

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ALMIGHTY: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



August 2019 (04 - 31 Aug)

This month we thought it would be interesting to highlight the importance of interpreting and understanding scripture in a contemporary context. In our Daily Worship resource we will be using the readings and prompts to spark off conversations between God, writer, and reader; allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the conversations into different areas of thought. We will reflect on the complications and conflicts we uncover as we read the Bible.

Context is important in helping us understand scripture. Both the context in which it was written and the context in which we find ourselves reading it today. Some scripture has significance for a community that has still to be formed while other scripture helps us understand how God has spoken to people in the past. The voice of God as heard in scripture is never spoken in a vacuum. It is always spoken in context in order to give us meaning and direction in our lives.

This month as we read scripture together it is our prayer that we will take these God conversations and use them as starters to bring about conversations with others in order to connect our friends and families into the great conversations in scripture.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ALMIGHTY Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

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Part 1: Creches, cafes + conversation

Conversation Starter

This month in our Daily Worship we are thinking about **context + conversation**. We are reminding ourselves both of the context the Bible was originally written and the context we find ourselves in reading it. Whenever we read the Bible we find ourselves in conversation — an ongoing conversation across history, languages and cultures. It is a conversation **about** and **with** God.

What do you enjoy about having a conversation? What is your favourite type of conversation? What do you struggle with when having conversations with others? What's your least favourite type of conversation?

Read Hosea 11: 1-11

In this reading God is shown as having the bittersweet love of a parent who — having fed, cared for and taught their child — has to watch them go their own way and suffer in the world. How do you feel about the metaphor of God being like a father or mother?

Do you think parenthood in Hosea's time was similar to parenthood in our time or vastly different?

Whether or not we are parents, ourselves, what can we do to follow God's compassionate example in the conversations we have with the next generations?

Read Colossians 3:1-11

Challenge yourself to think — do you have any prejudices against people that makes it difficult for you to follow the instructions of verse 8? Perhaps there's a particular viewpoint or position that winds you up and makes it hard for you to have a civil conversation.

Imagine you're sitting in a cafe and they walk in the door. What can you do to overcome these prejudices and interact with them more respectfully?

Read Luke 12:16-21

In the context this story was originally told agriculture was a key way of accumulating and storing wealth. While landowning is still a significant part of wealth today, many of the richest people in our society are not farmers and they don't use barns to store their riches.

As a group, come up with a way of retelling this parable in the context of our culture today. Instead of a farmer think of another wealthy position, instead of crops another valuable resource and instead of barns another way of storing it.... "Then he told them a parable..."

Does playing with the story bring you new insights? Share with the group.

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Part 2: Creation, camping + CCTV

Read Psalm 50: 1-2

God converses with us daily through the wonder of creation.

Where do you see *the perfection of beauty* in nature?

Where do you see *God shining forth*?

Read Genesis 15: 1-6

Have you ever been camping, or stayed somewhere remote over night? When the sky is clear, and you are off the beaten track away from electric lights, you can often see the stars shining incredibly bright.

Cheap modern lighting is an amazing innovation but have we lost a sense of wonder when we rely on our own lights and blind ourselves to the wonders of creation?

How do you think Abram felt, lying there having a starlit conversation with God?

Read Psalm 33:12-22

God keeps an eye on creation. In this month's theme we came up with the play on words *Careful Caring Terra Vision = CCTV* as a way of talking about God's caring concern for us.

How do we get our heads around the scale of God? We are invited into conversation with the creator God... a vast seemingly unknowable being who allows us the intimacy of friendship, of family. How do we begin to get a grip on that?

How do you have a conversation with someone who sees all and knows all?

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Part 3: Difficult conversations

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

The analogy of Israel being like an unproductive vineyard escalates quickly from a failed crop to a failed nation. Sometimes when things go really wrong, we need to face facts and have difficult conversations. In vineyards, and in life, we can get to those moments when the only way forward is to uproot and start again. It can be hard to judge when you pass the point of no return, the answers aren't easy.

Often the only way to move on from catastrophe is to have difficult conversations, to trample over how things have been to make room for what can be.

Where are the 'unproductive vineyards' in our lives that we need to uproot and replant? The things in our life that initially showed promise but are now falling apart?

How can we uproot and replant with God's love? And what are the difficult conversations we need to have in order to move on?

Read Jeremiah 23:23-29

In ancient times and in our own day and age — there are many false prophets who claim to have unique insights to the truth but their messages prove to be based on lies. Rather than leading us, they mislead us.

How do we have the difficult conversations to tell the true prophets from the false prophets? To test the message of prophets to see if they guide us to the truth that blesses life and not the lies that cheapen it? In other words, how can we tell the *wheat* from the *straw*?

Read Luke 12: 49-56

Jesus — fire bringer! Now, standing up for the truth tends to bring division — it's hard to have neutral feelings about the things that matter most in the world that Jesus spoke about. But it is unsettling to think of the *Good Shepherd* bringing fire. How do you feel about Jesus as a bringer of fire?

This reading shows us that Jesus wasn't afraid of difficult conversations. When we think of the context of Jesus' words it was at a time when he was being criticised as a radical who was stirring up the people. For Jesus disruption and conflict weren't to be avoided at all costs but were part of the journey towards a more lasting peace.

In what ways does following Jesus bring you into conflict with others? And how can this division be a starting point on the way to a deeper peace?

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Part 4: Conversations in love

Read Psalm 103 as a group (everyone who want to take part read one verse at a time, leaving a short pause between each verse, take your time leaving space for people to reflect)

Afterwards share with the group the word or words that stood out for you from the reading, either that you spoke aloud or that you heard someone else say.

It might be a word or phrase that encouraged you, inspired you, troubled you, confused you, comforted you or gave you a different emotion entirely.

Read Luke 13: 10-17 (imagine you are bystanders at the scene, watching this unfold before you, perhaps picture it taking place in a familiar street near where you live)

Now imagine having a conversation with the healed woman after this happened. How do you think she would be feeling? What would she tell you?

Then imagine having a conversation with the synagogue leader afterwards. How would he have been feeling? What would he have to say for himself?

Read 1 John 4: 7-12

God's love is perfected... in us... wow. (See verse 12, some translations put something like 'made complete' — what does your translation say?)

What on earth does this mean? How can we fragile, vulnerable humans **perfect** or **complete** the love of the creator who loved us from the beginning?

How can it be true?

How does it make you feel?

What shall we do about it?