

Meet Nick the non-Christian. Here are a few problems on Nick's mind. "I need to get my tires changed on that car. My check engine light just went on. One of the girls is sick, I wonder what that means for my schedule tomorrow. I really hope my boss is okay with me taking a few extra days to work on this project. I need groceries. I wonder what's going on in the news today. I should probably call my mom and check in. I need to consider my eternal destiny."

Now, all joking aside. Which one of those everyday items seems like it doesn't belong? (Pause)

What we are up against as evangelists is that we want people to have that last thought acutely on their mind. But here's the reality. For a lot of our friends and co-workers. It's just not. Life is so distracting and busy that for spiritual things to come up it feels like it literally needs to be **injected** into people's lives. Putting a rock in the shoe. And that's what brings us to this session. You've got positioning in someone's life. Perhaps you've gained some kind of hearing or favor with them. And now, you start to have *that feeling*. That pressure inside, perhaps that leading of the Holy Spirit. "I need to start a conversation about the gospel with them."

So how? I want to give a few minutes to thinking about how to START and GUIDE those conversations.

So first, let's **start**. And to start I've got 3 L's.

Look for open moments

With so much distraction, we need to be alert for moments of openness someone might have to spiritual things. If you are a parent, you know this quite well. You've learned to identify those undistracted moments. Maybe in the car driving or on a family vacation. But there are open moments for the average person as well. And this is why that time we gave to positioning was so important. Sometimes open moments might be obvious. Christmas. Easter. A funeral. A birth of a child. A big job change. But a lot of times they become clear because you've spent lots of time with the person and learned. You learn of a family tragedy. Or the anniversary of a lost loved one. Those are important moments.

Listen attentively

Simply put: **the best conversationalists are the best listeners**. Good conversationalists listen more than they talk. I have *really* had to grow at this in evangelism. I have so much to say! And listening is so challenging! The average person talks at about 225 words per minutes. But our minds can listen at up to 500 words per minute, which means it takes real effort and energy to actually pay attention to someone. But if don't listen well it will be impossible to ask good questions. Listening is a profoundly Christian thing to do. Listening demonstrates humility.

Learn how conversations typically work

Conversation skills are kind of an art. Some people are naturals. But it's also a skill that you can develop. And here is a really helpful tool that I think is pretty perceptive on how conversations work. How conversations move from the weather to the gospel. Conversation topics exist in three concentric circles, kind of like layers of an onion. The outermost layer is where we talk about interests — what kind of weather you like, who are you pulling for in the super bowl, what did you do this weekend, etc. These are pretty safe topics. The middle layer is where we talk about values. Where we talk about things that are better or worse, good or bad, wise or unwise. This is where people might disagree some. And That central layer is where we talk about worldview questions. Things about God. About humanity. About sin.

About why things are the way they are. About death and heaven and hell. That's where the gospel is. This is the **really** important layer.

You can always just start a conversation with someone — “hey if you were to die tonight, how confident are you that you will be in heaven?” And just blitz right through interests and values. That is some of you guys' style. But for most of us, we get to those things through talking about interests and values.

This is just how conversations work. And generally, as the relationship grows, the farther into the layers we go. Which brings us to **GUIDING** conversations.

In guiding the conversation, first it's really important to listen for subtle hints. Just the other day I was in a conversation with David, who was doing some work at my house. We have talked about lots of interests. And had a good time doing it! And then... after about 30 minutes of small talk, David shared with me that his girlfriend was expecting soon. It stood out to me, because he's seen my kids before. He had never brought that up before. It felt like a hint to move further in the conversation. So what do you do? Maybe you say... Congrats! Having kids is a blessing. Maybe you talk about your experience. Those are instinctual responses. But that stays in the interest layer. Instead I asked... *How are you feeling about becoming a dad?* I wanted to ask about his emotions.

David had given me a hint. He had laid out some bait. And I took it. I moved the conversations to the values layer. “How are you feeling about that” is a GREAT question. It was an invitation for David to get personal with me. It's an invitation for him to share what is most important to him. So we talked about what is good and challenging about being a parent. We talked about how it feels to be a dad. We stayed at the values layer for a while. And then eventually David gave me a hint that he wanted to go to the worldview level. I took the bait, and it led to a great conversation about the gospel.

Sometimes they will make the hint. But most often, we have to carry the burden of asking the questions.

Listen to Proverbs 20:5: “The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” We draw it out by listening and asking questions. Jesus asked tons of questions. He asked **far** more questions than he answered.

Good questions are some of your best friends in evangelistic contexts. Questions are non-threatening, they communicate humility, they allow listeners to discover truth for themselves, and, usually, they typically elicit a response question in return.

And asking good questions is a skill that A LOT of us want to grow in. And I'll tell you this : I have asked some bad questions in my day. A lot of bible study guides don't even have good questions. Look at a verse like John 3:16 — “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever shall believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” First question: So, what did God love?

That question is so obvious you won't get many to answer. It's almost an insulting question. A good question is intelligent, open-ended, and raises a point without being manipulative

Good questions help us to understand people at each layer (interests, values, and worldviews) and they help us move conversations from one category to the next. You'll see on your handout some helpful categories of questions.

(Read them)

The more questions we ask and the our info we learn, in some ways the easier it gets. Because I have specific data points to move further in the concentric circles. Here are a few questions I LOVE to ask.

1. After I plant the flag... do you have a faith? I like this question more than “Did you grow up religious?” because it doesn’t just give me insight into their background, it gives me some insight into their current beliefs.

2. Why? Learn to ask *why*. I remember a conversation with Will two a few years ago. We met for lunch and I was just getting to know him. Lots of talk about interests. I’d listen, maybe throw in a comment here or there, and then ask another question. Eventually I asked him. Hey, what kind of music are you into? That was the key that unlocked the door. A simple interest question. Will told me he loved electronic music. I asked a follow up... “Oh which band? I’d love to listen myself.” He told me and I wrote it down (Get interested). But then I asked the WHY question. So why are you into electronic music. He thought about it and said that when he goes to concerts he has this incredible experience where the music gets better and better and better as the night goes on. He shared that he had gone recently and it was so moving that at the end he broke down and cried, so sad that it was over. What an answer! So what do you do next! We are firmly in the values section. Go back to the question that got you there. Why? I asked... Will, why do you think music has such an impact on us? At this point I had moved it into the worldviews layer. Why are we as human beings the way we are? Will looked at me. And he said. You know, that’s a great question. I honestly don’t know. Why do you think so? That was my opportunity. I thought about it and said... I think it is because we are made in the image of God to have the capacity to understand things like beauty, art, and music. Harmonies move us because we are made in the image of a Triune God who exists himself in perfect harmony. More than that, I think music taps into the reality that we are made to worship.

3. Permission questions

Which brings me to my 3rd go to question. Will heard me and said. Wow, that’s really interesting. But that’s not the gospel. I want to get to the gospel. So I asked permission to go there. I asked: “Would you be okay if I shared why I’m a Christian?” After all those questions I asked him. After showing interest in what he was interested in. After causing him to think about his life with a well-timed WHY question. He said, yes! And from there I got to share the gospel with him.

That was a great conversation. But I didn’t want it to end there. So I ended with the **golden question**... “Would you be up for having another conversation about God sometime with me?” Simple, bold, personal, and direct. He said yes. We scheduled the time and met up the next week. We want everyday conversations to turn into meetings or Bible-studies. Most people won’t come to faith in one conversation. But over the course of a few weeks, God can do great things. 2 years later me and Will are still meeting up, reading the Bible. Sometimes we talk about what he’s reading and what he’s interested in. But this week we’re meeting to read a gospel together.

Friends, be patient. We have an urgent message, but persuasion happens with patience. I love Proverbs 25:15 — “With patience a ruler may be persuaded.” Don’t give up. Keep listening. Keep asking questions. Keep responding to questions with the good news of Jesus Christ. Keep inviting people to look at God’s word. And keep sharing the gospel along the way. With patience a ruler may be persuaded.
(Promo questioning evangelism at the end.)