

Identity Conversations

This worksheet is meant to provide guidelines for us to walk in community, and in unity, whether or not we agree. The questions are here to help you process concepts, ideals, and ideas that you may not have understood to be relative, personal, nebulous, or transitive. They are also here to help you reconcile the required clarity required of you to fairly and peacefully engage the conversation with others, especially those of a different generation (whether older or younger).

When in doubt, ask a question. The fruit of gentleness most often shows up in the form of a question.

Defining the Conversation:

1. How do you define IDENTITY?
 - a. *Hint:* identity has to do with more than gender and sexuality, but these are aspects of a person's identity, even if they do not choose to use these descriptors to answer the question.
2. What makes up your identity?
3. What doesn't make up your identity?

Identity is defined by three major factors:

1. Who I say I am.
2. Who the world says I am.
3. Who God says I am.

These three factors are often out of step with each other, or at least perceived or felt to be out of sync with each other. This creates internal tensions for a person, especially a child.

The felt tensions in this conversation, both individually and communally:

1. The desire to be my own unique person vs. the desire to belong or fit in.
2. What is always true about me vs. what might be true now or later (who I am)
3. What can change about me vs. what never changes (what I am or might be)

The felt tension for the Church:

1. We look to Scripture to answer questions that the Bible may or may not answer with a "yes" or "no".
2. We default to passage in the bible about homosexuality, but this is only one facet of the identity conversation (and isn't particularly helpful when talking

with or about children and youth who are not at an age to even consider marriage, let alone articulate a desire to marry or not).

3. We don't want to get it wrong.
4. This is not an issue to be solved. It's a people to be loved. We know it. And we are stuck.
5. What one church decides impacts the way the Church is perceived (and we are not sure we like the way that impacts us).
6. We feel we need to take a stand, say something, have a position. This may singlehandedly be today's greatest hindrance in the Church.

Some theological guardrails to guide the conversation:

- Just because Scripture says God made us male and female biologically doesn't mean that this resolves the gender conversation or can be used as defense for exclusion or condemnation.
 - Most people would not disagree that one's sex is either male or female if defined by genitals. There *is* a small percentage who might or will, including those in the intersex community and they are not excluded from the gospel or the love of Jesus.
 - Genitals, sexual orientation, and gender are three separate considerations of how a person may define identity, and one does not necessarily define or determine the others.
- The LGBTQIA conversation has often been boiled down to same-sex marriage in the Church. Marriage is only a very small part of the real conversation.
 - Inclusion and affirmation are misunderstood words. Ask for clarification about what is meant when such words are used.
 - Identity has little to do with marriage.
 - This often happens because it is the only part of this conversation that we can point to Scripture as even mentioning. Resist the urge to make this conversation about any one thing.
 - Just because the Bible doesn't mention it, doesn't mean the Holy Spirit won't lead us through it.
- We can resist the urge to draw conclusions about other peoples' sins regarding sexual orientation or gender. We do it for each other all the time (when condemnation would somehow require us to take stock, too.)
 - What we do have in Scripture deserves to be held in context and with reverence for what it does say, not for what we decide it implies.
 - We are more charitable with ourselves than others when it comes to confessing sins. Let's model a reversal in this behaviour.
- Scripture is very clear about the ways and the walk of Jesus. If we spent all our time being disciplined by the life of Jesus, and inviting others to not only do the same, but do it with us, I believe our laser-like focus would be fixed on Him.
 - He does not leave us alone in these conversations or in the decisions we need to make as a body.
 - His life gave us a few ways to learn and lead:
 - Ask lots of questions.
 - Tell real stories: either real from Scripture or real from your own life and experience.
 - Quote Scripture without lifting it out of its narrative. The Bible is a love letter not a text book.

- He had a close circle that He trusted and walked with. Build your circle so that it refines and challenges your thinking, not only of like-minded, similarly wired, aged or privileged people.
 - Diversity looks like age, stage of life, ethnicity, race, gender, ability, economy...
 - What makes us different teaches us something we cannot learn without someone from that side of the human prism.
- Allow Scripture to inform your words rather than the reverse: in other words, do not search scripture for places it agrees with you and then leverage that agreement. Allow Scripture to be a love letter, not a textbook, written by the Lord. Allow Him to search you and know what is in your heart, allowing Him to see if there is any wicked way within you, first (Psalm 139). Allow Scripture to change your mind.
- Follow people on social media who have done their homework, have something to say (and say it without injuring others), with whom you may not agree. When we unfollow voices that are different than ours, we miss out on the learning and refining that can happen in that sharpening process.
 - At the same time, do not follow accounts that are inflammatory, filled with gossip or hyperbole, use Scripture to injure people groups, even if they stand for something you believe is good at its core. The enemy is the author of confusion. All he needs is a toe in the door.
 - Lean toward articulate communicators who raise questions in you, not emotions.
 - Reading books is not a solution. It's a way to learn and grow so be sure to choose range in the authors you are reading. Ask for recommendations from someone you trust. And even if you are struggling with the content, give the author more than the intro before deciding if you agree.
 - Christian resources usually have a theological thesis they are leading towards. Check the "about" page of a publisher before choosing a book. Most have a denominational tie or clear theological tenets they will uphold. This isn't necessarily wrong; it will simply, and can only, have one outcome and will usually include a decisive stance. Engage such material with eyes wide open.

Time of Reflection:

1. What words would you use to describe yourself?
 - a. Which ones are just adjectives?
 - b. Which ones have become part of how you're known?
 - c. Which ones are important to you that others know?
2. What words would others use to describe you?
 - a. Which ones do you agree with?
 - b. Which ones do you appreciate?
 - c. Which ones do you wish weren't true, or at least true to others?
3. How do you want to be known?
 - a. What are your highest values?
 - b. What makes you who you are and you are proud of that?
 - c. Are there aspirational words that you are growing into?
4. What would Jesus say?
 - a. What has always been true about you, according to Jesus?
 - b. What has he deposited into you that makes you you?
 - c. What does he see that others may not at first glance?