

# Understanding Christian Apologetics

## Lesson 5: Directing the Conversation

### I. Using Leading Questions<sup>1</sup>

- A. Depending on your goal, it is often best to use questions to direct the conversation in the way you want it to go
1. Asking questions can be a helpful way of trying to win a person over to your point of view without giving the impression that you are trying to force your views on them
  2. Note, however, that a more direct approach is sometimes better when you are speaking in front of others with someone who is not likely to be persuaded of your view

- B. Example: using leading questions to explain your position:

*Do you believe people should be punished when they break the law? Have you ever broken God's law? Where does that put you with God? Christianity brings good news because it announces how God has provided a way to uphold his justice and forgive us of our sins.*

- C. Example: using leading questions to set the terms of the conversation:

“When someone asks for your personal views about a controversial issue, preface your remarks with a question that sets the stage — in your favor — for your response. Say, ‘You know, this is actually a very personal question you’re asking. I don’t mind answering, but before I do, I want to know if it’s safe to offer my views. So let me ask you a question: Do you consider yourself a tolerant person or an intolerant person on issues like this? Is it safe to give my opinion, or are you going to judge me for my point of view? Do you respect different points of view, or do you condemn others for convictions that differ from your own.’... This line of questioning trades on an important bit of knowledge: There is no neutral ground when it comes to the tolerance question. Everyone has a point of view she thinks is right, and everybody passes judgment at some point or another. The Christian gets pigeonholed as the judgmental one, but

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<sup>1</sup> This section is a summary of chapter 5 of Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

everyone else is judging, too, even people who consider themselves relativists.”<sup>2</sup>

- D. Example: using leading questions to exploit a weak argument (you can identify weaknesses by asking yourself if the person’s conclusion is justified by the evidence he gives):

If someone says, ‘Science proves that miracles don’t happen’, respond by asking, “would you please explain to me exactly how the methods of science have disproved the possibility of supernatural events?”<sup>3</sup>

- E. Innocent as doves (Mt. 10:16)

1. “we should be clever in our approach, yet remain innocent in our appearance.”<sup>4</sup>
2. Preface your challenge with the phrase, “Have you considered...”
3. Phrase your concern as a request for clarification (“Can you help me understand this?”)
4. Other options: “Let me suggest an alternative. Tell me what you think of this.”; “I’m not sure I agree. Think about this.”

- F. Narrating the debate

1. When your opponent tries to dodge your questions, stop and narrate what has happened
2. “I want you to notice what has just happened. First you made a fairly controversial statement, and I asked you a couple of questions about it. So far, you haven’t answered them. Instead, you have taken off in another direction. Before we move on to a new topic, would it be okay with you if we finish the old one? I’m

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<sup>2</sup> Koukl, 77-78. See Koukl’s other example on pp. 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> Koukl, 81.

<sup>4</sup> Koukl, 84.

really interested in your response.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. Preparing for Conversations about Spiritual Matters<sup>6</sup>

### A. Anticipate

1. Consider the various topics that might come up about your convictions
2. Brainstorm potential objections people have to the Christian faith
3. Think about ways to direct a conversation in which these objections come up

### B. Reflect

1. After you have a conversation, think through how it went and consider things you could have done differently
2. Knowledge — Did you have enough information about the topic? Are there areas where you need to do some studying?
3. Wisdom — Were there better questions you could have asked? Did you make any missteps?
4. Character — Was your manner attractive and gracious?

### C. Practice

1. Put the questions that you might have posed in words and say them out loud or write them out
2. Formulate responses to ideas that you hear expressed on television or elsewhere (see example on pp.94-95)

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<sup>5</sup> Koukl, 87.

<sup>6</sup> This section is a summary of chapter 6 of Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.

D. Dealing with challenges in conversations

1. If you see that the person is trying to use questions to make his point and you feel like you are being manipulated or led into a trap, simply ask him to state his point directly instead
2. If someone makes an assertion that is disguised as a question, ask them to make the implicit assertion explicit
  - a) “What gives you the right to say someone else’s religion is wrong?” is not really a question but an assertion that is intended to shut down your argument
  - b) Respond by asking them to clarify: Are you asking what my credentials are? If not, then it seems like you are not really asking a question but making a statement. Could you rephrase it as such?
  - c) It should become clear that the person is essentially saying, ‘It is wrong to say that somebody else is wrong’, which is a contradictory statement