

Questions to Ask Before Having Difficult Conversations

The following questions can be helpful to explore *before* engaging in difficult conversations. They can help determine how much energy you should devote to a particular issue and center us in our conversations.

1. Will this issue matter one year from now?

2. Is this issue essential to the gospel? If the gospel is at stake, it's time to deal with the issue. You'll also need to determine if the issue is central to your community's DNA, vision, etc. – but the urgency is not as great if the gospel is not at stake.

3. What does the Bible say? The Scriptures may not directly address every issue you face, but the Bible does give us what we need to deal with conflict. Spend time in the Word when you face conflict.

4. Am I so emotionally involved that I can't see the issues clearly? Few people say "yes" to this question even when they are, in fact, emotionally invested. It is important for us recognize this before something escalates.

5. What do I really want here? If the issue is resolved in the way you *really* want it resolved, will that resolution be honoring to God? Sometimes our fallenness leads us to want vengeance and vindication more than God's glory.

6. Do I need to involve others in my decision-making process? Of course, you may not be in a position to talk to somebody about every situation. Generally, though, having more than one wise voice in the conversation can be helpful.

7. Can I put this fire out with a squirt gun (or even a bucket)? If a few simple steps can take care of the problem, do it. Put the fire out while it's small. If the fire is already raging, make sure you have a team of "firefighters" helping you deal with the flames. Don't fight fires alone unless you're the only one standing for the gospel.

8. What's the worst thing that can happen here, and can I live with that possibility? It's possible the conflict won't be resolved without someone losing something so think through the possible consequences.

9. Have I prayed about my response? That is, have I sought God *before* determining the response? Talking to God first can save heartache in the long run.

10. What do you believe is the other person's position in this conversation? What reactions are you anticipating?

11. If I Say What I am Thinking, Will I Regret it Tomorrow? There is a reason why James said, "*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*" He knew the dangers in speaking first. When we speak first we spew out our in-the-moment response without thinking about the consequences of our words. What is important to remember is that once words are stated, we can never get them back. We can apologize and repent, but we can never erase the impact of our words from the person we say them to.

Some questions adapted from Ibelieve.com

12. Am I Praying about the Situation? Entering conflict without asking God for help is like turning down super powers. The patience, wisdom, and unconditional love we lack, He has in abundance. Instinctively, we know this, but somehow, we forget to invite God into our conflict. I am learning, however, to immediately begin praying. *“God, give me the words to say. Please help me to be slow to speak. Please cause my emotions to be in line with Your word*

13. How Can I Practice Humility? Christ is our ultimate example of humility. He had every right to protest his unfair treatment and yet intentionally refused to do so. As difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible as it is, we are to choose humility even when we are in a conflict.

What is the Big Picture? When we are in a conflict it is tempting to have tunnel vision. All we see is the here and now and what we want the outcome to be. We may not see how our conflict might impact others years later. We should think about the lasting ramifications of our words and choose wisely.

What questions would you add?