



**EPC**

*A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches*

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**Biblical Interviewing Skills  
to Evaluate Applicants' Integrity**

Outline for Internet Audio Course

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*Approved by the Ministerial Vocation Committee  
of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
as a resource for pastoral search committees  
and other personnel search teams*

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## Dedication

In honor of theologian John Calvin who taught me that  
“The pastor ought to have two voices; one, for gathering the sheep,  
and another, for warding off . . . wolves.”

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Ministerial Vocation Committee  
Evangelical Presbyterian Church

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## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **Seven Sessions (Approximate Length 2 hours)**

#### **PART ONE: THEORY**

1. Biblical Interviewing Skills to Evaluate Applicant's Integrity ..... 5  
(Length ≈ 17:00)
2. The Master Interviewer is Jesus our Lord ..... 7  
(Length ≈ 17:00)
3. Bible-based, Professionally-tested Applicant Screening System ..... 8  
(Length ≈ 21:00)

#### **PART TWO: PRACTICE**

4. Selecting the Appropriate Questions ..... 11  
(Length ≈ 16:00)
5. Setting the Stage for Truth-telling and Serving the Needs of the Applicant in  
Christian Love ..... 13  
(Length ≈ 9:00)
6. Sequential Interviewing Skills ..... 14  
(Length ≈ 18:00)
7. Systematic Review and Verification of Applicant's Statements..... 17  
(Length ≈ 42:00)



## Biblical Interviewing Skills To Evaluate Applicants Integrity

### Track One – 17:33

**Purpose:** To train pastoral search committees (or any church committee that is selecting applicants for various positions within the local church) with *Bible-based, professionally-tested interviewing skills to properly screen applicants* for service within the church.

### Bible-based Applicant Screening Skills

- **Biblical Principle** of Applicant Screening
  - Proverbs 26:10 - “Like an archer who wounds at random is he who hires a fool or any passer-by.” (NIV)
  
- **Problems** associated with Applicant Screening
  - Proverbs 26:25 - “Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart.” (NIV)
  
- **Process** of Applicant Screening
  - Proverbs 26:26 - “His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.” (NIV)
  
- **Planning** the Applicant Screening Process
  - Proverbs 15:22 - “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”
    - \**EPC Procedure Manual For Ministerial and Candidates Committee*  
(may be downloaded at [www.epc.org/resources](http://www.epc.org/resources))
    - \*\*“So You Need To Find A Pastor” (RTS publication)  
([www.rts.edu/Site/Resources/Booklets/Pastor\\_Search\\_07\\_Web.pdf](http://www.rts.edu/Site/Resources/Booklets/Pastor_Search_07_Web.pdf))

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- **Privacy/confidentiality** is critical in the screening process  
-Proverbs 11:13 - A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.  
(NIV)

\*EPC: “Establish a covenant of confidentiality . . . keep confidential, even from family members and church officers, the names of individuals being considered.”

- **Personal Interviewing** is the most valuable screening tool  
-Proverbs 20:5 - “The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.” (NIV)

\*In this presentation you will learn a ***Five-Fold Strategic System for Assessing the Integrity of Applicants.***

- **Proper Background Investigation** is the best way to verify information.

\*Positive reasons for background checks:

-Proverbs 22:29 - “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.” (NIV)

\*Negative reasons for background checks:

-Proverbs 18:9 - “One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.”  
(NIV)

- **Prayer** for the Pastoral Search and Screening Process  
-Philippians 1:9-11 - “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,<sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. (NIV)

## The Master Interviewer Is Jesus Our Lord

### Track Two – 17:43

#### 1. Jesus calls us to make a right judgment: John 7:24

-“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” (NIV)

-1 Samuel 16:7 – “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (NIV)

#### 2. Take statements literally, not figuratively

- Direct vs. indirect answers

-Matthew 5:37 - “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (NIV)

-Proverbs 20:14 - “It’s no good, it’s no good!” says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase.” (NIV)

#### 3. Use a sequential style of interviewing:

- Jesus as the “master interviewer”

-“batching” questions (John 7:19-23, 30)

- Introduction to the **Q.U.I.C.K.** approach to interviewing

**Q** = Question (general)

**U** = Undertaker (probing/follow up question)

**I** = Insight (question based on information received in conversation)

**C** = Confirming (question seeking corroboration)

**K** = Knowledge (information gained from the interview)

**Bible-Based, Professionally-Tested  
Applicant Screening System**

**Track 3 – 21:20**

- Proverbs - 24:26 - “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.” (NIV)
- Proverbs - 25:11 - “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. (NIV)

**Pre-interview Stage:**

**1. Selecting the appropriate questions**

- Asking the right questions of the applicant first starts with correctly analyzing his or her submitted materials.
- Psalms - 15:1-2 – “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart.” (NIV)

**Interview Stages:**

**2. Setting the stage for truth-telling**

- Create the conditions that encourage truth-telling.
- Most people lie by omission not by commission.
- Listen for what people are not saying.



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## Serving the needs of the applicant in Christian love

- Establish rapport in order for the interview to go smoothly.
- Be professional and prompt in communicating with the applicant during the process. (Matthew 7:12)

### 3. Sequential interviewing skills to dig deeply into the truth

- Never ask a general question without a follow-up, probing type question that seeks information that will fill out the applicant's statement or corroborate his account.
- Past behaviors often predict future behaviors
- Beware of "the bridge."
- Proverbs – 24:16: "for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity." (NIV)

### Post-interview Stage:

#### 4. Systematic review and verification of applicant's statements

- Professional interviewers will first comprehensively analyze the statements, behaviors, and omissions of an applicant. Second, they will conduct a background check in order to verify this information given by the applicant in the interview.
- Not much information from a reference means not much support from that reference.
- Elicit the applicant's participation in your background investigation

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**Presuppositions of this approach:**

- Faithful to the Bible
- Flexible in reference to the Holy Spirit
- Focuses on tested principles for applicant
- Freedom to love the applicant, whether accepted for the position or not
- Firm in conviction that the system protects the local church.

## Selecting The Appropriate Questions

### Track Four – 16:36

1. Questions that get at integrity will be found in the material you have received from the applicant.
  - a) **EPC:** “Review the Personal Information Form to identify points on which you would like further information, and formulate specific questions to generate the information.”
  
2. Check for omissions in the material

Some applicants will not give false information by the way of commission but will delete relevant but adverse information.
  
3. Conduct a preliminary background check prior to the first interview
  - a) Ask the applicant for 3 or 4 references that won't jeopardize their current position and will maintain confidentiality.
  
  - b) Do a pre-interview advanced Google search on the applicant
  
  - c) Personality screening tools may provide an x-ray into the heart

Example: *Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis Test (T-JTA)*.
  
  - d) Vocational guidance tool for evaluation of personality traits and to build team chemistry;
  
  - e) Use of Validity Scales that serve as a **discriminator**.

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f) -Proverbs 13:7 - “One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing (inflation of personality strengths); another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth (deflation of personality strengths).” See Romans 12:3.

4. Preparing Your Questions - Use the **Q.U.I.C.K.** approach:

a) **Q = Questions** that are open ended.

b) **U = Undertaker** questions that are designed to probe for “buried skeletons.”

c) **I = Insight** questions that emerge during the actual interview that you add.

d) **C = Confirming** questions that seek to corroborate the applicant’s story.

e) **K = Knowledge** is the result of such a sequential questioning process.

5. Ask all the questions you prepared in advance for the applicant

## Setting The Stage For Truth-Telling

### Track Five – 9:44

- A possible introduction to the interview:  
“Our Lord Jesus expects us to speak truth (Matthew 5:37). The Holy Spirit will only meet us here in this interview if our “yes is yes and our no is no.” We must be committed to lovingly speak to each other with candor, forthrightness, and transparency. As a search committee we pledge to do this; will you agree to do this as well? At this point the chairman should begin with a prayer and the applicant should be invited to close this prayer to ratify the agreement.
- Be completely up front about the fact that you will be conducting a comprehensive background investigation.  
  
-Proverbs 18:17 - “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” (NIV)

### Serving the needs of the Applicant in Christian Love . . .

- Tell the applicant what impresses you about them and their qualifications. You might not call them but another church probably will so make sure you send them on their journey built up in the Lord.
- Do not promise the applicant anything. “Thank the minister and remind him that the interview is not a commitment on the part of either party” (*EPC Procedure Manual*) Let them know they are indeed a good gift but you are making sure that they are the perfect fit for your congregation (James 1:17).
- Do not play games/manipulate. “Special care should be given to make certain that unintended pain is not inflicted on any applicants” (*EPC Procedure Manual*)

You are not interrogating anyone but you are interviewing a servant of God (“speaking the truth in love” Ephesians 4:15)

- ◆ Don’t play good cop/bad cop
- ◆ Don’t play the “stone face.”
- ◆ Don’t be deceitful about your views.

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**Part Two: Practice**  
**Sequential Interviewing Skills**  
**To Dig Deeply Into The Truth**

**Track Six – 18:37**

- **QUICK: Question + Undertaker + Insight + Confirming = Knowledge.**
  - **Set reasonable expectations:** You are hiring a “saint/sinner.”
  - **Give a Face Saving Opportunity:** “As you know applications don’t provide enough room to fully explain events that have happened to us. In fact, even if they did, sometimes we just plain forget to include important items on them.”

**Sequence 1**

- **Question (general):** Would you like to add anything that is not included in the materials you sent us at this time?
- **Undertaker:** Before we move on—is there any adverse information about your ministry career that you would like to add now?
- **Insight question:** \_\_\_\_\_?
- **Confirming question:** For instance, have you listed all the jobs you’ve been involved in for the last five years—including part time work?
- **Knowledge:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sequence 2**

- **Question (general):** Why did you leave your last church?
- **Undertaker probe:** If you hadn’t resigned, do you think they would have asked you to leave?

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- **Insight question:** Were there any other reasons you left?
  
  - **Confirming question:** When we contact this church, what will they say is the reason you left? Who would be a good person for us to talk to about this?
  
  - **Knowledge:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Sequence 3**

- **Question (general):** Have you had any experience with a “well-intentioned dragon” in the church setting?
  
- **Undertaker probe:** In the past two years, has anyone under your ministry complained about you?
  
- **Insight question:** \_\_\_\_\_?
  
- **Confirming question:** How did you feel about these situations? What would you do differently in each case?
  
- **Knowledge:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Sequence 4**

- **Question (general):** How do you spend time with God in prayer and personal Bible reading?
  
- **Undertaker probe:** How does your devotional life help you with stress and temptations?
  
- **Insight question:** \_\_\_\_\_?
  
- **Confirming question:** What Bible verse did you read today for your devotions? Would you mind sharing with us how the Holy Spirit moved, molded or mended you with this verse?

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- **Knowledge:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Special Tips to Dig as Deep as You Can in the Interview**

1. **Follow the 20/80 Rule:** Applicant should do 80% of the talking. You are to **elicit** information from the applicant in order to **evaluate** it to see if you are going to **endorse** this person to your church. You should not be left filling in the blanks. This is an open book test and the applicant is the one with all the answers.

*Do not equivocate in thought or speech, for a double tongue is a deadly snare. The words you speak should not be false or empty phrases, but fraught with purposeful action. (Didache)*

2. **Make sure you keep the applicant talking and don't let him or her:**

- **Flip** the committee
- **Filibuster** the time away
- **Frazzle** the situation.



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## Part Two: Practice

# Systematic Review And Verification Of The Applicant's Statements

### Track Seven – 42:30

- 1 Thessalonians 5:21 - “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” (NIV)
- Ephesians 4:15 - “...speaking the truth in love” (NIV)

#### 1. **Exegete the statements of the applicant**

-Matthew 5:37 - “Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (NIV)

- Interpret statements literally and not figuratively  
Truthful responses usually use spontaneous, realistic phrases with original thinking.
- Do not accept circumlocutions  
A truthful applicant has no reason or incentive to use indirect forms of communication.
- Realize that niceness is a social strategy  
Proverbs 29:5 - “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.” (NIV)

#### 2. **Exegete the behaviors of the applicant . . . Proverbs 6:13, 10:10 & 16:30**

-Proverbs 6:12-13 - “A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth,<sup>13</sup> who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers.” (NIV)

-Proverbs 10:10 - “He who winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin. (NIV)

-Proverbs 16:30 - “He who winks with his eye is plotting perversity; he who purses his lips is bent on evil.” (NIV)

- Watch for clusters of unusual behavioral responses
  - a) Body language

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b) Voice quality

c) First occurrence actions

d) Excessive blinking

- Embrace the awkward pause - See these as gifts from God.

a) Able to take notes

b) Applicant might offer more information during these times

c) Enabled to better observe the body language of an applicant

**3. Exegete the gaps in information from the applicant . . . John 7:14**

- Most people lie by omission not by commission
- Make sure you have satisfying answers to every question
- Handling excessive memory lapses in the applicant's answers
  - a) Ask about how important the issue is to the individual.
  - b) State why you don't think a memory lapse is acceptable here.
  - c) Make it plain you are in need of this information.

**4. Exegete the background of the applicant . . . Proverbs 14:15**

-Proverbs 14:15 - "A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps." (NIV)

- Do not settle for the primary references given by the candidate but go for the secondary sources for corroborative information.

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- Don't be hesitant to include the applicant in his or her own background investigation.
  - Past behavior usually predicts future behaviors.
  - What are you looking for when you review their work history?

Look for the **Four A's**:

1. *Affable*
2. *Attitude*
3. *Ability*
4. *Accountability*

**EPC Procedure Manual:**

“It may include such matters as the record of the person in his previous pastorate: his ability to work easily among all ages and classes of people, his attitude toward the total program of the church, and his ability as a preacher, pastor, educator, and church administrator.”

- *Not all adverse information is all that adverse.*
  1. Get both sides of the story.

-Proverbs 18:17 - The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him. (NIV)
  2. Do a credibility determination when you receive adverse information (from Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)
    - a) Does the complaint have inherent plausibility (does it make sense?)
    - b) What is the demeanor of the complainer
    - c) Does the complainer have motive to falsify?
    - d) Can the complainer give any corroborating evidence
    - e) Look at the past record or the complainer

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f) Is the complaint isolated?

- *The **Continuum of Compromise** is an extremely useful tool as recommended by the **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)**:*

a) A perceived sense of victimization

b) Loyalty over integrity

c) Entitlement over accountability

d) Acts of omission

e) Administrative acts of commission

-Psalms 15:1-4 - “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts. (NIV)

f) Acts of commission – criminal or egregious

## 5. Exegete the Holy Spirit’s guidance through the Word of God

- *God will be working among you. Honor the Holy Spirit as the sovereign Background Investigator.*

Ignatius of Antioch: “For even if some desire to deceive me in a merely human way, the Spirit is not deceived, for it is from God. For it knows whence it comes and whither it goes and exposes secrets.” (1 Corinthians 2:10, 14:24-25)

Thomas Oden: “God’s own Spirit is radically undeceived; aware of each whence, wherefore, and why.”

John Flavel on discerning God’s providence of God:

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1. Have the true fear of God on your hearts
  2. Study the Word more and more and the concerns and interests of the world less and less
  3. Reduce what you know into practice
  4. Pray for illumination and direction
  5. Follow providence so far as agrees with the Word of God, no farther.
- *Never forget the “King Saul Effect” (1 Samuel).*  
We are subject to succumbing to the temptation to lean on our own understanding and not trust wholeheartedly in the Lord’s counsel.

## CONCLUSION

1. The great **call** of the pastoral search committee  
-Acts 20:28 - “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (NIV)
  
2. The great **concern** of the pastoral search committee  
-Acts 20:29 - “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.” (NIV)
  
3. The great **covering** of the pastoral search committee  
-Acts 20:32 - “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (NIV)

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**About the speaker**  
**Pastor Ken Jones**

**Ordination in EPC:** November 29, 1987 (First Presbyterian; Rome, GA)

**Background Investigation Experience:** Deputy Sheriff-1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant (1989-2003)

- Fairfax County Sheriff's Office (Fairfax, VA)
  1. Sergeant, Recruiter and Background Investigator (1999-2000)
  2. 2nd Lieutenant, Applicant Recruiting and Screening Section (2000-2001)

**Background Investigator Training:**

*Police Applicant Background Investigation* (1998)  
Institute of Police Technology and Management, University of North Florida

*Verbal Judo* (1998)  
Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy

*Interview and Interrogation* (1999)  
Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy

*Supervisory Investigation* (1999)  
Prince George's County (Maryland) Internal Affairs Unit

*How To Control Aggressive Media Interviews* (1999)  
Effective Communications, Inc., American University

*Effective Recruitment Techniques* (2000)  
The International Association of Chiefs of Police

*The Recruiting Update Training* (2000)  
American Management Association

*Conducting The Perfect Interview* (2000)  
American Management Association

*The Basic and Advanced Reid Technique of Interviewing & Interrogation* (2000)  
John E. Reid and Associates

**Background Investigator Accomplishments:**

Co-authored article ***Designing Force Quality: Ensuring Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Deputies*** (March-April 2001 edition of the national *Sheriff* magazine)

***Fairfax County Outstanding Performance Award*** (2001)  
(for supervising a successful Applicant Recruiting and Screening Section)  
Fairfax County Sheriff's Office

Contracted to teach the course ***Interview Skills for Hiring and Supervision*** at *Southwestern Community College* (2007).