

Gospel
INFLUENCE 2.0
ASKING INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS



(Theme Slide)



It is time for annual reviews for the staff.

-- As I was thinking about my self-review, I thought back to a review I had many years ago.

-- The growth point was in my ministry of evangelism, in being a witness of the Good News of Jesus.

-- I remember being a bit defensive and saying something along the lines of, "I am trying to make the most of the opportunities God gives me. He just hasn't seemed to open the door for me very often."

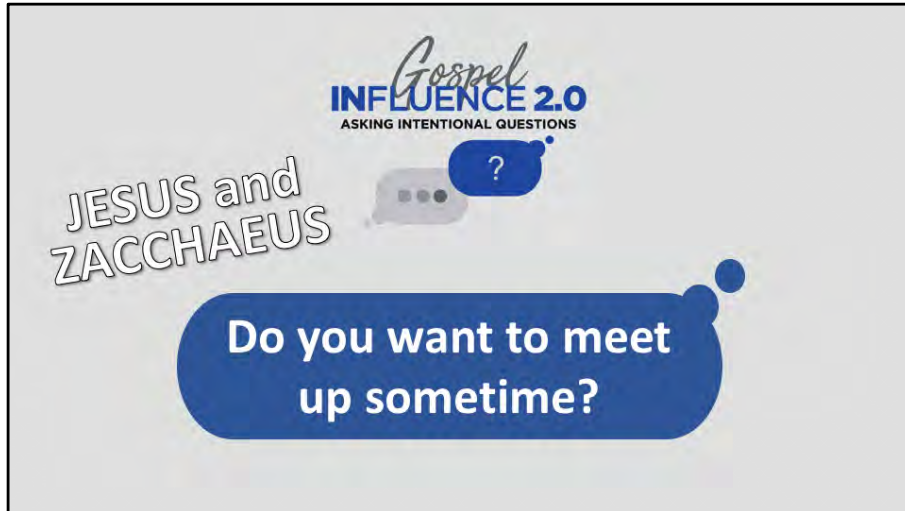
TR: The gentle, but firm response I received still challenges me, even today.



One of our founding elders, Enoch Olson, sought to spur me on.
-- He was and is a gifted evangelist.
-- Though it is culturally insensitive today, back then people said that he could sell ice cubes to Eskimos.
-- His challenge wasn't that I soar to heights, like someone who has the spiritual gift of an evangelist . . .
-- . . . but that I would at least PUSH THE BUTTON and get on the elevator.
-- I don't remember Enoch using that word picture, but it sure fits.
-- He graciously suggested that the reason I wasn't going up, was because I was not INTENTIONALLY pushing the button.
-- And, as someone who has stood with a group in front of the elevator doors, finally realizing that no one had push the button . . . I want us today to L-evate our Making the Most of

Every Opportunity God gives us for His glory and others' good.

TR: The past several weeks, we've been considering the intentional questions of . . .



. . . Gospel Influence 2.0.

-- We have parked on biblical passages that address and model this challenge.

-- We learned from . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Then Patrick Shea helped us to learn from . . .

Gospel INFLUENCE 2.0
ASKING INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

PHILIP and the
ETHIOPIAN
EUNUCH

What are you paying attention
to most these days and how
do you understand it?

... READ SLIDE

TR: Last week, we considered John 4's account of ...

Gospel
INFLUENCE 2.0
ASKING INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

JESUS and the
WOMAN AT
THE WELL

What are you thirsting for most
in life? And where are you
going to satisfy that thirst?

... READ SLIDE

TR: And, today, I want us to go with ...



. . . the Apostle Paul to Mars Hill, also called the Areopagus, and do a Spirit-led self review of whether we have L-evated our INfluence by asking . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Dr. Luke, writing his historical sequel to his Gospel account, tells us how the Good News of Jesus spread through the ministry of the early church.



In Acts 17 we find Paul in Athens, with its famous acropolis in much better condition than it is today.

TR: Let's consider how this passage of God's truth can help us elevate our witness . . . the common W of healthy that is weakest for most of us.



To get off the ground floor, we need to intentionally push the button for L1 . . . READ SLIDE

TR: In our Bibles we read in verse 16 . . .

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, **his spirit was provoked within him as he saw** that the city was full of idols.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- As Paul was waiting for his traveling companions to arrive, he **LOOKED** around.
- According to Pausanius, who visited Athens 50 years later, he said that it was easier to meet a god or goddess than a man.
- The population was about 10,000 but the numbers of statues of gods was about 30,000 (Hughes, p. 230)
- These were “spiritual” people, but what provoked Paul was that they followed **IDOLS**.

TR: Paul LOOKED for how God was preparing hearts, because he understood what he shared down in verse 26

Acts 17:26-27a

And (God) made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷**that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- We need to LOOK because God is preparing hearts.
- God is setting up divine appointments and seemingly chance connections that are not by chance but by His choice.
- For us to LOOK we must be PRAYERFULLY INTENTIONAL.
- For us to LOOK we must ask God to give us COMPASSION for the lost.
- Jesus is not with the 99 but with the one.
- My review back then said that it was not enough to be willing to make the most of the opportunities . . . I was to LOOK for them.
- Is it part of our regular, even daily, prayers that God give us an opportunity?

-- If not, then all we are doing is standing in front of the doors without hitting the button.

TR: Gospel INfluence 2.0 recognizes that there is more floors as we L-evate.



The second, or L2, floor is where we . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Again, Paul models this as seen in verse 18.

Acts 17:18

Some of the **Epicurean** and **Stoic** philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

ESV

Luke records what some of the people Paul spoke with believed.

-- Paul had to have LISTENED to them in order to know that.

-- READ SLIDE

-- Epicureans = everything happens by chance and death is the end (extinction). There are gods but they have nothing to do with this world. Practical agnostics who believed the chief end of man is pleasure.

-- Stoics = pantheists who believe in a "world soul." Everything is god and whatever happened was destiny. Sought to live with apathy and detachment – a fatalistic resignation (Hughes, p. 231)

TR: Paul LISTENED and understood something of their worldviews, and then down in v. 22, after being brought up to the Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, Paul said . . .

Acts 17:22-23

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I **perceive that in every way you are very religious.** ²³For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

ESV

... as we read ... **READ SLIDE**

-- Paul understood that difference between addressing Jews and devout people (in verse 17) and then the philosophers in verse 18.

-- He **BEGAN WHERE THEY WERE AT.**

-- People rarely come to Christ the first time they hear of Him.

-- Some studies say it takes at least 6 exposures.

-- Other studies I've heard of point to people needing to meet multiple true Christians in order to decide to follow Jesus.

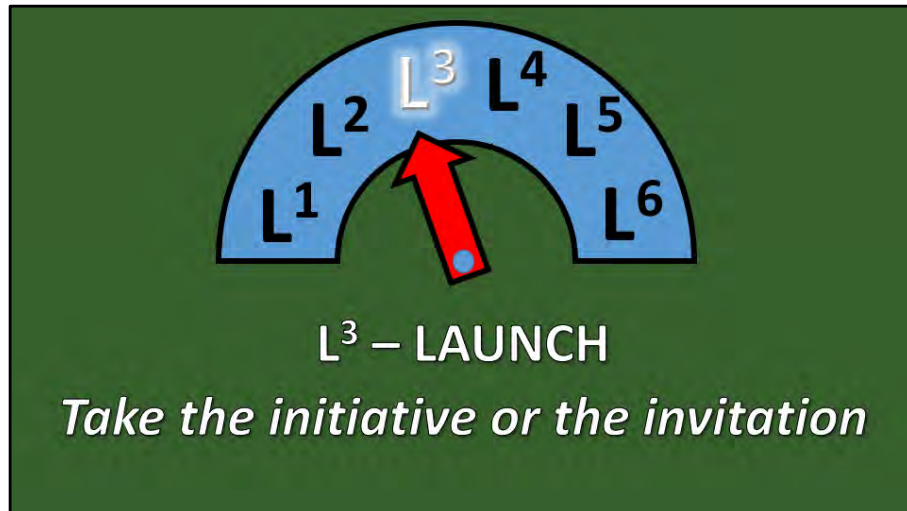
-- Do we even know what those whom God has placed on our hearts even believe?

-- If it takes **COMPASSION** to reach the L1 level, it takes **CURIOSITY** to make it to L2.

-- CF the missionary, Don Richardson, who couldn't effectively share about Jesus until he learned about **THE PEACE CHILD**.

***** In 1962, Don and Carol Richardson risked their lives to share the gospel with the Sawi people of New Guinea. Peace Child told their unforgettable story of living among these headhunting cannibals who valued treachery through fattening victims with friendship before the slaughter. God gave Don and Carol the key to the Sawi hearts via a redemptive analogy from their own mythology. The peace child became the secret to unlocking a value system that existed through generations over centuries, possibly millenniums, of time.***

TR: So far, most of us find this review of our WITNESS to be OK. . . . but it gets uncomfortable to go to L3.



We can LOOK and we can LISTEN, but at some point we must LAUNCH.

-- We need to either take the initiative to turn the conversation, or perhaps accept the invitation to address others' questions.

TR: Elsewhere, Paul asks others to pray for his boldness. When I found out that an evangelist like Enoch Olson prayed for boldness, I thought I too had ought to start.

Acts 17:17

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

ESV

Paul LAUNCHED with initiative . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Helpful to me is the word “reasoned.”



It helps break down the false division between head and heart.

- Jesus, referring back to the OT said, And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' (Mark 12:30)**
- One of our four core values says that we try to reach people's intellect AND emotions.**
- Most of us are a bit imbalanced . . . cf. left vs. right brained . . . but we all need to become WHOLE worshippers of God.**

TR: Paul LAUNCHED with initiative, but he also accepted the invitation. down in v. 19.

Acts 17:19-20

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean."

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Areopagus = Mars' Hill; hill of Ares, the god of war.

TR: We can almost picture these folks listening, maybe even grumbling a bit at times.



**We must remember that the Gospel asks people to change their allegiance.
-- It invites them to place their faith and hope in something other than where it is now.**

TR: There may be some who are like the Athenians . . .

Acts 17:21

Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- But, most people will not just come out and ask us, “What do you believe?”
- This passage reminds us that often invitations come to those who take initiative.
- And it challenges us as fishers of people.
- “You don’t catch fish if you don’t put your line in the water.”
- We have great fishermen like Randy, Nate, Mark, and John . . . but even they don’t catch anything if they don’t put their line in the water.
- If we needed **COMPASSION** to get to L1, and **CURIOSITY** to get to L2, we need **COURAGE** to get to L3.

-- That includes the courage to LAUNCH the spiritual conversations with our children, both you and old.

TR: L4 opens its doors to a critical component of Gospel Fluency.



**We must push the button to . . . READ SLIDE
-- We LOOK, we LISTEN, we LAUNCH . . . and if the doors open,
we LINK**

TR: Let's read verses 24-29

Acts 17:24-25

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

ESV

This is a record of what Paul said as he told the Athenians about the Unknown God . . . the true God.

-- READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 26

Acts 17:26-27a

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 27 continues

Acts 17:27b-28

Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸for

*"In him we live and move
and have our being";*

as even some of your own poets have said,

'For we are indeed his offspring.'

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Paul had LISTENED, beginning where they were at, giving a quote of Epimenides and Aratus

TR: Finally, verse 29

Acts 17:29

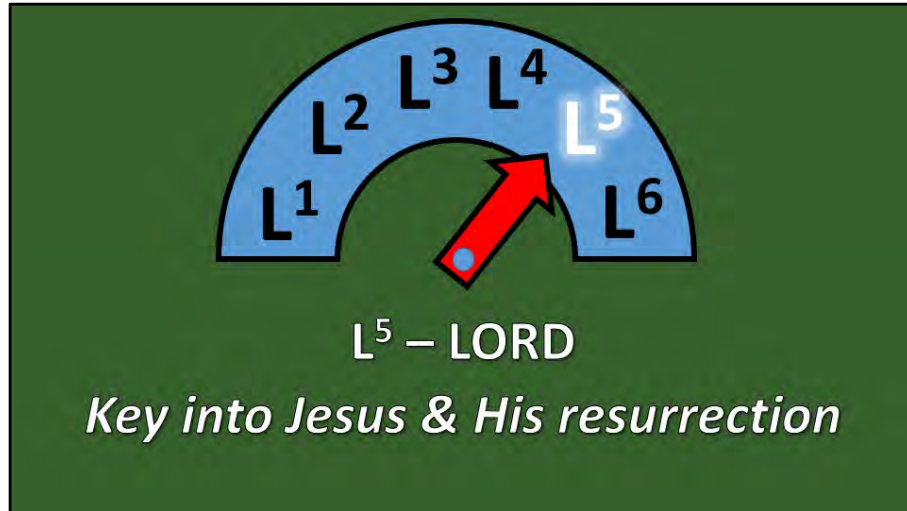
Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- cf. Ravi Zacharias' Cries of the Heart: to know God, to feel faith, to have a reason for suffering, to deal with our guilty consciences, to find freedom in pleasure, to deal with our deep loneliness
- Paul took initiative and then LINKED their questions, like, "Who is God? How has He revealed Himself?"
- He witnessed to the truth that God is the Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, Our Father
- We need the Spirit's help to have COMPASSION, CURIOSITY, COURAGE, and then help others make the CONNECTION.

**TR: But where the real courage is needed is to go to L5 . . .
making sure that our LINK to God's Story includes the
essential truth that Jesus is . . .**



... LORD.

-- We must ... READ SLIDE

-- In addition to COMPASSION, CURIOSITY, COURAGE, CONNECTION, we need absolute CLARITY about Jesus and His resurrection.

TR: Look again at verse 18

Acts 17:18

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—**because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: We must always seek to get to Jesus. And we cannot understand Who Jesus is without the historical truth of the resurrection. Down in verse 30 we read . . .

Acts 17:30-31

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all **by raising him from the dead.**

ESV

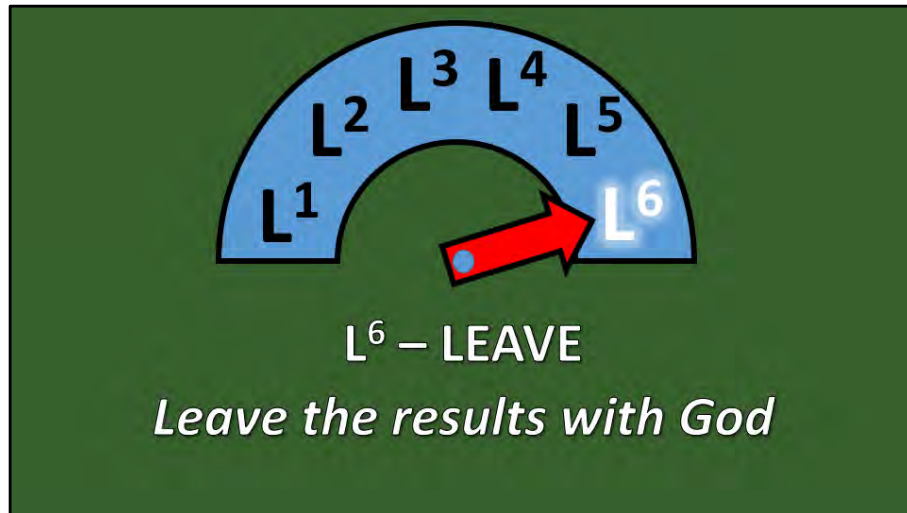
READ SLIDE

- Paul sought to understand before he tried to be understood.
- The reason many of us are standing on the ground level in front of the elevator doors, is because we are scared.

- We realize that the true Gospel includes the challenging news that:
 - God is also Judge
 - Mankind is not moving to extinction (Epicureans),
 - nor to absorption into the cosmos (Stoics),
 - but toward divine judgment and the judge is a resurrected man.

- The stumbling block is Jesus and His resurrection: because this includes His physical death (contra Muslims) and His bodily resurrection (contra Jehovah Witnesses).**
- To L-evate our witness we need CLARITY.**
- We must not make absolute what the Bible does not, but we must not take away the stumbling block of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.**

TR: There's one last floor, L6, where we remember to . . .



... READ SLIDE

TR: Some people may consider us to be ...

Acts 17:18

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "**What does this babbler wish to say?**" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

ESV

“babblers” like they said about Paul.

-- Babblers = literally a “seed picker” who peddled others’ ideas as being original but without understanding them; a plagiarist.

TR: The variety of responses is even better seen in verses 32-34 . . .

Acts 17:32-34

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, **some mocked**. But others said, "**We will hear you again about this.**" ³³So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴But **some men joined him and believed**, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

ESV

READ SLIDE

--There were responses of mockery, delay, and, praise God, belief.

-- Being faithful witnesses to our children, extended families, out into all the spheres of influence God has given to us . . .

TR . . . in NOT about having a certain personality, nor having certain gifts . . . but about walking in the Spirit and . . .



. . . pushing the button.

-- When we are standing at the elevator and the doors don't open . . . what's the first question we should ask?

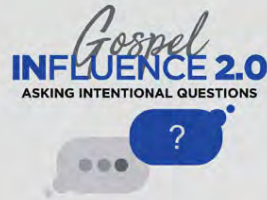
-- Did someone hit the button?

TR: This week, in our small groups, we will consider this intentional question . . .



READ SLIDE

TR: Practically, it means . . .

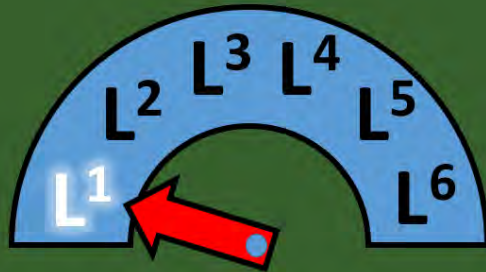


Ask a friend about their worldview and genuinely seek to be curious about it and understand it before seeking to make your worldview understood.

READ SLIDE

- This is all pretty intimidating, isn't it.**
- For an introvert like me to hear the challenge from a powerful evangelist felt like an unwinnable task.**
- But God hasn't called us to run each others' races, just our own . . . including in our witness.**
- Maybe not to be a gifted evangelist but to do the work of an evangelist.**

TR: And the starting place, this hour, is in prayer.

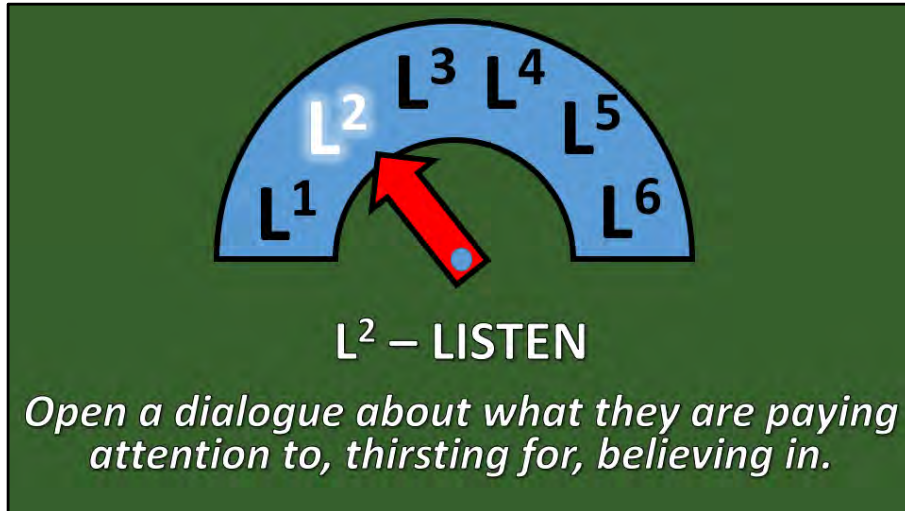


L¹ – LOOK

Pray for the ability to see with Jesus' eyes – to seek and to save the lost.

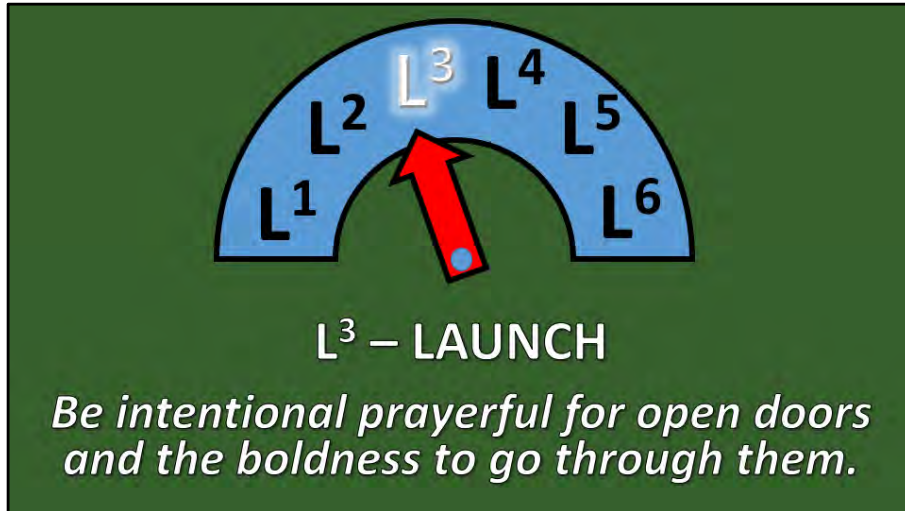
READ SLIDE (take time to pray for COMPASSION)

TR: Then to pray that we could and would LISTEN . . .



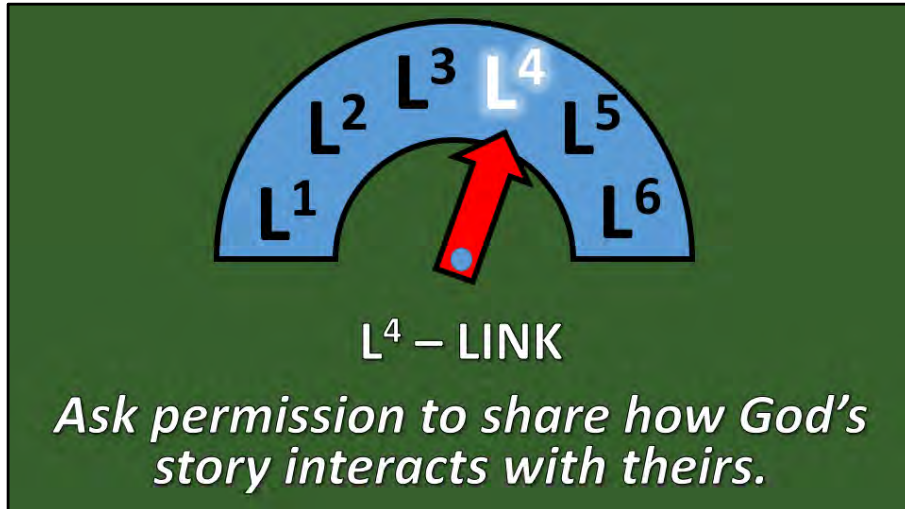
READ SLIDE (take time to pray for CURIOSITY)

TR: Then to pray for the courage to Launch



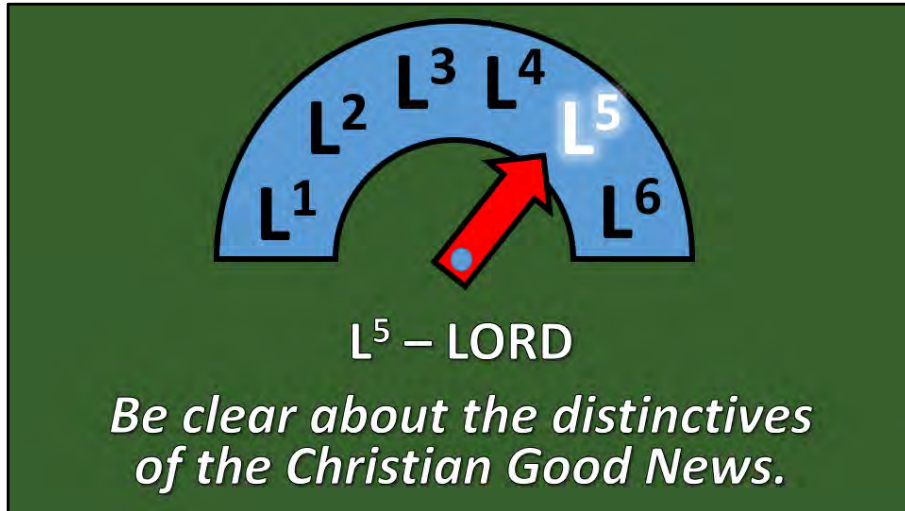
READ SLIDE (take time to pray for COURAGE)

TR: Perhaps some of us are pushing the button for L4 today and we pray . . .



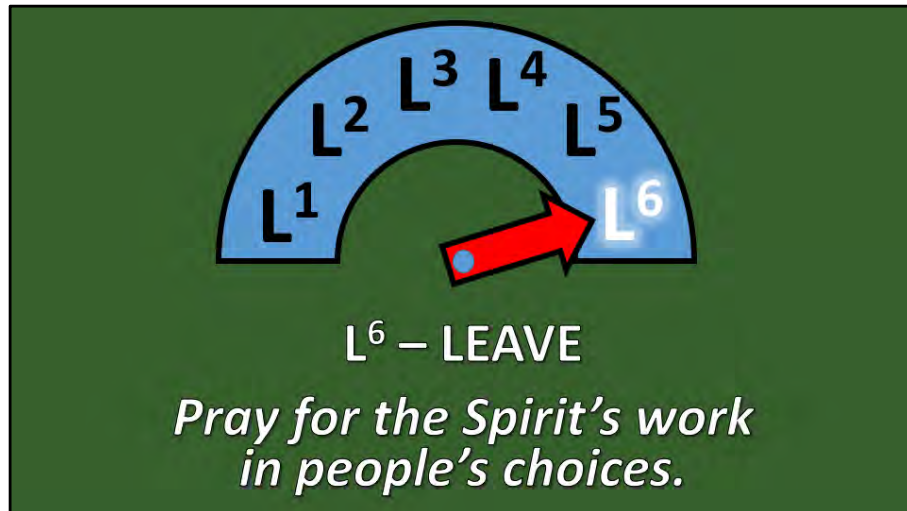
READ SLIDE (take time to pray for CONNECTIONS)

TR: As we pray for the courage to make the connections with God's story, let's ask for the clarity they need to understand the heart of the good news . . .



READ SLIDE (take time to pray for CLARITY)

TR: And finally we pray that . . .



READ SLIDE (take time to pray for CONTENTMENT)

-- that we would not take a posture of being the Holy Spirit
Who convicts of sin,
-- nor the Judge, Who is Jesus alone.

TR: Some of you who've been around TF for some time may wonder why I so often seem to push us to be active in sharing our faith.



It is because I remember that life-changing challenge when I was spurred on to do more than say I'm willing to walk through an open door"

-- . . . but to L-evate my witness by hitting the button.

-- I challenge us because some 30 years later I know how complacent I can become . . . becoming a laughingstock to some . . .

-- . . . and bringing great sadness to my Savior as I just stand there.