

Communication Skills for Evangelism

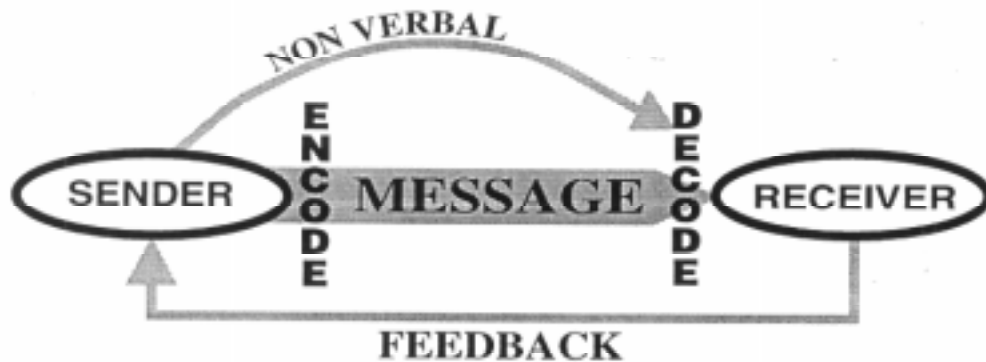
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Learning to Listen

Communication is a basic life skill. Good communication and listening skills are necessary for going deeper in friendship.

1. How communication works



2. Using non-verbal communication.

We communicate in many other ways than verbally. We communicate through our posture, voice inflection, silence, absence or lateness. The context of what is being said can also influence how it is interpreted (i.e., what's been said or done in our relationship previously.)

3. Learning to listen actively.

Active listening is a skill that as you practice, you will understand more and do it better. It is working to understand another person's thoughts and feelings, and verbally reflecting what you understand back to them (almost always in the form of statements) to complete the communication loop. It involves reading both verbal and non-verbal communication. It is very empathetic in its nature.

Active listening is NOT parroting, paraphrasing, asking probing or even insightful questions, directing the conversation, problem solving or advice giving. Your own experience should not be read into that of the other person.

Questions Non-Christians Ask

Paul Little used to say that non-Christians were all asking the same questions. All he had to do was a little study on each one and he would be able to handle most of the questions raised by non-Christians.

1. Giving a defense for the faith.

Think through these questions for yourself and then try discussing them with others.

- Why is it important to be able to make a defense for the faith?
- How do you feel when people ask you questions you cannot answer? How do you think they feel?
- What are some of the questions you have been asked, or are afraid non-Christians will ask you?

2. Some common questions.

Here are some common questions asked by non-Christians. If we are able to express even introductory answers to these questions, we will be a help to many people. Looking into the answers to these questions will strengthen our own faith as well.

- Is Christ the only way to God?
- Why do the innocent suffer?
- How can miracles be possible?
- Isn't the Bible full of errors?
- Isn't the Christian experience only psychological?
- Won't a good moral life get me to heaven?
- Wasn't Jesus just a great moral teacher?
- Doesn't Christianity stifle personal freedom?
- Isn't Christianity just a crutch for the weak and helpless?
- Doesn't science conflict with the Christian faith?
- What about people who have never heard?
- Why can't Christians agree among themselves?
- Life is meaningless, why try to find the answers?

3. Responding to questions.

Sometimes questions are merely smoke-screens and asked to throw us off-track. To determine how important a question really is, you might try asking If I answered that question to your satisfaction, would you consider becoming a Christian? Depending on the background of the person, the amount of time you have and whether you perceive the question as critical or not for the person, you can then adapt your answer.

Our confidence should never be in our ability to answer. It is better to say, I don't know, than give an uninformed answer. We should, however, wherever possible give honest answers to honest questions.

But, even at our best, all our answers will be partial. We cannot reason people into the Kingdom, even though ours is a reasonable faith. Because the minds of natural, fallen people are at enmity with God, the answer may be rejected but this doesn't invalidate its truth. Ultimately, the unresponsiveness of the questioner is not because of intellectual misgivings, but rather due to a moral condition.

4. Where to find answers.

There are a number of books that address the issues that are of concern to non-Christians. For example, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (IVP) by Paul Little or *Give Me An Answer* (IVP) by Cliffe Knechtle. Perhaps you can talk with a leader in your church or a Christian who is further along in their walk with God. Try looking directly at what Scripture has to say about these issues using a commentary.

Talking About Spiritual Matters

Stage 1 - Take the Initiative

In the course of a friendship, people may mention the Bible or going to church. This is an excellent opportunity to ask if they are interested in spiritual things. If you are starting a conversation cold (i.e., contact evangelism) you should:

- clearly state the spiritual purpose of your conversation
- give the person a clear opportunity to refuse the conversation
- have a genuine interest in the person.

Try saying:

Hi, my name is _____ and this is _____. We are involved in _____. We're interested in spiritual things and in listening to what other people think about spiritual things. Would you be interested in sharing your thoughts and talking with us for a few minutes?

Stage 2 - Build Rapport

It's good to build rapport with someone if you don't know them very well. Ask basic questions, but if you said you wanted to talk about spiritual things, don't spend all day talking about the friends you have in common! (If you know the person well, obviously you don't need to ask these sorts of questions.)

Try asking:

- Where are you from?
- Why did you come to _____? Is it what you expected?
- What is your major?

Stage 3 - Transition to Spiritual Issues

Try and discover what that person believes.

Try asking:

- Have your ideas of God changed since you have been in college? Why or why not? How?
- How would you describe a real Christian?
- What kind of religious background do you have? Do you still find it meaningful? How so?

Stage 4 - Ask Probing Questions

Try and find out what they believe and how they see the world.

Stage 5 - Clarify

Ask for clarification about what they have been saying. Raise any contradictory statements you heard.

Try asking:

- How do you know that these things are true?
- What is the basis for your understanding?

Stage 6 - Relate the Gospel

Check and see if they are open to the conversation going further. If they are open, proceed to give your testimony or a short, clear statement of the gospel using an appropriate outline.

Try testing their openness by asking:

- Can I share what Christ has done for me?
- Would you like to hear the gospel as I understand it? (e.g., the purpose of Jesus' life, the answer to man's problem, what has given me meaning in life)

- Have you ever seriously considered becoming a Christian?
- For those with a strong church background you might be able to be more direct.

Stage 7 - Seek a Response

Invite them to respond to what you have shared. If you sense (1) God's Spirit leading, (2) that the person seems to understand that becoming a Christian means to repent, believe and follow, and (3) that they seem open -- continue to ask questions.

Try asking:

- Have you ever personally trusted in Christ or are you somewhere along the way? (If yes , ask how that decision has affected their life. If no , ask How far along the way are you?)
- Would you like to commit your life to Jesus Christ or are there still things holding you back? (If yes , pray now together or individually . Or have them pray later in private. If no , thank them for talking with you and express an interest in talking another time.)
- Would you like to study the person of Jesus firsthand in an investigative Bible discussion with other seekers?

Asking Good Questions

Like Jesus, we need to learn to use questions to draw people out. It's easy for non-believers to drill Christians about what they believe, yet have no good reasons for believing what THEY do. We must be bold enough to ask our friends to defend what they claim to be the truth. Part of the process of coming to faith includes helping a person to examine their own views and beliefs.

1. What makes a conversation work?

Think through these questions for yourself and then try discussing them with others.

- How do conversations proceed? Are there different levels of conversation? How do you get from one level to the next?
- What characterizes a good listener? How can you tell if people are listening to you?
- What is the difference between a good question and a bad question?

2. Looking to Jesus as a model.

Jesus was a master at asking questions. Look at how he helped Nicodemus in John 3 and again with the woman at the well in John 4. Sometimes his questions are rhetorical, sometimes they are to gain information, sometimes they are to give new insight.

Jesus was also constantly listening for the question behind the question. He does not directly answer questions but looks for what is behind them. This is how he handled questions like Who is right when it comes to worshipping God? in John 4:20 and How can the new birth be true? in John 3:9. We need this same skill in listening. We need to ask ourselves if we have really heard what people are saying when they ask questions or make strong statements.

3. Some principles to keep in mind.

- Take every possible chance to ask searching questions, then keep quiet. (When we are talking we are not learning anything.)
- One thoughtful question is worth a dozen inquisitive ones.
- Questions that come near the other person's true interest get better answers.
- Be prepared to wait. Sometimes a long silence can be more rewarding than another question.
- In every case, the quality of an answer depends on the quality of attention given by the questioner.

- Questions must spring from honest inquiry, not from attempts at flattery or efforts to manipulate the other person's thinking.
- Questions that deal with a person's feelings are more provocative than those that deal with the facts. Listen for and encourage all expressions of feeling.
- What is our motive in asking questions? Are we just leading someone on in order to trap them or do we really care about the person?

4. What makes a question good.

Good questions can't be answered with just a yes or no (i.e., questions beginning with could, should, would, do, will or can.) Use open-ended questions such as what, where, when, how, why or who. Change questions from "Did you have a good day?" to "What did you do today?" Or "Do you feel angry?" to "How do you feel?"

5. Some sample questions.

Here are some good questions that will help you move into a conversation about spiritual things. Be sure and listen carefully to their answers. And be prepared to share your own answers to these same questions as well.

Questions about CHRIST:

- Who is/was Jesus Christ (i.e., his identity)? What do you think was significant about his life? What was he trying to accomplish (i.e., his purpose)?
- What do you think was significant about his death?
- A lot of people claim that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today. What do you think?
- How do you see Christ fitting into Christianity? (Try to separate religion from relationship.)
- Jesus said a lot of interesting things like, I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by me. What do you think he meant by these statements?

Questions about HUMANKIND:

- What is humankind's reason for being? What is your purpose in life?
- What do you think humankind's basic problem is? Do you believe we are good or evil or both? What kind of solutions to this do you see?
- What kind of needs do you see in the people around you? What is your deepest need?

Questions about CHRISTIANITY:

- How would you describe a real Christian? What exactly is it that makes one a Christian?
- What's been your experience with Christianity? What's your church background?
- What do you think it means to believe in Jesus?

Questions about BELIEF IN GOD:

- Why do you (or don't you) believe in God?
- When did God first become real to you?
- How has your view of God changed since coming to college?
- What do you think God is like and where are those ideas from? Is he concerned about us? What do you think God expects of us?

Questions about their VIEW OF THE WORLD:

- Many people say that if there is no afterlife, then life is meaningless. What do you think of life after death?
- How about the idea of heaven and hell? How would we get into heaven?
- What is your basis for ethics? What absolute truths are there?
- Why is there evil in the world?
- What do you think sin is? (Or, how would you define sin?)
- Would you be interested in getting together to discuss what the Bible says about the issues we've been talking about?

Giving Your Testimony

A testimony presents the power of the gospel to others in a personal and relevant way. Christ's person, power and promise are highlighted within a framework of how you were introduced to Christ, what difference He has made in your life and what He continues to do in you. The outline here was developed by Robbie Castleman who works with InterVarsity students in Florida.

1. Telling your story.

Answer the following question with brief summary answers.

- **When did I come to know Jesus Christ?**
Try to be as specific as possible. If you became a Christian early in life, in what ways were you aware of your need for Christ?
- **How did I come to know Jesus?**
What was your situation? Who was involved? What memories can help fill in the details? A few specifics can give the feel of an eyewitness account.
- **In what ways is my life different now?**
In what three ways has your life been significantly changed? Again, be specific. "I'm finally able to respect my parents and listen to them with much more interest in their problems" is much better than "I love my family more."
- **What two things has Jesus done for me to give me forgiveness and new life?**
There are only two invariable answers: Jesus has died on the cross in my place, and he has risen from the dead to secure my eternal life. Think of ways to express the significance of these key events in your own words.
- **In what two areas do I still need Jesus to work ?**
Time for transparency and honesty as you let people know that there are areas in which God still needs to work. This will help keep your testimony from sounding self-righteous.
- **What Scripture has meant the most to me?**
Answer this question after taking time to reflect on the questions above. What themes emerged as you put your story of faith together? What verses or sections of Scripture reflect those themes?

2. Guidelines for giving your testimony.

A testimony is not a ME-amony. The gospel is to be the focus. Your story is just the frame for the picture or the setting for the jewel. Your story should enhance the work of art and not distract or detract from it. Be sure and include the gospel essentials (i.e., God, Man, Jesus.) Relate the gospel in non-religious terms. Use alternative terms to say clearly what you want to communicate.

Try to avoid the following:

- Christian jargon or glittering generalities like wonderful , etc.
- Mention of non-central doctrines or church denominations
- Negative contrasts or implied criticism of others
- Giving the impression that the Christian life is easy
- A ministerial twang or preacher tone
- Arguing someone into the kingdom
- High pressure salesmanship (either in mentality or in style)

Remember to:

- Relax with your story and smile.
- Pay attention to the person with whom you are talking.
- Allow the Spirit to lead your conversation.
- Be ready in season and out (2 Timothy 4:2).
- Admit to mystery, and faith in unanswerable things.

Be confident that God's Word in your testimony will accomplish what God intends.

3. Translating your story.

You need to tell your story in a way others can hear. Take what you wrote earlier and translate it in light of the guidelines above. Answer the following in a few complete sentences:

- This is who I was without Christ:
- This is how I was introduced to and came to trust Jesus:
- This is how I grasp the truth of the gospel:
- This is the life evidence of the presence of Christ in me:
- This is my growing edge today in my relationship with Christ:
- Scripture reflections. . .

4. Putting it all together.

Combine all your thoughts into full paragraphs to come up with a complete three to four-minute testimony which will vary in emphasis according to your audience. Developing your own story in written form will allow you to share it succinctly and clearly in conversation. This means you are freed up to listen more carefully to the person you are with.

Calling for a Commitment

When you sense someone has heard enough of the gospel to understand the message and its implications, you will want to invite them to respond.

1. What's necessary to become a Christian?

Start by looking at Mark 1:14-20 and the verbs associated with Jesus' message. Try discussing what Jesus means when he says the following:

- Repent
- Believe
- Follow

Here are some definitions:

- **Repent** - an understanding of what the wrong is, a regret over what our selfishness results in and a resolve to become what we were meant to be by God's grace. Repentance indicates willingness to change but if it stops there, only a good resolution has been made. This is why Christ follows the command to repent with the urge to believe the gospel . The gospel gives power to change.
- **Believe** - involves intellectual acceptance, but in the true biblical sense, it must issue an action if it is to be real belief or faith. Belief and/or intellectual conviction becomes real belief or faith at the point when we act upon it.
- **Follow** - we must choose to follow Christ, hence following Christ has a beginning point which is called conversion. Every individual is either following Christ or not following Christ. But conversion is just the beginning. In the case of the disciples, Christ promises to remake them into fishers of men. We follow a person, not some set of doctrinal beliefs, a creed or institution.

2. Inviting a response.

There are a number of questions you can use to lead someone to commit themselves to Christ. For example:

- Have you ever seriously considered becoming a Christian? Or, would you like to become a Christian now?
- What questions do you still have that I can help you with?
- From what we've discussed so far about what it means to be a Christian, do you believe you are ready to become one?

If your friend says " No, I'm not ready yet," that's okay. God is still sovereign. He alone is the one who can bring them to that point where they will repent and place their faith in Christ. It's at this point that you can try to understand what barriers yet remain and how best to help your friend overcome them.

If your friend says " Yes, I think I'm ready to become a Christian," then it is a good idea to make sure they truly understand the gospel message, including the cost of discipleship. Pray together with them or have them pray individually. Remember, there is no magical formula to recite. God knows their heart.

3. Identifying Problem Areas for New Christians.

To acquaint yourself with some of the difficulties new Christians encounter, think through the following questions:

- What areas or concepts did you or your friends struggle with shortly after receiving Christ? How did God help
- you or your friends resolve that difficulty? What else might have been helpful?
- What other areas might be difficult for a young believer? What might be some solutions?

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