



Having Calm Conversations

Participant Notes

Why We Need to Have Calm Conversations

Sharing Jesus these days isn't easy. It can even make us anxious. How can we lay the conversation groundwork so that we can talk about faith-related things? How do we make good Gospel connections in conversation? How can we disagree well when someone holds a different position to us? Having Calm Conversations is a practical guide for those next steps in conversation. When we speak calmly, wisely and winsomely, we speak well to others about Jesus.

Session 0 Having Calm Conversations

What is this course about?

Evangelism can be anxiety-producing. It comes with a real or perceived threat of rejection and possibly persecution. Sometimes we are aware of this and we feel anxious. Other times the anxiety is at a subconscious level.

This course is about simple principles and practical communication techniques that can help us keep calm, create opportunities and share Jesus.

How it works

This course provides animated role-play and problem solving techniques to help you have better conversations about Jesus.

Each session in this course has a:

Problem

An evangelism scenario is presented in an animated video. When we are anxious (think fight, flight, freeze or appease responses) the problem is we don't think as clearly and so don't bring our best to the conversation.

Solution

There are two aspects to the solution - What we can learn from the Bible, and insights from secular wisdom.

Bible

The rationale for wanting to bring our best to evangelistic conversations and become the people that Jesus wants us to be.

Secular insights

A simple principle or practical communication technique that can help us fulfill the Bible's teaching.

 Breakdown

The solution is broken down with the use of a practical example in an animated video.

 Disaster recovery

What to do when the anxiety wins out and the solution doesn't work. How we can learn from the situation and "redo" things differently next time.

 Recap

Draws the learning from the session together.

 Reflection and prayer

Provides space for personal application of what you learned in the session.

 Structure

This course has 4 sessions designed to lay a foundation for conversing calmly, while building practical communication skills for different circumstances.

Session 1 - Conversations that are Calm. How to become a calmer, less anxious presence.

Session 2 - Conversations that Evolve. How to lay the conversation groundwork to be able to talk about faith-related things.

Session 3 - Conversations that Intrigue. How to make a good Gospel connection and say something true and wonderful about Jesus.

Session 4 - Conversations that Resolve. How to disagree well on faith matters and turn a negative into a positive.

 Get Ready

Ready to have some calm conversations? Proceed to Session 1, Conversations that are Calm.

Session 1: Conversations that are Calm

How to become a calmer, less anxious presence



The Problem

Play the animated video and see what happens to Amy in conversation.

The starting point to having calmer conversations is to become a calmer person ourselves. This isn't as easy as perhaps it sounds.

Evangelistic conversations can be anxiety-producing. They come with a real or perceived threat of rejection and possibly persecution. Sometimes we are aware of this and we feel anxious. Other times the anxiety is at a subconscious level.

The evidence that we are experiencing some sort of anxiety when evangelizing can be seen in our behaviours. We become reactive to the situation. Think classic fight, freeze, flight, appease responses. For example:

- We become so focused on winning the argument that we fail to notice the other person has stopped listening (fight response). [Not caring enough about the other person is a reactive response].
- We don't say anything because we think we don't know the answer even though in hindsight we have one (freeze response).
- We change the conversation or answer evasively to avoid a potential minefield (flight response).
- We find ourselves in agreement with the other person in order to maintain harmony (appease response). This was Amy's anxious response in the video.

Sometimes the first sign of any of these responses is physiological: think heavier perspiration, shallower breathing, raised heart rate.

The trouble is we don't think as clearly when we are anxious. Which means when it comes to evangelism, we don't bring our best to the conversation.

Reflection question

Q. Can you think of an evangelistic conversation where you demonstrated anxious behaviours?



Solution

What does the Bible have to say and how can secular wisdom help us fulfill the Bible's teaching?



Bible

1 Peter 3:15-16 [ESV]

¹⁵ In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

This is one of the well known evangelism passages in the Bible.

The word "gentleness" here means to be calm in the face of a negative situation. The negative situation Peter's readers are facing is the potential of further persecution if they continue to speak up for Jesus. There is a very real temptation to fly under the radar and not say anything.

Evangelism today can be a negative situation with the real or perceived threat of rejection (or persecution). These are just the situations where we need to think calmly and speak up for Jesus.



Secular wisdom

How can we keep calm in the face of a negative situation? One way is to become a calmer, less anxious presence. This is about responding from a thoughtful and

considered position rather than reacting to the situation. When we do this we are in a better place to bring our best thinking to the conversation.

A good question to ask ourselves is: Is this my best thinking? Is what I am saying - or about to say - coming from a thoughtful and considered position or am I responding reactively?

Sometimes we can have the presence of mind in the actual conversation to be aware that our reactivity buttons are being pushed. Our behaviours are the giveaway. We see ourselves becoming too focused on getting our point across, or changing the conversation or being evasive in our answers.

Where does this reactivity come from? The fight, flight and freeze responses were instinctive survival responses when you suddenly found a tiger in your path (the appease response is another - although it doesn't really work in the tiger scenario!). We have survival responses when it comes to relationships too. We care what people think of us (or perhaps we don't care enough - this too is a reactive response). We want them to think well of us. We want to impress them. We don't want to disappoint them (or ourselves). We want to please them and don't want to cause them distress.

In those moments when we recognise our reactivity buttons are being pushed, we can:

1. Stop and take a few deep breaths. This simple exercise can help calm our thinking down.
2. Pray! God is in control.
3. Address our relationship survival response with what we know from the Bible. For example: "I know I'm being evasive. I just don't want them to reject me! God wants me to be gentle: be calm and speak up for Jesus in negative situations. I choose that rather than giving in to the anxiety I'm feeling".
4. And then we can do our best to bring our best to the conversation and give a thoughtful and considered response.

Sometimes we don't notice our anxious reactivity - or sometimes we notice it too late. In that case, think of it as useful intelligence for next time. In the next conversation, try to observe if the same anxious reactivity is at play. Often we display similar patterns in different relationships with people whose opinions we care about. And once a pattern becomes evident then we can go into the next conversation more prepared.

 The breakdown**Exercises**

Q1. Imagine an unbeliever, a significant person in your life, says to you: "I think education in primary schools about gender identity is so important".

1. What could be a reactive response?
2. What could be a calm response?

Q2. Imagine an unbeliever, a significant person in your life, says to you: "I'm happy to read the Bible with you but there's no way I would become a Christian".

3. What could be a reactive response?
4. What could be a calm response?

Reflection question

Q. What did you learn through that exercise?

Play the second animated video and see how Amy puts the solution into practice.

 Disaster recovery**#1 I want to be calm... but what if I fail?**

That's ok. That happens. Jesus is bigger than that.

Our anxious reactivity doesn't disappear overnight. It's part of being human. But noticing when our reactivity buttons are being pushed is the starting point in learning to manage it. Managing it will take time, effort and prayer.

#2 What if I do my best to be calm... but the other person doesn't react well?

Remember what we are responsible for and what's in our control.

What's not in our control is how the other person responds. We can leave that in God's hands. What's in our responsibility is to be gentle: be calm and speak up for Jesus in negative situations.

The best disaster recovery is to think of what happened as a positive learning opportunity. Spend some time reflecting on what you did well and what you'd do differently next time. There's no need to be too hard on yourself because Jesus deals with us in grace.

 Recap

We want to bring our best thinking to the conversation, rather than responding reactively. To become a calmer, less anxious presence. The secret to having calmer conversations is to become a calmer person ourselves.

Sometimes our anxiety can get in the way of this. When it does, think of it as a positive learning opportunity for next time.

 Reflection and prayer

1. Take some time to reflect on some of the principles we have considered for becoming a calmer, less-anxious presence.
 - a. What do you want to take away and work on?
 - b. How will you know if you are making progress?

2. Think about a recent conversation with an unbeliever.
 - a. How did you go in terms of being a calmer, less anxious presence?
 - b. What would you do differently next time?

3. Pray.

Session 2: Conversations that Evolve

How to have good conversations



The Problem

Play the animated video and see what happens to Amy in conversation.

The secret to having good conversations is to become a good listener. This can be harder than we think.

Evangelistic conversations can be anxiety-producing. They come with a real or perceived threat of rejection and possibly persecution. The evidence that we are experiencing some sort of anxiety can be seen in our behaviours. For example:

- We stop listening to the other person because we're just waiting for an opportunity to jump in and speak (fight response). [Not caring enough about the other person is a reactive response].
- We stop listening to the other person as we panic over what to say next (freeze response).
- We half-listen because we are bored or frustrated by the conversation or where it is heading (flight response). This is Amy's anxious response in the video.
- We selectively listen and pick up on points we agree with, to keep the peace (appease response).

The trouble is we don't do our best thinking when we are anxious. We don't bring our best to the conversation.

Reflection question

Q. Can you think of an evangelistic conversation where you demonstrated anxious listening behaviours?



Solution

What does the Bible have to say and how can secular wisdom help us fulfill the Bible's teaching?



Bible

Colossians 4:5-6 [ESV]

⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer every person.

This is one of the well known evangelism passages in the Bible. In *Session 3 Conversations that Intrigue* we will see that "seasoned with salt" means adding some Jesus-flavour to the conversation.

Look though at what Paul says about conversations. He writes: "answer every person". He doesn't say "tell". We *tell* people we don't know - we *answer* people we do know.



Secular wisdom

We get to know a person by becoming good listeners. It takes self-awareness and practice to become a good listener.

Here are some simple principles to help us listen well.

Listen to learn.

We listen to learn to gain a sense of what life is like walking in their shoes - to understand what they think, and in some ways to enter into what they feel.

Develop an attitude of curiosity.

Listening to learn requires an attitude of curiosity. Without genuine curiosity, we fill in the blanks of their story with our own assumptions.

Have the intention of finding out what the other person values and cares about.

Listening to learn isn't about collecting information for the sake of it. We want to learn what the person values and cares about. We want to deepen relationships. It's an act of care. People can sense when the interest isn't genuine.

 **The breakdown**

Exercises

1. Statement 1: "I don't think homosexuality is a sin"
2. Statement 2: "I don't think God should be in a position to judge people"
3. Statement 3: "I don't need religion. My life is going well as it is"

Think of an unbeliever you know who would resonate with one of the above statements (or come up with something else).

Imagine you were having a conversation with them and they made this statement. How would you respond? How would they then respond?

See if you can imagine a conversation for 3 minutes.

Looking back over that imaginary conversation, how mindful were you of listening to learn, being curious and discovering what's important to them?

Alternatively, you could dissect an actual conversation to assess your listening (NOTE: this can be a hard exercise if you don't remember the specific details of the conversation).

Reflection question

Q. What did you learn through that exercise?

Play the second animated video and see how Amy puts the solution into practice.

 Disaster recovery

#1 I want to listen well... but what if I fail?

That's ok. That happens. Jesus is bigger than that.

#2 What if I do my best to listen well... but the other person doesn't give me much to work with?

That's ok. They might not be used to conversations at this level - or there might not yet be the level of trust in the relationship necessarily for vulnerability. That's part of getting to know the person.

The best disaster recovery is to think of what happened as a positive learning opportunity. Spend some time reflecting on what you did well and what you'd do differently next time. There's no need to be too hard on yourself because Jesus deals with us in grace.

 Recap

We want to bring our best to the conversation. We want to get to know the other person. We want to be good listeners. We want to do this not simply with the agenda of wanting to talk about Jesus, but as an act of care (loving our neighbour).

Sometimes our anxiety can get in the way of this. When it does, think of it as a positive learning opportunity for next time.

 Reflection and prayer

1. Some principles for listening.
 - a. What do you want to take away and work on?
 - b. How will you know if you are making progress?
2. Think about a recent conversation with an unbeliever.

- a. How did you go in terms of listening?
 - b. What would you do differently next time?
3. Pray

Session 3: Conversations that Intrigue

How to make a good Gospel connection



The Problem

Play the animated video and see what happens to Amy in conversation.

The key to making a good Gospel connection is to say something relevant, true, engaging and winsome about Jesus. This isn't easy.

Evangelistic conversations can be anxiety-producing. They come with a real or perceived threat of rejection and possibly persecution. The evidence that we are experiencing some sort of anxiety can be seen in our behaviours. For example:

- We start preaching to the other person because we want them to think about Jesus the way we do (fight response). [Not caring enough about the other person is a reactive response].
- We download anything and everything we know about Jesus because we don't know how to engage with what the other person has said (freeze response).
- We let the opportunity to talk about Jesus go by because we are worried about ridicule or labeling (flight response). This is Amy's anxious response in the video.
- We downplay certain aspects of what we believe in order to make Jesus more attractive (appease response).

The trouble is we don't think as clearly when we are anxious. We don't bring our best to the conversation.

Reflection question

Q. Can you think of an evangelistic conversation where you demonstrated anxious behaviours when it came to talking about Jesus?



Solution

What does the Bible have to say and what practical steps can we take to fulfill the Bible's teaching?



Bible

Colossians 4:5-6 [ESV]

⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer every person.

This is one of the well known evangelism passages in the Bible. In *Session 2 Conversations that Evolve* we saw that we “answer” a person, rather than “tell” a person, because we know them.

When Paul writes “seasoned with salt” he is talking about conversations that have a bold edge to them...and that edge involves Jesus. However it's not about saying anything and everything about Jesus. What we say about Jesus should be governed by what we know about the person. That will add flavour to the conversation because what you're saying is intriguing to them.

Note too the “always” (speech), which balances the “make the most of every opportunity” (conduct). It should be the regular practice to throw some salt into the conversation.



Secular wisdom

While it's important to get to know the person you are talking to, there are some prevailing attitudes in secular Western society when it comes to Christianity/Jesus. Many people wouldn't entertain the idea of exploring Christianity because they aren't convinced it has anything good to offer.

This is helpful to know when it comes to framing what you say about Jesus. We have an opportunity to provide a positive counter-story.

To make a good Gospel connection, say something true and wonderful about Jesus and the positive difference he makes to life.

*True...*We don't want to misrepresent Jesus and what life is like following him.

*Wonderful...*Because we can! Jesus is wonderful, and life with him at the centre is life at its best.

*Jesus...*Going straight to somewhere in the 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) gets us to the heart of the Christian faith (Jesus).

*Positive difference...*In this life Jesus provides us with purpose, meaning, identity, hope, peace, joy, community - all things that secular Western society craves.

To make a good gospel connection requires a number of steps.

Step 1: Theme. Identify the theme of the conversation that you'd like to make a good gospel connection to.

Step 2: Gospels. Think about what Jesus says or does in relation to the theme (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John).

Step 3: Connection. Say something true and wonderful about Jesus and the positive difference he makes to life.



The breakdown

Exercises

Scenario #1: Say you're talking to an unbeliever about forgiveness. They think forgiving someone is a good thing, just hard. Forgiveness is a familiar Christian topic and so you want to make a good gospel connection.

1. In the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) what's one thing Jesus says or does when it comes to forgiveness?
2. What would you say that's true and wonderful about Jesus and the positive difference he makes to life?

Scenario #2: Say you're talking to an unbeliever about the current loneliness epidemic. They have admitted to you that at times they feel lonely - and you have admitted that you sometimes do too. You'd like to say more by making a good gospel connection.

1. What is loneliness? (briefly come up with a definition)
2. In the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) what's one thing Jesus says or does that could address loneliness?

3. What would you say that's true and wonderful about Jesus and the positive difference he makes to life?

Reflection question

Q. What did you learn through that exercise?

Play the second animated video and see Amy replaying the conversation and this time making a good Gospel connection.

 **Disaster recovery**

#1 I want to make a good Gospel connection...what if I fail?

If you fail to seize an opportunity, that's ok. Not every conversation has to land on Jesus. Jesus is bigger than that.

The hardest steps are working out what the Gospels have to say and then making the connection. Reading the Gospels and becoming more familiar with them is a good start. Ask a trusted person (for example your pastor or bible study leader) what they would say.

#2 I make what I think is a good Gospel connection...what if the other person doesn't show any interest?

Remember what we are responsible for and what's in our control. What's not in our control is how the other person responds. We can leave that in God's hands. What's in our responsibility is to take up opportunities where we can to throw some salt into the conversation.

The best disaster recovery is to think of what happened as a positive learning opportunity. Spend some time reflecting on what you did well and what you'd do differently next time. There's no need to be too hard on yourself because Jesus deals with us in grace.

Recap

We want to bring our best to the conversation. Where there is opportunity, we want to make a good Gospel connection by saying something true and wonderful about Jesus and the difference he makes to life.

Sometimes our anxiety can get in the way of this. When it does, think of it as a positive learning opportunity for next time.

Reflection and prayer

1. The framework and process for making a good Gospel connection.
 - a. What do you want to take away and work on?
 - b. How will you know if you are making progress?

2. Think about a recent conversation with an unbeliever.
 - a. How did you go in terms of making a good Gospel connection?
 - b. What would you do differently next time?

3. Pray.

Session 4: Conversations that Resolve

How to disagree well and turn a negative into a positive



The Problem

Play the animated video and see what happens to Amy in conversation.

The secret to disagreeing well and turning a negative into a positive are some simple negotiation techniques.

Evangelistic conversations can be anxiety-producing. They come with a real or perceived threat of rejection and possibly persecution. The evidence that we are experiencing some sort of anxiety can be seen in our behaviours. For example:

- We focus on winning the argument (fight response). [Not caring enough about the other person is a reactive response].
- We lose track of the argument or what we think (freeze response).
- We start to distance ourselves in the argument out of boredom, frustration or sense of futility (flight response).
- We want to downplay certain aspects of the argument to diffuse the situation (appease response). This is Amy's anxious response in the video.

The trouble is we don't think as clearly when we are anxious. We don't bring our best to the conversation.

Reflection question

Q. Can you think of a difficult evangelistic conversation where you demonstrated anxious behaviours?



Solution

What does the Bible have to say and how can secular wisdom help us fulfill the Bible's teaching?



Bible

1 Peter 3:15-16 [ESV]

¹⁵ In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

This is one of the well known evangelism passages in the Bible. In *Session 1 Conversations that are Calm* we saw that “gentleness” is about being calm in the face of a negative situation.

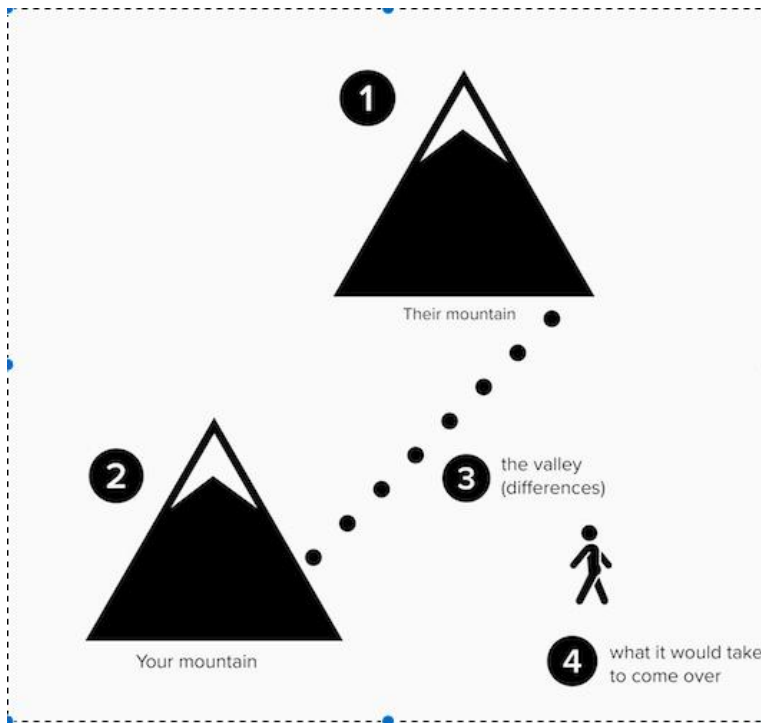
Peter wants his readers to speak up for Jesus. They are to do this in a respectful manner, even towards those who oppose them. Respect is all about giving due regard for the feelings, wishes or rights of others. It is about letting the other person speak and hearing what they have to say, with charity. Not an easy thing to do in a hostile situation.



Secular wisdom

Conversations where there is opposition have a habit of quickly escalating as people stop listening. One way to bring some calm to the conversation is to be aware of simple negotiation techniques.

This is especially useful in conversation where our positions are so different that it feels like we are on completely different mountains. Here are 4 steps to help us move the conversation forward rather than get stuck.



Step 1: Explore the view from their mountain.

Ask enough questions so that we understand their position and why it's important to them. We understand someone else's position when we can see why they would want it to be true. (Want more detail? See Session 1: Conversations that are calm and Session 2: Conversations that Evolve).

Step 2: Share the view from our mountain.

Here's where we can say something real and wonderful about Jesus and the difference he makes. (Want more detail? See Session 3: Conversations that Intrigue).

Step 3: Explore the valley between the two mountains.

We could ask what they think is the reason for the difference between their position and ours.

Step 4: Issue a friendly invitation to come over and share the view from our mountain.

We could ask them what it would take for them to change mountains.

Exercises

Read the following story.

Tick the things Amy does well.

Circle the things Amy could do better next time.

Meet Zac and Amy. Zac and Amy are work colleagues and get along well. Zac knows Amy is a follower of Jesus. They have had a few conversations now where it is clear they hold quite different positions.

One Monday Zac and Amy grab a coffee.

Zac asks Amy if she thinks he will go to hell if he doesn't believe in Jesus. Amy feels like Zac has just thrown her a live grenade.

Amy takes a breath and asks Zach why he's asking her that first thing on a Monday morning. Zac says his wife has certain beliefs and he's wondering whether Amy's are the same or different. Amy thinks: Great, he's pitting my beliefs against his wife's. And of course he'll go with hers.

So she asks more and more questions until she has a complete rundown on Zach's wife's religious beliefs and history. Eventually Zac, with a tone of slight frustration, asks his original question again.

Amy feels like she has to bite the bullet. So she says yes, that is what she believes. One has to believe in Jesus if one wants to avoid hell.

In a flash of inspiration, she asks Zac why he thinks she and his wife have different beliefs when it comes to Jesus and hell.

Zac says that's a good question and he doesn't know. Amy says it's because they have different ways of reading the Bible.

Amy then asks Zac what he thinks about the Bible. Zac doesn't have a very high opinion of the Bible. Every objection Amy raises, Zac comes back with 3 or 4 counter objections.

At last Zac says that he'll be ok anyway, going by his wife's beliefs. Amy says well what if the Bible is right and perhaps Zac should seriously consider that.

Zac says with a tone of frustration: calm down Amy. Let's just agree to disagree.

Reflection question

Q. What did you learn through that exercise?

Play the second animated video and see Amy replaying the conversation and this time using the negotiation techniques.

 **Disaster recovery****#1 I want to disagree well...what if I fail?**

That's ok. Not every conversation has to cross mountains. Jesus is bigger than that.

#2 What if I am calm...but the other person responds badly?

Remember what we are responsible for and what's in our control. What's not in our control is how the other person responds. We can leave that in God's hands. What's in our responsibility is to be gentle: be calm and speak up for Jesus in negative situations.

The best disaster recovery is to think of what happened as a positive learning opportunity. Spend some time reflecting on what you did well and what you'd do differently next time. There's no need to be too hard on yourself because Jesus deals with us in grace.

 **Recap**

We want to bring our best to the conversation. We want to be calm and speak of Jesus even in potentially negative situations. Remembering the 4 simple negotiation steps can be helpful (Explore their mountain; Share yours; Explore the valley in between; Invite them over).

Sometimes our anxiety can get in the way of this. When it does, think of it as a positive learning opportunity for next time.



Reflection and prayer

1. Negotiation techniques to help disagree well and turn a negative into a positive.
 - a. What do you want to take away and work on?
 - b. How will you know if you are making progress?

2. Think about a recent conversation with an unbeliever.
 - a. How did you go in terms of these negotiation techniques?
 - b. What would you do differently next time?

3. Pray.

