

Curious?

Sometimes we think the sole purpose of questions is to get answers. Jesus knew differently. In His conversations with His disciples, His questions probed their character and their stories, seeking deeper relationship and their transformation. *Upfront Online* explores this more deeply through these three additional articles, as well as a brand-new podcast featuring Brian Zaas and Michael Perrigo, creators of the CURIOUS tool on the previous page. Check it out!



Scan the QR code below to check out the new *Upfront* podcast or search for us on Spotify



Ava and the Unicycling Clown

Lyndi Markus (Upfront, TDC) once missed a chance at curiosity that could have led to connection with a neighborhood personality.

Vicki Gatchell (Church Ministries) noticed her conversation with Alejandro was staying informational. Could the right questions help it become transformational instead?

It Started with a Question



Curiosity Leading into Green Pastures

Jon Martin (Military) shares a moment when being curious for and with a friend brought transformation for his friend's marriage.

THE GIFT OF CO-CREATING CONNECTION

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Here are a few ways to co-create connection with someone who is different from you:

- Realize you come from different cultures with different experiences.
- Ask questions.
- Co-create language and meaning.
- Honor the unique DNA of the other, explore rather than judge it.
- Embrace the gift of relationship.
- Trust God and God's love.

Because of our differences, we almost lost a beautiful gift of partnership and collaboration. But God, in His wisdom, held it until we could put down assumptions, learn to co-create with one another, and also learn to co-create with Him.

My text back to Bonnie: *I love you, I'm so proud of you.*

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres. Love never fails.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:7 ◀

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Opportunities to Grow in Curiosity

Coaching skills intentionally develop the ability to listen to God, listen to others, and ask good questions. Check out these workshops from *Life and Leadership Coaching*!

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Real-Life Stories and Practical Tools
to Advance The Navigators Calling

Burning Bushes, Burning Questions

CHRIS SEGREST

Austin, Texas
City Director

“You all go explore the mall,” Mom said. “I’m going to stay here and people watch.”

People watch? What’s that? Curious, I slid onto the bench beside my mom as my siblings headed off.

“God created so much amazing diversity in this world,” she explained as we watched the world walk past. She pointed out tall people, short people... some whose clothes made us speculate which country they were from. Kids who looked just like their parents, a dad whose teenager slouched ahead as if to distance herself from him. “I wonder what their stories could be?” Mom mused. “What made them who they are today? What are their joys, hurts, and dreams? Every person has a story. Every person is like a good book; it’s a joy to take the time to read them.”

That day, Mom helped me see ordinary people with wonder. But I had more to learn.

For a long time, I dreaded evangelism. I had a huge heart for people knowing the gospel, but this meant giving a message to those who probably didn’t want to hear it and resented me for pushing it. Hating what I saw as my own cowardice, I simply “dug deeper” and mustered up courage to preach the gospel to strangers.

Then I learned about the Five Core Longings of the Heart—longings every human being everywhere experiences. We long: to be loved, to be respected, to have purpose, to feel safe or secure, and to be satisfied. Curiosity often results when we sense something in another person that connects with our own core desires, and we want to understand more. Motivated by compassionate love, curiosity leads us to search for deeper meaning.

I like to think of Exodus 3, where Moses was surprised, amazed by this burning bush. Maybe it wasn’t all that abnormal that the bush was on fire—lightning often strikes bushes in the desert. But Moses noticed that it wasn’t being consumed, and he moved closer in amazement and wonder.

BURNING BUSHES, BURNING QUESTIONS

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In the same way, God entices us to leave the ordinary and come over to investigate others’ core longings. Where do they look to find life and meaning? Where are they in their search? As you meet them there, they might begin to see you as a burning bush as well. They’ll see the amazing Spirit of the living God within you as you demonstrate kindness and genuine interest in their lives.

This kind of curiosity has transformed my prayer life, since now I pray constantly for friends I’ve developed in this way. It’s changed how I worship, since I can’t get their faces and stories out of my head as I sing and praise and plead with God to reveal Himself to them. And it’s caused me to say, “Lord, I don’t want to miss this. Don’t let me get so busy going about ‘your work’ that I forget to move toward people.” My daily rhythms and perspective have shifted.

The Story of My Sister

LEVI SSEMANZA NDMUBANZI
Uganda
Country Director



By the late 1990s, war and HIV/AIDS had ravaged my country, destroying entire families and villages. It left behind what was commonly referred to as “child-headed families,” families of little kids whose adults had been claimed by our tragedies.

At barely 17 years, I was the head of my household. We struggled to stay in school and have one meal a day. Our electricity often cut off. I have heard it said, “All parents have a favorite child,” and I too had one. My younger sister was stunningly beautiful, very intelligent, and gifted with all manner of talents.

Then her life took a downward spiral. Hardships at home and in the neighborhood brought about disillusionment, and all hope drained out of her. As she stopped fighting for a better life, she turned against any form of reasoning, conscience, and logic. She even moved to Malaysia, where she narrowly escaped prison as an illegal immigrant and made friends who were involved in drugs and prostitution. She hit rock bottom.

We did the telling, the quarreling, the ignoring, thinking that highlighting the pain and long-term consequences would motivate her to change. Nothing worked. Today my sister is back in Uganda, a mother of two sons. But with no job, education, or formal training, she can’t support them.

As I prayed for her, the Lord led me to Isaiah 61. God said to me, “I commissioned you to ‘rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; and renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.’” Regardless of what life

God has been teaching me, “You have permission to enjoy people.” People will smell it if you see them as a project. But thinking, “I love this person, and I really want to enjoy how God made them, their desires, and their deepest story,” is a total gamechanger. That wonder honors them and their uniqueness. It fosters deep growth, passion, and joy in us.

And it delights the Lord. ◀

Chris serves with the Navigators in Austin, Texas. He’s married to his amazing wife, Margaret and they have three wonderful young adult children. He loves to study history, play guitar, and watch American football. He also loves to hear peoples’ stories over a strong cup of dark roast coffee (no cream or sugar please).



had done to her, my sister bore the image of the God who had never stopped pursuing her.

Then I wondered, *Have we tried lovingly coming alongside her without trying to change her? How do we listen to her? What else can we do?*

So I tried to approach my sister with curiosity.

Me: What do you think about where you are in life?

Sister: I am nothing!

Me: Really? What makes you think you are nothing?

Sister: I spent 6 years in Malaysia, and I can’t quite account for it.

Me: What else?

Sister: My best friends and my sister that I left in Uganda are born again and have made significant progress in their lives.

Me: Tell me more about Malaysia.

Sister: It was hell, and that’s why I love God! God saved my life from death and prison. Many of my friends died, and some are still in jail.

Me: What do you mean when you say, “I love God”?

Sister: *I mean He hears me when I cry out to Him, and He loves me!*

In this moment, I felt God’s transforming presence in my view of my sister.

As we walk alongside friends, family, and people we minister to, we must believe that people can change and that they want to. We must listen to their experiences without preconceived judgment. This breathes hope into our conversations. Rebuilding ancient ruins, restoring desolate places, and renewing the cities devastated for generations can’t be accomplished in human strength, knowledge, or sheer self-determination. But by the grace and enabling of the Holy Spirit, we can respond in humility and obedience. When this happens, we are transformed! ◀

The Gift of Co-Creating Connection

JORDAN MERCEDES, MCC
Guest Contributor



Her text read: *I am so happy to co-labor with you, Jordan.*

Reading Bonnie’s text drew me into reflecting on our early days of collaboration. We met at a coach training I gave. Chatting after class, we realized not only did we have coaching in common, but our faith in Christ made a strong connection.

We also had plenty of things not in common. Bonnie is Korean American, I’m African American, and we’re from different generations. We process differently. Bonnie takes about 3.5 seconds to go from idea to execution, while I’m a contemplative processor who plans each step before launching.

We knew almost from the beginning that we wanted to work together. What we didn’t know was that our differences would nearly derail our partnership.

Bonnie took a shotgun approach to our work, scattering her aim over a wide area rather than a specific target. I didn’t understand her speed and apparent lack of planning. In return, she didn’t understand that my steady pace required details and clarity. She saw me as slow and disengaged. While we felt a Kingdom alignment, we didn’t know how to read each other, and this led to inaccurate assumptions. We soon went our separate ways.

Months later, Bonnie reached out. We talked.

She told me that when we began working together, she’d been under tremendous stress from another big project. She’d been on autopilot, driving hard to keep all the plates spinning. Coming from an entrepreneurial family, she was used to a fast pace, but this was too much. I told her I’d also been under pressure at that time. My family believed the best results came from taking one step at a time, but I’d been traveling and writing programs as well as coaching. Each had its own stress.

We realized we had never taken time to get to know one another culturally. We didn’t know how the other viewed work or success or what we meant when we spoke of “desired outcomes.” We didn’t know how to blend our strategic gifts to benefit the work, and we certainly didn’t understand each other’s actions. The sad part is that we never asked.

The best part? As we reconnected, we gradually grew to understand each other better and recommitted to working together. Through heart-centered curiosity about the other person and a mindset shift, we co-created a good way forward. We asked questions, and we honored one another. Now we both feel a palpable synergy when we’re collaborating. We’ve found that not only are our gifts compatible, but they make a powerful combination.

Co-creating connection works!

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CURIOUS
A Tool for Building Better Questions

Exploring transformational awareness that aligns to His Spirit at work within us and is shown through the fruit of relational connection.

COMPASSIONATE

Explores how to care well for others, felt needs and emotions, affirms and lifts up the spirit of those we walk alongside. Expressed through empathy and seeing the world through their eyes as they engage.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- What emotions are you experiencing right now?
- What are the felt needs you want to explore?

UNDERSTANDING

Exposes key character traits, values and worldview held by those you are walking alongside.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- What core values are most important to you?
- What challenges have you overcome that can help you move forward?

RELATIONAL

Establishes trust and safety; sows engagement at a personal level; demonstrates patience.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- How can I protect your heart and guard confidentiality?
- When would be the best time for us to get together?

INSIGHTFUL

Life giving, uplifting, inspirational, growth-oriented, forward thinking, help them explore new perspectives.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- What are some other ways to approach this challenge?
- What makes you most passionate?

OPEN

Shows vulnerability and transparency, brings a sense of joy or peace; explores how others might be affected.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- What are some of your biggest fears as you move in that direction?
- Who else might you need to consider when taking that action?

UNASSUMING

Looks beyond mistakes, peers into the heart, goes below the surface; faithfulness to overlook faults, shows patience.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- You said “I always fall short,” how true is that in your heart and mind?
- How does this line up with the way God sees you?

SINCERE

Learner’s mindset, tenacious, leaning in with insights; speaking truth in love; persistent.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS:

- What is your gut saying to you?
- What are you learning about yourself?