



THE  
WINSOME  
CONVICTION  
WORKSHOP

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## INTRODUCTION

The only thing more difficult than discussing Christian convictions in the public square is discussing them with fellow believers in the church. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it is true. We may have more disagreements with non-believers, but our disagreements with fellow believers are more problematic and more emotionally charged.

Outside the Christian community, one anticipates having biblical convictions contested, mocked, or even despised. Disagreement is unpleasant, but expected. We know our beliefs about Christ and morality are not broadly shared in the American public square. Therefore, we expect conflict and are equipped for it, or at the very least we know we should be. When our personal convictions are contested by fellow church members everything changes. We feel attacked from behind. It feels both unexpected and wrong! We assume our biblical convictions will be shared by those sitting on our right and left in Christian church. If they doubt or deny our convictions, we don't experience it as a mere difference of opinion, but rather as a violation of an unspoken agreement. We are not merely intellectually challenged by a new idea, or puzzled by a different viewpoint; we are hurt and offended. The struggle between fellow Christ-followers is not merely a modern one fueled by social media. Paul tells believers at Corinth that they have been called to be holy "together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2). Yet, nine verses later he writes that he has learned there are "quarrels among you" (1:11).

As the toxic polarization and division that characterizes contemporary culture creeps (or floods) into the church, we must learn how to have productive conversations about our convictions. We believe it is best to think through a difficult conversation as three separate conversations:

1. The pre-conversation we have with ourselves prior (our attitude, emotions, self-talk);
2. The actual conversation we have with the person with whom we disagree;
3. The post-conversation which includes both our own self-reflection and our de-brief of the interaction with our like-minded friends.

This following material will help you walk through a healthy pre-conversation.

## PRE-CONVERSATION

In preparing for a potentially difficult conversation, you'll spend five days examining your outlook from a mental, emotional, and spiritual perspective.



## NOTES

## PRE-CONVERSATION

### DAY 1

Jesus describes his followers as peacemakers prompting the apostle Paul to assert that unity is to be protected if at all possible (Eph. 4:3). Yet, if we are honest, do we want to pursue peace with the person with whom we are currently experiencing conflict? What emotions or thoughts surface when considering approaching this person? Scripture makes it clear that emotions run deep and we are often not aware of them. Today, we'll echo David's prayer of introspection: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts" (Ps. 139:23). Heading into this conversation are you:

- Feeling anxious that perhaps talking about the issue will make it worse?
- Discouraged that the relationship is perhaps beyond repair?
- Angry?
- Hurt at how you've been treated, or characterized?
- Hopeful that God can repair the relationship, or resolve the conflict?
- What other feelings or thoughts would you add?

### PRAYER

Quiet your heart and ask God to search you, bringing to mind the feelings that are going on in your soul. Spend some time simply sitting with the emotions and thoughts the Spirit brings to mind. If you begin to feel anxious, offer those thoughts to God and remind yourself of times when conflict was resolved between you and another person (Phil. 4:6-7). Write down anything the Spirit seems to be prodding you to think about on a deeper level.



## NOTES

## PRE-CONVERSATION

### DAY 2

The most important variable in our conflict with others is our relational history with them. Our past interactions bleed into present conversations. Before speaking it is crucial to assess your history with this person.

- How have we resolved conflict in the past?
- Did one tend to dominate another?
- How angry was the exchange?
- When talking to this person do I feel attacked or acknowledged?
- Are there any lingering feelings or regrets?

If your history with a person is poor then you must adapt your communication goals. Researcher John Gottman asserts that the first minute of a conversation sets the tone for the entire interaction. In light of your history with this person, what might be the best way to start the conversation (offer a compliment, affirm the relationship, mention an area of agreement, acknowledge negative ways you've treated them, ask for forgiveness). Write down two or three possible startups to the conversation.

### PRAYER

Life and death are in the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21). Ask the Spirit to reveal—in light of your relational history, or circumstances—how you might open the conversation in a way that breathes life into it, rather than death. As you seek the Spirit's guidance, write down how you think he is leading you to start the conversation.



## NOTES

## PRE-CONVERSATION

### DAY 3

“None of us is spared the reality of emotions,” states Roger Fisher the founder of the Harvard Negotiation Project. “They can ruin any possibility of a wise agreement.”<sup>[1]</sup> As we think about past interactions with a person, what emotions surface (anger, disappointment, frustration, hurt)? These emotions—unless managed—will bleed into the conversation before it starts. This transfer of emotions is called, emotional contagion. “We catch feelings from one another as though they were some kind of virus,” notes behavioral scientist Daniel Goleman.<sup>[2]</sup> One mistake we make is to think that our thoughts—if not made public—are harmless. What’s wrong with blowing off a little mental steam? If emotional contagion is true, then those negative thoughts are being transferred to the person before the conversation even starts!

### PRAYER

Ask the Spirit to bring to mind positive qualities or contributions of this person. “Even though I disagree with this person on this issue, she loves the Lord and has a powerful ministry. She has faithfully served our organization for years.” Equally, ask the Spirit to allow you to view the actions of this person in the best light possible. Just as we would want others to assume the best of us, are we assuming the best of them—including their motives (Mt. 7:12; 1 Cor. 13:4-7)?

[1] Roger Fisher & Daniel Shapiro, *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 5.

[2] Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 115.



## NOTES

## PRE-CONVERSATION

### DAY 4

Today we are asking that you playfully take the perspective of a chimp rather than a rhino. Rhinoceroses are notoriously short sighted—it is said they can't tell the difference between a tree and a human being from 50 feet away. And that explains their aggressive behavior. If they don't recognize it, they ram it. It's hard on both the trees and the humans. It isn't even that great for the rhino. It's bad news all around. Chimps are different. When chimps see something they don't recognize, they go investigate. They pick it up and prod it and play with it. They try it on their head to see if it will fit. If they decide it's not for them, they set it down and pick up something else, but at least everybody has had a good time and can walk away without being rammed. If your brother or sister in Christ has a personal conviction you don't understand, be curious, investigate, ask questions that you really are interested in getting the answer to. Don't ram them. Be a chimp not a rhino.

### PRAYER

As I think about the perspective of the person I'll be engaging do I feel a desire to ram it? If so, what seems to be fueling such an aggressive stance? Am I unwilling to investigate the issue and hear the other person out? What questions do I have about the other person's perspective? Ask the Spirit to help you set aside defensiveness or aggression and adopt a stance of curiosity. Keep in mind the Scripture's assertion that wisdom from above is both peaceable and open to reason (Jam. 3:17). Pray the Spirit would cultivate those qualities in your heart.



## NOTES

## PRE-CONVERSATION

### DAY 5

The ancient writers who comprised the book of Proverbs assert that a word spoken in the right circumstances is like creating fine jewelry (Prov. 25:11). Are the circumstances right to have the conversation now? Communication experts Fisher and Shapiro suggest you ask three questions of yourself before engaging another:

(1) Are my emotions out of control? If we had the conversation now, I know I'd say something I would later regret.

(2) Are my emotions risky? Powerful emotions are simmering and I'm afraid that if the conversation gets heated I won't be able to control them. "If you are finding it hard to concentrate on anything other than your emotions," state Fisher and Shapiro, "your emotional temperature is at least risky." [3]

(3) Are My emotions manageable? I am aware of my emotions and I feel I can control them even if the conversation gets tense. Can I think about my hurt without it dominating me? Do I have enough emotional or cognitive distance from the issue to be objective? The ancient writers admonish us to guard our lips so we will not speak rashly and come to ruin (Prov. 13:3).

### PRAYER

We end these five days of reflection the way we started—by asking God to search our heart. Specifically, ask the Spirit if you are ready to have the conversation?

Spirit, are my emotions out of control?

Spirit, are my emotions risky?

Spirit, are my emotions manageable?

Spirit, am I willing to be a peacemaker?

Close this time of introspection by entrusting the upcoming conversation(s) to the Lord.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).

[3] Beyond Reason, p. 148.