



# starting spiritual conversations



# with postmoderns

## **Instructor Guide**

Vibrant Church Renewal  
USA/Canada Evangelism Ministries  
Church of the Nazarene, International



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# starting spiritual conversations with postmoderns

Section	Time	Page	Brief Description
I. Introduction	5 min.	5	Introduce objectives, outline.
II. Lecture	20 min.	7	Facilitator presents information that will help participants identify areas for growth and development.
III. Small Group Exercise	20 min.	10	Participants work in small groups.
IV. Action Planning	10 min.	12	Participants use the concepts from the lecture to plan for the future.
V. Wrap-up	5 min.	13	Close the module with your final comments regarding the topic.

Total Time: 60 min.

The table above identifies each module section, the time allotted for each section, and a brief description of the section's objective. When you are familiar with this module, you may want to teach from this page rather than the detailed information.

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Build enthusiasm for the training module. Vibrant Church Renewal requires buy-in from people in the church. Use announcements, fliers, posters, etc. to prepare participants for the topic and build their interest. Speak to key stakeholders in person to encourage their support of this initiative.

Review the material in this guide and make notes of specific areas for special emphasis.

- This guide includes notation of corresponding slides to help you facilitate the presentation.
- Make copies of the participant handout for each person. This handout includes “fill-in-the-blanks” sections. The appropriate answers are underlined in this instructor guide.

Check the classroom for:

- Computer/projector
- Chalkboard or flip chart
- Sufficient tables and chairs for the participants
- Copies of the participant handout for each person
- Pens/pencils for participants

Arrange the room so that each church team sits around an individual table and you have ample room to move among the teams.

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## I. Introduction (5 Minutes)

Prior to the beginning of the session, adjust the projector and show slide #1 (Starting Spiritual Conversations with Postmoderns) and #2 (Credits).

Distribute participant handouts.

Let the participants know the material is theirs to keep and encourage them to take notes. The participant material includes:

- purpose
- objectives
- “fill-in-the-blanks” for the lecture
- application exercises

*We’ve all been in this situation—a neighbor moves in next door, or a friend needs to have a church support system in their life, or maybe a coworker expresses feelings of emptiness and a lack of a sense of fulfillment in life. We want to tell them about Christ and all he’s done in our lives, but we don’t know where to start. In today’s world, it seems like most people have given up on Jesus. Right and wrong have been replaced by “right for now.” True and false have given way to “truth or dare” thrill seeking, and faith can seem like an obsolete antique next to today’s relativism and skepticism.*

*Don’t let the apparent boredom of the dominant culture fool you; everyone is looking for meaning in their lives.*

*Whether it’s in relationships with other people, caring for pets, working long hours, following a sport fanatically, reading self-help books, watching reality television, or whatever else people do with their lives, we’re all looking for something that provides meaning.*

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Slides 1-2

The purpose of this module is to improve the church's witness to postmoderns.

The objectives for this module are to:

- Become aware of the impacts of postmodernism on culture and belief.
- Explore strategies for overcoming postmodern resistance to the Gospel.
- Learn questions that can be used to start spiritual conversations with postmoderns.

Review the schedule for this module:

Introduction	5 mins.
Lecture	20 mins.
Small Group Exercise	20 mins.
Action Planning	10 mins.
Wrap-up	5 mins.

Slides 3-4

Slide 5



## II. Lecture (20 Minutes)

- I. Postmodernism permeates American culture.
- A. Many people believe there is no single truth and are suspicious of anything claiming to be absolute.
  - B. They may even doubt there is such a thing as “reality,” believing instead that each person creates their own reality.
  - C. Relativism, a common element of postmodern thought, declares all points of view equally valid.
  - D. People, especially young people, who value being seen as bright or smart have been conditioned by postmodernism to reject religion on the basis of perceived flaws in logic, scientific proof, or apparent contradictions within the faith community.

II. The apostle Paul faces a situation similar to postmodernism when he travels to Athens in Acts 17: 16-34.

- A. Paul finds the city full of false idols, a community immersed in relativism, and begins spiritual conversations with the people he meets in the marketplace.
- B. Soon, he is engaged by a group of local philosophers who seem open to considering the Gospel as just another of their many religions.
- C. Paul tells them there is one true God who “...gives everyone life and breath and everything else” and that God has “set a day when he will judge the world with justice.”
- D. When he tells them about Jesus’ resurrection, some of the people dismiss Paul, but some of them believe and become his followers.

Slides 6-10

Slides 11-15

<sup>16</sup> While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup> Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup> You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” <sup>21</sup> (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Acts 17: 16-21

# Notes

III. A positive effect of postmodernism is that people, like the philosophers Paul met in Athens, are curious about the meaningful experiences of others.

A. Over time, postmodernism has increased the cultural desire to use a variety of experiences in the search for value and meaning. Though they may be resistant to “organized religion,” people will listen to sincere expressions of belief.

B. Remember that postmoderns are suspicious of absolutes and skeptical of anything that may be contrived or insincere. The effective witness first establishes a trusting friendship.

C. Honest friendship creates a safe environment where both people can share their experiences, beliefs and faith.

IV. Many people who are trapped in postmodernism are former church goers.

A. Lapsed churchgoers often deeply desire spiritual conversations.

B. Those who have experienced breaks in relationships at church may have a difficult time trusting churchgoers even though they sense the absence of God in their lives.

C. People who feel abandoned by God because of some past or present suffering may be hesitant to accept the Gospel as truth, even though they want to believe.

D. People who have been hurt by the church are often eager to tell you about their past. By listening and acknowledging their pain, you show the love of Christ that overcomes past wrongs.

## Starter Questions for a Lapsed Former Churchgoer

1. If you could ask God a question what would it be?
2. What is your idea of heaven?
3. What is something you believe will last forever?
4. What do you feel strongly enough about to protest?
5. What is one thing you are sure about?

Slides 16-19

Slides 20-24

Slide 25

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# Notes

V. A rapidly growing section of the population from Generation X or Y has grown up without the influence of religion.

A. These young people are vulnerable to misconceptions about God, religion and the church because they draw their information from popular culture, television, movies and their own past experiences.

B. As part of the postmodern generation, the young and unchurched are likely to be open to conversation.

C. First, build a relationship and develop rapport with individuals you encounter. Your day-to-day life of faith is a witness of God's grace

## Starter Questions for the Young & Unchurched

1. Do you give much thought to God and spiritual things?
2. What is something you think will last forever?
3. Do you feel you have a purpose or calling in life?
4. What do you have in common with your parents?
5. What traditions did your family have?
6. When was the most peaceful day you've had?

VI. Postmodernism presents a challenge to the church, however it can be overcome by congregations and individuals who are genuinely engaged in their community.

A. Keep the conversation going. An honest relationship and patience are essential.

B. Don't force it. Your day-to-day life with Christ speaks louder than your words.

C. Remember, the Spirit is working in each of our lives. God proceeds us in our relationships with the unchurched.

D. Consider each individual's comfort level with spiritual matters when sharing your faith.

E. People who have grown up in a postmodern world are conditioned to avoid conflict. If you find you disagree on an issue or topic, it may be best to "agree to disagree." Presenting your ideas as right or superior will likely damage your new relationship.

F. Propose, rather than pronounce your theological beliefs.

Slides 26-29

Slide 30

Slides 31-37

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### III. Small Group Exercise (20 Minutes)

This exercise provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on the information presented and begin to apply it to their lives.

Participants should break into groups of three to five. Instruct them to introduce themselves to each other if necessary and to spend a few minutes sharing their reactions to the lecture portion. What was surprising, challenging, or interesting to them in the presentation?

Next, invite groups to spend the next fifteen minutes completing the exercise on the participant handout.

**Tell participants:**

*Starting spiritual conversations with postmoderns in the community is important to building God's kingdom. As we build relationships with unchurched people, sometimes the first step to starting spiritual conversations can be difficult to take. Some questions to help you were provided in the lecture. These are designed specifically for talking with lapsed churchgoers and unchurched young people*

*Start by reviewing the questions on your participant handout. Then, in your small group, discuss how you might use the questions to bring spiritual topics into conversation. Answer the small group discussion questions on the handout as a group.*

*Finally, if time allows, think of ways you have successfully started spiritual conversations with postmoderns in the past, or think about ways that would be natural for you to do so. Add a few questions to the list that you will be able to use in your community.*

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Slides 38-40

**From the Participant Guide****Starter Questions for a Lapsed Former Churchgoer**

1. If you could ask God a question what would it be?
2. What is your idea of heaven?
3. What is something you believe will last forever?
4. What do you feel strongly enough about to protest?
5. What is one thing you are sure about?

**Starter Questions for the Young & Unchurched**

1. Do you give much thought to God and spiritual things?
2. What is something you think will last forever?
3. Do you feel you have a purpose or calling in life?
4. What do you have in common with your parents?
5. What traditions did your family have?
6. When was the most peaceful day you've had?

*Small Group Discussion Questions:  
Circle the questions in each group that seem most useful and appealing to you. Why did you choose these questions?*

*What kinds of spiritual conversations could you begin with the questions? Choose two or three questions as a group. Then take a moment to predict how the conversations could proceed and what you would share with an unchurched friend.*

*Take a moment to step into someone else's shoes. If you were an unchurched postmodern, how would you feel if someone*

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*asked you these questions? Choose one or two questions and discuss how it might make you feel.*

Ask if there are any questions about the activity, and when participants understand the assignment, invite them to begin. Watch the time during the activity, and tell groups when two minutes remain. Walk among the groups and answer questions or encourage group participation.

End the activity by reminding participants of the following key points from the lecture:

1. The Spirit proceeds us in our conversations, guiding our relationships and helping us know when it is time to speak and time to be quiet.
2. Our life, 24/7, and our love for others is how we best represent God in this world.

## IV. Action Planning (10 Minutes)

Now that the small groups have spent some time working with the information presented in the lecture, individuals should be prepared to identify postmodern individuals who need the Gospel.

Use the remaining time to work individually to start planning how to apply what has been learned in this module. The chart in the participant guide asks participants to list people they know who they want to talk to about God.

The instructions from the participant guide follow:

*Use the table below to plan the spiritual conversations you want to have with friends or acquaintances living in a postmodern world.*

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Slides 41-42

*Identify the relationship building steps you need to take to establish trust before you can have a conversation about spiritual matters. Then, consider what kind of question you would ask to start a spiritual conversation with each individual.*

People in the Postmodern World	Steps to Build our Relationship	Possible Questions to Start Spiritual Conversations
Unchurched young people:		
Lapsed churchgoers:		

## VI. Wrap-up (5 minutes)

This section provides an opportunity to close the module.

- Ask participants to share their thoughts about the module.
- If time allows, they may share the results of their evaluation and planning activity with other groups.
- Answer any questions and provide encouragement for the plans groups have identified.

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