

Can We Talk?

Ed Dunn

Life “sheltering in place” these days has had its share of challenges for all of us. For several academic quarters now, I’ve shared my home, again, with my twenty-year-old daughter, Lauren. I say “again” because, as a “Third-Year” at a California university, Lauren has been home from school and back with me taking classes online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Let’s just say we’ve had plenty of time and opportunity to talk.

As a father and daughter, we have talked about the recent events we as a nation, and the world, really, have experienced together on the critical topics of race relations, fairness and justice. You could say we’ve had our conversational plates full. To witness all we have through the media, whether social media or the more traditional media of television and print, we cannot deny we’ve been presented with so much to think about. And, so much to talk about.

In all this talking, it has become clear we do see some things quite differently. We also see some things exactly the same. Whether our views have been inspired by youthful passion, energy and a deep desire for constructive change, or by years of life lived and a sincere hope for a measured hand in bringing such change about, we have come to appreciate one another’s point of view.

The conversational process has not been easy. Lauren relies more on social media for the news and conversations she values. I rely more on the traditional media, but do so with what I believe is a healthy skepticism of it all. Lauren believes that constructive change should come quickly, whereas I believe change should take time. Neither of us is completely right and neither of us is completely wrong. Lauren can tend to simplify issues and I can tend to over-complicate them. At times, a great deal of patience, on both of our parts, has been required to talk it all through.

Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet and well-known teacher of his day, was famous for saying, “Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing

there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” I love this wisdom. I value it because, although we can see the big issues of our times very differently, and often from the point of view of “right” and “wrong,” it is our ability to talk to each other from a place of love that can serve us best.

Jesus himself liked to ask questions around the most pressing “hot button” issues of his day: “How do you see it?” or “How do you read it?” exemplifies how Jesus invited conversation with his listeners around key aspects of the Law (Luke 10:26). “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” served as a critical question around the tension of his identity (Matthew 16:13). He posed these questions in order to create the opportunity to discuss two of the most important topics of his day.

The truth is, in talking, we may not always come to a point of agreement. The intensity of the emotions we can experience may lead us to feel miles apart. The Apostle James offers some helpful advice which has stood the test of time between the stresses of his day and those of our own: “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). Although this advice is not always easy to follow, it can help us through the challenges when we just can’t seem to hear one another.

And that’s what I’ve come to see with all the recent conversations with my daughter, Lauren. A better question than, “Can We Talk?” has become, “Can We Listen?” Can we really listen to each other, consider and repeat back what the other is saying? Even if we can, we still may not always agree. We certainly haven’t with all the pressing issues in front of us every day. But, having the time and opportunity together to talk, and to listen, has been nothing short of a gift. □

Ed Dunn serves at PTM as editor, staff writer and host of the This Month at PTM (on the CWRblog).