

Sparks (Conversation Starters)

For Basil the Great

Thank you for supporting The Classics Cave.

You'll find books, readings, workouts, and more at www.theclassicscave.com. **Do you want to support the Cave's mission?** Let's talk! Contact Tim Young at tim@theclassicscave.com to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

"Basil the Great is excellent in all his works . . . inferior to none." —Photius (Patriarch of Constantinople)

"Basil started out for his life's work with the equipment of the most liberal education which the age could supply. He had studied Greek literature, rhetoric, and philosophy under the most famous teachers." —Blomfield Jackson

The Classics Cave ▪ www.theclassicscave.com

Suggestions for use ▪ Use the following Sparks to start a conversation with a friend or group. Or journal with them, using them to get to "know yourself" —an imperative straight from the ancient Greeks.

The following quotations come from the Cave's
The Best of Basil the Great on Reading Literature and Education.

Spark 1 ▪ Having a Plan (of Life)

Spark 1 Quotation

"Consider: if a ship's captain does not randomly deliver his vessel over to the winds without a plan, but he steers the ship directly to port, or if an archer shoots at a target, . . . then what reason would there be for us to be less than such practitioners in terms of the ability to generally perceive our own interests?" —Basil the Great

Spark 1 Questions

1. What are your "interests" in life? What is valuable to you? What matters? What are your goals (the ports to which you are sailing or the targets at which you are shooting)? Do they vary in significance? If so, how?
2. What is your plan?—to reach your ports, hit your targets, achieve your goals? What is your plan of life? When describing your plan, try to be concrete and specific.
3. What are the "winds" that blow you off course? These "winds" might be feelings, thoughts, or actions. Or desires or aversions, impulses or temptations—things that are contrary to your goals. Or other people (some). Do you ever "randomly deliver *yourself* over to the winds without a plan"? By contrast, what "winds" keep you on course? How do they keep you on course? What is your plan to sail with these beneficial winds?

Spark 2 ▪ Steering and Being Steered

Spark 2 Quotations

“My advice for you is that you should accept from the famous thoughts and words of ancient men only what is useful and know what to disregard. . . . You should not once and for all hand over the rudder of your mind to these men—as one might hand over the rudder of a ship to another—to follow along with them wherever they steer you.”—Basil the Great

“A prudent man . . . should make sound reason the guide of his life.”—Basil the Great

Spark 2 Questions

1. For Basil, our minds are like a ship that we must steer in one direction or another, to this or that port. Are we steering our ship or is someone else? Who or what holds the rudder of my mind? What steers me?
2. In what ways do different forms of media—literature, online content (whether by means of a laptop, phone, or tablet), apps, AI chatbots, music, TV, streaming platforms, social media, news, advertising and marketing, etc.—steer me? How are the ways media steers me under my control? How are they not under my control? Am I more active or passive in my relationship to media? What is one concrete, specific thing I can do or think to improve my relationship to media?
3. Am I more rational or emotional in my response to life and the various happenings of life? What is the value of making “sound reason the guide of *my* life”? When something happens, do I tend to feel/emote about it, think about it, talk about it, be with/relate to others about it, or act on/about it? How is each approach (feeling, thinking, talking, being with others, acting) beneficial? How is each potentially harmful (or not so beneficial)?

Spark 3 ▪ Collecting Whatever Is Beneficial

Spark 3 Quotation

“Those who make it their business to collect whatever is beneficial from every writing are like rivers that grow larger by taking in the flow of streams from every side. The poet *Hesiod’s* saying about ‘adding little to little’ is true not only for the accumulation of money but also for gathering together every kind of knowledge.”

—Basil the Great

Here’s what Hesiod said: “The man who adds to what he has will ward off burning hunger. If you add only a little to a little, and you do this often, soon the ‘only a little’ will become a lot. . . . If your spirit within you longs for wealth, then work in this way, and add work upon work.”

—See Hesiod’s *Works and Days* 361-363; 381-382 in the Cave’s *The Best of Hesiod’s Theogony & Works and Days*.

Spark 3 Questions

1. Do I “collect whatever is beneficial” from the media I consume (particularly “from every writing” or literature)? Do I consume mostly beneficial media? Or sometimes harmful media? What is the difference?

SPARKS (CONVERSATION STARTERS) ▪ FOR BASIL THE GREAT

2. What beneficial things or content can I collect when consuming various forms of media (including literature and the other mentioned in Spark 2, Question 2 above)? For Basil, we should focus on wisdom and models of good men and women. Do you agree? If so, give one example of wisdom you have gained and a model you have admired or imitated from literature or another form of media.
3. Going forward, how can I be more intentional in my approach to media in terms of benefiting myself and others?

Thank you for supporting The Classics Cave.

You'll find books, readings, workouts, and more at www.theclassicscave.com. **Do you want to support the Cave's mission?** Let's talk! Contact Tim Young at tim@theclassicscave.com to sponsor or donate to the Cave.

"Basil the Great is excellent in all his works . . . inferior to none." —Photius (Patriarch of Constantinople)

"Basil started out for his life's work with the equipment of the most liberal education which the age could supply. He had studied Greek literature, rhetoric, and philosophy under the most famous teachers." —Blomfield Jackson

The Classics Cave ▪ www.theclassicscave.com



THE CLASSICS CAVE
The earliest light for a brighter life
www.theclassicscave.com

