

The 10 Questions of a Courageous Conversation by Chris Hogan

If you have heard me speak recently, you may have heard me talk about having a courageous Conversation. These are conversations that require us to blend two key elements of mercy and truth in order to resolve pressing issues and at the same time develop greater levels of trust in our relationship. Proverbs 16:6 states "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. " The iniquities of self-will, and our pride is what causes so much of the tension in our relationships. Our pride reveals itself in our conversations when we say to ourselves, "we will have had a good conversation when you listen to me and agree that I'm right." This form of conversation does not include God's mercy and truth which sets us free, but it focuses on our own rights and expectations which cause wars among us as James 4 points out so clearly.

When I have helped mediate courageous conversations where people have been more interested in seeking to give mercy and truth rather than being right, I have seen truly miraculous reconciliation take place. God has said "And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." God has already done his part, the question is will we receive the grace He has already provided by humbling ourselves and allowing our iniquities to be purged by His mercy and truth. When our sins are pointed out and we humble ourselves and confess them, God cleanses us. I have seen people become so free that they have a fresh fear of God come upon them as they see His power made manifest in their lives and relationship. They depart from further evil so they can experience a greater level of intimacy and freedom in Christ.

The three goals of a courageous conversation are:

- **Wisdom to see from a bigger perspective.** When we see as God sees we will want to do as God does. The counsel of others will broaden our perspective. God can even use a donkey to help us see our blind spots. He will test our humility by sending us the most unlikely messengers.
- **Understanding that will establish trust in the relationship.** When we see from another's perspective we begin to understand why they do what they do. When you seek to understand a person, it doesn't mean you have to agree with them. When you provide them a safe environment of mercy, it will allow them to see their own false beliefs and begin to question their perspective if it is based on lies. A man convinced against his own will is of the same opinion still. Our goal is to look with another person at their own thoughts and beliefs so they consider the trustworthiness of their perspective.

- **Knowledge so we can take the next step.** When people gain wisdom and understanding by allowing the beatitudes of Christ to control their spirit, soul and body, then God will grant them the knowledge of His will to resolve any issue.

1. What is your most pressing issue?

Questions 1 & 2 deal with the Pressing Issues. Very rarely do I ever ask someone if they would like to have a courageous conversation. I simply realize that there is a problem because someone is either acting hurt or trying to get me to understand their viewpoint. When I see that a conversation is turning combustible because I don't feel understood or the other person is frustrated, it dawns on me that I need to humble myself and esteem the others need to be heard as greater than my own. This is the first beatitude Jesus describes of a happy, to be envied and prosperous man. I will simply say, "What I hear you saying is that your most pressing issue is..." or I will say "What I hear you saying is..., which of these is the most pressing issue?"

2. In addition to this, is there something else?

My goal in this question is to get to the real issue. I remind myself that most people may not be aware of how to describe their most pressing needs. I listen to what they say and try to see where one of two root issues may be causing the intense feelings.

- **Fear of Rejection** – This issue or person is making me feel like I am unacceptable and I don't feel good about myself because of it.
- **Fear of Failure** – This issue or person is making me feel inadequate.

When I am working with couples I think about how the woman's most important question is being answered. I believe a woman asks herself constantly "Am I worth being pursued?", so when her husband is not initiating the conversation or showing interest in her issues, she feels rejection.

From my experience with men it seems the major question they are asking themselves is "Am I adequate, do I have what it takes to succeed?" When they feel like others view them as inadequate or their ability to succeed is hampered then they begin to experience tension.

Sometimes people don't verbalize these root issues and I only bring them up if I sense they are willing to acknowledge that this fear is present, otherwise I let them determine their most pressing issue and agree to pursue this course with them.

It is important that you write down the most pressing issue in a concise sentence because all the other questions will refer to this issue. You can only deal effectively with one issue at a time.

3. How is this affecting you?

Questions 3 & 4 deal with the painful consequences of an issue. The beatitude of mourning can be displayed by the listener as they show empathy for the other person. When a person feels heard and cared about they can begin to move on to resolving their issues. It is a rare experience for most people to feel safe enough to talk about anything because there are so few people who can listen from another's perspective. One definition of intimacy I like is "In To Me See." When we look through another person's eyes and see as they see we can begin to understand why they are behaving the way they are.

When you take the brunt of their intense emotions and don't defend yourself, but mourn over what you may have caused or what others have contributed to, you are following the command "to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." It also allows you to see just how serious of an issue this is and what the cause and effects are for yourself and the organization.

Rephrase what you heard the person say to their satisfaction. This is a part of engaging in the conversation and helping the person feel understood.

4. What will the future be like if nothing changes?

This question is a real motivator for me because I begin to see the high cost of doing nothing. I want people to really consider just what the future could be and not gloss over this one. It helps everyone to be more committed to resolving the issue.

Rephrase what you heard the person say to their satisfaction. If they are not satisfied that you understand, allow them to rephrase their statement, don't try to guess, but be patient until they can verbalize their own thoughts. A right answer is like a kiss on the lips, and in this case it is an answer that shows you understand them.

5. What do you see as my responsibility for this issue?

Questions 5 & 6 deal with the personal responsibilities of those involved in the issue. When I ask this question I am showing a noble willingness to yield my rights and become meek and lowly, a servant like Christ, one who lays down his life for a brother. It also reveals a hunger and thirst for Christ's righteousness rather than defending my own. When I mediate courageous conversations this is the question most people fear to ask. It takes grace to die and lose your life, but God promises you will find it if you willingly lay it down. This

question opens up the opportunity to really understand the heart of another, they want to share with you their real needs. If you begin to explain, complain or blame them in response to this question then you will have failed and turned a courageous conversation into a combustible one due to cowardice in not laying down your life.

Rephrase what you heard the person say to their satisfaction. The goal of rephrasing their statement is to try and understand their heart. If they verbalized it well enough you can simply restate their comments, if God gives you further insight then be willing to share this as it comes to you. Do not try to make up new statements because you don't want to use their words, it will change the meaning. Our goal is to reveal that we do understand their heart.

6. What do you see as your responsibility for this issue?

This question is one the speaker is totally unprepared for because they have probably taken on the role of a victim. With this question you help them begin to move out of being a victim into a response able person. They can begin to share in the responsibility of resolving this issue. The turning point of the whole conversation starts with this question. People who are speaking begin to show mercy to the listener if they have demonstrated humility, mourning, meekness and a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Some people will maintain a victim mindset. It is easier for a mediator to deal with this issue than a person who is part of the issue. If I am part of the issue I simply say "What I hear you saying is..."

7. What does the preferable future look like to you?

Questions 7 & 8 are about the preferable future. This question turns the focus on what has been to what could and should be. It creates hope in the people because they begin to share a vision that both can agree on. When they realize how much they agree on their desired future they begin to walk together in agreement. This question begins to restore a sense of partnership and enthusiasm for what could and should be in their relationship and organization. God begins to give them a pure heart to see the future as he sees it, full of plans for good and not for evil.

Restate what you heard them say the preferable future could be.

8. What is the most powerful thing we can agree to ask God for?

This question is an acknowledgement of Psalm 55:22. We are to cast back on the Lord all our burdens that a conversation like this can create. We now know our responsibilities and the preferable future and we will either try to do it in the power of our flesh or we will cast our burdens on the Lord and acknowledge our weakness and dependence on Him to perform all things for us. When we agree in prayer right then we invite God's power to

impact this issue. Psalm 133 says that God commands a blessing when brethren dwell together in unity.

9. Based on the above, what is the one thing we cannot fail to do?

Questions 8 & 9 have to do with making Powerful Plans. This question helps us focus on one thing that will make all the difference if we execute it with consistency and excellence. We are looking for one thing that will help us move towards the preferable future. It is an idea such as "We cannot fail to communicate." It is an objective that is simply understood by everyone. For a doctor going into surgery, the one thing he cannot fail to do is wash his hands well or everything else he does will be rendered inconsequential. What is the one thing that you cannot fail to do or everything else will be rendered inconsequential? Understanding this one thing puts you on the path to making peace.

10. What practical steps must we take to make this happen?

Andy Stanley wrote a book about the "Most Important Question" and he states it like this "What is the wisest step you should take based on past experience, present circumstances, and future hopes?" These are the steps you can put in your planner. It describes who will do what by when. These are highly leveraged steps that will yield the greatest results. They are the 20% activities that will yield 80% of your results.

May God grant you the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that you may walk worthy of His noble calling and produce fruit that will stand the test of eternity as you make noble plans and carry out noble deeds.