

Christian Ambassador Essentials

Sunday Seminar – Week 3

Review

- Definition of an ambassador- One who stands between two parties with a message to communicate: the Sovereign being represented is God and the foreign subject is the world.
- We already are ambassadors
 - Message of reconciliation (a.k.a. the *gospel*)
 - Clear parallels to being a witness/ defender of the faith (apologist)
- Characteristics of an effective ambassador
 - Knowledge – an accurately informed mind ... need to know some things
 - Wisdom – an artful method ... need to know how to apply the knowledge to the culture (mission field)- *today*
 - Character – an attractive manner
- **Character** – the package the wisdom and knowledge come in
 - Exhibits the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; 1 Pet 3:15-16; 2 Tim 2:24-25)
 - Humble, Real, Fearful but courageous, bold
- **Knowledge** – things an ambassador for Christ need to know
 - Source for knowledge about God (Bible + nothing) ... *Sola Scriptura*
 - Avoid Ouija hermeneutics – study God’s Word! (no substitute)
 - God’s message (of reconciliation)
 - Repent & Believe (focus: the Cross, Faith=Believing Trust)
 - NOT “Try Jesus, you’ll like Him” (life enhancement)
 - Language and Culture to whom you are called
 - Postmodernist perceptions of truth, authority, the supernatural
 - Language Barrier – important to explicitly define your terms and ask them to do the same (brings us to Columbo)

Wisdom – “An artful method”

Introduction & Disclaimer

I hope by now you are confident that I am strongly advocating a biblical model for ambassadorship because today we will not be spending much time in Scripture. While the Bible is the authoritative source about God, the nature of man, sin, redemption, etc. , it is not the only source of knowledge and wisdom. [Before you take out stones to stone me...] you will not find the multiplication tables, instructions about how to be a shepherd, how to fight a battle (unless it is the opposite of worldly wisdom to demonstrate “there is a God in Israel,” etc.)

*Most of this lesson comes from Stand to Reason’s “ABC-Tactics in Defending the Faith” ©2002 Gregory Koukl” and is used by permission. For more information and more in-depth training, visit Stand to Reason at www.str.org. The “Evangelism on-ramp” section and some of the examples are not from Koukl.

Today we will simply be learning some methods of communication and ways of maneuvering in conversation to keep it on track. They are simply tools that can be used for good or for evil. In the same way a hammer can be used to construct a home, it can also be used to harm someone, these methods can be used to guide someone towards truth or to humiliate them and bolster the user's pride.

There are a number of tactics (methods) in the Stand to Reason ambassador training curriculum. I'll begin by sharing the simplest (and most useful) and move on from there.

The Columbo Tactic “The queen mother of all the tactics”

- This is the one tactic I¹ use more than any other, and it's easily combined with other tactics.
- This is the simplest tactic imaginable to help you stop a challenger in his tracks, turn the tables, and get him thinking.
- It's an almost effortless way to put you in the driver's seat.

Columbo and His Method – disarming and asks a lot of questions

Lieutenant Columbo comes across bumbling, inept, and completely harmless (Rumpled trench coat, bed-head, a stub of a cigar, a borrowed pencil, couldn't think his way out of a wet paper bag)

- “I got a problem. Something about this t'ing bothers me. Maybe you can clear dis up for me. I was talkin' to da wife the other day.... Do you mind if I ask you a question?”
- “Just one more thing.”
- “Hey, I'm sorry. I'm making a pest of myself. Yes, yes, I am. I know it's because I keep asking these questions. But I'll tell ya, I can't help myself. It's a habit.”

This is a habit you want to get into...

Key to the Columbo tactic: The Christian goes on the offensive in a disarming way with carefully selected questions to productively advance the conversation.

Simple guideline: If you hit a roadblock or find yourself in the hot seat, ask a good question.

- This can become second nature, especially if you plan questions in advance.
- The simplest, most effective question you can ask in most circumstances is some variation of “How do you know?” or “Why should I believe what you believe?”
 - 1) “What makes you think that's the right way to see it?”

¹ In most cases, the personal pronouns “I” and “me” in these notes refer to Greg Koukl.

- 2) “I’m curious. Why would you say a thing like that?”
- 3) “Why should I trust that your organization [Mormon Church/Joseph Smith, Watchtower, etc.] speaks for God?”

This is a good tactic to use where you work.

- Sometimes you’re discouraged from witnessing in the workplace. (that’s not what they are paying you for – give God glory by your excellence)
- Also, it’s often not fruitful to “preach” at others about your ideas.
- The Columbo tactic allows you to make good headway without actually stating your case.

Columbo: three uses, three questions There are three basic ways to use the Columbo tactic that can tame the most belligerent critic, each launched by a different question.

- To gain information and stay out of the “hot seat”
- To reverse the burden of proof
- To indirectly exploit a weakness or a flaw in someone’s views

Columbo Type I -- to gain information and/or get out of the “hot seat”

What do you mean by that?
(or some variation)

This is a clarification question, delivered in a mild, genuinely inquisitive fashion. This question tells you what he thinks, so you don’t misunderstand or misrepresent him.

Can you repeat their view back to them to their satisfaction? If not, you aren’t listening.

Here is where you can begin to start scaling the language barrier.

This is the simplest application of Columbo, comfortable with absolutely *no pressure*.

It can be a casual conversation starter.

Examples:

- “There is no God.” “What do you mean by ‘God’?”
- “Reincarnation was taken out of the Bible.” “What do you mean it was ‘taken out’?”
- “All religions are basically the same.” “In what way are religions all basically the same?”
- “You shouldn’t be forcing your views on me.” “Specifically, how am I ‘forcing’ my views on you?”

It can be a casual conversation starter. *People are often “saying things” without talking...*

Example:

- “I noticed that cross [pentagram, yin-yang, Star of David, Virgin Mary] on your necklace [tattoo, t-shirt, bumper sticker, ...]. Does that have religious significance or is it just jewelry [decoration ...]?”
- *Other examples (from the class)? (see someone exasperated by a news report in a waiting room..)*

It accomplishes a few things.

- First, it immediately engages the person (non-believer? – don’t make assumptions) in an interactive way.
- Second, it shows a genuine interest in the other’s view.
- Third, it forces him to think more carefully about exactly what he does mean. This may be the first time... don’t underestimate the power of this one type of question.

Staying **out of the “hot seat”**

- At times you may not be academically prepared or quick enough to deal with a challenge.
- Don’t feel under pressure to immediately answer every question asked or every point made.
- Here’s an easy way to buy yourself some thinking time: **Shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode.**
 - Say something like, “Carefully explain your view and your reasons for it so I get it right, then *let me think about it*. We can talk more later.”
 - Ask probing questions (Columbo tactic), but don’t try to win your case just then. Make sure you understand the challenge or the objection clearly, then *do some homework* on it and come back better prepared.

So now you know what he thinks... *how does he think?*

Columbo Type II -- to appropriately place the burden of proof

How did you come to that conclusion?
(or some variation)

Alternates: “Why do you say/believe that?” or “What are your reasons for saying that?”

This graciously assumes the non-Christian(?) has come to a conclusion, not just asserted or emoted.

- The type I question (“What do you mean by that?”) tells you what he thinks.
- The second question helps you to learn how he thinks, giving you valuable information on how to question further.

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Burden of proof: the responsibility to defend or give evidence for one’s view

- **Rule: the one who makes the claim bears the burden.**
- Don’t allow yourself to be thrust into a defensive posture when the other person is making the claim.
- No more free rides. Christians should get out of the habit of trying to refute every story a nonbeliever can spin or every claim he can manufacture. *Don’t accept a burden of proof where none exists.*
- Example from two weeks ago: “We could be two bacteria in the intestine of a goat.” *How might I have responded?*

Legitimate burden of proof reversal – the self-evident

- Some claims are self-evidently true (e.g., the laws of logic) and need no defense.
- Others are immediately justified because of the kind of claim being made. (*In these cases, the burden of proof is not on you but on the detractor.*)
 - You have no obligation to prove your own existence.
 - You have no obligation to prove the basic reliability of your senses.
- Unless there is evidence to the contrary, the way things appear to you is probably the way they actually are.
- Just because it’s remotely possible to be mistaken, doesn’t mean we have any reason to think that we actually are mistaken.

Illegitimate burden of proof reversal – the professor’s ploy

The professor makes a claim (“The Bible is just a bunch of fables.”). When challenged, he turns the burden of proof back on the questioner: “Oh, so you must think the Bible is inspired by God. Then why don’t you prove that to the rest of the class?”

- Don’t take the bait.
- The rule in these kinds of confrontations is, the person with the microphone always wins.
 - Don’t get into a power struggle when you’re out-gunned.
 - He has the strategic advantage. Don’t play into it.
 - Instead, use your tactics.
- **He’s making the claim, not you.** It’s up to him to defend it. He’s the teacher, after all.
 - “Professor, I haven’t made any claims, but it seems you have. I’m just a student here to learn, but since you are the teacher, I was wondering if you could tell us how you came to that conclusion. Would you share that with us?”
 - If he does give an answer, simply thank him for explaining himself and either ask another question or let it go for the time being.

Columbo Type I & II Exercise

I. (2 minutes) Alone or in a group, pick two or three of the following statements you might hear. Give a type one response AND a type two response for each. Though you wouldn't do both at the same time, this demonstrates two different directions you can take the conversation. You are in the driver's seat either way.

II. (3 minutes) Pick one and go deeper. Speculate on how the conversation would proceed from each of your questions. Do they take you in direction where you can make some progress towards truth? Consider other questions that might be better.

- “Intelligent design is religion, not science”
 - Type I:
 - Type II:
- “I could never believe in a God who allows so much evil in the world”
 - Type I:
 - Type II:
- “Calvinists don't believe in evangelism/missions”
 - Type I:
 - Type II:
- “I personally don't believe in abortion, but I think it is wrong to force my view on others”
 - Type I:
 - Type II:
- “More people have been killed in the name of religion than anything”
 - Type I:
 - Type II:
- “No Creed but Christ” [or ‘just give me Jesus’ or ‘doctrine divides’]
 - Type I:
 - Type II:

Do not underestimate the power of type I & II questions. Prompting a person to actually have to think through their reasons for their claims can often be enough to wake them up/alarm them to the fact that they *haven't* thought things through at all.

When in conversation with unbelievers, don't forget your goal (*hint: Great Commission*): Is it more important to: win a person to Intelligent Design or to Christ? to the pro-life camp or to the Body of Christ?

Columbo tactics will help you steer the conversation. People will often make statements about bad people, mean people, etc. When possible take the on-ramp to biblical evangelism².

Evangelism On-Ramp -- the good person test

Do you consider yourself to be a good person?

Do you consider yourself to be a good person? *-very rarely will you get a "no"*

- May I ask you a few questions to see if that's true? *-most are confident in their self-righteousness and say 'yes'*
- *[sometimes I like to insert some softball questions here ... do you sell crack to children or push old ladies in front of buses? – "No"-- then you are a pretty good person according to my standards... but now let's look at God's standards]*
- God gave a standard of morality in the Ten Commandments... have you ever told a lie? [if asked back, admit that you have] ... *yes*
- Have you ever stolen anything (regardless of value)? ... *usually yes*
- Jesus said if you have looked upon a woman [someone] with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart, have you ever looked at someone with lust? *yes*
- Have you ever used the Lord's name in vain or used it as a cussword? ... *often yes*

Remember, the Law brings a knowledge of sin ... *this is **not** legalism (where the law is taught as a means of salvation)*

- Gently! *"Help me out here. I've only stepped through four of God's laws and you've broken [almost] every one of them. If you died today and God judged you by **His** standard, do you think you'd be found innocent or guilty?"*
"God would forgive, God is love ... " *"God is also holy and loves justice... innocent or guilty?" ***if cannot admit guilt, they are not yet ready for the good news.***
- *"On that basis, do you think you'd go to heaven or hell?"*
"God would forgive, God is love ... " *"God is also holy and loves justice... heaven or hell?" ***if cannot admit hell, they are not yet ready for the good news.***

² The evangelism section does not come from Greg Koukl's materials.

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- Does that concern you? (some say no because they don't believe any of it ****if so they are not yet ready for the good news***)

To proceed to the cross with any of these is to throw a life preserver to someone happily splashing around in a pool, offer a savior to someone who neither wants nor believes he needs one. It is "casting pearls before swine." *It may well be necessary to leave them under the conviction of God's Law in the care of God's Spirit... don't worry, they are in good hands.

- If they admit their sin, that they deserve God's judgment, and they are troubled by it (the more troubled the better! – broken and crying out of control is a good thing here.) *It's time for God's Amazing Grace in all its sweetness! "You know, God has provided a way for you to be washed clean in His sight. Christ commands us to repent (and what that means is to turn away from our sin) and put our trust in Jesus Christ. Do you understand what He accomplished on the cross?" ... explain the atonement ... [More comfort needed? Story of Saul of Tarsus (murder/persecutor of the church turned Apostle) and/or David (murderer/adulterer king remembered as "a man after God's own heart" ref. Psalm 51 (repentance) and Psalm 32 (recollection)).]*

When you are ready to go on the offensive... *(in an inoffensive way)*

Columbo Type III -- graciously dismantling faulty thinking

Have you considered ... ?
(or some variation)

Third application of Columbo: to indirectly exploit a weakness or a flaw in someone's views

Asking the first two questions is primarily passive. You put nothing on the line.

This third step takes you on the offensive, yet not in an offensive way.

- Your third question suggests an alternative.
- Offer an alternative view that gently challenges his beliefs, possibly exploiting a point of weakness you uncovered in his answers to your first two questions.
- This last step requires you have an option you can explain clearly that gives him reason to abandon his view for a better answer.
- Examples:
 - Have you ever considered...the difficulty of removing something like teaching on reincarnation from every existing hand-written copy of the New Testament being circulated in the Roman world by the 4th century?

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- Have you ever considered...that the lack of any evidence what-so-ever for abiogenesis (life from non-life – life arising initially from inanimate matter) might count against the General Theory of Evolution?
- Have you ever considered...that the existence of evil is actually evidence *for* the existence of God, not against it? (*yes – we cover this later!*)
- Have you ever considered...that if the Bible were “merely written by men” it would be very hard to account for the fulfilled prophecies?
- Have you ever considered...that having a “burning in the bosom” about the Book of Mormon may not be an adequate test to know if it is from God or not?
- Have you ever considered...the odd situation that follows if homosexuality is truly natural; that nature also gave homosexuals bodies designed for reproductive sex with women, not men?
- Have you ever considered...that if partial-birth abortion is morally acceptable, it’s going to be hard to condemn infanticide, since the only difference between the two is the baby’s location – partially out of the womb or completely out?
- Have you ever considered...that if Jesus was wrong about His oft repeated claim He was the unique means of salvation, it then becomes difficult to call Him a good man, a prophet, or a wise religious teacher?

For these, you needed to know some things.

- *These examples require some ability to recognize flaws.* We’ll look at some of those in a moment.
- *These examples require some knowledge of an alternative.*

What if you don’t recognize the flaw or know an alternative to propose?

- Don’t go on the offensive... if still engaged and other topics were left hanging, pull back to Columbo type I & II
- You may not want to because you don’t know where to go next. That’s okay.
 - If you don’t have the resources to go further, consider it a fruitful, interactive learning experience that gives you greater understanding to prepare you for your next encounter.
 - You don’t always have to hit a home run. Sometimes just getting on base will do, and the first two questions accomplish that. You don’t know what God’s Spirit is doing in this person’s life. Be faithful and trust God. You may be watering where someone else has sown. And soon God will send someone else to reap the harvest.

Homework Challenge: Look up the following texts to see if Jesus ever used questions to “go on the offensive” (take the initiative) in conversation: Luke 20:22-26; Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 20:2-8; also note the many instances he brought knowledge of sin by indirect use of the law (Go, call your husband... --John 4:16)

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The Suicide Tactic

The suicide tactic makes capital of the tendency of many arguments to self-destruct when given the opportunity.

- They express contradictory concepts.
- The apologist’s job is simply to point this out and then watch the view quietly commit suicide.
- These are commonly known as self-refuting arguments. For example...
 - “I cannot speak a word in English.” (This is self-refuting when spoken in English.)
 - “There are no sentences more than five words in length.” (This sentence is more than five words in length.)
- Note that in self-refuting statements, the minute you say them they become false.
 1. Even when such statements initially appear true, they’re still false.
 2. They are necessarily false. They can’t be true in any possible world.

If the exact same reasons used to defeat an opponent’s view defeats the reasons themselves, then the view is self-defeating and commits suicide.

- **Views that commit this kind of suicide are sometimes obvious.**
 1. “There are no absolutes.” Are you sure? “Absolutely.”
 2. “You can’t know anything for sure.” Are you sure about that? “Yes.”
 3. “There is no truth.” Is that statement true? “Yes.” (I.e., “It’s true that there is no truth.”)
 4. “Don’t take anyone’s advice on that issue.” Is that your advice to me?
- **Sometimes suicide is a little subtler:**
 1. “You shouldn’t force your morality on me.” --“Why Not?”
 - Usually his response is going to be an example of him forcing his morality on you.
 - He must state a moral rule to make sense out of his objection, yet at the same time he denies that moral rules exist.
 - **It’s like saying, “There are no moral rules. Here’s one.” This is self-refuting.**
 2. “Question Authority!” --“Who Says?”
 3. “Who are you to say?” --“Who are you to ask the question?”
 - Challenging another’s view is wrong.
 - But the statement itself is a challenge.

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Suicide Tactic Exercise

I. Alone or in a group, pick one or two of the following statements you might hear. See if you can recognize the self-refutation. How might you graciously phrase a response? *Extra credit if you can phrase it as a Columbo question!*

Example:

“I’ll give you three good reasons you can’t use logic to find truth.”

- So you want to use logic to disprove logic?

“It’s wrong to try to change other people’s religious beliefs.”

- If you think this is wrong, then why are you trying to change my religious beliefs about missionary work, evangelism, and the Great Commission?

“All religions are true.”

- If all religions are true, then Christianity is true.
- But part of the truth of Christianity is that other religions, taken as a whole, are false.
- Either Christianity is true and others are false, or others are true and Christianity is false.
- Either way, all religions can’t be true.

“I don’t believe anything unless it can be proven scientifically.”

- Columbo II--What scientific experiment or proof taught you that only science can teach you truth?
- Incidentally, if you can’t know anything unless science tells you, you can’t know what you had for breakfast unless someone pumps your stomach and scientifically analyzes it.

“You can only know truth through experience?”

- Oh? What experience taught you that you could only know truth through experience?

A good example to be familiar with: “The problem of evil”

Usually, the objection to the existence of God based on the existence of evil commits suicide.

- Ask: What is evil?
 - Don’t give me examples of evil (torture, murder, rape, etc.).
- Tell me why you would call those things evil and not good?
 - Evil is a violation of an objective standard of moral perfection (perfect goodness).

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C.S. Lewis: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I gotten this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call something crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line³.”

- He points out that a portrait is a good or bad likeness depending on how it compares with the “perfect” original.
- Only God is an adequate grounding for objective moral good.
- God’s existence is necessary to make the notion of evil intelligible.
- Therefore, the existence of evil cannot be invoked to prove God does not exist.
 - Rather it indicates the opposite. Simply put:
 1. If the existence of God is necessary for the existence of objective moral good, and..
 2. Objective moral good is necessary for the existence of objective moral evil, then...
 3. The existence of God is necessary for the existence of evil.
 4. Therefore, evil cannot be used as evidence against the existence of God.
 5. Indeed, it is evidence in favor of the existence of God.
- In the movie “The Quarrel,” Rabbi Hersh challenges the secularist Chiam:

If there’s nothing in the universe that’s higher than human beings, then what’s morality? Well, it’s a matter of opinion. I like milk; you like meat. Hitler likes to kill people; I like to save them. Who’s to say which is better? Do you begin to see the horror of this? If there is no Master of the universe, then who’s to say that Hitler did anything wrong? If there is no God then the people that murdered your wife and kids did nothing wrong.

Sibling Rivalry – a special form of suicide

- Sometimes objections come in pairs that are logically inconsistent and oppose each other, thus canceling out at least one.
- This doesn’t disprove them both, but it does cut your task in half and also may expose the irrationality of the one asking the questions.

Relativists (post-moderns who don’t believe in moral absolutes) and the problem of evil

- The entire objection to God’s existence based on the existence of evil hinges on the observation that evil exists (objectively). Evil must be “out there” as an objective feature of the world.
- But relativism holds that the word “evil” reflects a mere personal preference.

Imagine how silly this conversation would sound:

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 31. [as quoted by Koukl]

He: I can't believe in God.

Me: Why not?

He: Brussels sprouts.

Me: Brussels sprouts? What do Brussels sprouts have to do with anything?

He: I hate Brussels sprouts, and I can't believe in a God that would create something that tastes so awful to me.

Relativism reduces the problem of evil to this: "How could a good God allow things that are contrary to my personal preferences?"

C.S. Lewis: "Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own [relativism]. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too – for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies⁴."

- When someone holds two different views at the same time that are in conflict with each other, there is a sibling rivalry suicide.
- Graciously point this out and ask which one is the real objection.

"Taking the Roof Off" Tactic (*condensed*) (**a.k.a. Reductio ad absurdum**)

Especially good with moral issues

"reducing the argument to its absurd conclusion or consequence"

First you adopt the other person's viewpoint for the sake of argument.

Then you press him to the logical conclusion of his view.

- Can he live with the moral or intellectual consequences of his beliefs?
- Taking the Roof Off 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 to his view.

Homework Challenge: Find and recognize the use of this "tactic" in the following Scriptures:

- Romans 2:1

- Matthew 12:24-26

⁴ Lewis, 31. [as quoted by Koukl]

Relativists can't live what they believe

- Do you have a wallet? Can I see it? [put in pocket and start walking away] “thanks”
- “Hey, wait a minute”
- “What’s the problem?”
- [you can't... you shouldn't ... that's wrong]
- “... Why are you forcing your morality on me?”

The “minimalist ethic”

- It's okay as long as I'm not hurting anyone.
- Then you have no objections to peeping-Toms? They're not hurting anybody.

“Modified pro-choice” position on abortion

“I personally believe abortion is wrong, but I don't think there should be laws against it.”
(This is the politicians' favorite position.)

Always ask this question: “Why do *you* think it's wrong?” (Columbo tactic)

Usually the response is something like, “It's wrong for me because I think abortion kills a human baby.” But this response puts them in an untenable bind.

He: I'm personally against abortion, but I don't believe in forcing my view on others.

Me: Why do you, personally, think abortion is wrong?

He: Because I believe it takes the life of an innocent baby.

Me: Let me feed back to you what I thought I heard you say, and you tell me if I got it right [Taking the Roof Off]. You actually believe abortion kills innocent human babies, but mothers should be allowed to do that to their children. Is that right?

He: Well, when you put it that way....

Me: Put it what way? That's your view. If I'm mistaken, please tell me.

All I did was take his view seriously, reflecting it back to him unambiguously – taking the spin off, as it were – showing him where it really led.

Final Exhortations--Practice Makes Perfect

- **Study this material and become familiar with it.**
- **Know your Bible so that you can give an accurate answer:** “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).
- **Be courageous and begin to mix it up with others before you think you’re adequately prepared.**
 - The best way to learn anything is to begin using the information.
 - In the process, you’re going to take a few hits, but you’ll also give a few in a good way.
 - You’ll also learn what the other side has, and you’ll often find it isn’t very much.
- **Push yourself beyond your comfort zone.**
 - Be faithful and courageous, then watch in awe as God changes hearts and minds.
 - Don’t be discouraged by outward appearances. A person may rebel at what you say, but chances are good you’ve given him something to think about.
 - Think of the ideas you’ve offered as stones in his shoe he’ll be hobbling around on for a while as the Holy Spirit uses them to bring that person to the truth.
 - Don’t get caught in the trap of trying to assess the effectiveness of your conversation by the immediate visible results.
 - Remember, the harvest is always a season away. These things often take time.