



WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Practical Discussions for
Personal Evangelism

INTRODUCTION

On the first day as Priest-in-Charge of a parish I had a phone call from a lady whose husband was dying from cancer. The gist of the conversation was that he was afraid, wanted someone to talk with about the assurance of heaven and eternal life. He has only a few days to live. What would you have said to him?

This is not an isolated case. Recently I spoke to a lady in her nineties who, despite her doubts and atheistic upbringing, was convinced that there was something more to life. There had to be meaning somewhere. All of us at some time come across someone who is either dying, or going through a soul-searching. The opportunity can arise at any time!

I have been blessed to teach Scripture in various primary schools for over twenty years. That would be in excess of 1500 children for half an hour each week over roughly 30 weeks of each year. Those students come with doubts and profound questions, mirroring the same sorts of questions that adults often ask. I have recently been teaching a syllabus called "Big Questions" to sixth grade. It involves leaving a question box in the classroom during the week, and tackling some of those questions when I arrive for the lesson. "Who made God?" "What about the dinosaurs?" "How can we be sure that the Bible is true?" "How can God guide us?" "What does God look like?" "If God knows the future why did he create Adam and Eve, knowing they would do the wrong thing?" "Why does God allow evil things to happen?" "Is there a hell?" I don't have the whole half-hour to answer these things and the answers cannot be too complex. A well thought out answer can be given in a minute or two, but this approach, which we call *Apologetics*, is only part of what I want to get across. I want these children to know how to enter into and maintain a meaningful relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. Although I have all year to do so, I want them to know how that can be done within the first five weeks so that I can build upon and reinforce that understanding over the year.

That is fine in school, but in everyday life we do not usually have that sort of time. So I ask again, "What would you say?" How much does a person need to understand to become a Christian? What information and explanation do you need to give, as a minimum, to the person seeking answers?

Can you think of conversations you have had?

What was helpful or unhelpful in the way you conducted them?

THINKING ABOUT SOME FAQs

What short answers might you give to the following? Choose as many as you wish to answer and add any others you would find useful to discuss.

REMEMBER YOU DON'T WANT TO BE ARGUMENTATIVE!

ANSWER gently.

PRAY silently before you open your mouth ...

"Who made God?"

"What about the dinosaurs / evolution?"

"How can we be sure that the Bible is true?" "Isn't it just fairy tales?"

"What proofs do you have?"

"How do we know the Gospels haven't just been altered along the way?"

"How can God guide us?"

"What does God look like?"

"If God knows the future why did he create Adam and Eve, knowing they would do the wrong thing?"

"Why does God allow evil things to happen?"

"Is there a hell?"

"Why should I follow Christianity when it's caused so much trouble in the world?"

"Why should I believe in a god I can't see and doesn't answer my prayers?"

Finish with a prayer time for people you have identified as those you want to share the gospel with.

Continue to pray each day that God will fill you with his Spirit so that you can be in the right place at the right time to share the gospel with someone.

Remember. Your part is to share. In that is success.

It is job of God's Spirit to convict. **John 16:7-14**



SESSION 6 – POCKET APOLOGETICS

Start by sharing any encounters you have had in sharing the gospel. Any things you have learned or been challenged about in the past weeks. Apologetics is all about explaining to people some of the questions that they have about life, God and Christianity. Very often it is about answering the doubts people have.

Notes:

- You don't have to know everything. You can say, "I will try to find out."
- Don't be superior. Be gentle.
- "That's interesting" or "I've not heard that before" is often better than outright contradiction.
- You don't have to win this battle. You don't want a battle. You want to keep a friend if it is in your power to do so.
- You don't have to explain the whole counsel of God, or pontificate for too long.
- Listen, pray and show true concern for the person you are talking to.

Comments like these can keep the conversation open and friendly,
"Look I can understand that you might feel that way / think that.
Many people do."

"I have found that..."

"I read in the Bible a while ago... How do you understand that"

"This is what I've read / been told by ... (some authority).

"Christians believe that..."

Finishing any explanation with,

"What do you think?" helps the conversation to continue.

Sometimes you will come across angry and disagreeable people and at such times it is better to disengage with something like,

"I'm sorry you feel that way. I don't mean to make you angry. Do you want to talk about this another time? Why does the subject make you so angry?"

You may have been thinking, "Well that's all right for him. He's recognised as a minister and people ask him about Christianity. Where do I find people like that to talk to?" So as well as asking, "What do you say?" we also need to ask, "Where do I find the opportunity to say it?"

We are recognising more and more that people do not come to church in the way that they used to. There are many reasons which involve time-poor people, many distractions, the image of the church, past hurts, scepticism, competition with other media, shortened attention spans and so on. Often, when people do come, they simply don't relate to what happens in our usual services. At one time people flocked to the Billy Graham Crusades and were converted on the spot. These days it *usually* takes time for the message to get across through developing a personal friendship with people.

In answering the questions, "What do I say?" and "Where do I find the opportunity to say it?" we turn to Scripture for some guidelines, drawing on both Jesus, and the preaching and activity of the early church in Acts.

The sessions will take the following form and may be spread over two weeks if necessary:

1 The Content of the gospel

2 Presenting the gospel in-group.

3 The power of personal stories.

4 Presenting your own story.

5 Where do we find people?

6 Guidelines for pocket-sized apologetics

1 Peter 3:15 *but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.*



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SESSION 1 – THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL

What do people most need to know when it comes to explaining the gospel?
How much information is enough to be able to make a decision to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Read the following passages and make some notes...

What were the facts that Peter gave the enquirers

Acts 2:32-42

Acts 3:17-21

What differences do you see with Paul's preaching to the Jews and then to the Gentiles in **Acts 13:26-39**

and 17:22-34?

Reading the above passages may suggest that we need to ascertain where a person stands before explaining the gospel. If there is no knowledge at all, we may need to start with Genesis, The Good Creation and the Fall.

It is important to *listen* carefully and *not get into an argument*.

Introducing a Bible and asking them to work out the meaning is usually better than you explaining the verses to them...

Have you ever had any sort of spiritual experience? Answer to prayer?

Have you ever been to church?

What did you think of it?

So what do you believe?

What do you think about Jesus?

What do think the purpose of life is?

Do you ever wonder about what will happen after you die?

What do you think it takes to get into heaven?

If what you are saying doesn't square up with the Bible/Christian teaching, would you want to know?

Can I show you a verse in the Bible (they read it aloud)?

What do you think that means? Do you believe it?

What is it that stops you from believing?

Having heard all you are going through, I find it makes a difference to ask for God's help. Would you like me to pray for you?

Share any other discussion starters that you have come across.

What do you think you have to be careful of when entering into discussion?

1 Peter 3:14-16

In John 1:41-46 what was Philip's approach?

THINK ABOUT who you might get to know better or engage in conversation this week. Spend time praying together that God's Spirit might open up opportunities for sharing the gospel with someone this week.

THINK ABOUT (for next week) questions that people often ask.

What spiritual truths does Jesus impart to her?

What is the result?

We recognise that we have to develop trust before someone will really listen to us, so...

Where do you meet unbelievers from week to week?

If you don't, how could you get to know unbelievers?

It is important that we don't only befriend people in order to convert them. Friendship needs to be genuine, so you will need to find people you relate to or who share your interests.

Having said that your love and care for others should include explaining to them, at some stage, the Good News, which can help and transform them in all the best ways.

So how do you bring Jesus into the conversation?

Here are some leading questions, which you don't have to use in any particular order, but may be slipped into the conversation as the opportunity arises.

Gospel in a nutshell:-

Acts 16:29-31,

John 3:16,

John 5:24 What does 'believe' mean here?

Here are a series of verses that could be used in presenting a basic gospel message.

What would your comment be on each verse if you were explaining them to an enquirer?

Genesis 1:26 and 31

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

John 3:16

How would you explain that "you must be born from above in **John 3:7**?

Romans 5:8

Ephesians 2:8-9

John 5:24

FOR NEXT SESSION:-

Prepare a short gospel presentation that you would give to someone enquiring about what he or she needs to do to be sure of going to heaven. Be prepared to give this to the group or in pairs or threes.

Think about what questions you might ask an enquirer before you begin your explanation.



SESSION 2 – PRESENTING THE GOSPEL

(Note If you feel too uncomfortable giving your own presentation you can pass. You can be an observer or listener)

Someone asks you, “What do I have to do to become a Christian?” or “I’m afraid of what is going to happen to me when I die. What do I do?”

It is often wise to start by asking them what they *do* believe.

A classic question to ask is, “If you were to stand before God and he asked you, ‘Why should I allow you in to heaven?’ what would you say?” The answer will reveal much, usually about their understanding of grace...

(Ephesians 2:8-9).

For people who have no biblical understanding at all (someone from another culture, but increasingly from our own culture) you may have to go back to the beginning of the Bible. At other times you may have to give an assurance that they are accepted by God’s grace through their trust in Jesus Christ.

I have found that a helpful explanation surrounds the word FAITH.

FAITH comprises three aspects...

KNOWLEDGE (you must know what and whom you are believing)

BELIEF (this is the assent you make in your mind)

TRUST (this is the commitment you make of yourself to Christ)

Some Christian people object to the reducing of the Christian Faith to a formula. (Say the right words and you are in). So it is important to note in any explanation of the Faith, that Christianity is primarily about entering into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, belonging to the Kingdom and being part of The Family. That relationship acknowledges Jesus as Master and as the one who died for us on the cross, rose again and ascended into heaven. This acknowledgement is evidenced in a desire to please God and to follow Jesus (even though we often fail).

There are many Christian people who have been brought up in this Faith and have always believed these things, but cannot point to a particular point at which they made a decision. They have just felt that they always belonged. Others need to formalise their commitment through such as adult baptism or Confirmation, or by simply making a firm commitment or recommitment



SESSION 5 – WHERE DO WE FIND PEOPLE WHO WANT TO HEAR THE GOSPEL?

Read John 4

Jesus seems to just come across the Samaritan woman as he is travelling through the region.

What might this suggest about where we can find people?

How does Jesus engage her in conversation at the start?

What cultural norms does he transgress?

How does the conversation turn towards spiritual matters?

How much is it down to Jesus guiding the conversation, and how much is it down to the woman’s curiosity?

What do her needs appear to be?



SESSION 4 – PRESENTING YOUR OWN STORY

Note: If you are unclear about your own faith, you might like to tell of where you are up to now in your understanding of the faith, doubts, highs and lows and so on. If you feel too uncomfortable presenting your own story you can pass in the expectation that listening to others may help you.

As with presenting the gospel outline, share your faith story with the whole group, or in threes or in pairs.

Afterwards:

What did you gain from listening to the story of others?

What were the advantages of giving your own story?

Was there anything you would do differently next time?

to Christ. Either way people sometimes need clarification of the elements of the faith or assurance that they really do belong to Christ and are going to heaven.

Using your prepared gospel outline you may,

1 In a small group, share it with the whole group as if they were a group of enquirers

OR 2 Share in groups of three where one is the enquirer, one explains and the third observes and takes notes. Rotate roles until all have had a turn and finish the session as a group with any observations.

OR 3 Just share in pairs.

Afterwards discuss...

How easy was the session?

What were the strong points in each presentation?

What are the things we may have to watch out for when explaining the gospel to someone?



SESSION 3 – THE POWER OF STORIES

Read **Acts 22:1-29** and **Acts 24:10-26**

Who is Paul addressing in each case?

What points does he emphasise?

What is the result?

How is he received in each case?

Can you recall other people's faith stories which have challenged or helped you over the years?

SHARING YOUR OWN STORY

Imagine you have just five minutes...

Clarify *why* you would tell your own story and what would you be hoping to *achieve* in telling it?

In sharing your own faith story, what sort of things do you think you should include?

What sorts of things should you leave out?

What might be the dangers in talking about yourself?

FOR NEXT WEEK

Prepare a five minute explanation of your faith journey for presentation next week