

Conversational Apologetics Course

Practicing the Art of Sharing
Your Faith with Others

*A 10-week program combining knowledge
and hands-on practice in the art of
conversational apologetics and evangelism*

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C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

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Introduction

C.S. Lewis, Tim Keller, Billy Graham, and other experts in the fields of evangelism and apologetics have produced wonderful books and audio and video recordings that encourage our faith. They help us understand that our belief in Jesus Christ is not based on blind trust, but rather on reasonable and defensible truths. The problem occurs, however, when we're unable to translate and communicate our faith to our neighbors and colleagues in an engaging manner. Many believers, feeling incompetent in articulating and defending their faith, retreat to the safe confines of their Christian world in fear. Others jump out into the world throwing punches, trying to persuade their nonbelieving friends using ineffective methods. There has to be a better way. After all, Jesus commanded His followers to spread the good news of the gospel and to be ready to give a reasonable answer for their belief in Him. This course, designed by the C.S. Lewis Institute, is our attempt to help believers in their personal and public spheres to more effectively articulate, defend, and live their Christian faith through a method we call conversational apologetics.

One could argue that C.S. Lewis himself came to faith through his friends' use of conversational apologetics. As Lewis embarked on a deeper quest for truth and discovering meaning in life, he realized that many of the people he most enjoyed happened to be followers of Jesus Christ. He had long discussions about religion, philosophy, and faith with these friends, including J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, and Hugo Dyson. They challenged Lewis to consider the claims of Christianity and especially to evaluate the historical person of Jesus Christ, His claims to be God, and the assertion that He had risen from the dead. One conversation in particular took place in the middle of the night behind Magdalen College, Oxford, on a nature path called Addison's Walk. Tolkien asked Lewis some questions that forced Lewis to look objectively, with new eyes, at the gospel stories, as he would study other pieces of literature, rather than coming to the stories of Jesus with a closed or prejudiced mind. This famous conversation convinced Lewis that the difference between other myths and the gospel stories was that Jesus actually was a historical figure and that the resurrection really happened. And so, through conversations with intelligent, thoughtful, believing friends who could defend their faith, Lewis became a wholehearted follower of Christ.

The Program Approach

There are three basic components to this approach. First, we will seek to gain an understanding of the common objections that people have toward faith and try and develop rational answers to deal with these hindrances to belief. Second, we will learn and practice some methods for engaging in conversation with nonbelievers that enable us to lovingly move them to consider the claims of Christ. Third, we will encourage believers to get off the bench and take risks for God, praying and also trusting that the Holy Spirit will help us as we share our faith with others in the real world through conversational apologetics.

This course may be used by churches, small groups, campus ministries, and other Christian organizations to train people like you and me to be apologists and evangelists within any sphere of influence. This approach to evangelism and apologetics is meant to be experiential and interactive rather than focused solely on the reception of information. It provides opportunities to practice conversational apologetics so that participants can become more confident and comfortable when discussing their faith in Jesus.

The Purpose

The goal of the C.S. Lewis Institute's Conversational Apologetics Course is to equip followers of Jesus with the knowledge, tools, and practical skills that will make them more competent and confident as they rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to articulate, defend, and share their faith.

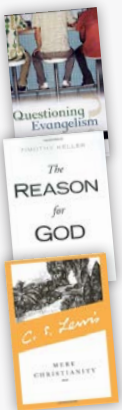
The Program Components

The following components of the C.S. Lewis Institute's Conversational Apologetics Course are designed to provide a ten-week, engaging, interactive, hands-on curriculum that will train believers in the art of conversational apologetics.

Books Needed for the Course

The following three books, along with this workbook, will be the texts for the course:

1. Randy Newman. *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004.
2. Timothy Keller. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Dutton, 2008; Riverhead, 2009 (paperback).
3. C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001 (or earlier editions).



Reading Assignments

Weekly reading assignments will be taken from the books above or are included in the appendix of this workbook. Only selected chapters of the books will be assigned in the course. Any unassigned chapters will provide good reading for participants after the course is over.

Apologetics Notebook

At the back of this workbook is your Apologetics Notebook. Use this notebook to record the following:

Section 1: Everyday Questions and Statements about God and Faith: Start listening to and observing the conversations you hear in everyday life and keep a list of questions you hear people asking about God and questions you yourself may be asking. Write down all the various statements people make about faith and God. If you can, write down the exact wording of the questions and statements. You may need to keep a scratch pad with you throughout the day or make notes on your smart phone.

Then transfer your notes to this section of your Apologetics Notebook.

Section 2: Categorize Questions and Statements: You'll probably begin to discover that there are ten to twelve basic questions and related ideas that people are discussing. Organize these questions or statements into similar categories.

Section 3: Start Finding Good Answers to the Questions and Statements about

God and Faith: At the top of each page in this section, you'll discover a common question or statement about God or religion. Read the assigned article or chapter from a book that addresses the question. Develop a one-page summary (using an outline or bulleted-statement format) that offers an answer to that particular question. In the few blank pages at the back of this section, you can add new questions or statements that have come up as you've listened to conversations. After completing this course, continue to find articles or resources from which you can develop more one-page outlines to respond to newly discovered questions.

Section 4: Strategies and Tactics: Read the assigned article or book chapter dealing with strategies and tactics in conversational apologetics. Use this section to record the strategies and tactics that can help you become more effective as you engage in discussions about your faith.



Action Assignments

Each week participants will be given an action assignment to encourage them—with prayer, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit—to step out of their comfort zones incrementally, to engage others in meaningful dialogue and discussion about faith in Christ. Participants will report back each week to their small groups on these assignments.

Memory Verses

Only three brief Scripture memory passages will be required for this course. Participants will be encouraged to memorize them and repeat them out loud at each weekly meeting, embedding them in both the mind and heart. Daily meditation on these verses is encouraged: Matthew 28:18–20; 1 Peter 3:15–17; John 3:16–18.

Small Group Discussion and Interactive Exercises

A weekly meeting agenda is provided and includes a discussion of the reading and some interactive group exercises such as role play, case studies, and conversational apologetics improvisation.

Leaders Agenda for Weekly Small Group Meeting

The leader should use the “**Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter**” located at the end of each chapter in the workbook as a guide for facilitating discussion and practicing the lessons from each week’s study. It should help the group tease out the session’s important truths and practices.

Program Delivery Methods

The combination of auditory, kinesthetic, and visual delivery methods enables people to learn the material through multiple learning styles and serves to reinforce the teaching and make it practical. As insights are shared from personal study and experience with the small group, the combined knowledge and skill of the group will grow. The hope is that the combination of the various program components will result in participants’ being able to absorb the knowledge and use it in the practical application of conversational apologetics.

First Step: The Orientation Meeting

We recommend that prior to the launch of the ten-week Conversational Apologetics Program an orientation meeting be held to distribute the workbooks and required books and explain the scope and sequence of the course. If this is done over dessert and coffee or a meal, it can be a good way to help group members connect with one another. Be sure to pray specifically for God's leading as your group embarks on this endeavor.

Things to Do for Orientation Meeting

1. Bring nametags.
2. Provide a Conversational Apologetics Workbook for each participant.
3. Provide a copy of the three textbooks for each participant: *Questioning Evangelism*; *The Reason for God*; *Mere Christianity*.
4. Provide food and drink.
5. Assign chapter 1 to be completed before next meeting.



Chapter 1

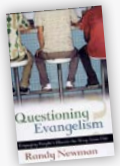
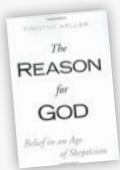
Introductory Lessons and Practice in Conversational Apologetics

"It is clear that there never was a time when nothing existed; otherwise nothing would exist now."

C.S. Lewis, from *Miracles*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. In section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook, record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week.
2. In section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook, begin to categorize common statements and questions about faith.
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 8, "The Clues of God"), 15 pp.
4. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller's book, develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 1: Does God Exist? Clues in the Universe**.
5. Read "*I'm Smart, but I'm No C.S. Lewis: How Can I Intelligently Discuss My Faith with Others?*" by Joel S. Woodruff, Ed.D. (see appendix 3), 4 pp.
6. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (introduction and chapter 1, "Why Are Questions Better than Answers?"), 25 pp.
7. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you've learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.



Memory Verses Matthew 28:18–20

(New International Version; NIV)

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Write these verses on a 3 x 5 card and carry it around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect upon them, meditate on them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

Identify and pray for some of the non-Christians in your life:

List three non-Christians (nonrelatives) whom God has placed in your life; make another list of non-Christian relatives.

Develop and start a plan to pray for these people on a consistent basis.

Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 1

Discussion Questions

1. Name some evangelists and apologists who have influenced your life. What did they say or do that impacted you? Why do you think that made a difference in your thinking and actions?
2. What words would describe your experience with evangelism and apologetics (i.e., easy, hard, exciting)? Why these words?
3. What motivated you to do this course on conversational apologetics?
4. Use the study guide questions on chapter 1 found in the back of the book *Questioning Evangelism*.

Discussion of Apologetics Question 1: Does God Exist? Clues in the Universe

1. Identify some clues in the universe that would point to God's existence.
2. How are these clues helpful to you in thinking about the existence of God?
3. What would be some ways to point people to these "clues in the universe," as you engage in conversation?



Conversational Apologetics Practice

Pairs Exercise: Pair up. Take five minutes working together to outline a scenario that demonstrates what an inappropriate use of apologetics or evangelism would look like. This could come from your own experience or observation of others, or it could be a creative fabrication. In other words, think of a work, neighborhood, or social situation in which you could really turn others off to thinking about faith in Jesus Christ.

Then act out the scenario for others in the group; the scenario should last no more than two minutes.

Truth Reminder: Despite our screw-ups, the Holy Spirit can still use our inappropriate attempts at evangelism to reach people; this is not an exercise to deride others or be critical, but rather to think through the things that may make it more difficult for us to present the truth of the gospel to others.

What was it that made the scenarios inappropriate or ineffective in communicating the love of Jesus and the Gospel to others?

Now act out the same scene, but this time approach the non-Christians in an appropriate manner.

What changed from the first to the second acting of the scenario?

Prayer Time

Pray quietly on your own for the non-Christians on your prayer list.

Pray together that the Lord would help all of you be active listeners and sensitive to the relationships the Lord has placed in your life.



Chapter 2

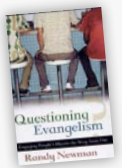
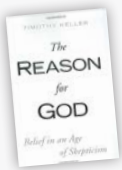
Defining Conversational Apologetics

"It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with the Power – it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk."

C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record, in section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook, questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week.
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 9, “The Knowledge of God”), 15 pp.
4. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller’s book, develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 2: Does God Exist? Clues from Within—Moral Law**.
5. Read “Conversational Apologetics,” by Michael Ramsden (see appendix 3), 5 pp.
6. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 2, “Solomonic Soulwinning: What Does the Book of Proverbs Teach Us about Questions?”), 14 pp.
7. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.



Memory Verses Matthew 28:18–20

(New International Version; NIV)

Continue to carry your Scripture memory passage around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

Identify one person on your list who may be likely to respond well to your initiating a conversation about faith. Before the next meeting, take one step toward a gospel conversation with that one person (e.g., email him and set up a time for coffee or ask her if she ever thinks about spiritual things; invite this person to some event that addresses worldview topics, etc.).



Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 2

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define apologetics? Conversational apologetics?
2. Why and how should we “defend” our faith with our actions? Our words?
3. Is the Christian faith reasonable? Why or why not?
4. Describe the kind of attitude we should have while engaging non-Christians with the gospel.
5. Share examples of times when you’ve seen followers of Jesus demonstrating the right kind of attitude, and/or a misguided attitude, when sharing their faith.
6. Why are questions a useful means of talking with people about your faith?
7. Use the study guide questions on chapter 2 in the back of the book *Questioning Evangelism*.

Discussion of Apologetics Question 2: Does God Exist? Clues from Within—Moral Law

1. Why would the idea that all people have human rights point to God?
2. How is the concept of right and wrong a clue to the existence of God?
3. How do the ideas of beauty, goodness, and love point to the existence of God?
4. What are some ways that you can point people to God through a discussion of morality; beauty; goodness; love?



Conversational Apologetics Practice

The Power of Your Personal Testimony: Pair up. Have one person designated as the non-Christian. Have that person say something like “So . . . you’re one of those hard-core Christians, aren’t you? How did that happen?” Then the Christian delivers part of his or her story and the non-Christian asks questions to draw out more and more of the story.
(Time Limit: 5 minutes)

Reverse roles and repeat the above scenario.

Reflection: How did it feel to listen to someone else’s personal testimony of coming to faith in Christ? Why is it interesting and engaging?

How did it feel to share your testimony with someone else? What advantages come from sharing your own personal story of faith with someone else? What are the disadvantages?

Goal: Look for opportunities this week to ask people about their life stories. If asked, share a piece of your story with someone else.

Prayer Time

Thank God for each other’s testimonies of His grace and goodness.



Chapter 3

How Do Questions Lead to Answers?

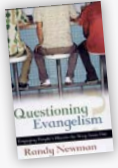
"Supposing science ever became complete so that it knew every single thing in the whole universe. Is it not plain that the questions, 'Why is there a universe?' 'Why does it go on as it does?' 'Has it any meaning?' would remain just as they were?"

C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 6, "Science Has Disproved Christianity"), 12 pp.
4. Read *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis (book 2, chapter 1, "The Rival Conceptions of God" & chapter 2, "The Invasion").
5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller's book, and Lewis's book, develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 3: Has Science Proved There Is No God?**





6. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 3, “How Do Questions Pave the Way for Answers?”), 17 pp.
7. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.

Memory Verses Matthew 28:18–20

(New International Version; NIV)

Continue to carry your memory verse around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

Brainstorm a list of three to five “starter questions” that you would be willing to ask as a way of initiating a gospel conversation (e.g., Do you ever think much about spiritual things? What kinds of issues are you most interested in? What are some of your favorite books or movies? Why do you like them? Do they address the big issues of life?). Have you yet taken that first step with one person on your list?



Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 3

Discussion Questions

Use the study guide questions on chapter 3 found in the back of the book *Questioning Evangelism*. Discuss questions 1, 4, & 5.

Discussion of Apologetics Question Question 3: Has Science Proved There Is No God?

Draw from the readings of Tim Keller and C.S. Lewis for this chapter.

1. Have you encountered people and/or authors who believe that science disproves God?

What was their line of argument?

2. What is a miracle? What reasons do we have to believe in the supernatural? In miracles?
3. In what ways might a naturalistic worldview—one that doesn't believe in miracles or the supernatural—be lacking in intellectual rigor?
4. Does evolution disprove the Bible? Why or why not?
5. Are science and Christianity incompatible? Why or why not?
6. How does the concept of right and wrong or justice point to God? How could our sense of injustice in the world be a clue to the existence of God?
7. How does Lewis argue that the complexity of the world and reality points to God?



Conversational Apologetics Practice

1. Use the study guide questions on chapter 3 found in the back of the book *Questioning Evangelism*. Follow the instructions for question 2. As you brainstorm, have one person record for the group a list of common questions that people ask today.

2. Follow the instructions for question 3. You may use the **Questions Chart** (see Questions Chart in Appendix 2) to help you as you role play the scenarios.

Reflection: How did it feel to lead the conversation by using questions rather than giving answers? When playing the role of the non-Christian, how did it feel to be listened to and asked questions?

What questions worked well and which didn't in this scenario? Why or why not?

Prayer Time

Pray for one another as you continue to step out in faith to ask questions and share your faith with other



Chapter 4

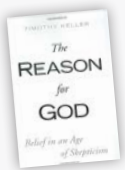
Is Jesus Really the Only Way?

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 1, “There Can’t Be Just One True Religion”), 18 pp.





4. Read *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis (book 2, chapter 3, “The Shocking Alternative”; chapter 4, “The Perfect Penitent”; chapter 5, “The Practical Conclusion”).

5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller’s and Lewis’s books, develop a one-page outline to respond to Apologetics **Question 4: How Can Jesus Be the Only Way?**



6. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 4, “Why Are Christians So Intolerant?”), 25 pp.

7. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.

Memory Verses 1 Peter 3:15–17

(New International Version; NIV)

¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

¹⁷For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Write these verses on a 3 x 5 card and carry it with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

1. Be prepared to report to your small group how your prayer plan for unsaved people is going.
2. Have you been able to be fairly consistent in prayer? What adjustments do you need to make?
3. Be prepared to report to your group about how your first step toward a gospel conversation went.



Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 4

Apologetics Questions Discussion

Use the study guide questions on chapter 4 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*. When answering the questions, consider Tim Keller's chapter on the topic as well as Randy Newman's.

Conversational Apologetics Practice

Pairs Exercise—Creative Dialogue: Pair up and have one person be the non-Christian who starts the scenario below with a statement or question. The Christian will then use questions (see **Questions Chart** in Appendix 2) within the conversation to help the non-Christian think about his or her statement or question. Be creative. Try to put yourselves within the mind of a non-Christian.

Reverse roles. After you've taken both parts of the dialogue, take a moment to critique how the conversations went: what seemed to work, what didn't? How could you have redirected the conversation to be more potentially effective?

Scenario—All Religions Are Basically the Same: You're having coffee with a friend. You're discussing world religions, and she says, "Well, I just think all religions are the same. I mean, Jesus was a great teacher, but Christians push it too far by worshipping Him, and putting Him on a pedestal above other great religious leaders."

Continue the conversation using questions.

Reflection: What did you learn from doing this exercise? What worked? Felt as if it would be effective?

Report on Action Assignment: Discuss how your prayer plan for unsaved people is going. Tell about any conversations you have had with people about faith.



Prayer Time

Pray for one another as you continue to step out in faith, attempting to ask questions and share your faith with others.

Chapter 5

If There Is a God, Why Does He Allow Evil and Suffering?

"God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right...And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."

C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 2, "How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?"), 13 pp.
4. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 5, "Why Does a Good God Allow Evil and Suffering Such as Columbine and AIDS? The Ultimate Why Question—Part 1"; chapter 6, "Why Should Anyone Worship a God Who Allowed 9/11? The Ultimate Why Question—Part 2"), 22 pp.



5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller’s book, and Newman’s book develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 5: If There Is a God, Why Does He Allow Evil and Suffering?**
6. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.

Memory Verses 1 Peter 3:15–17

(New International Version; NIV) *doing evil.*

Continue to carry your Scripture memory passage around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

Holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, and other family gatherings including vacations provide opportunities to have longer conversations with one’s relatives. Consider scenarios in which you might use a holiday gathering to ask questions of unsaved family members and help them reflect upon the more important questions of life. Come up with a list of ideas to share with your small group.



Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 5

Apologetics Questions Discussion

Use the study guide questions on chapters 5 and 6 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*. When answering the questions, consider Tim Keller’s chapter on the topic as well as Randy Newman’s.

Conversational Apologetics Practice

Pairs Exercise—Creative Dialogue: Pair up and have one person be the non-Christian who starts the scenario below with a statement or question. The Christian will then use questions (see **Questions Chart** in Appendix 2) within the conversation to help the non-Christian think about his or her statements or questions. Be creative. Try to put yourselves within the mind of a non-Christian.



Reverse roles. After you've taken both parts of the dialogue, take a moment to critique how the conversation went: what seemed to work, what didn't? How could you have redirected the conversation to be potentially more effective?

Scenario—The Terrorist-Attack Statement: You're watching TV with a friend. A news report comes on about the many innocent people just killed in a bombing. Your friend says, "I just don't see how a good God could allow such innocent bloodshed and suffering in the world. That's why I can't believe in God." Continue the conversation using questions.

Reflection: What did you learn from doing this exercise? What worked? Felt right or potentially effective?

Report on Action Assignment: Discuss ideas on how to ask questions and start conversations that go deeper than usual with unsaved relatives at a holiday gathering. Compare notes.

Prayer Time

Pray for one another as you continue to step out in faith, attempting to ask questions and share your faith with others.



Chapter 6

Why Should I Believe the Bible?

"For us these writings (the Scriptures) are 'holy', or 'inspired', or, as St. Paul says, 'the Oracles of God'."

C.S. Lewis, from *Reflections on the Psalms*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 7, "You Can't Take the Bible Literally"), 17 pp.
4. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 7, "Why Should We Believe an Ancient Book Written by Dead Jewish Males?"), 19 pp.
5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller's book and Newman's book, develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 6: Why Should I Believe the Bible?**
6. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you've learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.



Memory Verses 1 Peter 3:15–17

(New International Version; NIV) *doing evil.*

Continue to carry your Scripture memory passage around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.



Action Assignment

Brainstorm about ways that you can use gift giving to share your faith with unsaved people. Birthdays, Christmas, Easter, and other occasions may provide opportunities to share a good book, offer tickets to a Christian event, or give some other item that would open the door to deeper conversations about faith. Make a list of possible gifts and occasions to do this. Be prepared to share these ideas with your small group.

Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 6

Apologetics Questions Discussion

Use the study guide questions on chapter 7 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*. When answering the questions, consider Tim Keller's chapter on the topic as well as Randy Newman's.

Conversational Apologetics Practice

Conversational Apologetics Case Study—The Good Book: Read and then work with the following case.

Bob Franklin and Richard Duncan and their families have been attending the same church for the past fifteen years. They are good friends, and their families often spend holidays such as Christmas and Easter together. Following the Sunday morning service, Bob and Richard run into each other while grabbing a cup of coffee in the church lobby. They know they'll be there a while as their kids and wives will be chatting with their friends. So they make the best of it and talk a little football. Then, out of the blue, Richard, says, "You know, Bob, I'm not sure that I can buy everything the pastor has been talking about lately. You see, I've been trying to learn more about my Christian faith, and so I've been listening to some graduate courses on

CD from some Ivy League religion professors. These guys really know what they're talking about as they are experts in Greek, Hebrew, and theology, and they say that the Bible isn't quite as reliable as we've been told here in church. In fact, did you know that there are other gospels out there like the Gospel of Thomas and the Gnostic Gospels? Scholars aren't even sure that we have Jesus's words written down as accurately as we once thought. I'm coming to see that the Bible, while it's a good book full of moral teaching, is also full of human errors and not up-to-date with things we know now as a result of the scientific method and modern research. I know that you grew up in the church, Bob, but do you have some of the same doubts that I have about the authority of the Bible for our life?"

"Wow!" Bob replies. "It sounds like you've been thinking a lot about all of this lately. Personally, I've grown up with the Bible, and it just seems to me that it's true; after all, it seems to lay out a pretty good system for family life and church life and everything. I've always just assumed that if God wrote it, He'd want to be sure that it was passed on to us properly. So I haven't really struggled with the Bible like you are now. Anyway, I'm not sure that you can really trust those academic types. Sometimes they're too smart for their own britches. I wouldn't let them rob you of all that you've been taught in the church just because they happen to have some newfangled theories . . . In my Bible, Jesus's words are in red, so it seems pretty clear that we know what Jesus said."



Richard replies, "Well, maybe that works for you, Bob, but I just need to know that what I believe is based on rational, scientific fact, and so I'm not so sure that I can really trust all that the Bible says as being relevant for me today. It's still a good book, don't get me wrong, but I'm not sure that it's the only religious book of value. In fact, I'm thinking about checking out the Qur'an, and some other religious books, like the Book of Mormon, to see if there's any real difference in these holy books."

Bob replies, "Well, knock yourself out, Richard. Hey, are you guys grilling out before the game?"

1. Name some of the underlying assumptions, worldviews, opinions, and ideas that are being expressed by both Richard and Bob. What questions are being asked? What challenges are being made to biblical faith?
2. Analyze the discussion. Given their respective assumptions or worldviews, who presented the most convincing arguments? Why? What did Richard or Bob do to take charge or not take control of the conversation? What could Bob have done differently to answer his friend's questions and comments? What did the discussion accomplish in Richard's mind and in Bob's mind?
3. Reread the first paragraph. Now rewrite the dialogue in the manner that you believe would be the best way for Bob to respond to Richard's question at the end of the first paragraph.

4. Read aloud your new dialogue. What changed? Why? What was accomplished through the new dialogue in Richard's mind? In Bob's mind? Have you ever experienced a conversation similar to this one? If so, describe it and what you think was accomplished through that real-life discussion. What would you like to have done differently if you could do it again? What lessons can this case teach regarding how to best discuss our beliefs?

Share Action Assignment Ideas: Discuss ways in which you could use gift giving to share your faith with unsaved people in your workplace, in your family, in the neighborhood.

Prayer Time

Pray for one another as you continue to step out in faith, attempting to ask questions and share your faith with others.



Chapter 7

Why Are Christians So Close Minded on Sexuality?

"Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body – which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body."

C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 3, “Christianity Is a Straitjacket”), 15 pp.
4. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 8, “Why Are Christians So Homophobic?”), 21 pp.
5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller’s book and Newman’s book, develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 7: Why Are Christians So Close Minded on Sexuality?**
6. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.



Memory Verses John 3:16–18

(New International Version; NIV) *doing evil.*

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Write these verses on a 3 x 5 card and carry it around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, meditate on them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord..

Action Assignment

Review sections 1 and 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook. What are the top three questions being asked by people about faith in religion based on your interactions with people over the past two months? Be prepared to discuss this with your small group.

Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 7

Apologetics Questions Discussion

Use the study guide questions on chapter 8 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*. When answering the questions, consider Tim Keller's chapter on the topic as well as Randy Newman's.

Conversational Apologetics Practice

Conversational Apologetics Case Study—The College Reunion Discussion: Read and work with the following case:

Michelle Johnson has joined five of her closest college friends at the beach to celebrate their twentieth graduation anniversary. They are sitting in a boardwalk café when they notice a bikini-clad lesbian couple walking by, holding hands. The couple stops for a moment, looks adoringly in each other's eyes, gives each other a long kiss on the lips, and then continues on down the beach. One of Michelle's friends says, "It's only right that same-sex couples finally

have the right to get married. If it weren't for some of those fundamentalist Christians, holding up the same-sex laws in some states, people could be free to marry anyone they please." Another friend pipes in, "And as it should be. People should be free to do what comes naturally to them, regardless of sexual preference." A third friend says, "Michelle, you're a Christian. How come so many of your people are such jerks and are so homophobic? I thought Jesus said that we were to love everyone, not to hate our neighbor. You certainly don't oppose homosexuals marrying each other do you?"

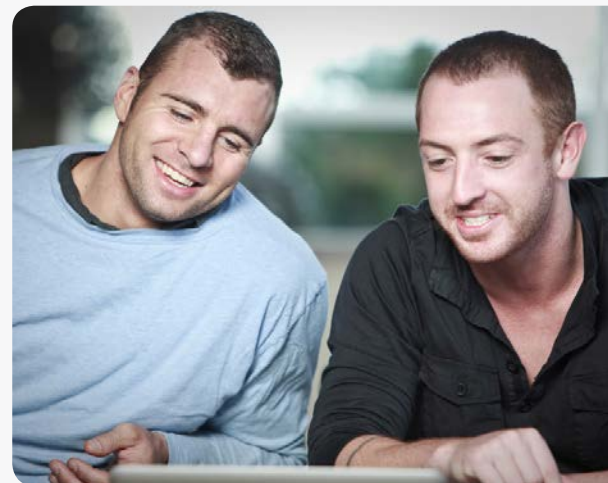
Michelle takes a long sip on her drink. "Well, I don't hate gay and lesbian people. I just don't think that people should have sexual relations with someone of the same sex. I mean, God didn't make our anatomy to work that way. I mean, I just think it's kind of gross to even think about what they do with each other. It doesn't seem natural."

A friend interrupts, "Then you're saying that because you think it's gross to you, that your beliefs about it should be imposed on everyone else, even if they may not be grossed out by it. Do you think it's right to impose your beliefs on other people? Aren't you being discriminatory and hateful by not allowing consenting adults to do what they feel comes naturally to them?"

Michelle responds, "Well, sex is also for having children, and homosexual couples can't have children, so it must not be right in God's eyes. And if God's not for it, then neither am I. I don't hate them, I just don't approve of what gays and lesbians do."

Another friend adds, "Then, Michelle, I think you're homophobic. You're afraid that they're going to corrupt your kids or something. Now, I have a cousin who is gay, and he is the nicest man you'll ever meet. He and his partner have adopted two children, and they're the best-behaved children on the block. I think you Christians are just old-fashioned and are not keeping up with the times."

Michelle looks down and says, "Can we change the subject? I'd rather not talk about this right now."



1. Name some of the underlying assumptions, worldviews, opinions, and ideas that are being expressed by both Michelle and her friends. What questions are being asked?
2. Analyze the discussion. Given their respective assumptions or worldviews, who presented the most convincing arguments? Why? What did Michelle or her friends do to take charge or not take control of the conversation? What could Michelle have done differently to answer her friends' questions and comments? What did the discussion accomplish in Michelle's mind? In her friends' minds?
3. Reread the first paragraph. Now rewrite the dialogue in the manner that you believe would be the best way for Michelle to respond to her friend's question at the end of the first paragraph.

4. Read aloud your new dialogue. What changed? Why? What was accomplished through the new dialogue in Michelle's mind? In her friends' minds? Have you ever experienced a conversation similar to this one? If so, describe it and what you think was accomplished through that real-life discussion. What would you like to have done differently if you could do it again? What lessons can this case teach us regarding how to best discuss our beliefs?

Action Assignment Discussion: Based on your observations, what are the top three questions being asked about faith and religion in your world today? Discuss in your small group.

Prayer Time

Pray for continued wisdom to know how to best answer the questions of our day with other good questions.



Chapter 8

Why Are Christians as Bad as Everyone Else and Hypocrites Too?

"We must, therefore, not be surprised if we find among the Christians some people who are still nasty. There is even, when you come to think it over, a reason why nasty people might be expected to turn to Christ in greater numbers than nice ones. That was what people objected to about Christ during His life on earth: He seemed to attract 'such awful people.'"

C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 4, "The Church Is Responsible for So Much Injustice"), 16 pp.
4. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 10, "If Jesus Is So Great, Why Are Some of His Followers Such Jerks?"), 17 pp.



5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller’s book and Newman’s book, develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 8: Why Are Christians as Bad as Everyone Else and Hypocrites Too?**
6. In the back of the workbook in Section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you to better discuss your faith with others.

Memory Verses John 3:16–18

(New International Version; NIV) *doing evil.*

Continue to carry your memory verse with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

Choose one of these options:

1. Set a date and invite some non-Christian friends over for dinner. Plan on using your listening skills and questioning skills to get to know them better and develop your relationship with them.
2. Invite a colleague or friend for coffee or lunch and plan on just listening and asking questions so that you can get to know him or her better.



Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 8

Apologetics Questions Discussion

Use the study guide questions on chapter 10 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*. When answering the questions, consider Tim Keller’s chapter on the topic as well as Randy Newman’s.

Conversational Apologetics Practice



Exercise—Creative Dialogue: Pair up and have one person be the non-Christian who starts the scenario below with a statement or question. The Christian will then use questions (see **Questions Chart** in Appendix 2) within the conversation to help the non-Christian think about his or her statement or question. Be creative. Try to put yourselves within the mind of a non-Christian.

Reverse roles. After you've taken both parts of the dialogue, take a moment to critique how the conversation went: what seemed to work, what didn't? How could you have redirected the conversation to be potentially more effective?

Scenario—Another Christian Scandal: You're sitting in the barber/beauty shop and your barber/beautician engages in conversation. "Did you see today's gossip section of the paper? Some big-time pastor was caught having an affair. Christians pretend to be 'holier' than everyone else, but they're really just a bunch of hypocrites." Continue the conversation using questions.

Reflection: What did you learn from doing this exercise? What worked? Felt right?

Action Assignment Discussion: What three tactics for doing conversational apologetics have most helped you? Why? Discuss among your small group.

Prayer Time

Pray that each of us will live in humility before our friends, expressing the love of Jesus toward others. Pray that we would be quick to ask for forgiveness and offer forgiveness when relational harm has been done.



Chapter 9

If God Is Love, Why Would He Send People to Hell?

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell."

C.S. Lewis, from *The Great Divorce*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments

1. Continue to record questions and statements about faith and religion heard during the week (section 1 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
2. Continue to categorize common statements and questions about faith (section 2 of your Apologetics Notebook in the back of this workbook).
3. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (chapter 5, "How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?"), 15 pp.
4. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 11, "The Question of Compassion: What if I Don't Care that My Neighbor Is Going to Hell?"; chapter 12, "The Question of Anger: What if I Really Want My Neighbor . . .?"), 28 pp.
5. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller's book and Newman's book develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 9: If God Is Love, Why Would He Send People to Hell?**



6. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you've learned to help you to better discuss your faith with others.

Memory Verses John 3:16–18

(New International Version; NIV) *doing evil.*

Continue to carry your memory verse around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.



Action Assignment

Reflect upon the past several months. Describe one encounter with a non-Christian that you believe the Lord used to point that person toward a relationship with Christ. Why do you think that encounter was effective in communicating to that person some new insight about the Lord? (If you haven't had any encounter that has touched a non-Christian, consider reasons why.) Be prepared to discuss with your small group your encounter or lack thereof.

Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 9

Apologetics Questions Discussion

1. Do people believe in hell? Why or why not?
2. Is “why does God send people to hell?” a good question? Why or why not?
3. Why is the reality of hell an important truth to communicate to others?
4. Use the study guide questions on chapters 11 and 12 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*. When answering the questions consider Tim Keller's chapter on the topic as well as Randy Newman's.

Conversational Apologetics Practice

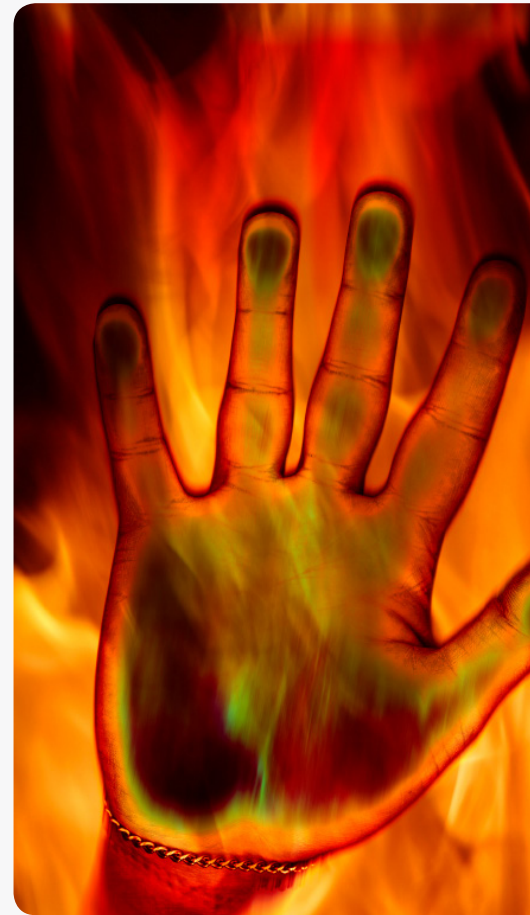
Pairs Exercise—Creative Dialogue: Pair up and have one person be the non-Christian who starts the scenario below with a statement or question. The Christian will then use questions (see **Questions Chart** in this workbook) within the conversation to help the non-Christian think about his or her statement or question. Be creative. Try to put yourselves within the mind of a non-Christian.

Reverse roles. After you've taken both parts of the dialogue, critique how the conversation went: what seemed to work, what didn't? How could you have redirected the conversation to be potentially more effective?

Scenario—Turn or Burn: You and your work colleague are walking down the street and pass a guy with a sign that says "Turn or Burn." Your colleague says, "There are too many nuts out there. I don't believe in hell. God is love, so He's accepting of everyone." Continue the conversation using questions.

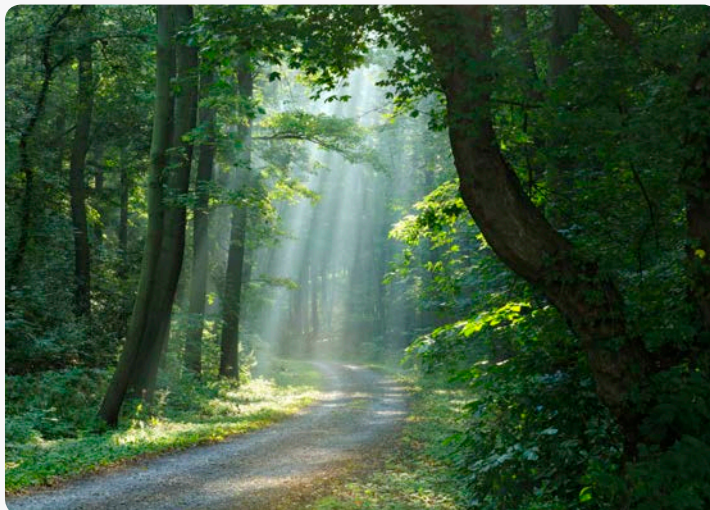
Reflection: What did you learn from doing this exercise? What worked? Felt as if it opened doors?

Report on Action Assignment: Share with your small group one encounter that you had with a non-Christian over the past several months that seemed to draw that person closer to Christ. Why do you think that encounter was effective?



Prayer Time

Pray that the Lord would continue to put people in your path who would be interested in responding to your questions about faith.



Chapter 10

When Is It Time to Just Listen, Ask Questions, or Proclaim the Gospel?

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else."

C.S. Lewis, from *Is Theology Poetry?*

Readings and Apologetics Notebook Assignments



1. Read *The Reason for God*, by Tim Keller (epilogue, “Where Do We Go from Here?”), 13 pp.
2. Read *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman (chapter 13, “The Question of Silence: When Is It Time to Shut Up?”; epilogue, “Unanswered Questions”), 22 pp.
3. In the back of the workbook in section 3, using Keller’s book and Newman’s book develop a one-page outline to respond to **Apologetics Question 10: When Is It Time to Just Listen, Ask Questions, or Proclaim the Gospel?**
4. In the back of the workbook in section 4, note any helpful tactics or strategies you’ve learned to help you better discuss your faith with others.

Memory Verses Matthew 28:18–20;

1 Peter 3:15–17; John 3:16–18

Continue to carry your memory verses around with you throughout the day, repeating the verses regularly to yourself, taking time to reflect and meditate upon them, and asking the Lord to show you how you can more effectively fulfill this great commission of our Lord.

Action Assignment

1. Consider having a dinner party with some non-Christian and Christian friends. Perhaps your small group could plan a fun event together in the neighborhood. Use the event to build your relationships with others as you actively listen to them and ask them questions.
2. Review the three Scripture memory passages from this course. Reflect upon them and be ready to discuss with your small group how they teach, inspire, and equip you to share your faith in Jesus.



Small Group Discussion Questions and Activities for Chapter 10

Apologetics Questions Discussion

1. Use the study guide questions 1–4 on chapter 13 found in the back of *Questioning Evangelism*.
2. How do you discern when it's best to be quiet and listen to someone?
3. How do you know when it's a good time to answer a question with a question?
4. How do you know when it's a good time to proclaim boldly the truth of the gospel message?
5. Based on Tim Keller's epilogue, summarize the gospel message that we need to proclaim boldly to non-Christians when it is the right time.

Conversational Apologetics Practice

Active Listening Exercise: Pair up. One person listens and only asks questions of the other person during an entire three-minute conversation. The topic: Things I've learned about conversational apologetics.

Reverse roles.

Then pair up with someone else and go through the same process, but this time the active listener can ask any number of questions.

Note: the goal is to take the role of an active listener and be disciplined enough to listen only and ask questions.

Reflection: Discuss what it felt like to be in the role of the active listener; to be the person being asked questions. How did active listening help you to learn more about the other person?

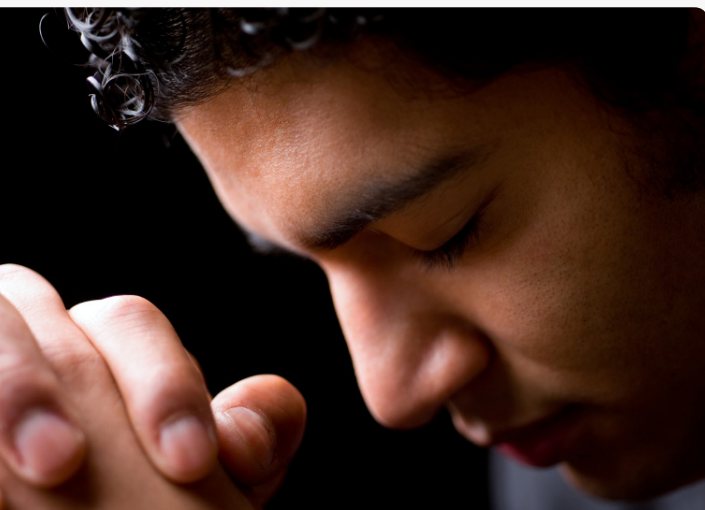
Pairs Exercise—Creative Dialogue: Pair up and have one person be the non-Christian who starts the scenario below with a statement or question. The Christian will then respond by appropriately summarizing the gospel message in a way that invites the non-Christian to consider whether he would like to surrender his life to Jesus.

Scenario—I Want What You Have: You are having lunch with a friend. Your friend says, “I know that you are a Christian, and I've been watching you closely. You're not like the stereotypical Christian I've had in my mind for so many years. I see a joy and contentment in your life that I want to have. I know your story. You've told me how you came to faith in Christ. Well, if I wanted to, how could I come to know this Jesus of yours?”

Respond to this question with a clear summary of the gospel in plain language. The non-Christian can ask questions as you talk.

Reflection: What did you learn from doing this exercise? What worked? Felt right?

Report on Action Assignment: Share with your small group how the Bible memory verses, teach, inspire, and equip you to share your faith. Discuss in your small group.



Prayer Time

Commit to praying for one another for the next month. Then pray that the Lord would use all that you've learned over the past three months for His purposes and the building of His kingdom on earth.

Appendix 1

Apologetics Notebook

Section 1: Everyday Questions and Statements about God and Faith

Start listening to and observing the conversations you hear in everyday life. Keep a list of questions you hear people asking about God and questions you may be asking. Write down all the various statements you hear people make about faith and God. If you can, write down the exact wording of the questions and statements. You may need to keep a scratch pad with you throughout the day or make notes on your smart phone. Then transfer your notes to this section of your Apologetics Notebook.

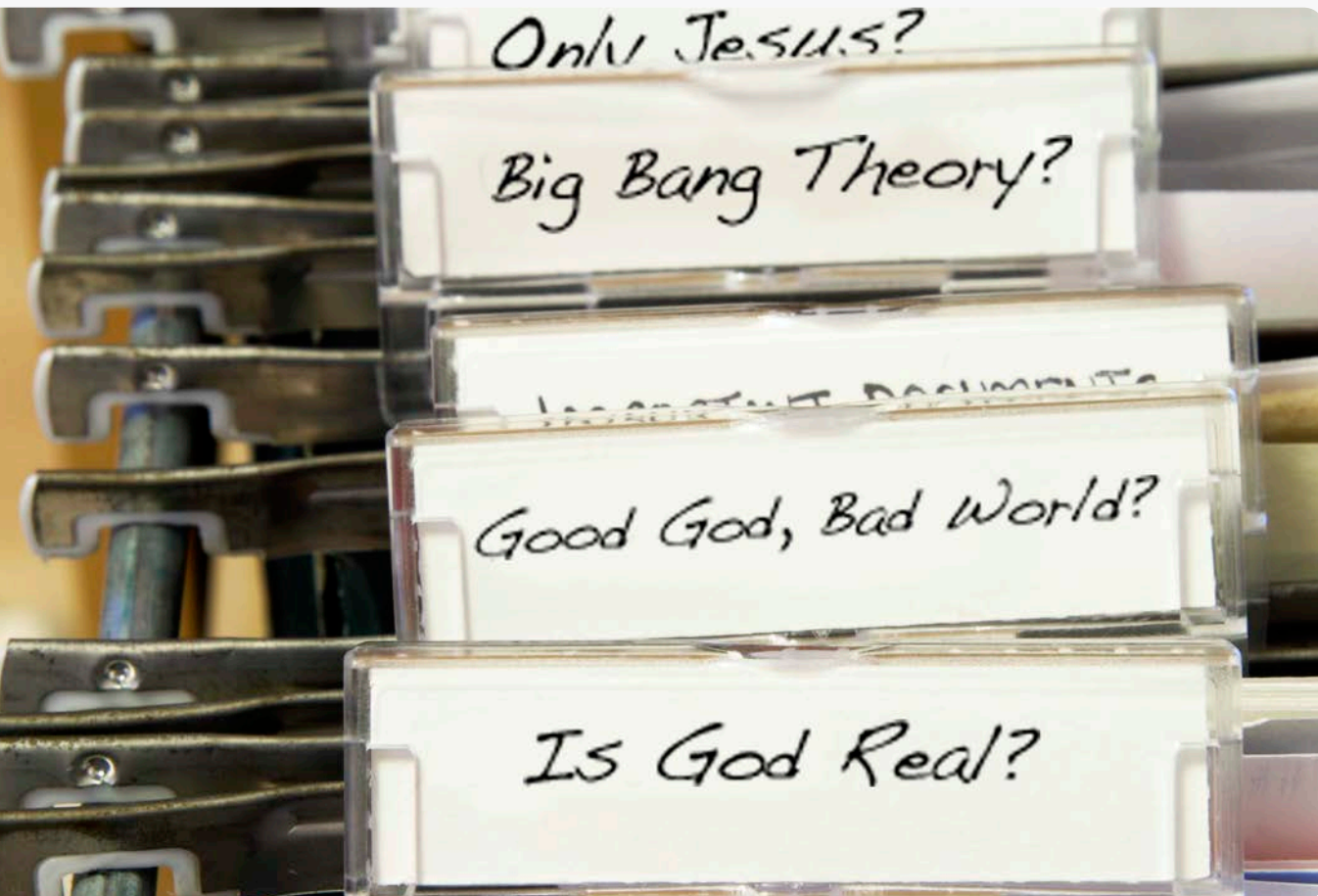


Section 1: Everyday Questions and Statements about God and Faith

Section 2: Categorize Questions and Statements

You'll probably begin to discover that there are 10-12 basic questions and related ideas that people are discussing. Organize these questions or statements into similar categories.

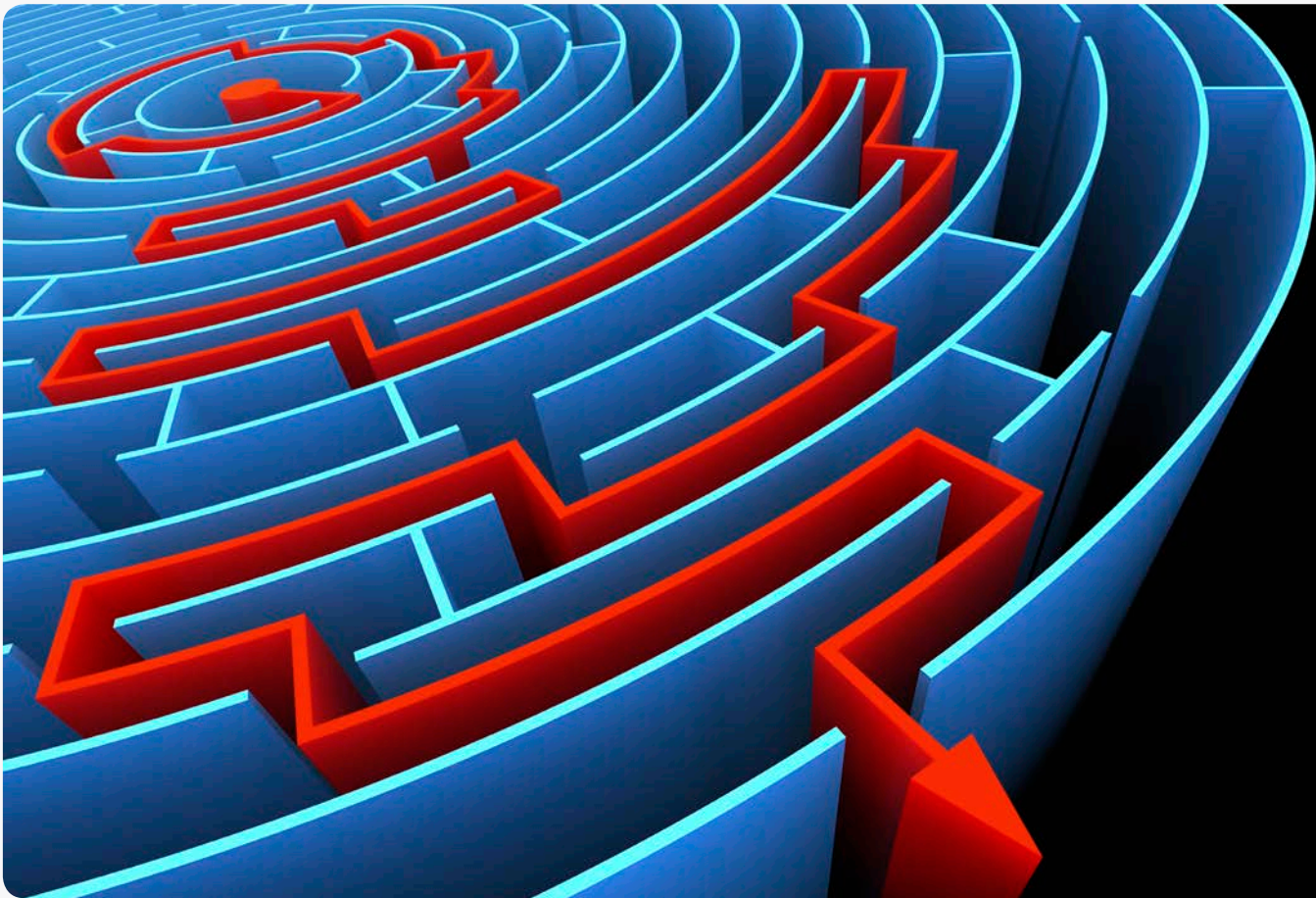
For example: You might put the following statements in the same category of Questions About the Reliability of the Bible: People say: "The Bible is outdated." "Isn't the New Testament full of errors." "The Bible is Just like any other set of Religious Scriptures like the Koran, or the book of Mormon."



Section 2: Categorize Questions and Statements

Section 3: Start Finding Good Answers to the Questions and Statements about God and Faith

At the top of each page in this section you'll discover a common question or statement about God or religion. Read the assigned article or chapter from a book that addresses the question. Develop a one-page summary (using an outline or bullet-statement format) that offers an answer to that particular question. In the few blank pages at the back of this section, you can add new questions or statements that have come up as you've listened to conversations. Once this course is over, continue to find articles or resources that could help you develop a one-page outline to respond to your newly discovered questions.



Apologetics Question 7: Why Are Christians So Close Minded On Sexuality?

Section 4: Strategies and Tactics

Read the assigned article or book chapter dealing with strategies and tactics in conversational apologetics. Use this section to record the strategies and tactics that can help you become more effective as you engage in discussions about your faith with others.

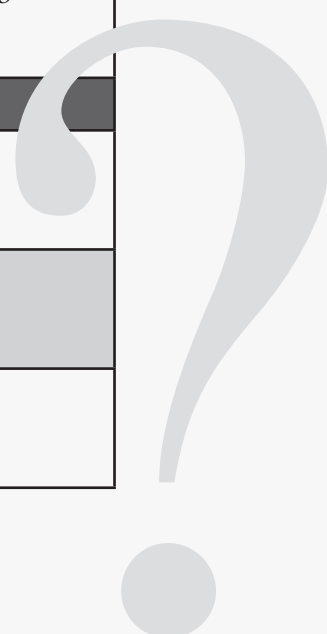


Appendix 2

Conversational Apologetics Questions

(Adapted from Questioning Evangelism, by Randy Newman)

Top Five Questions	Example
Really?	Do you really think all religions are basically the same?
What do you mean by that?	I'm not sure I understand—what do you mean when you say all religions are basically the same? Can you explain what you mean by the word evil?
How did you come to that conclusion?	What are your reasons for believing that all religions are basically the same? How did you come to be persuaded that all religions are basically the same?
So?	So? Hinduism or Unitarianism may be right that there are commonalities between religions, but aren't there also a lot of differences?
Is it possible?	Is it possible or plausible that only one religion is true and that all of the others are false? Have you considered that if religions contradict each other in their view of God it might be probable that one is right and the others are wrong?
Add More Questions	Add More Examples



Appendix 3

Articles for Assignments

Chapter 1 Assignment:

Joel Woodruff, “I’m Smart but I’m No C.S. Lewis,” from Spring 2014 *Knowing & Doing*

Chapter 2 Assignment:

Michael Ramsden, “Conversational Apologetics,” from Summer 2002 *Knowing & Doing*.



I'm Smart, but I'm No C.S. Lewis: *How Can I Intelligently Discuss My Faith with Others?*

by Joel S. Woodruff, Ed.D.

Vice President of Discipleship and Outreach, C.S. Lewis Institute

This article originally appeared in the Spring 2014 issue of *Knowing & Doing*.

Imagine that if you are reading this article you're pretty smart. God has given you a good mind. You may have done well in school, or you may be blessed with good common sense and the street smarts to excel in the modern world. And yet when you compare yourself to bright followers of Jesus, such as C.S. Lewis or Tim Keller, you don't feel all that competent when it comes to talking knowledgeably about your faith in Jesus around smart nonbelievers. I can relate. I consider myself intelligent, but when it comes to thinking quickly on my feet to respond to people's questions or statements about religion, I often flounder. (And I even went to seminary!) I'm like those politicians who can sound and look great when they have Teleprompters in front of them to help deliver prepared and rehearsed remarks. But if they have to go off script—look out! You just never know what's going to come out of their mouths, and usually it doesn't come off sounding all that erudite. In fact, to use a bad “S” word that my daughters tell me I shouldn't say, it sounds stupid. And I must admit, I don't like to feel or look stupid, especially in front of my bright friends.

If you are like me, this may give you some consolation: you and I are in the majority. Not very many followers of Christ have the unusual gift of Evangelism with a capital “E” or the gift of Apologetics with a capital “A.” And yet I want you to know that there is hope for us. Believe it or not, God can still use us in amazing ways to help others get closer to being reconciled with the Creator of the universe. In fact, even though we may not have the gift of Evangelism or Apologetics, God has given us a very important role and calls us to be actively involved in evangelism and apologetics. Relatively few are called to be evangelists, but everyone is called to be a witness (Acts 1:8) and make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20).

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 is given to all disciples of Jesus. None of us is exempt from the command to go into all the world and to make disciples, teaching them

to obey all that Jesus commanded. This isn't optional for the follower of Christ. And as Peter puts it so well, you and I should “Have no fear of them [non-Christians] . . . always being prepared to make a defense [*apologia*] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:14–15 ESV). These two scriptural passages make it clear that you and I are to be involved in evangelism and apologetics. This is to be a part of the normative life of a believer.

One of the best definitions of evangelism I ever heard was that it's one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread. If Jesus, the Bread of Life, has saved you and me from spiritual starvation and death, it seems only natural that we should share this good news with others. And apologetics can be simply defined as giving a reasonable explanation or defense of our faith in Jesus. We shouldn't feel sorry or ashamed to believe what we do; rather, if we take time to learn about our beliefs, we'll discover that the wisest Being in the universe, God, has given us logical, thoughtful reasons for putting our trust in Him. While faith is involved in trusting Jesus, it isn't a blind faith with no rationale or thinking behind it.

I'm not saying that doing evangelism and apologetics is going to be easy. Peter goes on to say that when you are giving a defense for our faith, you are to have “a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil” (1 Pet. 3:16–17). In other words, while we hope and expect that God will work in people's hearts and that some people become part of the Lord's family through our



Joel S. Woodruff, Ed.D.

words and testimony, others will react negatively to our convictions and belief in Jesus.

The good news is that Jesus promised to provide us with the most powerful help available on the planet, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26 ESV). So, if we can leave the conversion part in the hands of the Holy Spirit, live rightly, listen to others, and speak truthfully in love, we can live with the responses to our witness for Christ whether positive or negative.

There is some debate in theological circles as to the difference between apologetics and evangelism, some stating that apologetics is pre-evangelism—the tearing down of barriers to faith and belief—that makes possible evangelism, the sharing of the gospel message. Others will say that apologetics is one aspect of evangelism. Personally and practically, I don't think it matters. The key is that we are taking the daily steps in our life to be faithful to the call that God has given to each of His disciples to give reasons for our faith and to tell others that they too can be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Fortunately I've discovered that the Lord has raised up some winsome and clever brothers and sisters in Christ who have thought deeply about how we can better serve as evangelists and apologists. stalwarts such as Randy Newman, Gregory Koukl, Lee Strobel, Alister McGrath, Michael Ramsden, Amy Orr-Ewing, Art Lindsley, and, yes, even old C.S. Lewis have something to contribute to this arena in today's changing world. These gifted apologists and evangelists have written books and produced videos and audio recordings that make this endeavor more accessible to people like you and me. They have developed tactics, strategies, and tools that can assist those of us who would like to better defend and share our faith as commanded by Jesus. As I've tried to learn from these gifted Apologists and Evangelists, several introductory lessons stand out to me.

First of all, apologetics and evangelism are contact sports—played out on the field of relational life. We have to rub shoulders with nonbelievers in order to be effective. Just listening to lectures on your i-pod, or reading books and becoming fat and happy on knowledge about how to prove the Christian faith is not going to have any effect on the world around us. We need to find ways to implement and share the truths that we have been given. We can't be content with staying in our Christian bubble and never dialoguing with others. Once we're off the bench and applying what we've learned about apologetics and evangelism in our relationships at work, home, church, and at the grocery store, there is a good chance that we may get bumped around. At the same time, as we begin to actively engage with people about our faith,



we will also become aware of the Holy Spirit working in and around our personal sphere of influence. This will encourage us and inspire us to continue the practice of apologetics and evangelism.

Second, I encourage you to thank God for the great minds of the Christian faith from the past and the present. Prior to the Enlightenment in the 1700s, it was assumed that most of the brightest intellects were followers of Christ. After all, Western Civilization was founded on Judeo-Christian principles that provided the framework for scientific and philosophic discovery. With the understanding that God had created the world and then given mankind the command to “multiply and subdue the earth” came the implication that we were to discover through natural revelation more about God's creation. God-fearing intelligent men and women promoted the mind and ways to use it for the benefit of society, setting up universities, hospitals, libraries, and scientific discoveries that we take for granted today. These positive aspects of culture didn't develop in other parts of the world where religious worldviews didn't promote such humanitarianism progress.

Sadly, within the past couple of centuries, many within the academic world have belittled the Judeo-Christian worldview and belief in Jesus as antiquated or anti-intellectual. How far this is from the truth! Throughout history God has given the church great minds such as Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Blaise Pascal, Sir Isaac Newton, Jonathan Edwards, G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, and C.S. Lewis, and today people like Francis Collins and Tim Keller who have presented the logic and rationale of the Christian faith through their words and actions in ways that have helped their contemporaries and future generations grasp the beauty, goodness, and truth of Jesus Christ and the gospel message. They have defended the faith well and given solid reasons for putting one's trust in Jesus.

Just knowing that some of the greatest minds ever have developed good reasons for belief in God should bolster our confidence in the truth and reasonableness of our faith. A

2009 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press shows that 51 percent of scientists believe in God or some kind of higher power.¹ Don't let people fool you into thinking that there are no bright followers of Jesus or that our faith is irrational. Instead, take time to read, listen, and fill your mind with the true, beautiful, and solid arguments, provided by bright Apologists from the past and present, that can help ground your faith in Jesus.

Third, don't compare yourself to C.S. Lewis, or Josh McDowell. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (NIV), "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." In other words, God has given these great Apologists and Evangelists a gift, but He has also given you a gift or gifts to use in service to the kingdom. He has also given you the empowering presence of His Spirit. You are called to be the very best evangelist or apologist you can be within your natural spheres of influence: family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. And you are to use the gifts that God has given to you, whether hospitality, teaching, service, etc., in the various conversations and opportunities that come your way to share and defend your faith in Him. As you pray for occasions to share your faith in Christ and the gospel message, He will answer that prayer, for it is in the center of His will.

Fourth, and very important, you don't have to have the answers to every question. Dr. J. Christy Wilson, a mentor and seminary professor of mine, used to tell students, "It's all right to say, 'I don't know the answer to that question. Let me do some research and get back to you.' Then you can follow up later and carry on the conversation. The next time some-one asks you that same question, you will have an answer." Remember that Jesus asks His followers to be humble. Being able to say, "I don't have all the answers, but I'll sure try to find out for you," helps us develop humility and also creates trust with those with whom we're speaking. Far from turning people off, this will increase their respect for you. One reason

people don't trust politicians is that they make up answers to appease the crowd rather than being transparent and admitting that they don't have it all figured out. We must take care that we not fall into the same snare and lose our credibility.

Fifth, when engaged in conversation, listen and ask questions first, before giving the top ten reasons why God exists. Randy Newman, in his book *Questioning Evangelism*, notes that Jesus often asked people questions and more often than not answered their questions with a question of His own. It was the rabbinic way of teaching and one that helped lower levels of hostility and open people's minds to think about things in a new way.² Michael Ramsden, in his article "Conversational Apologetics," states that questions get people to think, expose contradictions, define the issue, and reformulate the real underlying issue.³ In other words, your questions can help others understand their own thinking patterns; this can lead to the self-discovery that they've been mistaken in their rationale. Your impact may be stronger when you allow people to come to a conclusion on their own without your preaching to or nagging them.

Sixth, pray and trust God to use you as a witness as you rely on the Holy Spirit's power to guide you. Too often we trip over our own feet in conversations because we're trying to prove our point or win the person over without seeking the Holy Spirit's help. After all, it is not we but the Holy Spirit who has the power to convict and persuade the heart and mind. If we can remember to pray without ceasing—as we're walking down the hall to the water cooler, as we begin an interesting conversation with someone—we'll be much better off. As we pray silently for the other person, that the Lord would be stirring her heart, we become other focused, sensitive to the prompting of the Spirit, and better able to listen and pay attention to presenting needs. This enables us to be ready to give a reason for our faith when the opportunity arises naturally in conversation rather than forcing something when the person isn't ready to hear it. When the Spirit does give us opportunities, we can trust Him to bring to our mind anything we need from the Bible or another reputable resource we have studied.

Seventh, take risks for God. As I mentioned earlier, being a witness of Christ and using apologetics is a contact sport. In other words, there is always potential that we might get hit or hurt in some way. On the other hand, if you sit on the bench and never engage in conversations with others about your faith, you'll do even greater harm to yourself and especially do greater harm to those around you. Your apathy and lack of concern for their spiritual well-being will prevent them from considering God's truth about eternal life. After all, every other worldview is bombarding them incessantly. Why shouldn't they at least be exposed from time to time to the truth of God through your words and actions? If you re-



ally love the people in your sphere of influence, you'll need to take some risks. The good news is that the same God who helped David slay the giant Goliath is walking with you. The risks of personal insult and slander are well worth the greater reward of possibly seeing someone move closer to a relationship with Jesus.

Eighth, don't feel that you have to hit a home run every time you come up to bat. In other words, you're not a failure if you don't lead someone in a prayer of salvation when you talk about Jesus. Gregory Koukl, in his book *Tactics*, makes the point that if you just "put a stone in someone's shoe"⁴ and make that person a little bit uncomfortable with his faulty worldview, you will be helping him become more open down the road to the truth of Jesus. We must realize that not everyone is at the same point in his spiritual journey. Stephen Smallman, in his book *Spiritual Birthline*, makes the point that all of us who have been found by Christ have a unique spiritual birthline, a story or journey that has included many small steps that eventually led to our conversion.⁵

If you sense that someone is ready to take a step of faith and put her trust in Jesus, then by all means take the risk and ask her if she'd like to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior right now. On the other hand, if the person is a hardened atheist and just needs to realize that there are bright scientists, philosophers and thinkers who are followers of Christ, that she has been prejudiced in her thinking, then it's probably not the time to lead that person in the sinner's prayer.

Ninth, take some time to study apologetics and learn some strategies, tactics, and ways of presenting the gospel that will enable you to be an effective witness and apologist when opportunities arise. There are many good books and resources available including a new resource developed by the C.S. Lewis Institute. We have sought to take some of these best practices in apologetics and evangelism and present them in what we are calling our Conversational Apologetics Course. This course can be used by churches, small groups, campus ministries, and other Christian organizations to train people like you and me to be effective witnesses for Christ. This small-group resource provides tools that help participants communicate the gospel in contemporary life, while relying on the Holy Spirit to take care of the results. This course is meant to be experiential and interactive rather than focusing on the reception of information. It provides opportunities for practicing conversational apologetics so participants can become more confident and comfortable discussing their faith in Jesus. If you're interested in checking out this

new C.S. Lewis Institute resource, go to our website at: www.cslewisinstitute.org.

One simple strategy used in the course is keeping a Conversational Apologetics Notebook. This is also a part of our year-long discipleship Fellows Program. Here's how it works: take a notebook and divide it into four sections:

Section 1: Everyday Questions and Statements about God and Faith: Start listening to and observing everyday conversations and keep a list of questions you hear people asking, or that you yourself may be asking, about God. Write down the different statements that people make about faith and God. If you can, note the exact wording of the questions and statements. You may need to keep a piece of scratch paper with you throughout the day, or make a note on your smart phone of what you hear. Then record it in your Apologetics Notebook.

Section 2: Categorize Questions and Statements: In time, you'll probably note ten to twelve basic questions and related ideas that people normally ask. Organize the questions and statements you've collected in Section 1 into categories of similar themes.

Section 3: Seek out Good Answers to the Questions and Statements: At the top of a page write out an apologetics question. Read a good article, chapter from a book, listen to an audio recording, or watch a video that addresses the question. Using an outline format, write a one-page summary that offers an answer to that particular question. Do this for each of the ten to twelve primary apologetics questions you've identified.

Section 4: Strategies and Tactics: Read books such as Randy Newman's *Questioning Evangelism* or Gregory Koukl's *Tactics* and write down ques-



tions, strategies, and tactics that can help you become more effective as you engage in discussions about your faith.

You and I may not be C.S. Lewis, but God has uniquely gifted us and given us the ability to learn from the good resources available in the area of apologetics and evangelism. You might be surprised to know that even C.S. Lewis felt some fear and trepidation when considering the task of evangelism and apologetics. In a letter to his friend Sheldon Vanauken, Lewis wrote,

My feeling about people in whose conversion I have been allowed to play a part is always mixed with awe and even fear: such as a boy might feel on first being allowed to fire a rifle. The disproportion between his puny finger on the trigger and the thunder and lightning which follow is alarming. And the seriousness with which the other party takes my words always raises the doubt whether I have taken them seriously enough myself.⁶

You and I and C.S. Lewis are not all that different after all. As Lewis expressed it to the young convert, Vanauken, “Think of me as a fellow-patient in the same hospital who, having been admitted a little earlier, could give some advice.”⁷

Notes:

1. Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project, “Scientists and Belief,” November 5, 2009, <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/11/05/scientists-and-belief/>.

2. Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004).

3. Michael Ramsden, “Conversational Apologetics,” in *Knowing and Doing*, Summer 2002.

4. Gregory Koukl, *Tactics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 38.

5. Stephen Smallman, *Spiritual Birthline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

6. C.S. Lewis, “A Letter to Sheldon Vanauken” (April 22, 1953), in Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 134.

7. *Ibid.*

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Conversational Apologetics

by Michael Ramsden

European Director, Zacharias Trust

This article originally appeared in the Summer 2002 issue of *Knowing & Doing*.

The trouble with most theologians," said one writer, "is that they go down deeper, stay down longer and come up murkier than anyone else I know." Maybe, as you read this, that sentiment expresses your own feelings about apologetics. However, apologetics is not about injecting a dose of confusion into the Christian Gospel to try and make it sound more profound. It is about communicating the profundity of the Gospel so that it removes the confusion surrounding it.

Apologetics is really about evangelism. The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which literally means a reasoned defense. The apostle Paul uses the word to describe his own ministry, when in Philippians he states that he is appointed for the defense and confirmation of the Gospel. We also find *apologia* used in 1 Peter, when a command is given that we should always be prepared to give an answer (*apologia*) for the reason for the hope that we have. Clearly, both Peter and Paul are thinking of evangelism in these contexts.

Unfortunately, however, apologetics has come to be defined in such a way that to most people it means little more than engaging in abstract philosophical arguments, divorced from the reality of life. Yet apologetics is not about dry intellectualization of the Gospel. For others, the word seems to imply apologizing, as if Christians should say they were sorry for believing in Christ. Yet apologetics is not about that either.

The Truth About Apologetics

So what do we mean when we talk about apologetics? The letter of 1 Peter is addressed to the wider church, which is suffering under persecution. The letter is a passionate one. Its readers are exhorted to lead holy and obedient lives, an endeavour made possible because of the new birth that has occurred in their lives through the living word of God. (1 Pet 1:17-24). Every chapter contains practical instruction as to how we should live and what attitude we should adopt. In the midst of all of this instruction comes a very clear command—to set apart Christ as Lord of our hearts and to be prepared to give an apologetic for the hope that we have (chapter 3:15). What then can we learn from this brief text about apologetics?

Firstly, the lordship of Christ needs to be a settled factor in our lives. The term "heart" does not just refer to the seat of our feelings, but also of our thoughts. Every part of us needs to be under the authority of, and obedient to, Christ.

The book of James speaks of the double-minded man. This turn of phrase does not mean to be two-faced, it means to try to look in two different directions, to be caught between two opinions and not have made a commitment either way. Such a person is sim-



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ply swept along by the tide, tossed backward and forward by the ever-changing winds of public opinion. In contrast, the man who asks in faith is stable, and his prayers for wisdom are effective. The connotation is of someone who has been persuaded and has put his trust into that which is truthful.

The starting point for giving an apologetic, therefore, is not possessing a top-notch education or holding a proliferation of theological qualifications. It is accepting Christ's Lordship in all areas of our lives including our thinking. If we are still caught in two minds, if we are not convinced of the veracity of the Gospel, we will never be able to develop an effective apologetic for the hope that we have, because Christ is not Lord of all of our life.

Secondly, the context of the command is one of holiness. Our attitude, our actions, and how we treat other people is vitally important (1 Peter 3:8 ff). Even when faced with persecution, evil is not to be repaid with evil. The reason for the persecution is not because Christians are disobeying God's commands; it is because they *are* obeying his commands. Similarly, the assumption in 1 Peter 3:15 is that, because our lives and attitudes are different due to living in obedience to God's commands, people will ask questions as to why. We are told that some non-Christians will ask questions, and that we should therefore be prepared. In other words, there should actually be a demand for an apologetic because of the quality of our lives. How we live should be generating intrigue in the Gospel. How are we doing on this front?

We must also remember that the letter of 1 Peter is addressed to the church. The command to give an apologetic is not one that is addressed to a handful of carefully selected specialists. The command to give an apologetic is one that is directed to every single member of the body of Christ. No one who is a Christian can excuse themselves.

It may be helpful here to draw a distinction between the process of evangelism and the gift of the evangelist. An evangelist is someone who has the gift of precipitating a decision in someone's life concerning their standing before Christ. Not everyone has this gift. However, the process of evangelism is something in which every believer is engaged. Every time we talk to someone about Christ, every time we invite someone to an event or to church, every time we give someone

something to read, we are involved in that process. It is precisely in that process that apologetics plays a role. As soon as you begin to answer someone's question, or tell someone why you are a Christian, you are giving an apologetic. It is not a question of whether we engage in apologetics or not, but what kind of apologetic we are giving when the opportunity comes by.

Fourthly, there is the need to be prepared. "There is no problem so big or so complicated," wrote one graffiti artist, "that it can't be run away from." This is, of course, perfectly true. The increasing complexity and diversity of the choices we face in life, coupled with a rapidly changing postmodern society, mean that the easiest course of action when faced with an apparently great problem is to run away. However, the Christian is called to an engagement with, not a retreat from, the world.

Engagement, however, is going to take effort. It is much harder to fight a battle than it is to excuse yourself from one. The word translated "prepared" in the NIV has its root in the idea of being fit. Getting prepared is going to involve us exercising the effort necessary to make sure that we are ready. Opportunities to share our faith should not be lost because we haven't taken the time to think through what we would say. The trouble is, we often don't know how we can say what we think we should.

That is why many Christians have already put their thoughts onto paper to help us in this task. In that sense, authors of books about apologetics should be regarded as personal trainers, to help us develop a spiritual fitness for the questions that will inevitably come our way. These people write books not to put weight on our bookshelves, but to lend weight to our thoughts and hence our conversations. Truly, we need to "stop thinking like children," being like infants in regard to evil while being like adults in our thinking (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Fifthly, the apostle talks of giving an answer for the *reason* for the hope that we have. People believe in all kinds of strange things. One of my colleagues in India loves to tell of the time he worked for the government there. One of the privileges he enjoyed was having a chauffeur-driven car to take him around on official business. In India, as over here, if a black cat crosses your path, it is considered to be bad luck. What was of interest was how each driver dealt with the problem

when it occurred. One of his drivers would stop the car, reverse over the spot where the incident had taken place, and then drive off again, trying to undo what had happened. Another would open the window and spit out of it, trying to curse the curse, if you like, and somehow turn it into a blessing. The third was the most interesting. He would slow down, letting another car overtake him, and with it presumably taking away any bad luck that he had received as a result. You wonder if he was afraid to overtake anyone himself.

We would call these beliefs superstitions. There is no logic or reason behind them. The Apostle Peter, however, is quite clear. Believing that Christ died so that we might be saved is not a superstition. It is not like saying that black cats bring bad luck. Instead there is a reason for the hope that we have; there is a logic, if you like, behind the Gospel; there are reasons that can be communicated and explained concerning the atonement. We must be ready to give an explanation, a defense, of why the Gospel is true.

Given that the lordship of Christ in our own lives is the starting point for giving an apologetic, the Cross is where we are heading. The reason for the hope that we have is the Cross and resurrection. There is no other reason why the Christian has hope, and there is no other reason for our confidence. Any *apologia*, any answer aimed at giving the reason for the hope that we have must therefore lead to or flow from the Cross. We must never lose sight of this fact.

However, at the same time we must recognize that people may have other legitimate questions that need to be dealt with before they are prepared to give us a hearing. If someone believes that Christ was not an historical figure, for example, then we need to establish for them that he was. Such a task is not difficult. It may be that they are convinced that there is no such thing as truth, that it doesn't matter what you believe. Again, we need to help such a person understand why this point of view can't be sustained. Having done this, though, we must recognize that we haven't discharged the Great Commission. We have made a small step—an important and vital step—but still only a small step, in the right direction. And as important as these are, we must remember that the reason we need to deal with these issues is so that we can clear away false ideas so that Christ can be seen for who he is.

Finally, our attitude is vital (1 Peter 3:16). The Christian does not share the Gospel out of a sense of moral superiority. Nor do we treat other people and their convictions with contempt. Instead, what we share is to be shared with gentleness and respect. Arrogance has never been an attractive or admirable quality, and it is all the more offensive when the message that is brought claims to be one of grace and peace. This is not to imply that the Gospel is to be compromised in any way. However, the mode and method of communicating the Gospel must be consistent with—not an obstruction to—the content that we are presenting.

Our confidence does not arise from the fact that we believe that our minds are infallible, or that we know everything. Several years ago, while at a seaside resort, I saw a tea-towel that read “Those of you who think that you know everything, are beginning to annoy those of us who do.” The funny thing is, of course, that the only person who could make such a statement is God! The Christian is not claiming exhaustive knowledge on an infinite subject. Our confidence rests in the reality of the relationship we enjoy with Christ, the change he has brought into our lives and the truthfulness of his claims. Our confidence is not in a system of thought. It is in the person of Christ. That is why the Apostle Paul says, “I know *whom* I have believed,” [emphasis added] and not *what* I have believed.

I am convinced that this is why we are also told that we should keep a clear conscience as we talk to others. We are not called on to pretend we know something when we don't. Nor are we boasting of how great our own minds are, as if we had figured out everything by ourselves. With humility, the fear of God and honesty, we testify to the truth and reality of the Gospel message, that Christ is still alive.

The Gospel promises to change lives. It is no surprise, therefore, that people expect to see lives changed. If our attitude indicates that Christ makes no difference to how we live or how we treat others, we immediately undermine its credibility. Ultimately, our goal is not to win arguments, but to see people come to know Christ.

From Why to How

Having laid a biblical understanding concerning the command to give an apologetic, it then becomes

important to consider how we go about fulfilling it. The temptation with apologetics is to offer set answers to set questions. Undoubtedly, it can be useful to have a structure in mind when dealing with certain issues. However, far more useful is to have an understanding of how we can effectively engage with people at a conversational level.

If we read through any of the Gospels, we see that Jesus spent a lot of time talking with people. In chapter one of John's Gospel, we find a record of Jesus' conversations with the first disciples. In chapter two, water is turned into wine at a wedding, and we read about Jesus' conversations with Mary. Chapter three contains Jesus' well-known conversation with Nicodemus, followed by his conversation with the woman at the well in chapter four. In chapter six, we have a series of conversations recorded between Jesus and his disciples, and in chapter seven Jesus goes to the Feast of the Tabernacles. Again, he is interacting with the groups of people he meets there. It is easy to go on. Clearly Jesus did a lot of other things apart from talking to people. But whether he is talking to individuals, small groups, or large crowds, there is an immediacy and intimacy in what he does.

A while ago I was speaking at a conference on evangelism. An African Bishop was also there. Following his address, the question was raised as to why he thought so many people were becoming Christians in his part of the world, and so few in the West. He didn't even stop to think about his answer. "When you walk around my neighborhood," he replied, "you hear people talking to other people about Jesus—in restaurants, in shops, even in bus queues. While I have been here, however, very few people seem to be doing this."

Hesitating to Join In

Maybe one of the reasons we are uncertain about engaging with some people is that we feel we don't have all the answers. If you ever meet someone who does have all the answers, please let me know. I have some questions for that person myself. The truth is that none of us knows exactly what to say all the time. However, a good apologist does not only think about answers to be given to other people's questions. It also involves thinking about the questions that need to be

raised to other people's answers, or even questions that need to be put to the questioners themselves.

Reading through the four Gospels reveals that Jesus asked well over one hundred questions of his critics and his questioners. Asking a question achieves many different things, but let me outline some things that are important here.

Getting People to Think

First, asking a question forces people to think. Thinking is not the enemy of the Christian faith. We consistently see that Jesus asked questions to make people think about what they were saying. In Luke 18, Jesus is asked the question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question is a good one. On the face of it, this is a perfect question for Jesus to jump straight in and tell him what he should believe. Instead, Jesus decides to ask a question of his own. "Why do you call me good?" he replies. I don't know if you have stopped to consider what went through the man's mind when this reply came back. I am certain it was not a reply that he was expecting; I am equally certain that it caused him to begin thinking. "No one is good but God alone," Jesus continues. However, if no one is good but God alone, and Jesus is good, then it must also follow that Jesus is God. Immediately, Jesus has taken this man to the logical conclusion that must follow from his own admission. It is done quickly and incisively, and there can be no doubt as to the implications that Jesus has spelled out.

Exposing Contradictions

Asking questions can also be a gentler way of exposing contradictions, and this is certainly the case when dealing with relativism. When I was an undergraduate, I was involved in a student support service. We were not allowed to give advice, only to listen and ask people questions. One evening, two young girls arrived at the center, one of whom had slashed her wrists with a razor blade in an attempt to take her own life. As they sat opposite me, the girl whose wrists were beginning to heal over looked at me and said, "There is no such thing as truth. If there was, then I would have a reason to live."

My immediate reaction was to offer my resignation from the service there and then, so that I could proceed to tell her why I thought that this position was philosophically untenable. Instead, I asked her a simple question that I had been asked myself a few years earlier: “You say that there is no such thing as truth—tell me, is that statement true?” It was as if someone turned the lights on in her life. It is correct to conclude that life must be meaningless if there is no such thing as truth. However, the conclusion depends on the assumption made, and in this case, it is what is assumed that must be challenged. Failure to do this will always result in disaster—which is why one thinker defined logic as going wrong with confidence. A faulty starting point will throw everything else out of kilter.

The faulty assumption made is the belief that the claim “everything is relative” can be meaningfully stated. To state that everything is relative is to make an absolute claim. If it is absolute, then it follows that not everything is relative. Literally, nothing has been said. You run into a similar problem if you try to deny that there is such a thing as truth. The statement “There is no such thing as truth” assumes that there is such a thing. What you are in effect saying is “The truth is, there is no such thing as truth.” However, if the statement is true, then there is such a thing as truth. If there is no such thing as truth, then the statement is not true. If it is not true, why believe it? The statement is literally nonsensical, and “nonsense remains nonsense,” said C. S. Lewis, “even if you talk it about God!”

Defining the Issue

Frequently as Christians, we want to jump in with answers to questions without really thinking about the assumptions in people’s minds concerning the issue at hand. In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked whether it is right to pay taxes to Caesar or not. If someone asked you today whether you thought Christians should pay their taxes or not, the answer you would give, I’m sure, would be “yes.” Why is it, then, that in Matthew 22, instead of giving a one-word answer, Jesus again asks a series of questions of his own? The reason is that the issue of paying taxes had become clouded in the minds of the people in Jesus’ day. As a matter of fact, Jesus knows that the question is a trap.

Israel was under occupation by the Romans, who were regarded by the Jews as the evil oppressors. To pay taxes, and certainly to collect them, was seen to be strengthening the hand of the enemy. Was not Israel God’s chosen people? Was this not their land? Surely to help the Romans was to go against God himself. In the minds of the listeners, if Jesus is going to be on God’s side, he is expected to say no. If he says no, it will get back to the authorities, and he will be arrested—which is what the questioners want. If he says yes, then he will lose the respect of the people. As far as the questioners are concerned, it is a win/win situation.

Jesus however asks for a coin. “Whose portrait is this?” He asks. “Whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they reply. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,” Jesus answers.

Do you see what has happened? Jesus has redefined the issue at hand. Yes, pay your taxes, he says, but he answers in such a way as to make sure that no one misunderstands what he is saying. He has not only answered the question, but also the sentiment and prejudice that lay behind the question. Frequently, as Christians, we think we have discharged our obligation to communicate the Gospel by answering questions put to us, without attempting to disarm what lies behind the question.

Let’s take a contemporary example with a lot of feeling behind it, the question of abortion. The temptation again is to rush in with answers, when really we should first of all be thinking about questions to help the situation along. The way that the issue is normally phrased is in terms of choice—does a woman have the right to choose what happens to her own body? The question, when phrased this way, seems to allow only one answer—yes, she does have the right to choose.

However, it is actually the wrong starting question. The first question is not about choice, it is about how to define life. If you were to ask the question, “When does someone have the right to terminate an innocent person’s life?” the answer from most people would be never. The primary question, therefore, is not one of choice, but how do you define life? Is what is in the womb a human life or not? If it is a human life, should it be protected? If it is not a human life, what is wrong in terminating it? Many people define life pragmatically in terms of what we do, and the fetus

doesn't really do much. For the Christian, however, life is defined, essentially, on the basis of who we are. To answer the question of choice without first raising the issue about how to define life is to fall into a trap by failing to effectively communicate with the people listening.

Giving the right answer does not rectify the problem of asking the wrong question. The question must first be reformulated before any answer can be given.

There is much more that can be said and written on this topic. Indeed, it already has. Let us listen carefully to what is being asked, and then get as much help as we can to effectively share that which has changed our lives.

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