



THE Socratic
Conversation
Telling Our Stories

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Telling Our Stories & Strengthening Our Walk!

STATEMENT OF CLARITY: This Socratic Conversation Guidebook may seem more complicated than it is. To get around that, participants should view it as a reference book for what the group can do but may not do. What the group does depends on group consensus. The process is simple: Before each meeting, participants may pose a question to discuss at the next meeting and facilitators may give participants limited material to read before the next meeting that will be discussed.

OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose is “your” purpose as “we” focus on relationship building that begins with developing intimacy with the Lord. Guided by “our” purpose, we inspire, encourage, and motivate living for the Lord in the real world—in different places, situations, and around different people. It’s not about religious living but our spiritual relationship with the Lord. It’s challenging but achievable as we interact within a fellowship setting, exchanging our various views on three vital questions that will identify where we are in our spiritual walk:

❖ *Who we are in Christ.*

- ❖ *Where we are in Christ.*
- ❖ *Where we stand with God.*

Thus, "The Socratic Conversation" is a discipleship process and outreach service of THE MISSION MINISTRY.

To accomplish our goal, we seek to accept, embrace, and celebrate non-threatening ethnic and cultural differences by exploring concepts of the Creator God, the Universe, Nature, Science, Technology, and Human Nature, and how they are correlated to each other.

We are a vehicle for promoting healthy dialog about provocative challenging subjects (without name dropping) about race, politics, and religion, including the difference between the original languages of Scripture and the Translations and the difference between Creation and Evolution. We focus on relationship models between subjects that are different.

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To inspire participants along with spiritual levels of breakthrough where we come into Christlikeness by examining where we are as believers along our journey and where we want to go.*
- 2) To provide an accountability network through a relationship where we come alongside each other and walk through those difficult times together without judging one another because of circumstances. "Accountability minus relationship is Control!"*
- 3) To promote and Network our Stories and Journeys as a Testimonial of Striving and Thriving in life as a disciple by Faith and Discipline.*
- 4) Engage in Relationship Building across our political, social, religious, economic, ethnic, and cultural differences.*

The Vision

Create a Forum to Share our Journeys and Refine our lives to reflect the Savior.

The vision of The Socratic Conversation is further to develop a safe comfortable platform for all people to share their journeys in life. Our life stories are testimonies. A testimony is God's Word coming alive through our experiences. Sharing our testimony does not mean that we air our dirty laundry. It means we leave some soiled clothes in the closet of God's grace and share general information about where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going! Our mutual group sharing creates a "group catharsis" (Emotional Release) of pent up feelings that unloads baggage.

It is biblical and practical that our interfacing and interacting in a small group setting edify (builds up) and inspires (encourages and motivates) people along life's journey in pursuit of their dreams, passions, and goals. In the context of James 5:16, general sharing produces inner spiritual healing. When inner spiritual healing takes place, people are freed and propelled to start new ministries, new businesses, and new church plants that help all people to better their lot in life.

The MISSION

Encourage and Support Participants in their Spiritual Journey, Ministries, and Businesses with Moral Support.

The Socratic Conversation is not a substitute or replacement for the local church, but it is designed to give people an immediate impact of church life in one place at one time! In our small group settings, people have a sense of glorifying God through up-reach worship, being edified through in-reach fellowship, wanting to reach others in service and to witness in outreach. The Socratic Conversation gives people who have been turned off and tuned out

of the church “as is” an opportunity to find a temporary community until they decide to re-connect with an existing church or unite with a new church plant.

The Format-Meeting in a Neutral Place!

Let him that is taught in the word communicate (“Koinoneo” or Share) unto him that teacheth in all good things. Galatians 6:6)

We take the theological, political, doctrinal, cultural discomfort out of a meeting in unfamiliar pressured environments because of our focus on kingdom culture.

The format for The Socratic Conversation community gatherings comes from I Corinthians 14 that describes the organization and administration of spiritual gifts through community fellowship. *Community gatherings include sharing a word, sharing scripture, sharing testimonies, sharing stories, sharing prayers, sharing songs, and questions and comments. Besides the components of church life, a major goal of The Socratic Conversation is to serve as an incubator (through dialog) for business, ministry, and church plants.*

The Socratic Conversation History

The Socratic Conversation builds on research and studies about the *Emerging Church Movement*, which many perceive as the *New Reformation*. The idea for The Socratic Conversation developed on the campus of New Life Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina in September 2012. Adjunct Professor Ross was teaching various courses in the Urban Studies Department and began addressing critical issues from students in what he called his “sidebar” discussions—dialog off the subject. The next stage of development for The Socratic Conversation began Monday, June 27th, 2013 at an informal meeting with a business couple at Professor Ross’s house. That meeting led to Professor Ross contacting his former colleague and partner with the Tapestry Church plant, Bill

Lamb. His partner agreed on the idea and opened his facility (The Annex) on The Plaza for meetings. The Socratic Conversation held its first official meeting on Sunday, August 23rd, 2013 at the Annex located on the Plaza in Charlotte, North Carolina. Unfortunately, politics and the politicizing of God's Word led to the cancellation of meetings. After four years of serving as an editor and self-publisher, and interest by others to start a new ministry, Jarvis Ross resumed the start of The Conversation Monday, August 2, 2019, but the mood wasn't right, so he tabled it. Then on Monday, July 6, he received a phone call from his former partner, and they arranged a brunch meeting for Wednesday, July 8, and resuming The Socratic Conversation meetings were confirmed with renewed energy.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SPIRITUAL? THE WAY WE DO CHURCH IS CHANGING!

Noted theologian Harvey Cox argues that spirituality is replacing traditional religion. He states, *"Christianity is moving from an 'Age of Belief' dominated by creeds and church hierarchies to an 'Age of Spirit,' in which spirituality is replacing formal religion."* He goes on to state the difference between faith and belief: *"I think of belief as having to do with the subordination of ideas or doctrines and kind of mental assent. Whereas faith is far more deeply rooted in life orientation."* Finally, he says, *"People are growing suspicious of taking something on someone else's authority, and I think that's healthy. 'Religion without relationship is life without Spirit!"*

People are growing cynical and tired of someone from a pulpit interpreting for them how they should live their lives based on doctrine and dogma which become rules and regulations. They are more concerned about finding Christ where they live, work, and play. Good ministers and preachers promote and preach living for Christ without condemnation.

We should de-mystify (take the spooky out) what it means to be spiritual. Being spiritual is not spiritualism. Being spiritual is no blind leap of faith, but about a trusting personal relationship with Christ. Biblically, when one is *spiritual*, they logically see God's purpose and plan for their lives unfolding, that others may not recognize or believe. *I Corinthians 2:15*, "The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments" Practically, this verse means that the spiritual person can discern people and circumstance around them, but others cannot discern (figure out) the spiritual person. In summary, it means that others find it difficult to understand a spiritual person because they cannot see where they are along their spiritual journey.

Spirituality is based on three biblical principles: *Maturity of Relationship, Having the Mind of Christ, Following the Voice of the Lord.*

- ❖ *Maturity of Relationship* is the ability to deal with life's problems on a higher level. When God dealt with Samuel because of his feelings of rejection when Israel wanted a king instead of him, God said to him, "...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me..." Don't take life's issues and problems so personal. Many times, they come to mature your relationship with Christ! Mature disciples of Christ can debate their varying views without dissolving their relationship. They know John Wesley's words well: "If it doesn't strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think."
- ❖ *Having the Mind of Christ* is the ability to think God's thoughts or simply reflect on God's Word. Paul in *Corinthians* compares spirituality with carnality and states that carnality is thinking like a brute person, minus the mind of Christ, and spirituality is thinking with the mind of Christ or in the context of God's Word.

- ❖ *Following the Voice of the Lord is the ability to act spontaneously when God speaks to our consciousness. God does not speak to our spirit out of the context of His Word and what He says is relevant to our current situation(s) where He either admonishes us or encourage us to prepare for what's ahead. When God speaks, there is an awareness throughout our bodies.*

Our *purpose* is to answer questions that people dare not ask in Church because of a feeling of being ridiculed and wrong! Our *goal* is to help people who have gotten “tired” and “turned off” to church “as is,” and help them strengthen their walk. This is by no means a statement of “rebellion” or a means of “bashing” “institutionalized” Christianity. God’s church is established and seen in different settings as a “community of faith.” God is not abandoning institutionalized Christianity. He is gathering people together to reach His harvest!

WE HOLD TO THESE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN THE INTERIM OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND IN CONSIDERATION OF OTHER PEOPLE’S SPIRITUALITY

Four Steps for Reaching Our Goal of Strengthening Our Walk!

Please respect each other’s varying views because our views of God theologically are like facets of a diamond—we see God from different vantage points because of life’s experiences. Our collective views are weighed by Scripture and we mutually develop a broader complete picture of who God is through dialog. *When telling your view or opinion, please do not state it in disagreement with others, rather from your standpoint of “This is how I see it.” Also, be respectful of time in your comments. Humbly keep in mind that this is not a time of teaching; rather share your faith*

and experiences. However, we will sum up our outstanding discussions by comparing the discussion with Scripture.

The following four steps are points to remember about our common Christian experience:

1. God's Word is an Ideal—An Achievable Goal

God's Word is the standard of our faith and practice. Some Christians live by ideals (standards seldom achieved) and some Christians live by practically taking steps towards achieving their goals. God's Word as a standard may not be where they want to be or where they think they should be, but daily they are striving with a sense of His Word before them. (*Philippians 3:14*)

2. We Maintain and Manage our Christian lives by the Grace of God given to us in the interim of developing Christian Character.

We call it "living in the moment," not in the sense of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," but in the sense of Christ's words that we shouldn't worry about tomorrow. We do not know what we will think, do, or what will happen tomorrow. We set ourselves up when we think we do. We may not be where we desire, but we are not regressing to yesterday.

3. Chronological Development runs parallel with Spiritual Maturity.

We go through phases in our natural growth and maturity from infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, mid-life, and old age, and one can identify where they are spiritually by those phases of development. One cannot take a 30-year-old man and make him commit to Christ if he never found his identity as a 14-year-old boy. Priests in the economy of Israel were not allowed to become priests until they were 30 years old. Thus, Christ began His public ministry at the age of

4. We should provide some form of mentoring ministry that helps them go through that passage so that chronological development and spiritual maturity run parallel. The goal of natural growth is a *mature Character and responsibility. The goal of spiritual maturity is a Christ-like Character and responsible Christian living.*
5. *In the interim of developing Christian character, we value and respect individual Spirituality.*

One's spirituality is like a snowflake or a fingerprint. No one has an identical spiritual life. Although we are striving towards the same goal, no one is at the same place spiritually. *Like individuality, our spiritual life is individual, and we cannot impose our convictions on others.* Our spiritual lives are summed up on three levels:

- ❖ *Where is God in my life?*
- ❖ *What is He up to?*
- ❖ *Where is the Church in all this?*

Summary: Christians have become "tired" and "turned off" to church "as is" not simply because of sin. They have turned away from church because their spirituality has been insulted and offended in some way. Spirituality is one's deep core convictions about their relationship with the Lord. When that is attacked, believers are insulted and walk away from the condemnation. We seek to minister to their convictions and accountability, which is why we seek to restore people to community. When one is spiritual, they know where they stand in Christ, that others may not recognize or believe. The Apostle Paul admonishes the Christian Community in Romans 14:1 not to condemn the views and lifestyle of believers who struggle with the Christian life. "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not to pass judgment on his opinions"