

Putting the Pieces Together Learning How to Have a Conversation

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Ground Rules

Questions? Please write them down.
You can give them to us before you leave or
Email them to kenb@calvarychurchfl.com
I will either send you an answer or send an answer to everyone.
This class is not fully comprehensive.

Our Road Map

Week 1 – What is truth and how can we know that the Bible really is God's word?
Week 2 – God – How do we know He exists and that our God is THE God?
Week 3 – Jesus Christ – Who is He, is He God and did He really rise from the dead?
Week 4 – **Why am I here, how should I live and where am I going...ultimately?**

There have been resources made available to you to help fill in the gaps that exist in what it is we have been discussing the past three weeks.

This has not been a comprehensive class nor has all the potential evidence, Biblical and non-Biblical, been discussed. Danny Lehmann's book has a bit more in it, but if you want to dig deeper, then I would direct you to the resources in the bibliography from each week.

Now comes the real fun, putting together what we have learned.

Nuts and bolts time.

Basic Questions

Leading into that though, we are going to deal with what I call some of the basic questions that tend to come up frequently. Before we can discuss these questions, we need to answer them ourselves.

1. Why am I here?
2. How should I live?
3. Where am I going, ultimately?

1. Why am I here?

- You were created for an intimate fellowship with God and to have daily communication with Him.
- You were created to overcome evil and establish God's goodness on this earth.
- You were created to have close relationships with others so that you might have companionship, friendship, and assistance as you praise and worship God, and do the work God has put before you to do. (Stanley 2004, 240)

We have been created to be God's imagers beginning at the moment of conception.

God's Image?

1. Both men and women are equally included.
2. Divine image bearing is what makes humankind distinct from the rest of earthly creation (i.e., plants and animals). The text of Genesis 1:26 does not inform us that divine image bearing makes us distinct from heavenly beings, those sons of God who were already in existence at the time of creation. The plurals in Genesis 1:26 mean that, in some way, we share something with them when it comes to bearing God's image.
3. There is something about the image that makes humankind "like" God in some way.
4. There is nothing in the text (Genesis 1:26 & 27) to suggest that the image has been or can be bestowed incrementally or partially. You're either created as God's image bearer or you aren't. One cannot speak of being partly or potentially bearing God's image. (Heiser 2015, 41)

In reality, that question is asking two other questions that can be part of the answer you convey. "Who is God? and What is God doing?"

2. **How should I live?** Refer to the previous answer for what our answer should be. You are either living for the Lord or for yourself. This can lead to being able to ask questions about things such as, "what do you want to be remembered for when you die?"

3. Where am I going? Ultimately.

For us as a believers, this should be an easy answer, for the person who is not, or is a cultural Christian, the answers may be illuminating.

Reincarnation

Currently, 9% of adults believe they will be reincarnated. That proportion is likely to continue growing, given the twin outcomes of a decline in Christian beliefs and the fact that four out of 10 Americans (39%) believe that reincarnation is a real possibility for them. There is a solid likelihood of continued growth in the acceptance of reincarnation since that belief is most heavily supported by several key population segments:

- *Our youngest adults, Millennials (51%)*
- *Our fastest-growing racial group, Hispanics (54%)*
- *Our parents of young children (47%)*
- *Residents of our largest states, which have greater influence on the nation (43%)*
- *LGBTQ adults, who are among the most influence-driven segments (65%)*

- *Liberals, currently the most politically-potent ideological segment (47%)*

Amazingly, substantial proportions of people associated with Christianity embrace the possibility of reincarnation. For instance, one out of four (24%) theological born-again Christians—i.e., people whose beliefs lead them to an assurance that they, personally, will experience an eternity in God's presence only because of their confession of sins and acceptance of salvation through the death, resurrection, and saving grace of Jesus Christ—accept reincarnation as a possibility. In addition, more than one-third of all self-identified Christians (36%) also believe that reincarnation is a real possibility for them. (Barna 2021)

I remember asking these three questions before becoming a believer. I found something out after coming to Christ, “all of these questions are unanswerable by science or philosophy because they involve issues beyond the scientist’s or philosopher’s ability to respond. They are unanswerable by non-Christian religions because they do not have divine revelation. These questions can only be answered by an all-powerful, all-knowing Intelligence who stands above and apart from humanity and yet who loves His creatures so much that He invites them to share in a loving personal relationship with Him.” (Story 1997, 227)

Our job is to ask questions.

If someone doesn’t want to talk to you and they are “ugly” about it, it really is okay to follow the instructions of Jesus.

Mark 6:11

“If you come to a town where people do not welcome you or will not listen to you, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a warning to them!” (GNB)

Matthew 7:6

“Never give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls before pigs. Otherwise, they will trample them with their feet and then turn around and attack you.” (ISV)

Knowing when to step back requires the ability to separate the dogs and the hogs from the lost sheep looking for a shepherd. But how do you know when someone has crossed the line? When do we have an obligation to speak, and when should we save our pearls for another time? (Koukl 2019, 199-200)

How are they responding to you? Is the person you are talking with willing to listen, or do they simply want to run you over. If the Holy Spirit says walk away, walk away. He wants to keep us safe from the pigs.

There are times to walk away and leave it with the Lord.

What we are going to do now is easy to do. But only you can do it.

We all have a story of what Jesus did or is doing for each of us. Where we were when we turned to Jesus and how that has changed each of us. That story is as individual as each one of us. My story is different than yours and so on.

Reminder: God is responsible for the results, not us. There is seriously, no pressure about this once you get it that He is the one who is responsible for the results.

We are going to talk about tailoring your message and then we will look at how others did this. Let’s get started.

Creating Your Elevator Speech

- First step - **Pray**
- Second step – write down or outline your story, **pray**.
 - It is your story so be as detailed or not as you want, and you can have more than one.
- Third step – add in those scriptures that brought you to the Lord, and maybe some other, and **pray**.
 - This is your story, keep it simple and something you can memorize and easily subdivide into pieces and parts.
- Fourth step – what are the possible objections and counters? Expanders? **Pray**.
 - Either prepare, or better yet, use as a lead in for another chat.
- Fifth step – set the appointment for the next visit. **Pray**.
- Sixth step – practice and **pray** some more.
- Guiding principle – what is the primary message you are conveying? **What Jesus did for you.** That is the primary message. Always drive back to the message. This shows up all over the Bible.

Redirect – at times you will get questions that are designed to send you off onto a rabbit trail. The enemy wants to get you away from the primary message. For example, you are talking about what Jesus did for you and they make a comment about the Bible. You see this on the news all the time. Reporters ask a question they want an answer to and instead you get five minutes about underwater basket weaving.

That is a redirect. So is this.

Daniel 2:26–28

“The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?” Daniel answered before the king and said, “As for the secret about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, sorcerers, soothsayer priests, nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. **However, there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days.** This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed.” (NASB 2020)

Daniel redirected, provided his message, then answered.

Did the King listen?

Daniel 4:1–3

“King Nebuchadnezzar sent the following message to the people of all nations, races, and languages in the world: “Greetings! Listen to my account of the wonders and miracles which the Supreme God has shown me. “How great are the wonders God shows us! How powerful are the miracles he performs! God is king for ever; he will rule for all time.” (GNB)

Tailoring Your Elevator Speech

Based on who you are having a conversation with as well as the location means there may be a need to address the same topic, differently. This is called tailoring the message.

Paul practiced this concept in his conversations while on missionary journeys. There are fourteen sermons that Paul gives in the book of Acts. In all but two cases, the sermons are to those who already have a general knowledge of what is in the Old Testament. He does not reference creation in those 12 sermons. But in two sermons, found in Acts 14 and 17, Paul is addressing those who have no background at all and he varies the message as a result.

In Acts 14, Paul was used of the Lord to heal a man in Lystra. The people were pagans and they thought that Paul was Hermes and Barnabas was Zeus. In his sermon to them, he references creation.

Acts 14:15

“and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men, of the same nature as you, preaching the gospel to you, to turn from these useless things to a living God, who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND EVERYTHING THAT IS IN THEM.” (NASB 2020)

Paul is saying we are men like you, we have all of the same desires you have, we are bringing you good news encouraging you to turn from these useless gods and things like that to the living God. The One who made everything and provides you with good things from that creation. Implied is the thought...the other gods are not alive and did nothing.

When Paul is in Athens, on the Acropolis, he does the same thing and once again brings in creation.

Acts 17:24–25

“The God who made the world and everything that is in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;” (NASB 2020)

Here he is dealing with highly educated pagans. The message was the same in all the sermons, but they were tailored for the audience.

We will realize as we step out in faith and begin having conversations with others, that the Holy Spirit will lead us to do the same.

The message was the same in all Paul’s sermons, but they were tailored for the audience. This does not mean that you should be ready to discuss creation, in Paul’s case, the pagan culture he was addressing had a belief in the gods having made the universe, Paul was level setting by stating which God, YAHWEH, is the one who did that as a means of engaging a conversation.

We will realize as we step out in faith and begin having conversations with others, that the Holy Spirit will lead us to do the same.

You will not have the same discussion with a 10-year-old as you would with a colleague at work.

In order to tailor your message, you need to be convinced of what it is you want to communicate and be personally grounded in the basics.

This gets back to what we have covered the last three times we were together as well as the answer to the three questions we discussed.

We have examined an abbreviated short list that you can expand on or subtract from as the Holy Spirit leads you. Time constraints prevent us from covering everything in depth, thus the recommended book and resources in the bibliography.

When you are having a conversation about the Lord, or rather, you bring the Lord into the conversation, you are entering the realm of apologetics. You are “giving reasons or evidence to support Christianity...By definition, apologists defend the faith. They defeat false ideas. They destroy speculations raised up against the knowledge of God.” (Koukl 2019, 25)

Remember this, most of us will not be closing the deal on the first contact, we are either dangling the bait, throwing some more seeds on the ground, or doing some hoeing to encourage growth.

1 Corinthians 3:5–9

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.” (ESV)

Our job, just be faithful to what the Lord has laid on your heart to say.

Here are the basics we have looked at.

Know What You Believe

Preparation point – ground rules – things we must believe

- Absolute truth exists – truth and the Bible.
- There is a living God. Creation, cosmology and beginnings – the world was created by someone.
 - It is not the age of the universe that is important, but that it was created.
- We are all sinners.
- Jesus died for our sins on the cross, was buried and was resurrected three days later.
- Jesus is Lord.

It is imperative for us to be thoroughly grounded in our relationship with Jesus Christ. He has given us the Holy Spirit who we also know as the paraclete, the helper. He is in us, empowering us and will bring to remembrance, as promised, what we need to know as we talk.

What is our Good News or Gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:1–5

“Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place. I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve.” (NLT)

Can I challenge someone to close the deal? Absolutely.

What do I say?

Romans 10:8–10

“What it says is this: “God’s message is near you, on your lips and in your heart”—that is, the message of faith that we preach. If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you

will be saved. For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved.” (GNB)

ABC's of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.

If you are privileged to close the deal and pray with someone to accept Christ, it is no more complicated than this.

Why are these basics important?

Back to Paul. Paul talked about creation twice. But it was not his major focus. This is a possible opener, not a required opener.

Where we come from is important. It helps you to find out the basic world view someone is coming from, but it should not be the focus of the conversation. Remember, the issue is not getting them to believe in creation, the issue is to introduce them to your best friend.

If they agree to intelligent design, then you can tailor your message along those lines. If they are materialists/evolutionists, that leads to a totally different conversation. Don't get bogged down in it though unless you are seriously prepared to do so.

The first and most important answer to any question about effective witness and apologetics is reliance on the Holy Spirit. God is the one who works his will, and he will call people to himself. But we are still obligated to plant the seed; moreover we are obligated to plant it well. So, the question for modern evangelicals in America is, How can we plant the seed of the gospel deeply into the soil so it might take root? (Noble 2018, 5)

We will talk a bit more about this before we finish.

One other thing, we are talking to the blind. Assume nothing.

2 Corinthians 4:3–4

“For if the gospel we preach is hidden, it is hidden only from those who are being lost. They do not believe, because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.” (GNB)

We are providing light. We must keep our eye on the prize and our message foremost because those who you talk to, are listening to someone who will try and send you down rabbit trails.

We are engaging in a faith exercise as part of overall combat operations against the enemy when we share.

His Army is for men and women of faith. Our courage is fueled by faith in God. If we lack courage, it's only because we lack faith. If we lack faith, we insult the integrity of Almighty God. (Comfort 1999, 92)

So you are in a conversation, and from left field comes the lobbed hand grenade. “Well, you know the Bible is full of errors.”

It is okay to respond to a question with a question. My favorite, please show me where? Or, “have you read through the Bible and discovered those for yourself?” “If God does exist, how would you have Him

communicate to us?” “Do people always make mistakes when they write?” “Why is the Bible less reliable than any other book you have read?”

Jesus is the expert when it comes to handling objections and landmines in a conversation. Remember, He has promised that the Holy Spirit will be there.

Luke 12:11–12

“When people bring you before synagogue leaders, rulers, or authorities, don’t worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, because at that time the Holy Spirit will teach you what you are to say.” (ISV)

When talking with unbelievers, remember, the Holy Spirit has this. We don’t. There is no way I can ever use my intellect and smarts to show someone their need for Jesus without the Holy Spirit being the key participant. He is the one who guides the conversation, and He is the one who will bring to remembrance the scriptures needed as well as provide the words to say. He is the one who closes the deal.

There are times where the Spirit guides me to say something I never would have thought on my own. I find myself sitting back and wondering where that thought came from because it was good.

The Holy Spirit, He is our partner in this enterprise.

Skills to Develop

- Praying
- Listening to the Holy Spirit
- Scripture reading and some basic memorization
- Learning how to tell our own personal story/stories/versions
- Learning how to deal with objections (it is ok to say I don’t know and to tell someone you will get back with them with an answer)
- Preparation
- And listening, listening, listening (I always look people right in the eye as I listen, or at least try to.)

Nehemiah, Our Example

One of the things I have learned over the years in studying rhetoric and speech is that when preparing to have a conversation with someone who you are not sure they hold the same views as you, preparation is required. Whether in business or talking to someone about Jesus, there is a single path we need to follow...prayer. We discover that path by looking at how Nehemiah, sommelier, civil servant, and diplomat employed by the Persian Emperor dealt with it.

In Nehemiah 1, we see the problem introduced. Some background, Ezra has already returned to Jerusalem with some of the nation to rebuild the Temple.

All is not good though in Jerusalem, the walls are still down.

Nehemiah 1:3

“They said to me, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”” (NLT)

Nehemiah was distressed about the report that he received, so as a believer, he did the thing we all need to do...pray. Remember, as far as He is concerned as a believing Jew, Jerusalem is the place that YAHWEH chose (2 Chronicles 6:38).

He was deliberate about seeking the Lord in prayer and he was emotionally invested in what he was praying about. Something had to be done. He didn't pray just once, but continually.

Nehemiah 1:4

"When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven." (NLT)

Many of us are praying for our friends, loved ones, family members and neighbors and we want to see them discover Jesus. But there are discussions that need to take place first. We need to be ready for those discussions.

Preparation point – prayer

I mean real heart felt continual prayer. "The bottom line is this: No matter how dark things look, God can turn the tide. But we must get desperate. God will fill us in accordance with our hunger, but if we are filled with other things, we will have little room for Him. How hungry are we?" (Brown 2021, 22)

Was there anything Nehemiah could do? No, not really. But who did he work for? He was a direct report of the Persian Emperor after all.

Did the Persian Emperor have the world view or the same vision as Nehemiah? Hardly. He was not Jewish, he was rich, powerful and had everything. He came from another culture. Why would he care? Does the person you are thinking about right now that you want to share with have the same view as you? The answer is probably the same.

Nehemiah prayed and then began the process of planning what his message would be when he had the opportunity to talk to his boss about this. He prayed about the impending discussion not knowing exactly when it would take place. He did know it would though since he had prayed about it.

Nehemiah 1:11

"O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me." In those days I was the king's cup-bearer." (NLT)

Nehemiah recognized who would be the one directing the conversation he needed to have with his boss...the Lord.

We also need to do the same and commit the impending conversation to the Lord in prayer. We are invited to ask for wisdom and further promised that the Holy Spirit will provide us what we need. He also involved others in the praying too.

Preparation Point – He supplies the wisdom, and the Holy Spirit runs the computer bringing up what needs to be said and how.

Our knowledge must be tempered with the wisdom that makes our message clear and persuasive. This requires the tools of a diplomat, not the weapons of a warrior, tactical skill rather than brute force. (Koukl 2019, 32)

Nehemiah did the hard work ahead of time and then relied on the Lord, nothing has changed in over 2000 years.

James 1:5

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." (ESV)

John 14:26

“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.” (GNB)

Nehemiah did not know when he would have the opportunity, and many times, we don’t know either. We would like to be prepared and ready; to have every argument rehearsed, but that is not always the case as the Lord may be asking us...”Do you trust Me on this?”

Disconnected facts are nice, but a story wins.

But we know what we are doing talking about Jesus and He provides us tools.

I have found that there are many times that He simply wants me to rely on Him. Nehemiah found this out as well. He had to wait on the Lord.

I have found that is the hard part. You’re ready, you’ve done the research, you’ve prayed, and you’ve got everything ready to go. You rehearsed and rehearsed the moment in your mind. You have looked at different scenarios and prepared.

But when it finally takes place, it is when and where we least expect it to.

Nehemiah 2:1–4

“One day four months later, when Emperor Artaxerxes was dining, I took the wine to him. He had never seen me look sad before, so he asked, “Why are you looking so sad? You aren’t ill, so it must be that you’re unhappy.” I was startled and answered, “May Your Majesty live for ever! How can I help looking sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” The emperor asked, “What is it that you want?” I prayed to the God of Heaven,” (GNB)

Nehemiah did not drop to his knees and start praying, his prayer was more along the lines of, “Help Lord.”

But he had already been talking with the Lord about the issue, just as we have been as well.

He was ready. Are we ready?

This gets back to what we looked at back in week one.

1 Peter 3:15

“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared** to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,” (ESV)

Being ready to go is tough. You never know when it becomes now

Nehemiah was ready, and he had a message prepared.

Nehemiah 2:5–6

“And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.” (ESV)

Nehemiah was ready when asked. He had rehearsed his message and then relied on the Lord to make the opportunity and provide the wisdom to frame an appropriate response. Now for hard part.

The Lord had Nehemiah say a phrase that as we read it means nothing, until you understand the mindset of a Persian. Divination by aid of the dead is said to have been common among the Persians (Strabo, xvi.

2, 39, νεκρομάντις).” Nehemiah was led to add “the city of my fathers’ graves” in his discussion. (Singer 1901-1906, 204)

Persepolis Necropolis



(Bolen 2018, Used with Permission)

Nehemiah 2:7–8

And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.” (ESV)

Nehemiah had a message he was ready with which he and others had prayed about. He tailored it specifically to his audience and the circumstance he found himself in. The Lord provided the wisdom.

Later Nehemiah would confront opposition from others to achieving what it is that had already been approved and in the eyes of the King, done. He stayed on task and on the mission given to him by the King that he had prayed for and asked for.

Guess what, you and I will also confront opposition when we talk to others. If they have listened and responded to what we said, anticipate, no expect, opposition from the enemy. We are out actively engaging others in the enemy’s territory and doing exactly what Jesus said we would, snatching them right out of hell.

Matthew 16:18

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” (NASB 2020)

When Jesus made this statement, He was engaging in spiritual warfare against the enemy on the enemy’s turf in demon central. He was in Caesarea Philippi also known as Panias. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ then Jesus points to a familiar place right in front of Him known as the gates of hell right in front of Mount Hermon. This was ground zero for the events of Genesis 6.

The Gates of Hell



(Bolen, Caesarea Philippi aerial from south 2012, Used with Permission)

Gates are defensive structures, not offensive weapons. The kingdom of God is the aggressor. Jesus begins at ground zero in the cosmic geography of both testaments to announce the great reversal. It is the gates of hell that are under assault—and they will not hold up against the Church. Hell will one day be Satan's tomb. (Heiser 2015, 285)

Nehemiah was confronting the same enemy that we confront today whenever we are having a conversation about the Lord. We are already on the victorious side.

The Challenge

Stepping out in faith and taking the next step.

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