

Responding to Objections about Jesus

OK, you just had a mission moment—a moment God gave you to share His truth and love with someone. Then came the objections. Statements like, “You’re being intolerant!” “I just can’t believe in a God who would tell me what I do is wrong” “All religions teach the same things” “It’s just about being the best person you can be,” and the dreaded, “That’s good for you, dear,” threaten to derail your conversation.

Objections are actually a good thing. Here’s why. First, if the person is offended, it means you expressed the Gospel correctly. The Gospel is an offense (John 6:61) and a stumbling block (1 Co 1:23). Second, objections can be a sign that the message has reached the heart. It is often uncomfortable when truth hits close to home and people will try to deflect or put up a smokescreen, like the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4. In this mission moment, Jesus confronts the woman’s rebellious lifestyle and she tries to change the subject away from herself to the controversy between Jews and Samaritans about where to worship. Jesus gently brings the conversation back to salvation in Himself and worship in spirit and truth. A third positive thing about objections is that they can reveal real concerns, misconceptions, and even bad experiences in the person’s life to which you can respond with clarification and genuine care.

Objections are often key to advancing a moment of Gospel proclamation into a meaningful discussion about a person’s relationship with the one true God. The end goal is discipleship—that this person, by the power of the Holy Spirit, would become a fully devoted follower of Christ. Your conversations are one way God brings His Word to them. Dealing gently with objections that arise during faith conversations and in response to proclaiming the Gospel are actually a beginning stage of discipleship. You are helping others get to know God, clearing up misconceptions, addressing hurts, and sharing the difference being a follower of Jesus makes in your life. You are pointing the way to Jesus so that someday they will say along with the Samaritans in John chapter 4, “Our faith is no longer based on what you’ve said. We have heard [Jesus] ourselves, and we know He really is the savior of the world.” *

Below are tips to P-L-A-N for responding to objections, resources for digging deeper, and examples for practicing on your own or with a group. If you have any questions, or want to share your ideas and stories, please contact [Lutheran Hour Ministries](http://LutheranHourMinistries.org) at equipping@lhm.org.

(*John 4:42 God’s Word to the Nations Translation)

Tips

Pray: Ask God to give you the words as He has promised to do (Mark 13:11), to be a discerning listener, and to be gentle and respectful (1 Peter 3:15).

Listen: Is the person’s objection...

- Actual or just an attempt to change the topic?
- Emotional or intellectual?
- Related to pride—no need to be rescued?
- Related to rebellion—denial of wrong?

- Revealing about what he or she does believe?

Listen actively; reflect your understanding of the objection back to the person to confirm what you hear. Ask for clarification when needed and challenge the person, when appropriate, to explain further. For example, if the objection is, “All religions teach the same things,” respectfully ask the person to identify what those things are. This can lead to an opportunity to talk more about the uniqueness of Christ.

Affirm: You can affirm a person’s right to object and accept his or her questions without agreeing. Let the person know it is normal to ask questions, perhaps that you had similar thoughts once yourself, or thank him or her for bringing up the topic so that you can have a meaningful discussion. When objections are emotional or personal, affirm the person for trusting you enough to speak personally. Honoring and affirming your relationship with this person is important.

Navigate: through the smoke screens, through accusations and emotions, to keep the conversation about Jesus and the personal relationship He desires with this person. Don’t dismiss the protest, but you do not have to respond directly to the objection itself.

A note about applying Law and Gospel: Dr. Robert Kolb (Speaking the Gospel Today, Concordia Publishing House) advises that when we are unsure about responding with Law or Gospel to a question, we can ask gently, “Why do you want to know?” The person’s answer will likely reveal whether or not to offer a reminder of God’s expectations or His compassion.

Digging Deeper

- Great for your reference and for giving to a seeking friend:
I Believe But I Have Questions by Jane L. Fryar
1994, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO
- Responding specifically to people of other religions:
The How to Respond Series, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO
- Don’t forget the Index of Topics in Luther’s Small Catechism! Luther gets to the Scriptural heart of each topic with brief explanations you can put into your own words.
- Also try Internet searches with key words: objections to Christ/Christianity, Christian apologetics, answering questions about Christ. You will find both good and bad— remember to “eat the fish and spit out the bones,” as with any Internet search.

Practice

Sample response to “It’s intolerance to say that there is only one way to God.”

Pray: Lord, help me to speak the words you want this child of yours to hear. Give me patience and wisdom to demonstrate Your love and Your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Listen: Is this a smoke screen? Does my friend just want to change the topic and put me on the defensive rather than admitting what he thinks about Jesus? Or is does this objection reveal something about his values and beliefs? Do I want to ask a clarifying question before responding?

Affirm: Whether a smoke screen or not, affirm the possible value underlying tolerance—respecting others. You can also affirm the person by your non-defensive tone and body language. And smile! Your friend's objection has given you the opportunity to share more about Jesus. Statements of affirmation:

- I know you really value respecting others...
- I can see how the "all roads lead to one" idea would make life easier...
- Intolerance is an important issue and as your friend I know you are a person who cares about others...

Navigate: How can I bring this back to Jesus? Options...

- Tolerance is an important issue, but what I'm concerned with right now is what you think about Jesus offering His love to you personally.
- Before we talk about tolerance, may I ask what you think about Jesus wanting a relationship with you as an individual?
- "One way" may sound exclusive, but this gift of new life in Jesus is offered to every single person on the planet.
- The most intolerant thing I could do would be to not tell you about Jesus.
- Yes, God is completely intolerant of disobedience and evil—and there's evil in all of us. That is exactly why He gave up His own Son to take the consequences of the disobedience of the whole world upon Himself, even though His Son was without evil, so that all people can be reunited with God for all time...

How would you respond? Think through possible conversations on your own or with a group.

- I just can't believe in a God who would tell me what I do is wrong.
- Jesus is a good example, but not God.
- Every church has their own Bible—how do you know what is true?
- All religions teach the same things.
- It's just about being the best person you can be.
- That's good for you, dear.

Pray: What do you want to pray for this person and this conversation?

Listen: Do I understand what they are really trying to say? Do I need to ask clarifying questions? Are they avoiding the issue or revealing a true concern?

Affirm: How can I let them know their objection or question is normal and non-threatening? How can I affirm my respect for them and my value for our friendship?

Navigate: How can keep the conversation focused on Christ? What can I clarify?