STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVELY DISCUSSING YOUR CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS

TACTICS

GREGORY KOUKL

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A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVELY DISCUSSING
YOUR CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS

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Tactics Study Guide
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ISBN 978-0-310-52919-4

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Published in association with the literary agency of Mark Sweeney & Associates, Bonita Springs, Florida 34135.

Cover photo: iStockphoto.com

Printed in the United States of America

17 18 19 20 21 22 22 23 24 25 26 27 /DHV/ 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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STUDY GUIDE INSTRUCTIONS

An Adventure in Learning

You are about to embark on an exciting adventure in learning with one of the finest training tools available. *Tactics Study Guide: A Guide to Effectively Discussing Your Christian Convictions,* together with the accompanying *Tactics Video Study,* provides an easy-to-follow, well-reasoned plan for mastering the art of maneuvering in conversations about spiritual things.

Though the information may be a little challenging at first, by faithfully going through this material you will not only learn it for yourself, but should by the end be able to teach someone else.

In six one-hour sessions, you will learn how to do the following:

- Initiate conversations effortlessly
- Stop challengers in their tracks and turn the tables
- Graciously and effectively expose faulty thinking
- Maneuver through minefields
- Present the truth clearly, cleverly, and persuasively

USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

The *Tactics Study Guide* is meant to be easy to use. It's designed so you can readily see the relationships between the main ideas. You'll also notice that the text is punctuated by special sections, each with its own unique purpose.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

These sidebars give tips that will help you improve your tactical skills when using your new knowledge so you can present the arguments in a winsome and attractive way.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

These important segments are designed to take your training experience from the passive stage to the active stage. If you're going through this study on your own, you will sometimes need to enlist the help of another person or even a few people for these sections. Exercises include discussion, role-playing, recall, directed reflection, and memory tips.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

These segments give you a chance to momentarily step aside from the main point and ponder a related idea. It may be an insight, a clever application, or a reflection designed to make the lesson more practical or meaningful.

GOING DEEPER: Information for Self-Study

Here you will find additional information to study on your own that is not included either in this study guide or the accompanying video study.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

A critical element of mastery learning is recall, the ability to bring to mind the important details you've been learning. These self-assessment quizzes are a powerful tool to help fix the salient details of the course in your mind so you can recall them quickly when you need them in the future.

DEMONSTRATING MASTERY

At the beginning of each new session, you will find a review of the "Self-Assessment" material from the preceding session. Be sure to do this exercise—either on your own or with someone else—before each session. It has two purposes. First, by working to recall the main points of the prior session, the ideas will be reinforced in your mind. Second, by reviewing the past material, you will be prepped for the next session.

ON YOUR OWN

Here you will find valuable exercises to immediately get you actively involved using what you've learned. This step is vitally important for mastery learning.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Additional articles are included at the end of each session to supplement your learning experience. They expand on concepts or principles dealt with during the sessions.

NOTES

The final section of each session has notes that either document the information taught in the manual or offer added insight. You may want to use the references as a guide to additional resources for further study.

THE SECRET TO MASTERY LEARNING

Finally, here is one secret that guarantees mastery of this material: Teach it to others. Anyone who is a student of the material can become a teacher of the material. Perhaps you

can give talks in your church, Sunday school, youth group, homeschool, or small group using the notes in your manual and adapting the material to your unique situation.

Whatever way you choose to pass the material on, the benefit will be twofold: You'll gain a better mastery of the material by teaching it, and whoever you share it with will benefit as well.

SESSION 1

Getting You into the Driver's Seat: Learning the Columbo Tactic

I. INTRODUCTION

A. This course could change everything for you.

1. You may look back on the time you spent learning this material and mark it as a turning point in your life in the way you engage other people for the Gospel.
2. I say this with some confidence because this is exactly what countless numbers of people have told me over the years. Tactics changed everything for them.

B. The tactical approach you will learn in this course will give you two indispensable skills to help you engage others about your Christian convictions.

1. First, it will train you to maneuver comfortably and graciously in conversations with those who disagree with you.
2. Second, it will teach you the art of maintaining appropriate control—what I call "staying in the driver's seat"—in your discussions with others.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

Pair up with another person and explain your answer to the following question: When I think about discussing Christianity with nonbelievers . . .

- I relish the encounter.
- I'm willing, but nervous and uncertain.
- It scares me, but I try anyway.
- I try to avoid it.

C. The missing piece

1. Going to conferences and pursuing individual study provides lots of information, but there's something missing.
2. There's a missing bridge that helps you get from the content to the conversation, from the scholarship to the relationship.
3. In this course I want to give you that missing bridge.

D. Goals for the first session

1. First, I'll define tactics and warn you of some dangers of using a tactical approach.
2. Second, I'll suggest a significant change in the way you approach evangelism.
3. Third, I'll introduce you to the first and most powerful tactic, the one that is the core of our game plan.

GOING DEEPER: Information for Self-Study

Apologetics has a questionable reputation with some Christians. By definition, apologists "defend" the faith. They "defeat" false ideas. They "destroy" speculations raised up against the knowledge of God. Those sound like fightin' words to many people. It's not surprising, then, that believers and unbelievers alike associate apologetics with conflict. In their view, defenders don't dialogue; they fight.

In addition to the image problem, apologists face another barrier. The truth is that effective apologetics nowadays requires more than having the right answers. It's too easy for some people to ignore our facts, deny our claims, or simply yawn and walk away.

Then again, sometimes they don't walk away. They stand and fight. They wade into

battle and fire a barrage we can't handle. Caught off balance, we tuck our tails between our legs and retreat, maybe for good.

I'd like to suggest a "more excellent way." Jesus said that when you find yourself a sheep amid wolves, be innocent but shrewd (Matt. 10:16). This calls for a tactical approach. Even though real spiritual warfare is going on,[1] our engagements should look more like diplomacy than D-Day.

II. OUR NEED FOR TACTICS, WHAT THEY ARE, AND HOW TO USE THEM

A. Our need for tactics concerns our commission to be effective ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20).

1. Ambassadors have three essential skills.
   a. Knowledge: an accurately informed mind
   b. Wisdom: an artful method
   c. Character: an attractive manner
2. These skills play a part in every effective engagement we have with a nonbeliever.
3. The second skill—the artful method, or "tactical wisdom"—is the focus of this course.

B. Tactics are distinct from strategy.

1. Strategy involves the big picture, the large-scale operation, one's positioning prior to engagement.
   a. I use the term *strategy* in reference to the tremendous resources of knowledge available to us to be adequately prepared to give an account for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).
      1) In our case, Christianity has strategic superiority—it is well "positioned" on the battlefield—because our ideas can hold up under serious scrutiny compared to other views.

2) We have an excellent case. We have the best answers to life's most important questions.

b. Our strategy concerns the content, information, and reasons why someone should believe that Christianity describes the world accurately, all of which fall under the heading of either defensive or offensive apologetics.[2]

1) Defensive apologetics answers direct challenges to Christianity. For example . . .

(a) It responds to attacks on the Bible's authority.

(b) It answers the problem of evil.

(c) It addresses Darwinian macroevolution.

2) Offensive apologetics makes a positive case for Christianity. For example . . .

(a) It provides evidence for the existence of God.

(b) It supplies evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

(c) It presents evidence of fulfilled prophecy.

c. Our strategic concerns include a number of contemporary issues.

1) The radical relativism and skepticism of postmodernism that denies the existence of objective truth.[3] This would include moral relativism (all moral truth is individual or group based) and religious pluralism (all religions are equally valid and "true" for those who believe).

2) The competing views on Jesus' identity.

3) The problem of evil.

4) The ethical issues of abortion, homosexuality, human cloning, doctor-assisted suicide, and the nature of marriage.

5) The historical accuracy of the Gospels.

2. In contrast, tactics literally refer to "the art of arranging," deploying one's assets, the details of the engagement.

a. Tactics, simply put, are about how we maneuver in conversations, allowing us to:

1) Use our knowledge in creative ways.
2) Choreograph the particulars of our response.
3) Style our response to objections.
4) Employ specific methods in addressing attacks.
5) Guide us with sound reasoning, clear thinking, and aggressive advocacy.

b. Often a clever commander has the advantage over a superior opponent through deft tactical maneuvering.

c. Tactics are not:
1) Tricks or slick ruses.
2) Clever ploys to destroy non-Christians, forcing them to submit to your point of view.
3) Attempts to belittle or humiliate or add notches in your spiritual belt.

d. Instead, tactics help you:
1) Manage, not manipulate.
2) Control, not coerce.
3) Finesse, not fight.
4) Navigate through the minefields.
5) Put you in the driver's seat of the conversation.

e. I offer these warnings about tactics for two reasons.
1) First, tactics are powerful and can be easily abused. It's not difficult to make someone look silly with these techniques.
2) Second, because the illustrations in this workbook are abbreviated accounts, they may appear harsher, more direct, or more aggressive on the page than they were in reality.

f. I do mean to be direct, focused, and challenging.

g. I do not mean to be abrasive, abusive, or alarming.

h. The goal is to find clever ways to exploit another's bad thinking for the purpose of guiding him or her to truth, yet remaining gracious and charitable at the same time.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

"It is not the Christian life to wound, embarrass, or play one-upmanship with colleagues, friends, or even opponents, but it's a common vice that anyone can easily fall into."[4]

—Hugh Hewitt

III. GARDENING VS. HARVESTING

A. Key insight: Before there can be any harvest, there must always be a season of gardening.

1. This insight has completely changed my approach to my conversations with non-Christians. Virtually no one becomes a Christian overnight, especially nowadays.
2. Jesus said:

> Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor. (John 4:35–38 NIV)

B. Notice the breakdown:

1. Two seasons: gardening and harvesting
2. Two kinds of workers: sowers and reapers
3. One team, with everyone rejoicing together!

C. What kind of worker are you, a gardener or a harvester?

1. Gardening takes more work than harvesting, since harvesting is easy when the fruit is ripe.
2. So we probably need more gardeners than harvesters.
3. I'm a gardener, and I bet you are too, at least most of the time you talk with others about spiritual things.
4. And maybe you've been sitting on the bench out of play because you weren't a harvester. Now you know where you can make a difference: gardening.

D. My modified goal:

1. Since I'm a gardener, I'm not focused on harvesting.
2. My main goal is simply to "put a stone in their shoe."
   a. I want to annoy them in a good way.
   b. I want to get them thinking.
   c. I want them to see that Jesus is worth thinking about.

IV. THE TACTICAL GAME PLAN

A. Here is my promise to you:

1. I am going to give you a game plan that will allow you to converse with confidence in any situation.
2. It does not matter how little you know, or how knowledgeable or aggressive or obnoxious the other person may be.

B. It's a game plan that's simple to follow, yet is tailor-made for each individual and will help keep you in the driver's seat in conversations.

1. Note these instructions by the Apostle Paul:

> Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Col. 4:5–6 NASB)

2. In other words, be smart, be nice, and be tactical.

C. When I talk about "staying in the driver's seat," I mean being in control in your interactions with nonbelievers.

For instance, notice how I was able to use the tactical approach to maneuver smoothly in a conversation with a young woman at a photo center.

GREG: [This conversation began when I noticed a pentagram—a five-pointed star—she wore around her neck.] Does that necklace have religious significance, or is it just jewelry?

WOMAN: Yes, it has religious significance. The five points stand for earth, wind, fire, water, and spirit.

GREG: Does it have religious significance for *you*, personally?

WOMAN: Yes. I'm a pagan. It's an earth religion.

GREG: So, you're Wiccan? [a student of witchcraft]

WOMAN: Yes. We respect all life.

GREG: So, then, that would make you pro-life regarding abortion, right?

WOMAN: No. I'm pro-choice.

GREG: That surprises me. Isn't it unusual for someone in Wicca to be pro-choice?

WOMAN: Well, I know I could never do that. I could never kill a baby. [Note her choice of words—"kill a baby."] I wouldn't do anything to hurt anyone else, because it might come back on me, kind of like karma.

GREG: But shouldn't we do something to stop *other* people from killing babies?

WOMAN: I think women should have a choice.

GREG: Women should have the choice to kill their own babies? [Note my use of her original words here.]

WOMAN: Well . . . I think all things should be taken into consideration on this question.

GREG: Okay, tell me what kind of considerations would make it okay to kill a baby?

WOMAN: [*quickly*] Incest.

GREG: Let me see if I understand you correctly. If I had a two-year-old child here next to me who had been conceived through incest, in your view I could kill her. Is that right?

WOMAN: [*pausing*] Well, I guess I'd have mixed feelings about that.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

When discussing controversial issues, be careful not to resort to slick rhetoric—empty slogans, loaded words, ridicule, or name-calling. This is misleading and unkind, and it won't persuade a critic. Use a reasonable argument instead.[5]

1. In this short encounter, I used three foundational tactics to help me challenge the young woman's faulty thinking.
   a. First, I asked nine questions.
      1) I used these questions to begin the conversation and gather information from her.
      2) I also used these questions to exploit weaknesses in what she said.
   b. I tried to show the inconsistent and contradictory nature of her views.
      1) On the one hand, she is a witch who respects all life.
      2) On the other hand, she is pro-choice on abortion, a procedure she characterized as "killing babies."
   c. Third, I used a tactic that allowed me to show her the logical consequences of her beliefs.
      1) She thought incest was a legitimate reason to "kill a baby."
      2) I asked her about a toddler who was conceived through incest.

3) We were left, through her reasoning, with a legitimate reason to kill this toddler.

2. The value of using the tactical approach is, simply put, to help you stay in the driver's seat of the conversation.
   a. It allows you to productively direct the discussion.
   b. It forces the other person to do most of the work.
   c. It helps avoid conflict. Remember, if anyone gets mad, you're going to lose your chance at making a difference.

D. Regardless of your present skill level, you can learn to maneuver almost effortlessly in conversations if you commit to learning the material in this study.

1. This study has equipped thousands of people like you with the confidence and ability to have meaningful, productive conversations about spiritual things.
2. This study guide covers almost everything presented in the accompanying videos, relieving you of the need to take extensive notes.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Tactics require you to think actively and give mental attention to what's going on. The approach resembles one-on-one basketball more than chess, involving constant motion, adjustment, and adaptation. The tactical approach requires as much careful listening as it does thoughtful response.

GOING DEEPER: Information for Self-Study

Let me offer you a word of encouragement. I've been defending the faith actively and "professionally" for more than three decades in the marketplace of ideas with people who oppose evangelical Christian views and are professionals in their own right—atheists, skeptics, Mormons, Jewish rabbis, and secularists of all sorts.

When I started, I wasn't sure how I would fare in public against the pros with thousands of people listening on radio or TV. I discovered that the facts and sound reason are on our side. We don't have to be frightened of the truth or the opposition if we do our homework. After all, even people who don't like tests don't mind them much when they know the answers.

The truth is this: The Gospel can be defended if it is properly understood and properly articulated. If we take our time and think through the issues, we can make a solid defense. If we have the truth, the opposing argument will always have a flaw. Keep looking for it. Sooner or later it will show up. The right tactic can help you discover the flaw in another person's thinking and show it for the error it is.

Remember this: Intelligent people still make foolish mistakes in thinking when it comes to spiritual things. The tactics you learn in this class will help you exploit those mistakes. You'll discover that people don't give much thought to their objections. How do I know? Because I listen to the objections.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

Ten-Second Window

Pair up with another person and consider the following real-world scenarios. In each scenario, you have a ten-second window of time to create an opportunity for further dialogue with the other individual. What would you do or say in each situation?

Scenario 1: "There Is No God"

The Scene: You're at a dinner party at your friend's home with some of your close friends from church. The conversation ranges naturally over a number of interesting spiritual topics. Suddenly, to your surprise and embarrassment, the host's fifteen-year-old son announces with some belligerence that he doesn't believe in God anymore. "It's simply not rational," he says. "There is no proof." No one had any idea he'd been moving in this direction. There's a stunned silence.

The Challenge: Your opportunity will pass quickly. You have only a few seconds to

initiate further dialogue, but you want to do so in a way that is productive and will help everyone in the room to reflect intelligently on the issue. What will you say?

Scenario 2: Religious Pluralism

The Scene: It's the night of your weekly Bible study group. During the discussion of the Sunday sermon on the Great Commission, a newcomer remarks, "Who are we to say Christianity is better than any other religion? I think the essence of Jesus' teaching is love, the same as all religions, not telling other people how to live or believe." The rest of the group fidgets awkwardly, but says nothing.

The Challenge: You're concerned about your friend's statement and want to say something, but you're also concerned about not sounding narrow-minded or intolerant. No one else is speaking up, and you have only a few seconds before you lose the opportunity to represent God's view on other religions. What will you say?

Scenario 3: The Bible

The Scene: You're riding the university shuttle with a friend who notices a Bible in your backpack. "I've read the Bible before," he says. "It's got some interesting stories, but people take it too seriously. It was only written by men, after all, and men make mistakes." You try to recall the points your pastor made a few weeks before about the Bible's inspiration, but come up empty-handed.

The Challenge: You didn't know your friend had any exposure to the Bible until now. You're concerned about keeping the conversation productive while being sensitive to the fact that other shuttle riders are listening. What do you say in response?

V. LEARNING THE COLUMBO TACTIC

A. The Columbo tactic is the "Queen Mother" of all tactics.

1. It's easily combined with the other tactics.

2. It's the simplest tactic imaginable to stop a challenger in his tracks, turn the tables, and get him thinking.
3. Plus, it's an almost effortless way to put you in the driver's seat of the conversation.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

It's not unusual for a Christian to get tongue-tied, not knowing what to say for fear of offending someone. The Columbo tactic provides a step-by-step game plan to help you ease into the process, making it easy even for the most timid to engage others in a meaningful and productive way.

B. The Columbo tactic is named for Lieutenant Columbo of the long-running television series *Columbo*, a brilliant detective who appears bumbling, inept, and completely harmless.
   1. With his rumpled trench coat, stub of a cigar, and borrowed pencil, Columbo looks like he couldn't think his way out of a wet paper bag.
   2. While putting his foes at ease with his harmless demeanor, Columbo then employs his trademark approach:
      a. "I got a problem. Something about this thing bothers me. Maybe you can clear this up for me. *Do you mind if I ask you a question?*"
      b. "Thank you. You're a very intelligent person. Oh, just one more thing."
      c. "I'm sorry. I'm making a pest of myself. It's because I keep asking these questions. But I can't help it. It's a habit."
   3. This is a habit you want to get into!

C. The key to the Columbo tactic: Go on the offensive in an inoffensive way with carefully selected questions that productively advance the conversation.
   1. Simply put, if you hit a roadblock, ask a question.
      a. Never make an assertion when a question can make the same point.

   b. With planning and practice, this tactic can become second nature.
2. Using questions offers tremendous advantages.
   a. Questions are interactive, inviting others to participate.
   b. Questions make headway without requiring you to state your case.
   c. Questions shift the burden of proof to the other person.
   d. Most importantly, the Columbo tactic puts you in the driver's seat.
3. The technique is particularly useful where you work. It makes it possible for you to subtly move your case forward without "preaching" at others.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

Once, while at the home of a well-known actor, I got into a long conversation with the actor's wife about animal rights. I had serious reservations about her ideas, but I didn't contradict her directly. Instead, I kept asking questions meant to expose some of the weaknesses I saw in her view.

Eventually she went on the offensive and began to challenge what she thought were my views. I then pointed out I had never actually stated my beliefs. I had simply asked questions. Since I had never asserted my own view then, strictly speaking, I had nothing to defend.

Once we make a claim in a discussion, others have every right to ask us for evidence. Until then, though, we're off the hook.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

In the space below, sum up the Columbo tactic in one sentence.

D. The Columbo tactic is your game plan. It has three unique applications,[6] each launched with a different kind of question.[7]

1. The tactical game plan provides you with an easy-to-apply, step-by-step approach to having conversations about your convictions.
2. It gives you an incredible margin of safety, since asking questions instead of making statements or claims protects you from having to defend a view.
3. The plan makes it easy to pursue friendly conversation and avoid unnecessary conflict.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

"Ask at least a half dozen questions in every conversation."[8]

—Hugh Hewitt

This skill at inquiry will immediately mark you as different and attractive . . . When you ask a question, you are displaying interest in the person asked—and in most settings this is a great boon to the pride and self-worth of the person being asked. Most people are not queried on many, if any, subjects. Their opinions are not solicited. To ask them is to be remembered fondly as a very interesting and gracious person in your own right.

Once developed, the habit of asking questions will inevitably give you advantages in every setting. You will obviously leave most situations with more information (and friends) than when you arrived, and being an asker allows you control of situations that statement makers rarely achieve. Once you learn how to guide a conversation, you have also learned how to control it. You can express your own opinions as questions, and every human emotion can be conveyed this way.

An alert questioner can judge when someone grows uneasy. But don't stop. Just change directions.[9]

E. The first application of the Columbo tactic is to gather information.

1. The very first thing you want to do in any conversation—before you do anything else—is to use questions to get the lay of the land. Think of it as gathering "intel." You almost always need more information to know how to proceed further.
2. This is the simplest way to use the Columbo tactic. It is virtually effortless, putting no pressure on you at all.
3. When used this way, a question can:
   a. Be a casual conversation-starter (like with the witch in Wisconsin).
   b. Buy you valuable time.
   c. Alert you to weaknesses, flaws, or ambiguities.
   d. Give you valuable information for this and future encounters.
4. Use this Columbo question: "What do you mean by that?" (or some variation).
   a. This is a clarification question that helps you learn *what* a person thinks so you don't misunderstand her or, worse, misrepresent her.
   b. This question should be delivered in a mild, genuinely inquisitive fashion.
   c. It also forces the person to be precise in her meaning, as many people object to Christianity for reasons they haven't completely thought through themselves.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Misrepresenting a view, even by accident, is a serious misstep. When we distort someone's view—especially when we make it appear weaker than it is—we are committing the straw-man fallacy—setting up a lifeless imitation of a friend's view (the "straw man") that we easily knock down, instead of dealing with his actual view. If you're guilty of setting up a straw man, you may find you've given a brilliant refutation of a view that the other person does not hold.

5. Here are some examples of the Columbo tactic in action.
   a. When someone says, "There is no God," ask them, "What do you mean by 'God'?" If they mean an old man with a beard who sits on a throne out in space, Christians don't believe in that kind of God, either. Maybe they reject the God of organized religion, but still believe in some divine "force." Maybe they don't believe in anything outside the natural realm. It's pointless to talk further unless you have a clear idea of what they mean.
   b. When someone says, "All religions are basically the same," ask, "Really? In what way are they basically the same?" The point here is not to determine if there are similarities between religions (there often are), but whether the similarities are weightier than the differences. After all, God cannot be both a personal being (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and a non-personal being (forms of Hinduism) at the same time.
   c. When someone says, "You shouldn't force your views on me," ask, "Specifically, how am I *forcing* my views on you?"
   d. When someone says, "That's just your interpretation," ask, "What do you mean by 'just'?" Although you are giving your interpretation (your understanding of the true meaning of the text), you need to find out if he believes all interpretations are equally valid and yours is "just" one of them. Where does he think your "interpretation" has gone wrong?
   e. When someone says, "Miracle stories were added to the Bible," ask, "What do you mean by 'added to'?" Here you're trying to determine how someone adds lines of text to thousands of handwritten documents circulating around the Mediterranean region in the first few centuries. This problem applies to any claim that the Bible has been purposefully altered.
   f. When someone says, "The Bible has been changed through copying and recopying over the years," ask, "How do you think it has been altered?" You need to find out if he's familiar with the study of the written transmission of ancient texts (called "textual criticism") or is he just repeating something he's heard.

g. When someone says, "How could God exist when there is so much evil in the world?" ask, "What do you mean by 'evil'?" or "What, in your mind, is the conflict?" As it turns out, evil doesn't provide good evidence *against* God, but *for* God, since God must exist to provide the objective standard of good by which any evil is measured.[10]

Important: In each case, have the person *spell out* the objection.

6. This first Columbo question accomplishes five important objectives:
   a. First, it immediately engages your friend in an interactive way.
   b. Second, it flatters him because it shows genuine interest in his view.
   c. Third, it forces him to think more carefully and more precisely—maybe for the first time—about his intended meaning.
   d. Fourth, it gives you valuable information about your friend's exact position.
   e. Fifth, it puts you in the driver's seat of the conversation.
7. Be sure to pay attention to the response.
   a. If it is unclear, follow up with more clarification questions.
   b. Say, "Let me see if I understand you on this . . . ," then feed back the view to make sure you got it right.
8. By the way, don't be surprised if you get the "sounds of silence" response when you ask this question.
   a. Some people merely repeat what they've been socialized to say and have never really thought about what they actually mean.
   b. When asked for clarification, they get caught flat-footed and don't know how to respond.
   c. Your questions graciously prod them to actually think through their view, maybe for the first time. So wait them out and give them time to think before jumping in again.

Do not underestimate the power of the question "What do you mean by that?" (or some variation). Use it often. You can ask this question all day long with absolutely no pressure on you.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

Ten-Second Window Redux

The Ten-Second Window scenarios are printed below. Pair up with a partner and role-play these scenarios using the first Columbo question. Develop a quick response to each scenario using some variation of the question "What do you mean by that?" Remember to choose a question that applies specifically to the particular issue at hand.

Scenario 1: "There Is No God"

The Scene: You're at a dinner party at your friend's home with some of your close friends from church. The conversation ranges naturally over a number of interesting spiritual topics. Suddenly, to your surprise and embarrassment, the host's fifteen-year-old son announces with some belligerence that he doesn't believe in God any more. "It's simply not rational," he says. "There is no proof." No one had any idea he'd been moving in this direction. There's a stunned silence. What will you say?

Columbo Questions:

_____

_____

_____

Scenario 2: Religious Pluralism

The Scene: It's the night of your weekly Bible study group. During the discussion of the Sunday sermon on the Great Commission, a newcomer remarks, "Who are we to say Christianity is better than any other religion? I think the essence of Jesus' teaching is love, the same as all religions, not telling other people how to live or believe." The rest of the group fidgets awkwardly, but says nothing. How do you respond?

Columbo Questions:

_____

_____

_____

Scenario 3: The Bible

The Scene: You're riding the university shuttle with a friend who notices a Bible in your backpack. "I've read the Bible before," he says. "It's got some interesting stories, but people take it too seriously. It was only written by men, after all, and men make mistakes." You try to recall the points your pastor made a few weeks before about the Bible's inspiration, but come up empty-handed. What do you say?

Columbo Questions:

_____

_____

_____

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Sometimes this first Columbo question is directed at a specific statement or topic of conversation. Other times, the question can be more open-ended to make friendly conversation and draw the other person out a bit. As the discussion continues, gently guide the dialogue (if you can) into a more spiritually productive direction with additional questions.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

Learning how to ask this first question is the first step in our game plan and your key to productive conversations, as people frequently don't know what they mean by the things they say, as strange as that may sound. Often they're just repeating slogans, so their statements, questions, opinions, or points of view are so muddled that it's impossible to proceed in the conversation without getting clarification. Asking some form of the question "What do you mean by that?" is the simplest way to clear up the confusion while also giving you time to size up the situation and gather your own thoughts.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

The Real World

Objective: Learn to use the first Columbo question, "What do you mean by that?" to gather information and move the conversation in a productive direction.

Think for a moment about three challenges to Christianity you have heard in the last year. Describe each view in one sentence. (1 minute)

Challenge

_____

_____

Challenge

_____

_____

Challenge

_____

_____

With a partner, assume the roles of challenger and defender so that the defender (the Christian) can practice using the Columbo question. What specific questions would you use to gather information or seek clarification of the challenge? After two minutes, switch roles.

VI. WHAT MAIN POINTS WERE COVERED IN THIS SESSION?

A. First, we talked about that missing piece that sometimes makes conversations so difficult—that bridge from the content to the conversation.

B. Second, we learned the value of using the tactical approach when discussing Christianity.

1. Tactics help you manage the conversation by getting you into the driver's seat and keeping you there.
2. Tactics help you maneuver effectively in the face of opposition.
3. Tactics help your conversations seem more like diplomacy than D-Day.

C. Next, we defined tactics and distinguished them from strategy.

1. Strategy involves the *big picture,* which, in our case, means the content, information, and reasons why someone should believe Christianity is true.
2. Tactics, by contrast, involve the *details of maneuvering* in conversation.

D. Fourth, we learned some of the dangers of using tactics.

1. Tactics are not tricks, slick ruses, or clever ploys that belittle or humiliate the non-Christian.
2. Tactics are used to gain a footing, to maneuver, and to exploit another person's bad thinking so you can guide him to truth.

E. Fifth, I suggested a modified goal for your conversations.

1. Focus on "gardening" instead of on trying to close the deal.
2. Try to "put a stone in their shoe," aiming to take smaller steps to move someone toward the Lord.

F. Finally, I introduced you to the game plan itself: the Columbo tactic.

1. Columbo is a disarming way to take the initiative using carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation.
2. The Columbo tactic is advantageous because questions are:
    a. Excellent conversation starters.
    b. Interactive by nature, inviting others to participate in dialogue.
    c. Neutral, protecting you from just "preaching."

   d. Helpful ways to make headway without stating your case.
   e. Able to buy you valuable time.
   f. Essential to keeping you in the driver's seat of the conversation.
3. The first step of the game plan is to gather information with the question "What do you mean by that?" (or some variation).
   a. This question allows a person to clarify his meaning so you don't misunderstand or misrepresent him.
   b. This question also forces the other person to think more carefully about his exact meaning.
4. In the next session, you'll learn another powerful use of the Columbo tactic, the second step in your game plan: reversing the burden of proof.

INTERACTIVE STUDY

Self-Assessment

Try to answer the following questions without using your notes.

1. What is the missing piece in our approach to sharing with others?
   - We are missing a _____from the _____ to the _____.

2. What are the three essential qualities of a good ambassador?
   - _____: an _____ mind.
   - _____: an _____ method.
   - _____: an _____ manner.

3. What insight suggests that we change our approach to evangelism?
   - Before there can be any _____, there must always be a season of _____.

4. What is the modified goal for our conversations about Christ?
   - Instead of trying to _____ , we are going to try to put a _____.

5. What is the difference between tactics and strategy?
   - Strategy involves the _____.
   - Tactics involve the _____.

6. Finish these sentences:
   - Tactics are not _____.
   - Tactics are not meant to _____.

7. What are good tactics meant to accomplish?
   - Tactics are clever ways to _____ to get a footing or an _____ in a conversation.
   - Tactics are meant to exploit another's _____ for the purpose of guiding him to _____.

8. The key to the Columbo tactic is using carefully selected _____ to productively _____ the conversation.

9. Give some of the advantages to using the Columbo tactic.
   - Questions are excellent _____ starters.
   - Questions are _____ by nature, inviting others to participate in dialogue.
   - Questions are _____; there is no "preaching" involved.
   - You can make headway without actually _____ your case.
   - Questions can buy you valuable _____.
   - Questions keep you in the _____ of the conversation.

10. The first application of Columbo is to gather _____ and employs some form of the question "_____?"

Self-Assessment with Answers

1. What is the missing piece in our approach to sharing with others?
   - We are missing a *bridge* from the *content* to the *conversation*.

2. What are the three essential qualities of a good ambassador?
   - Knowledge: an accurately informed mind.
   - Wisdom: an artful method.
   - Character: an attractive manner.

3. What insight suggests that we change our approach to evangelism?
   - Before there can be any *harvest*, there must always be a season of *gardening*.

4. What is the modified goal for our conversations about Christ?
   - Instead of trying to *close the deal*, we are going to try to put a *stone in their shoe*.

5. What is the difference between tactics and strategy?
   - Strategy involves the *big picture*.
   - Tactics involve the *details of engagement*.

6. Finish these sentences:
   - Tactics are not *tricks, slick ruses, or clever ploys*.
   - Tactics are not meant to *belittle or humiliate the non-Christian*.

7. What are good tactics meant to accomplish?
   - Tactics are clever ways to *maneuver* to get a footing or an *appropriate advantage* in a conversation.
   - Tactics are meant to exploit another's *bad thinking* for the purpose of guiding him to *truth*.

8. The key to the Columbo tactic is using carefully selected *questions* to productively *advance* the conversation.

9. Give some of the advantages to using the Columbo tactic.
   - Questions are excellent *conversation* starters.
   - Questions are *interactive* by nature, inviting others to participate in dialogue.
   - Questions are *neutral*; there is no "preaching" involved.
   - You can make headway without actually *stating* your case.
   - Questions can buy you valuable *time*.
   - Questions keep you in the *driver's seat* of the conversation.

10. The first application of Columbo is to gather *information* and employs some form of the question *"What do you mean by that?"*

GOING DEEPER: Information for Self-Study

1. This week, make it a point to enter into conversations with others using some form of the question "What do you mean by that?" Follow Hugh Hewitt's rule and ask at least half a dozen questions in every conversation. You'll be amazed at how much you'll learn and how enjoyable the interaction can be when none of the pressure is on you. If you are studying the tactical game plan as part of a group, be prepared to share your experiences with others when you meet for session 2.

2. Review the self-assessment exercise above so you'll be able to answer all the questions without the word prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you'll be given an exercise to demonstrate your mastery of these questions. Be prepared.

3. Skim over the next lesson in this workbook before the next class to prepare yourself for the session. This simple preview will help you understand the material when you cover it in your next meeting.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Good Questions Bring Clarity . . .

"What do you mean by that?" is an important question that forces the other person to make sense of his own objections.

For example, a common challenge to the authority of the Bible is, "The Bible was only written by men." Yes, the Bible was written by men, of course. We agree on that. But something else is implied by the word "only." This needs to be fleshed out for clarification, and your question helps accomplish that. For example, does the challenger mean that man is incapable of writing something true or without error? (This is a strong claim with obvious counterexamples. In fact, he takes his own view about the Bible's fallibility to be true and without error.) Or does he mean that if God exists, He could not ensure that human beings would write what He wanted them to write? (This is also a strong claim that borders on the preposterous.)

Other times, the first Columbo question serves merely to clarify an issue, which often is all that's needed to parry an objection.

For example, when someone says, "Who are you to say?" or "Don't force your morality on me," you can ask what she means. Does she mean that you don't have a right to speak your opinion? Or that you can express your opinion as long as you don't think it's correct? In what way does she think you were "forcing" your opinion on her? If you're stating your opinion and arguing for it (just as she is doing), what exactly is her objection to that? If she's bothered because you insist your own view is correct, isn't she doing exactly the same thing regarding her point of view?

. . . Toward More Subversive Questioning

Let's consider the usefulness of the Columbo tactic in a specific example—say, when someone raises the issue of church and state separation when you make a political point as a Christian. In their mind, political opinions that are motivated by religious or moral convictions somehow create a breach in the wall of separation between church and state. But this isn't accurate. The nonestablishment clause of the First Amendment restricts the government, not the citizens.

If someone were to invoke the church-state separation challenge, you could simply ask him what he means by that challenge. Your Columbo tactic would look something like this: "Are you saying that Christians should have no vote, or that they should have no voice? Or do you mean that only opinions motivated by or based on atheism or secularism are legitimate? How does having a religion-based conviction automatically disqualify a person's right to speak? It seems to me that in our system, everyone is entitled to his opinion and opportunity to vote, regardless of religious conviction. Do you disagree with that?"