



DIALOGUE is a token of genuine Christian love, because it indicates our steadfast resolve to rid our minds of the prejudices and caricatures that we may entertain about other people, to struggle to listen through their ears and look through their eyes so as to grasp what prevents them from hearing the gospel and seeing Christ, to sympathize with them in all their doubts, fears and ‘hang-ups.’ For such sympathy will involve listening, and listening means dialogue. It is once more the challenge of the incarnation, to renounce evangelism by inflexible slogans, and instead to involve ourselves sensitively in the real dilemmas that people face.”

John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*



HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

The most important goal is to listen and to understand:

- not to fix or control.

- not to defend or explain yourself.

Listening begins with submitting to God's Spirit in prayer.

Be aware of your temperamental inclinations and giftedness related to conflict and conflict resolution:

- Are you patient or intolerant?

- Are you peaceful or fearful?

- Are you data- or relationally-driven?

- Are you intuitive or cognitive?

- Are you able to live with disequilibrium?

- Do you process ideas internally or verbally?

- Are you aware that other people will process the questions and situations differently?

 - Do you generally value or tolerate such differences?

 - Do such differences generally stimulate or confuse your thinking and feelings?

Be prepared to accept someone's story as truthful and honest.

Be prepared for non-closure:

- for the conversation to be continued.

- for the matter to remain unresolved or unexplained (in whole or part).



In Deep Conversation by Pam O'Connell

HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS (continued)

Be committed to respecting other people's attempt to work through ideas and questions out loud. "Allow yourself to find the understandable part" of another person's thoughts and thought processes. (Jim Hurley)

Be committed to being fully engaged (eye contact; no checking email, phones, etc).

Be disciplined in how you speak:

- speak for yourself (use "I" statements).
- share the air time.
- affirm risk-takers.
- honor privacy and confidentiality.
- avoid sweeping generalizations and over-reaching absolutist categorizations.
- speak back the other person's ideas to confirm that you have heard them accurately.

Be willing to take risks:

- to ask questions.
- to admit what you don't know.
- to consider ideas with which you may not agree.
- to befriend people with whom you disagree.
- to sit patiently with a lack of understanding and closure even when pressured to act prematurely.
- to affirm ideas that are at odds with people whose approval you desire.



Saints Peter and Paul by Daniele Crespi (1598-1630)