

## **Too Much Information or Valuable Small Talk?**

One day as my wife and I were talking she raised her hand, palm upward to my face and politely said, "That's T.M.I." I said that's what? She pleasantly explained, "That stands for 'Too Much Information.'" Since then I have often heard this expression and I have used it myself. There are times that we can give too much information. When small talk involves gossip or hurting people, the Bible is clear, "*Speak not evil one of another, brethren*" (James 4:11). If it is empty talk, just talking to hear your own voice, well, this can become boring to an audience that is really not interested. A chilling warning is given by Solomon, "*A fool also is full of words...*" (Ecclesiastes 10:14). With your permission in the writing today, I want to convey the value, not of too much information, but contrariwise, the value of small talk. We have probably not thought too much about why we do the folksy, casual, comfortable talk that we engage in, usually at the beginning of conversations. Openings in conversations tell us what we are interested in, what we have in common, what concerns us, blesses us and maybe what you and the person you are talking to can think about, pray about or do something about. Small talk can be very important. So let's not write off all apparent peripheral comments as "too much information." Let us listen to that which is not being said by what is being said. Small talk is often in germ, the very basic of the whole. Let me explain why small talk is important.

### **1. You are bringing the person you are talking to within the circle of potential friendship.**

Small talk tests the waters. People will often see how we respond to the non-essential, to see if they can trust us with the personal. If we at this moment laterally or fugitively, put up the hand in a stop and say, "That's T.M.I.," they will probably laugh with you, but you have now forfeited to know what was bothering them, or what they wanted you to pray about. I know this may bother some of you who are saying, "Why don't people say what they mean; just tell it like it is." We will never be the friends that some individuals need if we insist on everybody being as blunt as you may be. If people can love you in spite of being blunt, can you not love someone else who might be a bit more shy, or needs reassurance of your love before they tell it like it is? When we allow someone to do the small talk, you have removed any perceived wall that was between you and him or her. I love the illustration of the Good Samaritan; please notice the wording, "*But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him*" (Luke 10:33). This is great insight of a man who helps people; he comes, addresses their deepest need. Small talks are the steps to friendship with the heart of a Good Samaritan; small talk leads you to where they are.

### **2. You are breaking ground with small talk to open up for big talk.**

Keep listening when small talk is underway; soon you will see the window opening to the real problem. Here is a scenario: "Kids are wild these days. I just read in the news about a teen that got into trouble. I couldn't believe it. They defaced some property at school. Wow! Where do these kids get these ideas? Yeah, well anyway, they caught them. Say Pastor, what do you think should happen to kids like that?" If I reply, "Well, I don't really know the whole story here; I might need more information before I could give my opinion. I know one thing, we do have a need in our community. That's one reason I want us, as a church, to reach out to the youth." Then the person says, "Well, Pastor, my teenager didn't deface property at school, but here's what he did do and we need some help." Suppose I had said, "We ought to give them the sternest possible punishment, press charges, make sure they have a permanent police record, for starters." On the other hand I might say, "Okay, yes, I know we have a problem with youth, but why are we here to talk? I am really pressed for time." In responding firmly without enough information or apathetically, we have closed the door for the issues that are pressing their hearts. An old wise saying addresses this issue: "People don't care how much we know, until they know how much we care." "*The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook*" (Proverbs 18:4).

### **3. You are providing the background, which allows the person with whom you are conversant to step into the foreground.**

Like a tapestry or painting that require the sometimes-dull colorations or monotonous tones, allowing for small talk operates under the same principal. When you permit someone to small talk, you are painting the sky and horizon; let them fill in the sun, the mountains and the trees. This works especially well with bashful people. Get them talking! So many people suffer from inferiority complexes. They would love to talk, but they feel unworthy. By giving them eye contact and your time, you are affirming their importance. You have made them comfortable to be where they need to be, i.e., in the foreground to really say what needs to be said. All it takes to dissuade some from expressing their true sentiments is one little rude interruption. I am bad about getting ahead of someone I am talking to. I am guilty of trying to guess what someone is going to say. I have learned the hard way, if we want people to talk with us, we cannot allow them to think we are putting words in their mouth. Actually, it is not always that complicated. If we interrupt enough, we are saying to them their opinions are of no importance. If we convey the thought that others' opinions are not important, they take the logic one step further and interpret your reaction as saying they are not important. We who are tempted to jump into someone's line of talk need to know how desperately important it is to be willing to be the background. Let me challenge you to observe two of the best interviewers, who have well-respected and famous people beating down their doors to be interviewed by them. (I am not, by the way endorsing their politics or lifestyle). The two of whom I speak are Charlie Rose on PBS and Larry King on CNN. Watch them sometime; they let their guest do the talking. And when a guest has given their spiel, they remain objective. Watch their pauses. They are masters at making even obnoxious persons feel special. And, oh, the information that is gained by someone who feels free to express their heart. *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"* (James 1:19).

### **4. If enough small talk is done, we move beyond the symptoms to the root of the issues.**

Small talk cuts to the chase. This is best exemplified in a soul talk. I have found that many a person God has given me the opportunity to win to Christ are the people with who we small talk. Our Lord was a great one to open up the root of the problem with small talk. In John chapter four, Jesus asks the woman at the well to go and call her husband. Then she replied, she had no husband. Our Lord then said, *"For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly"* (John 4:18). Jesus knew the woman needed to deal with repentance of a lifestyle contrary to the law of God. No one knew how better to get to the root of the problem than Jesus!

God will give us the discernment and wisdom to know how to give answers and be a blessing. Let us pray with the Psalmist, *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer"* (Psalms 19:14).

- Pastor Pope -

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