

## **Conversations Questions and Answers**

### **Introduction.**

Today we're going to be closing our series on *Conversations* by looking at some of your questions which you asked last week.

### **Part #1 Questions about my own inadequacies or fears**

- **What if they ask me a question to which I don't know the answer?**

Whenever you are asked a question that you do not know the answer, say this . . . every time. Ready? Say, "I don't know, I'll find out." People know when you're bluffing, so don't try to bluff. Just write the question(s) down and then tell the person that you'll get back to them later. Here's what this will do: (1) it will communicate that you're honest, that you're willing to admit what you don't know, and that you don't pretend to know everything; (2) it will give you another opportunity to have a spiritual conversation with them. Don't forget that having a spiritual conversation is in the context of a relationship that you're building and growing with this person. You're not trying to get a decision and move on. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 that he wanted to impart not only the Gospel but his very own life, because they had become so dear to him. So it's a relationship that's being built, not just a question that is being answered.

You may even know the answer to the question but if you answer it, you'll get off on a tangent. Avoid this by saying: "Would it be okay if I wrote that question down and talked about it later?"

Sometimes when I'm talking with someone about Christianity; I will ask them, "When was the last time you picked up a NT and read about the life of Christ?" A lot of people have read or heard or experienced Christianity in a church setting or seen about it from a televangelist. Or they've watched some mega-church TV preacher; and that's their perspective about Christianity. I think this is confusing. In fact, one of the questions was, "How can I share Christianity when the person has so many questions about different denominations (Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, Catholics, etc.) And some of them have been at odds with each other, etc.) The point is, it can be confusing; and conversations about Jesus can easily get derailed. So I wouldn't try to defend the denominations; and I wouldn't try to defend the Crusades; and I wouldn't try to defend the sin that Christians have committed over the centuries. What I would do is to encourage someone to read the Gospels. Read about Jesus himself. Read and then have pencil and paper; and let's deal with the text. Answer the questions you can answer and those that you cannot, say, "I don't know. We'll find out and talk about it next time."

- **How can I share my faith when I don't feel as if my life is altogether? It feels hypocritical.**

Let me answer this in two parts: Part one is this. Last year, Sarah had back surgery. She was debilitating pain. I've never seen her that much crippling pain. Before surgery, she was slumped over a yoga ball; that was her only relief. The day of surgery, she could walk—that night. 4 weeks after surgery, she was playing table tennis. Now, how would it sound, if someone else was having the same problem and came to Sarah; or Sarah noticed the problem—how would sound if Sarah thought, “I'd like to say something about how you can be healed of your back problem; but my health hasn't been that good in the past, and so I feel kind of funny telling you.” Well, that wouldn't make sense, would it? Because, and I like how one person has defined evangelism—one beggar telling another beggar, where to find the bread.

*15Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16 NIV)*

I think this touches on our style of sharing as well. Our tone is not one of moral superiority but of humility—coming across as someone who is holier than thou. We are simply sharing good news about Someone who has made a difference in our lives; and He can make a difference in your life, too.

That said, and here is the second part: It is extremely difficult—and for that matter, counterproductive—to share your faith when you aren't making any effort at all to imitate Jesus. One pastor put it this way to a group of pastors, “If the people in your church are listening to you talk about Christianity and they can't see themselves being like you, that's not good!” There's no sense having a conversation about Christ if you are not depending daily on Christ for your decisions and thoughts and habits and speech, etc. And that's why—and I'll say it again—if you are a gossip at work, if you are difficult, if you are unethical, if you are lazy, if you are cranky and moody—and then someone asks you where you go to church, don't tell them you go to Windsor Road!

Christians are not sinless; but as we grow in Christ, Christians should sin less and less and less. Our lives need to exhibit an attractiveness to Jesus.

“More often than not, it is what you are rather than what you say that will bring an unbeliever to Christ. This then is the ultimate apologetic. For the ultimate apologetic is: your life.” (Craig 1994, 302)

- **What if sharing my faith costs me my friendship with someone; or a relationship with a family member? Or my spouse?**

Well, it might. But in my experience, the times that sharing my faith has cost me friendships have been when I have come across pushy, obnoxious, or argumentative. Few people have ever been won to Christ by losing an argument; rarely do people ever get debated into the kingdom.

That said, for some of you; you are in a situation where your faith, where getting involved in a church community, serving the poor, being salt and light, giving and tithing—sometimes friends, family, and even your spouse; they are just not on the same page spiritually. They are resistant. How do you share Christ with someone who does not want to hear it?

In 1 Peter 3:1-2 talks about how Christian wives can share the Gospel without words, *“Wives, in the same way be submissive [submit yourself] to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.* “In the same way” as what? In the same way as Christ, who did not assert himself and his rights but he served. He was selfless. Literally, *submit yourself*, meaning, you do this to yourself. In other words, we influence our spouses by winning them over by Christ-like behavior! This is hard! Yes. Crucifixion is. Which is why 1 Peter 2:21-24 says,

*21To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

*22“He committed no sin,*

*and no deceit was found in his mouth.”[a] 23When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

Someone once said, “Preach the Gospel, if necessary, use words.” And here is the wonder of it all: you don’t always know what God is doing in the other person’s life, do you? So then, your selfless, Christ-like behavior toward that resistant person may very well be the last event in a series of events that God is doing to bring them to faith in Him! You may ask, “Well, why doesn’t God let me know the whole story?” And the answer is that you are on a need to know basis! God is God and I am not! My job is to do my part and following in the footsteps of Christ. Let God take care of the rest!

“Mighty to Save”

## Part #2 Questions about Jesus' exclusive claims and the problem of suffering

- **How do I respond to people who say that Christianity is intolerant of other beliefs because Jesus claims to be the only way to God?**

"Most non-Christians get hung up on the point that 'Jesus is the only way to God.' They consider this incredibly judgmental and narrow. How do you get past that?"

The thinking goes like this: "How can anyone say that theirs is the only true faith? Aren't all major religions equally valid and don't they all basically teach the same thing?" With help from Tim Keller's *The Reason for God*, let's unpack that for a moment.

Do we really want to say that the Branch Davidians or religions requiring child sacrifice are not inferior to any other faith? Ironically, to insist that religious doctrines are all equal and thus, do not matter, is really a doctrine itself. It holds a specific view of God, which is touted as superior and more enlightened than the beliefs of most major religions. So the proponents of this view do the very thing they forbid in others. In other words, "Inclusivism is really covert exclusivism."

Here's another common way of thinking about religion which, when unpacked, turns out to be illogical. It's about the story of the blind men and the elephant. One blind man feels the trunk and says, "This beast is long and flexible, like a snake." Another touches a leg and says, "No, it's like a tree." Still another, who touches the side of the elephant, declares, "No, it's like a massive wall!" The blind men see only a part of the elephant, not the whole. In the same way, the religions of the world see only a part of spiritual truth, not the whole.

Now, at first, this is very attractive. It's egalitarian. It's non-judgmental, etc. But here's the problem: "The story is told from the point of view of someone who is not blind! How could you know that each blind man only sees part of the elephant unless you claim to be able to see the whole elephant? What is the absolute vantage ground from which you claim to be able to relativize all the absolute claims these different [religions] make? How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed that none of the religions have?" (Keller 2008, 9)

"To say that all religions are equally valid" is itself a very white, Western view based in the European enlightenment's idea of knowledge and values. Why should that view be privileged over anyone else's?" (Keller's Defeater beliefs)

The question is not, "Should religions be exclusivist?" They are! The question is, "Which set of unavoidably exclusivist beliefs will help us see the world as it is, know

God as He is and produce humble, peace-loving behavior? Which will help us love God and love others?"

- **How do I respond to someone who objects to belief in God because of the world's pain and suffering? (i.e., how could a loving God allow suffering?)**

C.S. Lewis put it this way: "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so unjust. But how had I got this idea of 'just' and 'unjust'? What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" If you are sure that this natural world is unjust and filled with evil, then you are assuming the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which you make your judgment. (Is it possible for an all-knowing and almighty God to have reasons for suffering that my finite mind can't possibly grasp?)

Darwinian evolution depends on death, destruction, and violence of the strong against the weak. "Survival of the fittest." But are we ready to say that the Jewish Holocaust or Darfur or the genocide in Rwanda is simply Darwinian evolution in action? The fact that you recognize evil and injustice is evidence of the existence of God who is holy and just!

We may not know the reasons why God allows suffering but we know that it's not because he is indifferent or uncaring. And why? In the Christian worldview, God came to earth to deliberately put himself on the hook of human suffering. If God himself has suffered, then our suffering isn't senseless. The Christian God—unlike other religions—takes suffering so seriously that He gets involved.

On the Cross, in Jesus Christ, God experienced the greatest depths of pain and injustice and suffering. God takes our pain and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself. And when Jesus rose from the dead—physically and bodily—he was promising not consolation for the life we never had but restoration of the life we have always wanted. Every horrible thing that has ever happened will not only be undone and repaired but in some way make the eventual glory greater and greater. Everything sad is going to come untrue and it will somehow be greater for having once been broken and lost. (Keller 2008, 33)

[http://www.greentreewebster.org/Articles/Deconstructing%20Defeater%20Beliefs%20\(Keller\).pdf](http://www.greentreewebster.org/Articles/Deconstructing%20Defeater%20Beliefs%20(Keller).pdf)

**Communion**

### **Part #3: How do you respond to someone who believes in evolution?**

When Jesus died and rose again, He gave us a new identity, He freed us from self-righteousness and self-condemnation. He liberated us to accept people we once excluded and to break the bondage of things—even good things—that once drove us. He put us into a community of people which gives us a partial but very real foretaste of what the new heaven and new earth will be like when Jesus returns! He has given us purpose and meaning and direction! This is important to remember especially when you talk to someone about “evolution.”

Let me give you two creation stories and then you try to figure out whether it matters which one is true:

In the first story, “You are descendant of tiny cell of primordial protoplasm washed up on an empty beach three and a half billion years ago. You are the blind and arbitrary product of time, change, and natural forces. You are a mere grab-bag of atomic particles, a conglomeration of genetic substance. You exist on a tiny planet in a minute solar system in an empty corner of a meaningless universe. You are a purely biological entity, different only in degree but no in kind from a microbe, virus, or amoeba. You have no essence beyond your body, and at death you will cease to exist entirely. In short you came from nothing and are going nowhere.”

In the second story, which is the Christian worldview, “You are the special creation of a good and all-powerful god. You are created in His image, with capacities to think, feel and worship that set you above all other life forms. You differ from animals not simply in degree but in kind. Not only is your kind unique but you are unique among your kind. Your Creator loves you so much and so intensely desire your companion and affection that He has a perfect plan for your life. In addition, God gave the life of His only Son that you might spend eternity with Him. If you are willing to accept the gift of salvation, you can become a child of God.”

Now imagine two groups of people—let’s call them the secular tribe and the religious tribe—who subscribe to these worldviews. The religious tribe is made up of people who have an animating sense of purpose. The secular tribe has absolutely no idea why they exist at all. The religious tribe is composed of individuals who view their every thought and action as consequential. The secular tribe is made up of matter that cannot explain why it is able to think at all.

Which of the two tribes is more likely to survive, prosper, and multiply?<sup>1</sup>

Here are some suggested web sites on why you believe what you believe:

<http://www.str.org/site/PageServer>

<http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4213839/>

<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/menus/articles.html>

### Questions about actually leading someone to Christ

- **How do you actually lead someone to become a Christian?**

Philip and the Ethiopian

*26Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."*

Notice that Philip didn't know what he was getting into; he just did that little part he was told. The angel didn't say, "Now, you're going to meet this guy and he's going to be reading, etc."

*27So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a]eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."*

He didn't know anything else other than to go jogging by this chariot.

*30Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.*

*31"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

*32The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:*

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.*

*33In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.*

*Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth." [b]*

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<sup>1</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2007), p. 17. D'Souza credits this illustration to Randy Alcorn of Eternal Perspectives Ministries.

*34The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

The good news about Jesus is that He came reveal God to us; he came to rescue us from darkness and sin. Sin is not just a violation of laws, it is a culture, a kingdom, a mindset that opposes God. Sin says that I am God! When I sin, I put myself in a place reserved solely for God. But when God rescues us, he puts himself in a place solely for us. In Christ, God died the death we should have died. For the reason why he was deprived of justice was that he substituted himself for us and for our disobedience. In biblical Christianity, God is a holy God; He doesn't just sweep my disobedience under the rug, dismissively. His holiness and justice demand that He deals with it. His grace means that He deals with it Himself. He punished His Son for my infraction. God treated Jesus like he would have treated me had I paid the penalty for my disobedience and sin. Christianity is the only faith that tells of the King who came to die for His people. This is the good news about Jesus.

*36As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 37 Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."38And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*

Explain the Gospel:

- Why we are here—community with God
- What went wrong—sin;
- What puts the world right—God in sending Jesus to die for our sins
- How we can be a part of putting the world right—Trusting Jesus; making disciples in his name.

Would you like Jesus to be the King, boss, leader, redeemer, and forgiver of your life? Are you willing to call on Him to be your King? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God? Are you willing to turn to him, which is another word for repentance, and then follow Him and lean on Him for the rest of your life? The word faith means "to lean on." I am leaning on Jesus for direction, decisions, forgiveness, purpose and meaning in life. I will trust Him. Are you willing to agree that Jesus is most qualified to tell me how to live? Are you willing to follow him? Make that vow public?

If so, then you may be baptized. (It's not the water that saves. It's Jesus that saves! Baptism declares that I am trusting Jesus to do what I could never do!)

Baptism is not an optional ritual, to be delayed or postponed. It signifies your inclusion in God's family. It publicly announces to the world, 'I am not ashamed to be part of God's family.' Your baptism declares your faith, shares Christ's burial and resurrection, symbolizes your death to your old life, and announces

your new life in Christ . . . . It represents what happened the moment God brought you into his family . . . . It is an act of initiation, not something you put off until you are spiritually mature. There are no delayed baptisms in the New Testament. [The only conditions are belief and repentance.] If you haven't been baptized as an expression of your faith in Christ, do so as soon as possible, as Jesus commanded. (Warren 2002, 120-121)

*39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.*

- "Spontaneity is an under appreciated dimension of spirituality. In fact, spiritual maturity has less to do with long-range visions than it does with moment-by-moment sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And it is our moment-by-moment sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that turns life into an everyday adventure." (Mark Batterson From his book *Wild Goose Chase*)

## **Offering**

## **Closing**

- Missionary Oswald Chambers said:

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics....The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

Reprinted in "Wisdom in a Time of War," *Christianity Today* (1-07-02), p. 47