

The heart of this book is to connect people in loving community. Heather shows us how to embrace the Four Mindsets of a Loving Conversation and the Three Fresh Goals for Conversation. Readers are equipped with effective questions and action steps to implement in any situation—both personally and professionally.

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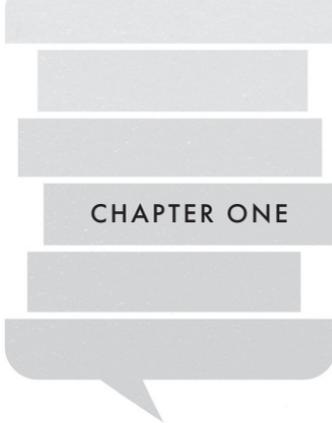
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## CHAPTER ONE

# THE FOUR MINDSETS OF A LOVING CONVERSATION

*“You can’t hate someone whose story you know.”*

—Margaret Wheatley, EdD, author and  
community building expert

I’VE NEVER MET ONE PERSON who didn’t wish they could have better conversations. When I begin teaching on this topic, students pay attention. They know their ability to connect well with others matters—not just to heal their chronic loneliness, alleviate relationship boredom, and improve the group dynamics in their clubs, but to also advance their professional goals. They also seek to repair relational damage with friends, family members, and romantic partners after a year that separated people based on political affiliations, views on the COVID-19 pandemic, and activity related to racial justice in the United States. The communication climate for so many has turned to suspicion, shame, hatred, and mockery. It’s a world of being canceled and unfriended if you say the wrong thing. So many of us feel awkward and unsure as we emerge from isolation. Like my students, you might

ask these questions: *How can I connect again with others? How can I feel close to this person? If my personal happiness depends on having warm relationships—like all the research shows—how can I become a better conversationalist to foster these connections?*

As a writing professor studying rhetoric and communication, I've investigated the social science research and analyzed conversation practices, positive communication, and the relational warmth so vital for well-being, health, and happiness. Like you, I want to grow in my conversation skills. I want to foster the relational connections that allow for true fellowship with others.

But how?

Let's start thinking about the best conversation you've had recently.

Think about the last conversation you had where you felt loved, understood, and connected to the other person or group involved. What was happening? Did you feel like the other person was *genuinely interested* in you? That they *liked* you? That they *cared* about your life? Did you feel like the other person *shared* in the conversation as well to create that closeness you've longed for?

When I can say yes to these questions, I know I've been in a great conversation.

Great conversations involve these essential elements of interest, liking, caring, and sharing. Great conversations cannot happen in the absence of one of these elements. And great conversations require cultivating the mindsets that continue to foster these elements. If I want great conversations, I need to know where I'm lacking and how I can develop my capacity for loving connection.

## **CULTIVATING THE FOUR MINDSETS OF A LOVING CONVERSATION**

In simple terms, if I were to tell you the four most critical things to do to foster a warm and connected conversation, I'd say this:

*Be curious*

*Believe the best*

*Express concern*

*Share your life*

The technical research terms for each phrase above sounds much more academic: *interpersonal curiosity*, *positive regard*, *investment*, and *mutual sharing*. Essentially, these conversational mindsets and accompanying behaviors will build your friendships and teach you the art of positive communication—a form of conversation involving asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, listening, and inspiring.<sup>1</sup> These mindsets embody what researchers on relational closeness call “closeness-enhancing behaviors” of “openness, attention, and involvement,” as well as showing other people “dignity and respect.”<sup>2</sup> We already identified these mindsets using different words when we thought about a great conversation we’ve had (interest, liking, caring, and sharing), so now let’s see them in action as what you can do: *be curious*, *believe the best*, *express concern*, and *share your life*.

My neighborhood friend and Penn State colleague uses the Four Mindsets in nearly every conversation we have. We recently began walking together once a week. She’s an engineering professor; I’m a writing professor. Her world is mostly math and technical problems; my world is vivid verbs and semicolons. She uses words I do not understand and delights in designing highly technical engineering problem sets for her students.

How do you create a warm relationship between an engineer and a writer? To make matters worse, she’s my opposite: she’s a runner; she loves adventure and travel; and she has a dog. I can’t run. I like to stay home. And I have three cats. This conversation shouldn’t work at all, right?

Here we go. I’m walking beside her (and her dog), and she

**You don't have to wait to start connecting with others. You can start the conversation revival right now.**

immediately asks about my latest writing projects, my teaching, and my children. *Genuine curiosity.* She's so interested in things I'm interested in. Next, she compliments me and tells me all the ways I'm inspiring her. *Positive regard.* She likes me! She's already believing good things about me. She's now asking me about my upcoming meeting and wants to brainstorm with me how I can achieve my goals. *Investment in my success.* She's wanting me to win. She wants the best for me. Then, she's vulnerable with

me. She reciprocates when I ask about her engineering classes and her goals so it's a time of *mutual sharing*. She shares vulnerably about where she's struggling. An hour passes, and I feel the relational closeness and warmth that fuels us both for the rest of the week.

I even find myself liking her dog.

Think again back to your favorite conversations. When was the last time you felt truly cared for because of the questions someone asked you about your life? When was the last time you felt that another person was looking out for your interests, wanting you to succeed, and figuring out ways to personally encourage you?

My students often look sad when I ask them this question. I know it's painful to feel alone and disconnected. But guess what? You don't have to wait to start connecting with others. You can start the conversation revival right now. You can develop the Four Mindsets yourself along with me, and we can start today to engage differently in conversations wherever we are. We all need friends to share our lives with. God made us relational beings, and with the latest research revealing our need for connection, we can grow in the areas of curiosity, positive regard, investment, and mutual sharing. And then, we can teach others.



Let's examine the Four Mindsets with more depth and analyze our own tendencies in each category.

### **Mindset One: Be Curious**

In 1936, Dale Carnegie published *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, a book selling over 30 million copies to become one of the best-selling books of all time. Carnegie claimed something so simple about how to make lasting friendships. *Be genuinely interested in other people.* He famously wrote, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."<sup>3</sup>

Simple enough, right?

I recently asked my teenage daughter if she has any friends who ask her about her life and seem to care about what happens to her. She talks about how rare this is, how nobody ever asks her questions about her life, and how, in a school of over 2,500 teens, she could only name *one person* who asks her personal questions. I then asked my college students the same question, and one student cried, "When I'm out with friends, they *never ask me one question* about myself."

***Young adults long for someone to be curious about them, to draw them out and try to connect deeply through good questions.***

The class nodded in agreement.

In my classroom, we talk about the epidemic of loneliness especially in teens and college students—and how disconnected everyone feels.<sup>4</sup> Young adults long for someone to be curious about them, to draw them out and try to connect deeply through good questions, but instead, most people in their lives stay self-absorbed and self-involved.

When we get together with friends, besides talking about the news or the weather or simply monologuing about work or children, rarely will someone ask a good question about our lives. It leaves so many of us frustrated, isolated, and empty after spending significant amounts of time in meaningless interaction. If only we could foster curiosity about one another!

If I could pick the essential character trait for my children and students to develop, I'd choose that of *curiosity*. In fact, I also talk to both my undergraduate and graduate students about developing curiosity as a key professional skill. In particular, I mean *social* or *interpersonal curiosity*—the desire to know and understand more about other people. I read and think about curiosity because I've learned that people who don't desire to engage others about their lives—even at the most basic level of interest—stay disconnected, lonely, and perhaps even depressed. Psychology researcher Todd Kashdan feels so strongly about the value of interpersonal curiosity that he called it the “secret juice of relationships.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, Kashdan argues that “if you take the fundamental things that people tend to want out of life—strong social relationships and happiness and accomplishing things—all of these are highly linked to curiosity.”<sup>6</sup>

At Penn State, I'm known as the “Name Game” professor because I ask a key attendance question in every class designed to invite everyone in the room (myself included) to share something meaningful about their lives (and learn one another's names). Why do I do this? As I encourage students to disclose information about themselves, and then begin to display curiosity about other people—even in just that brief moment of answering a personal question—the simple activity builds a sense of belonging, increases our positive mood, generates closeness, reduces prejudice, and enhances our creativity and productiveness.<sup>7</sup> I'll often ask the class, “What do you want to learn about each other today? What are you curious about?” They'll often choose a question from my

list of 100 favorite questions (see the appendix). We love answering questions about the first song we played over and over again or about something we're celebrating. They love to talk about the best meal on campus (the spicy ramen) or the best class they've ever taken and why. Even questions like, "What are you looking forward to?" or "What are your weekend plans?" inevitably invite follow-up questions rooted in curiosity: How did you get those tickets? How did you become interested in that? Who else goes to that event with you?

***Becoming More Curious:*** If you scan the research articles in both psychology, social science, and neuroscience, you'll learn about both the scope and benefits of becoming a curious person. Leading researcher on curiosity, Todd Kashdan, explains curiosity like this:

Curiosity's immediate function is to seek out, explore, and immerse oneself in situations with potential for new information and/or experiences. In the longer term, consistently acting on curious feelings functions to expand knowledge, build competencies, strengthen social relationships, and increase intellectual and creative capacities.<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, curious people desire new information about others; they believe they will learn something important or meaningful. But how does one develop curiosity? How do we leave our homes to engage well with others about their lives?

1. **Get excited about all you'll discover.** Socially curious people love learning about others because they believe other people possess rich treasures of experiences, insights, and wisdom to offer in conversation. When we allow ourselves to feel curious about other people's lives, we essentially believe that we will discover something meaningful and valuable from this interaction. Additionally,

a curious person often has a humble, teachable heart—a heart set on discovering more about the person before them who is made in the very image of God. Imagine the person in front of you will offer wisdom and perspective because of their unique point of view. Psychologist and educator Mary Pipher reminds us how another person’s individuality is a “tremendous gift to the world” because it is a “one-of-a-kind point of view on the universe.”<sup>9</sup> Even more, consider how other people are hiding a treasure within them; it’s our job to unearth that treasure—whether the treasure is how they see their world, what they know, or simply who they are in all their radiant beauty as children of God. What if you learn something that might change your life? What if they say something that unlocks a mystery for you? What if this person is the next step on your journey or vice versa? What if together you make a connection about something you would have never otherwise known? Sometimes I picture two people coming together in conversation like it’s a chemical reaction. Something amazing will happen in that moment. Something’s about to *catalyze* (great verb!).

**2. Invest in your own well-being.** As it turns out, curious people maintain “high levels of well-being,” and curiosity serves as a key ingredient in a “pleasurable and meaningful life” as reported by Todd Kashdan in his research.<sup>10</sup> In an article titled “Why Curious People Have Better Relationships,” UC Berkeley reports how curiosity helps us deal with rejection, makes us less aggressive, and helps our social life.<sup>11</sup> I’ve heard someone say, “It’s hard to be mad and curious at the same time.” I thought about this statement when I received an angry phone call from someone of a different political position who wanted to complain to me about all the people who disagreed with her. Instead of being riled up and letting her comments fuel my anger, I said, “I’m so curious. Tell me again the story

of why you're so angry. Remind me why this issue matters so much to you." Curiosity protected my own emotions in that moment and saved me from saying things in anger I might regret.

**3. Act as if you are curious.** Since curiosity fuels creativity and joy—not only in families and communities but also in the workplace—business leaders have taken a great interest in how to cultivate a posture of curiosity. One business leader reports how a colleague began her journey toward living in curiosity. She began to ask herself this question: “What would I say if I were curious?” This single question helped her build her curiosity.<sup>12</sup> Does this sound too simple to you? Maybe it even sounds disingenuous—to *pretend* to be curious. Well, it's a great technique to try, especially if you want to grow in conversational confidence: simply enter a conversation and let your mind role-play what a curious person would ask. Imagine you're a curious person who loves gathering information about others for the pure joy of understanding their lives. You can use any one of the Six Conversation categories in chapter 8 to begin your journey into interpersonal curiosity.

**4. Let yourself even fall in love.** Using questions fueled by curiosity will build connections to others, often with immediate results for not only friendship, but also for romantic connections. Perhaps you've heard of the famous *New York Times* article published in *Modern Love* called “To Fall in Love with Anyone, Do This.”<sup>13</sup> In this essay, author Mandy Len Catron references relationship scientist Arthur Aron's study of how to make strangers fall in love using just thirty-six questions. Dr. Aron succeeds in generating relational closeness in a lab setting in only forty-five minutes, because of how the questions invite self-disclosure.<sup>14</sup> You can read Dr. Aron's list of questions in *Modern Love*; my favorites from his

list include these: What would constitute a perfect day for you? When did you last sing to yourself? What is your most treasured memory?<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, Dr. Aron's list of questions fits neatly into the six dimensions of what it means to be human.

So let's be curious.

Curious people build better relationships. Curious people experience greater well-being and pleasure. Curious people become more creative and less stressed out. And your curiosity just might lead you to romance.

### 3 TIPS FOR GROWING INTO AN INTERPERSONALLY CURIOUS PERSON

1. Begin a conversation with these words: "I'm so curious. Tell me about \_\_\_\_\_."
2. Make a list of people in your life you'd like to grow closer to. What are some things you'd like to know about them? Turn to chapter 8 on the Six Conversations and pull out your favorite questions from your favorite category.
3. Attempt to ask a question rooted in curiosity to every single person you encounter—even strangers—and see the effect it has on other people (and yourself!). At the end of the day, record the most surprising things you learned.

## Mindset Two: Believe the Best

Without positive regard (believing the best), our attempts at curiosity won't make much difference. I've known people who act curious about my life for self-serving reasons; they want morsels to gossip about or ways to trap me in opinions they want to disparage. Or they just run through a list of questions because they are trying to connect out of duty or because it feels like a good leadership skill to ask a good question. Worse, I know they don't necessarily like me or wish to warmly

connect; they want to talk for argument's sake. But when someone asks questions rooted in genuine interest from a position of love and respect, I love to open up to this person.

My marriage, parenting, and teaching rest on the foundation of this phrase *positive regard*—a term I borrowed from psychology—in particular Carl Rogers, who believed that the best way to help people is to first accept them just as they are without trying to change them, judge them, or shame them.<sup>16</sup> He noticed incredible transformation in clients when he simply said, “I accept you totally.”<sup>17</sup> In simple terms, positive regard means you position yourself to respect, admire, like, and enjoy the person with whom you're in conversation. If you start from that point, you'll find that conversation blossoms; people want to share their lives with you. They feel safe, understood, and cared for in your presence. Positive regard changes conversation, and it changes people within those conversations. Research studies even suggest that positive regard from coaches and teachers creates more confidence and motivation from athletes and students;<sup>18</sup> positive regard helps others persevere through difficulty and perform better.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, in the workplace, positive regard among coworkers enhances job performance and even makes employees better citizens.<sup>20</sup>

We naturally offer positive regard in our parenting when we say things like, “Nothing you could ever do would cause me to love you less or cause me to stop loving you. You can tell me anything.” But in a marriage, we often don't start from this point. We instead begin from a point of suspicion, believing the worst, criticism, nagging, or blame. A marriage counselor once offered her best advice for the success of any marriage: *believe the best about your partner*. I was the type of newlywed who kept a record of all the ways I felt like my husband wasn't meeting my needs. I would recall ways he let me down or chores he hadn't finished. My toxic mindset made our marriage terrible *until I began conversations by believing the best about him*—and showing my

positive regard with compliments and high praise. Twenty-two years later, our marriage has flourished. Just as I never judge or shame him, he shows me positive regard as well.

In our work lives, we often function as if others need to earn our respect and our time. When I applied the principle of positive regard in my classroom, I told students my teaching philosophy: *I am with you and for you. Nothing you do in this class will change my positive opinion of you, and I will work hard to assist you in your professional goals.* Not surprisingly, our classroom community flourished and students began to write more vulnerably and powerfully with an authentic written voice. My five-year research into the study of shame allows this kind of classroom; people can do bad things (guilt), but they are not bad people (shame).

In day-to-day interactions, especially with young people, positive regard matters most of all for helping others experience true belonging. In *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation*, researchers argue that “accepting young people without judgment is an essential condition for belongingness to occur” and that this belongingness is “the state or feeling of connectedness that arises when seen, known, and accepted by another.”<sup>21</sup>

Finally, believing the best about people is a way of extending God's grace to people. Grace refers to the unmerited favor of God; He loves us despite what we do. As a Christian, I know that God continues to bless me and love me in the midst of my bad choices or failures. When I extend this mindset toward others, I reflect God's grace to them.

When I'm having trouble choosing to believe the best about someone because of their actions or attitudes that I may find morally reprehensible, I try to think of what this person was like as a child. I remember to discover the story behind why this person feels or acts as they do. Then I find myself overcome with compassion rather than condemnation.

How does someone know you believe the best about them unless you tell them? As you choose to believe the best, practice complimenting people in your life and telling them simple things such as, “I really enjoy talking to you.”

### 3 TIPS FOR BELIEVING THE BEST ABOUT PEOPLE

1. Try to recall or imagine a person who loves you unconditionally—like a parent or grandparent. Picture how his or her face lights up when talking to you. Picture that loving presence who invites you to share your life and talk about things that matter. Try to model this behavior as you talk to others. To remind you, imagine what it feels like to enter into a conversation with someone who you feel judges you, who criticizes you, and who is looking for ways to put you down, improve you, or change you. Nobody wants to open up in an environment like this.
2. Begin a conversation like this: “I’m so happy to be talking with you. I really enjoy connecting with you.” Offer compliments. Remember God’s grace extended to you that you now radically extend to others. Recent research from the Yale Relationship Lab on expressing gratitude for a friend showcases how doing so increases the sense of relational closeness. In this study, participants were encouraged to verbally thank a friend for something he or she did, express gratitude over a positive memory of that friend, or verbally indicate something you appreciate about your friend.<sup>22</sup>
3. Make a list of the people in your life you care most about. Write down several things you admire and respect about them. This will foster a mindset of positive regard, and it will give you suggestions for how to compliment them the next time you see them.

### Mindset Three: Express Concern

If you're learning to be curious about others and you've trained your mind to begin with positive regard, you'll find that conversations might still lack the warmth and meaning you're hoping for. What's missing then is *investment*. Investment means you're interested in the outcome of what a person shares with you, and you express concern about their lives. You're devoting time and energy because you care about what happens to the other person. You're *invested* in their lives. You're listening in order to support, encourage, and inspire. Investment also implies a gain on the behalf of both parties. You link their success with your success, their failure with your failure, their sadness with yours. Investment is a form of support that moves beyond empathy; it's a willingness to "carry each other's burdens," a biblical phrase written in the book of Galatians. Investment refers to a part of positive communication that focuses on "common good" (when one person thrives, we all thrive) and "supportive" interaction.<sup>23</sup>

In a recent study on how people form "mutually responsive close relationships," researchers stated that "an optimal relationship starts with it being a relationship in which people assume a special responsibility for one another's welfare."<sup>24</sup> I'm learning when I engage in loving conversations with others, communicating investment makes all the difference in the quality of connection. Therefore, we can express concern about what someone is going through. Consider this: your friend might be genuinely curious about you and like you, but if he doesn't really care about the information you're sharing with him, you won't feel the connection and warmth you otherwise could.

When I recently applied for a new career opportunity, I shared the information with a few friends. I found that the only friend I wanted to talk to about this new direction in my life was the one who showed true concern. She'd call, text, or offer to go on a walk and ask, "Okay, what's happening with that opportunity? What's the latest? How are

you feeling? I'm so excited for you. Tell me everything about it." This same friend asked me about my latest book contract and celebrated me so much it felt like it was *her* book contract, not mine.

Professionally speaking, I've had supervisors who casually ask about my work with curiosity and perhaps even positive regard, but they show no genuine concern. It doesn't really matter to them what happens to me. But I have one boss who shows sincere investment in my career: she inquires about my research, my writing, my contract negotiations, and my opportunities *as if they were her own*. She talks about my future as if it were somehow tied up in her own success. Guess which supervisor I most want to perform well for, who motivates me most of all, and who makes me feel valued?

***Investment is a way to live communally and joyfully so that you genuinely celebrate with others just as you would mourn with them.***

Colleagues often ask me why I tend to enjoy perfect attendance in my classroom and why students visit in office hours and stay connected with me relationally even twenty years later. I believe the secret is *investment* and how I've learned to express concern about what's happening in my students' lives—whether they have an interview, a parent battling cancer, a breakup, or anything important they're going through.

Expressing concern is perhaps the hardest skill of all because it involves the wisdom to know what to do and how to help with the information someone shares with you in conversation. Investment doesn't mean to take on everyone's problems as your own, but it does mean you position yourself to support others as you can, to care about them, and to imagine an interconnectedness with their lives. It's a way to live communally and joyfully so that you genuinely celebrate with others just as you would mourn with them.

## 3 TIPS FOR EXPRESSING CONCERN

1. Consider that someone else's success is tied to your own and that you are interconnected. Begin a conversation like this: "What's happening with that challenge or opportunity? I'm so excited to hear what's happening there. Update me on your good or bad news. I'm here to support you." My daughter's kindergarten teacher taught all the students to make a "happy comment" if someone shared good news. Think about making happy comments, comforting comments, and supportive comments as someone invested in another person's life. If you are unsure what to do or say, a person who is invested in another person might ask, "How do you like others to show their support to you?" You can also tell people the kind of support you are able to give. When friends are struggling, I ask, "How can I best support you today? Would you like a walk, a phone call, a coffee delivery, or a meal?"
2. Find out what the people in your life are concerned about. What are their major stressors? What upcoming decisions loom? What are they worried about?
3. Discover what the people in your life are celebrating or what good news they have. You'll find in the Six Conversations chapter many ways to unearth information that you can express concern about—whether good news or challenges.

**Mindset Four: Mutual Sharing**

You can ask questions rooted in interpersonal curiosity, from a position of positive regard, and express great concern, but at that point, you might feel more like an interviewer or even a therapist. How do these skills lead to the warm relationships so vital for well-being? The last missing factor? Mutual sharing. In *The Art of Positive Communication*,

professor of Applied Communication Julien Mirivel tells us the seven behaviors needed in a great conversation. Besides greeting, asking questions, complimenting, encouraging, listening, and inspiring, great conversations involve disclosing personal information.<sup>25</sup>

I'll admit it: I'm the worst at this. I'm great at asking questions (I'm naturally curious about other people). I'm great at believing the best (I saw how it saved my marriage). And I'm growing in the art of investment and showing concern as God helps me truly love other people better. But I hesitate to share vulnerably. I like to stay in control of a conversation. I like to avoid any situation where I reveal too much about myself. I'm the type of friend who regularly hears this statement: "Hey! You're asking all the questions. My turn! I want *you* to share now."

Maybe it's pride. Maybe it's the fear of shame. Maybe it's simply a form of control. Or maybe I've been in too many conversations where I do share something only to have the other person immediately make the conversation all about them. Worse, I've been in too many conversations where the other person spouts out advice or ways I need to improve. Have you experienced this? Sometimes our conversational histories have shut us down, but consider how vital disclosing personal information is to relational warmth. It might feel risky and even scary. Your heart might beat a little faster with the mere thought of talking about yourself with another person. But I promise you'll gain all the benefits of warm relationships if you commit to grow in this conversational skill.

To grow in the mindset of mutual sharing, I work hard to disclose personal information. I'll answer the question from the 100 favorites along with my students as honestly as I can. I am also learning to think about whether or not there's a *balance of sharing* in my conversations. Has my conversation partner shared about their life vulnerably? Is it now my turn to do so? Then, I practice sharing my life. As a part of positive regard, consider that sharing your life is a gift to another

person. Do we not believe that another person is worthy of this gift? Do we stay guarded and silent because we secretly believe another person isn't wise enough, kind enough, or important enough to know us? Are we waiting for another person to somehow earn the right to our friendship?

Ouch. I'm like this. I close my heart to people all the time, but I'm learning to grow in the area of sharing my life with others.

Just recently, I endured an emergency kidney stone surgery. When neighbors came by to drop off soup and express concern, I thought about how to answer the inevitable question, "How are you doing?" Instead of saying "Fine. I'm fine!" I chose to share vulnerably about my fear and my pain. I even let myself cry in front of one couple who immediately asked if they could pray for me in that moment. I felt so loved and so connected to them. When my students asked me the next week all about this emergency surgery, I told them how I *really* felt. I then asked if any of them had ever endured something like my experience. That day, we connected like real humans about the pain our bodies go through throughout our lives.

When I forget to share my life, I remember a key research study on "closeness enhancing behaviors" in conversation. According to the research on the three best strategies to create relational closeness, *openness*—the "willingness to share personal information" and not "withhold private information" matters deeply.<sup>26</sup> The other two behaviors—attention and involvement—relate to the mindset of *investment*. When we're invested and share our lives, we'll find we're on our way to truly meaningful conversations with others.

### 3 TIPS TO GROW IN SHARING YOUR LIFE WITH OTHERS

1. Think of how you relate to a person's situation. In conversation, you can find common ground with others after they've

had ample time to share. Instead of interrupting to immediately discuss your life, wait until they have shared thoroughly. You might even ask, "Is there more to that story?" to make sure others have finished sharing what they want and need to share. Then it's your turn. You can begin to share your life by saying, "I can relate to that. In fact, I recently . . ." If that feels too self-focused and not appropriate, remember you can talk about how another person's situation feels to you. You can express raw emotion with them by saying, "When you told me that, I felt so sad. I don't know what to say, but I'm so glad I'm here with you."

2. Consider topics on the subject of you. On any given day, develop the self-awareness to know three things you're struggling with, three things you're celebrating or happy about, and three upcoming decisions or areas of uncertainty. Discover your default conversation (what you tend to talk about and like talking about) from chapter 9. Let your conversation partner know you love connecting over these topics.
3. Use the Six Conversations to think of categories of responding to and connecting to others. When it's your turn to share your life, you can begin with these prompts:

*This reminded me about a similar interaction . . . (social)*

*That made me feel . . . (emotional)*

*You bring up a great point that made me think about my body or environment . . . (physical)*

*Your story makes me wonder about . . . (cognitive)*

*As you were talking, I began to think about this decision differently . . . (volitional)*

*As you spoke, I remembered something about my faith that's helped me . . . (spiritual)*

I'm still growing in the area of sharing my life. That's my greatest deficiency in the Four Mindsets. What about you? You might feel you want to grow in the areas of being more curious or more invested in other people. You might read this chapter and think of all the people you'd love to see with positive regard. As you finished this chapter (alone or in a group), rate yourself in the Four Mindsets of a Loving Conversation and begin challenging yourself to learn and practice new attitudes and behaviors in conversation.

### FOUR MINDSETS INVENTORY

Circle the answer to each statement and take some time to answer the reflection questions.

**Be Curious:** I'm naturally curious about other people:

**Rarely**

**Sometimes**

**Almost always**

*Reflect: Why do you think you feel this way? What happened to make you this kind of person? What's your next step in developing this skill? What resistance or hesitation do you have to this conversational skill?*

**Believe the Best:** I tend to enjoy other people, easily admire them, and respect them:

**Rarely**

**Sometimes**

**Almost always**

*Reflect: Why do you think you feel this way? What happened to make you this kind of person? What's your next step in developing*

*this skill? What resistance or hesitation do you have to this conversational skill?*

**Express Concern:** I have a hard time genuinely caring about what happens to other people:

**Rarely**

**Sometimes**

**Almost always**

*Reflect: Why do you think you feel this way? What happened to make you this kind of person? What's your next step in developing this skill? What resistance or hesitation do you have to this conversational skill?*

**Share Your Life:** I love to share my life with other people:

**Rarely**

**Sometimes**

**Almost always**

*Reflect: Why do you think you feel this way? What happened to make you this kind of person? What's your next step in developing this skill? What resistance or hesitation do you have to this conversational skill?*

If you're anything like me, you might still have some resistance or hesitation in your heart about the Four Mindsets. You might have questions about your personality and how to apply this book to your unique situation. But, if you're being honest with yourself (as I'm learning to be), we both know we long for close, meaningful relationships. And we truly want to become happier and more fulfilled people. While relationship science continues to advance the truth that we foster close relationships by becoming more open, more attentive to others, and more involved in their lives,<sup>27</sup> you might want to embed this book—not only in science and data, but through what the

## THE SIX CONVERSATIONS

Bible has to say about building healthy relationships. As you read on, we'll look at conversations through a theological lens to inspire you to grow into the kind of person who regularly commits to starting and continuing loving conversations.

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