

Brave Church/Hard Topics, 2/1/2023: Why Would We Want to Engage in Difficult Conversations?

This is the chat log of the discussion. Names and identifiable information have been removed for privacy.

References to slides for this session can be found in *BC-HT Why engage in difficult conversations 2-1-23.pdf* document linked [Brave Church-Hard Topics web page](#).

Additional information added after the discussion are identified with “NOTE:”

Discuss:

Having conversations on difficult, controversial topics can be challenging, stressful, frustrating, argumentative.

Why engage in difficult conversations at all? What obstacles get in your way?

To develop empathy for others (people on the other side of an issue).

Rather than try to argue, just listen and try to understand why they feel the way they do.

My dad loved to debate – I got that from him.

Have these discussions to get the issue out there and weigh them.

Learn to talk about things in a civil manner. Set the tone for our leaders to do the same.

Having a civil discussion with others will help us understand our own perspective better.

Avoid shutting down opposing views. Learn why we believe what we believe.

We don't learn anything by only listening to ourself and others who agree with us.

Grew up avoiding debates, but that keeps us from learning. This will give me practice on how to do this.

Exposed to many opinions previously (in service) but am now being introduced to a whole new scope of different opinions living here in Fairfax County.

These types of face-to-face discussions improve our clarity and helps with complete understanding. We don't see that with social media.

Jesus didn't shy away from difficult situations.

Obstacles: trying to keep the peace so we don't talk about hard things. Letting our ego take control.

As military or federal employees, we have to keep our views to yourself. It's good to have a safe place where we can engage in controversial conversations.

Counter: Navy pilot experience, we were blunt and honest with each other with no filters; as a civilian, we have to add filters.

Heard a podcast talking about how hard it is to have conversation these days because there is a “tyranny of purity” on both the left and right for an “ideologically unimpeachable position”. This tyranny is strongly opposed to compromise.

From the TED talk link on how to have a conversation: Listen to the person and take it all in instead of thinking about what your reply will be.

NOTE: Here's the link: [10 ways to have a better conversation – TED Talk by Celeste Headlee](#)

On a family holiday overseas, we attended services in England where the archbishop discussed a major event in the world. The last several years have had monumental movements in culture, thought. The crux of what we're wanting to get to is to consider these things in our faith, tie back to what Jesus would do. What might our position be based on our beliefs?

Change is threatening to many. That's why the "Christian nationalism" movement is gaining strength.

Next subject: Learning how to have a difficult conversation. See Slides 3-4 (also 9-11) in *BC-HT Why engage in difficult conversations 2-1-23.pdf*

Another tip would be to consider WHEN to engage, if at all.

We want each of us to feel comfortable expressing differing opinions. Let's not avoid controversial ideas.

Synopsis: Choose our words carefully. Be accurate in what we are saying.

We need not always be accurate as we will be stating our opinion about things many times.

Our words should be accurate to what we are trying to discuss.

Discussion: Talking to Those Who Are "Against" Us. See Slides 5-6 in *BC-HT Why engage in difficult conversations 2-1-23.pdf*

NOTE: Here's the link: [Talking to Those Who are "Against" Us? Reading 1 Corinthians after lunch with an anti-gay apologist](#)

How often do we see ourselves as "fundamentally on the same side" as Christians with whom we disagree?

How can we bridge the differences? [even if neither of you are likely to change your minds]

The turning point in the story: the author decided she needed to tell her friend what she thought and how she felt, and her evangelical friend listened with no response for an hour.

When the hurt to someone you care about is so deep, there is a weighing of why you should continue this conversation. We have to weigh whether it will do more damage than good. Valuing the relationship may be much more important.

For many issues, such as this one, we can find support for both positions in the Bible. Have to look at more than one part of the Bible. Sometimes we have to walk away from that. It won't bear fruit. Jesus said, 'dust the sand off your sandals and walk on.'

Our Christian faith is being hijacked much like the Muslim faith has been hijacked. A lot of the arguments are not quite Christian based. Need to pull back that veil and show it for what it is.

Perhaps we need to have a shared goal. With a common cause that unites us, our differences can pale and become secondary. Maybe in some family relationships, what's important is the relationship itself.

Use your Christian faith as a foundation, not as a filter---or a bat.

Reminded of last Sunday's sermon: wear our Christian faith out into the world.

The question "who is Jesus Christ" created an awesome discussion with one of our Afghan families. We should do more of these.

We need to have hard discussions outside this group because in this group we all tend to think similarly.

NOTE: We hope to provide different perspectives in this class, either in the information we provide, the questions we ask, or guests we can bring in. Stay tuned.

Tear down the barriers of us versus them.

Making Room for Stories. See Slide 7 in *BC-HT Why engage in difficult conversations 2-1-23.pdf*

Discussion: **How comfortable would you be with sharing your faith story? And how would you like to see Grace make more room for those stories?**

We have had times for sharing faith stories at Grace.

Here's a wild idea - maybe we need to do this on a regular basis: put a few firepits outside and invite people to share their stories.

A summer small group dedicated to people sharing their stories--with some guidelines.

Try sharing ideas while you are walking together.

Pub theology - provided an environment to talk about the issues of the day.

Preview of the next weeks: a 2-part series on "Is social justice a heresy?" Reading materials will be posted in preparation.