

Colossians 4:5–6

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

Can you describe a time when, while talking to an unbeliever, you felt unprepared to share the gospel?

A reason that we avoid talking with people about the Lord is the fear of being put on the spot. When we're thrust into the hot seat—if we don't have all the answers—we suddenly feel awkward, insecure, and even ashamed that we weren't more prepared. So, we shy away from those conversations to avoid losing our credibility all at once.

The 10 Second Window

Here are a couple examples of uncomfortable conversations in which you might find yourself. What would be your instinctive response to each situation?

1. You're having dinner with some close friends when one of them says, “I don't believe in God anymore. It's not rational. There's not any proof.” You had no idea that they had been thinking this way. How do you respond?

2. Someone new comes to church, and you and some friends talk with her after the sermon. She says, “Who are we to say that Christianity is better than any other religion? I think the essence of Jesus’ teaching is love, the same as all religions. It’s not our job to tell other people how to live or believe.” The rest of your friends fidget awkwardly. What do you say?

Teachers, here are a couple other situations that you can pose to your class:

3. *You’re sitting at a coffeeshop, when a person sitting near you notices the Bible on the table. “I’ve read the Bible before,” he says. “It’s got some interesting stories, but people take it too seriously. After all, it was written by men, and men make mistakes.” Where do you take the conversation?*
4. *While you’re waiting at the doctor’s office, you notice the TV. A news station is highlighting some religious groups that are trying to influence important moral legislation. A man sitting across from you says, “Haven’t those people ever heard of separation of church and state? Those Christians are always trying to force their views on everyone else. Why don’t they just leave the rest of us alone?”*

***I would not recommend** that you use the beginning of class to have your students share their responses to these situations. These are examples to get them thinking. At the end of the lesson, however, are included some potential solutions. If you have time, feel free to discuss the various responses at the end of class.*

In these types of situations, **you have about ten seconds** before you miss your opportunity to start a conversation. While you probably want to say something, you also want to be sensitive, keep the peace, preserve friendships, and not look extreme. You’re conflicted.

Jesus in action

In **Luke 20**, we find Jesus in these types of situations. “The chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him (Jesus), and could not find what they might do” (**Luke 19:47-48**). So instead of trying to kill Jesus, they try to destroy His reputation by bringing up controversial topics.

1. They ask Jesus, “Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? Or who is he that gave thee this authority?” (Luke 20:2)
2. How does Jesus respond to the question about His authority? (Luke 20:3-4) He asks a question: “The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?”
3. What does Jesus’ response reveal to the religious leaders? Jesus’ question reveals that the religious leaders were hypocrites that don’t care for the people they lead or the truth. Jesus shows them that they only care about their own security.
4. Later, when the leaders ask Jesus about whether Caesar’s taxes are fair, how does Jesus respond? (Luke 20:23-25)

5. Why do you think Jesus’ words cause the religious leaders to hold their peace? (Luke 20:26)

Once again, an attempt to trap Jesus has failed . . . A final point emerges from the drama: Jesus looks to be wiser than the leadership. He knows God’s way; they do not. - Darrell L. Bock

6. Then after answering a question about the resurrection, what question does Jesus Himself ask? (Luke 20:41-43) How say they (the religious leaders) that Christ is David's son?
7. What is Jesus' point in asking a question that even the religious leaders cannot answer? (Luke 20:45-47)

Instead of falling into the religious leaders' word traps, Jesus directed the conversation with questions. By doing so, Jesus not only satisfied the religious leaders, He also communicated truth to the many onlookers. In fact, questions are a pattern of Jesus' ministry to the lost. After healing the paralyzed man, Jesus asks the Pharisees "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?" (Luke 5:23). Later, He asks them again, "Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil?" (Luke 6:9) Then He asks the rich young ruler, "Why callest thou me good?" (Luke 18:19).

Over the next three weeks, we are going to learn three easy questions you can use like Jesus. The first question will help you initiate a conversation and gather information about who you're talking with. By asking, "What do you mean by that?" you can start the process of directing a person toward the truth.

Have you ever seen the old detective show Columbo? In the show, a bumbling, disheveled detective consistently solves cases by getting information out of the unsuspecting culprits. No one expects anything from the sloppy guy in the oversized coat, who says, "I've got a problem. You seem like an intelligent person. Do you mind if I ask you a question?" And eventually the criminals give Columbo the answer to the crime.

Tactic 1 - “What do you mean by that?”

1. What is your biggest fear when it comes to sharing your faith?

When someone says something controversial, often there is an opportunity for you to turn the conversation toward the gospel. Use the ten-second window to your advantage and ask, **“What do you mean by that?”**

2. What are the advantages of asking people to explain what they mean?

This question is a friendly, flattering way to begin a conversation. The answers will give you an education. It starts a conversation without being “pushy,” and it allows you to escape if they start accusing you—you can say “Wait, I never said what I believe.” Most importantly, asking people to explain what they mean allows you to direct the conversation.

Asking this question is extremely valuable. You will immediately engage them and begin gathering information to better help you later. You don’t want to misunderstand them, and you certainly don’t want to misrepresent them. Remember, God’s servants are “*in meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves” (2 Timothy 2:25). Jesus has the answer to their deep questions, but we need to know what their questions are before we give them the answers.

The best opportunities to ask, “What do you mean by that?” are when people say something vague (“Everything is relative”) or complex (“You don’t need God to be a good person”). What they say may be confusing to you because they are actually confused. But even if you think you know exactly what a person is saying, ask them what they mean anyway.

3. Give an example of something an unbeliever may say to which you can respond, “What do you mean by that?”

Why do we ask?

Remember our goal from last week’s lesson: **we want to put a stone in someone’s shoe**. Eventually, by His grace, they may accept God’s offer of salvation, but we are called to plant and water as God gives the increase. We also want our neighbors to consider hearing the gospel before rejecting it. In the end, we are not responsible for their choice. We simply need to give them the truth.

What is another way you could phrase the question, “What do you mean by that”?

From your interactions this past week, can you think of someone you could have asked this question (even if you don’t know their name)?

This lesson was adapted from Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions by Gregory Koukl, Chapter 3 “Getting in the Driver’s Seat: The Columbo Tactic.”

Potential Solutions to “10 Second Window” Situations

Teachers, here are some “answers” to the questions we posed at the beginning of class. Each is a variation of the question “What do you mean by that?” In fact, all the statements could be answered with the question as-is. But with a little creativity, anyone could adapt it to fit the situation.

- 1. Your friend says, “I don’t believe in God anymore. It’s not rational. There’s not any proof.” **You could respond with, “What is irrational about believing in God?”***
- 2. The church visitor says, “Who are we to say that Christianity is better than any other religion? I think the essence of Jesus’ teaching is love, the same as all religions. It’s not our job to tell other people how to live or believe.” **You could respond with, “What do you mean? Isn’t telling people to love the same as telling them how to live?”***
- 3. The man at the coffeeshop says, “The Bible’s got some interesting stories, but people take it too seriously. After all, it was written by men, and men make mistakes.” **You could respond with, “Could you clarify yourself? Are you saying that we should never trust the things men write?”***
- 4. The man in the waiting room says, “Haven’t Christians ever heard of separation of church and state? They’re always trying to force their views on everyone else. Why don’t they just leave the rest of us alone?” **You could respond with, “What is the problem with trying to convince other people of your perspective? Isn’t that what you are doing whenever you vote?”***