

Training #3

Creating Pathways of Belief (Not Arguments)

This training is about helping people be equipped in being; calm, relational, and spiritually attentive in conversations about God, faith, Jesus their questions associated. Most people are not argued into openness — they are loved into trust. These two skills sets help us create environments where people feel safe enough to share honestly and curious enough to keep talking.

The goal is not to “win” conversations.

The goal is to help people feel seen, heard, valued, and invited into deeper conversation.

Part 1: “Deescalation Station”

When people come to a pop-up location, they may bring skepticism, hurt, anger, fear, church trauma, confusion, or strong opinions. Leaders must learn how to carry peace into tense moments instead of reacting emotionally.

Deescalation is not weakness.

It is spiritual maturity under pressure.

Jesus consistently modeled this. He stayed calm with critics, patient with doubters, and compassionate with broken people. His posture often created safety before His words created transformation.

The Three “P” Practice:

1. Posture — “Palms Up”

Physical posture affects our emotional posture & perceived receptivity.

To stay open a good practice is to literally keep your hands open or relaxed with your palms up during conversations. Closed fists, crossed arms, pointed fingers, and tense shoulders communicate defensiveness without saying a word.

Open palm concept communicates:

- “I’m listening.”
- “I’m safe.”
- “I’m not here to fight.”
- “You matter.”

Primary Principle: When our physical posture becomes ridged, our emotions usually follow.

Practical Exercise: Pair people up. One person plays a frustrated guest.

- “Christians are judgmental.”
- “The church only wants money.”
- “Why does God allow suffering?”

The Other Person Responds Twice:

1. First with tense posture, crossed arms, quick reactions.
2. Then with relaxed shoulders, open palms, slower responses.

Afterward Ask:

- Which interaction felt safer?
- Which interaction made listening easier?
- What changed emotionally?

The Three “P” Practice:

2. Pause — “Lean Back Before Leaning In”

Primary Principle: Quick reactions often create unnecessary conflict.

Key Concept: You do not have to answer immediately to respond wisely.

A Pause Communicates:

- thoughtfulness
- humility
- emotional control
- curiosity

The pause is where listening happens. We must physically lean back slightly before responding to difficult comments. That tiny movement helps interrupt defensiveness and gives us a place to go “palms up” again before reengaging.

Key Verse: “Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.” James 1:19 NLT

Practice Exercise

Create a “Hard Question Circle.”

Take Turns Hearing Difficult Statements:

- “I think Christianity is fake.”
- “The Bible contradicts itself.”
- “Christians hate people like me.”
- “I prayed and nothing happened.”

Before Responding We Must:

1. Pause for 3 seconds.
2. Take a breath.
3. Ask a clarifying question before giving an answer.

Examples:

- “Tell me more about why you feel that way.”
- “Was there a specific experience behind that?”
- “What led you to that conclusion?”

Reminder: People rarely open up because someone had the perfect answer. They open up because someone genuinely listened.

The Three “P” Practice:

3. Pace — “Your Cadence Creates Warmth or Heat”

Conversations rise or fall based on emotional pace.

Fast speech, interruption, and intensity can accidentally communicate pressure or aggression.

A paced conversation communicates...

- confidence
- safety
- patience
- care

Not slow and robotic.

Just intentional.

Primary Principle: If the conversation gets hotter, your pace should get calmer.

Practice Exercise

Let’s role play the same conversation two ways...

1. Fast, interruptive, emotionally intense.
2. Calm, paced, warm, patient.

Then Discuss:

- Which version invited openness?
- Which version felt argumentative?
- How did tone change the interaction?

Reminder: Our tone & physical posture often creates the atmosphere before our words ever do.

Part 2: The Name Game Revisited

People open up spiritually when they feel personally valued.

This skill helps leaders move conversations from surface-level interactions into meaningful connection.

The goal is simple:

Help people feel remembered, noticed, and important.

1. Compliment – “Call Forward What You Notice”

Teach leaders to notice something intentional, genuine, and encouraging.

Not flattery.

Not manipulation.

Real observation.

Examples:

- “You have a really calming presence.”
- “You ask thoughtful questions.”
- “You seem passionate about helping people.”
- “That’s a great jacket.”
- “You communicate really clearly.”

A sincere compliment lowers walls.

Practice Exercise

Pair up and spend 60 seconds observing one another.

Each person must give:

- one external compliment
- one character-based compliment

Then discuss:

- Which compliment felt more meaningful?
- Why does being noticed matter?

Primary Principle: People don’t care what you know until they sense you care who they are.

2. Inquire — “Notice, Acknowledge, Then Ask”

Curiosity builds connection.

After noticing something, ask about it.

Examples:

- “That tattoo looks meaningful — what’s the story behind it?”
- “You mentioned growing up around church. What was that like?”
- “You seem passionate about justice. Where did that come from?”

Good inquiry communicates:

“I’m interested in you, not just the conversation topic.”

Practice Exercise

Creating a “Question Ladder.”

One participant shares a simple statement:

- “I grew up Catholic.”
- “I used to go to church.”
- “I’m spiritual but not religious.”

The other person must ask 3 deeper follow-up questions without turning it into debate.

Goal: Practice curiosity instead of correction.

3. Association – Retention Through Currently Known Information

Association builds familiarity and trust.

Learning how to connect someone's story with:

- a shared experience
- another person
- a relatable emotion
- something personally understood

Examples:

- “That reminds me of my cousin...”
- “I remember a friend with the same name... How do you spell yours?”
- “I’ve never met another _____. (Repeat name) That’s unique. Reminds me of _____.”

Practice Exercise

In groups of three:

- First person using your middle name...
- The second person practices introducing themselves and asking their name & making association to retain the information.
- 3 things to retain: name, something about their appearance, unique quality about then to help you remember something specific about them.
- The third person gives observations and feedback.

This is done best when we don't make the interaction about yourself but about the other person.

Remember people are not projects.

They are God's beloved entrusted to our care for the moment to point them to Him through love.

The mission is not to pressure people into decisions.

It is to create encounters marked by:

- peace
- curiosity
- compassion
- wisdom
- presence

Primary Principle:

- Calm people calm people.
- Curious people open people.
- Safe people help people become honest.

Often times the most spiritual thing you can do is listen well.

Creating Pathways of Belief (Not Arguments)

Big Idea: we are not trying to win a conversation—we are creating opportunity to move it forward. Pathways are built through building the skill of; finding the things to affirm, creating new pathways of curiosity, and in association to the topic sharing your personal story.

IDEA #1: Start with What You Can Affirm — Facilitator Narrative

“Before we jump into practicing, we need to shift how we think about conversations. Most of us instinctively listen for what we disagree with. But if our goal is to create movement—not win—then we start somewhere different. We start with affirmation.

That doesn’t mean we agree with everything someone says. It means we’re intentionally looking for what makes sense in what they’re saying. Every belief has a backstory. Every perspective has a reason behind it. When you affirm that, you’re stepping into their world instead of pulling them into yours.

Why does this matter? Because people don’t open up when they feel corrected—they open up when they feel understood. Affirmation lowers defenses. It builds trust. And without trust, there is no real conversation.

So practically, instead of reacting, we get curious. We ask questions that help us understand where their belief came from. We slow down enough to say, ‘Help me understand that.’

In your groups, your first job is simple: don’t move forward until the other person feels seen.

Observers, you’re watching for this: Did they affirm before they asked or shared? Not after. Not eventually. First.

Because if you skip this step, everything else feels like an argument—even if your tone is nice.

IDEA #1 Role-Play Outline: Start with What You Can Affirm

What This Means:

Find common ground first, not disagreement.

You're identifying what they already believe and stepping into that.

Why It Matters:

- People open up when they feel understood
- It lowers defensiveness
- It builds relational trust

How To Do It (Practically)

Instead Of:

- "That's not true"
- "I disagree with that"

Try:

- "That actually makes sense..."
- "I can see why you'd think that..."
- "I've thought something similar before..."

Use Good Questions To Uncover Belief:

- "What led you to that perspective?"
- "What do you think is most important about that?"
- "Where did that belief come from for you?"

Goal: Help them feel seen before you try to be heard.

IDEA #2: Ask What They'd Be Willing to Consider — Facilitator Narrative

What This Means:

Find common ground first, not disagreement.

You're identifying what they already believe and stepping into that.

Why It Matters:

- People open up when they feel understood
- It lowers defensiveness
- It builds relational trust

How To Do It (Practically)

Instead Of:

- "That's not true"
- "I disagree with that"

Try:

- "That actually makes sense..."
- "I can see why you'd think that..."
- "I've thought something similar before..."

Use Good Questions To Uncover Belief:

- "What led you to that perspective?"
- "What do you think is most important about that?"
- "Where did that belief come from for you?"

Goal: Help them feel seen before you try to be heard.

IDEA #2 Role-Play Outline: Ask What They'd Be Willing to Consider

What This Means:

You're not forcing belief—you're inviting exploration.

Why It Matters:

- People resist pressure but respond to curiosity
- Questions create space for reflection
- You're helping them think, not cornering them

Key Question: "What kind of evidence would you need to see before reconsidering your position?"

Other Powerful Questions:

- "If God were real, what do you think He'd be like?"
- "What would make you more open to faith?"
- "Do you think it's possible there's more than what we can see?"
- "What do you think explains (purpose, morality, origin, etc.)?"

Goal: Introduce ideas through questions, not arguments.

IDEA #3: Share Personally, Not Proof — Facilitator Narrative

“Now we come to the part where most people feel pressure—and we’re going to remove that pressure. You are not here to give perfect answers. You are here to share your story. Because here’s the truth: people will argue with your logic, but they will listen to your experience. When you share personally, you’re not saying, ‘This proves I’m right.’ You’re saying, ‘This is what moved me.’ That’s disarming. It’s human. It keeps the conversation relational instead of turning it into a debate.

So when you share, include your journey:

What questions did you have?

What didn’t make sense at first?

What shifted for you?

Why did it matter?

And keep it in that language:

‘For me..’

‘What helped me was..’

‘I wrestled with that too..’

Notice—you’re not prescribing. You’re describing. In your groups, this is where I want you to resist the urge to teach or explain everything. Just share one honest piece of your experience that connects to what they said.

Observers, watch for this: Did they stay personal—or did they drift into trying to prove something?”

IDEA #3 Role-Play Outline: Share Personally, Not Proof

What this means: You don't present airtight arguments—you share what personally moved YOU.

Why It Matters:

- Testimony is disarming
- People argue with logic but listen to story
- It keeps the conversation relational

How To Say It:

- “This was personally powerful for me...”
- “Something that really helped me when I had questions...”
- “I wrestled with that too, and what stood out to me was...”

What To Include:

- Your doubts or questions
- What shifted your thinking
- Why it mattered to you

Goal: Be descriptive, not defensive, or prescriptive.

Now, Let's Put It All Together!

1. **Affirm** → “That makes sense...”
2. **Explore** → “What would you need to see...?”
3. **Share** → “For me, what really stood out was...”

ROLE-PLAY TRAINING EXERCISES: Structure (for all exercises) // (Rotate Every Round)

Groups of 3:

- One person is the **Speaker**—you're practicing the conversation
- One is the **Seeker**—you'll play the objection
- One is the **Observer**—you're watching for these three skills...
- Did they affirm first?
- Did they ask real questions?
- Did they share personally (not argue)?

Follow This Simple Flow:

1. Affirm — ‘That makes sense...’
2. Explore — ‘Can I ask...?’
3. Share — ‘For me...’

If you get stuck, just come back to that. And one coaching reminder as you practice:

The moment you feel defensive, you've left pathway mode and entered argument mode.
Stay curious. Stay calm. Stay relational.

ROLE PLAY 1: “Science Explains Everything”

Seeker Says: “I just believe in science. I don’t think God is necessary.”

Speaker Must:

- Affirm belief in science
- Ask a “consider” question
- Share a personal reflection

Strong Example Flow:

- “Yeah, science explains so much—I respect that.”
- “Can I ask—what do you think about where everything originally came from?”
- “For me, that question actually stuck with me. I had a hard time believing everything came from nothing...”

ROLE PLAY 2: “Christians Are Hypocrites”

Seeker Says: “Christians are hypocrites—that’s why I don’t believe.”

Speaker Must:

- Affirm the frustration
- Ask what shaped that belief
- Share personal tension or realization

Strong Example Flow:

- “Honestly, I get that—there’s definitely been hurt there.”
- “Have you had a personal experience with that?”
- “For me, I had to separate people from Jesus—that helped me process it...”

ROLE PLAY 3: “I Grew Up Religious, It Didn’t Work”

Seeker Says: “I grew up in church—it just didn’t work for me.”

Speaker Must:

- Affirm their experience
- Ask what didn’t work
- Share how your perspective shifted

Strong Example Flow:

- “That’s fair—growing up in something doesn’t always mean it connects.”
- “What felt off about it for you?”
- “For me, it didn’t make sense until it became personal instead of just routine...”

ROLE PLAY 4: “Problem of Suffering”

Seeker Says: “If God is real, why is there so much suffering?”

Speaker Must:

- Affirm emotional weight
- Ask a deeper exploration question
- Share a personal anchor

Strong Example Flow:

- “That’s a real question—that’s hard.”
- “Have you thought about what you would expect God to do in those situations?”
- “For me, this didn’t fully answer it, but it helped knowing Jesus stepped into suffering...”

ROLE PLAY 5: “I Don’t Think There’s Enough Evidence”

Seeker Says: “There’s just not enough evidence for me to believe.”

Speaker Must:

- Affirm need for evidence
- Ask the key question
- Share what counted as evidence for you

Strong Example Flow:

- “That makes sense—belief shouldn’t be blind.”
- “What kind of evidence would you need to reconsider?”
- “For me, historical accounts of the resurrection started to matter more than I expected...”

ROLE PLAY 6: “I’m Spiritual, Not Religious”

Seeker Says: “I’m spiritual, just not religious.”

Speaker Must:

- Affirm spirituality
- Explore what that means to them
- Share how your faith became personal

Strong Example Flow:

- “I think a lot of people feel that way—it makes sense.”
- “What does being spiritual look like for you?”
- “For me, I wanted something more grounded—that’s where Jesus became real to me...”

ADVANCED ROUND

“Now that you’ve had some reps, we’re going to make it a little more real..”

In this next round, the responder can interrupt, push back, or even shift the conversation a bit.

Why? Because real conversations aren’t clean or predictable.

Your goal doesn’t change:

- Stay calm
- Keep asking questions
- Don’t argue

NOTE: When things begin to feel tense and we can clearly identify it we can use it as a clear indicator we’ve left a posture of curiosity and to return to it. The objective is not to try to regain control but to shift our posture back to curiosity.

And when we can do these things – we just developed one of the essential skills needed to be ultimately effective in having conversations that are actually helping people see Jesus.

“As we close, remember this...

You don't need perfect answers.
You don't need to win conversations.
You're creating pathways.

And pathways are built through:

- Curiosity
- Humility
- And a willingness to share your story

By consistently doing these three things—

- Affirming something in their current position
- Helping them explore new ideas by asking discovery questions
- And share your faith personally

you will have better, deeper, more meaningful conversations.