

Tactics for Talking About Christianity

Discussion Questions:

1. For each person, list out any 5 topics about which you feel you have a pretty decent understanding about. Now list out any 5 topics which you feel you don't have a clue about.

2. Now share all the topics as a group and pick 2 or 3 topics that you think on average, your group understands. Pick out 2-3 topics that, generally, your group is clueless about.

I. BEFORE ENGAGING IN A CONVERSATION ABOUT FAITH...

- A. Remember, no matter the point of view, a person who holds that view should be able to offer good reasons for that view.
- B. Many Christians feel ill-equipped to handle certain topics of personalities...
- C. Many people (both Christians and non-Christians) are wary of "salesmen" or pushy people...
- D. The point is to share the good news of Jesus Christ out of love for others, joy that we've found something wonderful to share, and humility in serving them.
- E. So I recommend to engage in a conversation with the following goals:
 1. Express genuine love and interest
 2. Demonstrate intellectual humility and charity
 3. Develop a familiarity with both the person and the issues
 4. Engage the person in a conversation, not a speech
 5. Do this by seeking to gain an understanding of the other person's views and reasons.
 6. Let them share their beliefs and their reasons before you get too far into your own views.
 7. Earn the right to share by listening carefully to them.
 8. Learn from them, even if you disagree with their views.

II. ASK QUESTIONS BEFORE MAKING ARGUMENTS

- A. Greg Koukl suggests using the “Columbo tactic”¹, or a form of the Socratic method in which you ask questions. Asking questions can be a fun, non-threatening, and productive conversation tool.
- B. *Once developed, the habit of asking questions will inevitably give you advantages in every setting. [Including leading small group discussions, counseling a person with a problem, or being a good friend & listener.] You will obviously leave most situations with more information (and friends) than when you arrived, and being an asker allows you control of situations that statement-makers rarely achieve. Once you learn how to guide a conversation, you have also learned how to control it.*²
- C. Perhaps most importantly, asking questions accomplishes 3 goals:
 - 1. It’s an opportunity to express genuine interest and love.
 - 2. You can information about the topic, the person’s views on the topic, and the person’s background.
 - 3. Tactically, it also shifts the attention and burden of proof to the other person.
- D. Three questions which I use often (along with Koukl and others) are
 - 1. What do you mean by that?
 - 2. How did you come to that conclusion?
 - 3. Have you ever considered...?

With these three questions you can engage in almost any conversation, even with topics you don’t know much about.

III. What do you mean by that?

- A. Sometimes the best way to engage in a conversation about faith is after another person asserts a position. Do this in a way that shows your genuine interest (don’t fake it) and lets them drive the conversation.
- B. But even though they are driving the conversation, you’re actually guiding it with your questions, your interest, and your attention.
- C. It’s been said that people don’t care what you believe until they believe that you care. There’s some wisdom in that for conversations about faith and Christianity. Every conversation you have should always be “full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone,” (Col. 4:6, NIV).
- D. Examples:
 - 1. What do you mean that all religions basically teach the same thing?
 - 2. What do you mean that science is incompatible with faith?
 - 3. What do you mean that evolution is a fact?
 - 4. What sorts of mistakes in the Bible are you thinking of?

¹ Gregory Koukl, “Tactics: Applying Apologetics to Everyday Life” from *To Everyone An Answer*, InterVarsity Press, 2004, pp.47-56. *I have used a similar tactic in my own conversations. You might find it helpful to read this concise chapter. But in my view, Koukl can come off a bit confrontational, and this chapter may seem that way, especially to a non-Christian.*

² Hugh Hewitt, *In, but Not Of*, cited in “Tactics: Applying Apologetics” by Koukl.

IV. How did you come to that conclusion?

- A. This probes deeper into why they think that way. Frankly, many people hold views that they actually thought about. Christians and non-Christians often do this.
- B. You also once again shift the burden of proof or demonstration to the other person.
- C. In doing this, you understand the other person more, where he/she is coming from. You may also begin to see places where you can ask more questions. You may ever begin to spot a mistake or error in their thinking.
- D. Note: I do not try to listen to people to spot mistakes. (That's what a debate is for. It's always easier to attack another person's position than it is to positively state your own.) But in my sincere interest to learn about the other's viewpoint, inevitably I have questions because something doesn't seem to click or logically follow...
- E. Examples:
 - 1. Why do you think that religious and moral views should be kept separate from the public sphere?
 - 2. How did you come to believe that all religions teach the same thing?
 - 3. Why do you think that evolution is a fact?
 - 4. What led you to believe the Bible is full of myths and mistakes?

V. Have you ever considered...?

- A. After you've listen to the other person, perhaps over multiple conversations, you can ask a question that raises another point.
- B. This is often more effective than asserting a counter point.
- C. Examples:
 - 1. Have you considered the moral view of keeping religion out of the public sphere?
 - 2. Have you had a chance to read some articles on the Bible's reliability?