

## Sunday, March 29, 2015— Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing the Word Rightly Divided— Dealing With a Steamroller in Three Easy Steps

Note: Gregory Koukl's book *Tactics: Developing a Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* was used as a guide for developing this message. Pages 89 through 103 and 157 through 166 were used in the preparation of this lesson. It should not be assumed that I agree with or support everything Koukl believes.

### Introduction/Review

- Last week we rounded out our discussion of the Columbo Tactic by considering the final two uses of this approach: 2) reversing the burden of proof, and 3) using Columbo to lead the way.
  - *Gather Information*—What do you mean by that?
  - *Reverse the Burden of Proof*—How did you come to that conclusion?
  - *Lead the Conversation*—Have you ever considered . . .?
- This morning, I would like to remind you that the third use of Columbo takes the most practice and requires knowledge of where you want to lead the conversation. Always remember:
  - **AS AN ABASSADOR OF JESUS CHRIST YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIT A HOME RUN WITH EVERY CONVERSATION. USE YOUR FRIST TWO COLUMBO QUESTIONS—"WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?" AND "HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?"—TO GET INTO THE GAME. THE REST WILL COME IN TIME.**
- This morning I would like to use our time together to do two things: 1) offer some final thoughts on perfecting the use of Columbo, and 2) spend the bulk of our time talking about how to deal with a STEAMROLLER.

### Perfecting the Use of Columbo

- On pages 89 through 103, Koukl offers the following practical tips for "Perfecting Columbo." For simplicities sake, I have broken them down into the following two categories, 1) before and after tips, and 2) things to beware of.
- *Before and After Tips:*
  - Before—try to anticipate the objections you might face, and then think of questions in advance. This allows you to formulate responses before the pressure is on.

- After—take some time for self-assessment after each encounter. Ask yourself how could I have phrased questions more effectively or conducted myself differently in the conversation.
- *Beware Of:*
  - Someone attempting to use Columbo against you. Refuse to answer someone else’s leading questions (There is no risk in answering the first two Columbo questions.). Always remember that you are in control of your side of the conversation. Ask them to simply state their point as well as their reasoning so that you can give it some thought.
  - Questions that are not really questions but assertions in disguise. When you encounter questions like these point out that they are confusing and ask the person to rephrase it in form of statement or use your first Columbo question and ask, “What do you mean by that?” Examples of questions in disguise include:
    - What gives you the right . . . ?
    - Who are you to say . . . ?
    - Who’s to say . . . ?

### **How to Deal With a Steamroller In Three Easy Steps**

- II Timothy 2:24— Strive—“To contend; to contest; to struggle in opposition to another; to be in contention or dispute; followed by against or with before the person or thing opposed; as, strive against temptation; strive for the truth.” (*Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*)
- A STEAMROLLER is someone who will try and overpower you. “They don’t overwhelm you with facts or arguments. Rather, they roll over you with the force of their personalities. Their challenges come quickly, one after the other, keeping you from collecting your wits and giving a thoughtful answer.” (Koukl, 159)
- “Steamrollers have a defining characteristic. They constantly interrupt. As soon as you begin to answer, they hear something they don’t like in your explanation, interrupt, then PILE ON another challenge. If you try to go down the new path, they interrupt again, firing questions, changing the subject, yet never really listening to anything you say. You find yourself constantly off balance and on the defensive.” (Koukl, 159)
- “Though there are benevolent steamrollers—over excitable but not hostile—MOST ARE INSINCERE. STEAMROLLERS ARE NOT USUALLY INTERESTED IN ANSWERS. THEY ARE INTRSTED IN WINNING THROGH INTIMIDATION.” (Kouk1, 159-160)
- The tone, tenor, and rapidity of a steamroller’s comments, verbal or written, reveal that honest dialogue and discussion are never the striver’s intended goal. Rather, despite any claims to the contrary, the steamroller’s intended outcome is WINNING regardless of the cost. When dealing

with a steamroller it will not matter how sound one's arguments are or how compelling the case against their position actually is the "steamroller" will utilize every tactic at their disposal to overwhelm, and/or distract from the real issues at hand.

- Because steamrollers are aggressive, you must manage them aggressively while at the same time avoiding being rude. For many people this will require mustering a bit of courage and intestinal fortitude to confront the steamroller. Koukl offers three steps for dealing with a steamroller: 1) *Stop Him*, 2) *Shame Him*, and 3) *Leave Him*.

### Step One: Stop Him

#### *Koukl Pages 160-161*

- "The first step in dealing with a steamroller is a mild one, Even though you may feel pushed to your limits by the annoyance, don't fire back in kind, guaranteeing a head-on collision. Don't buckle at the knees either. Once you opponent has intimidated you and knows it, you've lost." (Koukl, 160)
- Your first move should be a gentile request for courtesy. Stopping the steamroller to put the discussion on pause ought to be your first goal. Never attempt to talk over a steamroller; this will only further embolden them. Either wait for a natural opening or use your body language to indicate that a pause is in order. Once you have achieved the desired lull quickly negotiate an informal agreement. You ask the steamroller to give you something—patience and courtesy—so that you can give him something in return—an answer. Here are some samples of what you might say to accomplish this:
  - "Is it okay with you if I take a few moments to answer your question before you ask another? I'll give you a chance to respond when I get done. Will that work?"
  - "That is not a simple issue. I need a moment to explain myself. Is that okay?"
  - "Let me respond to your first challenge. When I am done, you can jump in again with another. Is that all right?"
  - "That's a good question, and it deserves a decent answer, but that will take a few minutes. Are you okay with that?" (Samples taken from Koukl page 161)
- **Notice how if the steamroller agrees to any of these propositions they have entered into a negotiated agreement.** If they subsequently break their agreement now you have the ammunition to enter into step two and "*shame them*" for breaking their agreement. When dealing with more aggressive steamrollers it is important for them to verbally consent to your request. If they refuse any of the propositions listed above you might simply ask them why they brought forth their challenge in the first place if they didn't care to hear your answer.

- Letting hostility or annoyance creep into your voice (or written text) is a mistake when dealing with this type of person. “Don’t let a steamroller get under your skin. Being defensive and belligerent always looks weak. Instead, stay focused on the issues, not on the attitude. Talk calmly and try to look confident.” (Koukl, 161) When given an opportunity to respond be sure to do so adequately before being forced to tackle another question or challenge. When you are through making your point you might consider saying something like, “Does that make sense to you?” This invites the steamroller back into the conversation and demonstrates your sincerity and willingness to discuss the matter.

### Step Two: Shame Him

*See Koukl Pages 161-163*

- If the steamroller breaks trust with your agreement, or if you can’t succeed in stopping him in the first place to negotiate an orderly conversation, proceed to step two of the Steamroller Tactic and *shame him* for his bad manners.
- First, ignore any new challenges he has introduced. Do not follow his rabbit trails. Second address the steamroller problem directly. If you are not able to get the floor right away, let him talk. When he finally pauses, look him in the eye and calmly say something like.
  - Can I ask you a favor? I’d love to respond to your concern, but you keep breaking in. Could I have a few moments without being cut off to develop my point? Then you can tell what you think. Is that okay with you?
  - Here is what I have in mind. You make your point, and I’ll be polite and listen. When you’re done, it will be your turn to be polite to me and not interrupt while I respond. Then, I’ll let you have your say without breaking in. I need to know if that’s okay with you. If not, this conversation is over. What would you like to do?
- The second example is very aggressive and might not be an appropriate starting point; however, you must keep in mind that steamrollers are strong customers and sometimes need to be met with equal strength.
- Step two should work. The steamroller might even be ashamed and apologize. Accept the gesture graciously then return to the original issue and deal with.
  - Let’s go back to the beginning. Your challenge as I understand it is . . . (repeat the question). Now here is who I’d like to respond.
- This second step is very effective in taming even the most belligerent steamroller. Don’t be snippy or smug. Stay focused, stay pleasant, stay gracious, but stay in control. If it doesn’t work, go immediately to Step Three.

### Step Three: Leave Him

*See Koukl Pages 163-165*

- When all else fails, let it go. Walk away. If the steamroller won't let you answer, listen politely until he's finished, then drop it. Let him have the satisfaction of having the last word, then shake the dust off your feet and move on. Wisdom dictates not wasting time with this kind of fool.
- This last step is dictated by a simple bit of insight: Not everyone deserves an answer.
  - Matthew 7:6—be gracious with the truth except with someone who shows utter contempt for the precious gift being offered them. This kind of person will trample it in the mud and then viciously turn on you.
- If you find yourself in a Jeremiah situation where you are speaking to deaf ears move on. There is however, one exception, sometimes one's real audience is not the person they are talking to but other people who maybe listening or dropping eaves on the conversation.
- Sometimes a word spoken to a hardened heart bounces off and hits a soft one.
- Dealing with a steamroller is rarely a smooth and tidy enterprise. When you encounter abuse, don't take it personally. It's not about you. It's about Christ.

### When Arguments Don't Work

*See Koukl Pages 157-159*

- The Holy Spirit in Romans 1 through 5 articulates perhaps the greatest argument in world history, the argument for justification by grace through faith plus nothing. Yet, despite the divine authority and authorship of this argument it often falls on deaf ears as people every day chose to reject the free offer of salvation being offered to them. Should we therefore conclude that there is a problem with the Holy Spirit's argument? God forbid. The problem must lie elsewhere.
- The fact is that arguments have limits; they don't always work. "If you're searching for that perfect line of logic capable of subduing any objection, you're wasting your time. There is no magic, no silver bullet, no clever turn of a thought or phrase that is guaranteed to compel belief." (Koukl, 157)
- Rational arguments often fail not due to a lack of clear thinking or even objections based upon reason. No, many times there are other barriers to civil discourse that may be lurking beneath the surface. Koukl offers three reasons why sound arguments often fail to persuade people: 1) emotional reasons, 2) prejudice, and 3) rebellion.

- *Emotional Reasons*— sometimes the steamroller might face rejection from family and friends or perhaps the prospect of suffering financial loss if they were to admit they were mistaken. Sometimes the steamroller has invested so much time and energy into advancing a particular viewpoint or point of doctrine that entertaining the possibility that they may have been mistaken is simply untenable for emotional reasons.
- *Prejudice*— other times steamrollers already have their minds made up. In other words, “they have prejudged your view before ever really listening to your reasons. They are interested in defending their own entrenched position, not considering other options. . . They plow ahead with blinders on, spouting the party line with no thought to the merits of the other side.” (Koukl, 158)
- *Rebellion*— some people are just plain pigheaded. Their real issue is no more elegant or sophisticated than rebellion. They need to be right regardless of the cost, so they persist in their mutiny and seek to take on or destroy anyone or anything that stands in their way.

### **Conclusion**

- Part Two of Koukl’s book offers many more valuable Tactics for finding the flaws in other people’s arguments.
  - Suicide: Views That Self-Destruct
  - Practical Suicide—views that hang together logically but practically won’t work.
  - Sibling Rivalry and Infanticide
  - Taking the Roof Off
  - Rhodes Scholar
  - Just the Facts, Ma’am
  - More Sweat, Less Blood
- Perhaps in the future, in a different more informal setting, we could explore the use of these Tactics as well.