Bob Russell
ministries

From Bob Russell

Around the Table

Conversation starters from America's story

Have you ever noticed how often Jesus asked questions? Simple questions like: "Have you caught any fish?" Probing questions: "What were you arguing about as we walked along the way?" Easy questions: "Who do men say that I am?" Personal questions: "Who do you say that I am?" Difficult questions: "Why did you doubt?" Challenging questions: "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" Liberating questions: "Woman, where are your accusers?"

Conversation among Christians should edify, encourage, and "spur one another on toward love and good deeds." But we often spend an entire evening talking about sports, current events, children, restaurants, and movies but never go deeper and we waste opportunities to fortify one another in the Christian life, and unfortunately we can miss opportunities to share the gospel.

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Around the Table

Throughout the Old Testament God encouraged the Israelites to remember how He had provided for them and protected them. He established monuments and Feast Days to remind them of significant events in the past. It's vitally important that a nation that has been uniquely blessed by God, review history in order to have a sense of identity and continue to embrace the values that made their country distinctive.

One evening recently, after eating a meal with our small group, I asked those seated around the table a series of questions about American history. We had a lot of fun trying to recall some answers and adding some additional thoughts following each question. I think these same questions could be good discussion starters for other families or small groups gathered for an evening meal. It also may reveal how little we actually know about basic American history.

I've pulled these questions from things I've written and preached over the years. The answers are in the back.

Conversation Starters

The Pilgrims at Plymouth

1. What was the name of the ship that carried the Pilgrims to America?
2. In what year did the Pilgrims land at Plymouth?
3. The Mayflower Compact says in its own words why the Pilgrims made the voyage. What was the purpose?
4. Which church were the Pilgrims leaving England to get away from?
5. About how many of the 102 people aboard the Mayflower died that first winter?
6. When they finally landed, whom did William Bradford say the Pilgrims blessed?
7. In the Compact's own words, what did the signers form?
8. How long was the Mayflower at sea?
9. The Pilgrims did not think of themselves as keystones. What did they call themselves for the sake of those who would come after?

The Founders

10	Finish the last line of the Declaration of Independence: “we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes…”
11	How many men signed the Declaration of Independence?
12	When the Constitutional Convention had stalled in the summer of 1787, who stood and called the delegates to prayer, and what did he say about God?
13	Which traveling evangelist became Franklin’s friend and left his mark on him?
14	In August 1776 Washington had 9,000 men trapped on Long Island with 20,000 British soldiers closing in. What saved them?
15	What did George Washington write in his diary on June 1, 1774, as the colonies faced a break with Britain?
16	As a young officer in 1755, Washington rode through a battle that killed the men around him. How many bullets went through his coat, and how many horses were shot from under him?
17	What did Washington credit for the storm that kept Cornwallis from escaping at Yorktown?
18	In his Farewell Address, Washington named two things as “indispensable supports” of political prosperity. What were they?
19	Which president said our Constitution “was made only for a moral and religious people”?
20	Late in life, Adams wrote Jefferson about what the founders had achieved independence on. What did he call it?
21	Where does the phrase “wall of separation between church and state” actually come from?
22	Jefferson wrote his own epitaph and listed three achievements. Which big one did he leave off?

Symbols, Songs, and Kentucky

23	What four words are stamped on every piece of American money?
24	Four presidents are carved into Mount Rushmore. Can you name them?
25	A Bible verse is cast on the Liberty Bell. Which one?
26	Two Latin words sit at the very top of the Washington Monument, where almost no one sees them. What are they?
27	What motto is in the last stanza of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” the one hardly anyone sings?
28	Who wrote “America the Beautiful,” and where was she standing when the words came to her?
29	What 1801 camp meeting in Kentucky helped spark the Second Great Awakening?

30 For nearly two centuries American children learned to read from the New England Primer. Answer its first catechism question: “What is the chief end of man?”

31 Daniel Webster said one thing makes men good citizens. What?

32 In 1954 the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court said two things had been America’s “guiding geniuses” from the beginning. Who said it, and what were they?

Lincoln

33 Two men spoke at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. How long did each speak?

34 A Harrisburg newspaper called the Gettysburg Address “silly remarks.” How long did it take the paper to retract that review?

35 Finish Lincoln’s line from his 1863 call to a national day of prayer: “those nations only are blessed…”

36 When a group presented Lincoln with a Bible in 1864, what did he call it?

37 After which battle did Lincoln tell his cabinet that God had “decided this question in favor of the slaves,” and then issue the Emancipation Proclamation?

38 About how many Americans died in the Civil War?

Around the Russell Table — bonus points for blog readers

39 What goes in Judy Russell’s Thanksgiving “Blessing Pot”?

40 Which dessert does Bob thank God for by name in his Thanksgiving prayer?

41 When a Russell grandchild turns a certain age, Bob and Judy take that child on a trip that is “not an amusement park trip.” What age, and where?

42 Where were Bob and Judy on the night of America’s 200th birthday, July 4, 1976?

43 Bob asked some young interns from Poland what impressed them most about America. What did they say?

44 Bob’s Uncle Joe gave something for the liberty we enjoy. What, and when?

45 Where did Bob first deliver his “Prayer of Repentance,” the one later read on the floor of the Kansas legislature?

Going Deeper

In-depth conversation can be initiated, and a lot can be learned by just asking questions. Stimulating inquiries give people an opportunity to reveal something about themselves others didn't know before and they provide an opportunity for relationships to deepen.

TWO QUESTIONS BOB HAS USED WITH FRIENDS FOR YEARS

"What was the center of warmth in the home where you grew up – was it a place or a person?"

"When did Jesus Christ first become real in your life?"

Here's an important qualifier for deepening the conversation and edifying one another: be interested, not just interesting. When someone else is talking, move forward in your seat and give focused attention to the person speaking. You'll draw out the best in them and encourage them by valuing their story.

"Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today.'" (Hebrews 3:13)

AN IDEA FOR MEANINGFUL THANKSGIVING CONVERSATION

The Blessing Pot

An annual Thanksgiving tradition in the Russell household is to pause before Thanksgiving meal and pass around "The Blessing Pot." My wife initiated the custom more than thirty years ago and reestablishes it every year despite occasional murmurs of "Oh, not again!" Yet it is a valuable tradition that gives our family roots and serves as a positive reminder to "count [our] blessings and name them one by one." The Blessing Pot is just a tiny cup filled with grains of corn. It is passed around for everyone to take one kernel. It is then passed around a second time, but as it stops at each person, they are asked to express a special blessing that God has provided within the past year before placing the kernel of corn back into the pot. That simple tradition often brings tears and always serves as a reminder to thank the One from whom all blessings flow.

The Answers

The Pilgrims at Plymouth

1. The Mayflower.
2. 1620.
3. "For the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith."
4. The Church of England, the one church the Crown recognized.
5. About half of them.
6. "The God of heaven," who had brought them over "the vast and furious ocean."
7. A "civil body politic," the first self-government in America.
8. About two months. Sixty-six days by most counts.
9. "Stepping stones." Worth a minute at the table: which one are you?

The Founders

10. "…and our sacred honor." The same sentence says it was made "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence."
11. Fifty-six.
12. Benjamin Franklin, on June 28, 1787: "God governs in the affairs of men."
13. George Whitefield.
14. A fog. He ferried the whole army across the river overnight and did not lose a man.
15. "Went to church and fasted all day."
16. Four bullets and two horses. He wrote his brother that he had "escaped unhurt."
17. "The interposing hand of Heaven."
18. Religion and morality.
19. John Adams, in 1798.
20. "The general principles of Christianity."
21. A private letter Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802. It is not in the Constitution.
22. Being President of the United States.

Symbols, Songs, and Kentucky

23. "In God We Trust."
24. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.
25. Leviticus 25:10: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land."
26. "Laus Deo." Praise be to God.
27. "In God is our trust."
28. Katharine Lee Bates, on top of Pikes Peak.
29. Cane Ridge, in Bourbon County, led by Barton W. Stone.
30. "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."
31. "Whatever makes men good Christians."
32. Earl Warren: "the Good Book and the spirit of the Savior."

Lincoln

33. Edward Everett spoke for about two hours. Lincoln spoke for about two minutes, 272 words.
34. One hundred fifty years. The retraction ran in 2013.
35. "…whose God is the Lord."
36. "The best gift God has ever given to man."
37. Antietam, September 1862.
38. More than 600,000, more than in all our other wars combined at the time.

Around the Russell Table

39. Kernels of corn. Everyone takes one and names a blessing from the past year before dropping it back in.
    From "Thanksgiving – The Mother of All Virtues," November 2023.
40. Derby Pie.
    From "Thanksgiving Is My Favorite Holiday," November 2025.
41. Ten. Williamsburg, Boston, Philadelphia, or Charleston, to learn something about America and our heritage.
    From the sermon "How to Bless Your Grandchildren," April 2018.
42. In the air, flying from Louisville to Denver, watching fireworks burst over one small town after another below them.
    From the introduction to After 50 Years of Ministry.
43. The supermarkets. "So many choices. So much food!"
    From "Why I Love America," June 2026.
44. His life, in World War II. He was not yet thirty.
    From "Memorial Day Merits Our Observance," May 2021.
45. The Kentucky Governor's Prayer Breakfast, in 1995.
    Kentucky Governor's Prayer Breakfast, 1995.

Material in this booklet comes from sermons and written materials from Bob Russell throughout the years. Read those and other resources at bobrussell.org.

More Grateful Than Everyone

A nation that began with a firm reliance on Divine Providence.

Psalm 33:12 promises, *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance."* That verse applies not just to Israel but to any nation that honors God. America has never been a perfect nation. But it is a unique nation in that it began with "a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence." As always, God kept His promise. That doesn't make us superior to anyone, but it should make us more grateful than everyone.

The first thanksgiving the Pilgrims stopped and gave God thanks for an adequate harvest that gave them hope of surviving the upcoming winter. Compared to us they had so little. We have so much to be thankful for today. The least we can do is pause and praise our Heavenly Father, the giver of *"Every good and perfect gift"* (James 1:17). God has more than fulfilled His promise to *"…meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19).

But our physical advantages pale in comparison to the spiritual riches we have in Christ Jesus. We have the total forgiveness of sin, the promise of eternal life in heaven and the assurance of daily guidance by the Holy Spirit. All that because *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

We are children of the King of the Universe who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine. We stand in line to inherit His riches in glory! *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe"* (Hebrews 12:28).

A PRAYER FOR THE TABLE

Father, forgive our whining, griping, and complaining. We're like the Israelites in the wilderness—freedom from slavery wasn't enough, daily manna wasn't enough, fresh water from a rock wasn't enough, the shade of a cloud by day and the warmth of a pillar of fire by night somehow weren't enough. We're always wanting more. Lord, we don't deserve Your goodness—we deserve Your wrath. Thank You that You are *"…gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love"* (Psalm 145:8). Forgive our spiritual blindness. You have given us so much. Please give us one more thing… grateful hearts. In the name of Jesus, our Savior who gave His lifeblood for us. Amen.

— Bob

Bob Russell

Bob Russell served as Senior Minister of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, for forty years, from 1966 to 2006, as it grew from 120 members meeting in a basement to one of the largest churches in America. He continues to preach, mentor pastors, and write, and is the author of more than a dozen books and over 600 articles at bobrussell.org. He and his wife Judy have two sons, seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

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