GARDEN

Relational Evangelism Study

GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

Week 7 - Putting It All Together
From Preparation to Real Conversation

BIG IDEA

Prepared evangelism is not a script. It is the ability to listen, ask, explain, respond, admit limits, use resources wisely, and continue the relationship as the conversation unfolds.

Leader Preparation

Purpose of Week 7

Week 7 integrates the entire GARDEN process through realistic conversation practice. Participants should experience that preparation provides flexibility rather than a script. They practice opening, listening, asking, explaining, checking understanding, handling follow-ups, admitting unknowns, using resources appropriately, and ending with a wise next step.

The Stage Three Project moves from written preparation to **demonstrated conversational readiness**.

Before the Meeting

Read **Acts 8:26-40**. Practice your own Stage Three conversation aloud. Notice where your explanation becomes long, technical, or rehearsed. Prepare to participate in the Conversation Lab rather than merely supervise it.

Your Role

Create a safe practice environment. This is not a debate tournament and not an apologetics exam. Help participants improve clarity, listening, tone, flexibility, and faithfulness. Do not rescue every participant by answering the objection for them; the goal is to help them discover what they can do and what they still need to learn.

> **Practice should expose gaps without creating shame.**

Participant Study Begins

How to Use This Study

Read the material aloud together, switching readers at each section break. When you reach a **DISCUSS** section, pause and discuss the questions as a group. When you reach a **REFLECT** or **MY STAGE THREE PROJECT** section, take a few minutes to write individually before continuing. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages should also be read aloud together.

> **No one needs to teach the lesson. Work through it together.**

Scripture First

As you read **Acts 8:26-40**, pay attention to the movement of the conversation. Notice **Philip's attentiveness, his opening question, the Ethiopian's question, Philip's explanation, and where the conversation eventually leads.**

Acts 8:26-40

DISCUSS

1. How does Philip enter the conversation?

2. What role does a question play before Philip begins explaining?

3. What does Philip do once he understands what the man is asking?

4. Does the conversation stay at the level of questions, or does it eventually include a clear explanation of Jesus?

5. What parts of this encounter depend on God's providence, and what parts involve Philip's attentive participation?

> **LEADER NOTE - A CONVERSATION WITH MOVEMENT**
>
> This passage gives Week 7 a useful integration point: attentiveness, a question, listening, explanation, Scripture, Jesus, and response. Do not imply that every conversation will move this quickly or end in conversion. Acts records a particular providential encounter. The transferable lesson is that faithful engagement can involve multiple GARDEN practices in one unfolding conversation.

You Have Been Building Toward This

For six weeks, your Stage Three Project has been developing one piece at a time.

Week 1: You chose a person.
Week 2: You identified an issue that may actually matter to them.
Week 3: You identified what you know and where your knowledge runs out.
Week 4: You developed thoughtful questions.
Week 5: You researched and built a Christian response.
Week 6: You personalized that response for the actual person.

Now we put the pieces together.

The goal is not to memorize a conversation. The goal is to become capable of having one.

Real Conversations Do Not Follow the Outline

On paper, preparation looks orderly.

UNDERSTAND -> QUESTION -> EXPLAIN -> RESPOND -> RESOURCE

A real conversation may look nothing like that.

You ask a question. The person changes the subject. You answer briefly. They raise an objection you did not expect. You admit you do not know. They tell a story that changes how you understand the original issue. You listen. Three days later you send a resource. Two weeks later you return.

That is not failure.

Preparation gives you tools. Wisdom helps you decide which tool belongs in the moment.

GARDEN was never intended to be a script. It is a framework for faithful engagement over time.

> **LEADER NOTE - DO NOT GRADE THE CONVERSATION BY SEQUENCE**
>
> During practice, participants may worry that they forgot a GARDEN letter or did things "out of order." Correct that immediately. Evaluate whether they listened, understood, spoke truthfully, handled the person with care, and knew what a wise next step might be.

A Healthy Conversational Rhythm

Although there is no script, several movements often appear in healthy conversations.

LISTEN

Pay attention to the words, reasons, experiences, and emotions actually being expressed.

ASK

Clarify meaning. Discover reasons. Explore assumptions. Open doors.

EXPLAIN

When appropriate, state what Christianity teaches and why you think it is true.

CHECK

Do not assume your explanation landed the way you intended.

"Does that make sense?"
"What do you think about that?"
"Is that getting at your concern, or am I missing it?"

RESPOND

Address follow-up questions or objections where you are prepared to do so.

ADMIT

When you reach the boundary of your knowledge, say so.

> **"I don't know enough about that part to answer responsibly."**

CONTINUE

Decide what the relationship needs next: another question, more research, a resource, prayer, time, or simply returning later.

> **A good conversation is responsive, not rehearsed.**

Do Not Dump Everything You Know

One of the dangers of becoming prepared is that you finally have information you are excited to use.

Your friend asks one question.

You give them the entire research project.

Cosmology. Morality. Fine-tuning. Consciousness. The resurrection. Manuscripts. Objective truth. A book recommendation. Three podcasts. And a forty-minute explanation of the Kalam Cosmological Argument.

The information may be excellent.

The conversation may be terrible.

> **Answer the question in front of you, not every question you have learned to answer.**

Begin with the short version. Let the other person pull for more.

If they want depth, go deeper.

If they want time to think, give them time.

If they change the subject, you do not have to drag them back.

> **Preparedness should make you more flexible, not more overwhelming.**

LEADER NOTE - WATCH FOR APOLOGETICS DUMPING

This is especially relevant for enthusiastic participants. In practice, encourage concise first answers. A useful coaching prompt is: **"Could you say that in half the time and then ask what they think?"**

Do Not Be Afraid to State the Christian View

The opposite danger is hiding forever behind questions.

Questions are powerful. Listening matters. Relationships matter.

But Christianity is not merely a method for helping other people examine their worldview.

Christians have something to say.

At some point, the person may ask:

> **"So what do you believe?"**

Answer them.

Or you may realize the conversation has created an appropriate opportunity to say:

"Can I tell you how I think Christianity makes sense of that?"

The gospel itself is a message, not a question.

Questions can prepare the soil. They cannot replace the seed.

Relational evangelism must remain evangelism.

> **LEADER NOTE - KEEP CHRIST AT THE CENTER**
>
> A participant can become skilled at worldview discussion without ever clearly speaking about Christ. Week 7 should prevent that drift. Not every conversation must contain a full gospel presentation, but the long game should genuinely be moving toward Christ rather than merely producing interesting philosophical discussions.

When the Conversation Surprises You

Your preparation will never cover everything.

Suppose your topic is the problem of evil. You have prepared carefully. Then your friend suddenly asks:

"What about people who never hear about Jesus?"

You have three options.

Pretend

Say something confident because silence feels uncomfortable.

Panic

Assume the entire conversation has gone badly because you were not ready for that question.

Stay in the Conversation

Ask what they mean. Share what you know if useful. Admit what you do not know. Make a note to research it. Return later.

Stage Three readiness on one topic does not require Stage Three readiness on every topic.

Your confidence should come partly from knowing that an unexpected question no longer has to defeat you.

Conversation in Practice - Round One

Imagine your Stage Three person says the statement or objection you have been preparing for.

A useful opening might be:

"I was thinking about what you said the other day..."

From there, the conversation could move in many directions.

You might ask one of your Week 4 questions.

You might discover that you misunderstood the issue.

You might give your two-minute explanation.

You might hear a follow-up you prepared for.

You might hear one you did not.

You might decide the best next step is simply to listen.

DISCUSS

What makes "I was thinking about what you said the other day" a useful way to reopen a conversation?

What signs might tell you the person wants a deeper explanation?

What signs might tell you to stop talking and ask another question?

How can you tell whether your answer actually addressed the concern?

What would a good ending look like even if nobody changed their mind?

Practice: The GARDEN Conversation Lab

This week, the main exercise is practice.

Work in groups of two or three. One person will be the **Christian**. One will play the **conversation partner**. If there is a third person, that person will be the **observer**.

For the Christian

Use your actual Stage Three topic. Do not try to recite everything you prepared. Listen and respond naturally.

For the Conversation Partner

Use the real objection or concern the Christian has been preparing for. You do not need to impersonate the actual person. Simply make the conversation realistic. Ask follow-ups. If the Christian says something unclear, say so.

For the Observer

Do not score who "won." Watch for the quality of the conversation.

Notice:

- **Did the Christian listen?**
- **Were the questions natural?**
- **Was the objection represented fairly?**
- **Was the explanation understandable?**
- **Did the Christian talk too much?**
- **Did they respond well to uncertainty?**
- **Was the tone gracious and respectful?**
- **Was there a natural next step?**

After the practice, give feedback in this order:

1. **One thing that worked well.**
2. **One place you became confused or felt the conversation tighten.**
3. **One question or adjustment that might improve the next attempt.**

LEADER NOTE - PROTECT THE PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

This is practice, not performance. Do not allow participants to embarrass one another with obscure objections or turn role-play into competitive debate. The conversation partner should create realistic resistance, not attempt to defeat the Christian. The observer should comment on clarity, listening, tone, and next steps rather than theological sophistication alone.

Practice: Round Two

Switch roles and practice again.

This time, deliberately introduce one unexpected development:

The person changes what they mean.
The person tells a personal story.
The person raises a follow-up objection.
The person says, "I don't know."
The person asks something the Christian cannot answer.
The person becomes uninterested and wants to move on.

The Christian's job is not to force the prepared material back into the conversation.

> **Respond to the person who is actually in front of you.**

REFLECT - After Practice

What felt most natural?

Where did I sound rehearsed, overly technical, or unclear?

Did I listen long enough before responding?

Did I use questions to understand or mainly to steer?

Could I explain the Christian response in ordinary language?

What unexpected question or turn exposed another gap in my preparation?

What would I change before having this conversation with my actual person?

MY STAGE THREE PROJECT

Week 7 - Conversation Plan and Practice

Your goal is not to script what your person will say. Prepare your side of the conversation while leaving room for the person to surprise you.

My person: _____

My issue:

1. NATURAL OPENING - How might I naturally begin or return to this subject?

2. FIRST QUESTION - What question would help me understand where the person is today?

3. SHORT EXPLANATION - What is my clearest short version of the Christian response?

4. CHECK - How could I invite the person to react rather than continuing to lecture?

5. LIKELY FOLLOW-UPS - What 2-3 questions or objections am I prepared to address?

6. MY BOUNDARY - Where might I need to say, "I don't know"?

7. RESOURCE - What resource, if any, might fit naturally?

8. NEXT STEP - What are several good ways this conversation could end without forcing a decision?

Prepare the conversation you hope to have. Be ready for the conversation you actually get.

LEADER NOTE - GOOD ENDINGS ARE VARIED

A good ending may be a clear gospel invitation. It may also be "Let's talk about this again," a resource, a question to think about, permission to research something, prayer during a difficult moment, or simply a strengthened relationship. Do not define every practice conversation by whether it reaches a conversion appeal.

What Does Success Look Like Now?

Return to the question from Week 1.

Suppose you have the conversation.

You listen well.

You ask thoughtful questions.

You explain Christianity accurately.

You treat the objection fairly.

You admit what you do not know.

You leave the person with something worth thinking about.

And they remain unconvinced.

> **Did you fail?**

No.

You cannot manufacture belief.

Your responsibility is faithfulness.

> **Plant. Water. Trust God for the growth.**

But notice something else: you are no longer the Christian from Week 1 who felt that one difficult question could end the conversation.

You have learned a process.

You know how to listen, ask, research, prepare, explain, return, and continue growing.

> **That is the deeper goal of the Stage Three Project.**

DISCUSSION

1. Which part of a real conversation is hardest for you: opening, listening, questioning, explaining, handling objections, admitting uncertainty, or ending well?

2. Why can preparation make some people talk too much?

3. Why can a questions-first approach make some people reluctant ever to state what Christianity teaches?

4. What is the difference between a conversation having direction and being controlled?

5. How should we respond when the person changes the subject away from the issue we prepared?

6. What does it mean to "check" whether an explanation actually addressed the person's concern?

7. What would make someone want to have another spiritual conversation with you even if they disagree strongly?

8. How has your understanding of successful evangelism changed since Week 1?

> **LEADER NOTE - QUESTION EIGHT PREPARES WEEK 8**
>
> Listen carefully to how participants define success now. The desired shift is from immediate outcome to faithful participation without reducing evangelism to vague friendliness. Faithfulness includes love, truth, preparation, courage, and appropriate movement toward Christ.

This Week in the GARDEN

This week, move from preparation toward faithful availability.

PRACTICE ONCE MORE

Say your short explanation aloud. Practice one or two likely follow-ups. Keep it conversational.

LOOK FOR AN OPEN DOOR

Do not manufacture a conversation. But do not hide if an appropriate opportunity appears.

USE WHAT FITS

You do not need to use every question, argument, or resource you prepared. Use what serves the actual conversation.

RETURN IF NEEDED

If the conversation exposes another gap, write it down, research it, and return.

PRAY

Pray for courage without pressure, preparedness without pride, sensitivity without fear, and genuine opportunities to point your person toward Christ.

Pray Together

Pray for the actual conversations represented in the room.

Ask God for **open doors, wise speech, attentive listening, clear explanations, courage to speak of Christ, humility about what you do not know, and trust in God for the growth.**

Before Week 8

Bring your entire Stage Three Project next week.

You will evaluate whether you are now Stage Three ready on this issue using the five-part standard:

UNDERSTAND -> QUESTION -> EXPLAIN -> RESPOND -> RESOURCE

Then we will turn toward what happens after the course.

Week 8 - The Long Game: Becoming a Prepared and Faithful Christian

The goal was never to become prepared on only one topic. It was to learn a process you can repeat for the rest of your life - and eventually help other Christians learn it too.

After the Meeting - Leader Reflection

Could participants move naturally between questions and explanation?

Did anyone dump too much information?

Did anyone hide behind questions and avoid stating the Christian view?

Were participants comfortable admitting a limit to their knowledge?

Did observers give constructive relational feedback rather than simply judging arguments?

Did participants recognize multiple faithful ways a conversation can end?

Who appears Stage Three ready already, and who needs another round of research or practice?

Did practice reveal that anyone has been preparing for the wrong issue?

Leader Preview - Week 8

Week 8 evaluates Stage Three readiness and turns the course outward. Participants should leave with two continuing plans: a **My People Plan** for relational evangelism and a **My Preparedness Plan** for lifelong growth. Explicitly introduce multiplication: someone who has completed GARDEN, has the Leader's Guide, and is willing to facilitate rather than lecture can help another group work through the same process.