

THE KEY TO HAVING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

My friend [Jason Jimenez](#) is an expert on helping people have difficult conversations. Check out this brief interview with some practical steps for having meaningful conversations on important issues.

MCDOWELL: *What are the 3 top excuses Christians have for avoiding tough conversations and why?*

JIMENEZ: The first common excuse I hear from Christians is that they aren't any good at having substantive conversations: "I never know what to say," "I'm not sophisticated enough," "I'm not smart enough," "I get tongue-tied."

The second excuse people use to avoid challenging conversations is they get too worked up and become defensive. And so rather than confront a problem with someone, they dodge it out of fear their emotions will get the best of them.

The third excuse, "I get uncomfortable," is probably the most common excuse for avoiding challenging conversations because no one likes to be in an uncomfortable situation. The very thought of saying something that might offend someone can cause Christians to panic. And so rather than confront the problem, Christians tend to avoid the talk and land up tossing it aside with the other unresolved issues.

Now, what I discovered is that these three excuses break down into two types of characters with different approaches to conversations: the aggressor, who speaks down to people and dominates the conversation, and the avoider, who is reluctant to do or say anything. But the thing is, neither the aggressor nor the avoider aligns with Christian living. As Christians, God calls us to connect with people and to speak the gospel truth no matter how difficult it might be (Eph. 4:15).

MCDOWELL: *How can Christians overcome being either an aggressor or an avoider and start having challenging conversations?*

JIMENEZ: In my work, I help Christians envision themselves becoming an advocator of God's truth. An advocator is a conversant Christian who speaks the truth in love and unafraid to jump into conversations with people who don't see eye-to-eye with them. They see it as an opportunity to connect with people in the exchanging of ideas by applying three highly effective tactics.

The first tactic is to *relate*. In this tactic, the Christian will gain insight on how to personalize the conversation by building rapport. The approach is to honor the person made in God's image—not disparage them if they don't conform to your point of view. Your starting position isn't "I'm going to set you straight." It should be, "I want to understand your position and why you hold it."

The second tactic is to *investigate*. To be effective in this tactic, you will need to ask a lot of questions. To get the scoop on something—or, in this case, gain an understanding as to why the person believes whatever they believe—you need to ask the right questions along the way. The problem is, people usually get nervous and land up doing all the talking. A great way to prevent this from happening is to see your primary role as a journalist whose job is to get to the truth.

The third tactic is to *translate*. After you've built rapport and asked a lot of probing questions, you'll want to wrap up the conversation by evaluating three questions: (1) What did we learn? (2) Where do we agree? And (3) Where do we go from here? These questions will help the two of you clear up any confusion, find points of agreement, and determine the next steps in where the two of you go from here.