

Links to Wondering Resources:

God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally by Doug Pollock (LifeTree 2009)

The Power of Listening by Lynne Baab (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014)

Finding Common Ground by Tim Downs (Moody 1999)

Questioning Evangelism by Randy Newman (Kregel Publications, 6448)

The Complete Book of Questions, by Garry Poole (Zondervan, 2003).

Curiosity, the Wick in the Candle of Learning can be found at <http://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/sds/docs/loewenstein/WickCandleLearning.pdf>

Q Place is a web-based ministry that picks up and runs with the whole theme of Holy Conversation.

<http://www.qplace.com/>

Its reasonably-priced programme called The Arts of Spiritual Conversation is especially useful.

<http://www.qplace.com/howqplaceworks/trained-facilitator/the-arts-of-spiritual-conversations/>

You can get a free introductory module by providing your email address at

<http://www.qplace.com/shop/introducing-the-arts/>

Wise men and women are always learning,
always listening for fresh insights.
(Proverbs 18: 15, The Message)

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the godshaped life



Spiritual Practice Fifteen

Wondering Our Way In *to Spiritual Conversations*

“Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don’t miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.” Colossians 4: 5—6

“Practice” means the repeated performance of a task or action regularly over time. A spiritual practice is exactly what the word suggests, a way to be deliberate about matters of the soul. But when we think of Spiritual Practice, we usually think of something inward, solitary, subjective. We don't realise that there are intensely practical virtues, like asking respectful curious questions, that also benefit from deliberate and attentive practice.

“A godshaped life is a flourishing tree” Prov 11: 28

Eastview Baptist Church 2014

Wondering

This booklet is based on a series of messages preached at Eastview in 2014.

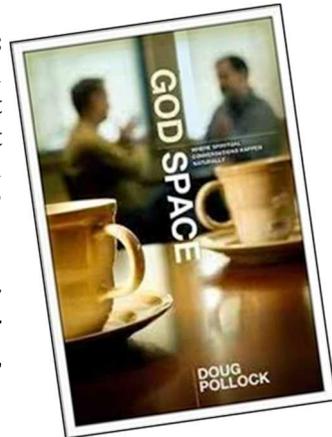
In our reflections on Holy Conversations based on themes from a book called **Godspace** by Doug Pollock, we also thought about **Wondering your Way In** to spiritual conversation. Wondering is a really natural and organic way into a deep conversation. It peels back the layers and helps us see ourselves and our world differently. Jesus asked some great wondering questions:

Why do you worry? (Matthew 6:28), What is it you want? (Matthew 20:21), Where is your faith? (Luke 8:25), What do you think? (Matthew 21:28).

He knew that people who aren't interested in pat answers will often respond to our wonderings; they love it when we are interested in their point of view. Open questions tap into a reservoir of human curiosity. Educators know this and use wondering questions with young children; counsellors use them to deflect suspicion and harness creativity. When an issue is posed as a question, it starts a chain reaction that ignites our curiosity.

Curiosity has been described as a desire for learning and knowledge, but its underlying mechanisms were not always understood. In 2009, behavioural scientists at CalTech performed MRIs on people while they read trivia questions. The level of curiosity when reading questions correlated with activity in regions of the brain thought to be involved with anticipating reward. A followup behavioural study showed subjects were willing to spend scarce resources to find out answers when they were more curious. Curiosity also increased participants' memory for surprising new information. The research was published under the title "Curiosity: The Wick in the Candle of Learning." A problem posed as a wondering question invites ideas that might be a solution. Not even just one solution; an open-ended, wondering question hints that there might be many approaches that could work.

That's why Doug Pollock says "Wondering is conversational WD40;" it helps overcome fear and hostility and acts as a social lubricant. Without respectful wondering, we can come across as arrogant and one-eyed. Randy Newman describes his failed attempts at spiritual conversations like this: "I've often answered questions with biblically accurate, logically sound, epistemologically watertight answers, only to see questioners shrug their shoulders. My answers, it seemed, only further confirmed their opinion that Christians are simpletons." The better way, he says, involves answering questions with questions; not for the sake of evasion but to allow the other to discover the deeper issues for themselves.



Good wondering questions don't control the agenda, follow a script or launch into a monologue. They flow out of a desire to understand, show you are a good listener, and promote a conversation that can sensitively probe belief systems. Alpha Course leaders are trained to use non-judging responses like *I notice that...* or *I'm interested in...* Like 'I'm wondering,' they soften everything that comes later. Garry Poole has written a whole book of curious conversation starters for any occasion - 1001 of them on a range of general and personal subjects. Some sound weird (eg, how many times a day do you

look at yourself in the mirror?) but there are others we could use with kids or teens, as well as adults (eg, which of the five senses do you treasure most?). If questions are reframed as wonderings, they become less intimidating, eg I'm wondering what you think it means to take a leap of faith? Even 'Cowards for Jesus' can wonder out loud.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying:

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when they contemplate the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.

Curiosity focuses your attention on the other person, not yourself. It reduces the fear of not asking the right question, saying the right thing or having the right answer. Curiosity is the bridge that gets us from silently noticing to actively engaging with another. We started this series on sharing our faith, with the question, why would we want to talk to others about being a follower of Jesus? The preacher reminded us how faith in Christ means the treasure of the universe is found in the core of our lives:

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. (2 Cor 4: 7)

The enterprise of sharing our faith is not about our ability or goodness. It's about a treasure that is God in us. Preach the gospel at all times, St Francis is reputed to have said, and if necessary use words.

To Chew Over: *How do your words and actions act as partners in sharing Christ?*

