SESSION 1

etting You into the Driver's Seat Learning the "Columbo" Tactic

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduce yourself and state the purpose of the workshop.

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THIS COURSE AIMS TO TEACH YOU TWO INDISPENSABLE SKILLS IN APOLOGETICS.

- 1. First, it will train you to maneuver comfortably and graciously in conversations with others about your Christian convictions and values.
- 2. Second, it will teach you the art of maintaining appropriate control what we'll call "keeping you in the driver's seat"— in these discussions with others.



STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Buddy up with another person in class and explain your answer to the following question: When I think about discussing Christianity with non-believers ... (2 minutes)

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

B WHEN I TALK ABOUT "KEEPING YOURSELF IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT," I MEAN MAINTAINING A CERTAIN LEVEL OF CONTROL IN YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH NON-BELIEVERS. FOR INSTANCE, CONSIDER HOW THE QUESTIONS POSED TO THE YOUNG LADY IN THE DIA-LOGUE BELOW FUELED THE CONVERSATION, BUT ULTIMATELY LEFT HER RESPONSIBLE FOR HER ANSWERS.

GK: [This conversation began when I noticed the pentagram symbol she wore around her neck.] "Does that necklace have religious significance, or is it just jewelry?"

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

GK: "Does it have religious significance for you?"

woman: "Yes. I'm a pagan."



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Ask a few in the group to share their answers.

| ΝΟΤΕΣ | |
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| | [My wife, surprised by the woman's candor, laughed spontaneously, then quickly apologized. "I've never heard anyone actually say it like that," she explained. "I mean, to actually admit it right out."] |
| | WOMAN: "It's an earth religion, like the Native Americans." |
| | GK: "So, you're Wiccan?" I confirmed, referring to the study of witchcraft. |
| | WOMAN: "Yes. We respect all life." |
| | GK: "So, then you're pro-life?" |
| | WOMAN: "No. I'm pro-choice." |
| | GK: "That surprises me. Isn't that an unusual position for someone in Wicca to take?" |
| | WOMAN: "Well, I know <u>I</u> could never do that, kill a baby. [Note her strong 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." ¹ |
| | GK: "But shouldn't we do something to stop other people from doing bad things, like hurting babies?" |
| | WOMAN: "I think women should have a choice." |
| | GK: "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." |
| | GK: "Okay, tell me: What kind of considerations would make it okay to kill a baby?" |
| | WOMAN: "Incest," she said quickly. |
| | GK: "So, if I have a two-year-old child here next to me and she was conceived through incest, I should have the liberty to kill her?" |
| | WOMAN: "I'd have mixed feelings about that," she conceded after a pause. |
| | GK: "I hope so." |
| | In this short encounter, I used three foundational tactics to assist me in disarming the young woman's faulty thinking — the Columbo tactic, the Suicide tactic, and the Taking-the-Roof-Off tactic. <i>a. Using the Columbo tactic I asked nine pointed questions.</i> I used these questions to begin the conversation and gain information |
| | from her. 2) I also used these questions to exploit weaknesses in what she said. |
| | b. The Suicide tactic helped me demonstrate the inconsistent and contradictory nature of her views. |
| | On the one hand, she is a witch who respects all life. On the other hand, she is pro-choice on abortion, a procedure she characterized as "killing babies." |
| | <i>c. The Taking-the-Roof-Off tactic allowed me to unveil the logical consequences of her beliefs.</i> |
| STAND TO REASON | She presented incest as a legitimate reason to kill a baby. I presented a toddler who was conceived through incest. |

| N O T E S | 3) We were left, through her reasoning, with a legitimate reason to kill this toddler. |
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| | 2. The value of using the tactical approach to apologetics is found in this one principle: staying in the driver's seat.<i>a.</i> It allows you to productively direct the discussion.<i>b.</i> It forces the other person to do most of the work. |
| | REGARDLESS OF YOUR PRESENT SKILL LEVEL, YOU CAN LEARN TO MANEUVER ALMOST EFFORTLESSLY IN CONVERSATIONS IF YOU COMMIT TO LEARNING THE MATERIAL IN THIS COURSE. |
| | 1. This course has equipped thousands of people like you with the confidence and ability to have meaningful, productive conversations on spiritual things. |
| | 2. The material in this course ensures success to those who apply themselves. |
| | 3. This course provides an interactive learning experience that includes discus- sion, role-playing, self-assessment quizzes, recall exercises, memory tools, directed reflection, class feedback, games, and competition. |
| | 4. This workbook contains everything presented in the course, relieving you of the need to take notes. |
| | 5. The ability to become an effective ambassador for Christ is yours and requires only that you pay attention, follow the instructions, participate in the exercises, and complete the weekly assignments. |
| | • WE WILL ACCOMPLISH FOUR GOALS IN THIS FIRST SESSION. |
| | 1. First, we will learn the value of the tactical approach to discussing Christianity. |
| | 2. Second, we will define "tactics" and then distinguish tactics from strategy. |
| | 3. Third, we will explore the dangers inherent in using tactics. |
| | 4. Fourth, we will introduce the first and most powerful apologetics tactic: the Columbo tactic. |
| | GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY |
| | Apologetics has a questionable reputation among non-aficionados. By defini- tion, 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: Circle the wagons. Hoist the drawbridge. Fix bayonets. Load weapons. Ready, aim, fire. It's not surprising, then, that believers and unbelievers alike associate apologetics with conflict. In their view, defenders don't dialogue; they fight. |
| STAND | In addition to the image problem, apologists face another barrier. The truth is |
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that effective apologetics in the 21st century requires more than having the right answers. It's too easy for post-moderns to ignore our facts, deny our claims, or simply yawn and walk away from the line we've drawn in the sand.

But sometimes they don't walk away. They stand and fight. They wade into battle and then fire a barrage we can't handle. We realize too late that we've ignored one of the first rules of engagement: Never make a frontal assault on a superior force. 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 amidst wolves, be innocent but shrewd.² This instruction calls for a tactical approach. Even though there is real warfare going on,³ our engagements should look more like diplomacy than combat.

II. Let's discuss our need for tactics, what they are, and how to use them.

OUR NEED FOR TACTICS CONCERNS OUR COMMISSION TO BE EFFECTIVE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST.

- 1. Ambassadors use 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 with a non-believer.
- 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, of 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).
 - 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.



| GOING DEEPER: Information for Self-Study |
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| b. As Christians, our strategy concerns the content, information, and reasons why someone should believe Christianity describes the world accurately, all of which are contained in either defensive or offensive apologetics.⁴ 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 macro-evolution. 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 which denies the existence of objective truth.⁵ 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, and doctor-assisted suicide 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 entail the artful arranging of resources, specifically in maneuvering through conversations. They allow you to: |
| Use your knowledge in creative ways. Choreograph the particulars of your response. Style your response to objections. |
| Employ specific methods in addressing attacks. Guide yourself with sound reasoning, clear thinking, and aggressive advocacy. |
| b. Often a clever commander has the advantage over a superior opponent through deft tactical maneuvering. |
| <i>c. Tactics should not be used as:</i> 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 to gain notches in your spiritual belt.<i>d. Instead, tactics</i> |
| Enable you to present the truth clearly and cleverly. Help you maneuver to get a footing or an advantage in a conversation, helping you to navigate through the mine fields. |

- 4) Allow you to, in many cases, stop a challenger cold and turn the tables.
- e. The goal in using tactics is to:
 - 1) Manage, not manipulate.
 - 2) Control, not coerce.
 - 3) Finesse, not fight.
- f. These warnings about tactics are issued for two reasons.
 - 1) First, these tactics are powerful and can be abused quite easily.⁶ 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 more harsh, direct, or aggressive on the page than they were in reality.
- g. I do mean to be direct, focused, and challenging.
- h. I don't mean to be abrasive, abusive, or alarming.
- *i.* 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.

REFLECT 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." — HUGH HEWITT, IN, BUT NOT OF (NASHVILLE: THOMAS NELSON, 2003), 166.

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.⁷

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

In order to employ tactics, you must think actively and give mental attention to what's going on. This approach resembles one-on-one basketball more than chess. There is constant motion, adjustment, and adaptation. The tactical approach requires as much careful listening as it does shrewd 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 over two 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.

When I started, I wasn't sure how I would fare in public against the pros with thousands of people listening. But what I discovered was 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's 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, there will always be a flaw in the opposing argument. Keep looking for it. Sooner or later it will show up.

The right tactic will help you discover the flaw in your opponent's thinking and show it for the error it is.

It will help if you remember this: Some of the most intelligent people make the most foolish mistakes in thinking when it comes to spiritual things. The tactics you learn in this class will help you exploit those mistakes. You will discover that people don't give much thought to their objections. How do I know? I listen to the objections.

Purpose: To ignite a desire in the participant to learn a tactical approach that turns a volatile situation into an opportunity. In short, this exercise should help answer the question, "Why should I care about tactics?"



STUDENT INTERACTIVE

"10 SECOND WINDOW"

Pair up and consider the following real-world scenarios. In each scenario, you have a ten-second window to create an opportunity for further dialogue with the other individual. What would you do or say in each situation? (5 minutes)

SCENARIO 1: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The Scene: It's January 2004 and you're sitting at the car dealer, waiting with other customers as your cars are serviced. A television news program highlights recent same-sex marriages for which activist mayors in San Francisco and New York have issued licenses. The person sitting across from you says, "It's about time. These folks just love each other. They should be able to get married like anyone else."

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

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

is productive and will stimulate everyone in the room to reflect intelligently on same-sex marriage. What will you say?

SCENARIO 2: RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The Scene: It's the night of your weekly small group, and during the discussion of this week's sermon, a friend of yours in the group says, "Well, I think the essence of Christianity is loving God and neighbor. Shouldn't we love those outside of Christianity? After all, who's to say Christianity is better than any other religion? Don't all religions teach basically the same thing — don't judge, and love your neighbor?"

The Challenge: You are concerned about your friend's statement and want to say something, but you are also concerned about preserving your good relationship. 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: ABORTION

The Scene: It's November 2003. You are waiting for the university shuttle with a friend who says, "Did you hear that Bush signed that partial-birth abortion ban? He didn't even have any women present when he signed the bill. He'll never understand. I wish he would just stay out of women's issues."

The Challenge: You didn't know your friend cared about abortion until now. You're concerned about keeping the conversation productive while being sensitive to the fact that there are other shuttle riders who are listening. What can you say in response?

III. LEARNING THE COLUMBO TACTIC

THE COLUMBO TACTIC IS THE "QUEEN MOTHER" OF ALL OTHER TACTICS.

- 1. It is more flexible and adaptable than any other tactic.
- 2. It is easily combined with the other tactics.
- 3. It's the simplest tactic imaginable to stop a challenger in his tracks, turn the tables, and get him thinking.
- 4. It's an almost effortless way to put you in the driver's seat.





REFLECT 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 guide to help you ease into the process, making it easy even for the most timid to engage others in a meaningful way.

B THE COLUMBO TACTIC IS NAMED FOR LIEUTENANT COLUMBO, A BRILLIANT DETECTIVE WHO APPEARS BUMBLING, INEPT, AND COM-PLETELY HARMLESS TO HIS ENEMIES.

- 1. With his rumpled trench coat, bed-head, 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 t'ing bothers me. You're a very intelligent person. Maybe you can clear dis up for me. Do you mind if I ask you a question?"
 - b. "Just one more thing."
 - *c.* "Hey, I'm sorry. I'm making a pest of myself. I know I am. It's because I keep asking these questions. But I'll tell ya, I can't help myself. It's a habit."
- 3. The Columbo "habit" is a habit you want to get into!

THE KEY TO THE COLUMBO TACTIC: GO ON THE OFFENSIVE IN A DISARMING WAY WITH CAREFULLY SELECTED QUESTIONS TO PRODUCTIVELY ADVANCE THE CONVERSATION.

- 1. The guideline is simple: 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. This approach 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 at work. It allows you to move your case forward without "preaching" at others.

REFLECT 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. She had to shoulder all the burden of proof because she'd made all the claims, whereas I had simply asked questions. Since I had never asserted my own view, strictly speaking, I had nothing to defend.

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

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

In the space below, sum up the Columbo tactic in one sentence. Then take a few minutes to discuss with a partner how you think the tactic works and what some of the advantages of this approach might be. (4 minutes)

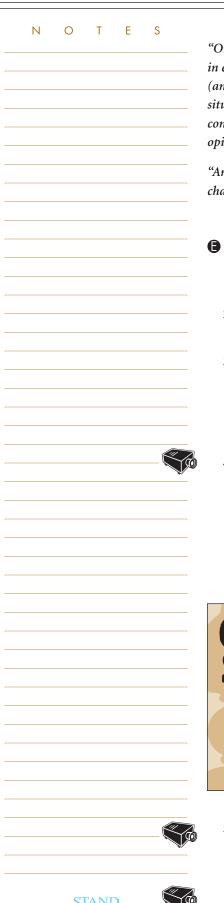
D THE COLUMBO TACTIC HAS THREE UNIQUE APPLICATIONS.[®]

- 1. The Columbo tactic has three unique applications, each launched by a different question.⁹
 - a. The first application is to gain information.
 - b. The second application is to reverse the burden of proof.
 - c. The third application is to indirectly exploit a weakness or a flaw.

REFLECT A MOMENT

"Ask at Least a Half-Dozen Questions in Every Conversation" — 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."¹⁰

THE FIRST APPLICATION OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC IS TO GAIN INFORMATION.

- 1. Sometimes you just 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, the questions can:
 - a. Be a casual conversation-starter.
 - b. Buy you valuable time.
 - c. Help you know how to proceed in the conversation.
 - d. Give you information for this and future encounters.
- 4. Key question: "What do you mean by that?" (or some variation)
 - a. This clarification question tells you 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.* This question 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.

MBASSADOR SKILLS

Misrepresenting a view, even by accident, is a serious misstep. When we misrepresent 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 our opponent's view (the "straw man") that we easily knock down, instead of fighting our opponent's actual view. If you're guilty of setting up a straw man, you may find you've given a brilliant refutation of a view your opponent does not hold.

- 5. Let's watch the Columbo tactic in action!
 - a. When someone says, "There is no God," you 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.
 - b. When someone says, "All religions are basically the same," you ask, "Really?

Ο Т Е S 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. c. When someone says, "You shouldn't force your views on me," you ask, "Specifically, how am I forcing my views on you?" d. When someone says, "That's just your interpretation," you 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 they believe all interpretations are equally valid and yours is "just" one of them. e. When someone says, "Reincarnation was taken out of the Bible," you ask, "What do you mean reincarnation was 'taken out'?" Here, you are trying to determine how someone removes lines of text from the thousands of handwritten documents circulating around the Mediterranean region in the first four centuries. f. When someone says, "The Bible has been changed over the years," you ask, "How do you think it's been altered?" You need to find out if they are familiar with the process of the written transmission of ancient texts or are just repeating what they've heard. g. When someone says, "How could God exist when there is so much evil in the world?," you ask, "What do you mean by 'evil'?" or "What, in your mind, is the conflict?" The question of evil doesn't provide evidence against God but in favor of Him, for God must exist to provide the absolute standard by which evil is measured.¹¹ IMPORTANT: IN EACH CASE, HAVE THEM SPELL OUT THE OBJECTION. 6. This first Columbo question accomplishes five important objectives. a. First, it immediately engages the non-believer in an interactive way. b. Second, it flatters the non-believer because it shows genuine interest in his or her view. c. Third, it forces the non-believer to think more carefully and more precisely — maybe for the first time — about his intended meaning. *d*. Fourth, it gives you valuable information about the non-believer's exact position. e. Fifth, it positions the non-believer in the defensive position while placing you in control of the conversation. 7. Be sure to pay attention to the response. a. If it's unclear, follow up with more 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 let them merely repeat what they just said.
 - a. "You're intolerant."
 - b. "What do you mean by the word 'intolerant'?"
 - c. "I mean you are intolerant!"

DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF THE QUESTION, "WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?" USE IT OFTEN. YOU CAN ASK THIS QUESTION ALL DAY LONG AND THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO PRESSURE ON YOU.



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STUDENT INTERACTIVE

"10 SECOND WINDOW" REDUX

The 10-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 make the question specific to the particular issue at hand. (4 minutes)

SCENARIO 1: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The Scene: It's January 2004 and you're sitting at the car dealer, waiting with other customers as your cars are serviced. A television news program highlights recent same-sex marriages for which activist mayors in San Francisco and New York have issued licenses. The person sitting across from you says, "It's about time. These folks love each other. They should be able to get married like anyone else."

Columbo Question:

SCENARIO 2: RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The Scene: It's the night of your weekly small group, and during the discussion of this week's sermon, a friend of yours in the group says, "Well, I think the essence of Christianity is loving God and neighbor. Shouldn't we love those outside of Christianity? After all, who's to say Christianity is better than any other religion? Don't all religions teach basically the same thing: don't judge, and love your neighbor?"

Columbo Question: _

SCENARIO 3: ABORTION

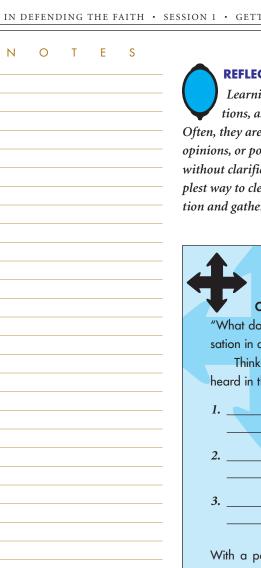
The Scene: It's November 2003. You are waiting for the university shuttle with a friend who says, "Did you hear that President Bush signed that partial-birth abortion ban? He didn't even have any women present when he signed the bill. He'll never understand. I wish he would just stay out of women's issues."

Columbo Question:

MBASSADOR 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. As the discussion continues, gently guide the dialogue into a more spiritually productive direction with additional questions.





REFLECT A MOMENT

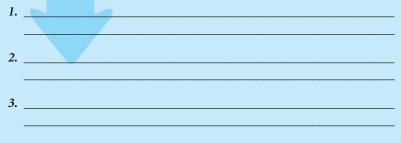
Learning how to ask this first question is your key to productive conversations, as people often don't know what they mean by the things they say. Often, they are merely repeating slogans. Frequently, their statements, questions, opinions, or points of view are so muddled it's impossible to proceed in conversation without clarification. Asking 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 thoughts.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

THE REAL WORLD

Objective: The Christian will 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)



With a partner, assume the roles of challenger and defender so that the defender (the Christian) can practice using the Columbo question. After 2 minutes, switch roles. (7 minutes)

IV. *W* hat main points were covered in this session?



FIRST, WE LEARNED THE VALUE OF USING THE TACTICAL APPROACH WHEN DISCUSSING CHRISTIANITY.

- 1. Tactics help you control 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 engagements seem more like diplomacy than combat.



SECOND, 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 involve the details of the engagement.

THIRD, WE LEARNED ABOUT THE DANGERS OF USING TACTICS.

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

I FOURTH, WE WERE INTRODUCED TO THE COLUMBO TACTIC.

- 1. The Columbo tactic is a disarming way to assume the offensive with carefully selected questions that productively advance the conversation.
- 2. The Columbo tactic is advantageous because it uses questions, which 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 make headway without stating your case.*
 - e. Able to buy you valuable time.
 - f. Essential to keeping you in control of the conversation.
- 3. The first purpose of the Columbo tactic is to gain information with the question, "What do you mean by that?" (or some variation).
 - *a.* This question clarifies a person's 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 will learn another powerful use of the Columbo tactic: reversing the burden of proof.



| N O T E S | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Lead your group in the self- | STUDENT INTERACTIVE |
| assessment exercise. Then strongly | |
| encourage them to do the "Going | SELF-ASSESSMENT |
| Deeper: Information for Self- | <i>Try to answer the following questions without using your notes.</i> |
| Study" exercises that follow the | 1. What is the difference between tactics and strategy? |
| self-assessment before the next | Strategy involves the |
| class (5-10 minutes.) | Tactics involve the of |
| | |
| | 2. Finish these sentences: |
| | Tactics are not,, or |
| | Tactics are not meant to the |
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| | 3. 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 |
| | 4. The key to the Columbo tactic is using carefully selected |
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| | 5. Give some of the advantages to using the Columbo tactic. Questions are excellent starters. |
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| | participate in dialogue. |
| | Questions are; there is no "preaching" |
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SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS

1. What is the difference between tactics and strategy?

- Strategy involves the <u>big picture</u>.
- Tactics involve the <u>details</u> of <u>engagement</u>.

2. Finish these sentences:

- Tactics are not <u>tricks</u>, <u>slick ruses</u>, or <u>clever ploys</u>.
- Tactics are not meant to <u>belittle or humiliate</u> the <u>non-Christian</u>.

3. What are good tactics meant to accomplish?

- Tactics are clever ways to <u>maneuver</u> to get a footing or an <u>appropriate</u> <u>advantage</u> in a conversation.
- Tactics are meant to exploit another's <u>bad thinking</u> for the purpose of guiding him to <u>truth</u>.
- 4. The key to the Columbo tactic is using carefully selected <u>questions</u> to productively <u>advance</u> the conversation.

5. Give some of the advantages to using the Columbo tactic.

- Questions are excellent <u>conversation</u> starters.
- Questions are <u>interactive</u> by nature, inviting others to participate in dialogue.
- Questions are <u>neutral</u>; there is no "preaching" involved.
- Questions allow you to make good headway without actually <u>stating</u> your case.
- Questions can buy you valuable <u>time</u>.
- Questions keep you in <u>control</u> of the conversation.
- 6. The first application of Columbo is to gain <u>information</u> and employs the question, <u>"What do you mean by that?"</u>

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

- This week, make it a point to enter into a handful of conversations with others using the question "What do you mean by that?" Follow Hugh Hewitt's rule: Ask at least half a dozen questions in every conversation. You will be amazed at how much you will learn and how enjoyable the interaction can be when none of the pressure is on you. Be prepared to share your experiences with the group when you meet for session two.
- 2. Review the self-assessment exercise above so you will be able to answer all the questions without the prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you will 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 a very important question that forces a 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. We agree on that, but something else is implied by the word "only." This needs to be fleshed out for clarification, and your question accomplishes that. For example, do they mean that man is incapable of writing something true or without error? (This is a strong claim with obvious counterexamples.) Or do they 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, this Columbo question serves merely to clarify the issue, which often is all that is needed to parry the objection.

For example, when someone says, "Who are you to say?" or "Don't force your morality on me," you can ask what they mean. Do they mean you don't have a right to speak your opinion? Or that you can express your opinion so long as you don't think it's correct? In what way do they think you were forcing your opinion on them? If you are stating your opinion and arguing for it (just as they are doing), what exactly is their objection to that?

... 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, as a Christian, you make a political point. In their mind, political opinions that are motivated by religious or moral conviction somehow create a breach in the wall of separation between church and state. But this is silly. The non-establishment 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 her what she means by that challenge. Your Columbo tactic could look something like this: "Are you saying that Christians should have no vote, or simply that they should have no voice? Or do you mean that only opinions motivated by or based on atheism are legitimate?" It seems to me that in our system, everyone is entitled to his opinion and opportunity to vote, regardless of religious attachment or conviction.



| N O T E S | ENDNOTES |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| | 1 This comment in itself was worth pursuing, though I didn't. Is karma her best motivation — that the only reason she would avoid hurting a child is because something bad might happen to her? |
| | 2 Matthew 10:16. |
| | 3 Note Paul's comments in Ephesians 6:10-20. |
| | 4 Sometimes defensive and offensive apologetics are called negative and positive apologetics, respectively. |
| | 5 Here I'm referring to either a denial of metaphysical realism — a denial that there is a mind-independent world that can be known — or a denial of episte- mological realism — if there is a "real world," it can't be known. Postmodernists affirm a certain kind of "truth," but it is not truth as we nor- mally characterize it (truth as correspondence to reality). |
| | 6 Two books that come to mind that exemplify this approach are <i>How to Stay a Christian While in College — An Interactive Guide to Keeping the Faith</i> , by J. Budziszewski (NavPress), and <i>Between Heaven and Hell</i> , by Peter Kreeft (InterVarsity Press). |
| | 7 If you follow our radio program, either live or on the web (www.str.org), you'll notice I take pains not to abuse callers who disagree with me. |
| | 8 The best way to see how this is done is to watch it in action. This can be done through the STR weekly radio program — a talk show where I engage callers of all persuasions on a large variety of different issues. My intent in this program is to give my callers something to think about as I challenge their views on spir- itual issues and advance the Christian worldview as an alternative. During these encounters, I am constantly alert to tactical concerns. Even if you are not with- in STR's broadcast footprint, you can listen to any show aired in the last seven months by visiting our web site at www.str.org and clicking on the "Radio" link. |
| | 9 I'm grateful to Kevin Bywater of Summit Ministries for improvements he helped me make on the questions used in Columbo. |
| | 10 Hugh Hewitt, In, But Not Of (Nashville, Thomas Nelson: 2003), 172-3. |
| | 11 Find more detail on this argument at www.str.org. Search under the key word "evil." |
| | |
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SESSION 2 Refining the "Columbo" Tactic

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As a warm-up, take a few moments to let students share how their practice interactions outside of class went.

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Being able to give clear answers to these questions demonstrates your mastery of the information from the last session. Use this self-assessment exercise as a review of what you learned last time.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE



DEMONSTRATING MASTERY Try recalling the answers to the following questions without using your notes. The answers are located at the end of session 1.

- 1. What is the difference between tactics and strategy? Strategy involves the ______ Tactics involve the ______
- 2. Finish these sentences: Tactics are not ______ Tactics are not meant to ______

1._____

- 3. What are good tactics meant to accomplish? Tactics are clever ways to _____
- 4. The key to the Columbo tactic is ...
- 5. Give at least three advantages to using the Columbo tactic.

2._____

3._____

6. The first application of Columbo is to _______. employs the question, "______."

___ and



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STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of three or four and share some "war stories" from the last session's assignment. How did you employ the first Columbo question to initiate conversations, gain information, or clarify a point of view? (5 minutes)

I. Review

▲ IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED

- 1. The value of using a tactical approach.
 - a. Tactics help you get into the driver's seat and control the conversation.
 - b. Tactics help you maneuver effectively in the face of opposition.
 - *c. Tactics make your engagements with others seem more like diplomacy than combat.*
- 2. The distinction between tactics and strategy.
 - a. Strategy involves the big picture.
 - *b. Tactics involve the actual details of engagement the orderly, immediate, hands-on choreography of the particulars.*
- 3. The danger of using tactics.
 - a. Tactics <u>are not</u> tricks meant to belittle or humiliate non-Christians.
 - *b.* Tactics <u>are</u> clever ways to maneuver toward an appropriate advantage and stay in control of the conversation.
- 4. The introduction to the Columbo tactic.
 - *a.* The Columbo tactic uses carefully selected questions to go on the offensive in a disarming way.
 - 1) Questions are a great way to start a conversation.
 - 2) Questions are interactive.
 - *b.* The Columbo tactic removes the need for "preaching," as you can make good headway without actually stating your case.
 - c. The first Columbo question is, "What do you mean by that?"
 - 1) This clarification question provides you with important information about your opponent's views.
 - 2) This question forces the other person to think more carefully about his or her exact meaning.



B IN THIS SESSION WE WILL . . .

- 1. Examine the second use of the Columbo tactic: reversing the burden of proof.
- 2. Learn how to avoid a common trap in conversations.
- 3. Discover what to do when you don't know what to do.
- 4. Practice using the Columbo tactic to keep you out of the "hot seat."

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

The Columbo tactic enables you to escape the charge, "You're twisting my words!" When someone offers that challenge, respond by saying, "How could I twist your words by asking a question? I'm simply asking for clarification precisely because I don't want to twist your words. I want to understand your view and its consequences."

II. The second step in the Columbo tactic: reversing the burden of proof

THE FIRST APPLICATION OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC HELPED YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT A PERSON THINKS; THE SECOND APPLICATION — KNOWN AS REVERSING THE BURDEN OF PROOF — HELPS YOU LEARN WHY HE THINKS THE WAY HE DOES.

1. What is the "burden of proof"?

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

"The only rational explanation for how we got here is evolution. You can believe in creation if you want, but that's all based on your faith in the Bible."

"A fetus doesn't have self-awareness, so it's not a person. You think that a blob of cells is more important than real people who are already here? That's a religious claim you accept without proof."

"The Gospels are a bunch of stories created by early Christians to get other people to join their religion. You fundamentalists just have blind faith in your Bible stories."

In groups of four, discuss the following questions (4 minutes):

- 1. How do these statements affect your confidence? Would you shy away from answering a critic who said these things? Why?
- 2. What do you think the phrase "burden of proof" means?
- 3. Who shoulders the burden of proof in statements like these? Why?



- a. The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend or give evidence for his or her view.
- *b.* The burden of proof has one cardinal rule: Whoever makes the claim bears the burden.
- *c.* Don't allow yourself to be thrust into a defensive position when the other person is making the claim.
- 2. This rule means there are no more free rides for the non-believer.
 - *a.* It isn't the Christian's responsibility to refute every story a nonbeliever can spin or every claim he can manufacture.
 - b. When your opponent advances a view, make him or her defend it.
 - 1) Steer the burden of proof back on their shoulders, where it belongs.
 - 2) Make them give you their arguments, not just their points of view.
 - c. In the immortal words of Ricky Ricardo from I Love Lucy, "they've got a lot of 'splaining to do!"

REFLECT A MOMENT

Challenges to Christianity thrive on vague generalities and forceful but vacuous slogans. The burden of proof tactic forces people to be more explicit about their views and the reasons for their objections.

- 3. Let's watch this rule in action.
 - a. The following dialogue occurred on a secular talk-radio station in Los Angeles when a caller attempted to refute my argument that the "Big Bang" theory provided evidence <u>for</u> God, not against Him ("A big bang needs a big 'Banger," I argued).

CALLER: Well, I don't think it does because you could start with a base of nothing, and you could say that there was nothing but an infinite, continuous moment until, eventually, one insignificant thing happened: a point happened in the nothingness. And then that point expanded, which is an extremely simple process. It requires no intelligence, so no intelligent God had to intervene. All we needed was a tiny imperfection in the perfect nothingness, and that imperfection could then expand and become variegated and increasingly complex, and soon you would have galaxies and planets.

GREG: I understand the story, Dick, and I like the way you started: "You could say that...." Well, that's just what you've done — you just <u>said</u> it. You've just told a story. It's one thing to "<u>say</u>" it. It's another thing to <u>demonstrate it is reasonable</u> given the evidence. That evidence shows the universe had a beginning. Now we have to explain how that beginning came to be. You can't explain it by natural law, because that was the beginning of natural law.

GREG (TO THE HOST): This is a good call because it illustrates something: the tendency of people who don't like a point of view to tell a story to explain it away. But it's just a fairy tale to say, "Once upon a time there was nothing, and then something came out of nothing." It may be very easy for him to believe, but a story is not evidence, and it certainly isn't science. You can't

refute a particular view based on evidence before us by telling a story about what you think might have happened.

- b. Here's what we can learn from this lesson: Saying whatever we want is one thing, but giving evidence or reasons for those views is another thing altogether.
 - 1) It's our opponent's job to defend his unbelief and prove his views.
 - 2) It's not our job to refute them.

REFLECT A MOMENT

Remember that an alternate explanation is not a refutation. It is not enough for someone to contradict your view by offering a different explanation that appeals to him more or saves his paradigm, even if it's a plausible one. Though that might be a legitimate first step, he must take it further by showing why his alternate view is more reasonable than your view. Your opponent must shoulder the burden of proof for his own view.

On the other hand, reversing the burden of proof is not a trick used to avoid defending our own claims. When we make claims, we too must answer for them. When we ask questions, we want to eventually be able to answer some of them. We have a responsibility, but so do they — that's my point.

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

Some exceptions can be made to the burden of proof rule, such as self-evident claims or "properly basic" beliefs. To say that there are no square circles, for example, is self-evidently true and needs no defense.¹

Basic beliefs are those beliefs that are grounded in reasonable assumptions about reality and place the burden of proof on the detractor. For example, we are under no obligation to prove our own existence or the basic reliability of our senses. Unless given evidence to the contrary, the way things appear to be are the way they actually are. This applies to the basic laws of logic, as well we must adhere to them to engage in any form of meaningful conversation, and we are therefore under no obligation to prove them to be true.



So who bears the burden of proof? Actually, both people do because both are making claims. The claims explicit at the end of the dialogue are that the embryo is not a human being (John) and that the embryo is a human being (James). Neither one is making his case. They are just trading assertions and getting nowhere.



STUDENT INTERACTIVE

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Take a moment to reflect on the "burden of proof" concept and the role it plays in conversation. How would you explain it to another person? What is the tactical importance of understanding this concept? Turn to a partner and rehearse together what you've just learned. Be sure to clarify why an alternate explanation is not a refutation. (3 minutes)

Now, with your partner, test your knowledge by deciding who bears the burden of proof in the following scenario (8 minutes):

JOHN: The president is so foolish. He's withholding funding for stem cell research.

JAMES: Isn't stem cell research immoral?

JOHN: You haven't been listening to those religious pro-life people, have you? They're such extremists.

JAMES: What's extreme about saying stem cell research is wrong?

JOHN: Because stem cell research would really help a lot of people.

JAMES: But doesn't stem cell research kill innocent human beings?

JOHN: You think embryos the size of the period at the end of this sentence are human beings?

JAMES: Sure, they're human beings.

JOHN: No, they're not. They're just protoplasm.

JAMES: Yes, they are. They're every bit as human as you are.

JOHN: No, they're not. They're only potentially human.

JAMES: They're already human.

JOHN: I disagree. You and I are human beings. An embryo is different.



B THE SECOND COLUMBO QUESTION ENFORCES THE BURDEN OF PROOF RULE: "NOW, HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?"

- 1. This question graciously assumes that the non-believer has actually reached a conclusion that he has reasons for his view and has not merely asserted it carte blanche.
 - a. It will give him a chance to express his rationale, if he has one.
 - b. It will also give you more material to work with in addressing his objections.
 - *c.* It ultimately shifts the burden of proof to the other person, which is where it often belongs.
- 2. Since many people have never thought through their views and don't know why they hold them, don't be surprised if you get a blank stare after asking this question.
- 3. Alternate questions are, "Why do you say that?" or "What are your reasons for holding that view?"

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Sometimes the simplest, most effective question you can ask someone is a variation of the question, "How do you know?" This tactic can also take the form of the following questions:

- "Why should I believe what you believe?"
- "What makes you think that's the right way to see it?"
- "I'm curious. Why would you say a thing like that?"
- "Why should I trust that your organization the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, the Watchtower — speaks for God?"

REFLECT A MOMENT

We can spend hours helping someone carefully work through an issue without ever mentioning God, Jesus, or the Bible. This doesn't mean we aren't advancing the Kingdom, though. It's always a step in the right direction when we help people to discover truth. It gives them tools to assess the bigger questions that will eventually come up.

Further, when we challenge people to think carefully, we acknowledge they bear the image of God. This affirms their intrinsic worth. For a discussion on the value of human beings apart from the cross, see the commentary "Gospel Fodder" at www.str.org.

- 4. Consider the responses you could make to the following claims.
 - a. "You can never know anything for sure"— Why should I believe that? Can you give me a good reason why I should believe nothing can be known with certainty?
 - *b.* "Morals are just an invention of culture; there are no objective moral rules"— What would be your evidence for that?



- *c.* "The miracles of Jesus in the Gospels were an invention of the early church"— Give me some of the reasons you think that's true.
- *d.* "Reincarnation was taken out of the Bible"— What support do you have for that idea?

STUDENT INTERACTIVE



THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Both should ask an appropriate variation of the question, "How did you come to that conclusion?" or "Why do you think the embryo is/is not a human being?" Remember John and James, who disagreed about whether or not the embryo is a human being? Read the last portion of their dialogue again and determine what burden of proof questions each person could ask to make the conversation more productive. (4 minutes)

JAMES: Sure, they're human beings.

JOHN: No, they're not. They're just protoplasm.

JAMES: Yes, they are. They're every bit as human as you are.

JOHN: No, they're not. They're only potentially human.

JAMES: They're already human.

JOHN: I disagree. You and I are human beings. An embryo is different.

?

JAMES: ___

JOHN:

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

Occasionally, in response to your request for the reason for a particular belief, the person will quip, "I don't have any reasons; I just believe it." This is a remarkable admission that should not pass without you asking another question: "Why would you believe something you have no reason to think is true?"

If they say they don't need reasons to believe something, ask why they would believe that. See if they take the bait and proceed to give reasons why they don't need to give reasons.

WHEN USING THE BURDEN OF PROOF TACTIC, BEWARE OF THE "PROFESSOR'S PLOY."

1. Some professors are fond of taking pot-shots at Christianity with remarks like, "The Bible is just a bunch of fables," even if the topic matter has nothing to do with religious issues.



| N O T E S | 2. Well-meaning believers sometimes take the challenge and attempt a head-to- |
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| | head duel with the professor, but this approach is rarely successful. |
| | 3. A basic rule of engagement governs exchanges like these: The person with the microphone wins. a. Never attempt a frontal assault on a superior force. b. The professor always has the strategic advantage, and he knows it. c. Don't get into a power play when your're out-gunned. |
| | 4. There's a better way. a. Don't disengage; instead, use your tactics. b. Raise your hand and ask, "Professor, what do you mean by that?" c. Next ask, "How did you reach that conclusion?" d. Make him — the teacher and the one making the claim — shoulder the burden of proof. e. This approach enables you to stay engaged while deftly sidestepping the power struggle. |
| | 5. The "professor's ploy" comes into play when he responds by attempting to make you shoulder the burden of proof. a. He may sense your maneuver and respond by saying, "You must be one of those Christians who thinks the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Okay, since I'm a fair man, why don't you prove that to the rest of the class?" b. In one quick move, he's cleverly switched the burden of proof back on you, the student. c. Don't take the bait! You aren't the one making a claim; he is. He must defend his own claim. He's the teacher, after all. |
| | 6. You can respond to the professor's ploy with dignity and tact. a. When he shifts the burden of proof on you, calmly respond by saying, "Professor, first, I haven't revealed anything about my views. Second, my views don't really matter right now. You're the teacher and you've made a strong claim about the Bible. I'm just trying to learn your reasons for it." b. If he gives an answer, thank him for it and either ask him another question or let it go. |
| | 7. Notice that the burden of proof tactic takes the pressure off you, but still keeps you in the driver's seat. a. You don't have to be the expert on every subject. b. If you keep the burden on the other side when they're making the claim, you don't have to have all the answers. c. In fact, you can be effective even when you know very little if you ask the right questions. |
| | REMEMBER: THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT TACTICAL QUESTIONS YOU CAN EVER ASK ARE, "WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?" AND "WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT?" |



STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Have you ever been cornered by someone who simply asserted something? Break into groups of four and briefly share those times you remember. Specifically determine how you might have responded differently if you knew then what you know now about the burden of proof. (4 minutes)

REFLECT A MOMENT

Keep in mind that the tone of these questions —"What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?" — is engaging and conversational. The questions allow us to probe deeper while remaining amicable. They keep you in the driver's seat while the other person does the work.

DON'T SWEAT IT IF YOU'RE NOT SURE WHERE TO GO NEXT.

- 1. The third Columbo tactic, covered in the next session, helps you uproot the flaws, difficulties, or problems with another's view.
- 2. Getting to the third tactic, however, requires insight into those flaws.
- If you don't have the resources to go further or you sense the person is losing interest, don't feel compelled to force the conversation.
 a. Let the encounter die a natural death.
 - b. Consider it a fruitful, interactive learning experience, nonetheless.
- 4. You don't have to hit home runs. You don't even have to get on base.*a. Sometimes just getting up to bat will do.*
 - b. The first two Columbo questions accomplish that.

REFLECT A MOMENT

You don't have to get to the foot of the cross in every encounter. Most people need time to consider what you've talked about, and that's healthy. After all, if people get to the cross too quickly, they may leave it just as quickly.

Also, some Christians are good "closers" and some are not. Those who are consistently successful at bringing others to a decision for Christ with the simple Gospel mistakenly conclude it should be just as simple for everyone else. The fact is, other ambassadors have usually paved the way for them with planting, watering, and weeding (1 Corinthians 3:7–8), making it possible for the evangelist to harvest with ease.





Most of us are not harvesters, but gardeners, tending the crop so that others can harvest in due season. Some Christians, aware of their difficulty in harvesting, never get into the field at all. But it's okay to sow seeds even if you don't harvest. As different members of the same Body, we each play a unique and vital role.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

THE REAL WORLD" REDUX

Objective: To practice using the first two Columbo questions in realworld interactions and to learn to argue against Christianity (since you will have trouble persuading others if you can't understand what it's like to be in their shoes).

List three challenges to the Christian worldview in one-sentence statements below. These will be conversation starters in this activity. (2 minutes)

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Pair up and choose a challenger and a defender. The challenger should present an assault on the Christian worldview, and the defender should use the first two Columbo questions we've learned ("What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?") to keep the burden of proof where it belongs. Switch roles. (8 minutes)

As a group, share your reflections about this activity. How did it feel to think like a non-Christian and to be the recipient of the Columbo questions? How did it feel to defend Christianity with the Columbo tactics? Did it make your job easier? Could you use this tactic in the real world? (8 minutes)



AMBASSADOR SKILLS

NARRATING THE DEBATE

Many people you talk to will struggle when you turn the tables and they're being asked to provide evidence for their views. They will try to change the subject or simply reassert their views, sometimes because they haven't thought much about the issue you're discussing. Dodging your question may be their only recourse.

It is critical that you "narrate the debate" at this point. Take a moment to stop and describe to them what's going on in the conversation. This will help your friend (and others listening in) to see how she's gotten off course. You can say, "Hold on. First you made a fairly controversial statement, which I challenged you to clarify and defend. So far, you haven't done that. You've just taken off in another direction. Before we move on to a new topic, can we finish this one?"

Don't let your friend get off the hook by dodging the issues. This approach keeps the pressure on while keeping the conversation cordial. Encourage your opponent to clarify herself. Forcing her to face the music may be the first step toward a change of mind.

THE COLUMBO TACTIC CAN ALSO HELP KEEP YOU OUT OF THE "HOT SEAT."

- 1. Sometimes the fear of getting in over our heads is enough to keep us from saying anything at all.
- 2. We especially dread the possibility of some aggressive critic blasting us with arguments, opinions, or information we are not equipped to handle.
- 3. The Columbo tactic helps control the conversation when you fear being overmatched by the person opposing you.
- To buy yourself some thinking time, simply switch into fact-finding mode.
 a. Begin by slowing them down with, "Hold on a minute; this is new to me."
 - b. Next say, "I want to understand your point, so can you carefully tell me what you believe and why you believe it?" (the first two Columbo questions).
 - c. Finish by saying, "Let me think about it."
 - d. Then work on the issue later, at your leisure, when the pressure is off.

REFLECT A MOMENT

Think for a moment how useful this approach is. Instead of trying to resist the force of another's attack, practice a little verbal Aikido—just step aside and let him barge right in. Give him the floor and invite him to make his case. However, he must do it slowly and clearly so you'll have an opportunity to fully understand his point.

STAND TO REASON

When you are being overwhelmed, this move to fact-finding mode takes you com-

pletely out of the hot seat. It deftly shifts control of the conversation back to you while shifting the spotlight — and the pressure — back on him. You are no longer under any obligation to answer, refute, or even respond because you've already said you need to give the issue more thought.

This is easy. Essentially you're saying, "Oh, you want to beat me up? Fine with me. Just do it slowly and thoroughly." This is a move that even the most delicate, retiring, shy, bashful, skittish, timid, or reserved personality can employ with great effect.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Some examples for the Student Interactive:

"The radical religious right is ruining America."

"Darwin's finches are a clearcase example of evolution at work."

"The Bible has been translated and re-translated. The stories about Jesus can't be trusted."

"The Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the raising of Lazarus, even the Old Testament miracles—all are freely used for religious propaganda, and they are very effective with an audience of unsophisticates and children." -Richard Dawkins

"The most fundamental freedom is the freedom of reproductive self-determination." — Gloria Feldt

THE HOT SEAT

Break into two teams. Each team should compile a list of three top challenges that put Christians in the hot seat — the more sophisticated, the better.

Next, send a volunteer from your team to the front of the room to field challenges by an aggressive member of the other team. The challenger should try to overwhelm the volunteer with points she cannot answer, which places her in the hot seat. Her goal is then to use the first two questions of the Columbo tactic in the fact-finding mode to stay out of the hot seat. The volunteer will have succeeded and won a point for her team each time she successfully deflects the challenger and remains unruffled. The team making claims should not be put down easily, though. Try to keep it realistic, but not obnoxious. (10 minutes)

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Asking simple, leading questions is an almost effortless way to accomplish balance. You can advance the dialogue and make capital of the conversation for spiritual ends without seeming abrupt, rude, or pushy. Questions are engaging and interactive, probing yet amicable. Most important, they keep you in the driver's seat while someone else does all the work.

III. What main points were covered in this session?

FIRST, WE EXAMINED THE SECOND USE OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC: REVERSING THE BURDEN OF PROOF.

- 1. The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend or give evidence for his or her view, and the person who makes the claim bears the burden.
- 2. It's not enough to simply give an alternate explanation.
- 3. The question used to reverse the burden of proof is, "How did you come to that conclusion?"

| B SECOND, WE LEARNED HOW TO AVOID THE "PROFESSOR'S PLOY, A COMMON MOVE TO ESCAPE THE BURDEN OF PROOF. |
|--|
| 1. Don't allow yourself to get caught in a power play; instead, use your tacti |
| 2. Refuse to shoulder the burden of proof when you have not made the claim |
| THIRD, WE REALIZED THAT WE DON'T NEED TO FORCE A CONVERSATION. |
| We don't have to hit home runs every time we have a conversation with someone. Sometimes just getting up to bat will do. |
| 2. The first two Columbo questions help us get in the game. |
| FOURTH, WE PRACTICED USING THE COLUMBO TACTIC TO KEEP OURSELVES OUT OF THE "HOT SEAT." |
| 1. We shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode. |
| 2. We ask probing clarification questions without trying to win our case. |
| ⁻ 3. We work on the issues later, when the pressure is off, once we understand |
| their point of view. |
| |
| THE NEXT SESSION WILL EXPLORE THE FINAL PHASE OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC — EXPLOITING A WEAKNESS OR A FLAW IN SOMEONE'S VIEWS — WHILE HELPING YOU IMPROVE YOUR COLUMBO SKILLS AND DEFEND YOURSELF AGAINST THE COLUMN TACTIC WHEN SOMEONE ELSE USES IT ON YOU. |
| COLUMBO TACTIC — EXPLOITING A WEAKNESS OR A FLAW IN SOMEONE'S VIEWS — WHILE HELPING YOU IMPROVE YOUR COLUMBO SKILLS AND DEFEND YOURSELF AGAINST THE COLUMI |
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| Point out the article at the end of | STUDENT INTERACTIVE |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| the session called "Ten Easy Ways | SELF-ASSESSMENT |
| to Start Meaningful Dialogue." | |
| Encourage the students to read | <i>Try to answer the following questions without using your notes.</i> |
| it during the week. | 1. What do we mean by the term "burden of proof"? |
| | The burden of proof is the someone |
| | has to his own view. |
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| | 2. What is the burden of proof rule? |
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| | 5. What is the "professor's ploy"? |
| | Switching the back on to the |
| | person who hasn't |
| | 6. What is an easy way to stay out of the "hot seat" when someone is |
| | coming on strong? |
| | Shift from mode to mode. |
| | Say, "Carefully explain your and your |
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Ο Е S Ν Т **SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS** 1. What do we mean by the term "burden of proof"? • The burden of proof is the <u>responsibility</u> someone has to <u>defend</u> his own view. 2. What is the burden of proof rule? ■ The person who <u>makes the claim</u> bears the burden. 3. What is the second key question of the Columbo tactic? "How did you come to that conclusion?" 4. This graciously assumes that the non-Christian has actually come to a conclusion — that he has reasons for his view and has not just asserted it. 5. What is the "professor's ploy"? Switching the <u>burden of proof</u> back on to the person who hasn't <u>made the claim</u>. 6. What is an easy way to stay out of the "hot seat" when someone is coming on strong? ■ Shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode. ■ Say, "Carefully explain your <u>view</u> and your <u>reasons</u> for it, then let <u>me think</u> about it." GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY 1. This week, take another step in developing your Columbo skills in conversation. Use questions one and two ("What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?" or some variation) to begin engaging others in dialogue. Be prepared to share your experiences with others in class during the next session. If you need help starting a conversation, see "Ten Easy Ways to Start Meaningful Dialogue," by Steve Wagner, in "Food for Thought" below. 2. Introduce a friend to the two uses of the Columbo tactic that you've learned. Describe the main idea of each question and your reasons for using them. Explain to him the value of the Columbo tactic and how it can help him in conversations with others. 3. Review the self-assessment exercise above so you will be able to answer all the questions without the prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you will be given an exercise to demonstrate your mastery of these questions. Be prepared. 4. 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 next time you meet together.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

JESUS AND COLUMBO

It may interest you to know that Jesus used the Columbo tactic in His dealings with other people. It was His habit to go on the offensive by asking probing questions meant to challenge his opponents or trap them in their foolishness. Consider the passages below, for example, and reflect on the ways you might learn from Jesus, the ultimate example of apologetics in action.

LUKE 20:22-26 "'Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But He detected their trickery and said to them, 'Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?' And they said, 'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.""

MARK 12:35-37 "And Jesus answering began to say, as He taught in the temple, 'How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself said in the Holy Spirit, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet." David himself calls Him "Lord," and so in what sense is He his son?' And the great crowd enjoyed listening to Him."

LUKE 20:2-8 "And they spoke, saying to Him, 'Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?' And He answered and said to them, 'I shall also ask you a question, and you tell Me: Was the baptism of John from Heaven or from men?' And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, "From Heaven," He will say, "Why did you not believe him?" But if we say, "From men," all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.' And they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.""

MATTHEW 21:28-32 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, "Son, go work today in the vineyard." And he answered and said, "I will, sir;" and he did not go. And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, "I will not;" yet he afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, 'The latter.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him. And you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him."

JOHN 18:22-23 "And when He had said this, one of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, 'Is that the way You answer the high priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?'"

LUKE 7:40-42 "And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he replied, 'Say it, Teacher.' 'A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to



repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have judged correctly.'"

LUKE 14:1-6 "It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?' But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. And He said to them, 'Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?' And they could make no reply to this."

LUKE 10:25-37 "And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?' And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.' But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied and said, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?' And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same.'

TURNING THE TABLES

If you're placed in a situation where you suspect your convictions will be labeled intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, and judgmental, turn the tables. When someone asks for your personal views about a moral issue, preface your remarks with a question.

Say, "You know, this is actually a very personal question you're asking, and I'd be glad to answer. But before I do, I want to know if you consider yourself a tolerant or an intolerant person. Is it safe to give my opinion, or are you going to judge me for my point of view? Do you respect diverse points of view, or do you condemn others for convictions that differ from yours?" Then when you give your point of view, it's going to be very difficult for them to call you intolerant or judgmental without looking guilty, too.

This response capitalizes on the fact that there is no neutral ground in these kinds of discussions. Everybody has a point of view he thinks is right, and everybody



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judges at some point or another. The Christian gets pigeon-holed as the judgmental one, but everyone else is judging, too. It's an inescapable consequence of believing, explicitly or implicitly, in any kind of truth.

WHEN A QUESTION IS NOT A QUESTION

When is a question not a question? Good question, isn't it? We've been talking about questions you can ask to get things rolling, but sometimes a question is asked of you that is not really a question, but rather a challenge in disguise.

Like this one: "What gives you the right to say someone else's religion is wrong?" I'm used to getting this response from non-Christians, but the last time I heard it was from a fellow believer, a graduate student at UCLA. Implicit in her question was a statement, a challenge, motivated no doubt by her own mixed feelings on the subject. What right did she, as a Christian, have to lay claim to the truth of her faith and thereby claim others were wrong?

Statement-questions like these are hard to answer because they don't entirely make clear the person's intent. You're caught off-guard, mouth open, scratching your head. It was worded like a question, but you're pretty sure it wasn't one. Now what?

Often the best way to navigate these kinds of situations is to simply point out that the question is confusing. Say, "I get the impression you think I've made a mistake here. Where did I go wrong?" This will force the person to rephrase her question in a statement, which is precisely what you want.

As I confronted this issue with the student from UCLA, I explained that the question couldn't be taken at face value. Did she really want to talk about rights? Did she really want to know who I was to make such a claim, what my credentials were, or what authority I possessed to speak on these things? Clearly not. I wasn't laying claim to any authority, nor was I promoting my pedigree, academic or otherwise. The only "rights" I was appealing to were rational rights. I offered an argument, which stands or falls on its own merits, not on the authority of the speaker.

There's nothing magical about this move. It wasn't a one-line zinger that stopped my challenger in her tracks. I wanted her to think about what was really behind her "question," phrased in the form of a statement, so that I could work with her real meaning.

The most important thing to remember about these questions is that the real statements behind them are strong claims that are open to challenge. For example, the question, "What gives you the right to say someone else's religion is wrong?" can be restated as "No one is justified in claiming one religious view is more true than another"—a statement that requires a defense. And herein lies my point. The statement-question has power only when it remains unchallenged. If you force the implicit claim to come to the surface, the objection loses its luster and you can address the real claim lurking behind the question.

NOT QUICK ON YOUR FEET?



Maybe you don't consider yourself fast enough on your feet to keep up with someone quicker than you in an intense discussion. No problem. Don't feel under pres-

sure to immediately answer every question asked or respond to every point made.

For tactical reasons, you may want to adopt the posture of a neutral observer. Shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode.

Try this. Say something like, "Interesting point. I'd like to hear more. Let me ask some questions about your view and your reasons for it so I understand you. Then let me think about it. We can talk more later." This shows you take the other person's view seriously, and it also buys you valuable time.

Ask probing questions with the Columbo tactic, but don't try to win your case just then. Take notes if you need to. Make sure you understand the challenge or the objection clearly. Then do some work on your own — maybe even enlisting others in the process — and come back prepared.

If your discussion was just part of a chance meeting, you may not be able to revisit the topic with the same person, but you'll be prepared next time the issue comes up.

This is a wonderful way to completely take the pressure off you. It's not a retreat tactic; it's just a different type of engagement. It greatly reduces your anxiety level, strengthens your own confidence, and prepares you to be more effective next time around. — Greg Koukl, "In the Presence of Hostile Witnesses," *Solid Ground*, March–April 2001.

TEN EASY WAYS TO START MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE Steve Wagner, Stand to Reason

The key to entering a meaningful conversation is to look for opportunities, then start the conversation by building a bridge with a friendly opener. The following list gives helpful tips for striking up conversations with non-believers.

- 1. Be alert to circumstances where people might like to talk.
 - a. Waiting rooms (doctor's office, car repair, DMV)
 - b. Social events (receptions, dinner parties)
 - *c.* On-campus locations (central quad, classes, library, computer center, student union)
 - d. Lunchrooms
 - e. Instant messenger forums
 - f. Chat rooms or web forums
 - g. Coffee shops
 - h. Carpools
- 2. Ask a question: "What do you think about ...?"
- 3. Show interest: "Can I ask your opinion about something?"
- 4. Ask for help: "There's something on my mind. Do you have a few minutes to talk?"
- 5. Express concern: "I can't believe this happened!"
- 6. Express amazement: "Did you hear about ...?!"



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7. Get to know people.

Get better acquainted with your friends and co-workers. Don't make the mistake of assuming you know where people stand unless they've had a chance to tell you. Use questions like "What do you mean by that?" or "What do you think about . . . ?" in order to gather information and show genuine interest in someone else's ideas. Don't presume you know what they're thinking. You might be surprised by what you learn.

8. Talk about current events.

Use the common obsession with news to initiate a conversation on meaningful topics. Government decisions, natural disasters, human rights violations, war, elections, foreign relations, cultural events, business mergers, and even sporting events all could be points of access to conversations that touch on values, ethics, or religion.

9. Read newspaper and newsmagazine articles.

Whether we like it or not, most public discourse happens in short articles surrounded by large photographs, images, or graphics of some kind. Use all of these things to your advantage. Use a recent article to express concern about something. Or ask someone sitting nearby what they think about a recent turn of events. Ask, "Did you see the photo of the terrorist bombing in <u>Time</u> today? Why do you think this keeps happening?" or "Have you read Anne Quindlen's article in <u>Newsweek</u> on abortion? What did you think of it?"

10.Discuss current movies or recent TV programs.

Most of our friends feel like they're on safe ground discussing movies or last night's prime-time special. This makes the latest movie a great opportunity to discuss issues, especially if it is a drama people are taking seriously already. Ask, "Did you see this movie? Did you like it?" Then, listen closely to their response. When it's your turn to share your opinion, offer a question or observation about a fundamental issue raised or a point of view advanced by the film, and then toss the ball back to the other person for their response.



| N O T E S | ENDNOTES |
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| | 1. That is, there are no squares that are not squares because it's a logical impossi- bility. All laws of logic are self-evidently true and need no defense. In fact, any argument against the validity of the basic laws of logic must employ those laws to deny them. |
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SESSION 3

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of what you learned last time.

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Perfecting the "Columbo" Tactic

Being able to give clear answers to these questions demonstrates your mastery of the information from the last session. Use this self-assessment exercise as a review

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

MONSTRATING MASTER

As a warm-up, take a few moments to let students share how their practice interactions outside of class went.

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| The burden of proof is the someone to his own view. 2. What is the burden of proof rule? The person who bears the burden. 3. What is the second key question of the Columbo tactic? "How did you?" 4. The second Columbo question graciously assumes that the non-Christ has actually for his view and has not just it. 5. What is the "professor's ploy"? | 1. What do we mean by the term "burden of proof"? |
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| ing on strong? | 6. What is an easy way to stay out of the "hot seat" when someone is com- ing on strong? |
| ■ Shift from mode to mode. | Shift from mode to mode. |
| Say, "Carefully explain your and your then let me? | Say, "Carefully explain your and your for it, then let me means and your" |
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Stand to Reason exists to equip ambassadors for Christ with knowledge, wisdom, and character to effectively defend classical Christianity and classical Christian values. To further this mission we grant the purchaser permission to duplicate this manual for his students. "Tactics in Defending the Faith" © 2006 Gregory Koukl, Stand to Reason, 1-800-2-REASON or www.str.org

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of three or four and share some "war stories" from the last session's assignment. How did you employ the first and second Columbo questions to initiate conversations, gain information, clarify a point of view, or get out of the hot seat? (5 minutes)

I. Review

▲ IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED

- 1. First, we examined the second use of the Columbo tactic: reversing the burden of proof.
 - a. The burden of proof is the responsibility someone has to defend or give evidence for his or her view, and the person who makes the claim bears that burden.
 - b. This requires a defense, not just an alternate explanation.
 - *c.* The question used to reverse the burden of proof is, "How did you come to that conclusion?"
- 2. Second, we learned how to avoid the "professor's ploy," a common trap for the burden of proof.
 - *a.* Don't allow yourself to get caught in a power play when you're outgunned; instead, use your tactics.
 - b. Refuse to shoulder the burden of proof when you have not made a claim.
- 3. Third, we realized that we don't need to force a conversation.
 - *a.* We don't have to hit home runs every time we have a conversation with someone; sometimes just getting up to bat will do.
 - b. The first two Columbo questions help us get in the game.
- 4. Fourth, we practiced using the Columbo tactic to get ourselves out of the "hot seat."
 - a. We shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode.
 - b. We ask probing clarification questions without trying to win our case.
 - *c.* We work on the issues later, when the pressure is off, once we understand the point of view.



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- 1. Examine the third use of the Columbo tactic: exploiting a flaw or a weakness in another person's view.
- 2. Learn specific ways to improve our use of Columbo.
- 3. Learn how to defend against the Columbo tactic when someone else uses it against us.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

When someone's cherished view is at stake, it's not unusual for them to raise empty objections — objections that initially sound worthwhile, but simply can't be defended once examined. The probing questions of the Columbo tactic often show the lack of substance behind the bluster. As with the emperor and his new clothes, all it takes is for one person to say, "You're naked," and the game is up.

Don't settle with always being on the defensive. Go on the offensive and dismantle the other person's viewpoint by asking penetrating questions. That is key to the Columbo tactic: placing the burden of proof on your opponent.

II. The third step in the Columbo tactic: exposing a weakness or a flaw

KNOWING WHAT A PERSON BELIEVES AND WHY HE BELIEVES IT — THINGS YOU LEARNED FROM THE FIRST TWO STEPS OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC — ALLOWS YOU TO ASK NEW QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE A PERSON'S IDEAS. THIS IS THE FINAL STAGE OF COLUMBO.

- 1. The first two questions are somewhat passive.
- 2. The third Columbo question takes you on the offensive in an inoffensive way.

B THE CONVERSATION MAY ALERT YOU TO SOME WEAKNESS, FLAW, OR CONTRADICTION IN THE PERSON'S ARGUMENT THAT CAN BE EXPOSED AND EXPLOITED.

- 1. There is no special formula for making this discovery.
- 2. You'll uncover it by listening carefully and then thinking about what was said.

THE KEY TO THIS STEP IS PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, "HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?"

- 1. Are there any blatant weaknesses in the view?
- 2. Do the conclusions follow from the evidence?

- S Ο Т Е Ν
- 3. Can you question any underlying assumptions?
- 4. Is there a misstep, a non-sequitur, a fallacy, or a failing of some sort?

ADDRESS ANY INCONSISTENCY YOU DISCOVER WITH A QUESTION, NOT A STATEMENT.

THIS STEP TAKES MORE PRACTICE THAN THE OTHERS, BUT IN TIME YOU WILL IMPROVE.

- 1. It requires some insight an ability to see the flaws in the argument which is a demanding request.
- 2. It is easy to "stall out" in the beginning, so don't be surprised or discouraged.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

In groups of four or five, try to uncover the intrinsic flaws in the common challenges below. If you do, suggest a question that begins to address the underlying flaw and write it down in the space provided. If you can't find it in one, simply move on to the next. Don't be frustrated if it's not clear at first. (7–8 minutes)

"You shouldn't push your morality on me."

"You're intolerant and arrogant."

"The miracles in the Bible prove it's a myth."

"Jesus was a good man and a prophet, but He wasn't God or the only savior."

"The fetus may be a human being, but it's not a person."

"How can God exist when there's so much evil in the world?"



| LET'S CONSIDER HOW TO RESPOND TO THE ABOVE CHALLENGES. |
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| When they say, "You shouldn't push your morality on me," you can ask, "Why not?" a. It's going to be hard for them to answer this without contradicting themselves. b. When they say you shouldn't push your morality on them, they're pushing their morality on you. |
| When they say, "You're intolerant and arrogant," you can ask, "What do you mean by that?" (the first Columbo question). <i>a. Asking this question flushes out their definition of "intolerant" or "arrogant," exposing what I call the "passive-aggressive tolerance trick."</i> <i>Here's the way it usually looks:</i> "You're intolerant and arrogant." "What do you mean by that?" "I mean you think you're right and everyone who disagrees with you is wrong." "Tell me, do you think your views are right?" [Of course he does; that's why he believes what he believes.] "Help me out here. Why is it that when I think I'm right, I'm intolerant, but when you think you're right, you're just right? What am I missing?" |
| 3. When the professor says, "The Bible is just a bunch of myths and fables," you can ask, "How did you come to that conclusion?" a. The professor has probably assumed, because of his naturalistic philosophy, that miracles are impossible. Therefore, prior to evaluating any evidence (i.e., a priori¹, he has determined that any "historical" references to miracles are myths or fables. b. Since modern day science is based on naturalistic philosophy, too, he thinks science has proved — instead of assumed — there are no miracles. c. Since science can only measure the natural world, it cannot draw any conclusions, even in principle, about the supernatural world. d. In using this logic, the professor has made what's known as a "category error."² e. You can follow up the claim that science has proved miracles don't exist by asking, "Would you explain how the methods of science can disprove the supernatural?" |
| 4. When they say, "That's just your interpretation," you can ask, "What do you mean by 'just'?" a. Your goal is to find out if they believe all interpretations are equally valid and yours is just another in the long line of alternatives. b. If this is what they believe, then you're free to interpret their words any way that then strikes your fancy, an "interpretation" that is just as good as any other. c. You can challenge this view by making some drastic claim — for example, by taking them for a skinhead who thinks all Jews and homosexuals should be put in prison. When they object, follow up by saying, "That's my interpretation of what you're saying. If you disagree, that's just your own interpretation. All interpretations are equally valid, aren't they? Or could it be that |

| N O T E S | 5. When they say, "Jesus was a good man and a prophet, but He wasn't God or the only savior," you can ask, "How could Jesus be a good man and a prophet, but be mistaken about his own identity and purpose?" a. If Jesus was wrong about His oft-repeated claim that He was the unique means of salvation,³ it then becomes difficult to call Him a good man, a prophet, or a wise religious teacher. b. If Jesus was not correct, then he was lying or deeply deceived — qualities we would never use to describe a good man or godly prophet. |
|-----------|--|
| | 6. When they say, "The fetus may be a human being, but it's not a person," you can ask, "What's the difference?" a. They are claiming there is a morally relevant difference between an unborn child and a toddler that justifies killing one and not the other. b. To them, the difference between the two is personhood and allows you to kill the unborn, but not the toddler. c. This is a difference they must defend, not just assert. |
| | 7. When they ask, "How can God exist when there's so much evil in the world?" you can ask, "But if there is no God, how can we call anything evil in the first place?" a. The existence of evil assumes a standard that is used to distinguish good from evil. b. But there is no way to account for a standard of objective good — the moral rules that are violated by people who commit the evil in question — without the existence of a moral rule maker: God.⁴ c. How do we make sense of the difference between good and evil if there is no God? |
| | © YOU CAN SOFTEN YOUR APPROACH BY FIRST REQUESTING CLARIFICATION. 1. Begin by asking, "Can you clear this up for me?" or "Can you help me |
| | understand this?"2. Next, offer your objection by gently challenging the belief or confronting the weakness in the argument. |
| | 3. Consider the gentle approach of the following questions. a. Can you clear this up for me? How could the teaching on reincarnation be removed from every existing hand-written copy of the New Testament circulating in the Roman world during the 4th century? b. Can you help me understand this? If the Bible were "merely written by men," how could it contain fulfilled prophecies? c. Can you clear this up for me? How does having a "burning in the bosom" about the Book of Mormon give adequate evidence for its truth when people have similar reasons — a strong conviction from God in response to prayer — for rejecting it? d. Can you help me understand this? If homosexuality is truly natural, then why did nature give homosexuals bodies designed for reproductive sex with women, not men? Why would nature give desires for one type of sex, but the body for another? |
| | efending the Faith" © 2006 Gregory Koukl, Stand to Reason, 1-800-2-REASON or www.str.org |

- e. Can you clear this up for me? If partial-birth abortion is morally acceptable, on what grounds do we condemn infanticide, since the only difference between the two is the baby's location — partially out of the womb or completely out — and location seems irrelevant to the baby's value?
- f. Can you help me understand this? If there is absolutely no evidence for abiogenesis (life from non-life — life arising initially from inanimate matter) and much evidence against it, how can we say that Darwin's theory of evolution is a fact?

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

The following dialogue is an example of one student's gentle use of the third step in the Columbo tactic. It's found in the fine critique of evolution, *Icons of Evolution*, by Jonathan Wells.

TEACHER: Okay, let's start today's lesson with a quick review. Yesterday I talked about homology [how different organisms show remarkable similarity in the structure of some of their body parts]. Homologous features, such as the vertebrate limbs shown in your textbook, provide us with some of our best evidence that living things have evolved from common ancestors.

STUDENT (RAISING HAND): I know you went over this yesterday, but I'm still confused. How do we know whether features are homologous?

TEACHER: Well, if you look at vertebrate limbs, you can see that even though they're adapted to perform different functions, their bone patterns are structurally similar.

STUDENT: But you told us yesterday that even though an octopus eye is structurally similar to a human eye, the two are not homologous.

TEACHER: That's correct. Octopus and human eyes are not homologous because their common ancestor did not have such an eye.

STUDENT: So regardless of similarity, features are not homologous unless they are inherited from a common ancestor?

TEACHER: Yes, now you're catching on.

STUDENT (LOOKING PUZZLED): Well, actually, I'm still confused. You say homologous features provide some of our best evidence for common ancestry. But before we can tell whether features are homologous, we have to know whether they came from a common ancestor.

TEACHER: That's right.

STUDENT (SCRATCHING HEAD): I must be missing something. It sounds as though you're saying that we know features are derived from a common ancestor because they're derived from a common ancestor. Isn't that circular reasoning?⁵



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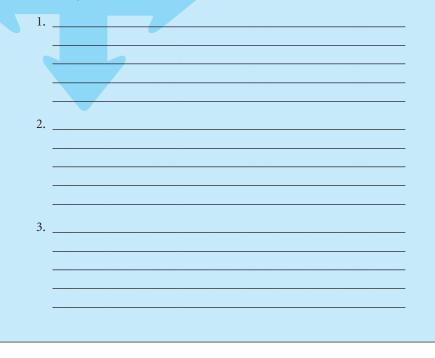
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STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Without looking at your notes, recall the main idea in each Columbo question and write them in the space below. Pair up with another student and explain the basics of each element as if you were explaining them to another person for the first time. (5 minutes)



MBASSADOR SKILLS

Sometimes the best way to disagree with someone is not to face the issue head-on, but to use an indirect approach. Offer an alternative and invite a principled response.

- "Let me suggest an alternative and tell me if it isn't an improvement. Then you can tell me why you think your alternative is better."
- "I wouldn't characterize it that way. Here's what I think may be a better or more accurate way to look at it."
- "Have you thought about or considered another alternative?"
- "I don't think that's going to work, and here's why."
- "I'm not sure I agree with the way you put it. Think about this . . . "

This approach shows respect for the person you disagree with. Once you understand her viewpoint, you can ask, "Do you mind if I ask a couple of questions about what you've told me?" or, "Would you consider an alternative, or be willing to look at another angle?" By soliciting permission to disagree, you make the encounter more amicable. You also stay in the driver's seat. Remember, the person who asks the questions controls the conversation.



| GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY |
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| III. THERE ARE TWO BASIC EXECUTIONS OF THE COLUMBO TACTIC |
| THE FIRST APPROACH IS THE APPARENTLY HARMLESS METHOD OF LT. COLUMBO HIMSELF — HALTING, HEAD-SCRATCHING, AND BUM- BLING. |
| You can use a number of phrases to introduce questions that soften your challenge, such as: <i>a.</i> "<i>I'm just curious</i>" <i>b.</i> "<i>Help me out because I'm trying to understand you on this</i>" <i>c.</i> "<i>I'm a little confused on something</i>" |
| d. "Maybe you can clear this up for me" e. "Something about this thing bothers me…" f. "Maybe I'm missing something" |
| 2. This style is best used in a college classroom or with a group of people you don't know. |
| B THE SECOND APPROACH IS MORE CONFRONTATIONAL AND AGGRESSIVE. |
| 1. This technique is similar to that used by a lawyer in a courtroom. |
| 2. The important rule in this approach is that a lawyer never asks a question I doesn't know the answer to. a. When I use the Columbo tactic aggressively, I have a goal in mind. b. I ask specific questions that legitimately get another person to dig his own grades |
| IV. U OU CAN IMPROVE YOUR COLUMBO SKILL WITH THREE STEPS: ANTICIPATE, REFLECT, AND PRACTICE. |
| INITIALLY YOU WILL NOT BE QUICK ON YOUR FEET WITH RESPONSE LIKE THE ONES ABOVE. |
| 1. Your best ideas will come afterwards, when the pressure is off. |
| 2. This is the perfect time to focus on improving your technique. |
| B FIRST, TRY TO <u>ANTICIPATE</u> OBJECTIONS AND THINK OF QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE. |
| Work on an issue or question that has stumped you in the past. a. Brainstorm straightforward response questions that will put you in the driver's seat of those conversations. b. Remember that a question mark is shaped like a fishhook—you want to us |

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2. Advance preparation takes work, but can be quite effective. The next time you're asked those particular questions you'll have responses at your fingertips.

AFTERWARDS, <u>REFLECT</u> ON QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE ASKED.

- 1. After each encounter, take a few moments for self-assessment.
 - a. Think about questions you might have asked.
 - *b.* Determine how you could have phrased questions more effectively or maneuvered through the conversation differently.
 - c. With the pressure off, other alternatives may occur.
 - d. Write down your thoughts and review them later.
- 2. This kind of assessment is not hard and can be a lot of fun.
 - a. It prepares you for your next opportunity.
 - b. It puts new ideas at your fingertips next time around.
 - c. It becomes second nature when you get into the routine of it.

WHEN YOU THINK OF A NEW IDEA OR APPROACH, PRACTICE THE QUESTIONS — AND POSSIBLE REJOINDERS — OUT LOUD.

- 1. Practice increases your practical experience it places you in the actual dialogue yet in a safe environment.
 - *a.* Anticipate the turns your new tack might take and how you'd respond to possible rejoinders.
 - b. Role-play it with a friend.
- 2. Practice prepares you for actual encounters.
 - a. If you practice in advance, when these issues come up you'll be ready.
 - *b.* This really works because when issues come up in the future you've already rehearsed your response.
 - c. It's the way political candidates prepare for televised debates.

REMEMBER: IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO PREPARE. YOU MUST ENGAGE. INTERACTING WITH OTHERS FACE TO FACE IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO IMPROVE YOUR ABILITIES.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Always try to anticipate the rejoinders or counterarguments the other side might raise. Take these rejoinders seriously, state them fairly and clearly — even convincingly — then refute them in advance. This tactic removes the objections before they're raised. It's as if you're saying, "I know what your thinking and it's not going to work. Here's why."





STUDENT INTERACTIVE

THE REAL WORLD

If you can't think like your opponent, how can you hope to reach them with the Gospel? If you think all objections to Christianity are foolish and crazy, you may be caught by surprise. More importantly, it will be almost impossible to make an impact on someone whose view you think is so wacky you could never take it seriously.

Think of one statement you have heard that opposes Christianity or Christians. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the one objecting. Jot down at least two reasons you think they might give for their challenge. (2 minutes)

The challenge: _____

Reason #1: _____

Reason #2: _____

Now turn to a neighbor and engage in an improvised dialogue. Offer your challenge by acting as if you oppose Christianity. Your partner will practice the Columbo tactic by asking you questions that force you to defend that view. After a few minutes, switch roles. (5 minutes)

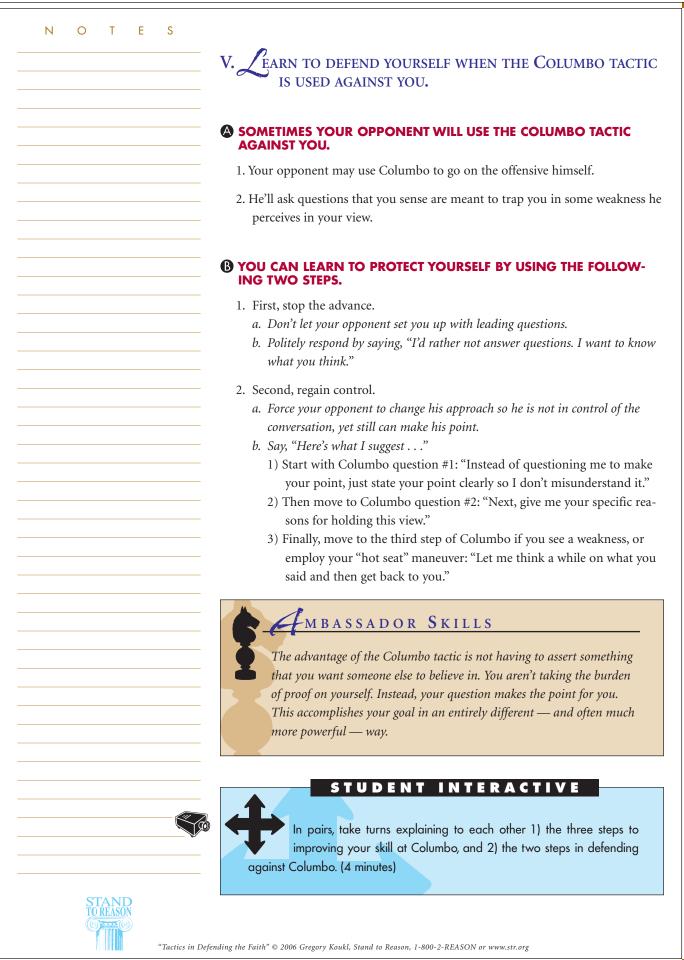
Finally, debrief about this experience. How did it feel to be in "the other person's shoes," opposing Christianity? Was it difficult? Did it help you better understand your non-Christian friends? (2 minutes)

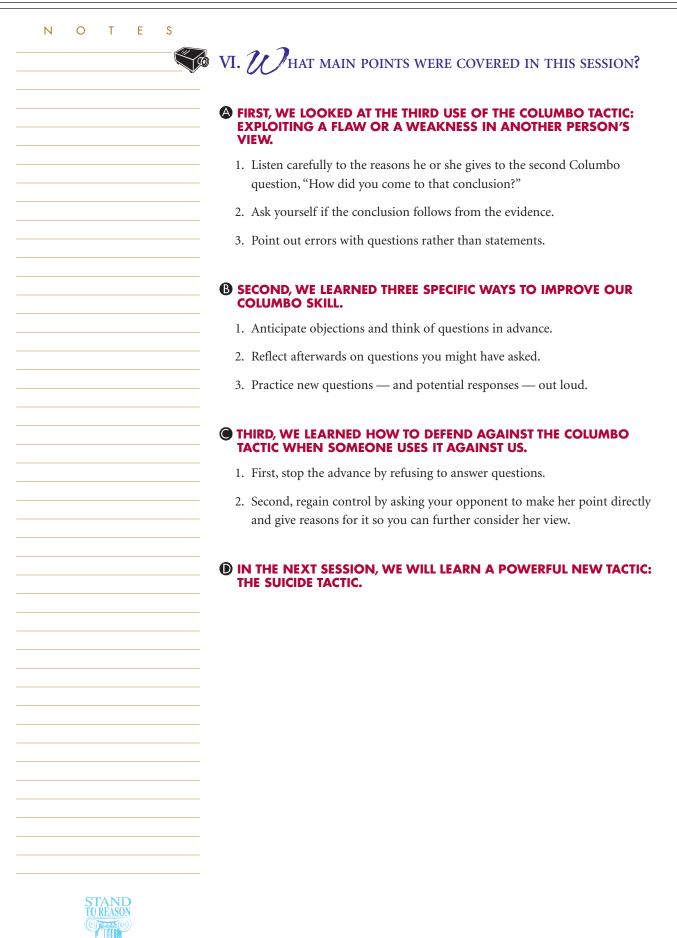
AMBASSADOR SKILLS

CHARACTER CHECK

Once you learn the Columbo tactic, you'll realize how few people can answer for their views. It's easy, once you see this happen, to drift into pride and take pleasure in another's failings. Therefore, take care to show concern for the other person. Establish common ground whenever possible by affirming points of agreement. Encourage the other person to think further on the subject if he or she doesn't have a satisfactory answer. Assume the same best intentions you'd like others to assume about you when you're in the hot seat.







| <i>Try to answer the following questions without using your notes.</i> |
|---|
| 1. The third application of the Columbo tactic is to use your questions to subtly a weakness or |
| in the other person's views. |
| 2. There is no special formula for acting on your discovery. Just about |
| what has been said. |
| 3. The key to mastering the third step is to pay |
| Do his conclusions follow from his evidence? |
| 4. List three specific ways to improve your Columbo skill. |
| objections and think of questions in advance. on questions you might have asked. |
| new questions — and potential responses — out loud. |
| 5. List two steps to defend yourself against the Columbo tactic. |
| First, the Politely refuse to |
| his leading questions. |
| Second, regain control by asking him to simply and his for it. |
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\cap Т Е S Ν **SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS** 1. The third application of Columbo is to use your questions to subtly exploit a weakness or flaw in the other person's views. 2. There is no special formula for acting on your discovery. Just listen carefully, then think about what has been said. 3. The key to mastering the third step is to pay close attention to the answer your opponent gives to question two. Do his conclusions follow from his evidence? 4. List three specific ways to improve your Columbo skill. ■ Anticipate objections and think of questions in advance. ■ <u>Reflect</u> on questions you might have asked. ■ <u>Practice</u> new questions — and potential responses — out loud. 5. List two steps to defend yourself against the Columbo tactic. ■ First, stop the advance. Politely refuse to answer his leading questions. Second, regain control by asking him to simply state his point and his reasons for it. **GOING DEEPER:** INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY 1. This week, look for opportunities to hone your Columbo skills. Use the first two questions, "What do you mean by that?" and "How did you come to that conclusion?", to navigate in conversations. If you feel comfortable, use further questions to gently challenge points of weakness you see. If you are stumped, let the issue go for the time being and brainstorm possible responses later with a fellow believer. Be prepared to share your experiences in class during the next session. 2. Introduce a few friends to the three uses of the Columbo tactic. Describe the main idea of each question and your reasons for using them. Explain how they can improve their Columbo skill and defend against it when someone uses it on them. 3. Review the self-assessment exercise above so you will be able to answer all the questions without the prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you will be given an exercise to demonstrate your mastery of these questions. Be prepared. 4. 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 next time you meet together.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

SHEEPISH IN SEATTLE

Once in a restaurant in Seattle, I got into a chat about religion with the waitress who was serving my table. My general comments were met with an approving nod until I said, "When it comes to religion, people believe a lot of very foolish things." Then a shadow of disapproval crossed her face.

"That's oppressive, not letting people believe what they want to believe," she said.

Now, much can be said about this simple remark. For example, notice how she felt that just challenging a view was a threat to personal liberty, a "forcing" of my beliefs on others. I ignored that problem, though, and zeroed in on a more fundamental flaw. I asked a simple question — a variation of the first Columbo question.

"So, are you saying I'm wrong?"

She balked, unwilling to commit the same error she had just accused me of making. "No, I'm not saying you're wrong. . . . I'm just trying to understand your view."

I chuckled. "Be honest; admit it. You think I'm wrong. If you don't think I'm wrong, then why are you correcting me? If you do think I'm wrong, then why are you oppressing me?"

It was clear that she believed some people could be wrong — me, in this case. Like many who espouse this confused sense of tolerance, the waitress couldn't play by her own rules. Mine was a simple question that gently boxed her in.

After this, she stammered for a moment and then replied, "All religions are basically the same, after all." Notice that this comment had little to do with my original question. It was a parry — a stock retort. But she had just made a claim, and now it was her job to defend it.

"All religions are basically the same? In what way?" I asked.

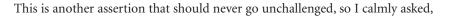
This question had a remarkable effect on her. Her jaw fell slack, and her face went blank. She didn't know what to say. She had obviously never looked closely at other religions. If she had, she'd have known they are worlds apart. Why would she have made this claim, then? I suspect she'd gotten away with it many times before.

"Consider this," I said. "Either Jesus is the Messiah or He isn't, right?"

She nodded. So far, so good.

"If He isn't the Messiah," I continued, "then the Christians are wrong. If He is the Messiah, then the Jews are wrong. So, one way or another, somebody's right and somebody's wrong. Everyone can't be right at the same time, can they?"

After stumbling around a bit, the waitress offered a diversion. "Well, no one can ever know the truth about religion."







| N O T E S | "Why would you believe a thing like that?" |
|--------------------|---|
| | The turn-about caught her by surprise. She was used to asking this question, not answering it! I was violating the rules, and she wasn't prepared for the role change |
| | I waited patiently, not breaking the silence, not letting her off the hook. Finally, s ventured: "But the Bible's been changed and retranslated so many times over the centuries." |
| | This was another dodge. It had nothing to do with the issue. Even if the Bible va ished from the face of the earth, some knowledge of God would still be possible seemed, at least in principle. |
| | But I chose a different tack. "Oh? Have you actually studied the transmission of the ancients documents of the text of the Bible?" |
| | Once again, the question stalled her. She couldn't defend her own assertion. "No I've never studied it," she said. This was a remarkable admission, given her confi dent contention just moments before, but she didn't seem the least bit bothered. |
| | I didn't have the heart to say what I might have in a case like this —"Then what you're saying is you're sure about something you really know nothing about." Instead, I simply said that I'd studied Bible transmission enough to know that th academic results were in, and there was no reason to believe the Bible had been corrupted in the way she thought. |
| | One by one, her options evaporated and she began to get uncomfortable. "I feel like you're backing me into a corner," she complained. |
| | I wasn't trying to bully her intellectually, but rather challenge her politely with fa questions. She was beginning to feel trapped because that's what careful question ing does: By eliminating foolish options, it forces a person down the narrow cor dor of truth. |
| | Note what happened here. I said some people are foolish in their thinking on sp itual matters, and she responded by saying mine was an oppressive view. She the proved my point by serving up her standard menu of muddled, foolish religious challenges. With each claim she made, I asked a simple question. |
| | She was speechless not because I was clever, but because, I suspect, she had neve before been challenged to defend her own claims. I asked why I should swallow any of this, and she complained she was being cornered. |
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| STAND TO REASON | |

Ο Т Е S Ν **ENDNOTES** 1. That which is known before, "prior to," a process of discovery, in particular, discovery by sense experience. The word is often used to describe philosophical commitments that are brought to the table as defining elements of a debate before other relevant evidence is considered. These commitments determine how the evidence will be viewed or whether it will be considered at all. "A priori" is contrasted to "a posteriori," that which is known after looking to experience, specifically sense experience. 2. "This is an 'apples and oranges' error because it mixes up two ideas that don't belong together, [e.g.,] 'What does blue taste like?'" Geisler and Brooks, Come, Let Us Reason Together (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 108. 3. Sometimes the issue of Jesus being the only way of salvation is best answered by Jesus Himself and the men He trained to carry His message after Him. Order a copy of the STR booklet "Jesus: The Only Way - 100 Verses" at str.org to find 100 different references — nine different lines of argument — in the New Testament demonstrating the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation. 4. There are a number of STR resources that develop this idea, including the CD "Evil, Suffering, and the Goodness of God." Or you can go to str.org and do a search on the word "evil" to find multiple entries. 5. Jonathan Wells, Icons of Evolution, Science or Myth? (Washington, D.C., Regnery: 2000), 79-80.



SESSION he "Suicide" Tactic

Being able to give clear answers to these questions demonstrates your mastery of the information from the last session. Use this self-assessment exercise as a review

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

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of what you learned last time.

As a warm-up, take a few moments to let students share how their practice interactions outside of class went.

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| DEMONSTRATING MASTERY Try recalling the answers to the following questions without using |
|--|
| your notes. The answers are located at the end of session 3. |
| |
| 1. What is the third application of the Columbo tactic? |
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2. What are the key ways of finding a flaw in the other person's view?

3. List three specific ways to improve your Columbo skill.

4. List two steps to defend against Columbo.



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STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of three or four and share some "war stories" from last session's assignment. How did you use the Columbo tactic to expose a weakness or a flaw in someone's view? How did they respond? What friends did you introduce to the Columbo tactic? What did they think of it? (5 minutes)

I. Review

IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED . . .

- 1. First, we learned how to employ the third use of the Columbo tactic: using questions to subtly expose a weakness or a flaw in another person's view.
 - a. Listen carefully and think about what has been said.
 - *b.* Pay close attention to the reasons given to question two, "How did you come to that conclusion?", and ask yourself if the conclusions follow from the evidence.
 - c. Point out errors with questions rather than statements.
- 2. Second, we learned three steps to improve your Columbo skill.
 - a. Anticipate objections and think of questions in advance.
 - b. Reflect afterwards on questions you might have asked.
 - *c. Practice your questions and possible rejoinders out loud by yourself or with someone else.*
- 3. Third, we learned how to defend when the Columbo tactic is being used against us.
 - a. Stop the advance by politely saying, "I'd rather not answer questions. I want to know what you think."
 - b. Regain control by saying, "Why don't you state your point clearly so I don't misunderstand it, along with your specific reasons for holding this view? Then let me think about it."

B IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL LEARN THE "SUICIDE" TACTIC.

- 1. We will discover the nature of self-refuting claims.
- 2. We will learn how to recognize when someone's view self-destructs.
- 3. We will see specific popular ideas commit suicide and learn how to respond to them.
- STAND TO REASON
- 4. We will consider a unique variation of the Suicide tactic called "Sibling Rivalry."

 \cap Т Е S N II. THE SUICIDE TACTIC THE SUICIDE TACTIC MAKES CAPITAL OF THE TENDENCY MANY ERRONEOUS POINTS OF VIEW HAVE TO SELF-DESTRUCT WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY. 1. These self-destructive views are commonly called self-refuting statements. 2. These views commit suicide on their own, and all you need to do is point that out. 3. For example, consider the dialogue in a *Peanuts* cartoon. • Sally: "No!" That's my new philosophy. I don't care what anyone says, the answer is "No!" • Charlie Brown: That's your new philosophy, huh? Sally: Yes! I mean, No! [pause] You've ruined my new philosophy. 4. Statements that commit suicide have within them the seeds of their own destruction. a. "I cannot speak a word in English" is self-refuting when spoken in English. b. "There are no sentences more than five words in length" is a sentence that has more than five words. "You can't know anything for sure" is a truth skeptics are pretty sure about. **GOING DEEPER:** INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY Philosopher J.P. Moreland points out that every statement is about something.¹ For example, the sentence "Dogs have fleas" is about dogs. Sometimes statements include themselves in what they refer to. The statement "All English sentences are short" is about all English sentences, including itself. When a statement fails to satisfy its own criteria of validity, it is self-refuting. It can't possibly be a true statement. Suicidal statements have within them the seeds of their own destruction. They cannot satisfy their own standard. This is why the minute you utter them, they become false. Even when such statements initially appear true, they're still false. This holds true for all self-refuting statements. If the exact same reasons used against your view also defeat the reasons themselves, then the view is selfdefeating; it commits suicide. The person using such arguments can't even recommend his own advice. For example, when someone says "You shouldn't make moral judgments," he is making a moral judgment (the word "shouldn't" is your clue).

Ο Т Е S Ν

REFLECT A MOMENT

Even God Himself can't cause self-refuting statements to be true. These kinds of statements are irrational, and since rationality is part of God's essential character, he cannot violate His nature and make contradictory statements become true. This is not a limitation on God's power in any way because power is not the relevant factor here: No amount of raw power can make a contradictory statement true. Suicidal ideas, therefore, are false of necessity. They can't be true in any possible world.

B HERE'S WHY THE SUICIDE TACTIC WORKS.

- 1. The Suicide tactic works because it trades on a fundamental rule of logic: the law of non-contradiction.
 - *a.* The law of non-contradiction states that two contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time.
 - b. "A" cannot be "non-A" at the same time, in the same way.
- 2. All suicidal views express or entail contradictions.
 - a. They make two different claims at odds with each other.
 - *b.* The contradictions "A is the case" and "A is not the case" may be explicit or implicit.
 - 1) Explicit contradictions are usually obvious.
 - *a*) "I never, never repeat a word. Never." The contradiction: I don't repeat a word. I do repeat a word.
 - *b) "There are no absolutes. Absolutely." Contradiction: There are no absolutes. There are absolutes.*
 - *c) "This page intentionally left blank." Contradiction: This page is blank. This page is not blank.*
 - *d*) "I used to believe in reincarnation. But that was in a former life." Contradiction: I don't believe in reincarnation. I do believe in reincarnation.
 - *e) "I'll give you three good reasons you can't use logic to find truth." Contradiction: He wants to use logic to disprove logic.*
 - 2) Implicit contradictions often are hidden and require further reflection to see.
 - *a)* "My brother is an only child." Contradiction: My brother has a sibling (me). My brother is an only child, he has no siblings.
 - *b*) "I never tell the truth." Contradiction: It's true that I never tell the truth.
 - c) "Always go to other people's funerals, otherwise they won't go to yours."— Yogi Berra. Contradiction: If you don't go to a person's funeral, they will some how decide, after death, not to go to yours.
 - *d)* "Ask me about my vow of silence." Contradiction: I've taken a vow of silence, but let me tell you about it.
 - 3) Sometimes suicide is more subtle.
 - *a)* Radio caller: "You shouldn't be correcting Christian teachers on the radio." (Then why is he calling my radio program to correct me?)
 - *b)* "You shouldn't force your morality on me." (Why not? Are you telling me it's wrong to say that other people are wrong?)



| N O T E S | |
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| | 4) Conversation with Gil, the physical therapist: |
| | <i>Gil:</i> Greg, you Christians are always judging other people. It's wrong for you to judge others. |
| | <i>Me:</i> Then why are you judging me? |
| | <i>Gil:</i> HmmOkay. [He was regrouping.] It's all right to judge, as long as you don't try to force your morality on other people. |
| | Me: Is that your morality? [He nods.] Then why are you forcing it on me? Gil: It's not fair! There's no way I can say it so it sounds right. [He thought I was playing a word trick on him.] |
| | Me: It doesn't sound right because it isn't right. It's self-refuting. |
| | Often, at this point |
| | He: Now you've got me all confused. |
| | Me: No, you were confused when you started. You just now realized it. |
| | What's in a name? Plenty. A person's name is one of the sweetest sounds to his ears. Keep this in mind when conversations begin to get hostile or combative with someone you've just met. At the very first sign of tension, pause and ask them their name. Then use it in a friendly manner as you continue. It can really help take the edge off. |
| | |
| | The Suicide and Columbo tactics work well together. As you pay attention |
| | to a person's viewpoint and notice that his or her view commits suicide, |
| | point it out with a Columbo question. |
| | |
| | IN ORDER TO RECOGNIZE A POINT THAT COMMITS SUICIDE |
| | 1. First, identify the basic premise, conviction, or claim. It's not always obvious. |
| | 2. Next, determine if the claim undermines itself.a. Does the statement satisfy its own requirements?b. Is there an internal contradiction? |

c. Can the idea be stated in the form "X is the case" and "X is not the case" at the same time? If so, it commits suicide.



 \cap т Е S N TUDENT INTERACTIV Break into groups of four or five and work through the challenges below to identify their flaws. Each of them falls prey to the Suicide tactic. Can you find the self-refutation? (7-8 minutes) "It's wrong for missionaries to try to change other people's religious beliefs." "All religions are equally true and valid." "You can only know what has been proven by science." "There is no truth." "It's wrong to try to change other people's religious beliefs." • This statement claims it is wrong to change other people's religious beliefs, yet the statement itself is meant to change someone's religious belief — the Christian belief in the Great Commission to evangelize the lost. • Contradiction: It's wrong to change people's religious beliefs. It's not wrong to change people's religious beliefs. "All religions are equally true and valid." If all religions are true, then Christianity is true and valid, yet an essential claim of Christianity is that all other religions are false, taken as a whole. Either Christianity is true and others are false, or others are true and Christianity is false. • *Either way, all religions can't be true.*² Contradiction: All religions are true. All religions are not true. "You can only know what has been proven by science." This statement makes a truth claim — a claim that the speaker implies that he knows. • It self-destructs because scientific proofs and experiments can't teach us that science is the only way to learn truth. Contradiction: Only science can teach us what we know. This is something we know that science didn't teach us.

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Sometimes people don't see contradictions staring them in the face. When that happens, we simply point them out. Other times they miss a contradiction because they don't have the information they need, as is likely in the case above — someone may not see the problem with pluralism because they don't know Jesus claimed to be the only true way to the Father (John 14:6). In these cases, you'll have to give them the correct information before they'll see the conflict.

REFLECT A MOMENT

When approaching the "science is the only source of truth" problem, use the first Columbo tactic. Ask, "Am I to take that statement as mere feeling, personal preference, or fact?" If they take it as fact, then they need to defend how they know it to be so. Facts are knowable only through scientific proof — on their view — so in order to prove as fact that science is the only source of truth, they must provide scientific proof for it. As it turns out, this claim is not a fact of science, but a philosophical claim <u>about</u> science³ that can't actually be known, according to this approach.

"There is no truth."

- This is a postmodern claim that ultimately denies we can know anything about the "real" world.
- Postmodernism is a community-based relativism that claims all "truth"— all reality is relative to one's linguistic community, and that each account of "reality" is equally and actually true for those who believe it.
- In this view, there is no truth in the sense that most of us use the word an accurate understanding of the way the world really is.
- Contradiction: We cannot know truth. We know this to be true. It is true that there is no truth.

REFLECT A MOMENT

Careful postmodernists will deny they are making metaphysical claims about how the world actually is. But how, then, are we to take their own claims? In spite of their protests, postmodernists make sweeping claims about knowledge itself, and not just about the knowledge within their own linguistic communities. This is why postmodernism commits suicide.



Here are some sample responses * for the Student Interactive.

- "It's wrong to condemn anybody for anything." When you say people are wrong for condemning others, aren't you condemning them?
- *"Everyone's view is a product of his own prejudices."* Is this view merely a product of your own prejudice? Why, then, should we take it seriously?
- *"Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds."* Do you hold this view consistently? If not, then consistency is sometimes a virtue. If so, then you are small-minded.
- "God doesn't take sides." This person presumes that God agrees with his side on the question of whether or not God takes sides.
- "You are what you eat." On this view, in order to "be," we must first eat. Yet we cannot eat unless we already exist. This view refutes itself, not to mention reduces us to mere bodies.
- *"The world is an illusion, and we're each part of the illusion."* This is a Hindu belief that claims we cannot experience true reality. Yet if everything is an illusion, including each of us, how can we know we are partaking in it?
- "The Bible could not have been inspired by God because men wrote it and men make mistakes." If men always make mistakes, then this idea itself must be mistaken, having come from an errant human.
- "God can't exist because there's so much evil in the world." Since this objection assumes an objective standard of good and evil, God must exist. There would be no other adequate explanation for morality.
- *"God used Darwinian evolution to design the world."* Darwinian evolution, by definition, is a non-directed process driven by mindless, natural processes. Design, on the other hand, is purposeful. The idea that something is designed by chance is contradictory.



AMBASSADOR SKILLS

Here is how the Suicide tactic worked out for me in a debate with Dr. Marv Meyer at Chapman University entitled, "Is Truth True?" I defended the resolve, "Objective truth exists and can be known." Dr. Meyer took the opposing view arguing that nothing can be known, which is a contradiction (he knows he can't know). Dr. Meyer's efforts were doomed to failure from the start. By merely showing up to defend this view, he implicitly conceded my claim before he even said a word. Further, every vote for Dr. Meyer was a vote that his view was objectively true and mine was false. In other words, every vote for Meyer was really a vote for me.

Ambassador Skills

One goal of the Suicide tactic is to show the ambiguities—even doublestandards—in the claims of others. When someone says "There is no truth," it's clear he believes some truths, just not others. When he says, "It's wrong for you to push your morality on others," he can't think it's always wrong or he wouldn't be doing it to you just then. The Suicide tactic forces your opponent to address this inconsistency. How does he know what's true and what's false? Under what circumstances might we legitimately "force" morality on someone? Do those circumstances apply here?

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

STOP THE SUICIDE

In teams of four or five, you will play a game that helps you expose the suicidal tendencies of self-refuting statements. When you receive the challenge, teams will have 2 minutes to discover how the challenge is self-refuting. The first team to shout "Suicide!" must explain how it commits suicide and give a sample response that exposes the flaw. If they fail to explain it, the next team gets a chance to prove it.

REFUTE THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES:

- "It's wrong to condemn anybody for anything."
- "Everyone's view is a product of his own prejudices."
- "Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds."
- "God doesn't take sides."
- "You are what you eat."
- "The world is an illusion ("Maya"), and we're each part of the illusion."
- "The Bible could not have been inspired by God because men wrote it and men make mistakes."
- "God can't exist because there's so much evil in the world."
- "God used Darwinian evolution to design the world."

Note: A complete analysis of these challenges can be found in "Going Deeper: Information for Self-Study" below and "Food for Thought: Mass 'Suicide" at the end of the chapter.

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

Most of the challenges listed above are analyzed at the end of the chapter, in "Food for Thought: Mass 'Suicide," but a few are included below for further study.

"The world is an illusion, and we're each part of the illusion." This is a basic Hindu claim that says all of "objective reality" is really just an illusion. But if we're part of an illusion, how can we know that's true? Can members of a dream know they're in a dream? Does Charlie Brown know he's a cartoon character? This Hindu concept that the world is an illusion contradicts the idea that I can know I'm part of an illusion. Therefore, this central doctrine self-destructs.

"God doesn't take sides." When someone says God doesn't take sides, he thinks that this is the view God Himself holds. In a way, this is just another way of stating that God would be on his side on the issue of God taking sides, which contradicts his statement.

"God can't exist because there's so much evil in the world." When we hear this challenge, it's important that we ask what the person means by "evil." Don't let them give you examples — ask what qualities those examples have that make them intrinsically bad. Why would we call them evil instead of good? At its core, the existence of evil implies an objective moral standard of perfection that has in some way been violated. As C.S. Lewis once observed, "A man does not call something crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."⁴ Only God can be the true standard of moral perfection. Since God's existence is necessary to make the notion of evil intelligible, the existence of evil cannot be invoked as a proof God does not exist. It proves just the opposite.

D LET'S EXAMINE "SIBLING RIVALRY" SUICIDE.

- 1. Sometimes objections come in pairs that are logically inconsistent with each other. This puts them in rivalry.
- 2. This doesn't mean that both objections are false, but it does cut your task in half, because both can't be true at the same time. Also, it may expose the potential irrationality of the person making the challenge.
- 3. Consider the following examples.
 - a. Prakesh Yesudian of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) in India talked to a Hindu who held two inconsistent views.
 HINDU MAN: Is Gandhi in Heaven? Heaven would be a very poor place without Gandhi in it.

PRAKESH: Well, sir, you must believe in Heaven, then, and apparently you have done some thinking about what would qualify someone for it. Tell me, what kind of people go to Heaven? [Note his use of Columbo tactic #1] **HINDU MAN:** Good people go to Heaven.



PRAKESH: But this idea of a good person is very unclear to me. What is good? [Continued use of Columbo tactic #1]

HINDU MAN (IN TYPICAL HINDU FASHION): Good and bad are relative; there is no clear definition.

PRAKESH: If that is true, sir, that goodness is relative and can't be defined, how is it you assume Gandhi is good and should be in Heaven? *The "sibling rivalry"*:

- *a)* Gandhi is good and there is an objective standard of good and evil, or
- *b)* Morality is relative and Gandhi cannot be called "good" in any ultimate sense.
- *c)* A USC law student was an atheist and an animal rights activist.
 - 1) She believed animals had a transcendent right not to suffer.
 - 2) She didn't believe in God, though, who is the only adequate source of transcendent rights.
 - 3) Consistency would require she either believe in God and animal rights, or reject both God and her transcendent rights claims.
 - 4) As it was, her two views were in conflict, a sibling rivalry.

ALWAYS BE ALERT FOR ARGUMENTS THAT SELF-DESTRUCT.

- 1. Don't feel like you have to do all the work refuting a bad argument.
 - a. Keep your eyes open and stay alert to see if the view destroys itself.
 - b. Ask the question, "Does that position carry the seeds of its own destruction?"
- 2. When you discover that an opponent's view is self-refuting, ask a question that exploits the problem and lets him sink his own ship.

III. What main points were covered in this session?

SFIRST, WE LEARNED THE NATURE OF SELF-REFUTING CLAIMS.

- 1. Suicidal views express contradictory concepts.
- 2. Suicidal views are necessarily false; they can't be true in any possible world.

B SECOND, WE LEARNED HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN SOMEONE'S VIEW SELF-DESTRUCTS.

- 1. First, we pay attention to the basic premise, conviction, or claim.
- 2. Then, we determine if the claim undermines itself.
 - a. Does the statement satisfy its own requirements?
 - b. Does it possess an internal contradiction?



| THIRD, WE EXAMINED THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES OF POPULAR IDEAS THAT COMMIT SUICIDE AND LEARNED HOW TO RESPOND TO THEM. |
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| 1. "It's wrong to try to change other people's religious beliefs." |
| 2. "All religions are equally true and valid." |
| 3. "You can only know what has been proven by science." |
| 4. "There is no truth." |
| FINALLY, WE LEARNED HOW TO RECOGNIZE "SIBLING RIVALRY" SUICIDE. |
| This kind of suicide happens with logically inconsistent pairs of objection that oppose each other. |
| 2. We can eliminate at least one of the objections by pointing out the conflic |
| IN THE NEXT SESSION WE'LL TALK ABOUT "TAKING THE ROOF OFF," A POWERFUL TACTIC THAT DEMONSTRATES HOW CERTAIN VIEWS ARE COMPLETELY UNTENABLE. |
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| STUDENT INTERACTIVE |
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| SELF-ASSESSMENT |
| <i>Try to answer the following questions without using your notes.</i> |
| 1. The Suicide tactic makes capital of the tendency of many points of view to when given the opportunity. |
| 2. Views that commit suicide express concepts. |
| 3. Statements that commit suicide are also known as |
| 4. List the two steps we take to recognize a point that commits suicide. First, pay attention to the basic, or |
| Second, determine if the claim satisfies its own Is there an internal?" |
| 5. In "Sibling Rivalry" suicide, a pair of objections are logically |
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Ο Т Е S Ν SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS 1. The Suicide tactic makes capital of the tendency of many points of view to self-destruct when given the opportunity. 2. Views that commit suicide express contradictory concepts. 3. Statements that commit suicide are also known as self-refuting statements. 4. List the two steps we take to recognize a point that commits suicide. First, pay attention to the basic premise, conviction, or claim. • Second, look to see if the claim satisfies its own requirements. Is there an internal contradiction?" 5. In "Sibling Rivalry" suicide, a pair of objections are logically inconsistent with each other, thus canceling out at least one. **GOING DEEPER:** INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY 1. This week, work on your ambassador skills by using the Suicide tactic. See if you can discover self-refuting statements in things you read, statements you hear, or conversations you have with others. 2. Take a few friends aside and introduce them to the Suicide tactic. Describe how it works and give them a few examples. 3. Review the self-assessment exercise above so you will be able to answer all the questions without the prompts. At the beginning of the next class, you will be given an exercise to demonstrate your mastery of these questions. Be prepared. 4. Skim over the next lesson in this workbook before the next class to prepare for the session. This simple preview will help you understand the material when you cover it next time you meet together.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

MASS "SUICIDE"

CONDEMNING CONDEMNATION

The following dialogue was taken from an actual radio show broadcast on February 11, 1995, and demonstrates the self-destruction of the claim, "It's wrong to condemn anyone for anything."

LEE: I'm not a homosexual, but I think that it's wrong to condemn anybody for anything.

GREG: Why are you condemning me, then? [Suicide tactic]

LEE: What?

GREG: I said, why are you condemning me if you think it's wrong?

LEE: I'm telling you because a lot of Christians condemn people.

GREG: Well, you're condemning me because I just condemned homosexuals as wrong.

LEE: Yes, I am. You are supposed to love everybody.

GREG: Wait a minute, you just said it's wrong to condemn people, and now you are condemning me. So I'm asking, why are you doing the same thing that you say is wrong when I do it? [narrating the argument]

LEE: No, I'm not. [Then the light begins to dawn.] Okay, let's put it this way. I'm not condemning you, I'm reprimanding you. Is that better?

GREG: Then my comments about homosexuals are simple reprimands as well.⁵

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT?

I once saw a sign in a restaurant that read, "You are what you eat." I pointed out to the waitress that this was true only if we are nothing more than our bodies. Further, if we are what we eat, we can't be anything until we've eaten something. But we can't eat something until we are something. Therefore, it can't be true that we are what we eat.

The waitress looked a me and said, "You'll have to talk to the manager."

TO ERR IS HUMAN

A common attack on the Bible goes like this: Man wrote the Bible. Man is imperfect. Therefore, the Bible is imperfect and not inspired by God.

This attempt fails for two reasons. First, the conclusion doesn't logically follow because the first premise subtly presumes what it's trying to prove — that the Bible isn't inspired by God. What's at issue is whether natural man is solely responsible for the Bible or whether God worked through men and inspired the text. Since the first premise presumes the conclusion, the approach is circular.



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Second, the argument commits suicide because it presumes that if man is capable of error, he will always err — that he couldn't have been involved in any sound or

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accurate enterprise, like writing the Bible. But if that were true, this argument itself would have to be false, because it, too, comes from an errant human. Taken at face value, this objection is self-refuting.

It doesn't follow that if man is capable of error, he always will err. It's not enough to dismiss the Bible simply by noting that "man wrote it." This, in itself, proves nothing.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION: DESIGNED BY CHANCE?

The neo-Darwinian synthesis entails a particular mechanism that determines — this is an important word — which changes are reproduced in the next generation. This mechanism is called natural selection.

In natural selection, specific circumstances in the environment allow a particular individual to survive and reproduce, passing its mutated genes on to the next generation. Serendipitous conditions in nature make the "choice," not God. If nature is selecting, then God is not selecting. The two are at odds with each other.

What could be more obvious? Either God designs the details, or nature shuffles the deck and natural selection chooses the winning hand. The mechanism is either conscious and intentional (design), or unconscious and unintentional (natural selection). Creation is teleological; it has a purpose, a goal, an end. Evolution is accidental, like a straight flush dealt to a poker rookie.

Theistic evolution is the belief in design by chance. That's like a square circle — there is no such thing. Blending evolution with creation is like putting a square peg in a round hole. It just doesn't fit.

FREEDOM, RATIONALITY, AND KNOWLEDGE

Some hold that everything in life is determined by prior physical conditions and there is therefore no freedom of the will. This would also be the case if there is no soul. If there is no first-person center of our existence that exercises free will, then all of our "choices" are merely inevitable results of blind physical forces.

Here's the problem. Without freedom, there can be no rationality. None of us would be able to choose his beliefs based on reasons — we would hold our beliefs because we'd been predetermined to do so.

That's why it's odd when someone tries to argue for determinism. His conviction could not be based on reasons — the merits of the view itself—but on prior conditions that caused his belief. He'd be "determined" to believe in determinism, while others would be "determined" to disagree.

Therefore, if there is no free will, no one could ever know it. Every one of our thoughts, dispositions, and opinions would have been predetermined instead of chosen for good reasons.

Still others limit the area of knowledge to those things that can be empirically tested. To them, all knowledge is based on observation. But is this a truth they have observed? Further, have they observed "all knowledge" in order to know what all knowledge is like?

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| CAN GOD MAKE A ROCK SO BIG HE CAN'T LIFT IT? |
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| This is a pseudo-question. It's like asking, "Can God win an arm wrestling match against Himself?" or, "If God beat Himself up, who would win?" or, "Can God's power defeat His own power?" |
| The question is nonsense because it treats God as if He were two instead of one. The phrase "stronger than" can only be used when two subjects are in view, like when we say Bill is stronger than Bob or my left arm is stronger than my right arm. Since God is only one, it makes no sense to ask if He is stronger than Himself. That's why this is a pseudo-question. It proves nothing about any defi- ciency in God because the question itself is incoherent. |
| The goal of this person's objection is to show that there are some things God can't do, thus undermining the Christian concept of an omnipotent Creator. This illustration, however, miscasts the biblical notion of omnipotence, and is therefore guilty of the straw man fallacy. The only way it could even begin to make sense is if it attempted to pit one aspect of God's ability against another — in this case, His creative ability against His ability to lift. |
| Omnipotence doesn't mean that God can do anything, however. The concept of omnipotence has to do with power, not ability per se. In fact, there are many things God can't do. He can't make square circles. He can't create a morally free creature who couldn't choose evil. He can't instantly create a sixty-year-old man (not one that looks sixty, but one that is sixty). None of these, though, have to do with power. Instead, they are logically contradictory and therefore contrary to God's rational nature. |
| RELATIVISTS' INCONSISTENCY |
| A person can wax eloquent in a discussion on moral relativism, but he will com- plain when somebody cuts in front of him in line. He'll object to the unfair treat- ment he gets at work and denounce injustice in the legal system. He'll criticize crooked politicians who betray the public trust and condemn intolerant funda- mentalists who force their moral views on others. Yet each of these objections is a meaningless concept in the twisted world of moral relativism. |
| TAINTED THOUGHTS |
| C.S. Lewis cites an example of self-refutation in his book of essays <i>God in the Dock</i> . In response to the Freudian and Marxist claim that all thoughts are tainted (either psychologically or ideologically) at their source, Lewis writes: |
| If they say that all thoughts are thus tainted, then, of course, we must remind them that Freudianism and Marxism are as much systems of thought as Christian theology or philosophical idealism. The Freudian and the Marxian are in the same boat with all the rest of us, and cannot criticize us from the outside. They have |

| | | CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT |
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| | | Someone famous once said, "Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds." He probably thought himself profound, but the statement commits suicide. A simple question reveals the error: Do you hold that view consistently? |
| | | If he does, then he, too, would be small-minded in denigrating consistency. If he doesn't, then consistency isn't always the hobgoblin of small minds. Either way, th statement fails; consistency itself can't be faulted. |
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| N O T E S | ENDNOTES |
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| | 1. J.P. Moreland, Scaling the Secular City (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 9 |
| | 2. Note: Stand to Reason has an invaluable booklet entitled <i>Jesus, the Only Way</i> 100 Verses to enable you to biblically answer the charge that "all roads lead to Rome." It's an affordable resource that every Christian should have. Order a copy at www.str.org. |
| | This view is called "scientism." Empiricism, the claim "I only believe what I operceive with my senses," self-destructs in the same way. The truth of the proposition itself cannot be perceived with the senses. |
| | 4. C.S. Lewis, <i>Mere Christianity</i> (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 31. |
| | 5. For the full transcript, see "A Conversation with Lee" at www.str.org. It's a delightful lesson in the use of the Suicide tactic. |
| | 6. C.S. Lewis, <i>God in the Dock</i> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 272. |
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SESSION 5 The "Taking the Roof Off" Tactic

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As a warm-up, take a few moments to let students share how their practice interactions outside of

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class went.

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Being able to give clear answers to these questions demonstrates your mastery of the information from the last session. Use this self-assessment exercise as a review of what you learned last time.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE



DEMONSTRATING MASTERY

Try recalling the answers to the following questions without using your notes. The answers are located at the end of session 4.

1. Describe the Suicide tactic and why it works.

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2. Statements that commit suicide are also known as self-refuting statements. How would you describe a self-refuting statement?

3. List the two steps to recognizing when a point commits suicide.

4. Describe "Sibling Rivalry" suicide.



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STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of three or four and share some "war stories" from last session's assignment. Did you discover self-refuting statements in the things you read, the statements you heard, or in the conversations you held with others? (5 minutes)

I. Review

IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED . . .

- 1. First, we learned the nature of self-refuting claims. *a. Suicidal views express contradictory concepts.*
 - b. Suicidal views are necessarily false; they can't be true in any possible world.
- 2. Second, we learned how to recognize when someone else's view self-destructs.
 - a. First, we pay attention to the basic premise, conviction, or claim.
 - b. Then, we determine if the claim undermines itself. We ask, "Does the statement satisfy its own requirements?" Does it have any internal contradictions?
- 3. Third, we examined the following examples of popular ideas that commit suicide and learned how to respond to them.
 - a. "It's wrong to try to change other people's religious beliefs."
 - b. "All religions are equally true and valid."
 - c. "You can only know what has been proven by science."
 - d. "There is no truth."
- 4. Finally, we learned how to recognize "Sibling Rivalry" Suicide.
 - *a.* This kind of suicide happens when pairs of objections oppose each other because they are logically inconsistent.
 - b. We can eliminate at least one of the objections by pointing out the conflict.

B IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL LEARN A TACTIC CALLED "TAKING THE ROOF OFF."

- 1. You will see how some points of view logically lead to unacceptable conclusions.
- 2. You will learn how to recognize those arguments and how to reduce them to their absurdity (*reductio ad absurdum*).
- 3. You will see how man's rebellion against the truth makes this tactic possible.
- 4. You will consider specific examples of popular ideas that lead to counterintuitive consequences and learn how to exploit them by "taking the roof off."

II. THE "TAKING THE ROOF OFF" TACTIC

THE "TAKING THE ROOF OFF" TACTIC IS A SIMPLE TECHNIQUE USED WITH GREAT SKILL BY DR. FRANCIS SCHAEFFER.

- 1. Consider the tactic in brief.
 - a. First, you adopt the other person's viewpoint for the sake of argument.
 - b. Next, you press him to the logical and absurd consequences of his view.
- 2. This tactic is also known as *reductio ad absurdum* (or simply reductio): reducing the argument to its absurd conclusion or consequence.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

The point of this tactic is to see if a person can really live in the kind of world he's affirming. Can he live with the moral or intellectual consequences of his beliefs? In essence, you're taking his moral or intellectual rules seriously and applying them consistently to show they are inadequate or absurd. The Taking the Roof Off tactic makes it clear that certain arguments prove too much. The goal here is to show that one has to pay too high a price to hold certain views.

B HERE'S HOW TO TAKE THE ROOF OFF SOMEONE'S ARGUMENT, STEP BY STEP:

- 1) First, reduce the point of view to its basic premise, assertion, principle, or moral rule.
- 2) Second, give the idea a "test drive" and see where it goes by asking...
 - a. If I follow this principle consistently, what would be the result?
 - b. Do any absurd consequences result when this view is consistently applied?
 - c. Does the rule have other unintended consequences that seem counter-intuitive?
- 3) Third, invite the person to consider the implications of his or her view and the truth that follows from the reductio.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

Here's why this tactic is so effective. As a point of fact, man is made in the image of God and must live in the world God created. Consequently, every person who is a non-theist must live with a contradiction between what he says he believes and what is actually true.

In a very real sense, every man who denies God is living on borrowed capital. He enjoys living as if the world is filled with morality, meaning, order, and beauty, yet he denies the existence of the God who grounds these things and makes them possible.

Because of this, non-Christians live in a contradictory world that creates a point of tension between what they believe and what is actually true. Man has erected as a defense a subconscious self-deception — a "roof," so to speak — to protect him



from considering the consequences of his beliefs. Your goal is to remove that roof, expose the fraud, and deprive him of his false sense of security.

In Francis Schaeffer's words:

Every man has built a roof over his head to shield himself at the point of tension... The Christian, lovingly, must remove the shelter [the roof] and allow the truth of the external world and of what man is, to beat upon him. When the roof is off, each man must stand naked and wounded before the truth of what is... He must come to know that his roof is a false protection from the storm of what is.¹

When you find the place where that tension exists, exploit it gently, but directly. This is where a well-placed question, like the third one in the Columbo tactic, can be very effective. Your goal is to cause him a little pain, push him off balance, and direct him toward the logic — actually, the illogic — of his espoused beliefs.



In order to press a person's view to its logical (and absurd) conclusion, you must first understand the view. Use your Columbo tactic to probe for the details until you have a good grasp of the person's point. Then you will be in the best position to assess it and, if possible, refute it.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT

Everyone who rejects Christianity must believe something in its place. There is no philosophical neutral ground on this issue. Even the person who refuses to decide must defend his agnosticism. If he rejects Christianity in favor of some other belief (e.g., skepticism), this leaves him open to the Golden Rule of Apologetics: "Ask of others as they ask of you." In other words, why is his belief (or non-belief) more reasonable than belief in Christianity?

GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

Jesus also used the Taking the Roof Off tactic in His interactions with the Pharisees. Notice how He reduced the Pharisees' reasoning to its logical and absurd conclusion:

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons." And knowing their thoughts He said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:24-26)



| III. EXAMPLES OF TAKING THE ROOF OFF Let's put into practice our three steps to Taking the Roof Off: |
|--|
| FIRST, LET'S CONSIDER THE PRIMARY CLAIM PEOPLE USE TO FAVOR HOMOSEXUALITY. |
| People often justify homosexuality by claiming they were born with the "natural" tendency for it. a. They take this claim as a moral justification for their behavior. b. It doesn't follow, though, that a natural urge for something means it's okay to fulfill that urge. c. It could be argued, using this line of reasoning, that if I have a "natural" tendency to beat up homosexuals, then gay-bashing should be morally acceptable. d. Here's how it might look: HE: I was born that way. ME: Let me ask you a question. What if I were born with the 'natural' impulse to beat up homosexuals? Would that make gay-bashing morally acceptable? |
| Clearly, appealing to alleged "natural tendencies" is not adequate to establish the morality of the behavior. a. This confuses what is with what ought to be—the is/ought fallacy (a.k.a., the naturalistic fallacy). b. The point of morality is to curb natural impulses that are wrong. c. Animals always do what comes naturally. That's not the rule for humans. d. The difference between "doing what comes naturally" and principled self-restraint is called civilization. THE BASIC PREMISE: Any "natural" tendency or behavior is morally acceptable. THE REDUCTIO: If gay-bashing is "natural" for me, then it's okay. THE TRUTH: Just because it's natural doesn't mean it's moral. |
| NEXT, LET'S RESPOND TO THE "MINIMALIST ETHIC." |
| 1. The minimalist ethic says that any behavior is okay, as long as we're not hurting anyone. |
| 2. This moral system cannot survive because it justifies peeping Toms, sexual assault on unconscious victims, and necrophilia, to name a few. THE BASIC PREMISE: Any behavior is okay as long as I'm not hurting anyone. THE REDUCTIO: Peeping Toms, sexual assault while someone is unconscious, and necrophilia, all survive this test, but they are immoral. THE TRUTH: The minimalist ethic is not an adequate moral system.² |
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MBASSADOR SKILLS

Notice how STR speaker Steve Wagner uses the Taking the Roof Off tactic in the following discussions.

At the University of Missouri, Steve talked with "Matthew" about whether abortion was right or wrong.

MATTHEW: Morals are relative and have to do with personal preference.

STEVE: If that's the case, then wouldn't it simply be a matter of personal preference if a father protected his daughter rather than molest her? On your view, we couldn't say either is right or wrong, better or worse, could we? [Notice his use of the reductio technique.]

MATTHEW: Hmmm. That's a good one. I like that one.

STEVE: So you'd agree that some moral rules transcend time, culture, and place, then?

MATTHEW: Yes, we can say it's wrong to harm someone else.

In Peru a few years ago, Steve had a discussion with a young American lawyer at the hostel where he was staying. At one point, she made a startling statement:

LAWYER: Sure, the unborn is alive in the sense that it's growing, but it's just part of the mother's body.

STEVE: If that's the case, then the mother has four arms, four eyes, twenty toes, and possibly a penis (if she's carrying a boy) during the pregnancy. [Notice again his use of the reductio technique.]



STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of four or five and consider the ideas below. Can you find the absurdity, the conflict in the ideas? What is the basic premise entailed in each, and the reductio? Some are more difficult than others. Don't be frustrated if it's not obvious at first. Quickly jot down the problem, then move to another. (7–8 minutes)

- Moral relativism and theft
- Atheistic evolution and condemnation of genocide
- "I'm personally against abortion, but I don't believe in forcing my view on others."
- Capital punishment is wrong because Jesus would forgive.
- There is no truth; therefore, we ought to tolerate other people's views.



GOING DEEPER: INFORMATION FOR SELF-STUDY

You can respond to the challenges above by considering the follow viewpoints.

MORAL RELATIVISM

The easiest way to answer someone who denies moral absolutes is to steal his or her stereo. Not really, of course, but this person would have to concede that theft is wrong, which is a concession to at least one moral absolute.

THE BASIC PREMISE: There are no objective moral obligations. **THE REDUCTIO:** Stealing (or any other behavior) is not objectively wrong. **THE TRUTH:** There must be some moral absolutes.

ATHEISTIC EVOLUTION

If there is no God and we evolved by chance, there is no fundamental, qualitative difference between animals and humans. Yet we permit a farmer to divide the weak from the strong in his pack of cows, but we're horrified that Hitler would do the same to Jews. Why is the first right, but the second wrong, given our starting point? The logical conclusion is that if God doesn't exit, there is no justification for ethics.

THE BASIC PREMISE: We are governed only by the natural process of evolution. **THE REDUCTIO:** The strong are permitted to oppress the weak.

THE TRUTH: Evolution is not an adequate explanation for morality. God must exist to ground obvious ethical rules.

THE "MODIFIED PRO-CHOICE" ABORTION STANCE

The modified pro-choice position is a politician's favorite. In the same breath, he will admit his own belief that abortion is wrong, but then say others have the right to an abortion. If he really believes that abortion actually kills an innocent human being, then why would he legally allow this barbaric practice?

THE BASIC PREMISE: Abortion should be legal, even though the politician personally believes it kills an innocent baby.

THE REDUCTIO: Mothers should be allowed to kill their children inspite of our personal disapproval.

THE TRUTH: The "modified pro-choice" position is barbaric. What kind of person champions the right to kill what they actually believe is an innocent human child?

The reductio here is easily combined with the Columbo tactic. Ask, "Why do you personally think abortion is wrong?" When they say, "Because I believe abortion takes the life of an innocent human baby," say, "Let me see if I understand you. You actually believe abortion kills an innocent human child, but you think it should be legal for mothers to do that to their children. Did I get that right?"

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Mother Theresa once appealed to the governor of California to stay the execution of a double-murderer on the grounds that "Jesus would forgive." When



applied consistently, this view disqualifies any punishment because Jesus would always forgive. While true — Jesus would forgive a person, if they repented emptying the prisons doesn't seem to be what Jesus or the Bible had in mind with the notion of forgiveness. Scripture affirms the government's authority to execute punishments for wrongdoing.³

THE BASIC PREMISE: If Jesus would forgive, then we have no right to punish. **THE REDUCTIO:** No punishment of any kind would be justified, neither capital punishment nor imprisonment.

THE TRUTH: The fact that Jesus would forgive does not mean that government's should not punish.

NO-TRUTH CLAIM

To the person who claims there is no truth, we should say, "Then what's the point?" If, in fact, there is no truth, there's no reason to continue educating ourselves. And if there is no truth, then there's no moral truth, either, and we therefore are under no obligation to tolerate people who differ from us. **THE BASIC PREMISE:** There is no truth.

THE REDUCTIO: There is no reason to go to college. There is no obligation to be tolerant of those who disagree.

THE TRUTH: If we have an obligation to be tolerant, then objective truth must exist.

THE VALUE OF CHEATING

An educational philosophy called "values clarification" says that morality is an individual matter, and that each student should clarify his own values. But this view also leads to an absurd conclusion, as the following story by philosopher Christina Hoff Sommers shows:

One of my favorite anecdotes concerns a teacher in Newton, Massachusetts, who had attended numerous values clarification workshops and was assiduously applying its techniques in her class. The day came when her class of sixth graders announced that they valued cheating and wanted to be free to do it on their tests. The teacher was very uncomfortable. Her solution? She told the children that since it was her class and since she was opposed to cheating, they were not free to cheat. "In my class you must be honest, for I value honesty. In other areas of your life you may be free to cheat."⁴

At best, the teacher has offered contradictory advice. If the teacher values honesty, then those are her own values that apply only to herself, not her students. In light of what she has just been teaching, she has no right to stop her students from cheating if that's the value they decide to uphold.

THE POLARITY OF GOOD AND EVIL

Someone who claims good and evil exist in polarity — that evil must exist to balance out good — has no right to complain about suffering in certain parts of the world. If good and evil must balance each other out, then evil must exist in some places so that good can thrive in others. Reduced to its absurd conclu-

sion, the suffering children in India must continue to suffer so that happy children in America can continue to be happy.

THE BASIC PREMISE: Evil and good exist in a polarity, balancing each other out. **THE REDUCTIO:** Children must suffer in India to maintain a balance with the children in America who are happy.

THE TRUTH: It is not true that evil and good must coexist so they can balance each other out.

That's Taking the Roof Off — moving a person to the logical — and absurd — conclusion of what he believes. As Francis Schaeffer once said, "We confront men with reality; we remove their protection and their escapes; we allow the avalanches to fall."⁵

\mathcal{V} IV. \mathcal{V} hat main points did we cover in this session?

IN THIS SESSION, WE LEARNED A TACTIC CALLED TAKING THE ROOF OFF.

- 1. First, we learned to adopt the other person's viewpoint for the sake of argument.
- 2. Next, we learned the value of pressing him to the logical and absurd consequences of his view.

B WE LEARNED THREE STEPS TO EMPLOY THE TAKING THE ROOF OFF TACTIC.

- 1. First, we reduce the point of view to its basic premise.
- 2. Second, we give the idea a "test drive" to determine whether any absurd consequences result when this view is consistently applied.
- 3. Third, we invite the person to consider the implications of her view and the truth that follows from the reductio.

WE LEARNED WHY THIS TACTIC WORKS.

- 1. Man is made in the image of God and must live in the world God created.
- 2. Every person who denies this fact lives in a contradiction that creates a point of tension.
- 3. To protect himself, man has erected a self-deception a "roof"— to shield himself from the logical implications of his beliefs.
- 4. We try to remove that roof to deprive him of his false sense of security.

STAND TO REASON

FINALLY, WE LEARNED A NUMBER OF WAYS TO APPLY THIS TACTIC TO SPECIFIC CHALLENGES.

| N O T E S | STUDENT INTERACTIVE |
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| | SELF-ASSESSMENT |
| | <i>Try to answer the following questions without using your notes.</i> |
| | 1. Briefly describe the Taking the Roof Off tactic. |
| | First, you the other person's |
| | for the sake of argument. |
| | ■ Next, you press him to the and |
| | consequences of his view. |
| | 2. Another name for this tactic, in Latin, is |
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| | 3. List the three steps of employing this tactic. First, reduce the point of view to its basic |
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| | application of this view. |
| | Third, invite the person to consider the |
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| | <i>Explain why this tactic works.</i> Man is made in the and must live |
| | in the world |
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SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS

1. Briefly describe the Taking the Roof Off tactic.

- First you <u>adopt</u> the other person's <u>viewpoint</u> for the sake of argument.
- Next, you press him to the <u>logical</u> and <u>absurd</u> consequences of his view.

2. Another name for this tactic, in Latin, is reductio ad absurdum.

3. List the three steps of employing this tactic.

- First, reduce the point of view to its basic <u>premise</u>.
- Second, give the idea a "<u>test drive</u>" to determine if any absurd <u>consequences</u> result from the consistent application of this view.
- Third, invite the person to consider the <u>implications</u> of this view and the <u>truth</u> that follows from the reductio.

4. Explain why this tactic works.

- Man is made in the <u>image of God</u> and must live in the world that <u>God</u> <u>created</u>.
- Every person who denies this lives in a <u>contradiction</u> that creates a <u>point of</u> <u>tension</u>.
- To protect himself, man has erected a self-deception, or a "<u>roof</u>," to protect himself from the logical implications of his beliefs.
- We try to remove that roof, depriving him of his false <u>sense</u> of <u>security</u>.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Unfortunately, most people hold to beliefs they haven't considered carefully and that often lead to absurd consequences. The following vignettes tackle a number of those views by employing the Taking the Roof Off tactic. Notice the multitude of ways this tactic can be used.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The dialogue below employs three tactics — the Columbo tactic, the Suicide tactic, and the Taking the Roof Off tactic — and concerns the problem of evil. Many people reject a belief in God because of the evil they see in the world. If you're a relativist, though, this objection commits suicide. As it turns out, the presence of evil in the world is one of the best evidences in favor of, not against, the existence of God.

CHRISTIAN: You said earlier that you don't believe in God or any moral absolutes. Now you're asking me how God can exist when there is so much evil in the world. Is that right? [Columbo question #1]

NON-BELIEVER: That's right.

CHRISTIAN: So you do believe in evil?

NON-BELIEVER: Of course. That's the reason for my objection.

CHRISTIAN: This may sound like a silly question, but what is this evil you're talking about? Can you define it for me? [Again the use of the first Columbo question, "What do you mean by that?"]

NON-BELIEVER: You know, famines, earthquakes, murders, disease, rape, pillaging, that kind of thing.

CHRISTIAN: So, you're concerned about human evil and natural evil, right?

NON-BELIEVER: Something like that, yes.

CHRISTIAN: You mentioned earthquakes, disease, famine . . . all of which are natural evils. Aren't you an evolutionist?

NON-BELIEVER: Of course! You don't think I'm a creationist, do you?

CHRISTIAN: No, of course not. But that raises a question for me. Why is a "natural" thing like a tidal wave or an earthquake evil? You wouldn't call a two-foot shore break evil, would you?

NON-BELIEVER: No, but tidal waves and earthquakes cause damage; people get killed.

CHRISTIAN: So what? Should that matter? [This begins the Taking the Roof Off tactic.] Living things die every day, making food for other living things. That's the balance of nature, isn't it? It's the beautiful thing about "mother nature." Any city wiped out by the tidal wave becomes food for crabs and starfish who are better adapted to survive underwater and eat the refuse that comes their



way. From the crabs' perspective, tidal waves are great. The same thing happens when someone gets AIDS.

So, what's your complaint? It seems to me that, from an evolutionary perspective, one organism beats up on another in its struggle to survive. One man's funeral is another worm's smorgasbord. What's wrong with that? We try to kill the virus; the virus tries to kill us. No judgments. It's all part of the chance of the dance. You'd probably call killing a typhoid germ good, but if it kills you, that's bad. Isn't that kind of a self-centered view of natural evil where humans are concerned?

NON-BELIEVER: But I don't want to die!

CHRISTIAN: Neither do I, but now we're talking about our personal desires, not the moral problem of earthquakes and disease.

NON-BELIEVER: You aren't suggesting a germ and a human being have the same value.

CHRISTIAN: Oh, I'm not suggesting it at all. I don't believe they do. But I have a reason why I don't believe that, a justification for viewing bugs one way and human beings another. What I'm trying to figure out is how you could possibly believe that a human death is ultimately more "evil" than the death of a virus if evolution is true and chance rules the universe. [Again, this is an extension of the Taking the Roof Off tactic.] Any suggestions? Can you clear this up for me? [And a movement back to Columbo question #3.]

NON-BELIEVER: I don't get it.

CHRISTIAN: My question is simple. If we live in a chance universe of blind cause and effect where no God exists, how can you refer to some accidents of nature as evil — not just unpleasant or disliked, but evil? That's a moral judgment, isn't it? Is nature immoral? [Again, a use of the Columbo tactic #3.]

NON-BELIEVER: I don't know how to explain it.

CHRISTIAN: Well, maybe we can do better with human evil.

NON-BELIEVER: Right, Hitler and drive-by killings and stuff. How can your God allow that?

CHRISTIAN: I need to ask you another question just for my clarification. You're saying those things like genocide and drive-by shootings are evil? [Employing the use of the "What do you mean by that?" question.]

NON-BELIEVER: Of course they are!

CHRISTIAN: What I'm trying to understand is this: Is that only your opinion, or does your moral view apply to everyone else? [Request for further clarification]

NON-BELIEVER: That's evil to me. That's my truth.

CHRISTIAN: So, ultimately, those things are only evil from your perspective?

NON-BELIEVER: That's my opinion.



Ο Т Е S N

CHRISTIAN: Okay, I accept that. But if that's so, I don't really understand your objection. If I've got it right, your objection to God goes something like this: "I don't believe in God because there's evil in the world, and evil is whatever I define it to be." It sounds to me like you won't believe in God because some things happen that you don't like, but those things might be okay for others. You don't like killing (that's <u>your</u> moral truth), but others might think it's fine. Nazis liked killing Jews, for example. So, there's no right or wrong here, only different feelings about it. [Taking the Roof Off again.]

NON-BELIEVER: No! I think what the Nazis did was terrible.

CHRISTIAN: You mean it was truly wrong, immoral in some objective sense, regardless of who did it and when they did it?

NON-BELIEVER: To me, it was wrong. In my opinion, that was evil.

CHRISTIAN: See, this is what confuses me about your question. You say that what the Nazis did was evil, and you're asking why God allows that kind of evil. Then you say that evil is only a matter of opinion. So it sounds like you're asking, "Why does God allow something that's against my opinion?"

Let me put my question another way. It sounds to me like you're saying, "I can't believe in God because stewed cabbage exists." I say, "What's wrong with stewed cabbage?" You say, "I hate the stuff." The fact is, I personally agree with you about stewed cabbage, but many people think it's great. However, just because you don't like stewed cabbage doesn't mean God's can't exist. So I'm asking, how can you say God can't exist just because you didn't happen to like the Nazis? A lot of people loved them. [Again, the third use of the Columbo tactic.]

It seems to me that your objection says more about your personal tastes than it does about God's existence. What am I missing here?

NON-BELIEVER: But murder and vegetables are two different things!

CHRISTIAN: How so?

NON-BELIEVER: Come on. It's self-evident.

CHRISTIAN: I agree entirely, and that's my concern. [Notice that up to this point the Christian hasn't argued any point yet. He has simply questioned the non-believer's position.]

I hold that there are objective moral principles, not laws that we make, but laws that are outside of mere personal opinion. For example, say I made up a law that all property within a twenty-mile radius of my house belonged to me and you lived fifteen miles away. I could pass out fliers announcing that everyone on "my" property has to move. Would you move? No, because I have no authority. But if the state decided to put a freeway through your backyard, you'd begin looking for a new place to live because the state is a legitimate authority for that kind of thing. It seems to me that there can only be a binding moral principle ("It's wrong to murder or steal") if a legitimate authority is involved.



In the same way, evil — real evil, the kind that creates these dilemmas for us — must be defined by some objective standard outside of us before we can really beef about it. And the minute we've agreed to that, we have to acknowledge that there must be a legitimate authority outside of our own feelings (God?) that makes sense of the existence of evil before we can complain about it. Ironically, the kind of human evil you're talking about — oppression, murder, violence — only happens when specific moral absolutes are rejected and men begin treating other men like mere animals. That invariably happens whenever men or governments contend there is no God to whom we must answer.

NON-BELIEVER: I don't follow you.

CHRISTIAN: Sure you do, you just don't like where it's leading.

NON-BELIEVER: Well, now you've got me all confused.

CHRISTIAN: (Smiling good-naturedly) No, I think you were confused when we started. You're just now discovering it!

ABORTION FOR RAPE VICTIMS?

If we allowed an abortion in the case of rape, it would send a terrible message. That message would be that when someone reminds you of something extremely painful, you can eliminate them. But you can't kill another human being just because their existence makes your life physically or emotionally burdensome.

TROTTING OUT THE TODDLER⁶

Virtually every argument for abortion could equally justify killing newborns. If it's wrong to take the life of innocent human beings on one side of the birth canal, it seems wrong to take their lives on the other. Conversely, if abortion is justifiable, then euthanasia would be acceptable for the same reasons. A 7-inch journey down the birth canal cannot miraculously transform a non-human tissue mass into a valuable human being we should shelter and protect.

That's why when discussing abortion we use a version of Taking the Roof Off called "Trotting Out the Toddler." When we talk with someone who holds this view, we can say, "Do you realize that the principle you're advancing not only takes away the rights of the fetus, but also of the newborn? Wouldn't newborns also be in danger if, for example, something like self-awareness is what makes humans valuable?"

When someone says, "Women have the right to choose," respond by trotting out the toddler again.⁷ Ask, "Should a woman have the right to choose to kill her two-year-old child?" Since both the unborn and the toddler are human beings, the same moral rule should apply to each. One way out is to argue that the unborn is not a true human being, but this is scientifically unsound.

At the University of New Mexico a student said we should abort children to save them from future child abuse. STR speaker Steve Wagner "totted out the toddler." "And we should also kill two year olds for the same reason," he asked, "to save them from future child abuse?"



"I hadn't thought about that," the student responded. And that's the point. People don't think their ideas out to the logical conclusions. It's our job to help them see their mistakes.

WERE YOU EVER AN UNBORN CHILD?

It doesn't seem to make sense to refer to yourself as a former sperm or egg. Does it make sense, though, to talk about yourself before you were born? Did <u>you</u> turn in your mother's womb or kick when you were startled by a loud noise? Did <u>you</u> suck your thumb? Were those your experiences or someone else's?

If you were once the unborn child your mother carried, then you must accept an undeniable truth: Killing that child through abortion would have killed you. Not a potential you. Not a possible you. Not a future you. Abortion would have killed you.

This is why abortion is tragic: It kills more than a human body. It kills a valuable human being.

CARING FOR THE KIDS

A standard objection to the pro-life view is that pro-lifers have no right to oppose abortion unless they're willing to care for the woman and her child. If you're confronted with this challenge, take a moment to restate the claim without the spin. What's actually being asserted is amazing, when you think about it.

"If I understand you right," you could say, "you're saying I can't object to the killing of unborn children unless I am willing to care for those children? Is that right?" Then ask, "Do you really believe that I can only object to the killing of children if I'm willing to raise them myself? Why would you believe a thing like that?"

It simply does not follow that because one objects to the killing of innocent human beings, he must be willing to care for those that survive. Imagine, for example, how bizarre it would sound if someone argued, "You have no right telling me not to beat my wife unless you're willing to marry her," or, "Unless you are willing to hire ex-slaves for your business, you have no right to oppose slavery." (Indeed, slave owners used this very argument a 150 years ago.) In the same way, abortion is not justified if pro-lifers fail to care for those (both mother and baby) involved in a crisis pregnancy.

As a point of fact, though, there are more crisis pregnancy centers — pro-lifers who are willing to care for those involved in crisis pregnancies — than there are abortion clinics in this country. Roughly 4,000 national and international pro-life service providers are dedicated to the well-being of mothers in crisis who choose life for their children. They provide medical aid, pregnancy support, housing, baby clothing, cribs, food, adoption services — even post-abortion counseling services — and all at no cost.

NO REALITY, REALLY

Here is the response of an STR regular to an atheist who continued to sidestep meaningful conversation by chanting the post-modern mantra, "There is no reality, only perception of reality." Notice how she takes the roof off, forcing him to confront the logical consequences of his view:



"For thousands of years, people have been debating ideas, evaluating claims, making progress in knowledge, discovering true things about the world. We have developed medicines, explored space, and created amazing transportation and communication devices.

"We've done this because we have believed in reality, thought it was worth knowing, and thought it was possible to know. People have disagreed, discussed, and worked things out peacefully in countries where it has been allowed.

"If your view becomes, for the first time, the dominant view and nobody will discuss, communicate, or evaluate ideas, then beware. If that happens, the only recourse people will have to get their ideas across will be force. If you combine that with atheism — if there is no God to hold you accountable for violently oppressing people — the results will be disastrous. Be careful what you wish for."

Her clear, direct, and honest approach convinced him to come to the table and at least consider the evidences for Christianity.

"UNNATURAL" ADOPTION

The line of reasoning that justifies homosexuality because it is a "natural" desire for those born that way annihilates the argument for adoption rights by homosexuals. If homosexuality is right because it's natural, then adoption must be wrong because it's unnatural. If nature dictates morality, and the natural consequence for homosexuals is to be childless, then it's unnatural — and therefore immoral — for homosexuals to raise children. Artificial insemination of lesbians or adoptions by homosexual couples would be wrong by their own reasoning. The same principle governs both issues.

DON'T PRAY FOR ME

British evangelist John Guest tells the story about the college student who said, "I don't want God in my life. I want to do my own thing." John said, "Can I pray for you about that?" Then he put his hand on his shoulder and prayed, "God, you just heard what this man said. Please answer this. Don't have anything more to do with him. Remove your protection from Him." He knocked Guest's arm off his shoulder and said, "Stop that!"

CLIMATE CONTROL

A chorus of voices charges that Christians, through their moralizing about homosexuality, are promoting a climate of hate. The phrase of choice is "less than." By claiming homosexuality is evil, Christians demote homosexuals to a "less than" status. If a homosexual is "less than," he is the appropriate object of scorn, hatred, and physical abuse.

This is twisted logic. In Los Angeles, KABC talk show host Al Rantel — himself a homosexual — noted that this kind of thinking would make Alcoholics Anonymous responsible every time a drunk gets beat up in an alley. It simply does not follow that moral condemnation of homosexuality encourages gay-bashing.

Such a tactic is equally dangerous to those who use it. According to them, taking a moral position is called hate. But their own objection to hate is also a moral posi-



tion. Are those who demonize Christians for their views equally guilty of hatemongering? Clearly, this kind of attack is not really about principle, but politicallycorrect politics.

"LIFE A BEAUTIFUL CHOICE? IT'S NOT SO BEAUTIFUL FOR AN UNWANTED CHILD."

Believe it or not, a pastor made this comment. I had to ask myself, "Why isn't an unwanted child's life beautiful?" Presumably, the answer is, "Because he's unwanted." But this alone doesn't make anyone's life miserable. There's more to it than this. What makes an unwanted child's life miserable? Other people do. Unwanted children are unhappy because of the way they're <u>treated</u>.

This pastor's startling admission amounts to this: "If we let this child live, we're going to treat him so badly and we'll make life so miserable for him, he'll wish he were dead." It's an admission that he would rather kill a child than do what is necessary to give that child a meaningful life. Is this a good argument for abortion? Do you see what kind of people we're becoming?

MORALITY FROM NATURE?

It's common of late to justify one's "sexual orientation" by an appeal to nature. The claim "I was born this way" is all that's needed to stem moral criticism of homo-sexuality. But why settle for this approach? Why think that the state of nature is an appropriate guide to morality?

Seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes noted famously, "Life in an unregulated state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." It was precisely this fact, according to Hobbes, that caused humans to enter into social contracts, gladly accepting the moral constraints of civilization to its alternative, the law of nature. Morality, as an extension of that contract, is a way of protecting ourselves from the brutality of living in a world where people simply did what came naturally.

Since living according to nature would justify all kinds of barbarism, how does it make sense to invoke the natural state of things to justify anything morally? Behavior that's "natural" is the very thing morality is meant to protect us from. Morality that counters one's natural inclinations rather than approves of them is our only refuge from a life that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

EARTH DAY FOR EVOLUTIONISTS?

Has anyone else but me noticed an inherent contradiction in the underlying convictions that drive annual Earth Day celebrations? The vast majority of those who attend such fetes are Darwinists who believe humans have a moral obligation to protect the environment. But why?

For millions of years, Mother Nature has spewed noxious fumes and poisonous gasses into the atmosphere and littered the landscape with ash and lava. Indeed, the most "natural" condition in the universe is death. As far as we know, the life on Earth is completely unique; death reigns everywhere else.



Species have passed into extinction at a steady rate from the beginning of time, the strong supplanting the weak. Why shouldn't they? Each is in a struggle to the death for survival. It is a dance of destruction that fuels the evolutionary process as each creature seeks to exploit every other for its own benefit. That's evolution.

No locust swarm stops short of denuding a field because it ought to "leave a bit for the crickets. After all, we all have a right to be here." The logic of naturalism and the rules of evolution dictate that human beings rape our environment, just as everything else does, rather than protect it.

The moral obligations underpinning Earth Week activities simply do not follow from the naturalistic worldview that embraces Darwinism. It follows, rather, from a theistic worldview in which God has created man as unique and given him responsibility over the Earth to care for it. Earth Week makes sense for Christians, not for Darwinists.

CHRISTIAN "FAITH" VS. KNOWLEDGE

For many Christians, faith and knowledge are diametrically opposed. The more evidence you have, they claim, the less faith is involved. The more bizarre and unbelievable the claim, the greater the faith needed. The greatest faith, then, would be the one farthest removed from reason or evidence.

Two odd conclusions follow from this kind of thinking.

First, apologetics — giving evidence in defense of faith — would actually be detrimental to one's faith. Yet Peter tells us to always be ready to give an *apologia*, a defense, for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

Second, if faith and knowledge are inversely proportional, then the more evidence we can find against Christianity, the better. Indeed, believing something you knew to be false would be a great virtue, biblically. God would be most pleased, on this view, with those who knew the resurrection never happened, yet still believed.

The apostle Paul called such a person pitiful, however:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:13–14, 17–19)

According to Paul, if we believe contrary to fact, we believe in vain and are fools.



| O T E S | ENDNOTES |
|---------|--|
| | 1. Francis Schaeffer, <i>The God Who Is There</i> , in <i>The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer</i> , Vol. I (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 140–141. |
| | 2. In any given situation, there may be a number of ways to express the truth that follows from your reductio. |
| | 3. See Romans 13:3–4 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. |
| | 4. Christina Hoff Sommers (Associate Prof. of Philosophy, Clark University), "Teaching the Virtues," reprinted in <i>AFA Journal</i> , January 1992, 15. |
| | 5. Schaeffer, 142. |
| | 6. Those of you who have been students of the first STR Interactive course, "Making Abortion Unthinkable—The Art of Pro-Life Persuasion," will recog- nize "Trotting Out the Toddler" as an important tactic in refuting arguments for abortion. "Making Abortion Unthinkable" is available at 1-800-2-REASON or at www.str.org. |
| | 7. Note: This was the very tack I took with the witch from Wisconsin in Session 1. |
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SESSION 6 he "Steamroller" Tactic

Being able to give clear answers to these questions clearly demonstrates your mas-

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tery of the information from the last session. Use this self-assessment exercise as a review of what you learned last time. As a warm-up, take a few moments STUDENT INTERACTIVE

ENDING



D

DEMONSTRATING MASTERY

FAIT

Try recalling the answers to the following questions without using your notes. The answers are located at the end of session 5.

1. Briefly describe the Taking the Roof Off tactic.

- 2. Another name for this tactic is
- 3. List the three steps of employing this tactic.

First,

Second,

Third,

4. Explain why this tactic works.



to let students share how their

practice interactions outside of

N O T E S

class went.

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STUDENT INTERACTIVE

Break into groups of three or four and share some "war stories" from last session's assignment. Did you discover any claims that led to logical and absurd — conclusions? (5 minutes)



▲ IN THE LAST SESSION WE COVERED

- 1. A tactic called Taking the Roof Off.
 - a. First, we learned to adopt the other person's viewpoint for the sake of argument.
 - *b.* Next, we learned the value of pressing him to the logical and absurd consequences of his view.
- 2. The three steps used to employ the tactic.
 - a. First, reduce the point of view to its basic premise.
 - *b.* Second, give the idea a "test drive" to determine if any absurd consequences result when we consistently apply this view.
 - *c.* Third, invite the person to consider the implications of his or her view and the truth that follows from the reductio.
- 3. Why this tactic works.
 - a. Man is made in the image of God and must live in the world that God created.
 - *b. Every person who denies this lives in a contradiction that creates a point of tension.*
 - *c.* To protect himself, man has erected a self-deception, or a "roof," to shield him from the logical implications of his beliefs.
 - d. We try to remove that roof to deprive him of his false sense of security.
- 4. Finally, we learned a number of ways to apply this tactic to specific challenges.

B IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL LEARN A TACTIC CALLED THE STEAMROLLER.

- 1. You will learn how to recognize a steamroller.
- 2. You will learn three steps to stop the steamroller and put you back in control of the conversation.

II. THE STEAMROLLER, A DEFENSIVE TACTIC

WHAT IS A STEAMROLLER?

- 1. Steamrollers are people who overpower you.
- 2. Steamrollers have strong opinions, strong personalities, and big mouths.¹
- 3. Steamrollers mean to keep you off balance and on the defensive by overwhelming you with interruptions, attitude, and a lot of noise.
- 4. Steamrollers' words come fast and furious, keeping you from collecting your wits and giving a thoughtful answer.

B HOW DO STEAMROLLERS OPERATE?

- 1. Steamrollers have one defining characteristic: They interrupt constantly.
 - *a.* Steamrollers are aggressive people who cut us off before we can respond to their challenge.
 - *b.* As soon as we begin to answer, steamrollers find something they don't like in our explanation, interrupt us, then pile on other challenges.
 - c. We may try to respond again, only to be interrupted yet another time.
 - *d.* The steamroller continues to fire questions, constantly interrupting even changing the subject overwhelming us, and never listening to anything we say.
 - e. If this description sounds familiar, you've been steamrollered.

2. Steamrollers are insincere.

- a. Steamrollers know it's easier to ask hard questions than to listen to hard answers.
- *b.* Steamrollers are usually not interested in answers, but in winning through power and intimidation.

STUDENT INTERACTIVE

In groups of three or four, share your experiences with steamrollers. Has it ever happened to you? What was it like? How did it make you feel? How did you deal with it? (3 minutes)

 \cap Т Е S N DEAL WITH THE STEAMROLLER IN THREE STEPS. 1. Step #1: Stop the interruption graciously, but firmly, then negotiate an agreement. a. Many times all you need to do is simply hold up your hand and gently say, "I'm not quite finished yet." b. If necessary, ask for adequate time by saying, "Hold on a minute, I need a little more time. You asked a good question, and you deserve an answer. Are you interested in what I have to say?" c. If the steamroller is especially aggressive, calmly wait for a clear opening; don't try to talk over him if he's not cooperating. d. To negotiate an agreement, ask him to give you something (patience) so that you can give him something in return (the opportunity to respond with an answer). e. Let's take a look at the following examples of this first step in the Steamroller defense in action. 1) "Is it okay with you if I take a few moments to answer your concerns before you ask another question? I'll give you a chance to respond when I get done." 2) "I know it's easier to ask the hard questions than to listen to the hard answers. But I need a moment to explain myself. Is that okay?" 3) "Let me respond to your first challenge. When I'm done you can jump in again. Is that okay?" 4) "That's a good question, and it deserves a decent answer. Let me try and give you one. Is that okay?" f. Be sure to respond adequately to the first issue before you are forced to tackle another. g. When you've made your point, ask him to acknowledge your response. Ask a question like, "Is that a fair answer to your question?" or, "Does that sound plausible to you?" h. Don't take unfair advantage of the time you buy in the negotiation. 1) Make your point, then let him back into the conversation. 2) Don't become a steamroller yourself — give the other side a fair chance to make a point or offer a reply. STUDENT INTERACTIV THINK-PAIR-SHARE Pair up and practice step #1 in the Steamroller defense. The first person should ask a simple question, such as "What political party do you support and why?", and then begin to interrupt when the second person attempts an answer. Use the first step in the Steamroller defense to regain control of the conversation. Then switch roles. (4 minutes)



MBASSADOR SKILLS

GRACE UNDER FIRE

When I face an aggressive challenger, I often give him the last word. Not only is this a gracious thing to do, it's powerful, conveying a deep sense of confidence in your own view. Instead of fighting for the last word, give it away. Make your concluding point clearly and succinctly, and then say, "I'll let you have the last word." But don't break this promise — grant him his parting shot, and then let it rest.

- 2. Step #2: Shame the steamroller.
 - a. If the steamroller breaks trust with your first agreement, or maybe you can't succeed in stopping him to briefly negotiate, you need to be more aggressive.
- b. Shame him by taking the same tack you did in step #1, but be more direct.
- 3. Ask very explicitly for courtesy in your conversation.
 - a. First, ignore his new challenges; don't follow the rabbit trail.
 - b. Second, address the steamroller problem directly, as shown in the following examples.
 - 1) "You would like an answer from me, wouldn't you? I presume you asked the question because you want a response, but I could be wrong — you keep interrupting. Which is it?" (Wait for an affirmation.)
 - 2) "Could I ask you a favor? I'd love to respond to your concern, but you keep interrupting. Could I have a few moments to develop my point without being cut off? Then I'll let you tell me what you think. Is that okay with you?" (Wait for an response.)
 - 3) "Can I ask you a quick question? I need to know if you want an answer to your challenge, or if you just want to talk. When you continue to interrupt me, I get the impression you don't really want an answer. If all you want is an audience, just let me know and I'll listen. But if you want an answer, you'll have to give me time to respond. Which do you want? I need to know before we continue." (Wait for an answer.)
 - 4) "Here's what I have in mind. You ask your question or make your point, and I'll listen. When you're done, I'll respond and you won't interrupt. When I'm done, it will be my turn to be polite and let you have your say. I need to know if that's okay with you. If not, this conversation is over. What would you like to do?" (Wait for a response.)

AMBASSADOR SKILLS

This last example is very aggressive. If you started this way, you would come off belligerent and rude. At some point, though, a direct approach is the only thing that will save the conversation. Remember, steamrollers are strong and aggressive, and sometimes they must be answered in kind.



- *c.* Third, return to the Steamroller's original challenge and deal with it: "Now, your challenge as I understand it is this...[repeat the question]. Here is how I'd like to respond."
- *d. Finally, don't be snippy or smug stay focused, pleasant, and gracious while in control.*

STUDENT INTERACTIVE



THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Pair up with a new partner and practice step #2 as you did in the last exercise. This time, the steamroller should be much more aggressive, only giving way when the second person employs step #2 to stop him. Switch roles. (4 minutes)



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- 4. Step #3: When all else fails, leave the steamroller.
 - a. If he won't let you answer, listen politely until he's finished, then drop it.
 - *b. Let him have the satisfaction of having the last word, then walk away.*
 - c. Wisdom dictates not wasting time with this kind of fool.

REFLECT FOR A MOMENT — PEARLS BEFORE SWINE?

Jesus warns us, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6). How do we know when we have an obligation to speak and when we should keep our pearls to ourselves? The answer is easy when we consider the rest of the verse: "... lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

We should be generous with the truth unless we encounter someone who shows utter contempt for the precious gift he is being offered. If he's the kind of person who will take what is holy, trample on it, and then turn on you, don't waste your time. There's plenty of ripe fruit waiting to be harvested!

To III. What main points did we cover in this session?

SFIRST, WE LEARNED HOW TO RECOGNIZE A STEAMROLLER.

- 1. Steamrollers overpower you with their strong personalities.
- 2. Steamrollers interrupt constantly.

B SECOND, WE LEARNED THREE STEPS TO DEAL WITH A STEAMROLLER AND PUT YOU BACK IN CONTROL OF THE CONVERSATION.

- 1. Step #1: Stop the interruption graciously but firmly, then negotiate an agreement.
- 2. Step #2: Shame him by asking in a very direct way for courtesy.
- 3. Step #3: Leave him let him have the last word, then walk away.

| SELF-ASSESSMENT |
|--|
| Try to answer the following questions without using your notes. |
| 1. Steamrollers are people who you with their |
| 2. The defining characteristic of a steamroller is |
| 3. The first step in dealing with a steamroller is to graciously but firmly, then |
| 4. The second step in dealing with a steamroller is to |
| 5. The third step in dealing with a steamroller is to Let him have the last, then |
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| | SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH ANSWERS |
|-------|---|
| | 1. Steamrollers are people who <u>overpower</u> you with their <u>strong personalities</u> . |
| | 2. The defining characteristic of a steamroller is <u>interruption</u> . |
| | 3. The first step in dealing with a steamroller is to <u>stop the interruption</u> gracion ly but firmly, then <u>negotiate an agreement</u> . |
| | 4. The second step in dealing with a steamroller is to <u>shame him</u> by asking in a very direct way for <u>courtesy</u> . |
| | 5. The third step in dealing with a steamroller is to <u>leave him</u> . Let him have the last <u>word</u> , then <u>walk away</u> . |
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IV. FINAL REFLECTIONS

"The more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in battle." — Marine Corps training adage

FIRST, KNOW YOUR BIBLES WELL ENOUGH TO GIVE AN ACCURATE ANSWER FOR THE FAITH THAT IS IN YOU: "BE DILIGENT TO PRESENT YOURSELF APPROVED TO GOD AS A WORKMAN WHO DOES NOT NEED TO BE ASHAMED, HANDLING ACCURATELY THE WORD OF TRUTH." (2 TIMOTHY 2:15)

B SECOND, STUDY THESE TACTICS.

- 1. Become familiar with how they work.
- 2. Know when to use them and how to initiate them.

THIRD, PUSH YOURSELF BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE.

- 1. Be courageous begin to mix it up with others before you feel adequately prepared.
- 2. You'll learn best by <u>immediately</u> using the information you've gained.
- 3. You'll take a few hits along the way, but you'll also give a few back in a good way.
- 4. You'll also learn what the other side has to offer, which often isn't very much.

D FOURTH, DON'T BE DISCOURAGED BY OUTWARD APPEARANCES.

- 1. Don't get caught in the trap of trying to assess the effectiveness of your conversation by its immediate, visible results.
- 2. Even though a person rebels at what you say, you may have still put a "stone in his shoe."
- 3. The Holy Spirit can use all things to bring others to the truth.
- 4. The harvest is always a season away. These things often take time.

FINALLY, LIVE OUT THE VIRTUE OF A GOOD AMBASSADOR (SEE THE "AMBASSADOR'S CREED, BELOW).

- 1. Represent Christ in a winsome and attractive way.
- 2. You God's own ambassador are the key to making a difference for the kingdom.
- 3. With God's help, show the world that Christianity is worth thinking about.

TUDENT INTERACTIVE

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Take a few minutes to share with the group some of the specific things you found especially helpful in this course. How have you been encouraged by this material? How do you plan to use it in the future?



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A STONE IN HIS SHOE

In some circles there's pressure for Christian ambassadors to "close the sale" as soon as possible. When pressed for time, they say you should get right to the meat of the message. Get to the Gospel. If the person doesn't respond, at least you've still done your part, right? Shake the dust off your feet and move on.

A wise ambassador, though, weighs his opportunities and adopts an appropriate strategy for each occasion. Sometimes, the simple truth of the cross is all that's needed. The fruit is ripe for harvesting. Bump it, and it falls into your basket.

Usually, though, the fruit is not ripe; the nonbeliever is simply not ready. He may not have even begun to think about Christianity. Dropping a message on him that, from his point of view, is meaningless or simply unbelievable doesn't accomplish anything. In fact, it may be the worst thing you can do. He would likely reject a message he doesn't understand and then would be harder to reach next time.

Here is my own more modest goal: I want to put a stone in his shoe. All I want to do is give him something worth thinking about. I want him to hobble away on a nugget of truth he can't simply ignore because it continues to poke at him.

Whether the opportunity is a short one with a transient audience or a long one with a captive audience, my goal is the same — place a stone in their shoe.

Some people are good "closers." They're good at getting the sale. What they don't realize is that harvesting often comes easily for them because, in God's sovereignty, many ambassadors came before them to plant, water, and weed the soil, one by one tending to the plant and cultivating healthy growth until it was ripe and ready to reap.

Follow the strategy I use when God opens a door of opportunity. I don't know how long the door will be open, so I pray quickly for wisdom (James 1:5), then ask myself, "In this circumstance, what is one thing I can say, one question I can ask, one thought I can leave that will get him thinking?"

Then I simply try to put a stone in his shoe.

TACTICS AND COMMON GROUND

While interacting with others, I've found it helpful to try to frame my comments in the context of the other person's interests, discipline, or profession.

For example, when an attorney tells me he won't believe in the soul because it can't be measured physically, I ask him how can he prove in court that a motive exists when it cannot be measured physically, either. Even the laws that are the stock-intrade of his profession are not physical. They can't be weighed. They have no chemical composition. They aren't located in space. The attorney must face the fact that the practice of his own profession defeats his objection against the soul.

This approach makes it easier to persuade him because he sees my point in light of things he already knows to be true, or procedures he's already familiar with.



Learning to contextualize your points by tying your comments or explanations to relevant parts of the other person's world establishes common ground — and is an important tactical skill of an effective ambassador.

TEACHING AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS

Very few people quickly admit that their beliefs have been wrong, so don't expect anyone to surrender too much ground right away. Changing beliefs is hard. Usually it's a slow process for someone to admit his error, especially when a lot is at stake.

Don't try to move too quickly with your opponent. Simplify an issue by breaking it into smaller parts. Take it step by step and piece by piece. Try to make headway on only one part at a time. Do everything you can to help him feel comfortable with the process. Don't bruise the fruit. Instead of forcing an issue, be confident that God can use your efforts.

AMBASSADOR'S CREED

An ambassador is...

- **READY.** An Ambassador is alert for chances to represent Christ and will not back away from a challenge or an opportunity.
- **PATIENT.** An Ambassador won't quarrel, but will listen in order to understand, then with gentleness seek to respectfully correct those in opposition.
- **REASONABLE.** An Ambassador has informed convictions (not just feelings), gives reasons, asks questions, aggressively seeks answers, and will not be stumped by the same challenge twice.
- TACTICAL. An Ambassador adapts to each unique person and situation, maneuvering with wisdom to challenge bad thinking, presenting the truth in an understandable and compelling way.
- **CLEAR.** An Ambassador is careful with language, and will not rely on Christian lingo nor gain unfair advantage with empty rhetoric.
- **FAIR.** An Ambassador is sympathetic and understanding towards the opposition, and will acknowledge the merits of contrary views.
- **HONEST.** An Ambassador is careful with the facts and will not misrepresent his opponent, overstate his own case, or understate the demands of the Gospel.
- HUMBLE. An Ambassador is provisional in his claims, knowing that his understanding of truth is fallible, and will not press a point beyond what his evidence allows.
- ATTRACTIVE. An Ambassador will act with grace, kindness, and good manners and will not dishonor Christ in his conduct.
- **DEPENDENT.** An Ambassador knows that effectiveness requires joining his best efforts with God's power.



| N O T E S | ENDNOTES |
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| | 1. On occasion you'll encounter what I call "benevolent steamrollers," overly excitable, but not hostile. |
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