

Connecting Conversations

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Welcome to “Connecting Conversations”!

Women crave *connection*.

And we women experience connection best through *conversation*!

What better way to start the new year (or any season of life, for that matter) than connecting with a new or old friend over a spiritually stimulating conversation!

Here’s how you can use “*Connecting Conversations*”— Scripture-focused conversational launchpads for heart-to-heart sharing.

- 1) First invite 1-2 friends (old or new) to meet weekly with you for “*Connecting Conversations*” over the next few weeks. (What’s holding you back? Call or text them right now!)
- 2) Mutually agree on a time and place to meet each week—at a coffee shop, kitchen table, walking trail, over a video call, whatever.
- 3) A Scripture and 2-3 questions are provided to get the spiritual conversation rolling when you get together each week. (If you can only meet for 3 weeks, or only every other week, that’s okay; get creative & just do it. You’ll be glad you did!) If you end up enjoying it so much that you want to continue, we’ve provided additional conversations you can connect over!
- 4) Try to be honest and transparent, allowing your friend to understand your heart, your struggles, your doubts and fears—and together your relationship as spiritual sisters will grow as you encourage each other.

This is probably one of the easiest assignments you’ve ever been given: Invite. Show up. Talk.

It is our prayer that you enjoy “*Connecting Conversations*” as conversations that will help you connect with the heart of a friend and lead you to connect more deeply with the heart of God.

--Bekah Mulvaney, Rmulvaney@cox.net

Connecting Conversation #1: *Spiritual friendships*

Start the Conversation:

Share how a spiritual friend has helped you along on your journey with Jesus.

Read the Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16

“Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” –from a sermon by Jesus ^(The Message)

Continue the Conversation:

What are some lessons you’ve learned and ways you’ve grown on your faith journey that you could share with others to encourage them on their journey?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

This week, write a handwritten note or text of appreciation to one or more individuals who have influenced your growth in relationship with Christ. Be specific about what they taught or modeled for you.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #2: *Rising up when life is getting me down (Resilience)*

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share something that has a tendency to get you down and how you attempt to rise above it?
(Share your preferred distraction, self-talk, etc.)

Read the Scripture: 2 Cor. 4:7-12

⁷ We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. ⁸ We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. (New Living Translation)

Continue the Conversation:

What do you think it was in this author's life that gave him determined resilience?

What is it that you are living for? Does it give you such determined resilience?
(If what you're living for doesn't hold you up when life is getting you down, can you think of something strong, solid & unshakeable that could get you through hard times?)

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

This week, put a small empty-but-wrapped gift box or a gift bag on your nightstand where you will see it as the first thing in the morning & the last thing as you go to bed at night. Let this visual prop remind you to start each day with a prayer (silent or aloud), thanking God for the gift of this day, anticipating other unexpected gifts of the day as you "unwrap this gift of Today", and at day's end, thanking Him again for the gifts of this day.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #3: *Interpreting my everyday circumstances (Perspective)*

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share something disturbing in your life—something you wish were different; now look for something in that same situation that you can be thankful for.

Read the Scripture: Habakkuk 3:17-19

*¹⁷ Even though the fig trees have no blossoms,
and there are no grapes on the vines;
even though the olive crop fails,
and the fields lie empty and barren;
even though the flocks die in the fields,
and the cattle barns are empty,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD!
I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!
¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength!
He makes me as surefooted as a deer,
able to tread upon the heights. (New Living Translation)*

Continue the Conversation:

Following Habakkuk's example, share at least 3 truths about God you can *always* be thankful for, even in the most awful situations.

Together discuss what your top "go-to" thoughts will be when you need a "perspective adjustment" (for example: God is good, God is with me, God is in control, God is for me, etc.) Which ones are the most vital or the hardest for you to remember?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

At the end of each day this week, write down something that happened that day that could be seen as a "negative" (something you'd rather NOT to have experienced—words uttered, mistake made, a disappointment, an unexpected interruption); then write down something within that experience that you can be thankful for.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #4:
Who has the right to rule my life? (Control & trusting God)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share a situation in your life in which you are concerned about the outcome; talk about what the outcome would be if *you* were in control.

Read the Scripture: Phil. 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ^(NIV)

Continue the Conversation:

Considering the above situation you're concerned about, how differently would it look to trust God with the outcome? How would you feel?

How would this change the way you pray?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

This week, write a letter to God about a situation or person you're concerned about. Tell Him what concerns you, express any fears, be honest about what you're feeling and what you'd like to see happen. Then tell Him you trust Him with this situation or person.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #5: Am I measuring up? (Worth)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share what makes you feel like you're worthy of taking up space on planet earth. In other words, what do you "bring to the table"? (Accomplishments? Personal strengths? Character? Impact on others? etc.)

Read the Scripture: John 15:9-15 (the words of Jesus)

"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love. I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father." (The Message)

Continue the Conversation:

Name a challenge or opportunity you will face this week, and then answer these two questions:

- How will you approach this challenge/opportunity if your identity & worth is solely based on your personal assets?
- How will you approach this challenge/opportunity if your identity & worth is based on who you are as the beloved child of God & one in whom Christ delights?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

This week do one act of service in secret or give a gift anonymously (i.e., without the receiver knowing you were the one who did it, though it's not a failure if they figure it out.)

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #6: What am I holding too tightly to? What's got a hold on me? (Security)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Other than family, what would be the top two hardest things for you to lose?

Read the Scripture: Genesis 22:6-7, 13-14

⁶ So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, ⁷ Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

⁸ "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together...

¹³ Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." (New Living Translation)

Continue the Conversation:

In the Scripture above, Abraham trusted God to be his Provider.

- Name some things you trust God to provide for you?
- Name some things you have trouble trusting Him to provide?
- What are you most afraid of losing?

What do your answers suggest you might be holding too tightly to? What steps could you take to transfer your "tight grip" to a trust in the Provider?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

This week, give away five of your things that others might benefit from. (These can be things you no longer need or want.)

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #7: *Can I really trust God to be good? (Confidence)*

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation: Choose to answer one of the questions below.

- I wonder what God is up to when _____.
- If you were the benevolent master of the universe for one day, what would be your first good act?

Read the Scripture (taking turns reading each verse): Psalm 103:1-6, 8-13 (New Living Translation)

¹ *Let all that I am praise the LORD;
with my whole heart,
I will praise his holy name.*

² *Let all that I am praise the LORD;
may I never forget
the good things he does for me.*

³ *He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.*

⁴ *He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love
and tender mercies.*

⁵ *He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed
like the eagle's!*

⁶ *The LORD gives righteousness
and justice to all
who are treated unfairly.*

⁸ *The LORD is compassionate
and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled
with unfailing love.*

⁹ *He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.*

¹⁰ *He does not punish us
for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us,
as we deserve.*

¹¹ *For his unfailing love toward
those who fear him
is as great as the height of the
heavens above the earth.*

¹² *He has removed our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west.*

¹³ *The LORD is like a father to his children,
tender and compassionate
to those who fear him.*

Continue the Conversation:

Share an example of a valuable lesson you have learned in life, and then, whether it was learned through a painful process or a pleasurable experience.

If God is good, why do you think He holds back from fixing everything or making our lives only pleasurable?

Soul-training practice (between conversations): At the end of each day this week, record one evidence of God's goodness from your day.

(In your next Connecting Conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #8: ***How do I handle a cultural value that conflicts with God's Word? (Truth)***

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Name a Biblical standard that you find challenging or difficult.

(For example: Love your enemy. Forgive those who offend you. Submit to your husband. Don't be greedy. Clothe yourself in kindness, gentleness, mercy, & patience. Don't gossip, quarrel, envy, or be proud.)

Read the Scripture: Romans 12:2

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (The Message)

Continue the Conversation:

Name a cultural narrative or standard that tends to draw you in.

(Here are some examples: "More is better." "I need to be more . . . beautiful, skinny, smart, etc." "It can't be wrong if it feels so good." "I need to pursue what's best for me." "It's my right, my body, my life!" "He doesn't deserve my respect." "It's about time I take care of me & my happiness!" "I don't feel like being . . . married, pregnant, a woman.")

Together discuss what Biblical narrative or standard contradicts the cultural narrative that easily sneaks its way into your thinking.

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Choose one Biblical virtue that is a current challenge for you (for example, patience, kindness, forgiveness, serving, gospel-sharing, submission, esteeming others, a quiet response, etc.) and choose in advance a familiar situation in which you will express it. (For example: "When my teenager complains about the curfew this week, I will respond with kindness & gentleness.")

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #9: What can I do when I feel overwhelmed? (Renewal)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Complete this sentence: I get overwhelmed when I'm _____.

Where do you tend to go to escape or cope with those feelings of being overwhelmed? (For example: Binge-watch Netflix? Pick up a novel? Shopping? A friend?) (What's your go-to escape or coping mechanism. . .)

Read the Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out . . .? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."(Jesus' words as paraphrased in The Message)

Continue the Conversation:

When you think about your "go-to" for dealing with being overwhelmed, doubting, or hurting (in the above question), will that something/someone *always* be there for you?

If renewal is found in the Person of Jesus rather than a change in the situation, how would you see yourself being renewed? What would this look like for you?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Think about what kind of activities revive your mind, body & soul, and then plan a "mini-sabbath" this week—an unstructured, unhurried time set aside for rest and recharging.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #10: What is the most important thing in my life? (Priorities)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

If you had to evacuate your home, name something (besides the people in your home) that you would not want to leave behind.

Read the Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. ^(NLT)

Continue the Conversation:

1. If you unexpectedly came into some money, what expenditure would give you the greatest delight?
2. What temporary opportunities, responsibilities, needs & desires tend to drive you and distract you from what's eternally important?
3. What would you say is your #1 treasure? Does the way you spend your time & money reflect this? (Would a glance at your schedule & checkbook verify this?)

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Choose one day this coming week and write down a list of all activities that you spent an hour or more doing. (For example: exercise, read Bible, pay bills, fix meals, text friends, carpool, social media, watch TV, volunteer, etc.) Then next to each activity, write down what you are treasuring by spending your time in that activity.

(In your next Connecting Conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #11:
What messages is my soul listening to? (Truth)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

What's the funniest or falsest rumor that ever circulated about you?

Read the Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-11

⁸For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! ⁹For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

¹⁰Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.^(NLT)

Continue the Conversation:

It's been said that we privately preach to ourselves continually. Share a mental message that you've been hearing in your head since childhood—that you realize isn't entirely true or healthy.

What have you been saying to you about yourself? Is it true?

What have you been saying to you about God? Is it true?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Consider one truthful message your soul needs to hear (about yourself or about God). Write it down and repeat it to yourself daily throughout the week.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #12: Where can I find PEACE in such anxious times?

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share a time when you experienced peace; what were the contributing circumstances?

Read the Scripture: Philippians 4:6-8

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.^[NLT]

Continue the Conversation:

1. When circumstances threaten to rob you of peace & you start feeling anxious, which question do you typically ask: Why? How? What if? or Who?
2. What practical, self-care actions help you lessen anxious feelings?
(For example, turning off the news & turning on worship music, going for a walk or run, playing soothing music, etc.)
3. How would you personally be affected if you turned your H-O-W (How can I fix this? How can I change the outcome?) into W-H-O (Who does He say He is? Who does He promise to be?)

We don't need to know the future; we just need to know HIM.

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Consider your daily morning routine & determine which area could use a gentle shift towards intentional peacefulness. This week, make just one change to your morning routine, whether you commit to taking the time to make your bed, or take a 15-minute walk, or dismiss your cell phone for a period of time, or rise an hour earlier to work before the children wake.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #13: Why Do I Feel so Weak? (Strength)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share an experience when you felt unprepared, unqualified, confused or weak, for example:

- You dropped the ball or failed a task
- You made a promise you couldn't keep
- You didn't know an answer, forgot something, or got lost

Read the Scripture: There are many Scriptures about "strength" in the Bible, such as:

Psalm 20:7-8 *Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
8 They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.* ^[ESV]

Ephesians 6:10 *Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* ^[NLT]

Isaiah 40:29 *He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.* ^[NLT]

Continue the Conversation:

Where do these Scriptures say that we can find strength? What do you tend to do when you feel weak or inadequate?

Can you share a time when you thought you were strong enough to face a situation, only to discover you were weak? [It's been said: The delusion of strength—not weakness—is the real danger!]

Have you ever found strength in admitting your weakness? How does this work?

Words of wisdom: The God of grace gives us all the strength we need to do all He calls us to do, but we must enter that strength by admitting how little we actually have.

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Sometime during each day this week, admit your own weakness to someone, even if it's kneeling next to your bed admitting it to God as your first act of the day. Keep a list of these admissions. (In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #14: *How much is too much? (Margins)*

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share a time when you experienced too much of a good thing.

Read the Scripture: 1 Cor. 6:12

*You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you.
And even though "I am allowed to do anything,"
I must not become a slave to anything.^(NLT)*

Continue the Conversation:

How can self-indulgence become a "slave-driver"?

What kinds of time-expenditures (activities) threaten to consume your days, weeks, life—or at least, more time than you planned?

If you were to reduce your activity-load from 100% to 80% (in order to live an "available life"—available for God and for others), what activities would be the wisest to cut back or cut out?

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Plan a media sabbath for some time this week (a specified time when you will stay off-line). Decide early in the week when you will do this and for how long—a day, a half-day, daily after supper, etc.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #15: *Hate to Wait? (Patience)*

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation:

Share something in your life that you had to wait a long time for.

Read the Scripture:

Psalm 27:14 *Wait patiently for the LORD.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.* ^[NLT]

Isaiah 40:31 *but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.* ^[ESV]

Continue the Conversation:

What is something you are currently having to wait on? (An answer to prayer? A restored relationship? Resolution to a problem?)

Describe what it would look like for you to “wait patiently for the Lord” in this situation.

How does waiting patiently require courage? (Psalm 27:14) How could waiting patiently translate into renewed strength? (Isaiah 40:31)

Soul-training practice (between conversations):

Soul-training: This week, choose some options that force you to develop patience. Here are some ideas: Leave earlier for appointments and drive slower; try driving in the slower lane. Intentionally choose the longest or slowest check-out lane when shopping. Handwrite some personal notes, rather than emailing or texting. When you're trying to get out the door at home, try laughing with lollygaggers, rather than telling them to “hurry up”. Slow your pace, notice people around you, linger over meals

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)

Connecting Conversation #16:
I would do more, but I have a good excuse! (Consuming seasons of life)

Share how last week's **Soul-training practice** impacted you or others.

Start the Conversation: What are some of your go-to excuses for not doing what you know you ought to do? (Let's face it, we all have some reasonable excuses.)

Read the Scripture: Matthew 25:21 [In this parable, Jesus tells of a man who entrusts his servants with his property while he was traveling. Upon returning from his travels, he discovers his servant's good stewardship.]

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" ^[NLT]

Continue the Conversation:

As this parable is an analogy of our own faithfulness to the Lord with what He has given us, share some of the things that God has entrusted to you (gifts, talents, passions, experiences, etc.)

Busy seasons of responsibilities and obstacles can become our "good excuses" or they can become our stepping stones to becoming more like Christ. Name an obstacle in your current season of life that threatens to interfere with your serving God, your faith community, or others. How could your situation (responsibilities, difficulties, or demands) be turned into a stepping stone for you to become more faithful?

Who is someone you know who never lets a busy season get in the way of her/his serving God or others?

Our lives are a continuum of diverse seasons in which faithfulness takes on different shapes. Together brainstorm how a person could possibly continue to be faithful with what he/she has been entrusted in a particularly consuming season of life (such as when one battles a health-issue or is a full-time caregiver).

Soul-training practice (between conversations): This week, consider 1 action that would be an act of faithfulness (to God or others) that you probably will *not* get around to. Decide on a time this week to do it, put it on your calendar, and don't let any excuses get in the way.

(In your next conversation, you will share how this practice impacted you.)