



# 25 Family-Focused Spiritual Conversation Starters

*(And How Not To Use Them)*

By Janel Breitenstein



1. How did you two meet?

2. *[When sharing a marriage or parenting struggle you're having.]* Please tell me this isn't just us. How are your kids doing lately? Maybe we can live vicariously through what's going right with yours!

3. How has marriage (or parenting) changed you?



## **How Not to Use Spiritual Conversation Starters**

### **1. As a hidden agenda.**

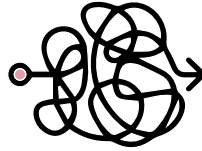
When someone's telling their story, a listener who railroads the conversation to talk about their own topic is typically thought of as ... well, rude. And spirituality isn't actually different, unless it flows into the conversation because it naturally energizes us.

4. What's different about marriage (or parenting) from how you thought it would be? What's better, and what's harder?!

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5. I was thinking about [insert a tough time in your own parenting or marriage]. Have you had moments like that which totally changed you?

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6. What dreams do you have for your kids? How do you hope to get there?

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7. How have marriage and/or kids changed what you think “love” is—both receiving it and giving it?<sup>1</sup>

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8. What do you wish someone would have told you before marriage (/parenting)?

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9. What's the one piece of advice about lasting love that you'd tell anyone who'd listen?

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## How Not to Use Spiritual Conversation Starters

### 2. As a quick win.

See these particular spiritual conversation starters as avenues to knowing and understanding someone. Toss the spiritual chess match, and settle in to listen. As you begin to hear how someone met their spouse or what pains them about their kids, you might hear about holes in their soul.

### 3. As a way for them to share their stuff without showing yours.

Some of our greatest apologetics in a bristling, disconnected cultural climate are *empathy*, *active listening*, and *vulnerability*. And it's difficult to accomplish the first two when they're the only ones sharing the hard. Just like judgment tends to beget judgment, authenticity tends to beget authenticity.



10. [For someone going through a tough season] What's the one question you wish you could answer right now?

11. What do you want most for your relationship with [name] right now?

12. Where do you find refuge or comfort when things aren't going right with [name]?

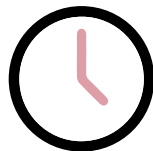


13. In your whole family, whose performance matters most to you? Why?<sup>2</sup>

14. Who do you feel like you need to please right now? Who do you really long for approval from? Or fear being rejected?

15. When you have it, what makes you feel rich, secure, and happy?

16. What kinds of things are you investing time in nearly every day?



17. When it comes to your family, what's your "If only...?"



### ***How Not to Use Spiritual Conversation Starters***

#### **4. As storytelling alone.**

Jesus notoriously saw through people's questions or actions—whether the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the Pharisees—toward the questions their hearts were asking. Press into the heart issues beneath, rather than the heart-dodging questions.

**18.** What do you really want out of life?

**19.** If you pray, can I ask what you pray about?

**20.** I'm really into learning from other people when I can. What's the greatest lesson you've learned so far as a spouse/parent?



**21.** What's one of the best pieces of marriage/parenting advice you've ever received?



**22.** What do you really love about marriage/parenting? What's the worst part?



**23.** When, where, and with whom do you feel most at home? What represents "home" to you, and why?<sup>3</sup>

**24.** How is your spouse different from you—in both ways that are good and ways that are hard to understand?

**25.** What's one time in your life when you felt alone?

## “Where do I go from here?”

These questions help you begin to understand what your neighbor knows and loves. Eventually, you may be able gently point out the ways your neighbor’s beliefs feel unfulfilling, less-than-adequate. We can then follow up with questions that tenderly press into the tensions they may already be sensing.

Most of these conversation starters can be followed up with questions like:

- What was that like for you?
- What do you wish people could understand about that experience for you?
- I remember when I went through something similar to that. It was [describe, with vulnerability, your experience].
  - Think:**
    - **What was your life like** when you felt a similar pain to this person?
    - **What made God compelling and more fulfilling** than the alternative?
    - **How have you changed?**
  - I can resonate with \_\_\_ from your story. [Affirm their legitimate desire: to feel significant, in control, loved by others, etc.).
    - That feels like a really **legitimate longing**. I’ve felt a similar thing when ---.
    - I also can’t help but think that even if you had what you wanted, if you don’t mind me suggesting this—**it might still let you down**.
    - Because even the times I’ve experienced that desire fulfilled, **something falls short** of being enough for me.
    - [Insert your mutual object of desire] **can’t support the weight of the desire we feel inside** for [insert their desire].
    - I’ve really **only found that fulfillment in God**.
    - This is how **my life is different from before**. I don’t feel like I’m clawing for [insert desire] anymore.

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1. Some questions adapted from Doug Pollock. “99 Wondering Questions that Could Work for You.” <https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/train-and-grow/99-wondering-questions.pdf>

2. Some questions adapted from David Powlison and Timothy Lane. “X-Ray Questions” taken from How People Change. <http://storage.cloversites.com/crosshaven/documents/xray.pdf>

3. Some questions adapted from Janel Breitenstein, “Questions to Take Your Marriage Deeper.” <https://www.janelbreitenstein.com/2021/02/26/closer-marriage/>