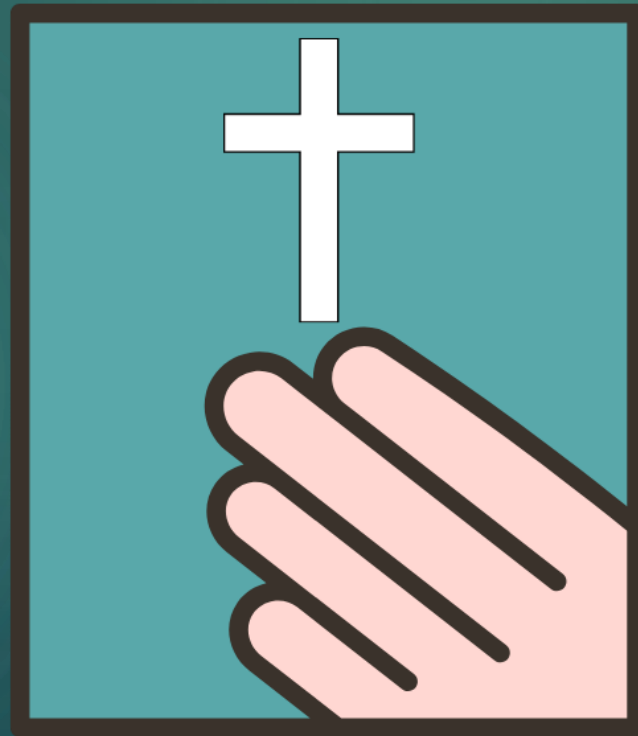


Living in Truth

Confident Conversation in a Conflicted Culture



Bible Study adapted from
Living in Truth by
Mary Jo Sharp

Welcome

- Recap of Week 3
 - Listen to Discover Truth
- Hearing Vs. Listening
 - Listening requires obedience
 - Listening requires intentional focus
- Guarding against an "us" vs. "them" mindset
- Identifying objective vs. subjective statements



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Session 4: Question Cultural Views & Individual Beliefs

Do young
Americans
know anything?



Asking the Right Questions



- What do you think you would have done in Mary Jo's situation?

Asking the Right Questions

- Read Matthew 21:23-27. What did the religious leaders ask Jesus?
- How did Jesus respond?
- Read Luke 9:18-20. What is the first question Jesus asked? What is the second?
- Instead of asking questions, why do you think Jesus didn't just give a teaching on this matter?

Asking the Right Questions

- Like Jesus, we can use questions to uncover the beliefs of the people with whom we converse. Discovering their beliefs and helping them clarify those beliefs opens opportunities for productive dialog.
- An important element in having good conversations is making the environment safe for meaningful discussion. Questions are useful in tense situations and can help de-escalate a person's anger, or even deflect the anger altogether.

Asking the Right Questions



- "People tend to trade only conclusions, not how different parties arrived at their conclusions." - Tim Muelhoff
- Think of the last time you asked someone a question about their belief in God. What did you ask? What prompted the question? What was the result (if any)?

Asking the Right Questions

- Questions are a crucial tool for learning in any situation.
- "He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not ask a question remains a fool forever." - Chinese proverb

What's in the bag?!?

- Give me reasons for why you believe there is nothing in the bag
- State that you believe X is in the bag and that I should confess that X is in there as well
- Expound on the evils of unmarked brown bags
- Tell me that in order to experience the fullness of the contents of the bag, I must first surrender my life to opening the bag.

What's in the bag?!?



- Can you think of a problem with saying that the contents of the bag are whatever any of us thinks it to be?

What's in the bag?!?

- The brown bag contains something, and now you want to know the truth about its contents. So you are faced with another conversations choice:
 - Do you demand to see the contents?
 - Do you lecture me on my purposely evasive behavior?
 - Do you ask further questions?

What's in the bag?!?

- The brown bag mystery may seem a bit frivolous (if not downright annoying), but we can apply the same principles to conversations about God:
- Suppose you invited me to dinner and I brought a "brown bag" of mixed beliefs about God. You're pretty sure I don't believe in the God of the Bible, but you're not sure exactly what I believe. Your curiosity is piqued and so you ask me, "I know we've skirted around the issue before, but what do you believe about God?" Suppose my answer is, "Whatever you think about God is good for you, and whatever I think about God is good for me." How would you respond?

Digging Deeper

- A good question to start with in most situations is "What do you mean by that?" or "How did you come to that conclusion?"
- Don't just look for the "what do you believe?" but look for the "why do you believe that?"
- Ask open-ended questions rather than short "yes" or "no" questions.

Digging Deeper



- "Dialogue calls for the free flow of meaning – period. Nothing kills the flow of meaning like fear. When you fear that people aren't buying into your ideas, you start pushing too hard. When you fear that you might be harmed in some way, you withdraw...on the other hand, if you don't fear that you are being attacked or humiliated, you yourself can hear almost anything and not become defensive." - *Crucial Conversations*

Questioning Cultural Beliefs

- Suppose someone said to you, "There is no empirical evidence for God." How would you respond?
- According to Merriam Webster, "empirical evidence" means "originating or based in observation."
- What benefit might come from asking questions about this person's assertion rather than jumping straight to a rebuttal? What questions would you ask?

Questioning Cultural Beliefs

- Suppose you asked the person, "What do you mean by that" And they responded with, "We can only truly know what our senses tell us." What further clarifying questions might you ask?
 - Examples: "How do you know that?" "What is your grounding for thinking that your senses give you accurate information about reality?" "Can you use your senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing, etc.) to verify your claim that sense is the only way to know something?"

Questioning Cultural Beliefs



- This situation actually happened to Mary Jo Sharp, and when confronted with these questions, the man got angry, cursed and said, "I don't know!" Her questions revealed the heart of the matter: this man came across as a man of "objective science", so why did asking a few simple questions elicit such an emotion-driven response?
- Many people's identities are so entwined with their beliefs that to question their beliefs is to question their identity. These beliefs, however, are never formed in a vacuum and are often based on assumptions rather than careful consideration. (think back to Tim Muelhoff's quote)

Questioning Cultural Beliefs



- To a large degree, humans are products of our environment and upbringing. We cannot achieve a state in which we develop a view that is completely void of emotional influences, social influences family backgrounds and biases.
- Merely tossing around the word "science" or scientific terminology does not make a person's belief more or less true than yours, so don't be intimidated by this tactic.

Questioning Cultural Beliefs



- In Mary Jo's example, the man eventually apologized for his outburst and eventually disclosed that he had been emotionally hurt by the church in his childhood. He had used the anger from that early experience to fuel his pursuit of intellectual dissent for most of his life.
- Revealing the truth of the man's anger, Mary Jo was now in a position to change the conversation from intellectual posturing to one of ministering to a hurting soul.

Science or Faith?

- Science and faith are at war with one another
- Science and faith belong to different domains of human inquiry, thus remaining separate from one another
- Science and faith are both part of the human experience, being neither enemies nor strangers. Thus, they are in some sense friends aiding each other.

Science or Faith?

- The man's trust in "empirical evidence" was not completely invalid, he was just missing a key component.
- The pursuit of truth through observation only makes sense in the framework of a God who has *intentionally* created us with the faculties to discover truth.
- Romans 1:20 - "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

Self-Diagnostic

- How does the conversation about science and faith make you feel? Excited? Frustrated? Indifferent? Intimidated?
- If you are like most people, you may be telling yourself that today's material is a little bit difficult or "over my head." If so, what do you think is the source of those thoughts?
- We tend to tell ourselves things which hinder our conversations with others, such as "I'm not smart enough to discuss this" or "I don't want to look foolish."
- These are lies from the enemy to keep us from speaking Truth in love. "If the enemy can silence people of Truth, he can enslave the multitudes."

Christians and "Intolerance"

- "For the power of man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what they please." - C.S. Lewis
- As a society lets go of an objective basis for morality, it ends up conditioned to believe the values and preferences of a few. C.S. Lewis called these people the "conditioners" - those with power, a voice and a platform. They "condition" (bully) the rest of society to think and act like them.

Christians and "Intolerance"

- Hate speech: "a communication that carries no meaning other than the expression of hatred for some group, especially in circumstances in which the communication is likely to provoke violence. It is an incitement to hatred primarily against a group of persons defined in terms of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation and the like. Hate speech can be any form of expression regarded as offensive to racial, ethnic and religious groups and other discrete minorities or to women." - Definition of hate speech according to USlegal.com.

Christians and "Intolerance"



- Frank Turek, after a debate on God, science and morality, was accused of hate speech because he did not positively affirm same-sex marriage.

Christians and "Intolerance"

- Frank's message contained no incendiary language, no communication without meaning, and no hatred toward another group. He simply stated that he did not agree with same-sex marriage.
- His critics changed the definition of "hate speech" to effectively mean "holding an out-of-favor opinion."
- This is nothing more than social and verbal bullying, and will lead to a breakdown of meaningful conversations about anything in our society, let alone conversations about Truth.

Christians and "Intolerance"

- Allowing anyone to define what should or should not be discussed publicly to fit their own values and preferences is the height of intolerance. Essentially, the message is "we are the tolerant ones, yet we will only tolerate that with which we agree."
- How can we as Christians stand up to social bullying and advocate for the free exchange of ideas, even for the person whom we disagree with?
- How can we as Christians respond with gentleness and respect, even when we are misrepresented?