

Defending the Faith in Conversations

By Sam Dallas

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to John 5:15–18 in the section **It's in the Book**. Then read Matthew 12:8–14. This passage records another instance when Jesus' opponents challenged Him for healing on the Sabbath. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What defenses does Jesus give in this passage for healing on the Sabbath?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to John 5:31–47 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share a list all of the “witnesses” to Himself that Jesus mentions in verses 33–47. Also share two different witnesses mentioned in verses 39–47.

Assignment Three

Read Acts 17:2–4; 17:17; 18:4; 18:13; 18:19; 19:8–10; 19:26; 26:28; and 28:23–24 and count every time the word “persuade” or “reason” is used in the context of evangelism. Then turn to comments related to these verses in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Does what you learned support or refute the notion that Christians are to advocate a “blind” faith? Why?

Scripture to Memorize

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Colossians 4:6

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the importance of defending one's faith in conversations and will learn the value of incorporating apologetics into evangelism when needed.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Sitting down at the cafeteria, you unintentionally enter into a lively discussion about Jesus and Christianity. Sarah says that Jesus was a good moral teacher and didn't believe Himself to be God. Dylan argues that Jesus never even existed and was invented by early Christians to support and spread their new religion. Clay (your Christian friend) is flustered and red faced trying to respond to the two of them. After giving you a plea for help with his eyes, Clay silently seeks your help. Can you help him? Do you defend your faith? What would you say?

Jesus the Apologist

Read John 5:15–18, 31–47 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 16. on the Sabbath. The Gospels record Jesus healing on the Sabbath in several places (see John 9; Mark 3:1–5). Jesus' religious opponents felt He was breaking the fourth of the Ten Commandments, which states, "Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work" (Deuteronomy 5:12–14). The Sabbath day is based on God's "resting" on the seventh day of creation, as recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis (see Genesis 2:2–3).

Verse 17. My Father is working . . . I am working. Jesus was using the *continuous* work of God the Father as a justification for His own actions on the Sabbath. After all, God's "rest" on the seventh day was a rest from His work *of* creation, not from His activity *in* creation.

Verse 18. This was why . . . making Himself equal with God. Jesus' Jewish opponents recognized His use of "My Father" (and not "Your Father" or "Our Father") as a clear claim to divinity. He also called God "My Father" in John 2:16. In the John 2 passage (vv. 13–22), Jesus alludes to Himself as being greater than the temple. Indeed, Jesus viewed Himself as equal with God.

Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share answers to the following question: What defenses does Jesus give for healing on the Sabbath, according to Matthew 12:8–14?

Discussion Questions

Have your beliefs ever been challenged? What was that experience like? Do you think it is important that we know how to defend our faith in conversations?

Studying the Passage

Verse 31. If I alone bear witness . . . My testimony is not true. According to Old Testament Law, one cannot be legally validated or condemned by the testimony of only one individual (see Deuteronomy 19:15). Therefore, Jesus provided additional witnesses to affirm His claims.

Verse 32. There is another who bears witness about Me. The "another" Jesus mentions in this verse is a reference to God the Father, not John the Baptist. This becomes clear after

reading verses 33– 34.

Verse 35. He was a burning and shining lamp. The past tense “was” may have been an indication that John was already dead when Jesus gave this teaching. The “lamp” metaphor points to John’s lighting the way, since he consistently pointed people to the ministry and mission of Jesus.

Verse 36. the very works that I am doing. This was a reference to both His ministry activities and His miracles.

Verse 39. You search the Scriptures. “Scriptures,” in this context, was a reference to the Old Testament. **it is they that bear witness about Me.** Jesus was making a powerful claim here that the Old Testament points to Him.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share a list all of the “witnesses” to Himself that Jesus mentions in verses 33–47. Also, they can share two different witnesses mentioned in verses 39–47.

Discussion Question

Looking at the John 5 and Matthew 12 passages, in what ways does Jesus model defending one’s faith in conversations?

Apologetics and Evangelism

Read Acts 17:2–4, 17; 18:4, 13, 19; 19:8–10, 26; 26:28; and 28:23–24 out loud.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share how many times these verses from Acts 17–28 use the terms “reason” or “persuade” in the context of evangelism. They can also share whether these selected verses support or refute the notion that Christians are to advocate a “blind” faith.

Studying the Passage

17:2. reasoned. Paul dialogued with the nonbelieving Jews through questions and answers. **from the Scriptures.** Paul would have used the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament.

17:3. explaining and proving. Paul did more than just proclaim the truth. He was also able to talk about it on a deeper level and show from Scripture why his statements about Christ were true.

19:9–10. daily in the hall of Tyrannus . . . both Jews and Greeks. Paul preached in this lecture hall daily for two years. He may have had to rent the space. Such an opportunity allowed Paul to share with numerous Jews and Greeks.

28:24. Some were convinced . . . others disbelieved. Paul was faithful to give his witness, and some became believers, while others did not. According to Acts 28:29, the discussion continued even after they left the lecture hall!

Discussion Questions

What does Acts 17–28 teach you about the relationship between apologetics and evangelism? Why is it important that we don't forget to share the gospel message when defending our beliefs?

On Your Own

In the space below, list some benefits of knowing how to defend your faith in conversations. What are some steps you can take to learn how to better defend your faith? When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** at the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The Bible does not promote “blind” faith. Jesus never told people to “just believe,” but rather He supplied reasons *why* people should believe in Him. Jesus pointed to the “witnesses” that testified of His truthfulness. He pointed to the witness of:

- John the Baptist (John 5:33–34)
- His own works (John 5:36), which included:
 - His exemplary moral life and character
 - His captivating teachings
 - His ministry of miracles
- God the Father (John 5:37–38)
- Scripture (the Old Testament)
- Moses (John 5:39–47)

Since the Bible does not proclaim a blind faith, we should not proclaim a blind faith, either. As followers of Christ, we must “always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). We live in a time and culture where the things of God are not readily accepted. What are we to do? The answer cannot be to sit on the sidelines.

With such a task in front of us, the disciples that live today must be ready to defend their faith in conversations and to speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). As a disciple, you must not only learn *what* you should believe as a follower of Christ, but also *why* you hold your beliefs. Only then will you learn how to articulate your beliefs to others in spiritual conversations.

When putting it all together, the end goal should reflect Paul’s exhortation to the Christians in Colossae: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6).

Follow up Question

What are some steps you will take to learn how to better defend your faith in conversations?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.