

# **“A Strategic Plan Incorporating THINK Method Principles into the Practice of Evangelism and Mentoring in the University of Nebraska Christian Challenge.”**

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## **Introduction**

In the past decade, as I have shared Christ with students at the University of Nebraska, I have observed what I can only compare to an earthquake. A friend of mine was in the Alaska earthquake in the 60's, and he described it as disorienting, confusing, and very sad. There was despair in not being able to find your way to a familiar place because the landmarks were gone. I have felt that despair, confusion, and sadness as I have seen how familiar ways of communicating the good news of Christ no longer communicate. I have for years been clearing away the rubble and rebuilding in small group design and large group communication. But there has been this pile of rubble called classical apologetics that I have not known even where to begin. This training has given me some tools to clear away the rubble and begin to rebuild.

## **AN ANALYSIS OF THE APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELISM APPROACH**

Several things were very helpful in the presentation of apologetics and evangelism in the class. The linking of evangelism and apologetics together was a new, helpful concept for me. In the past, evangelism and apologetics have been viewed as two separate and unequal activities and disciplines. Evangelism was more of an umbrella concept which involved sharing a propositional message and calling for commitment. Apologetics was seen as a tool to use if the evangelism approach did not work. It was more of something to fall back on rather than something to lead with. The presentation in the THINK course was to integrate apologetics and

evangelism. This idea is helpful because apologetics usually was neglected in the training of students although it is an incredible need for them as well as their friends.

Another helpful idea was that the function of apologetics is to help people take steps away from their current distorted worldview towards Theism and Christianity. This helpful because most non-Christians are not aware of their worldview or of any distortions produced by it. When helping someone discover their worldview and its implications becomes an important and necessary task in the evangelism process, success in evangelism is redefined. Success becomes linked to not just embracing a new worldview but to letting go of a distorted worldview. This is the biblical category of repentance. It could be described as repenting one little step at a time as they move toward Christ.

Starting farther back than the “chasm of sin” in presenting Christ was a very helpful image. It is one that I have employed in my evangelism training. The course highlighted why this is important. It enables a person to build a plausibility structure for Christianity before they are asked to commit to it. This makes logical as well as emotional sense. Too often it seems that we are asking people to make a leap of faith that to them looks like a blind leap. Starting farther back and building a plausibility structure helps them have a good reason to believe.

The discussing of evangelism and apologetics painted the helpful picture of evangelism as a process. This was explicitly presented and implicitly express through the idea of long term sowing. This makes all kinds of sense. The America we currently live in has not provided a biblical foundation or information that was provided thirty years ago. There is great ignorance of the Bible and stereotyping of Christians and Christianity. There truly are barriers that have to been removed and information that must be given. This cannot happen in a ten-minute evangelistic presentation. Time is the issue and the preparation of a person’s heart. In a

previous generation, one could use a harvesting tool and lead many to Christ who were ready. Today more people need the ground of their worldview plowed up before sowing can even occur. It is a process.

The definition of Biblical faith was a tremendous help in clarifying the link between evangelism and apologetics. “Trusting in what I have good reason to believe is true even if the evidence is not exhaustive or fully evident” (Dave Geisler). This definition speaks to the important issue of certainty. So many people think that to be a Christian you must be 100% certain. How can a person be 100% certain when the evidence truthfully is “not exhaustive or fully evident?” This definition put the criteria where it needs to belong on “good reason to believe.” In other words, it is credible. Credibility versus certainty needs to be the measure.

One of the things that did not seem to fit well was the focus on objective and subjective as the two categories that need to be considered in an effective apologetic. There is a third category that was briefly mentioned that deserves more attention. That is the spiritual dimension. This is important because this generation is aware of and accepting of the spiritual dimension of life. A more full explanation of the spiritual side of people and the spiritual conflict between Satan and the Holy Spirit in someone’s life would have been more helpful.

Several things in this discussion were omitted that would have strengthened the description of what is the apologetic approach. First, there was not a discussion on the openness of the witness. One thing that most Christians trained in evangelism do not exude is humility. They are not trained to say very often, “I don’t know.” When apologetics and evangelism are linked, the openness and humility of the witness can be developed. The truth is that in the area of apologetics many things are not known. It is not an exact science. It requires exploration of the witness’ own views as well as the facts. I think this is one thing that apologetics can do to help

evangelism as it is popularly practiced. It can bring about an openness that will enable people to want to hear.

Another lack of emphasis in the presentation had to do with community. It seemed that there was a highly individualistic approach to the subject of evangelism and apologetics. It was geared to one person speaking to another person. What about the apologetic of community? A group of believers living in community and bringing seekers into that community provide a whole different level of apologetics and evangelism. There is in that community a human witness to the revelation of God. There is a group life and interaction that is animated by the Holy Spirit. Often a seeker will see something really different and become curious about what is causing this group of people to treat one another differently. That community illuminates what it means for Christ to be Lord. It gives it meaning. There is a mystery in that community. The lives of the people seem to be incomprehensible without God. It causes people to ask, “Why such hope?” This kind of community is more than people who believe the same things about God and the Bible. It is a community that has embraced Christ for the whole of their lives including their relationships as well as their moral behavior.

In summary, the approach of apologetics and evangelism was very helpful. For those who are Christians and have a background in traditional evangelism training it would be life changing if it were to be embraced. Those who live every day with a harvesting mentality versus a sowing mentality would resist it. It would seem to slow and not aggressive or bold enough. For the college student with no evangelism training it would make good sense.

**A CURRICULUM TO TEACH APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELISM**  
**BASED ON THE CONCEPTS OF THE THINK METHOD**

The curriculum that I have developed, takes the four roles of artist, archeologist, engineer, and warrior in order. It teaches and trains students to take steps in becoming those things for Christ's sake for their friends. In this curriculum, I will flesh out "what" I want them to know in ten "Teaching Modules." I have selected a video or audio clip as illustrative of the material being presented. I have designed these to be used as a part of our weekly leadership training for small group leaders. There is a set of "Interview Questions" to ask a friend each week before the leadership training meeting. The purpose of the interview is to get the students talking openly about God to people they know and thinking about critical issues. It will help them become more comfortable thinking, listening, and responding. The interview assignment has been used successfully in previous evangelism training sessions. Each week a student will be asked to share with the group his or her interview interaction from the previous week. There is an outside homework assignment that will require some reading for them to do on the subject each week if they choose. A summary follows the curriculum. Finally, an appendix includes "conversational responses to common objections or statements" that will be put on our website this Fall, 2003.

**INTRODUCTION**

**Teaching Module #1** "The Long Journey"

**Objective:** To help students understand long term sowing, understand what one step closer looks like, and see the apologetic value of community.

**Video Clip:** "Wizard of Oz"

**Teaching Points:**

1. In our world today there is a rejection of moral absolutes, extreme skepticism, and an indifference towards the truth.
2. Evangelism methods that are based solely on proclamation are ineffective.
3. We need to realize that rather than reaping we must give ourselves to long term sowing.
4. We must establish common ground by listening to them, sharing our lives and sharing objective Christian evidence.
5. One step closer looks like moving away from a belief that their worldview requires. It looks like repenting one piece at a time.
6. Introducing a seeking friend or skeptic to a community of believers and including him/her in the life of that community is a powerful apologetic.

**Interview:**

- In your opinion where did the universe come from? What do you base your opinion on?
- Do you believe that science and the Bible contradict each other? Based on your answer, how does that affect your view of the Bible?
- If God created the universe and human beings how would you describe your responsibility and relationship to God?

**Handout/Homework:** “Are Biblical Documents Reliable”

[www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bib-docu.html](http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bib-docu.html)

**Teaching Module #2** “A Reasonable Faith”

**Objective:** To help students understand the role of apologetics and the need for dependence on the Holy Spirit.

**Video Clip:** “Bruce Almighty”

**Teaching Points:**

1. Be ready to give an answer. (1 Peter 3:15) This verse is about going on the offense to convince people rather than just about being on the defense.
2. Faith involves reason. “Trusting in what I have good reason to believe is true even if evidence is not exhaustive or fully complete.” (Dave Geisler)
3. God’s truth is beyond reason but not against reason.
4. Evidence cannot make you believe in Christ.
5. We must trust the Holy Spirit to empower our words to make a difference. (Acts 14:1)
6. In addition to words, the Holy Spirit must empower us to live godly lives. (Phil. 1:14)

**Interview:**

- In your opinion does God exist? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that all world religions are valid paths to God? Why or why not?
- Who do you believe Jesus Christ is? Does Jesus have any relevance to life?

**Handout/Homework:** “Is Jesus God” Booklet or Download from <[meeknessandtruth.org](http://meeknessandtruth.org)>

**PART I: THE ARTIST**

**Teaching Module #3** “Listen to the Story They Are Singing

**Objective:** To help students understand what a worldview is and how to affirm the truth that is in a particular worldview.

**Video Clip:** “Amadeus”

**Teaching Points:**

1. People with different worldviews require different kinds of evidence. Biblical examples: Mark 2:6,7 and 10,11.--Jesus, the Scribes, and the Paralytic; Acts 28:23,24-- the use of Old Testament prophecies; Acts 17--Paul’s use of poets and the worship of Athenians

2. Define Worldview: “As individuals develop, they do seem to adopt certain answers to fundamental questions of life. These answers are put together into a comprehensive system--a view of the world. At the same time, this view of the world becomes the way they view the world. They tend to become firmly entrenched because they constantly reinforce themselves through their self-sustaining feedback loop.” (Pollard, p. 35, 36)
3. The worldview is what is referred to in 2 Cor. 10:3-5. Our goal is to tear down these strongholds that keep people from the knowledge of God.
4. We can be wrong too. 1 Thes. 5:21 encourages us to test what we believe and to hold on to the good. So we must approach people with a learner’s, listening heart and avoid any arrogance. We can affirm what is true about a worldview without being fearful of losing our witness. All truth is God’s truth.
5. The process of helping someone see his or her worldview is the first part of what is called by Nick Pollard “positive deconstruction.” The emphasis is on “positive” versus “negative.”

**Interview:**

- Does absolute truth exist in any arena of life? If so, who or what defines it? Can something, such as a belief system or religion, be true for one person and not another? If so, is this actually truth?
- How do you define truth?
- What percentage of what you are taught by your textbooks and professors do you believe is actually true? What about the media?
- Do you govern your life by any set of truths?

**Handout/Homework:** World Views in Brief (Historical Development of Western Worldviews)

## **Teaching Module #4** “Listen to the Words and the Conflict”

**Objective:** To help students know how to ask questions that reveals contradictions within someone’s worldview.

**Audio Clip:** The #1 Song on the Charts

### **Teaching Points:**

1. As we talk with friends we need to listen for their worldview and thinking. We need to listen for contradictions between what they believe and how they live. (Gal. 2:14-16) We need to illustrate what we are hearing them say by mirroring their thinking back to them. (Acts 17:22-30)
2. We can best do that through asking questions rather than by making statements. (Mt. 21:24,25)
3. Three key questions to think about as you listen to their worldview: “Is their view coherent?”, “Does it correspond to reality?”, “Does it work?”

### **Interview:**

- Have you ever read any of the Bible?
- When was the last time you read the Bible?
- What do you remember most about what you’ve read?
- Do you believe that God speaks in a unique way through the Bible as opposed to other religious writings? Why or why not?
- Do you believe the Bible represents absolute truth? Why or why not?

**Handout/Homework:** Positive Deconstruction Worksheet (Pollard, p. 57, 66)

## **PART II: The Archeologist**

## **Teaching Module #5** “Find the Pieces to their Story”

**Objective:** To help students dig into someone's thinking by asking questions.

**Video Clip:** "Raiders of the Lost Ark"

**Teaching Points:**

1. Ask questions that clarify the meaning of words. This will enable them to see what we see without us stating the obvious. "What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?"
2. Ask questions in response to their questions to uncover a false belief system. For example: "It doesn't matter what you believe." "Do you think it matter what the men on the planes believed on 9/11?" This exposes a false belief system.
3. Realize that misunderstood terminology can hinder our witness. Explain the difference between "belief that" and "belief in." We need to clarify our own words and translate properly. (Ex. The difference between a leap of faith and blind faith.)
4. Our purpose is to provide our friends a mirror for them so that they can see themselves.

**Interview:**

- Who defines what is moral or immoral in your life?
- How do you decide between what is right and wrong?
- What are your morals in the arena of lying, (white lies, etc.)?
- What are your morals and values in your dating relationships?
- Can some action be moral for one person and immoral for another? If so, what constitutes values and morality? Is there such a thing as morality?

**Handout/Homework:** Study John 4. "Jesus and the Woman at the Well"

**Teaching Module #6** "Put the Puzzle Together"

**Objective:** To help students determine the real barriers to faith in Christ.

**Video Clip:** "The Big Kahuna"

**Teaching Points:**

1. The arrogance of some Christians is a barrier to most skeptics. It enables them to dismiss the argument without hearing it. The more certain we seem, the worse we look.
2. Three things that we want to accomplish in positive deconstruction and asking questions are make the person uncomfortable with their own views, make them curious about the witness' views, and respond to them in a non-defensive way.
3. One thing a witness needs to discern is how to balance the objective information the person needs and the subjective input they need. "What kind of evidence would convince you Christianity is true?"
4. Determine whether their barrier is an intellectual question or emotional question or concern.

**Interview:**

- How would you describe/define forgiveness?
- Are there times when a person who wrongs you shouldn't be forgiven?
- Please comment on this statement: "We may talk as much as we like about forgiveness, but it will never make any difference to us unless we realize that we need it."
- Do you believe that God is willing to completely forgive people no matter what they have done?
- Would you like to know how I know that God has forgiven me?

**Handout/Homework:** Witnessing to Skeptics Script (Download from <[meeknessandtruth.org](http://meeknessandtruth.org)>)

**Teaching Module #7** "Can They Embrace the Puzzle?"

**Objective:** To help students determine more barriers to faith in Christ.

**Video Clip:** "A Few Good Men"

**Teaching Points:**

1. Uncover emotional baggage they may be carrying. “What is your past religious experience?”
2. Determine if it a legitimate question or a smoke screen. Ask them, “Do you want evidence or just be left alone?”
3. What is your biggest barrier to Christianity?
4. What would motivate you to get answers in these areas?

**Interview:**

- When you reach old age and look back on your life how will you want to have invested your life?
- What do you think that most people on this campus are giving their lives to?
- Is there anything in your life that makes it worth living? Is there anything worth dying for?

**Handout/Homework:** “Can they all be right?” World Religions Perspective Diagram

**PART III: The Engineer**

**Teaching Module #8** “The Logic of the Bridge”

**Objective:** To help students know how to build a logical bridge to God.

**Video Clip:** “The Matrix”

**Teaching Points:**

1. What you believe will affect how you live.
2. Not all religious viewpoints can be right.
3. Some viewpoints are better than others.
4. Faith must have an object to have merit.
5. Objective truth does exist.
6. Truth is non-contradictory.

**Interview:**

- When you hear that God is a God of love, what do you think that means?
- Do you have a sense of being loved by God? Why or why not?
- Does your spiritual life affect your dating relationships?
- Is love a feeling or an action or both? Please explain.

**Handout/Homework:** The Bridge Illustration at [www.navresources.com](http://www.navresources.com)

**Teaching Module #9** “The Building Blocks of the Bridge”

**Objective:** To help students know the claims of Christ.

**Video Clip:** “The Jesus Film”

**Teaching Points:**

1. His Claim to be a light giver- John 8:12.
2. His claim to be the bread of life- John 6:48-51.
3. His claim to be the son of God- John 6:40.
4. His claim to give life- John 5:39,40.
5. His claim to be from above- John 8:23,24.
6. His claim to have pre-existed- John 8:57-59.
7. His claim to represent God- John 12:44-46.
8. His claim to be one with God- John 10:30.
9. His claim to be the exclusive way to God- John 14:6.

**Interview**

- How do you define hope?
- What do you hope in for the future?

- Are your hopes based upon established events which will take place in the future or on events which you only wish will happen?
- How do your hopes affect your outlook on life?
- Is there any real hope for the human race, and the future of the world?

**Handout/Homework:** “Jesus’ Claim to Be God” Download

[www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/claims.html](http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/claims.html)

### **PART IV: The Warrior**

**Teaching Module #10:** “We are at War!”

**Objective:** To help students to understand the nature of the warfare.

**Video Clip:** “Braveheart”

**Teaching Points:**

1. It is a spiritual war. (Ephesians 6:10)
2. The enemy has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving. (2 Cor. 4:4)
3. Jesus Christ has already won the victory. (Col. 2:13,14)
4. We can enforce is victory through prayer. (2 Cor. 10:4,5)

**Interviews**

- Why is there so much evil in the world?
- Do you think it is right to blame God when tragedy strikes? Why or why not?
- What should a person do who is a victim of injustice?

### **Summary**

The curriculum that I have laid out in outline form includes what I have often used in training students: a presentation of the gospel, an interactive assigned weekly project that puts students in verbal conversation with unbelievers, and some form of follow up or homework material. What

has been added because of the “Think” method is a logical progression in training that does not focus on presenting a gospel plan but rather focuses on listening, illuminating the other person with what you are hearing, uncovering obstacles and sharing your discovery with the person, and then building a bridge to Jesus Christ. This training has the potential to be much more interactive and image based than what I have used before. The image of Artist, Archeologist, Engineer, and Warrior are easily remembered. If communicated well, a student can ask herself in her relationship with an unbeliever, “Where am I? Do I need to be an Artist, Archeologist, Engineer, or Warrior in this person’s life right now?” The inclusion of video clips in this curriculum will help the students connect. During some weeks of training, it might be possible to have a video of a student doing the interview questions rather than reporting on the interview.

I am convinced that it is possible to offer students training in a new way with a new emphasis that fits them and the culture they are trying to reach. The “Think” method has helped me get more of a handle on this by bringing a structure to enable me to think through exactly what I am trying to do and why I am trying to do it.

## **Appendix I**

### **CONVERSATIONAL RESPONSES TO COMMON OBJECTIONS OR STATEMENTS**

1. “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere and you don’t hurt anyone else.”

How can you know that someone’s beliefs will not be harmful?

Why you think sincerity is a safeguard? Didn’t people sincerely think using asbestos or lead in paint was OK?

2. “All religious beliefs have equal validity.”

What do you mean by valid?

Would it bother you if your sister became a fundamentalist Muslim? Doesn't that mean that some religious beliefs have more validity than others?

3. "I am unwilling to commit to a religious perspective."

If it were possible to know truth about a religious perspective, would you want to know?

Wouldn't Christianity be a good place to start?

Don't you think it would be the easiest religion to disprove?

4. "God knows I don't measure up. I just try to do the best I can!"

In what ways do you think you don't measure up?

If that is your standard, can you imagine what God's standard might be?

5. "Christianity is too exclusive."

What do you mean by exclusive?

If you mean arrogant, I agree with you that there is no room for that.

Is being exclusive always bad? What about marriage?

6. "How can you claim there is only one way to God?"

If there is an Almighty God, doesn't it make sense that God would determine the path to him?

If our relationship with God were broken, how would that relationship be restored?

How are dating relationships or marriages restored?

7. "Christians are not very tolerant."

I agree that some Christians are harsh and intolerant.

What is the difference between disagreeing with someone and discriminating against someone?

Is disagreeing OK if it is not discriminatory?

8. “It’s okay to believe what you want but you shouldn’t be trying to convert others.”

Is persuading someone to change always wrong? What about an alcoholic in a family?

If you strongly think that what I believe might be harmful, would you agree that you might want to help me change my mind?

9. “You should not be judgmental about other people’s beliefs.”

Is it judgmental of someone to think someone is wrong?

Doesn’t judgmental imply a sense of moral superiority versus thinking someone is wrong?

10. “If God is so loving, how can there be a hell?”

What do you mean by hell?

How would you determine justice if there was no punishment for wrongdoing?

Would it be loving of God to make everyone believe in Christ whether they wanted to or not?

11. “What about those in other countries who have never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel?”

What do people have access to regarding God?

Is God the kind of God who would do whatever it takes to let people know the truth?

12. Regarding the resurrection of Jesus: “People claim JFK and Elvis are alive too!”

How would you substantiate the claim that JFK or Elvis are alive?

What substantiation is there for Jesus’ resurrection?

13. “What makes Christianity different from any other religion?”

What do you mean by religion?

Would you agree that some views are better than others?

Did you know that Christianity is the only religion based on a historical event versus a philosophy?

14. "So many people disagree. Relativism must be true."

If it is okay to disagree about science why is it not okay to disagree about religion?

Just because people disagree does not mean there is no right or wrong?

Was it okay for Hitler and Stalin to massacre innocent people?

15. "Is it even possible that your beliefs about Christianity could be wrong?"

If you think my views are wrong, could you show me?

16. "You have the right to choose your own values, so homosexuality is okay!"

When you say it is "okay", who sets the standard?

Is it possible that something can feel really right, but in the end be very harmful?

17. "I don't believe God exists."

Are you absolutely certain there is no God?

What evidence would you need to convince you there is a God?

For someone to say there is no God, wouldn't they have to know everything?

18. "Whether God exists or not is irrelevant to me!"

If there were an aspect of life that would add joy to you, would you want it?

If we are just affects of material causes, how do you fit love, meaning, and beauty into life's realities?

19. "Where did God come from?"

What color is time? That is a similar question.

The existence of God answers the question of "Why is there something rather than nothing?"

20. But why can't there be more than one God?

If there were more than one God, would they have to differ?

If they differed, then one would be God and one would not be God.