same time: a conversation with that person and also a conversation with God where we are asking, “**What are you up to, Lord? How do you see this person right now? What are you wanting me to say or not say in this moment?**” A lot of what we are talking about takes faith: faith that God is working in the other person even though we may not see it. And it also takes courage: courage to trust that God might call us to speak in a way that takes us out of our comfort zone.

Group Discussion:

- What do you think of this idea of having a two-way conversation? Can you relate to that? What questions or issues does that raise for you? Do you have any examples of experience that?

“Spirit-led Wondering”

Tonight's Focus

Tonight, we also want to introduce the idea of wonder. We introduce the idea of asking Spirit-led “wondering” questions and statements. In our society today, many people’s beliefs have become more like billboards. They are quick statements like tweets or soundbites that may sound definitive, but oftentimes they aren’t actually well thought out and may simply be said to deter further thought on the subject. The opportunity for us, then, is to cooperate with the Spirit to help people think more deeply about what they believe with the prayer that they might discover God’s truth in the process.

Author Doug Pollock describes how good wondering questions/statements are a way to probe sensitively and reflectively into someone’s belief systems, but in a way that is open-ended and promotes more dialogue and reflection. They can facilitate that person’s own journey of self-discovery. They are an opportunity to help others ask the important questions, seek the answers, and knock on the door of the kingdom (Mt 7:7).

According to Pollock, “here is what happens when wonder enters into your relational connections:

- a climate of mutual curiosity in which we explore the mystery of life together, as fellow sojourners
- a tearing-down of the us-versus-them wall
- possibilities of mutual discovery
- elimination of the fear factor that keeps most Christ-followers from actively participating in spiritual conversations.”

Sometimes we feel like we either have to speak truth into a situation (and create conflict) or we choose not to say anything at all. Wondering provides a healthy alternative that keeps a conversation going but gets at the deeper issues of the matter. So tonight we consider listening to the Spirit and cooperating with Him to help others wonder about the deep truths of life.

Spirit-led Wondering

Solo Reflection.

Take 5-10 minutes to read the following statements that might come up in the course of a conversation. Under each statement write down one or two possible wondering questions or statements you might say in response. The goal of this exercise is not to memorize a series of questions and responses, but rather to simply practice wondering well with others.

Example

Statement: ***"I don't think there is a God."***

Wondering questions:

- *I'm wondering if there was a time in your life when you did think there was a God.*
- *What in your life led you to that conclusion?*

All religions are basically the same.

I believe in love and not organized religion, besides I'm a good person.

I consider myself a spiritual person.

I'm going to party hard this weekend.

I think Christians are hypocritical and judgmental.

You Christians hate _____. I don't want to be a part of anything that hates.

I don't see how a loving God could allow so much suffering in the world

You think all other religions are wrong. You are so prideful.

My church is my friends and family. That is all I need.

You pray, but I meditate and think good thoughts. That does the same thing.

Spirit-led Wondering

Write down at least one statement not mentioned above that has been challenging for you to respond well to.

Group Discussion:

Break into twos or threes and take 15-20 minutes to do the following:

- Walk through the statements above together. Take one statement at a time, and share your wondering questions with each other, and feel free to talk about anything that comes to mind as you do that together.
- Share the statement you came up with on your own and have the group wonder out loud possible questions with which to respond.

Homework:

This week, practice wondering with a spouse, roommate, or friend. Think of a topic that's been stirred up by the media, and ask to share what they're wondering about the topic. Ask a few wondering questions from their initial thoughts and see where the conversation takes you. Then share what you've been wondering.

Leader Notes

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Gather & Welcome

Begin by welcoming people. Ask people to put Nov. 5th, 6pm at Grace on their calendar for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church prayer night. Then ask the following question: Can you share a story of any interesting conversations with someone who doesn't know Jesus since we last met? What did you notice and what did you take from that conversation?

Read Cooperating with the Spirit Introduction and discuss

Read out loud for the group and answer the group discussion questions.

Read Tonight's Focus

Read the page. If its clear that they understand then move on. If you need to give an example there is a sample conversation on the next page from “God Space.”

Spirit- led Wondering Solo Reflection (5-10 Min)

Take 5-10 minutes to read teh following statements that might come up in the course of a converstaion. Under each statement write down one or two possible wondering questions or statements you might say in response. See examples provided in the exercise.

Small Group Discussion (15 -20 Min)

Break into twos or threes and take 15-20 minutes to do the following: 1) Walk through the statements above together. Take one statement at a time, and share your wondering questions with each other, and feel free to talk about anything that comes to mind as you do that together. 2) Share the statement you came up with on your own and have the group wonder out loud possible questions with which to respond.

Whole Group Discussion (5 Min)

Ask the group how it was for them and what they learned through the activities.

Go over Homework (2 Min)

This week, practice wondering with a spouse, roommate, or friend. Think of a topic that's been stirred up by the media, and ask to share what they're wondering about the topic. Ask a few wondering questions from their initial thoughts and see where the conversation takes you. Then share what you've been wondering.

Close the Evening & Pray

Pray for specific names of people who have come to mind during the study who make difinite closed statements.

Sample

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...Mormon Missionaries knocked on my door interrupting me watching my football game:

After they finished their awkward attempts to connect with me, I said, “I enjoy meeting people who have deep convictions and are passionate their beliefs. You guys seem to fit that category because I'm guessing you've had a few doors slammed in your face today.”

They laughed and acknowledged that this had been the case. I continued, “I'm wondering what makes you willing to risk this kind of rejection in my neighborhood.”

Elder Bob and Elder Jim explained that they were passing out the Book of Mormon and inviting my neighbors to attend their place of worship. After they finished I said, “I'm wondering what good news you feel my neighbors and I are missing out on that the Book of Mormon will supply us with.”

They did their best to explain that the Book of Mormon represents the rest of God's story and that Christians are missing out on it. After they finished, I summarized what I had heard to make sure that I had the whole picture. I then said, “It sounds like you guys are going door to door in my neighborhood because you're convinced that my neighbors and I are missing the last piece of God's revelation, which would help us in this life and in the life to come.”

They nodded in agreement, so I wondered some more. “I'm wondering, if my neighbors and I did take your book and read it and agree to come to your place of worship, could you assure us that this would put us in a right standing with God?”

After thinking about my wondering question for a moment, they both replied, “We hope so!”

I continued, “I'm wondering if you guys have this same assurance.”

Again, they said, “We hope so!”

Now you've really stirred my curiosity,” I said. “I'm wondering what more two guys like you, who have given two years of your life to spread your beliefs, would have to do in order to have this assurance. Would you need to spend more time each day going door to door? Would you need to spend more time reading the Book of Mormon? Please fill in the blank, because I'm trying to figure out how two guys like yourselves, who by most people's standards seem very committed to your beliefs, do not know for sure whether you'll spend eternity with God.”

Elder Bob and Elder Jim paused and reflected. My wondering questions had penetrated their defenses and talking points. We were now thinking together, as fellow human beings, about their truth claims. I continued in this thoughtful moment to summarize what they'd been saying in my own words. I said, “Correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like you're asking my neighbors and me to get off the religious treadmills of our choice and jump on the model you're selling door to door. While I want to affirm you guys again for your passion and depth of conviction, I'm struggling to understand what I have to gain by doing this. By your own admission, if I jump on your treadmill and the ride ends, I'll still be left wondering whether I'll spend eternity with God.”

Elder Jim looked at me and honestly said, “I see what you mean.”