

UNDER CONSIDERATION

TUNING OUT, TUNING IN

JUAN ALCALA, MANAGER OF PASCAL'S COFFEEHOUSE, recently had the pleasure of interviewing Chipper Flaniken, pastor of City Church. Chipper led a book discussion for the Christian Study Center this fall on *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* by Sherry Turkle (Penguin Press, 2015). The following interview, edited and adapted by Honesty Abramowich, delves into some of the valuable content in this resource.

Why don't you start by telling us a little bit of the central problem for Turkle?

Honestly, the title of the book is pretty telling as far as how she sees the problem. It's called *Reclaiming Conversation*. Sherry Turkle argues that despite some of the benefits of digital technology and living in the digital age, we've lost the art of conversation. Henry David Thoreau said that he had three chairs in his cabin at Walden Pond. The first chair was for solitude. The second chair was for family, and the third chair was for society, such as friends, neighbors or co-workers. She believes we've lost conversation on all three levels.

So what does a conversation in solitude look like?

There is a big difference between being alone and experiencing solitude especially when you think about some of the things that digital technology does to distract us. Solitude, according to Sherry Turkle, is an opportunity to provide space for self-reflection, trying to understand better who you are, why you are the way you are, why you think the things that you think. And it's also a space for processing what you hear from other people. You can be alone but not actually experiencing solitude, and digital technology is often the culprit. You can be out on the back patio of your house enjoying coffee, but if you're on your phone and scrolling, you're probably not enjoying solitude per se because there is not a lot of self-reflection in the process.



Would she say that our ability to self-converse, being in solitude, would be the beginning step for reclaiming conversation in the other two spheres?

Right. So we're not going to have productive conversation with family members, that would be the two-chair conversations, or with society, with three-chair conversations, unless we have this space to kind of self-process. At the heart of a good conversation is deep listening, but you then need an opportunity to do something with what you've listened to. Some of this is responding in conversation directly and some of it is taking that information into solitude where you can think about it more. You process it, and that feeds back into more good conversation with others. In two and three-chair conversations deep listening is key.

I know one of the themes she tries to unpack is the difference between being connected and being in relationship. There is a difference. What is at stake in that difference?

You can be connected with somebody without ever actually listening to them. And without ever really seeing them react or respond. I can connect with somebody, say, on a social network, and just sort of launch things at them, post things, send messages, but I can't see their body language. I can't, you know, see if they are shocked, if they are comforted. I can't see any of that. It's less risky to communicate with people when you're just connected, but it's not as rich.

Does she allow for the possibility that relationship and genuine conversation

can happen via social media, or are social media relationships to her by definition merely connection?

One thing that Sherry Turkle does really well in her book is make the point that she's not anti-technology. She's all about being intentional with our technology. And so one of the things that

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means is, it's less about what medium you're using and more about how intentional you are with that medium.

Nothing is ever going to replace, in her mind, sitting down with somebody in person. There are things that you can read in a person that you would never be able to read even on Skype or facetime or something like that. But there are benefits of something like Skype. You can communicate with somebody overseas that you might never be able to sit down and have a conversation with otherwise. If you are both taking time to listen and not being distracted, not surfing the net, then yes, there are opportunities to have a meaningful conversation.

What other solutions does Turkle propose in her book for how to reclaim conversation?

She talks about the need for breaks from technology—technology fasts, so to speak. Turkle does say, yes, you can do these things within a corporate context but she would also push us on a personal level: Do you have space throughout the day, throughout the week, throughout the year, when you can completely get away from technology?

She also argues that as we start treating our devices almost like humans, as we talk to them – think about Siri on an iPhone – what tends to happen is we start to treat humans like machines. For example, when in the check-out line at a grocery store, you can have a phone conversation the entire time and not even acknowledge the presence of the human being that's swiping groceries because, in your mind, that person is a machine that's doing something for you and not really a human.

What hope do you have for the church in these issues? What word do you have for pastors and lay leaders in the church? How can we take the

lead on this and seek the flourishing of our communities with regard to how we interact with technology?

It's amazing that when God instructs us, He has our flourishing in mind. For example, one of the classic Christian disciplines is solitude. We think about solitude because we need to be in communion with the Lord and we need to pray and meditate on Scripture, absolutely true. But as Turkle's book shows, solitude is also important for self-processing and for considering what other people have told you that day and throughout the week. When you lose solitude, you don't just lose your time with Jesus, you also lose some things that are critical to having substantive conversations with human beings.

So I think one of the things we can do as pastors is show people that when God commands things, the benefit of the things that he commands for flourishing are more profound than we think.

We pastors also need to cultivate skills of deep listening. One thing about pastors is we are communicators to our congregations, but what I think we're probably short on is robust listening. I'm concerned that if we focus too much on putting content out to our flock, our skills as listeners are going to regress. I think that one of the most important parts of pastoral ministry is listening really well to people.

So, step one, deepen our vision for solitude, and step two, for pastors especially, and maybe as a call for all of us, develop disciplines of listening.

Yes. Solitude and deep listening. These are pretty basic ideas, but we don't get there without just being really intentional.

Thank you, Chipper. I am hopeful that even our conversation here will lead to a more deliberate use of social technologies and to better practices of both solitude and conversation. 🙏

'TIS THE SEASON

Do you appreciate the work we do? Would you like to see a thoughtful, faithful Christian understanding of life and culture as part of the university community? Would you like to see more conversation between people who have differences but are willing to talk about them? With the end of the year approaching rapidly, we ask for your prayers. Often one-third or more of the budget is received in December. There are many ways you can contribute:



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NEWS & NOTES

PASCAL'S



PASCAL'S FALL AND SPRING HOURS:
Keep up to date of any changes of schedule via Instagram or Facebook.

Regular Hours

Monday–Friday 8 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Finals Week

December 11-12 8 a.m. – 7 p.m.
December 13-15 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Closed for Holidays Dec. 16 - Jan. 7

Pascal's reopens for regular hours on January 8th

HELLO TO OUR NEWEST BARISTA: Brian Barber started behind the bar this summer. Welcome!

BARISTA SOCIETY: The Barista Society, a newly formed program for Pascal's baristas led by manager Juan Alcala, enjoyed three dinner meetings this semester with rich discussions on C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.

#DoSomeCommonGood: Pascal's featured drink specials benefit the Christian Study Center for Giving Tuesday and beyond.

- Pascal's Coffeehouse created two specialty barista inspired syrups to support the CSC: ginger molasses and cinnamon maple. While supplies last, a portion of the purchase price of drinks made with these syrups goes directly to support the CSC.
- On Giving Tuesday (Nov. 28th) these specialty drinks were purchased for a "name your own price" donation. Check our website, Instagram or Facebook for updates!

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CSC

Travel, Speaking and Publishing Notes

- **ANNUAL CCSC CONFERENCE:** Richard Horner, Laura Lynch, and board members, Jeff Andre, Sarah Hamersma and Nick Dunn enjoyed the annual conference of the Consortium of Christian Study Centers at Wheaton College in July. During the conference Dr. Horner presented a workshop focused on the intellectual resources of the Christian tradition through Pascal.
- **ANNUAL CMTEV CONFERENCE:** Richard Horner and Lauren Babb attended the annual Campus Ministry Theological Exploration of Vocation (CMTEV) gathering where Dr. Horner was asked to present on a panel: Evaluation and Sustainability of Faith and Vocation Programming.
- **COMMENT MAGAZINE:** Dr. Horner contributed an essay on Blaise Pascal to *Comment Magazine*, and CSC board member, Dr. Sarah Hamersma, wrote economic pieces for *Comment* and is now a member of the editorial board.
- **JOURNAL OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY:** CSC board president, Dr. Jay Lynch, published an essay in a column on the Art of Oncology in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.
- **PREACHING OPPORTUNITIES** for Dr. Horner include: Oak Hammock Retirement Facility, Christ Church (Jacksonville), Christ Community Church (Gainesville), and the Church of the Redeemer (Atlanta) for the ordination of Alex Woods, alumnus of UF and the Study Center.

BUILDING CONVERSATIONS

Update on our capital campaign and renovations:

- **THANK YOU!** God's good hand of blessing is revealed in you! We have received \$78,000 toward our goal of \$125,000, including two special memorial gifts:
 - » In memory of Joseph & Jacqueline Cutri and Kenneth & Dorothy Horner by April & Richard Horner
 - » In memory of Kenneth Degel by Gary & Doreen Kimball
- **SO FAR:** Outdoor cleaning and painting are complete. The parking lot is finished, except for landscaping. Front porch renovations will begin shortly.
- **LOOKING FORWARD:** Inside bathroom and office renovations and furniture replacement will begin next summer.



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- Interview with Chipper Flaniken about Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (Penguin Press, 2015)
- News and Notes

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This newsletter is a publication of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville which facilitates the thoughtful consideration of a Christian understanding of life and culture in the university community.



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