

Questions for a Conversation: An Introduction

As a thoughtful homemaker and as a woman, I encourage you not only to read The Thoughtful Home but to share and discuss it with others. Doing so will help you to deepen your insights and broaden your experiences, and the friend, family member, or group with whom you share it could serve as the “professional colleagues” recommended in chapter 13. If you are anything like me, and I’ll bet that you are, you will enjoy this collaboration immensely as you share, disagree, laugh and even cry.

To this end I offer a set of questions to spark or guide such conversations. What follows is not a study guide, but a few questions for each chapter which could get a conversation going if this doesn’t happen spontaneously. Some questions are more personal than others and our homes should be private and intimate spaces, and therefore I encourage you never to feel obligated to share personal experiences which would be better kept private. Common sense and mutual respect will go far in making such conversations and shared experiences fruitful and enjoyable.

Most of the chapter headings of the book are in the form of a questions. My intention was to answer the question in the course of the chapter, but it could be an interesting exercise to answer the question in your own words in the light of what you have read and shared.

I welcome feedback, and you can offer it easily by clicking on the “Contact Dia” tab. If you have a good discussion about a point or question not offered here, I would be grateful to you for sharing such experiences for the sake of other readers.

Questions for Conversation

Introduction: The Thoughtful Home

- In what ways was your childhood home a place where you (and others) felt “thought about” and “attended to”? In what ways was it not such a place?
- Do you consider yourself a homemaker? If so, do you class yourself more as a new recruit, a soldier deep in trenches, or a veteran?
- Is the word “thoughtful” meaningful to you? What memories or ideas does it stir up?

Chapter 1: Does Home Matter?

- Regarding the importance of the home to those who live there, what stories have you heard? What stories do you tell yourself?
- Share a specific strategy which you have tried to implement in an effort to solve problems in your home. Where did you get the idea? Did it help?
- Can you think of an instance when an innovation you adopted in an effort to solve a problem led to more work, anxiety, or stress?
- Have you been told that your expectations regarding your home and family life are too high? How did this make you feel?
- Can you identify one or more ways in which you seek to escape home-related anxiety?

Chapter 2: Is It Practical to Be Thoughtful?

- Do you like rules? Why or why not?
- Can you describe the ideal home in your imagination? Where do you think this image came from? Are you trying to live up to it, or does it seem impossible to achieve?
- Who are your “accomplished and experienced authorities” on the work of the home?

Chapter 3: What Is a Home?

- Can you give an example of a practice in your childhood home which you assumed was universal but discovered what not? How did you make this discovery?
- Do you have a favorite or particularly memorable home from literature?

- Which aspects of homemaking did your mother teach you, if any? Where do you wish she had been more thorough, and why?

Chapter 4: What Is a Home For?

- Do you live, or have you lived, alone? Can you identify consequences, negative or positive, of this lack of attention and human interaction? Do/did you find a substitute for this interaction outside of your living situation?
- Can you identify other instances of homelessness beyond those living on the streets?

Chapter 5: Who Is a Home For?

- Have you moved in order better to accommodate your family? In what way, that is, what was it which needed to change?
- Do you have experience of living with people you aren't related to? What steps, if any, did you take to make this arrangement more like a family home?
- Can you identify a conflict between the needs of the family and the demands of hospitality, either in your childhood home or in your present home? How was this addressed or resolved?
- How do you feel about the house you grew up in? Is that house still available to you?

Chapter 6: Does a Home Just Happen?

- How does the word "homemaker" make me feel? Is it positive or negative response?
- Compare or contrast your emotional responses to the terms "homemaker" and "stay-at-home mom."
- "We know that we are the homemakers." Are you comfortable with this statement? Why or why not?

Chapter 7: Why a "Thoughtful" Home?

- Did you grow up with a regular family meal? Why do you think this happened, or didn't happen?
- What were the primary criteria for choosing your current house? Did you think about specific ways in which this house would make family life easier or better?
- "Simply reproducing the home of the past...is not the path to making a good home." Do you agree?

Chapter 8: What Do We Need?

- How does your home offer contact with material reality? Can you identify practical ways in which it could offer more contact?
- Is your home a place of rich human contact?
- How do you incorporate beauty into the design and content of your home?
- Does your home allow for silence and wonder? How?

Chapter 9: The Cultural Challenge

- The experience of the phone is a defining factor for the different generations (Boomer, Gen Y, Millennial, Gen X, etc). What has your experience been, and has what is considered proper phone etiquette changed within your lifetime?
- Where do you share or compromise in your daily life?
- Do you welcome the challenges of living in the current era and culture, or do you seek to ignore or escape them?
- Share an example of when you have embraced a challenge willingly and found that the struggle involved was worth it.

Chapter 10: Dwelling at Home

- In your home as it is right now, when are the natural occasions of gathering and spending time together as a family?
- What kinds of activities or entertainment are appealing and attractive to your family members?
- Do you have “just barely enough” time for your work as a homemaker? Do you see this as a problem to be solved, or as something which cannot be changed?
- “More than anything else, your presence makes your home attractive.” Do you hear this as a recognition of the value of what you do, or as a criticism of how you fall short?

Chapter 11: How Do We Do This?

- Do you find the work of the home creative? What do you understand creativity to be?
- What do the contents of your home say about your values, positively or negatively?

- Was the culture of your home a topic of conversation between you and your spouse before you married? Do you talk about it now?

Chapter 12: Methods for Making a Thoughtful Home

- “Habits of submitting our individual preferences to a common experience...” How does this idea make you feel? Do you find it appealing or unappealing?
- How often did you eat dinner as a family when you were growing up? How often do you do so now? Does it seem reasonable to share at least five family meals in your home each week? Why or why not?
- Do you agree that efficiency should not be the primary consideration in homemaking? If so, how do you show this in your home?
- “Coordinated routines in the home create...natural opportunities for human contact...” Can you identify some “natural meeting places” in the routines of your home? Do you experience such meetings more as noisy chaos or as a shared life?
- Are you able or willing to tolerate noise and inconvenience for the sake of a shared life?
- Have you tried to set aside Sunday or another day for leisure and recreation? What has the experience been like?
- Do you agree that in your home you have the power to organize the use of time? Do you agree that you have the power to exclude devices or practices from your home? Why or why not? Who or what limits your power?
- Share your policies for internet use in your home
- Share an experience of “less is more” in your home.
- “We homemakers can foster family life by being generous with our time...” As a homemaker, do you think your job is to provide the setting and conditions for family life more than to participate in that life?

Chapter 13: The Work of Making a Thoughtful Home

- How does the word “professional” make you feel, in connection with homemaking?
- Do you work in a profession other than homemaking? If so, how does that profession help you in the work of the home?
- “...The indispensable work of paying attention to and caring for the others.” Do you accept this as your professional work?

- Who are your professional colleagues in the work of the home? Do you have adequate opportunities for consulting with them? Do you need more? How could this happen?
- What homemaking “job” have you become proficient at thanks to “on the job experience”?

Chapter 14: Where is God in the Thoughtful Home?

- How do you manifest your religious beliefs in your home?
- Is it important to you to give your children a taste for beauty, order, and truth?

Chapter 15: The Home and the World

- Given your personality and life experience, are you more likely to sacrifice your home for the sake of making an impact on the outside world or more likely to try to fortify your home against the outside world? Why do you think this is?
- When you notice someone’s excellent manner or service in public, do you tend to think that she must have come from a good, that is, a thoughtful home?
- Share a resolution that you have made as a result of this book and these discussions.