

Simple guide to talking about religion and politics (while keeping your friends)

1. Love



When you are wondering whether you should share your views on a particular religious or political topic, ask yourself, “Will I be loving the person I am speaking to by sharing my view?” If the answer is no, don’t speak about it. No matter how much you want to, or if you think you could ‘enlighten’ them. Loving the other person is the most important thing (1 Corinthians 13:13). When Jesus says that the most important commandment is to love God, He follows with, “The second [commandment – loving your neighbour] is like it.” (Matthew 22:36-40). To love others, is to love God (Matthew 25:40).

Sometimes it seems easier to stay quiet on the things that are important to us, avoiding awkwardness or conflict at all costs. But is staying quiet what we are called to do? In this simple guide, candidate Natalie shares her framework to approaching those tricky, yet crucial, conversations.

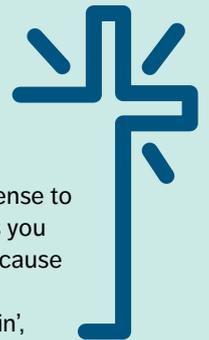
2. Listen to understand, not to respond



In the midst of a potentially heated conversation, how easy is it to be thinking about what you’ll say next rather than actually listening to the other person. We want to win, right? However, if our priority is relationship and to love our friend, then as hard as it is, we need to let go of our desire to ‘win’ and step into their shoes. We must actively listen, genuinely seek to understand and open ourselves up to be impacted by what they have to say.

4. Don’t speak in Christianese

Christianese [Kris-chuh-nee-z] noun def. ‘The language spoken by Christians.’ It makes no sense to anyone unfamiliar with biblical texts, but earns you major points in the eyes of other Christians, because it means your words are ‘hella holy.’ Examples include: ‘Lord’, ‘born again’, ‘grace’, ‘salvation’, ‘sin’, etc. If you’re seeking to share your faith, don’t use jargon terms which are not only meaningless to the other person, but also make you seem arrogant and your faith inaccessible. Speak in their language.



3. Be vulnerable



Rather than speak of religion and politics as abstract things, recognise your emotional response to the issue and try and identify why you have that response. Then, share that rather than speaking abstractly about the issue. Our political and religious views are rooted in our experience and culture... and this becomes an emotional response. If we are vulnerable and share why we believe what we believe, the person is unlikely to dismiss or condemn, but rather seek to empathise, even if they disagree. Plus your vulnerability will encourage them to share more deeply and mutual trust and understanding will grow.

5. Be humble; you’re not right about everything



God loves diversity and it is through our unity with one another that we better understand the truth of who God is and what God’s intentions for the world are. God reveals Himself to different people in vastly different ways, so we need to listen to people of other cultures, religions and experiences. Neither you nor I have sole access to the mind of God. And while few would argue that they do, it takes humility to relate to everyone with the belief that they could expand your understanding of God.