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## Session: Mystery Bag

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### Description

There is a sense of dividedness in the US today which impacts families in a variety of ways. Culture reflects the state of people's hearts and minds, but it is so much more complex if we consider the impact of personal history on that culture, among many other things. I sometimes think about whether I wish culture would change, or instead I wish we would come as broken as we are and turn towards God then see what God changes in us. Human beings will often fail, so even when different faith traditions such as Christians, run parallel newspapers, television broadcasts, blogs and websites this isn't necessarily integrating or impacting popular culture because Christians themselves are the ones creating and utilizing these platforms. Rather than lovingly impacting a divided culture this is simply creating a Christian artifact and sticking it in the middle of a secular culture.

One of the purposes of Conversatio is to form and transform us into the likeness of God (who loves all of us) partly through learning about others whom we may perceive to be different from us, and being generous toward others through engagement and inclusion rather than by drawing lines and staying on what we perceive to be the "correct" side.

"Pluralism involves an attempt to hold unity and diversity in balance, to value the many within the one, to resolve conflict without imposing synthesis or expelling groups, and to celebrate difference." – *Richard Schwartz*

Our actions leave a wake for future generations.

My friend Karen once shared a phrase she'd heard, "Ministry is the wake we leave behind when we follow Jesus". Craig and I are water people so this is a powerful image for me. I remember so many early mornings on the lake with our children. Even now I can close my eyes and I am transported. I love to rise early for a kayak paddle across the lake. Cool summer mornings, the sun is coming up and there's a low sleepy mist just waking and beginning to rise softly. Eyes on the horizon I head out into the stillness of the morning with only the sounds of paddle brushing water. And here's the interesting part. Long before I'd ever heard that expression "Ministry is the wake we leave behind when we follow Jesus" I had a habit of pausing when I reached the center of the lake, turning back and contemplating the wake I'd left behind. To me it seemed like a little legacy of sorts. My wake starts off small of course, I am only one kayaker on a large lake. But I am moving and shifting things as I paddle. A little family of ducks slides gently to the right, an old log is dislodged from its resting place and my wake begins to carry it off toward the Boy Scout camp at the end of the lake. And like music, it expands as it ripples out, more sticks, more ducks and now some lily pads shift, and a fish jumps far off - just at the edge of my wake. And then I think it's over, but as I begin to turn back I catch a glimpse of those ripples having made it all the way to the edge of the lake and I watch as they begin to bounce back to me, crossing over one another like a folding telescope.

I go out into the world, eyes on Jesus, my small paddle moving living water as it ripples out into the world then returns again to me as joy. Had I not turned back I wouldn't know that

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my presence there had left a little legacy. And so it is with life. What joy to do the little and big things that we can, eyes on God, living into the knowledge that with every stroke and every Spirit-led kindness, a glimmer of faith in humanity is restored – ripples of salve to hurting souls.

Conversations create ripples. Oftentimes no one really teaches us how to share our stories so we never get to those deeper conversations when we meet new people. A great place to start is with your own family. In this session you will use mystery objects to trigger memories and stories. Your first story will be a funny one (two truths and a lie) and the next two will be a little deeper.

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### Materials Needed

Soft bag (made of something you can't see through) filled with all kinds of ordinary objects such as squeaky toy, statue, religious beads, spool of thread, bike mirror, spoon, keys, cat collar etc. Fill the bag to the brim so there are lots of choices.

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### Handouts

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## Mystery Bag

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### Read aloud the quote or scripture

“God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.”

– *Ephesians 3:20-21- The Message*

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### Questions for discussion (10 minutes)

1. Do you think that sharing your personal story has an impact on other people? If yes, how so?
2. Do you think that the positive things you say and do make a ripple in the world? If yes, explain how.
3. Could your actions have a negative impact in the world that ripples out to impact more people? Give an example.
4. Do you think God cares whether you leave a legacy in the world? Explain.
5. When you die and God says to you “Well done, good and faithful servant”, what will God be referring to? (What did you do in your life that God saw as “good” and “faithful”?) Explain.

### Rule of life activity

#### Mystery bag

1. Get your mystery bag filled with all kinds of everyday objects. Make sure the bag isn't see-through. Don't let anyone see what's in the bag.
2. Have the first family member grab one thing out of the bag. Give them a couple of minutes to think. The first round will be the ice breaker.
3. For the first round, have them tell two truths and a lie using personal stories relating to that object.
4. Family members guess which are the truths and which is a lie. That person puts their object back in the bag.
5. Now repeat until each family member has had a turn, each drawing out their own object.
6. Next, starting with the person who went first, have them select a different object from the bag.
7. This time that person shares a personal story that the object reminds them of. After sharing put the object back and repeat with each family member.
8. For the last round, the first person takes an object from the bag and shares a personal story, but this time adds how God is involved in that story.
9. If they don't feel that God is involved in that last story, how might they like him to be?
10. Repeat for each family member drawing out their own object and sharing.

### Examen

#### How did it go? Debrief highs and lows

1. Each person shares their favorite part of the conversation / activity and why.
2. Each person shares their least favorite part and why.
3. Did you do a serving / giving activity last week? How did it go?

**Serving /giving ideas for any time this week: Choose one or create your own. These can be done individually or as a group. You will be sharing your serving experience in the next session.**

- Make a commitment to say one positive, encouraging thing to a stranger every day for a week.
- Create a gratitude journal. Each night record 3 things that you are grateful for. If it involves another person, thank them.
- Volunteer to wash a neighbor's car for them.
- Purchase sleeping bags and distribute to a homeless shelter.
- Purchase new backpacks and donate to foster care providers.

<sup>i</sup> Richard Schwartz and Martha Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 2020), 15.