



The Power of Pausing During Difficult Conversations October 12, 2020

Dear friends,

We humans are built for community. During this time of social distancing, it's crucial that we remain connected, holding one another in love and support. It's for this reason that **each week during the COVID-19 crisis, we'll be sending you a short resource** to use in a virtual meeting held over the phone or via video conferencing. This weekly resource is a great tool to stay connected with your current and past JFM small groups. It is also a great resource to use individually, or with groups of friends or family to stay connected and engaged in a meaningful way. These reflections will provide a time to pray together, check in with one another, and have conversation around a short passage.

In the meantime, we're offering tips and tools for facilitating all of our current programs through videoconferencing. While we hope that this weekly resource will spiritually sustain your community while in quarantine, [now is also the perfect time to start one of our regular programs](#) (perhaps [Cultivating Nonviolence](#), [Harvesting Peace](#)) The call to seek justice is just as important now as ever!

Last but not least, generosity is, at its core, a benefit to everyone. When you donate today, your gift helps us sustain individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#). Also, please feel free to forward this resource to friends and family!

Thank you for continuing to care for one another during this time of heightened anxiety. Know that we are praying for you!

Stay well,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short reflection before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer.

Play soft instrumental music in the background if you wish.

Leader or group members: Read a line or two of the St. Francis Prayer pausing between lines. Everyone repeats each phrase after the reader. (If you are alone, repeat each phrase twice.)

Lord, make me a channel of your peace (*repeat*)

Where there is hatred, let me sow love

Where there is injury, pardon

Where there is doubt, faith

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light

And where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master, grant that I may

Not so much seek to be consoled as to console

To be understood, as to understand

To be loved, as to love

For it is in giving that we receive



And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned

And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen

Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

Ask these open-ended questions. If you're by yourself, journal about them.

Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?

Reflection (15 minutes or so)

Leader: Ask the group members to silently read through this reflection. Or you can send this document to participants before your meeting, and ask them to read the attachment ahead of time.

There was a time in the last century when most homes had a front porch. It was very common in the evening to have neighbors join each other for porch conversations. They would sit in old, comfortable chairs and talk and sit and talk and sit. There would be long



comfortable pauses and deep listening as stories, ideas and perspectives were shared. It was a great way to make connections and to gain an understanding of each other.

Things are very different today. Communication is often hard. Polarization is the norm and perspectives seem worlds apart. We have also been trained through news media soundbites to communicate in brief, quick snippets. Our cell phones have trained us to communicate in short texted phrases or with emojis. Sadly, it seems rare to have these quick threads of communication weave together to become good connections and deep conversations. It seems like we are having more and more difficult discussions with colleagues, friends, and family that are distancing us rather than bringing us closer together.

So in this communication milieu, how can we be channels of God's peace? How can we seek to first understand before being understood? We all yearn for, and there is a Gospel call for, deep connections with others, both those who we know well and those we do not, both those who are similar to us and those who are very different. So how do we first seek to understand when we are having difficult conversations with others?

We start with our intention. Sometimes our intention (conscious or not) is to be heard, to share wisdom, to give advice or to change others. And then there is the very common desire to be right. These intentions influence the flow of the conversation and our responses. However, with difficult conversations, it is very helpful to change our intention to a desire to deepen our connection with the other person, to show loving kindness, and to truly listen to seek understanding. Just stating these intentions to ourselves shifts something in us and opens our hearts to the possibility of a deeper connection. Keeping these intentions in mind during the conversation helps us to stay focused on what we want to see happen.

We can also do something that is rarely seen in today's conversations. We can push back against the norm of fast-paced talking and pause to slow the conversation down. Pausing is the deliberate act of momentarily stepping back from a conversation. This practice of pausing during a conversation can be extremely powerful and effective in moving us towards understanding others and creating deeper connections.

But how do we create a pause in difficult conversations when our cultural habits push against it so strongly? One way is to say something like: "I really want to fully understand what you are sharing, could you give me a moment to think about what you just said?" Note: It is important that while making this comment and during a pause, all nonverbal communication projects loving kindness and openness.

It is amazing how the whole tenor of a conversation can change for the better with just a short pause. You have just shared that you are seeking to understand and it may change everything.



A pause in the conversation is purposeful. It allows us to:

- *Take a few deep breaths to connect with my center of peace and calmness.*
- *Reflect on what feelings bubbled up inside of me from what I just heard? Am I feeling anxious, defensive, perplexed, curious? Identifying my feelings helps me gain control over these feelings.*
- *Reflect on if I fully understood what was just said? Was I listening intently or was I listening only enough to create a response?*
- *Reflect on what feelings might be behind what was said by my conversation partner. Did I detect fear, anxiety, anger as the other person spoke? Was there pain and vulnerability behind her words? Can I connect to these feelings with an open heart and loving kindness?*
- *Reflect on a question I can ask that will invite further discussion and a deeper understanding of what is being shared.*

It is amazing that a pause with these reflections can take only a moment or two. The important thing is that we pause, take a breath, and reflect. And then we invite open dialogue. We are showing our openness and intention to fully listen and hear the other person. We are seeking understanding.

After the pause, the best way to pick up the conversation is to ask a question that will prompt the other person to share deeper. In other words, we invite the other person to continue speaking by referring to and asking about something that was shared. Once the conversation partner has shared more, invite her to go deeper with more gentle nudges. Soon she will open up and share not only her perspectives but the feelings behind them, all because we were open and showed loving kindness and a real longing for understanding and connection. Doing these things often helps our conversation partner to become more open and to want to understand our perspectives as well. In other words, we are being the change we want to see in the conversation - opening up with loving kindness to seek understanding.

Once we have tried pausing during difficult conversations, we will be inspired to use a pause again and again. Making deeper connections with others is very satisfying. However, it is really hard to do. For most of us, it takes lots and lots of practice, like developing any new habit. We are conditioned to eagerly express our perspectives and our points of view. In addition, sometimes our “buttons are pushed” and our emotions get the best of us. Pausing helps with both of these.



It is easier to use pauses in conversations if you have a regular practice of spiritual quieting like Centering Prayer, meditation or chanting. These practices connect us to our spiritual center, that place of calmness and peace where the Spirit speaks to us. This is the same place we are trying to connect with when we are pausing during difficult conversations.

In summary, this simple practice of pausing, reflecting and inviting can have a powerful impact on our conversations and relationships. It can move us “back to the porch” where the conversations were slower with lots of pauses. It can be a tremendous help with our desire to “first seek to understand” and it moves us closer to being a “channel of peace.”

Leader: Ask group members:

- What resonates with you from this reflection?
- What is your response to the idea of pausing in conversations? Have you tried this?

Exercise: Quietly think of a conversation you had recently where you may not have responded as you hoped. Replay the conversation in your mind and add a pause. Reflect on how a few deep breaths and some reflection might have affected your response. Discuss out loud (or journal).

Resources:

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg; *The Sacred Art of Listening: Forty Reflections for Cultivating a Spiritual Practice* by Kay Lindahl; *Peaceful Living: Daily Meditations for Living with Love, Healing, and Compassion* by Mary Mackenzie

Announcements (10 minutes-ish)

- Remind participants that today’s conversation offered only a brief insight into a huge topic. If they would like to take a deeper dive into this subject matter, they should consider the eight-week program [Cultivating Nonviolence, Harvesting Peace](#).
- Let participants know that the materials for this gathering were free, put together by the JustFaith Ministries staff in order to equip more people for the work of peace and justice. In order to support the creation of more resources and programs, participants are encouraged to donate to JustFaith Ministries through justfaith.org.



- JustFaith Ministries is currently hosting a monthly webinar series called “Acting for Justice While Sheltering in Place,” in which an expert on a justice-related topic will offer tips for taking action during COVID-19. Visit the [JustFaith Ministries Facebook page](#) for more information on times and topics.
- Are there any opportunities for action or advocacy happening in your community this week? Invite participants to share ways to support the work of local groups working for justice.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes-ish)

Leader: Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.

Pause for 30 seconds

Let's pray.

Leader or group member: Slowly re-read the St. Francis Peace Prayer:

Lord, make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy
O Divine Master, grant that I may
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
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For it is in giving that we receive

And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned

And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

We are disciples on a journey.

We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.

We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.

If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.

Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world. Amen.



Attachment: Reflection – The Power of Pausing during Difficult Conversations

There was a time in the last century when most homes had a front porch. It was very common in the evening to have neighbors join each other for porch conversations. They would sit in old, comfortable chairs and talk and sit and talk and sit. There would be long comfortable pauses and deep listening as stories, ideas and perspectives were shared. It was a great way to make connections and to gain an understanding of each other.

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