

The Neglected Ministry of Asking Questions

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[BLAKE GLOSSON](#)



Think about people who make you feel loved. What about them makes you feel this way? Without knowing you (or them), I can almost guarantee that they ask good questions and listen well. As David Augsburg has [observed](#), “Being heard is so close to being loved that most people cannot tell the difference.” Show me a person who asks questions and listens, and I’ll show you a person who makes people feel known and loved.

Sadly, this is an increasingly rare gift. As Stephen Covey [observed](#), “Most people don’t listen with the intent to *understand*; they listen with the intent to *reply*.” In other words, most people don’t actually listen -- they wait. They wait for you to stop talking so they can talk. Some of this is a matter of attention span -- trained by short videos on social media, minds quickly wander. But at a deeper level, most people are simply more interested in what *they* have to say than what the other person has to say.

This makes asking questions and actively listening one of the rarest (and most powerful) ways to communicate love. And when we bless others by asking good questions and listening well, we reflect the character and love of God in a unique and powerful way. Question-asking was one of Jesus's favorite tools. Even though Jesus knew all things ([John 16:30](#)) -- including people's hearts ([John 2:24-25](#)) -- he still asked over 300 questions in the Gospels alone.

Though we know this from experience, we can often feel ill-equipped to actually do it ourselves (and ashamed to ask how). This is particularly true for younger generations, whose social development is often shaped more by social media than genuine human interaction. To that end, here are three principles for question-based conversation.

1. Be Curious

The beginning of asking good questions is being genuinely curious about the person to whom you're speaking. A good conversational tool to keep in your toolbelt is the acronym FORKS. Whenever you meet with new people, ask about their:

- Family
- Occupation
- Recreation
- Knowledge
- Spirituality

"Why" questions are often the best kind to ask. This will help draw out the other person's motivations, passions, and feelings -- which not only makes for better conversation, but also helps you get to know this person beyond a surface level.

Another great way to begin a question is with the phrase "Can you teach me about?" Pick a topic that you know the other person is passionate about or experienced in, and ask

or the person to educate you on it. This is one of the most effective (and fun) ways to get to know people and to make them feel valued -- and it gives you an opportunity to learn. Everyone wins.

2. Follow Up

Once the other person finishes talking, try to repeat the content, in your own words (e.g., “So, you’re saying?”). Making a habit of asking this follow-up question will help you learn to listen well. It’ll also assure other people that they’ve been heard, and that you value what they have to say.

Another great follow-up question is “Can you tell me more about [choose one part of what they just shared]?” or “What do you mean by [choose one part of what they just shared]?” Not only does this spark deeper conversation, but it signals to the other person, “I’m interested in what you have to say, and I want to make sure I don’t misunderstand you.”

3. Ask *Leading* Questions

One of the best ways we can love others (and glorify God) is to ask questions that lead to mutually edifying, Christ-exalting discussion. God tells us to think about things that are *praiseworthy* ([Phil. 4:8](#)) and to talk about things that *build up* the people in the conversation ([Eph. 4:29](#)). Think about the kinds of questions that you typically ask. Do they typically stimulate discussions that lead to praise and gratitude? Or do your questions typically stimulate gossip or complaining?

All questions lead somewhere and set the tone and trajectory of a conversation. The next time you’re conversing with someone, ask yourself: Where do my questions lead? Do they tear down or build up? Do they promote anger or love? Do they lead to mutual frustration or mutual edification?

Communicate Love

Everyone has something to say -- but few have the opportunity to say it, since question-asking and listening are increasingly rare.

The next time you meet with someone, challenge yourself to *ask* more questions than you answer. This can go a long way in making the other person feel valued -- and it's one of the most powerful ways to communicate the character and love of God.

Blake Glosson is a student at Reformed Theological Seminary. Previously, he served as the director of young adults at [New Covenant Bible Church](#) in St. Charles, Illinois.

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