

FACILITATING TABLE CONVERSATIONS

One of the main practices of a Table Community (TC) is having spiritual conversation around the table. We do this by (1) sharing where we've seen God at work in our lives and by (2) having conversation around what is shared by others. This is a powerful practice, because it helps us grow in our awareness of Jesus. Both as we gather together as well as in everyday life. The role of the facilitator is to help guide the conversation around the table, making sure people share and respond to what is shared.

The main skill for facilitating table conversation is practicing, what we call, *double listening*, which means listening to what others are sharing while also being attentive to what Jesus might want to say through us to those sharing.

The following can be helpful ways to jumpstart conversation around the table:

1. **Going First.** The best way to help to initiate conversation is by simply going first as the facilitator!
2. **Use a Starter Question.** Below you will see our standard set of questions we use around the table as well as a resource from Practicing the Way. It can be helpful to pose a starter question to get conversation going. Answering, "Where have you seen God?", can feel too open ended. But if you ask, "How has God provided for you lately?" Then it gives people something concrete to respond to.
3. **Asking Others Questions.** Asking questions is one of the easiest ways to facilitate deeper conversation. Asking questions can be helpful in many ways:
 1. It gives people who are typically quiet an opening to share (sometimes people need someone to ask them directly).
 2. Asking questions is the easiest way to respond to someone who has shared (which helps carry on and deepen the conversation).
 3. It's a great way to follow up with people from something shared from previous weeks.

As someone is sharing, good facilitators will be prayerfully processing the following:

- **What is Jesus saying?** The goal is ultimately to meet with the risen Jesus. So everything that follows are ways in which we can begin to sense Jesus in our midst. We want to grow as whole-life disciples and everyday missionaries. So our time around the table is to help awaken us to Jesus in our stories of discipleship.
- **Connect the Dots.** It's common for people struggle seeing how God is at work in their lives. So it can be helpful to connect the dots for others in order to see how God might be at work! We often need other people to help us discern Jesus' presence in our everyday circumstances.
- **Cultivate Curiosity.** One of the best postures to adopt is simply being curious about someone and what they're sharing. Cultivating curiosity is one of the best ways to help yourself respond to what someone has shared. If you're genuinely curious it's easy to think of a question to ask.

- **Placing Yourself in Their Story.** By placing yourself in their story you're able to empathize with the sharer. In doing this, you can try to better understand what they were feeling, experiencing, thinking, etc. As you do this it helps shape better questions or ways in which you might respond.
- **Think Biblically.** What does the Bible have to say about what is being shared? Does it remind you of a Biblical story? Word of comfort or encouragement?

As a facilitator, it's important to help the community avoid the following:

- **Cheap advice.** If someone shares a problem with the community the natural response can often look like offering cheap advice. Most of the time, however, people are longing to be seen and loved by their community. If someone needs or wants advice they will typically ask for it.
- **Quick fix solutions.** Going off the above, it's important to not jump into problem solving mode. We have to remember people are not problems to be solved. The goal around the table is point one another to Jesus. Typically, if the solution was simple then it would have already been address by the person.
- **Shaming others.** One of the worst things that can happen in response to what someone has shared is by subtly shaming others. This could be done by speaking down to someone, elevating ourselves above them, using Scripture to shame others, etc.
- **Keep the community focused.** Sharing around the table can feel intimidating to people. So as people share, it's important for the facilitator to keep the community focused on whoever is sharing. This could mean gently asking people to stop side conversations or getting up from the table. If the community isn't attentive as others share, it could hinder the depth of conversation and discourage others from sharing in the future.

The following are practical tools to help table conversation:

Standard Set of Questions

- What/where could you say, "Only God could do that?"
- How has God answered prayer?
- When did God prompt you or strengthen you to do something?
- Did God provide for some need?
- What can you give thanks to God for?
- When have you wondered, "Where is God?"
- Has God spoken to you through Scripture, prayer, or other disciplines?
- How has God blessed you through others?
- Where have you sensed God's presence?

Another helpful resource for table conversation can be found here: <https://www.practictheway.org/tableconversations>. Once there, you can download a set of questions that you can use with your Table Community if you need help jumpstarting conversation.