

# **The Art and Power of Asking Questions**



## **And Telling Stories**

# **The Art and Power of Asking Questions and Telling Stories**

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This booklet was written by Paul and Janice Meiburger to help encourage and strengthen evangelism among the members of Il Rifugio, an Evangelical Christian Church at the University of Turin, Italy. Paul serves as one of the pastors in this university church. You can read more about their family and ministry at the end of this booklet.



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# **The Art and Power of Asking Questions and Telling Stories**

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The Meiburger Family and Ministry

## **The Art and Power of Asking Questions or Telling Stories**

The stage was set. In my efforts to share as a young believer in my workplace, I had placed my testimony tract on everyone's desk. Now they would know I was a Christian and surely ask me about my faith. But it didn't happen. No one said anything to me at all, not even acknowledging the existence of that tract. But something else did happen and even thirty years later, I can recall it with clarity and shame.

We were all in the lunch room, eating and casually engaging in normal conversation. Then it turned to religion and my spiritual antennae was on alert, not knowing which direction the conversation would go. The tone turned critical and insulting, and negative comments about the Bible and Christians became the theme. Then as if in some kind of morbid conspiracy, they all turned and looked at me.

They all knew that I was a Christian and that I believed in the Bible. What would the Christian say? I found myself speechless. I awkwardly smiled and looked down, dying from the embarrassment of not being able to defend my Savior. I think at that moment, I understood how Peter must have felt.

People generally might make either two types of responses when they are questioned or challenged in their faith, like I experienced in the lunch room. The one I

chose, that of fear and passivity, is clearly not God's desire for His children. Another response might be better, but still not effectively help others understand the truths of Jesus' love and salvation through the gospel.

When challenged in their faith, some might strongly defend their Christian beliefs and the Bible through an elaborate and rational explanation of the evidence for the truth of the Bible being God's word. Significant evidence to support the veracity of the Bible is well-documented and available for those who are interested. Yet, no matter how strong the explanation of the truth might be, there might still be little to no effect on the heart and mind of the listeners. They just do not accept the words, despite a logical or powerful defense of the truth of the Bible.

Randy Newman, who had engaged thousands of university students as a campus minister with Campus Crusade for Christ, related his own experiences in evangelism like this:

At times (far too many, I'm afraid), I've answered questions with biblically accurate, logically sound, epistemologically watertight answers, only to see questioners shrug their shoulders. My answers, it seemed, only further confirmed their opinion that Christians were simpletons. My answers had, in fact, hardened them in their unbelief rather than softened them toward faith. I realized that, instead of moving people closer to a salvation decision, an answer can push them further away. Rather than engaging their minds or urging them to

consider an alternative perspective, an answer can give them ammunition for future attacks against the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

*A better way exists.*

Questions can be one of the most effective, disturbing forces in the universe. Dictatorial regimes, wanting to control or limit public opinion, prohibit the questioning of their authority. Questions can rattle the status quo. Asking questions is one of the most powerful weapons in the battle for the hearts and minds of people. From a biblical point of view, this battle has eternal consequences. Questions can be the beginning of a person's journey to search for the eternal truths of the gospel, transferring him from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, through Whom he can experience eternal redemption and forgiveness of his sins (Col. 1:13,14).

## **1. Why Ask Questions?**

Simply put, Jesus should be our model for proclaiming the truth to the mass of blind and lost humanity. Question: How did He testify to the truth? Answer: He often answered a question with a question.

A study of the four gospels would reveal this recurrent method of exchange that Jesus often employed. On two occasions in the Gospel of Luke, we find

someone asking Jesus very clearly, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This is every evangelist's dream question and visions of drawing the bridge diagram, loaded with Bible verses, leap to mind. That is not what Jesus did. Instead, on both occasions, He asked the person another question.

In Luke 9:25, the lawyer, well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, does not receive an answer, but another question: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”

To the rich, young ruler who calls Jesus “Good teacher”, Jesus responds with “Why do you call Me good?” (Luke 18:18-19). Jesus knew, as we must also realize, that just communicating facts and verses sometimes falls short in winning a person's heart.

Prayer is the indispensable weapon of the Christian's arsenal in the spiritual battle for men's souls. Paul's admonition is clear in his letter to the Colossians, saying, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:2-3). Paul, after a lengthy presentation of the spiritual armor of Christians, reiterates to the Ephesians that they should be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:18-19).



Clearly, without prayer, even our best apologetics and most discerning questions will fall on deaf ears. Prayer is always our best preparation for the spiritual battle for the souls of men. God does not need us or our ministry. Rather He chooses to use us, and it only stands to reason that when we follow His example, He will be able to use us more.

The benefits of engaging people with the truths of the Bible through questions include some of the following:

1. Questions show a genuine interest in the person
2. Questions can start a person to think or rethink his opinions or beliefs
3. Questions can reveal hidden issues in a person's life
4. Questions can open someone's heart to the teachings of Jesus and the Bible

Questions can often pinpoint the crack in the hard outer shell of the person, where he often tries to protect himself from thinking about the deeper issues of life and death. A wise person learns to scale this “wall” in a person's heart and bring down the strongholds in which he trusts. Strongholds such as the false security of relationships, riches, careers or education are delusional. People can think that these will bring them happiness, when in reality, without Christ, they are a false hope for joy or security. Solomon said it well: “A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the stronghold in which they trust” (Proverbs 21:22).

## **2. Motivation to Ask Questions**

Long before moving to Italy, I had a tendency to sometimes drive like Michael Schumacher in the Monaco Grand Prix, imagining myself driving on the streets of Monte Carlo with my 1975 Rambler Hornet Sportabout. This was especially true whenever I was on my way to see my fiancée, Janice. There was no holding back on the gas pedal in my anticipation of seeing her. On the drive home, however, the opposite was true. I always went below the speed limit because I wanted to cherish those final moments with the woman I was going to marry. The contrast struck me, how I would speed to see her, but then my love for her was controlling my foot on the gas pedal on the way home.

That reminds me of our primary motivation for asking questions. Paul wrote, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised” (II Cor. 2:14,15). Love motivates where good intentions and piety fail. God's tremendous love for us, demonstrated by His Son's life for ours, should control and motivate us to take initiative in the lives of others and ask questions.

In preparation for our marriage, we were encouraged to approach couples who we respected and discover some principles or habits which kept their

marriage strong. One of these couples had made a commitment to each other never to leave the house disunited. To live by this principle, the couple was forced to quickly resolve conflicts which inevitably occur in a marriage relationship. We decided to pray and make this commitment to one another and to God.

It didn't take long to test this commitment. One evening, shortly before leaving for a dinner invitation, we experienced a conflict and were definitely not united. Instead of leaving, I called to cancel our dinner plans, explaining the situation and our commitment to one another. On another occasion, I went into work late in order to honor our commitment. When I arrived at work, I explained the situation to my boss, who understood and appreciated our commitment.

These scenarios also bring to mind this same verse "For the love of Christ controls us". It was not easy to face awkward situations because of our commitment. However, we had made a commitment to one another, but more importantly before God. I have always been a little confused about that verse, whether it was God's love for us or our love for God that controls us. I have decided that both are true and applicable. Certainly, God's love for us controls us and moves us to respond in love and obedience. We know love because He first loved us (I John 3:16). But our love for God also controls us and motivates us to live a life pleasing to Him. It is not always an emotional love, but oftentimes a response to our obedient commitment to Him. Often before taking initiative with a friend in the form of a question, it can get

awkward and I can get cold feet. But hopefully, my love for God in the form of a commitment to live a life pleasing to Him, will move me to want to take the next step in asking a thought-provoking question and identify with Jesus.

The wonderful thing about asking questions is that it is not usually offensive to our friends and acquaintances. Showing a genuine interest in what others think will probably open channels of communication much more effectively than merely airing our own opinions. The goal is not to always share the entire gospel, but rather to stimulate their thinking and plant seeds which the Lord will then cause to grow. If the Lord is working in their heart, they will begin to have sincere questions. At that time, He opens the door for sharing more deeply His truth and stories, which are more palatable to them because it is invited.

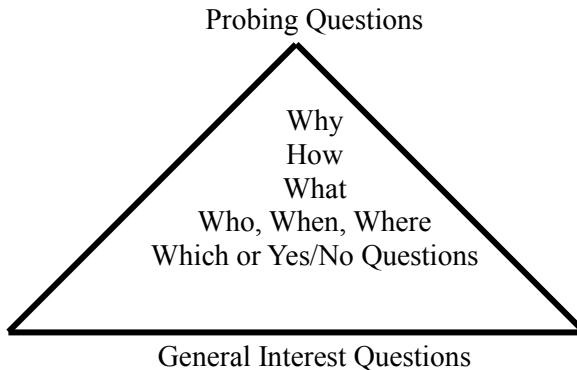
### **3. Types of Questions**

Two famous people used questions as their primary method of teaching and communicating truths. Both of these men were killed by the governing authorities, and yet neither one of them ever wrote a book or in any way documented their beliefs or ideas. Both, using questions as their primary teaching technique, literally changed the world. One of these, of course, was Jesus, who was clearly the most influential Person who ever lived. The other person lived and taught in Athens about 400 years before Christ. Socrates taught Plato who

taught Aristotle; from this school of thought developed the foundation of western philosophy.

Just as these men dared to ask questions, so should we. By doing so, we can explore how someone thinks, and then strategically challenge his beliefs.

Questions usually begin with key words such as who, why, how, where, when, etc. Depending upon the intent of the question, the key word may introduce general interest questions, or deeper questions. A diagram ordering question key words from deeper to more general follows.<sup>2</sup>



Following are some basic techniques for asking questions, including a number of examples for each kind of question.

**1. General Interest Questions.** Sometimes

questions can feel intrusive to others, especially if they are perceived as too personal. Therefore, it is important to begin with simple questions that develop a friendship and help you earn the right to ask the more personal questions. Basic questions show a genuine interest in a person. We often ask all kinds of questions of people when we are getting to know them. An others' orientation, will often involve asking questions about their family, life, interests, etc. General interest questions generally start with words like who, where, or what.

Asking questions can be a tool to make others feel known and understood, and on the road to a real friendship. Genuine interest questions are also helpful with established friendships. Questions about their weekend activities, hobbies, and family relationships can provide springboards for deeper conversations.

One challenge with established friendships is falling into the trap of listening to negative talk about others. Avoid this at all costs, since it only sets a stage for further negative talk. A simple statement like “I am trying to look at others in a positive way. Can you help me?” can help keep your conversations positive, like Paul urged in Ephesians 4:29, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*”

**2. Probing Questions.** Beginning with general interest questions, and advancing to more probing questions can often push someone to think more about

their thoughts, feelings and beliefs, even prompting some personal disclosure or a statement of his belief system. Sometimes, people do not know what they think or believe about the profound topics of life and death and the afterlife. They often mimic what they may have heard or been told.

The law curriculum even includes the six types of Socratic questions, named after the style of questioning Socrates commonly used during his street discussions in the city center of Athens.

### **3. Six Socratic Questions with Examples<sup>3</sup>:**

#### **Types of Questions and Sample Questions**

##### **1. Clarification**

What do you mean by \_\_\_\_?

Could you put that another way?

Can you give me an example?

##### **2. Probing Assumptions**

What are you assuming?

How did you choose those assumptions?

What could we assume instead?

##### **3. Probing Reasons and Evidence**

How do you know?

Why do you think that is true?  
What would change your mind?

**4. Viewpoint and Perspectives**

What are you implying by that?  
What effect would that have?  
What is an alternative?

**5. Probing Implications / Consequences**

How can we find out?  
Why is this issue important?  
What generalizations can you make?

**6. Questions about Questions**

What does that mean?  
What was the point of this question?  
Why do you think I asked this question?



## **4. Deepening the Conversation**

For many, one of the more difficult aspects of sharing their faith, or even asking deeper questions about their faith, is making the transition to deeper spiritual topics. An obvious solution is to slowly deepen the conversation by asking increasingly deeper or more personal questions. It can be likened to going down a set of stairs, the bottom representing intimacy of heart.

### **Family**

- Do you have good relationships with your family?
- Who do you feel closest with in your family?
- How was it growing up where you lived?

### **Past Challenges in Life**

- What are some of your best memories from when you were young?
- Did you have many challenges when you were growing up?
- What was one of the more difficult memories from your childhood?

### **Current Challenges in Life**

- What are some of the challenges you are facing now?
- How do you deal with these challenges?
- Who do you go to for help when you are in need?

## **Fears**

- Do you ever have a fear of failure?
- What are some fears you need to face in your life?
- How do you deal with these fears?

## **Purpose**

- Do you ever think about why we do life?
- Do you ever think there is a purpose behind your life and our day-to-day activities?
- Do you ever wonder about what is the real purpose of our lives?

## **Meaning of Life**

- Do you ever think there is a deeper meaning behind your life?
- What do you think is the meaning behind your life?
- Do you ever wonder why God made you the way He did?

## **Eternal Security / Bible / Who is Jesus**

- Did you have anyone close to you die?
- Do you ever wonder about what happens after we die?
- Did you ever read what the Bible says about these things?

In taking stairs, it is possible to skip one or maybe even two steps, but it is dangerous jumping down the entire set of stairs. Similarly, it is not always necessary to go through each of these steps, but we definitely need to

tread carefully to these deeper levels of communication. As you pray for your friends, the Holy Spirit will guide you as you ask questions. You do not have to always reach the bottom, in every conversation; that would be exhausting, provide fuel for resistance, and begin to feel more like a counseling session than a friendship. Be led by the Spirit. Keep praying for their hearts to be open, and keep asking God to lead you in your relationships.

## **5. Going Deeper in our Questions**

Especially in the midst of conversation, it is important to keep praying so that we can discern deeper motives and wise responses to questions that might arise. Jesus gives us a wonderful example in Luke 9:18-20.

*Now it happened that as He was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And He asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." Then He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*

Interesting. Jesus was with his friends, yet He was praying alone. It was like they were having a conversation, and Jesus was silently praying for His Father's help in this questioning process. Then He asks them a relatively non-threatening question about what the crowds think or say about his identity. This is relatively easy to answer, since it does not touch their personal beliefs or feelings. But then He goes deeper by asking

them personally, *“But who do you say that I am?”*

This is a relatively simple way to shift into deeper conversations with our friends or acquaintances. This approach can work with many different topics, such as:

1. If the conversation moves to the topic of someone who has recently died, perhaps a famous person, or even (with sensitivity) a friend or family member, you can ask: “What do most of your friends think happens after death?” and then “What do you think?” Some follow-up questions could be:

- Why do you think that?
- Do you think there is any way to really know for sure?
- If there is a heaven and a hell, do you think someone can know for sure they are going to one or the other?
- Have you ever read what the Bible says about heaven and hell?
- A follow-up or closing story could be the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31. It is very sobering how suffering in hell is described in this story. Then just stop, and let them either ask another question or change the subject.

2. If the conversation moves to books or a popular book, you can ask what their favorite book is. Then you can say something like, “I once heard that the Bible is by far the most popular book of all time. “What do your friends say about the Bible?” “What do you think about the Bible?” Some follow-up questions could be:

- Why do you think the Bible is so popular?
- Did you ever read the Bible?
- Why did you want to read the Bible? Or why have you never considered reading the Bible?
- Did you have any questions about things you read in the Bible?
- Do you have any favorite stories you remember from the Bible?
- Can I share with you one of my favorite stories from my reading of the Bible?
- You can close with your favorite story from the Bible and why you like it so much, then just stop, and let them either ask another question, or change the subject.

3. If the conversation goes to religion (any religion), or even famous people, you can say something like: “Do you know who is the most hated and most loved person?” They will likely say “Who?” Then you can reply and say: “This might sound strange, but believe it or not, it is Jesus. That seems interesting to me. We have all heard about Him, but what do you think most people think about Jesus?” “What do you think about Jesus?”

A cynic or an antagonist might reply and say something like, “That is stupid or irrelevant,” in which case you can simply reply: “Why do you think that is stupid? More people have tried to suppress His teachings and killed His followers than any other person, and yet more people have fully dedicated their lives to Him, even thousands of years after His life and death. Why do you

think people do that?”

Some other follow-up questions could be:

- Why do you think Jesus was, and even is, so hated and also so loved?
- Do you know anyone who really seemed to hate or really seemed to love Jesus?
- How would you describe that person who really hated or love Jesus?
- Did you ever hear why they convicted Jesus to die on the cross? Because of blasphemy, claiming to be God. What do you think about His claims to be God? Do you think His life supported His claim? Why or why not?
- Do you know of anything that Jesus said during His life on earth?
- Can I share with you one of my favorite quotes by Jesus? If yes, then share one of your favorite verses from the gospels, such as John 3:16 or John 14:6.
- If you have never read the Gospel of John, I would encourage you to give it a try. I like it so much because it is like you are seeing Jesus' life from the eyes of His closest friend, John. Then just stop, and let them either ask another question, or change the subject.

## **6. The Hidden Issues behind Questions**

There are a number of hidden issues that can sometimes be exposed by the process of simply asking more questions. This happened to Jesus when the jealous Pharisees flatter Jesus, and then try to trap Him in front of the Romans, by asking about paying taxes to Caesar. (See Luke 20:19-26.) Jesus, after seeking a coin, asks the deceptive Pharisees “Whose likeness and inscription is on this coin?” After noting the image of Caesar on the coin, Jesus gives His still famous line “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s.” Obviously, the Pharisees were not interested in the answer, but only in trapping Jesus in front of the Roman authorities. This is also true in the following situations.

### **1. Defining the Real Issue - The Abortion Controversy**

The issue is packaged as a matter of choice, such as “Doesn’t a woman have the right to choose what happens to her own body?” Yet the real issue is life. Some good response questions might be:

- When do you think life begins?
- Recently babies live even when born 3 or 4 months premature. Would you say these babies are alive?
- Do you think someone has the right to terminate an innocent person’s life?
- We all probably know someone who has had an abortion; do you know how God sees these people?

- Have you seen some of the emotional scars of people who have had an abortion?
- Only God can heal these scars; do you know why? God sees all of us as sinners needing to be forgiven. Only by receiving this forgiveness can real healing happen.

It is important to help people to understand the hidden agendas behind their questions.

## **2. Exposing Contradictions - Relativism**

Our current culture is sometimes described as a “post-everything” type of culture. It is certainly post Judeo-Christian and also post-modern. Our post-modern culture is very relativistic, anti-foundational, with no universal truths and no outward objective reality. A phrase commonly used is “This is my truth; what is yours?” This can be a very fatalistic philosophy, which often leads to a life without meaning.

Asking questions is always a better way to help someone realize contradictions in their own thinking. We often hear statements like; “There is no such thing as truth.” or “Everything is relative.” If these statements are made as absolute statements, then you got them. A follow-up question might be “You say that there is no such thing as truth, or that everything is relative – tell me, is that a true statement?”

If they say that their statement is true, then there



really is something that is true, making their statement “Everything is relative” or “There is no such thing as truth” essentially not true. It makes no sense. If people are intellectually honest, they will see that their statement is clearly self-contradictory.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Exposing Motives**

Asking key questions also help expose people's real motives behind their questions or even their beliefs. Someone might say they do not believe in the Bible, and a simple response question might be “Is there any reason why you do not believe the Bible?” There might be all sorts of responses to this question, but few people have really studied the manuscript evidences and come up with an intellectual opinion that the Bible is not true. Some who have done this type of thorough research have come to the opposite opinion, and to a sincere faith in Christ. Two such skeptics wrote books which chronicle their search (Josh McDowell’s “More than a Carpenter”, and journalist and Yale Law School graduate Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Christ”).

For the majority of people who have not done this detailed research, there can be many other motives behind their belief that the Bible is not true. Maybe they read an article in a magazine or heard others sharing their critical opinions on the Bible. Perhaps they think it is embarrassing to admit that they believe the Bible, and their motive is to be thought well of by others and to be accepted by them. Maybe they think it is old-fashioned and not relevant for today’s problems or today’s society.

Maybe someone they were close to who was not a Christian recently died, and by believing the Bible, it means that they must admit that their lost friend or loved one is now in hell, a terrible thought for them to accept.

Asking the simple “why?” question can begin the process of exposing the hidden motives behind their disbelief. Depending on their response, it might be necessary to probe with more questions. Once the hidden motive behind their statement or disbelief is exposed, then that can be properly addressed. However, if we simply give a detailed explanation as to why the Bible is true, we may very well miss the mark, which is their heart. This is where the real obstacles to faith in Jesus and the Bible are usually located.

## **7. The Questions behind the Question**

Once we had a nice dinner party at our home, and we encouraged our friends to invite their friends. One friend of a friend was sitting next to me, and knowing I was a pastor, wanted my opinion on the differences between various religions or beliefs. Rather than just explain the differences, I thought I might try to practice what I was learning about questions, so I asked him, “There are definitely differences in different religions or beliefs, so how would you know which one is correct?” The Bible came up as a reliable source to his mind, so I asked him, “Have you ever read the Bible?” He had read it very little, so I encouraged him to continue his search for the truth by praying first and then reading from the

Gospel of John. As the conversation continued, he said that his mother once told him that you cannot live your life by what you see in the Bible, and he agreed with her. I acknowledged his need to honor his mother, but also that there was a higher authority, that being God. If he truly wanted to know the truth, and sought God with a pure heart, He would reveal Himself to him. In the end, I realized that his real question or problem was not really a comparison of religions or beliefs, but about the relevancy of the Bible to real life.

There are reasons for questions or objections people have to Jesus Christ and Christianity. Some may question because they are skeptics, wanting only to make fun of Jesus and Christianity, in which case, wisdom from Solomon is needed. (see next section). Sometimes, however, there are deeper motives behind questions and objections. Here are some examples of common questions or objections people might have, followed by some possible questions that can be asked in an effort to begin the process of an honest searching within their hearts. Surely you have had these questions posed to you before. Perhaps these questions will change the way you respond in the future.

## 1. **Jesus is the Only Way**

### Why are Christians so narrow-minded and intolerant?

Many are offended by Jesus' words that He is the only way to heaven. We must face these questions, but there may be deeper issues in the person's heart, and questions can expose them.

Possible questions might be:

- Why do you say Christians are narrow-minded or intolerant?
- How would you define intolerant? Does that mean that Christians do not allow others to believe what they want to believe, or simply that they are convinced that what they believe is the truth? Even though some may try, the fact is no one can force their beliefs on others. Some may punish others to believe differently than they do, but they cannot force them to change their beliefs. Many have died rather than renounce what they believed to be true.
- Why do you think it is wrong to believe that your beliefs are true or to hold tightly to a set a beliefs?
- Do you have any strong beliefs to which you hold tightly?

## **2. The Person who never heard about Jesus**

What about the person who has never heard about Jesus?

- That is an interesting question. Who do you think is the person who judges people after they die?
- Do you think a perfect God will be just? Only He has the ultimate right to judge people.
- Jesus said that we must be perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). What amazes me is how God could allow anyone into heaven. Why do you think God should allow anyone into heaven, since no one is really perfect?
- Someone once said that the Cross is where God's love and justice met. Have you ever seriously considered what happened at the Cross?

## **3. Questions about the Bible**

I cannot accept the Bible as an authority in my life. It was written so long ago, and it just does not seem applicable to me or my life today. Furthermore, how can I know it is true?

- Many people have questions about the Bible, and why the Bible is or is not any different from other religions' books. Have you ever seriously read the Bible? If so, how much?
- Why did you want to read the Bible?
- Was there anything that you remember, or impressions you had from when you read the Bible?
- Did you ever get the big theme of the Bible? What do

- you think is the overall theme of the Bible?
- Would you be willing to look at it again? If so, I would suggest you read \_\_\_\_\_. (Different books might be better for different persons, for example, John is often good for most “post-everything” Western Europeans, but Luke might be best for a Middle-Eastern person.)
  - Do you ever pray?
  - I always suggest that people pray briefly before reading the Bible, since it is perhaps difficult to understand, and God can really help. If you pray with a sincere heart to know and understand God, He will help you.

#### **4. Questions about God (atheists or agnostics)**

The concept of God is hard for me to grasp. How can anyone know that there is a God or what He is like? or I cannot believe in a God. I just think people made it up to explain what they could not explain or understand.

- You are not the only person who has difficulty understanding these deep topics on the existence of God, or whether He is even able to be known. Tell me, what makes you think there is no God or that you cannot know Him?
- Can you or anyone be certain that there is or is not a God?
- If God did exist, what would He be like?
- Jesus said that He was God. That is, in fact, why they killed him, for blasphemy. That is a pretty bold statement. Do you think His life represented what

God might be like? In what way?

- Have you ever really studied the claims Jesus made?
- If you are interested, there are many resources on-line, or I could recommend some books also (such as “More than a Carpenter”).

## **5. Heaven and Hell**

How can a loving God send anyone to hell?

- Hell is a difficult concept to imagine. Personally, I hate thinking about it. Do you believe in a heaven and a hell? Why or why not?
- Who is the one who really knows for sure whether there is a heaven or a hell? Really only God knows for sure; Christians believe in it through their faith in the validity of the Bible.
- If there is a heaven and a hell, would you think it is important to know how to get to heaven instead of being sent to hell?
- If there is a heaven and a hell, who would decide who goes where?
- How do you think God would decide who would go to heaven or hell? (Most people would say based on whether they are good or bad.)
- The Bible says clearly that no man is good (Ps 14:1 and Romans 3:10-11). According to what you said, no one should go to heaven, right?
- The Bible clearly says there is a heaven and a hell. Would you like to know what the Bible says about how someone can be sure of going to heaven?

## 6. Suffering and Evil in the World

How can a loving God allow so much evil in the world?  
If God were all powerful, He would not allow this to occur. God either does not exist or is unloving.

- Have you or someone you know ever experienced a lot of personal suffering in your or his life?
- Has a close friend or family member recently died?
- Where do you think the evil in the world comes from?
- Do you think God allows people to choose good or evil?
- Do you think God loves people?
- Do you think it hurts God when He sees people hurting or killing others?
- Jesus said that He was God, and that is why He was killed. Do you think Jesus and God are unfamiliar with suffering and pain?
- Have you ever considered why Jesus went to suffer on the cross?

Asking questions about their objections to God, Jesus, the Bible or the Christian faith, can reveal their motives. Apologetics (defending the doctrine), may mean nothing to them, since that is not really their problem. Always depend on the the Holy Spirit's guidance while asking questions.

If someone asks a question, we should ask God for help and run through these questions:

1. Why was he/she asking this question?



2. Is there possibly a deeper motive or problem behind their question?
3. What can I ask him in return?
4. How can I communicate Biblical truths related to the deeper issues behind the question using a story in the Bible?

## **8. Wisdom from Solomon**

Years ago, at work, I finally found someone who was interested in discussing the Bible with me. We started talking and looking at the Bible together during our lunches, and during our discussions, he always had a response that was critical or skeptical of the Bible. It was beginning to disturb me, since I did not know how to help him to seriously consider the claims of Jesus. As I was reading in Solomon's Proverbs, God gave me peace as I read the following verses.

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.*

*Answer a fool as his folly deserves, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

(Proverbs 26:4-5, NASB)

Dialoguing with a fool, according to Proverbs 26 can just further their foolishness. If you really sense that

someone asks questions just to ridicule Jesus and Christians, you must be wary, but answer him. The question is how do we “Answer a fool as his folly deserves?” Maybe like this.

Question by cynic: “How could you ever believe in a God who would allow so much pain and suffering in the world?”

Response: “How can you NOT believe in a God in view of all the evil in the world?”

Question by cynic: How can you just believe EVERYTHING you see in the Bible?

Response: Why not?

Cynic: Because it is just not true.

Response: How do you know it's not true?

Cynic: Because I read a book that said .....

Response: But how do you know that is true?

In summary, it is important to discern the spirit of the person you are talking to. Do not feel that you need to

give a response to every question people ask; in fact, you might want to stay away from dialoguing with fools. Fools and cynics are just not ready for the truth, and it might do them more harm than good. Here are some other thoughts from Solomon.

Pr. 14:7 *“Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.”*

Pr. 18:2 *“A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.”*

Pr. 23:9 *“Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.”*

Even Jesus had some words of advice for engaging the fool and cynic. Matthew 7:6 *“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”*

Years ago, when I was a young believer, I was with my pastor speaking with students at the University of Missouri, trying to engage them with spiritual conversation and the gospel. We came across an evident fool, who certainly did not want to listen to what God had to say. My pastor, after realizing his spirit simply read from Proverbs 1:22-33 (a scathing rebuke by God of cynics and fools), and then ended the conversation. You may not want to do that with a friend, but it did seem appropriate for this person, and hopefully it had a positive rebuking effect in his life.

On another occasion, I was talking with a long-time friend who obviously had serious problems in his life. I was sharing the hope and salvation available in Jesus; he was not listening and began making fun. Finally I said with all clarity “You are going to hell”, the truth of which saddened me. He kind of disregarded my comment, but later told me it really pierced his heart, and he could not get it out of his mind. A few months later someone at his work invited him to a Bible study, and he surprised himself and everyone else by saying yes. A few weeks later he came to Jesus and his entire life was radically changed.

## **9. Stories to Communicate Spiritual Truths**

Our current culture is sometimes described as a “post-everything” type of culture. It is certainly post Judeo-Christian and post-modern, but also post-secular (not disregarding the existence of a spiritual dimension to life), and even post-intellectual (people saying I am not an intellectual – I am socialistic).

Our culture is very relativistic, anti-foundational, with no universal truths and no outward objective reality. Many people think that a truth for all times and all cultures simply does not exist. The anti-secularist will commonly reject organized religion, but be really open to spirituality. Experience is very important. It is also very common to mix and blend various ideas or religions.

In this kind of culture, you will find that people reject the idea of one overarching story or explanation of things they see or experience, but they are drawn to short stories that might apply to a particular situation.

Once we have asked enough questions and understand their real issues and objections to faith, we can pray and ask God to help us share a story from the Bible that might meet their real needs or answer their objections. The story may not answer all of their objections, but hopefully it will speak to their deeper needs and their heart. In Luke 18:18-23, the ruler who came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life was unwilling to give up his riches to follow Jesus. If we can identify an idol in a person's life, we can also try to find a story that addresses that issue. As we are praying and asking God for His wisdom and help, He can show us verses as we are spending time with Him, and ask Him for an opportunity to share with them.

It is not always necessary to actually read the parable or story from the Bible with our friend. This might be a little awkward, but in the course of our conversation, we can possibly ask them, "Do you mind if I share a short story with you that I recently read?"

Jesus was a famous story-teller. He used parables over and over again, and the people listened intently, even if they did not totally understand the spiritual meanings or truths behind all of His stories.

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Here are several reasons to consider:

- **Parables were usually very visible, using everyday objects that people easily understood.**
- **Parables make teachings easier to remember and apply.**
- **Parables are enduring, dealing with basic principles applied to specific situations**
- **Parables allow you to make statements that would otherwise get you in trouble.**
- **Parables have a time-release effect; they plant seeds that sprout later.**

Many of the parables taught by Jesus encouraged His friends to walk in a manner worthy of their calling as Christians. But He also used parables with those who were not yet His followers. A brief summary of some different types of people and various parables that can be shared with them follows on the next page.

Type of Person	References	Description
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Cynics or Skeptics	Matthew 24:32-35, Mark 13:28-32, Luke 21:29-33	The budding fig tree / Understand the times / God's word never fails.
	Matthew 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-18	Landowner with unrighteous tenants.
Self-Righteous People	Matt 9:10-13 Mark 2:15-17 Luke 5:29-32	The Great Physician. The righteous do not need a doctor, only the sick. Those forgiven much, love much.
	Luke 18:9-14	Two people praying, one self-righteous the other a sinner. The sinner is forgiven, not the other.
Decision Time - Come to Christ	Matthew 22:1-14	Marriage Feast – Invited guests make excuses, but the poor and needy are invited and come, but a wedding garment (Jesus) is necessary, or suffering comes.
	Luke 16:19-31	The rich man and Lazarus both die, and Lazarus goes to heaven, and the rich man to hell. Good description of hell, no second chances, the Word is enough.

God says there are certain powers and benefits to sharing His word, as described below:

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

*“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

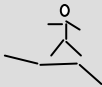
Sharing a parable or story from the Bible to help meet the spiritual needs of our friends is invaluable; we can also share other stories or experiences from our lives or the lives of others. We can also always share our testimony of how we came to a saving faith in Christ. All of these stories, God can use to help our friends understand the deeper truths of the Bible.



## 10. The Greatest Story of All

Obviously, this is the life and sacrificial death of Jesus, but how can we simply and effectively share this story with our friends in response to our provocative questions? I like this simple method often called “One Verse Evangelism”, first coined by the Navigators. It is a very simple and effective method of sharing the story of Jesus and the opportunity to find salvation through Him.

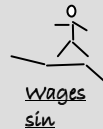
For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in Christ Jesus  
our Lord.



First, just write the verse Romans 6:23 on the top of a small sheet of paper. You can also draw a picture of a man just below.

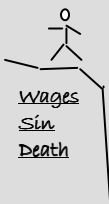
Next, underline the word WAGES, and explain that this is something that we earn or deserve. Re-write the word below the man. Do the same for SIN, explaining that sin is both active and passive rebellion against GOD.

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in Christ Jesus  
our Lord.



Then, do the same for DEATH, and explain that

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in Christ Jesus  
our Lord.



there are three types of death, physical, spiritual and then eternal death, which is hell. Because we have all sinned, we all deserve hell. Draw the line down

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
 eternal life in Christ Jesus  
 our Lord.

wages  
sin  
death  
~~Help / Hope~~ BUT

Then, explain that we might be physically alive but spiritually dead. In this condition, there is no HELP from God and no HOPE. Write these two words and draw a line through them. Then add the word BUT, and explain that the story does not end here.

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
 eternal life in Christ Jesus  
 our Lord.

wages  
sin  
death  
~~Help / Hope~~ BUT

God  
 free gift  
God

Then, underline the words FREE GIFT and GOD. Write God on the right, and the cliff. Re-write the words FREE GIFT and GOD. Explain that a free gift cannot be earned by good works; it can only be freely received.

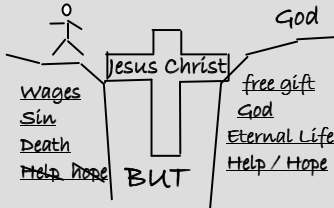
What is this free gift from God? It is ETERNAL LIFE. Underline it and re-write it below. Then, explain that this also means God's help and hope for this life also. Write those words also. Then ask, "How do we get this eternal life"?

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
 eternal life in Christ Jesus  
 our Lord.

wages  
sin  
death  
~~Help / Hope~~ BUT

God  
 free gift  
God  
Eternal Life  
 Help / Hope

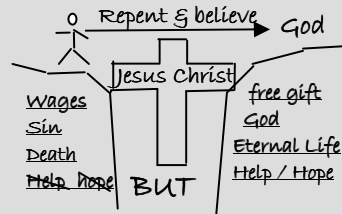
For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in Christ Jesus  
our Lord.



They will usually say from God, which is true, but bring them back to Jesus Christ who suffered on the cross as our payment for our sins. Write His name in the middle of the cross between the two sides.

Close by saying that Jesus is the bridge, the way to pass from the death we deserve because of our sins, to the eternal life that God gave us through Jesus death on the cross. As we repent and believe, we can receive this free gift from God. Draw the words “Repent and Believe” with the arrow from left to right. You might want to define repent as being a sincere desire in your heart to follow God and His ways for our lives. Then you can say that they can pray and express their sincere desire to receive this free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For the wages of sin is death,  
but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in Christ Jesus  
our Lor



This truly is the greatest story of all time, and it is a true story. This is our desire for all or our family and friends that they come to know and receive the eternal life that God gave us as a free gift in Christ.

## 11. Final Remarks

Questions and stories can open the door to many exciting conversations with our family and friends. Obviously, they are not the only means to reach our unsaved friends. However, often, in our zeal to share the gospel, we lose sight of the person and pour truth into an unwilling vessel. A study into Jesus' interactions with the lost reveals no such haste into the facts of the gospel, but rather a penetrating, insightful inquisition into the state of affairs of the heart.

May we, in this natural environment of asking questions and telling stories, allow the Lord to help us and use us as His mouthpiece.

*“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you (or them) on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*  
(2 Cor. 5:18-21)

## The Meiburger Family



The Meiburger Family moved to Italy in the year 2000 to help start a university church at the University of Turin. At that time, Erin and Kristen were 17 and 14 respectively. God used this decision to shape our lives in marvelous ways and influence the lives of many others from all parts of the world.

Ten years later, there are no regrets. In 2008 Erin married Ben Bringardner, a fellow American missionary who served in Italy, and they now have one child, Matteo Tigre Bringardner. They currently live in Dallas, Texas. Kristen just finished her graduate degree in Biomedical Engineering at the Turin Engineering University and is engaged to marry Andrea Testa, an Italian leader in our church, this coming June.

The church they helped plant is called Il Rifugio, and it currently has about 40 participants. This university church is composed of young people from all over the world.



Our goal at Il Rifugio is to follow Jesus' Great Commission, which means to disciple men and women and help them to follow Jesus with all their hearts. Our mission is to give birth to new communities of Jesus' disciples that will reflect the LIGHT (Italian word LUCE) of Jesus in Torino, Italy and to the world. Luce is the Italian acronym as follows:

**L**odare – WORSHIP God with all our lives and hearts

**U**nirsi – To be UNITED in fellowship

**C**rescere – GROW in the use of our gifts and talents

**E**spondere – to EXPAND God's love for others, both inside and outside of our community.

Pray with us as we serve to raise up national believers who will fulfill this goal and mission, and for God's wisdom as he leads us to new places in the future. If you are led by God to financially invest in this ministry, you can contact Great Commission Ministries. Contact information is in the front of this booklet or you can go on-line at [www.gcmweb.org/getinvolved/Give](http://www.gcmweb.org/getinvolved/Give).

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