



# Standing in the GAP

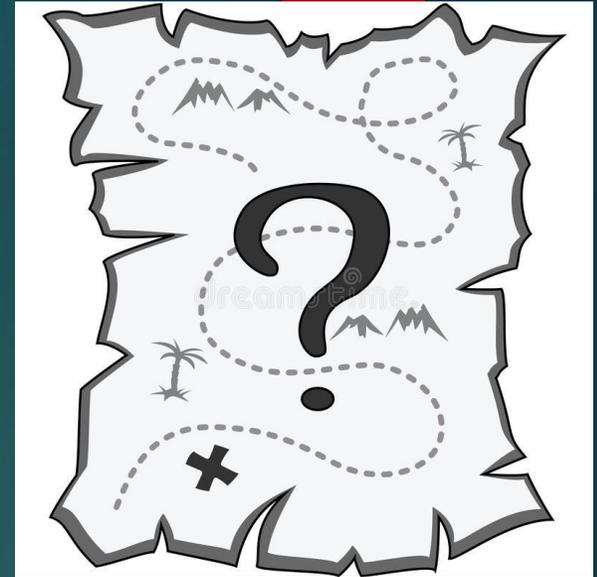
Ezekiel 22:30

# Church Standing in the Gap

HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

# Growing division: How did we get here?

- ▶ Two-party political system forces everything into one side or the other
- ▶ Extremists on the left and the right dominating the issues
- ▶ News media needing 24-hour controversy
- ▶ Social media creating silos and shouting matches
- ▶ Growing regional differences between red and blue states, urban and rural/small town, poor and rich
- ▶ Great social change that is still being sorted out



# Question

- ▶ When is the last time you had a difficult conversation with someone you disagreed with?
- ▶ How did it go?
- ▶ What could you have done better?

# What Is the Difference Between?

- ▶ Conversation
- ▶ Debate
- ▶ Argument
- ▶ Fight
- ▶ Battle

# What is the mission of the church in a time of great division?

- ▶ Choose sides and win arguments?
- ▶ Work for justice and exclude those opposed to particular policies or assumed ideologies?
- ▶ Create a space for community and conversation?
- ▶ Give vulnerable people a voice?
- ▶ Be a people who are diverse in thought and united in mission?
- ▶ Prioritize relationships over righteousness?



# Standing in the Gap (Breach)

- ▶ Isaiah 58:12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.
- ▶ Ezekiel 22:30 And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one.



# The cross of Christ: Holding the opposites in tension

The cross is not just a singular event. It's a statement from God that reality has a cruciform pattern. Jesus was killed in a collision of cross-purposes, conflicting interests, and half-truths, caught between the demands of an empire and the religious establishment of his day. The cross was the price Jesus paid for living in a "mixed" world, which is both human and divine, simultaneously broken and utterly whole. He hung between a good thief and a bad thief, between heaven and earth, inside of both humanity and divinity, a male body with a feminine soul, utterly whole and yet utterly disfigured—holding together all the primary opposites (see Colossians 1:15-20).

Christians are meant to be the visible compassion of God on earth more than "those who are going to heaven." They are the leaven who agree to share the fate of God for the life of the world now, and thus keep the whole batch of dough from falling back on itself. A Christian is invited, not required, to accept and live the cruciform shape of all reality. It is not a duty or even a requirement as much as a free vocation. Some people feel called and agree to not hide from the dark side of things or the rejected group, but in fact draw close to the pain of the world and allow it to radically change their perspective. They agree to embrace the imperfection and even the injustices of our world, allowing these situations to change them from the inside out, which is the only way things are changed anyway. – from Richard Rohr

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/coincidence-of-opposites-2019-02-07/>

# Colossians 1:15-20



The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ***For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.***

# How to Have Impossible Conversations

*Conversations between people who hold radically different beliefs about religion, politics, or values have always been challenging. In that sense, the conversation between Peter and SDL wasn't likely to go smoothly, but it didn't have to go that badly. There are good and bad ways to have conversations with people who hold radically different beliefs, and better approaches aren't just imaginable, they're achievable. Because our current cultural environment is deeply polarized, it's even harder than usual to converse productively across these divisions.*

Boghossian, Peter; Lindsay, James. How to Have Impossible Conversations (pp. 2-3). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.

# How to Have Impossible *A Very Practical Guide* Conversations

**PETER BOGHOSSIAN  
& JAMES LINDSAY**

# What can be done?



*Our response to this pervasive social dysfunction is to treat having impossible conversations as a skill to be mastered and a habit to be engaged. Don't be afraid to voice your opinion. Don't fear disagreement. Don't hesitate to ask questions. People are waking up and realizing that there is political capital to be gained, friendships to be had, insight to be gleaned, and intellectual integrity to be harnessed by meaningfully engaging others and even crossing moral aisles. You can be part of this renaissance. To join, you only need to know how to productively engage people in ways that are less likely to make them defensive and more likely to help them hold their beliefs less tenaciously.*

Boghossian, Peter; Lindsay, James. *How to Have Impossible Conversations* (pp. 5-6). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.

# Seven Fundamentals of Good Conversations

1. **Goals:** Why are you engaged in this conversation?
2. **Partnerships:** Be partners, not adversaries.
3. **Rapport:** Develop and maintain a good connection.
4. **Listen:** Listen more, talk less.
5. **Shoot the messenger:** Don't deliver your truth.
6. **Intentions:** People have better intentions than you think.
7. **Walk away:** Don't push your conversation partner beyond their comfort zone.



If Daryl Davis can...



# Quote

*You think that the heads of state only have serious conversations, but they actually often begin really with the weather or, "I really like your tie." — Madeleine Albright*

Boghossian, Peter; Lindsay, James. *How to Have Impossible Conversations* (p. 9). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.





# Standing in the GAP

Ezekiel 22:30

# Church Standing in the Gap

HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

# Reconciliation before Religion

## Matthew 5:21-24

[Jesus said:] "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.



# #1 – Goals: What's Your Purpose?

- ▶ Many different reasons for a conversation
  - ▶ Reaching mutual understanding
  - ▶ Learning from each other
  - ▶ Finding truth together
  - ▶ Intervening to try to change someone's beliefs or methods of forming beliefs
  - ▶ Impressing others
  - ▶ Yielding to coercion
  - ▶ Having a light, friendly interaction
- ▶ Why am I having this discussion?
- ▶ What do I want to get out of this?
- ▶ You can have more than one goal, or change your goals mid-conversation
- ▶ Be clear for yourself about your goals when beginning



# #2 – Partnerships

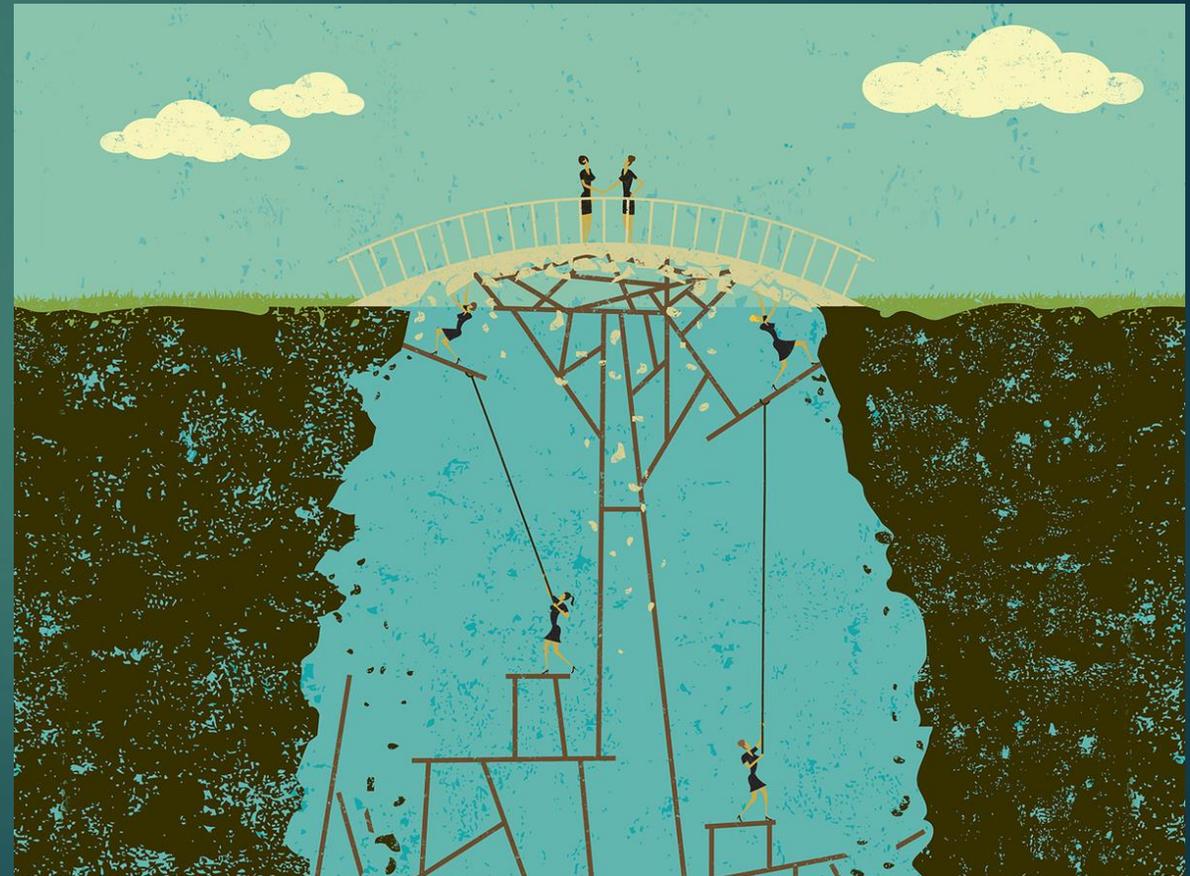
- ▶ How to change minds, influence people, build relationships, and maintain friendships?
  - ▶ Kindness
  - ▶ Compassion
  - ▶ Empathy
  - ▶ Treating individuals with dignity and respect
  - ▶ Create a safe environment
- ▶ View yourself as a conversation partner
  - ▶ Treat others as if you're working together to have a fruitful conversation
  - ▶ Seeing conversations as partnerships is the single biggest step to keeping them civil and for building relationships
- ▶ How do you switch from viewing people as opponents, moral degenerates, or even enemies to valued partners?
  - ▶ Shift your goal from winning to understanding
  - ▶ Working with each other to understand not only what you believe but why you believe it



# Ministry of Reconciliation

## 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.



# Truth and Reconciliation



# #3 – Rapport

- ▶ Rapport is a kind of friendliness
- ▶ Building rapport leads to feeling comfortable, mutually empathizing, building trust
- ▶ The more divergent the viewpoints between two people, the more important it is to build rapport
- ▶ To build rapport: Ask sincere questions that you genuinely want to know about them (movies, music, hobbies, travel)
- ▶ Specifics for building rapport:
  - ▶ Do it right away. Do not start with a substantive issue.
  - ▶ Ask ice breaking questions.
  - ▶ Ask about their interests and experiences.
  - ▶ Find common ground: food, sports, books...
  - ▶ Don't parallel talk (using what your partner says to start talking about yourself... ask more questions about them instead)
  - ▶ Invest in the relationship, let them know you care.
  - ▶ Engage in substantive conversations only if you're willing to make time.
  - ▶ Be ready to talk about something else if conversation gets sticky
  - ▶ Avoid call-outs except for severe infractions (rudeness, abuse, etc.)
  - ▶ Be courteous



# #4 – Listen

- ▶ When has someone really listened to you? What was that like?
- ▶ When has someone not listened and only talked about themselves? What was that like?
- ▶ If you do not listen, you cannot understand.
- ▶ Listening well is difficult and requires practice and discipline.
- ▶ How to improve your listening skills:
  - ▶ Let the other person speak first.
  - ▶ Look directly at someone and turn your body toward them. Nod to acknowledge when you understand. Must be authentic. Fully engaged.
  - ▶ Do not finish their sentences.
  - ▶ Pause. Don't rush to fill in silence. Give room for reflection.
  - ▶ Turn away from distractions or identify it.
  - ▶ If you don't understand, put the burden on yourself. Don't say: *You were unclear.* Say: *I'm not sure I understand. Can you say more?*
  - ▶ If you sense fear, frustration, anger in your partner, pay attention to the words she uses. Acknowledge the feelings using the same words.
  - ▶ Don't pull out your phone during the conversation.
  - ▶ Say: *I hear you.*



# Quote

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

-- Stephen Covey





# Church Standing in the Gap

HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

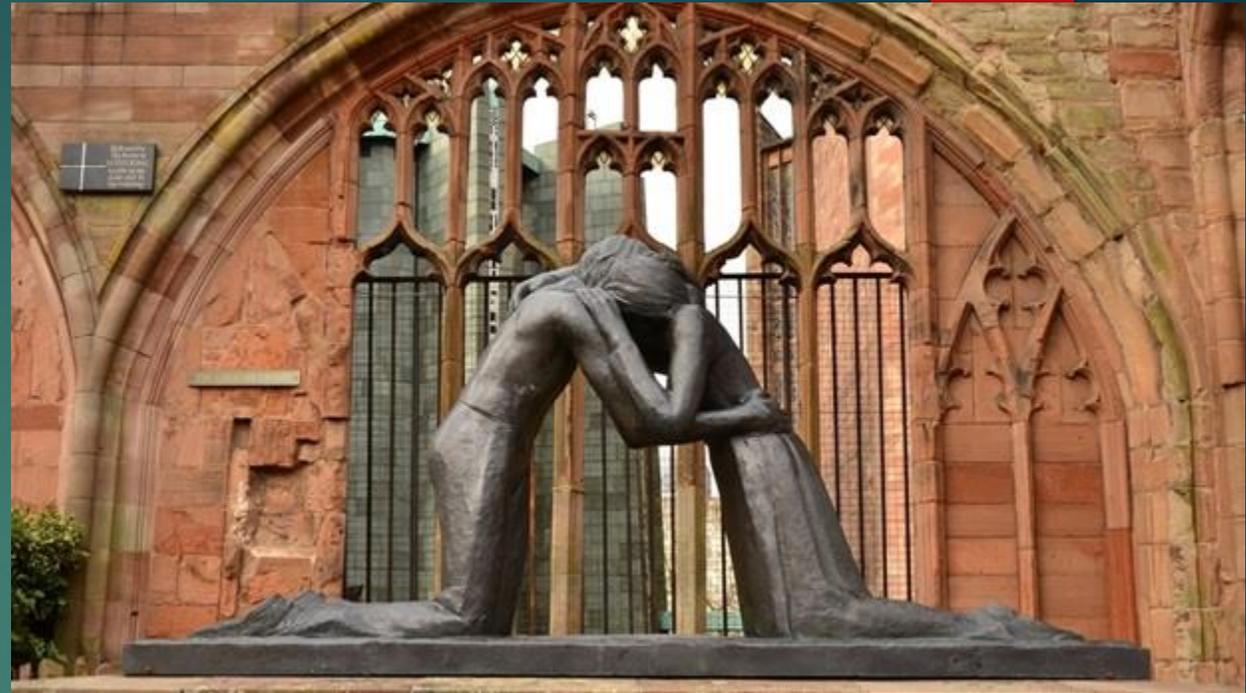
# Seven Fundamentals of Good Conversations

1. **Goals:** Why are you engaged in this conversation?
2. **Partnerships:** Be partners, not adversaries.
3. **Rapport:** Develop and maintain a good connection.
4. **Listen:** Listen more, talk less.
5. **Shoot the messenger:** Don't deliver your truth.
6. **Intentions:** People have better intentions than you think.
7. **Walk away:** Don't push your conversation partner beyond their comfort zone.



# Ephesians 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. <sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. <sup>17</sup> So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.



# #5 – Shoot the Messenger

- ▶ Messages are information conveyed in one-way transactions.
- ▶ Messengers espouse beliefs and assume their audience will listen and ultimately embrace their conclusions.
- ▶ Research on effective conversations shows that delivering messages does not work.
- ▶ What do sweetbreads have to do with delivering messages???
- ▶ Self-generated reasons for believing something are more effective than delivered messages.



# Ways to Shift From Being a Message Delivery Service to a Conversation Partner

- ▶ If you're thinking, "If they only understood this point, they'd change their mind," you're delivering a message.
- ▶ Ask yourself "Was I invited to share this, or am I just telling them?"
- ▶ Approach every conversation with an awareness that your partner understands problems in a way that you don't currently comprehend.
- ▶ Don't meet their message delivery with your own. That's leading to debate. No one likes to be lectured.
- ▶ Do not shoot the messenger when it's your partner. Only take aim at your own messenger. Listen, learn, and ask questions.
- ▶ Deliver your message when your partner requests it. Be succinct. Then return to collaborative conversation mind set.
- ▶ Say: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say that. I appreciate it. Any thoughts you'd like to add?



# Quote

“The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech.”

— Edwin H. Friedman

# #6 – Intentions

- ▶ Resist the inclination to assume someone with different beliefs is ignorant, crazy, or malicious.
- ▶ Consider that they view issues from a different perspective or that they're acting upon what they think is the best information available.
- ▶ In disagreements people often assume their partner's intentions and motivations are worse than they are.
- ▶ Assuming your partner has malicious intentions stifles your conversation. It hals cooperation. It makes you less capable of listening.
- ▶ Assume your partner has good intentions. Internet trolls and psychopaths are exceptions.
- ▶ How to apply this:
  - ▶ If your partner assumes you have bad intentions, don't waste time trying to convince her otherwise. Instead try to explore your reasoning.
  - ▶ If you start to assume your partner has bad intentions, switch to a frame of curiosity. Assume your partner may know something you don't.
  - ▶ Admit frustration and ask for clarification about their intentions in the conversation.
  - ▶ Don't feed the trolls.



# Good Ol' Marty

## The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

*What is this? or What does this mean?*

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.



# #7 – Walk Away

- ▶ Know when to walk away even when the conversation is going well.
- ▶ Putting pressure on your partner to continue beyond their comfort level shuts down listening and encourages defensiveness.
- ▶ When you feel you've exhausted all your options it is time to part amicably.
- ▶ People need time to wrestle with doubt, incorporate new information, and rethink their positions. So do you.
- ▶ Try to end on a positive note.



# How to Disagree Better





# Standing in the GAP

Ezekiel 22:30

# Church Standing in the Gap

HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

# Seven Fundamentals of Good Conversations

1. **Goals:** Why are you engaged in this conversation?
2. **Partnerships:** Be partners, not adversaries.
3. **Rapport:** Develop and maintain a good connection.
4. **Listen:** Listen more, talk less.
5. **Shoot the messenger:** Don't deliver your truth.
6. **Intentions:** People have better intentions than you think.
7. **Walk away:** Don't push your conversation partner beyond their comfort zone.



# Beginner Level: Nine Ways to Start Changing Minds

1. **Modeling:** Model the behavior you want to see in others
2. **Words:** Define terms up front
3. **Ask Questions:** Focus on a specific question
4. **Acknowledge Extremists:** Point out bad things people on your side do
5. **Navigating Social Media:** Do not vent on social media
6. **Don't Blame, Do Discuss Contributions:** Shift from blame to contribution
7. **Focus on Epistemology:** Figure out how people know what they claim to know
8. **Learn:** Learn what makes someone close-minded
9. **What NOT to Do (Reverse Applications):** A list of fundamental and basic conversational mistakes



# Quote

*These basic skills open conversations and shift them into learning mode. In particular, you'll focus on the importance of understanding how and why your conversation partner thinks and believes as she does. You can then use that understanding to help others—and yourself—become more humble about what they think they know. It's always worth remembering: to give others the gift of doubt, you need to possess it yourself.*

Boghossian, Peter; Lindsay, James. *How to Have Impossible Conversations* (pp. 34-35). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.





# If God's mind can change...

Exodus 32:9-14

The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

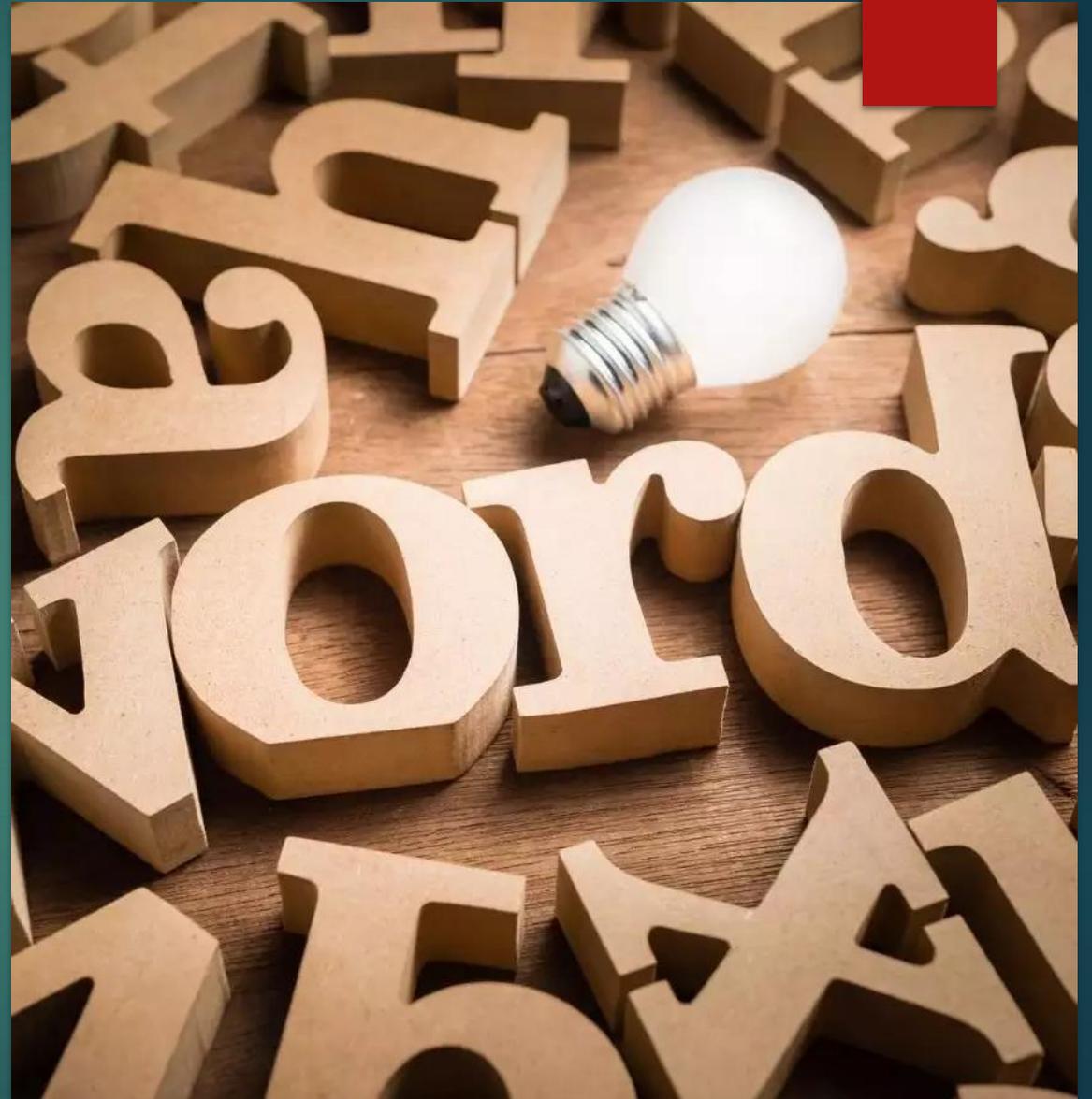


# Modeling

- ▶ Say “I don’t know” when you don’t know; model ignorance, honesty, humility, sincerity.
- ▶ Model traits of effective conversation: listening, curiosity, openness, fairness, charity, humor, willingness to change your mind.
- ▶ Admit you don’t know enough and ask your partner to explain their beliefs in detail.
- ▶ Expose your own Unread Library Effect (you don’t know as much as you think you do) by trying to explain in detail what you know
- ▶ Model clarity; avoid jargon.
- ▶ Do not model bad behavior.

# Words

- ▶ Arguments may seem to be about matters of substance. They may just be disagreements about the meanings of words.
- ▶ Words can signify profoundly different things to different people.
- ▶ How to get on the same verbal page:
  - ▶ Define words upfront. “What do you mean by XXX?”
  - ▶ Try to understand the context in which the word is being used.
  - ▶ Go with their definitions after asking for them. If you can't for a term that's crucial to the conversation, move on or end the conversation.
  - ▶ Be attentive to a word's moral implication. This may influence your partner's assumptions about the truth of their belief.



# Love, Unity, Peace

Ephesians 4:1-3

*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*



# Ask Questions



- ▶ Focus your conversation on a specific question as opposed to a general topic
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions using “How?” or “What?” rather than closed questions that require only a one-word response.
- ▶ Clarify the topic of conversation in a question.
- ▶ If the conversation goes astray, bring it back.
- ▶ Be authentic, not manipulative or gimmicky in your questions.
- ▶ Do not disguise statements as questions. Avoid leading questions that carry an agenda.

# Acknowledge Extremists

- ▶ Extremism fosters tribalism, polarization, unwarranted skepticism, distrust, defensiveness, and unfair caricatures of the other side's views.
- ▶ Point out how extremists on your side go too far. This may be an easy point of agreement, building trust.
- ▶ Disavow extremist behavior of those on "your side."
- ▶ Identify how "your side" goes too far.
- ▶ Do not bring up extremism on "their side."
- ▶ Treat "their side" charitably.
- ▶ Check yourself for extremism and keep it out of your conversations.



# Reverse Q&A



# Beginner Level: Nine Ways to Start Changing Minds

1. **Modeling:** Model the behavior you want to see in others
2. **Words:** Define terms up front
3. **Ask Questions:** Focus on a specific question
4. **Acknowledge Extremists:** Point out bad things people on your side do
5. **Navigating Social Media:** Do not vent on social media
6. **Don't Blame, Do Discuss Contributions:** Shift from blame to contribution
7. **Focus on Epistemology:** Figure out how people know what they claim to know
8. **Learn:** Learn what makes someone close-minded
9. **What NOT to Do (Reverse Applications):** A list of fundamental and basic conversational mistakes



# Navigating Social Media

- ▶ “Attempting to ask provocative questions on social media and then expecting a civil discussion isn’t just naïve, it’s imbecilic...”
- ▶ Why do you think social media conversations so often go so badly?
- ▶ Face-to-face conversations convey much more meaning and tone than text conversations.
- ▶ When people post something on social media they probably don’t want their belief to be corrected. Usually they are looking for confirmation.
- ▶ Social media conversations are usually public spaces, which creates unique problems.



# Best Practices for Engaging Conversations on Social Media

- ▶ Remember that the internet is forever – even when you delete what you said.
- ▶ Never post (or email, or text) when you're angry.
- ▶ You do not owe anyone a response on social media because they've engaged you. You may wish to respond privately.
- ▶ Never argue on Twitter.
- ▶ Avoid religion, politics, and philosophy on personal social media posts.

# Don't Blame, Do Discuss Contributions

- ▶ Blame ends goodwill and puts those blamed on the defensive. It hinders problem solving and dissolves rapport.
- ▶ The Harvard Negotiation Project notes that there is an effective alternative to introducing blame into conversations: look collaboratively for contributions.
- ▶ Blame is one-sided. Most problems have more than one contributor.
- ▶ Identifying contributions is a joint, interactive approach to understanding a broader picture of how something came to be.
- ▶ Consider the election of Donald Trump as president. What's the difference between choosing who to blame for his election, verses looking at contributing factors.
- ▶ Avoid saying "X caused Y." Don't say "both sides" when your side is a contributor to the problem.



# Focus on Epistemology

- ▶ Epistemology is the theory of how we know what we know. It helps distinguish justified belief from opinion.
- ▶ Asking questions about someone's reasoning is less likely to evoke a defensive posture than challenging their beliefs directly.
- ▶ How to's:
  - ▶ Make a brief, positive statement before probing their reasoning: That's an interesting perspective. What leads you to conclude that?
  - ▶ Ask outsider questions: How can someone who has a different view come to reach the same conclusion?
  - ▶ Start your conversation in wonder: How did my partner arrive at this conclusion? What is their reasoning process?





# What Not to Do

- ▶ Be discourteous or uncivil.
- ▶ Display anger.
- ▶ Raise your voice or talk over someone.
- ▶ Be intentionally disrespectful.
- ▶ Ridicule and blame someone.
- ▶ Laugh at someone.
- ▶ Attack a position before understanding it.
- ▶ Display an unwillingness to hear your partner's arguments.
- ▶ Adopt a less charitable interpretation of someone's words.
- ▶ Attack a person rather than the belief.
- ▶ Be dishonest with yourself about what you believe.
- ▶ Pretend to know something you don't know.
- ▶ Suggest a person can't really know something because of an immutable attribute.

## **NOT** TO DO LiST

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



# What Not to Do

- ▶ Don't change your mind when presented with new and compelling evidence.
- ▶ Insist that extremists on your side are acting rationally.
- ▶ Correct someone's grammar.
- ▶ Interrupt.
- ▶ Finish other's sentences for them.
- ▶ Look at your phone while having a discussion.
- ▶ Name-drop.
- ▶ Brag.
- ▶ Refuse to disengage until there is a burned bridge.

## **NOT** TO DO LiST

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

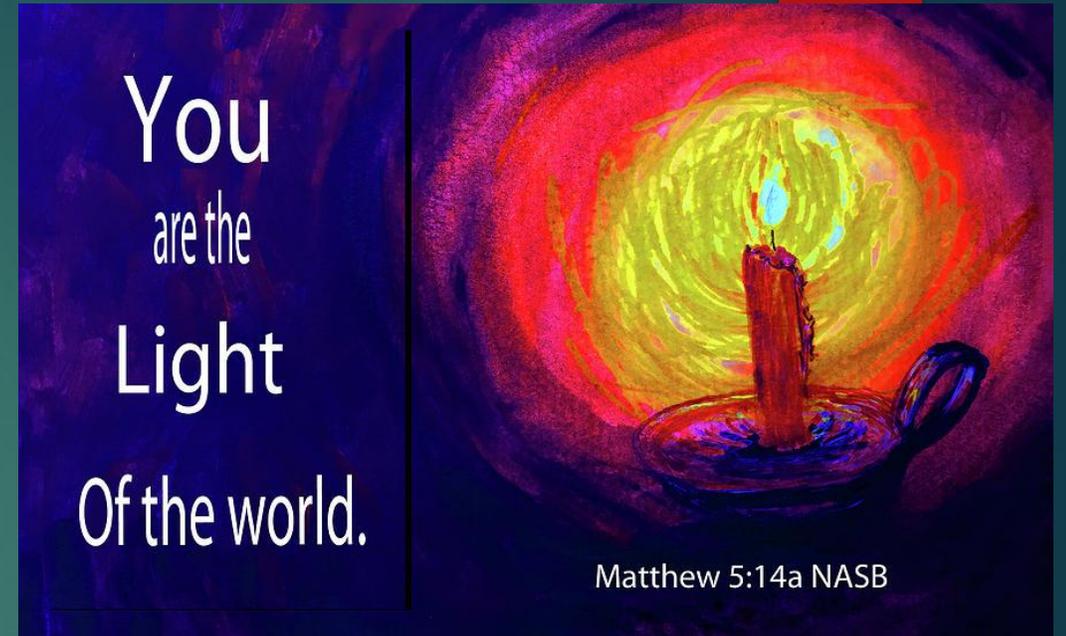


# Reverse Q & A



# Salt and Light Today?

**Matthew 5:13-16** "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. <sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.



# Intermediate Level

- ▶ #1—LET FRIENDS BE WRONG
  - ▶ It's okay if someone disagrees with you, even about a cherished conclusion
- ▶ #2—BUILD GOLDEN BRIDGES
  - ▶ Find ways for your conversation partner to avoid social embarrassment if they change their mind
- ▶ #3—LANGUAGE
  - ▶ Avoid “you,” switch to third person or collaborative language like “we” and “us”
- ▶ #4—STUCK? REFRAME
  - ▶ Shift the conversation to keep it going smoothly or to get it back on track
- ▶ #5—CHANGE YOUR MIND
  - ▶ Change your mind on the spot
- ▶ #6—INTRODUCE SCALES
  - ▶ Use scales to gauge effective interventions, figure out how confident someone is in a belief, and put issues into perspective
- ▶ #7—OUTSOURCING
  - ▶ Turn to outside information to answer the question, “How do you know that?”

## How to Have Impossible *A Very Practical Guide* Conversations

PETER BOGHOSSIAN  
& JAMES LINDSAY