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We’ve all had strange conversations, haven’t we? In small groups, you’ll get to talk about the strangest, most awkward conversations you’ve ever had. I wish I could be in all of your small groups, because nothing is better than hearing that other people have been as awkward and clumsy in conversation as me at some point. We all go through it, right? But I have found that no matter how strange the conversation is, no matter how much I fear having it going into it, whenever I embrace a strange, awkward exchange, God works it out for my good.

[Author Note: Below, I shared a story of an awkward conversation I had, and how it really worked to my benefit, even though I was very weird throughout it. You’ll want to use your own illustration here.]

Of all the strange, awkward conversations I’ve ever had, one stands alone as the weirdest, but it also stands alone as the most beneficial to me. It is the story of when I asked out my wife Sarah. Now, you might wonder how strange it could have been, since she obviously said yes, and we ultimately got married. See for yourself. I was afraid to ask Sarah to be my girlfriend, because I understood she was better than me. I first asked her to go see a movie as friends, because I was too afraid to come right out and ask her. So we went to a movie. I picked her up after school around 4:00 PM. When I got to her home, she gave me a poem she had written for me. The summary of that poem was, “I like you. Please ask me out.” I should have right there, but I didn’t. After the movie, I suggested stopping at mall to hang out more. She agreed, so we did. We were in there another couple hours, just sitting and talking.

When we finally gave up – me on gaining the courage, her on being asked out by me – we went to the car. It had snowed a lot while we were there. I brushed off the car and got in. She lived about a mile from the mall. As I approached her driveway, I lightly braked, but then I passed her house, explaining that it was too slippery to stop that fast. I was just buying time, trying to work up to asking her. After driving around a bit, we finally made it to her house, and I still haven’t said anything. As she finally fully gives up, she reached for the door handle and went to get out of the car. I blurted out, “Wait! I want to ask you something!” Now I was stuck. I said to her, “Sarah, I like you.” She responded with a smile, “I like you, too.” Suspecting she wasn’t smart enough to pick up on what I was saying, I further explained. “No, I mean I really like you.” Again, she smiled and replied, “I really like you, too.” So I smoothly replied, “Oh, okay. Well, I was wondering if you’d be my girlfriend.” And she said she would!

Now, you might think that wasn’t too strange, but sadly, the conversation wasn’t over. It was just getting started. We didn’t hug or anything, which seems like something you’d do. Instead, I started talking again. I told her she had very pretty hair that I really wanted to touch it. That really happened. She seemed surprised, because nobody would expect such a strange exchange to take place, but she said it was okay. So I literally patted her on the back of the head twice, thanked her for being my girlfriend, and she got out of the car. Amazingly, she didn’t immediately dump me. I was afraid to talk to her. It was strange. It worked out just fine.

[End Awkward Story]

Many of you won’t have anything that strange to share, today or at any point in the future. You’ve all had some strange exchanges, though. I believe that God sometimes calls you into those conversations, and other times He redeems them and uses them for your benefit. If we shy away from having tough conversations, just because we’re afraid or it’s going to be awkward, we may miss out on being used by God. Over the next few weeks, we’re going to see how people in the Bible embraced different strange exchanges, because God brought them to that moment.

Before you tell yourself that it’s different for you, because you’re still a teenager, and the people in the Bible were giants in the faith, I want to read a story of a young boy that was called to the most difficult, awkward conversation I’ve read in the Bible. The boy’s name was Samuel, and most scholars agree that he was just 12-years-old when the following story took place.

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (ESV)

*"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."*

So, the boy Samuel was in the Tabernacle, sleeping in the same room as the Ark of the Covenant. He slept in God’s presence, and God spoke to him. God called him, and Samuel thought it was Eli, the High Priest. After three times, Eli finally figured out what was going on, and he told Samuel to go back and listen for God again. This time, if God called him, Eli told him what to say.

1 Samuel 3:11-14 (ESV)

*Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."*

This was very bad news for Eli. God had had enough of Eli’s children, and He had had enough of Eli’s lack of discipline. Eli didn’t stop his children. So, God declared that He would remove the priesthood from Eli’s family. They were done. One of the highest honors in Israel, which typically stayed with one family from generation to generation, was going to be taken from his family and given to another family. That was heavy news for Samuel, because he was being raised by Eli. Eli was Samuel’s mentor. Worse yet, he knew Eli knew that God had spoken to him. What was he going to do if Eli asked him what God had said?

1 Samuel 3:15-18 (ESV)

*Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him.""*

Sure enough, Eli asked him what was said. What did Samuel do? He told him everything. He didn’t run away in the night. He didn’t leave out details. He didn’t shy from it. He told Eli exactly what God had said. God blessed Samuel and he became the next great prophet in Israel. He was used throughout his life in powerful ways. But the very first assignment God ever called him to, was a strange exchange with his mentor, with a man who was raising him like a father, and he stood tall.

Throughout your life, you’re going to be called to these kinds of situations. There are going to be tough conversations to be had. Will you shy away from them, or will you stay and have the conversation? When Esther was called to a difficult time and a difficult conversation, she thought about staying quiet, but her uncle told her that she could be a part of what God was doing by standing up and speaking up, or she could let God use someone else. Then he said, “Who knows? Perhaps you were made for such a time as this.” When you face strange exchanges in your future, maybe even your near future, are you going to let God use someone else, or are you going to stand up and speak out? Maybe you were made for just that moment.

Let’s pray.