

Ben Best, Co-host

Welcome to *Defragmenting*, a podcast promoting biblical integrity and thoughtful Christianity.

Ben Best, Co-host

When Christians think about sharing the gospel, many of us tend to think primarily in terms of making a presentation. Dr. Randy Newman, the Senior Fellow for Evangelism and Apologetics at the CS Lewis Institute, is convinced that we need to think much more about how to engage people in conversations. For years, he's been teaching that asking questions is an effective way to accomplish. Dr. Newman is the author of *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*, recently released in its third edition. He joined Dr. Keith Plummer to talk about it. They discuss why asking questions and listening well are so important. Some of the top questions non-Christians ask about Christians, why the new edition includes a new chapter on science and Christianity, the difference between evangelism and pre-evangelism, and more. If you'd like to grow more confident about talking to people about the good news of Jesus Christ, we think you'll find this encouraging and helpful. Let's listen in to their conversation today.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Today, I have the delight of talking with my friend Randy Newman about what is one of my favorite books on apologetics and evangelism. Randy is the Senior Fellow for Apologetics and Evangelism at the C.S. Lewis Institute in the Washington, DC, area. He served with Campus Crusade for Christ, now CRU, for over 30 years, and has authored a number of books, including *Bringing the Gospel Home: Witnessing to Family Members, Close Friends, and Others Who Know You Well*, *Engaging with Jewish People: Understanding Their World*, *Sharing Good News*, *Corner Conversations: Engaging Dialogues About God and Life*, *Unlikely Converts: Improbable Stories of Faith What They Teach Us About Evangelism*, and the book we're going to be talking about today, recently released by Kregel in its third edition, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Heart, The Way Jesus Did*. Randy, welcome to the podcast. And congratulations on the new edition.

Dr. Randy Newman

Thanks. Great to be with you. So good to see you again.

Dr. Keith Plummer

You, too. Well, this has something of a deja vu feel, because about two years after the first edition was published, we talked about it in another internet venue, and that means that we are old.

Dr. Randy Newman

Well, okay. I don't see why you wanted to start there, but okay, fine. I'll give you that. That's right, though. We talked about that book when it first came out.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Randy Newman

God has really blessed that book. It's really been fun to watch.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, I am looking forward to hearing about the ways that God has used it. Before we go into the book, though, can you tell us just a little bit about your coming to faith and something about your spiritual journey, just so that people get an idea of who it is that is behind this book?

Dr. Randy Newman

Sure. Delighted to. Well, I grew up in suburbs of New York City, out on Long Island, in a Jewish family. My family didn't hear anything about Jesus for a very long time, other than my dad used his name in some pretty unkind ways. So I took Judaism pretty seriously, I think more so than the rest of my family. I was searching, I think. I had my bar mitzvah when I was 13. When I was about 16, I said on Yom Kippur, Okay, I'm going to do everything you're supposed to do on the day of Atonement, get my sins forgiven by God so I could be close to him. It just didn't work. It didn't connect me to God the way I had hoped it would. I remember walking home from synagogue, and I realized I was wearing dress shoes because I was dressed up in a suit and I wear dress shoes. I remember that in my preparation for bar mitzvah, I learned that on Yom Kippur, you're not supposed to wear dress shoes. That's not in the Bible, by the way. That's rabbinic. I just thought, Oh, that's why I didn't connect with God because I wore the wrong shoes.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Oh, that's good.

Dr. Randy Newman

Then I thought, No, there's got to be a better way. That began for me searching and looking and talking to Christian friends and eventually reading the gospel of Matthew and reading C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity, and the Lord used those things to pull it all together and show me that the fulfillment of Judaism is the Messiah Jesus. That was over 40 years ago, and I've been delighting in how those two worlds really are inseparable or should be inseparable ever since. That was the quick version.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I'm sure there's much more to it. Concerning the premise of the book, before we get to the latest edition, just the overall premise of the book, I know that those worlds of considering Jesus as a rabbi and how rabbis taught, as well as your experience, your extensive experience in campus ministry and evangelism, came together. Tell us how that helped you formulate this idea of questioning evangelism.

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. Well, it really started out of a great deal of frustration. I was on staff with Campus Crusade, as you mentioned. My training in evangelism was that I, as the evangelist, would do the vast majority of the talking, that I would make a presentation. On the campuses where I was assigned, East Coast, big city campuses, very secular, lots of Jewish students, lots of Catholic students, lots of skepticism, the presentation approach just didn't work. We didn't even see any decent conversations, let alone conversions and decisions. I just started experimenting because I had to, and I just tried to make it more of a dialogue, more of my asking more questions than making statements and drawing people out. It started from... I mean, that's my Jewish culture, and I did a lot of training in Jewish evangelism. I told people, You should really ask a lot of questions when you're talking to Jewish people. People started saying to me, That's true, not just with Jewish people. I went, Oh, I don't think I realized that. I just started experimenting when we were in Baltimore at Towson State, where at first, again, we just didn't see any fruit.

Dr. Randy Newman

But then with this method of just asking a lot more questions, making it more of a two-way conversation instead of a one-way presentation, just had much better results. I mean, I'm not saying revival broke out or we saw millions, but it was just a much better engagement with people. When I started teaching on that, quite a few people said, You got to write this down. These are some good ideas. And so the book flowed out of that.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, you've answered some of this already, but could you go into a little bit more detail as to what are some of the benefits that you see in this approach in making more use of questions and engaging people in spiritual subjects?

Dr. Randy Newman

Well, I'm going to answer your question with a question.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I would expect nothing less.

Dr. Randy Newman

What happens in your mind when I ask you a question? Now, you don't have to answer. I'm posing this question also to your listeners. What happens when someone asks you a question? Well, doesn't your mind start formulating an answer or start exploring and asking questions? In other words, doesn't hearing a question engage you in the answering process? And that's what a question does. And that's what Jesus did so masterfully. When people ask him a question, so very often he responded in a way that you wouldn't expect, in a way that wasn't a direct answer. Now, quite often he did eventually give them an answer, but not right away. And most often, I think, his answer to a question was a question like, Is it okay for us to heal on the Sabbath? Well, if you had an animal that fell into a ditch, wouldn't you pull it out? Or, Should we pay taxes to Caesar? Let me see a coin. Whose face is on the coin? You see what happens is people start going, Oh, I actually know the answer to this already, or I know something that helps me get involved in the answering process.

Dr. Randy Newman

Instead of it being someone asking a question and then watching you at arm's length try to answer, it engages them in the process and moves them from unbelief to belief or from doubt to, gee, maybe I should consider this. It's just a more engaging way of learning. It's funny. We know this in the education world. If you take classes in education, here's how you ask students questions. We know it in the counseling world. I'm sure that more and more people in the business world are learning this is how you manage people, sales people. You do more asking of questions than making sales pitches. I'm just trying to say, I wonder how this works itself out in evangelism.

Dr. Keith Plummer

I tell students in apologetics something that Blaise Pascal said about people being more willing or inclined to believe something that they feel that they have discovered than that they are merely told. It sounds like what you're describing is that by asking questions, we're inviting people to enter into discovery, not simply telling them something.

Dr. Randy Newman

Absolutely, yes. I think that's exactly right. I love that distinction of discovering versus just hearing or cold. We do need to be careful. I don't want to promote this idea because Hey, this is more effective and you'll get more converts. I really think it's more of we want to engage with whole persons, with people, because they're made in the image of God, and we want to love them, and we want to share the best news with them, not to defeat them or to defeat their arguments, but to win them to the savior.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, before we talk about some of the revisions and updates of the third edition, the book is almost 20 years old now, and I was curious as to what is among some of the most encouraging feedback that you have gotten from people as they have put this into practice?

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. Oh, thanks for that. The most encouraging feedback, and I've heard this a fair amount of times, people would say, I read your book and I feel like, Oh, I can do that. I can ask questions. For a whole lot of people, evangelism is really intimidating. I don't know if I could say those things. What happens if people ask me questions and I don't know the answers to? I'm just so afraid of rejection. There's so much working against it. What people have said to me about your book is, the idea about asking questions and being a good listener, I think I can do that. I'm going to try that. Some people even come back and say, Hey, I've been trying to talk to whoever, my uncle, my neighbor, my brother for decades, and nothing has gotten through. The other day, I tried asking him some questions, and we had one of the best conversations we've ever had. Hey, here we go. It's been very encouraging along those lines. I still think evangelism is difficult. I write books about it, and I'm still intimidated by it.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, I've heard you say on many occasions that you don't think that you have the gift of evangelism. Is that correct?

Dr. Randy Newman

I have said that. I've been challenged by people, so I now put it in a different way. I do think God has called me as an evangelist, but in the sense of the evangelist in Ephesians 4 for the purpose of equipping the saints. So the kind of evangelist that we usually think of the Billy Graham or the Bill Bright, I don't think that's what God has called me to. I had a very good friend really challenge me and say, evangelism isn't listed as a spiritual gift in any of the New Testament. It's listed as an office or a calling in Ephesians 4. I'm not the kind of evangelist who just can't not evangelize. I've heard a lot of speakers say that. I cannot imagine not evangelizing. I always think they're going, Oh, no. I can imagine very vividly. I hear a lot of stories of you like, Every time I get in an airplane, I talk to the person next to me about Jesus, and I think, Oh, man. Every time I get in an airplane, I put on my noise canceling headphones. I love those things. I'm not that kind of evangelist, but I do think God has me to equip the saints that way.

Dr. Randy Newman

By the way, I think as a fellow struggler, I think that that has been helpful for a lot of people because I don't find it to be easy or natural or normal or that thing.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yeah, most definitely. The times that I have read you and heard you confess to, as you just did, the sense of intimidation that you still feel, the resistance that you have, that is encouraging because it could very well be that someone says, Oh, this guy wrote this book on this. This just comes so naturally to him, and he doesn't know what it's like to be me. But yeah, I have

appreciated the fact that you have let people into, Oh, this isn't without some reservation or difficulty for me.

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. I hope this isn't stating it too strongly. I think there really was a breakthrough for me. I would say for the first at least 10 years on staff with Cru, Campus Crusade. I just kept thinking, as I would hear Bill Bright, the founder of the organization, other people up front, I kept thinking, at some point, someday, this is going to be easy for me. And it never did. It just never got easy. And then there was this moment, and I really do think it was when I was at Towson in Baltimore, which was a really difficult campus, by the way. At one point it was, wait a minute, maybe this is never going to be easy for me. Can God use me anyway? Maybe this is never going to be comfortable. Maybe, this is a horrible thought, maybe I'm lifting up comfort as too high of a goal or too high of an idol. Maybe God can use me as a very uncomfortable, struggling evangelist. And it was, oh, yeah. Then I started seeing verses that I had read in the Bible, like Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, where he says, I was with you with much fear and trembling. Okay, that's my guy. All right. Remember, I think it's in Acts 18, he was so anxious about going into Corinthians, this really immoral and difficult city. It says that angels had to come and comfort and strengthen him. I thought, okay, all right. There we go. All right. The nervous, anxious, struggling evangelist, God can use that because the power is in the message and the power of God's word and his truth, not the boldness or the comfort of the messenger.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yeah, there's great relief in that. Well, Third edition, almost 20 years old. What's new about this and why?

Dr. Randy Newman

Well, I had this horrifying moment. I was using the book as a textbook in a seminary class that I was teaching, and one of the students was a campus minister, a woman who said, Dr. Newman, I really like your book. I'm not so sure I can use it with too many of my students. You have a lot of illustrations in there related to September 11th, 2001, and none of my students were alive then. I went, oh. I had to go back and read it. I wrote it, assuming people just knew all about that day, and and knew the horror and the pain of that day, which was accurate for probably the first 10 years after the book came out. But now it's ancient history, like World War II. That was the spark that said, you know what? I think this might be worth revising. And the publisher liked that idea a lot. A whole lot was just updating some illustrations and more recent things.

Dr. Randy Newman

There are two things that were pretty substantial changes. One was the chapter on homosexuality needed to be brought up to the current time when that has become so much bigger of an issue. It's the first issue. It's the initial roadblock that stops people from even thinking about this. The teaching of the Bible hasn't changed at all, but the way I wrote that chapter needed to be updated in light of current challenges.

Dr. Keith Plummer

You break it down into three parts. The first part is dealing with why ask questions, which we somewhat discussed. Now we're dealing with the second part, where you have a very helpful section with a number of chapters looking at what are the questions that people are asking about Christianity and Christians, one of them being why are Christians so homophobic, and some other questions such as, what's so good about marriage? Why are Christians so intolerant? Just helping us to be mindful of where people's thought lies with respect to Christianity. And then the third part of the book, why aren't questions and answers enough, which I do want to get to. But since we're still in that middle portion, I know one of the things that you added in that section was a new chapter about science.

Dr. Randy Newman

Yes.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Tell us a bit about why you did that.

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. Well, first, let me back up and say, when I teach I want Christians to think that we usually only think in two categories or two phases. One is, what's the question people are asking? And then secondly, what's the answer? The first is, okay, what's the question? And that includes being a really good listener and finding out, okay, now why is the person asking this particular question? And are they asking it with an intellectual curiosity? Are they asking it with an emotional pain? What are they really asking? Then secondly, what does the Bible say as the answer or answers? But I want to add, and those are absolutely crucial, but there also is, Okay, but now what do I say? How do I say it? How do I take the answer that's in the Bible and deliver it to someone that doesn't just dump truck a whole load of facts on them? That's where I think dialogue and conversation can be better. That's this backdrop.

Dr. Randy Newman

The chapter on science. Well, again, as we're looking around and listening, what are people asking or what are people's objections to the gospel? Why are people either rejecting the gospel or rejecting even the notion of even thinking about it. I just think there's a whole lot of people who, No, I'm not going to consider your stupid beliefs for a second. No, they don't even enter the conversation. So there's work we need to do just to even begin the conversation. I just started hearing and finding and seeing more and more people say, What is it that you Christians have against science? Why are you so anti-science? I don't know if you noticed this, if you heard about this, but there was a pandemic. Oh, that's right. We're still in it. The pandemic just raised a whole lot of questions to the surface. And the assumption by a lot of non-Christians, whether this is fair or not, is another whole topic. But the assumption is, well, Christians have made a bad situation worse by not getting vaccinated and by calling into question what scientists have

said. And I don't try to resolve those questions in the chapter, but I do want to look at science of how should Christians think about science? And the big point I'm trying to make in that chapter is we, Christians, we should be very positive about science. Not scientism and not the way some people believe in science as a religion, and they really do. But science in its best practice is the exploration and the study of the world that God has created with a tremendous amount of order and design and beauty. It's a study of how human beings are created and how we work best and what brings the best amount of flourishing to us. We should be very, very positive about science, not uncritically, but much more positive rather than dismissive. I've just heard a lot of very dismissive things said about science, and I think that's a mistake.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yeah. You say one point, Christians should love science and that science should lead us to worship. Could you expound on that a bit?

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. Well, for quite a few years, when I was with Campus Crusade, I was with a branch of crew that worked with university professors. What we found, and I say we, there was a whole team of us, of close to 100 of us who worked on a whole bunch of different campuses, the majority of Christian professors came from the sciences, not from the humanities and the social sciences. Now, there were plenty in that world, too, but pretty much all of us who had some weekly gathering of professors who were also Christians said more than half of the people who attended those meetings were in the fields of physics and chemistry and astronomy and not in psychology and sociology. Again, not, it wasn't 100% versus 0%. It was because these men and women saw... Well, first of all, they started with an assumption that you could study the world and get decent answers. Well, that assumes a certain level of order and logic and reason, which pointed them to a God who created the world in a way that we could study it and find answers and gave us the kinds of brains that could discover these things or study them.

Dr. Randy Newman

I've heard it from so many Christians who are in the field of science. The more they discover and learn, the more it leads them to doxology and praise. Just recently, I heard it from a guy in the world of astrophysics who studies planets. He's just like a little kid because just in the last five years, there have been such advances in technology of telescopes, of satellites, that they're learning things that people in his field have wondered about for 100 years. It's just so exciting. It points to design and order and beauty. There are scenes that they're seeing in outer space that it's taken us 10 years to get telescopes there so that we could see it. It's absolutely beautiful in both the visual way and the cognitive intellectual way. You think, why is there such beauty that far out there? It must be because God is out there and he likes it there, and he likes the same invisible beauty in the depths of the oceans.

Dr. Randy Newman

Then I heard almost the exact same thing of how exciting it is to be doing research today from a neurobiologist who studies the brain. There are things that we're learning today that are just so rich and beautiful and point in the exact opposite direction of, well, we're just random chance thrown together molecules that just so happen to, by the luck of our lucky stars, bring about a brain that's so complex. I mean, yeah, I guess that could be an answer. It seems far more reasonable to believe that there's an intelligent God who said, I'm going to make people in my image, and that's different than how I make animals. They're going to have a brain that's just wonderful to study for an entire lifetime.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yeah. As you were talking, I was thinking how frustrating it is. And this is probably on my mind most recently, because today I showed an apologetics class of clips of Richard Dawkins him talking about what faith is, believing without evidence and so forth. And one of his big objections is that religious belief offers explanations that aren't really explanations, and that it somehow shuts down the curiosity that would give rise to exploration. When in actuality, and you touch upon this in the chapter, it was the conviction that the natural world was the product of a mind that led to the expectation that while there couldn't be exhaustive understanding of it, there was some intelligibility that could be discovered. So far from being a science stopper, the conviction that creation is the result of intelligence is what motivates with the expectancy there is something that we can understand about this.

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah, right. I'm going to butcher the quote, but there's this story about a student of C.S. Lewis' who, after graduating from Oxford, was sending letters back and forth to Lewis about his faith and his growth. At one point, the student wrote to Lewis and said, I'm beginning to lose my faith in reason. I doubt whether human reason is adequate. And Lewis wrote back a very short note of, I'm very busy. I don't have time to respond at length, but I do wonder why you're using reason so much to explain to me about your lack of trust and reason. I'm beginning to doubt human reason. Let me give you my reasons why. Wait a minute. Hold on. I'll just have to think in there. But Richard Dawkins is a challenge because he's just so forceful and strong, and he's very convincing, I'm sorry to say.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Randy Newman

But there's gaps in his logic all over the place, but it's almost impossible to get through to him. I think we can get through to some of his followers.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, you say in that chapter that you are not looking to give someone all the artillery that they would need to engage someone, maybe in an academic, scientific environment and so forth, but you are trying to give people a strategy for science-faith conversations. I know that you can't go into great depth with all of the elements of that strategy, but could you just identify some of the things that you think it is important for a Christian who is speaking to a non-Christian about some of these things to have in mind?

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. So a couple of thoughts or strategies. One is I think it's important for us to try to be as positive as we can be about science? Because, again, the prevailing assumption, I think, by a lot of Christians is that we're very anti-science. Tragically, I think there's good reason why they have that assumption, because I think a lot of Christians have said some very dismissive or demeaning things. There's something terribly arrogant about saying that these brilliant scientists who have PhDs are all wrong about a topic that the person who's speaking hasn't studied on that level. I think we try need to be positive. I also think we need to try to be respectful of the person that we're talking to and about the nature of this world that God has created. There's just so much wonder and amazement. The heavens declare the glory of God. That's a verse packed with implications. We should have an attitude of awe and reverence rather than dismissiveness, and I don't know what the right word is, snarkiness or something.

Dr. Randy Newman

Then I think there's somewhere in the process of this conversation, we want to have a call to humility, both on our part and on their part. This is tricky, but good scientists admit what they don't know. Good science acknowledges Well, here's what we're discovering, here's what we're finding, and it's really helpful, but here are the questions that we still have yet to explore. That's the standard format of every academic journal article that you publish. Here's an experiment that we ran. Here's what we discovered. Well, here's our methodology. Here's what we discovered. Here's what we learned. Here's what's still left for further study, always. There needs to be a humility. Even in an examination, there were some things that scientists said a while ago, they were really strongly convinced of it, and now they look back at it and they go, Oh, maybe performing lobotomies on people really wasn't such a good idea. But at one point, that was standard. There was one point where doctors put leeches on you and drained blood out of you to try to heal diseases. Now we look back and say, I can't even find the words. So it just needs to be a humility.

Dr. Randy Newman

Again, telling about this astronomy professor that I have gotten to know, he was part of the team of people that sent this exploratory probe to Pluto. Just so excited about it. It took 10 years to get that thing there. Then finally, they started getting all sorts of feedback and photos and research and things coming back to them. What he said was, this is like the highlight of his life and the highlight of 50 other NASA astronomers. What he said was, there were so many things that we were learning and discovering, but he said there were also so many surprises. We were

surprised by things that we were learning. In other words, we expected this, but we got that. We should try to find a humility, again, for both us and for them, which I hope brings the whole conversation onto a level playing field of two people who are being respectful of each other and respectful of the subject matter.

Dr. Keith Plummer

In the third part of the book, *Why Aren't Questions and Answers Enough?* You have a chapter that is on silence. The question that you pose in that chapter is, when is it time to shut up? And which for a book on evangelism, I don't know if I've ever come across that.

Dr. Randy Newman

I'm hoping none of your listeners are thinking that they've ever thought about us right now.

Dr. Keith Plummer

When is it time to shut up? What are you getting at there? When is it time? How do we know when silence is the most appropriate response?

Dr. Randy Newman

Boy, wouldn't it be great if we had an app?

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yes.

Dr. Randy Newman

It would be like an evangelistic Geiger counter.

Dr. Keith Plummer

That's right.

Dr. Randy Newman

You hold it underneath the table, so you see it. But it tells you, Here's a question to ask, and now it's time to let them talk. But I haven't developed that app yet. Well, let me just back up again. That third section was, I felt it was important to include something in the book of not just, again, it's like that third part of the process. It's not just what's the and what's the answer, but how do we deliver the answer? And listening and have a chapter on compassion, I have a chapter on anger, about how to handle our own anger or how to handle when they get angry. I mean, these are emotional dynamics of the process that don't often get addressed in a book on evangelism. That's why I wanted to include it. Again, how to develop to be a good listener. I think it's a lifelong skill. I'm not so sure too many people ever master it, but we want to keep

improving and asking and listening and learning how to recognize what people are saying, both from the words they say, but also their facial expression and tone of voice. Then I tried to weave in a number of insights from the Book of Proverbs that tell us a lot about, sometimes you're talking to a fool, it's best not to answer a fool, or sometimes you're behaving like a fool, and it's time for you to shut up and examine your own heart.

Dr. Randy Newman

But sometimes it's recognizing that, okay, no matter how good of an answer I might give, it's not going to get through because the person isn't really open or listening, and it's learning a lot of human dynamics. There were times that Jesus didn't answer people's questions, and he realized that they were just challenging him or they were attacking him. We need to not be so naive as to think that all we need is just to deliver an answer, and it's always going to get through. There are times to say to people things like, Was that a real question? Do you really want to talk about that? Or, I don't get the idea that this is going to be a good conversation. I just feel like you're attacking me. Is that what's going on? Am I misreading it? That was a difficult chapter to write, by the way, because I've been guilty of so much. I've recently replayed experiences in my life and I thought, Oh, I won that argument and I lost that person. How painful. So we need to include those emotional components of things like listening and compassion as part of the process.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Yeah, those are very helpful sections of the book. One of the things that I wondered is, since a lot of interaction between Christians and non Christians is taking place online, are there any suggestions or tips you to offer as to how we can better use social media applying some of the things that questioning evangelism is about.

Dr. Randy Newman

Boy, oh, boy, boy. Is this now a second podcast we're going to do? No, I think that that's a whole other book. I'm not so sure I'm the person to write that book because I don't do a whole ton in the world of social media. But yes, if all of the things that we've been talking about apply to interpersonal face-to-face conversation, then they apply tenfold. The nature of most social media is you're not seeing the person you're talking to. You're not watching their facial expression. It's not really two-way communication, which is tremendously limited. It's I lobbed something out there, and then somebody lobs something back at me. But it's not really a dialogue. It's a sequence of monologues. There's something really profound and beautiful about real interpersonal face-to-face conversation. It's a beautiful thing. We just need to start with the recognition that, okay, tweeting or posting things on Facebook or whatever, that is a very limited form of communication. I'm not saying we couldn't do it, but we shouldn't expect it to do all that real, face-to-face communication does, which, by the way, has its own set of challenges. I'm sure the beginning point is, oh, it's best to say less. It's best to try to tone down as much emotion as possible to avoid loaded terms and name calling. There's some really great wisdom about delaying before hit that send button or post or whatever.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Oh, yes.

Dr. Randy Newman

There's some great wisdom of have somebody else look at it before you send it. Someone who knows you well and knows what you're trying to do who can say to you, Oh, no, No, you can't. No, no. Highlight and delete. I'm sure it can be used well, but it is loaded with all sorts of dangers. If all of those warnings in the Book of Proverbs about the power of the tongue and what James says in James 3 about the power of the tongue applies to our speech, it just seems we need to say, Okay, and how does that apply to things that I send out through a keyboard?

Dr. Keith Plummer

I can imagine someone maybe just being introduced to some of the things that you're doing in the book and thinking, well, all this question-asking is good and listening and so forth, but we got to get to the gospel. We have to get to the message. And for someone who's thinking along those lines, I wanted to share something and ask you to elaborate on it. Toward the end of the book, I believe it's in the epilogue, You say "At some point we need to shift from our pre-evangelistic conversations, plausibility building questions and common ground explorations to posing the question, Jesus asked Peter, who do you say that I am? The stakes are too for us to never make this decisive turn. We must cross the pain line and ask people to respond. For most of us, this will never feel comfortable, but comfort should never be our highest priority. We may need to repent of our worship of the idles of ease, others' acceptance, hassle-free living, and not rocking the boat. Then we can urge people to seriously consider the offer God has made to them, one of forgiveness of sins, adoption into God's family, and eternal eternal life."

Dr. Keith Plummer

Talk, if you will, about that, because the purpose of the questioning is to get people to think about the gospel and about some of the problems in their own unbelieving perspectives. But I was so glad that you included this in terms of the purpose of the pre-evangelism is, ideally, to, at some point, get to the evangelism, which is calling people to respond. Would you say whatever you would like about that?

Dr. Randy Newman

Well, and it starts with clear definitions of what is pre evangelism and what is evangelism. I hope I spell that out. So evangelism is the verbal proclaiming of the gospel message. We need to have very, very clear boundaries of what that is. It's telling someone, either speaking it or writing it, saying, Here's who God is, here's who we are, here's who Jesus is, and you need to respond. God sent his son to atone for the sins of sinful people, and if they put their trust in him, they can be saved. We need to formulate clear ways of articulating that precise message, not blur the

lines around it. That's evangelism. Pre-evangelism is all sorts of conversations that we can have, questions we can ask, articles we can ask people to read, sharing our testimony. There's a lot in there. But it's important to remember that's pre-evangelism. And so there comes a point, like I'm trying to say, is, okay, we've done a fair amount of this pre-evangelistic stuff. I hope I've helped you move from, No, I'm not even going to consider this, to, gee, I really should think about it. Okay, well, let me tell you what it is that I believe.

Dr. Randy Newman

At that point, we do shift from a conversation to a presentation. And so, yes, so for the person who says, Well, we have to get to the gospel, I agree. But I don't want to negate the importance of pre-evangelism. By the way, let's think about, Jesus had this conversation with this woman at the well in John 4 about water and thirst and about her failed five marriages and the immoral life she was living. That was a long conversation before he got around to saying who he was. I am the Messiah. I think there are a number of biblical examples in the New Testament of pre-evangelism. I think that's a big chunk of what Paul was doing on Mars Hill in Act 17. It's just remembering the distinctions and remembering the part of the word pre. We are trying to get there.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Sure. Well, we're winding down to a close, but before we did, I wanted to hear a little bit about your work with the CS Lewis Institute. You're a senior fellow with the institute. Let listeners know what's your role in it and so forth.

Dr. Randy Newman

Commercial time. Good. I like it. Well, the CS Lewis Institute is a discipleship ministry. We're trying to help people think deeply about their faith, similarly to the way CS Lewis thought deeply about everything through the Christian lens. We're trying to produce materials, articles, videos, audios, and all sorts of things to help people grow in-depth in their spiritual walks. A big chunk of what we do is a year-long discipleship program, but we have a whole lot of other things. I do some teaching and some writing. I also host a podcast for us. We call it *Questions That Matter* that explores how can we live our faith more deeply, more meaningfully, more thoroughly. That's a brief commercial. We do have a good website, cslewisinstitute.org. It's a whole lot of letters to type, but we have a ton of resources there. That's who we are. I'm thrilled to be part of it. It's really fun for me. I really love C.S. Lewis a lot, so I get to quote him a lot, but we're not about C.S. Lewis. We're not trying to make more fans of C.S. Lewis or promote him as much as promote the way Lewis thought about everything through the gospel lens. So that's who we are.

Dr. Keith Plummer

Thanks. Well, I subscribe to the *Questions That Matter* podcast, and I'm always excited when I get notification that there is a new episode, and I appreciate what you're doing there. And I didn't make mention, but since we're talking about Lewis, another one of your books is *Mere*

Evangelism, where you look at what we can learn about engaging unbelievers evangelistically from the thought and the writing of Lewis.

Dr. Randy Newman

Yeah. I think Lewis was just such a genius about this topic of pre-evangelism, and especially the way he did that in those radio broadcasts that eventually became the book *Mere Christianity*. He just started so much further back and moved gradually that I thought, we need to study not just what he said, but how he said it, how he engaged people's imaginations. He did things in evangelism that still, to this day, we still don't do anywhere near as much as we should, like people's imagination and move gradually, slowly. I was thrilled when the good book company said, Why don't you write a book on this? I thought, I get to write a book about CS Lewis. How fun is that?

Dr. Keith Plummer

Well, I like to extend an open invitation for you to come back with every successive revised edition of *Questioning Evangelism*. I am very excited. I anticipate that there will be more. I really, really... I mean, this is a book that has impacted me both personally in terms of my own life and the engaging of people, but also my teaching. There isn't an apologetics semester that goes by that students do not hear about *Questioning Evangelism* in some form another. I am really grateful for you and your work in this and really, really thankful for the time that you took to talk with us about questioning evangelism, engaging people's hearts the way Jesus did today.

Dr. Randy Newman

Well, thank you. This has been a great privilege for me.