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How to Use Questions to Answer Christianity's Toughest Challenges

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Greg and Amy chat about Greg's new book, *Street Smarts: Using Questions to Answer Christianity's Toughest Challenges*, discussing the goal of the book, how this new material differs from and adds to the original *Tactics* book, how using tactics will help you have clearer, more personalized conversations with others about what they believe, and more.

Transcript

Welcome to the hashtag, S-T-R-Ask podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. Hey, Amy. Hey, Greg, this is going to be a special episode, a very special episode here on Patrick's List.

It is. I'm smiling from ear to ear here, and actually you should be, you are kind of, because your, your contribution was so important to what we're going to talk about here today. Yes, and what we're going to talk about is your new book, *Street Smarts, Using Questions to Answer Christianity's one of these toughest challenges*.

For those viewing online and I can see the video there. Here's a copy of the book right here. It just came out, and so we are going to talk about this book because I'm sure people will be interested.

And we talk a lot about tactics and how to respond to people. And this book is a continuation of your original *tactics* book. Yeah, I like to describe it for those familiar with the tactical game plans.

And remember in the *tactics* book, the first portion really is setting up the game plan. I called the Colombo tactic after the infamous Lieutenant Colombo who used questions to navigate in his criminal investigation, his murder investigation, to find the criminal, you know, and the bad guy. And he always came in kind of under the radar and his scratches head like he didn't know what he was doing and asking these innocent sounding

questions, but they always led to a particular end.

And so that game plan is, of course, the foundation of the tactics book that many people are familiar with that actually 14 years ago now and four years since the 10 year anniversary edition came out. And it's been tremendously helpful as a game plan to help people. Of course, the tactics book has all the other tactics too, like taking the roof off and just the facts, Pam.

And what a friend we have in Jesus and inside out and Rhodes Scholar and all the rest of them that are meant to help people in conversation. But this book does something very different. It's the third use of tactics.

That is the third part of the game plan, which is using questions. To make a point on steroids, as it were. So it's, it's really meant to radically expand an area that I only touch on just a little bit in the tactics book, the initial one.

Now, of course, in street smarts in the beginning, I go back over the game plan. I talk about gardening and harvesting and the contrast between them and the reason why Christians are frightened to go into the marketplace, you know, in the streets, so to speak. So I cover all kinds of new areas that aren't covered, obviously, in the original tactics book.

It's a good one, two punch. But if people just got street smarts and hadn't read the tactics book, it still is a standalone piece. And this is probably the third question of clumbo is the one that people have the most trouble with, right? Because then they have to come up with something to challenge the person that they're responding to.

That's right. And so that's what this will help people do. Yeah, this is the way I put it is when you, the first thing I've done with, the first two steps are very simple.

And I describe it as people being Christians being in the shallow end of the pool because there's no risk. And the first one is to gather information about a person's view or about their challenge or something like that. And we're just learners at that point.

What do you mean by that was the model question. Tell me more. I'm an atheist.

Really? What kind of atheist are you? You know, well, the Bible's been changed. Tell me about how that happened that you think. What do you mean by that particular challenge or, you know, belief in God is irrational.

Really? What's irrational about it? It's wrong for you to push your morality on me. Exactly how am I pushing my morality on you? So these are all different variations of what do you mean by that? That's our first opening question, just gathering information. And that helps people to see what a person thinks.

And the second step then is similar to it. You're going to ask them questions that help you to understand why they believe what they believe. So how did you come to that conclusion? What are your reasons for that? Help me out.

And so all we're doing in the first two steps is gathering intel. Very important. No risk to the Christian at all.

But in the third step, we're going to use questions to make a point. Okay. And in this particular case, the point is to parry a challenge that somebody might make to Christianity or to find a weakness or a flaw and expose that in their own view, whether it's atheism or pro-choice or some gender issue or something like that.

All that's covered in the book. And so that's it. There's a speed bump there.

Okay. Because you actually need to know three things. First, if you're going to use questions to expose a flaw or weakness or parry a challenge, you have to know what the flaw or the weakness is, right? You have to know what's wrong with the challenge to be able to parry it.

So that's one step. The second step is generally these kinds of characterizations when you're trying to expose a weakness or a flaw or parry a challenge, take a few steps of thinking, there's this, then there's this, then there's this, then there's this. And this is kind of the final conclusion.

And therefore your view is mistaken or compromised in some way. The difficulty is it's hard to keep laying those pieces down in a row without being stopped by an aggressive challenger at every step of the way. Plus, when you do it that way, and I'll give some examples of that in a few moments, but when you do it that way, you are, you're making your own claims, which they can, as I pointed out, gainsay or disagree with breaking up the flow of thought.

And you're preaching at them, so to speak, you know, you're telling them why they're wrong. Now, in a certain sense, that's part of what we're doing here, but there is a shrewd way to do that. And that is, as people who familiar with the game plan know by using questions, but that introduces a new problem.

You've got to know the difficulty of the challenge. You have to know the steps to get to the conclusion that the challenge is shown. It's a shallow or compromised, but then you have to know the questions to ask the other person to make each of the individual steps.

Remember, the subtitle of Street Smarts is using questions to answer Christianity's toughest challenges. Okay, so those are three tough steps to resolve challenges that Christians are going to face. And we have, I mean, in the book, we've got all kinds of things that they're going to face.

But what I do in Street Smarts is provide the information for each of those steps. Okay. And the past, as Onderman has asked me to write a basic book on apologetics, I thought, I don't want to do that.

There's a gazillion of them out there. They're fabulous. So why should I write another one, you know? And then I started thinking, well, maybe I can put a twist on it and do a kind of a basic apologetics book, but from a tactical perspective and provide tactical dialogues that will help people with things like atheism, which I have two chapters on, problem of evil one chapter, abortion two chapters, the Bible two chapters, one on, one on challenges to the Bible, like alleged genocide in the Bible or slavery in the Bible, another one on science and the Bible.

Okay. I mean, those are areas of trouble that people run into. I've got two chapters on Jesus, Jesus being the only way of salvation, Jesus being the Son of God and the Trinity and those kinds of challenges that Jehovah's Witnesses way it raised and so do Muslims.

I also have a chapter in gender, sex and marriage. And I mean, these are all the hot button issues. Well, for whatever reason, this is the exact right time for this book because what's funny is about a few months ago, I started getting emails from people and you know, because I've sent them onto you where they've said, Hey, do you have any resource that gives me example conversation? And I have never gotten those questions before until recently, the last, you know, four or five months and all of a sudden, so something's going on out there that people really are asking for this kind of thing right now.

So can you give us an example of one of these conversations? conversation, sure. But let me make an observation. I think that all of these, and this was interesting because I was already committed to do the book and we've been working on for the last two years together.

I mean, Amy's a tremendous, you know, likely to say it's a love hate relationship. Amy's so good, but she's so hard, you know, but she always makes me a better writer. So we've been working on for two years and we started recently getting these notes on.

So it showed us we were on the right track here with something that's marketable, but these were coming, I think principally from people who had already read the tactics book. And so there are examples of conversations I've had or conversations I made up for the purpose of illustrating the tactics, but there was this big thing missing that they wanted more of. And so we were in the process of doing it.

So let's just take atheism for example. Okay. Keep in mind, by the way, what's what I mean by streets more streets is where the street is wherever you feel uncomfortable.

All right. Well, you feel unprepared. You feel vulnerable.

It could be with a, it could be with your employer. It could be with colleagues at work. It could be with your friends.

It could be with students and professors. It could be with family members where you can talk about whatever you want to talk about until you hit certain types of topics and you know they're off limits. Our stuff, the most important thing, then you're going to get in trouble and you're going to get really hard pushback from people.

So folks just kind of stay on the bench. They don't get involved. They don't get into the street partly because they're frightened, which I understand entirely.

I mean, the apostles were frightened. We see that Matthew 10. Paul was frightened.

Jesus had to appear to him. That was in Acts 18. And so, and encourage him.

So I get that. All right. So let's just take atheism, for example.

So an atheist might say something like, look, there's no evidence for God. Okay. Now keep in mind.

I know that there's evidence for God. Good evidence for God. I know the problem here.

And I go into a lot of detail in the first part of each chapter dealing with any issue in giving the whole rationale. So the reader understands the rationale. Then I show, okay, now here's how we take what we've just learned and build it into a conversation with questions.

And the questions are meant to have the the person who disagrees with us put the pieces on the table that are necessary for us to take, make the conclusion. And this is very important. We're actually going to enlist the skeptic as an ally in defeating his own view by getting the skeptic to make common sense affirmations in response to my questions that lead right up to the the conclusion that his view or her view is just not solid.

And incidentally, many people who've read this, the tactics, they know that what I'm after is not to close the deal. I'm just trying to get people thinking the way I put it is put a stone in their shoe. Okay.

I want to annoy them in a good way, right? Get them thinking. So that's all I'm doing here. So somebody says, there's no evidence for God.

Okay. Let me ask you a question. So I'm going to role play both sides of this.

And this is all in the book. I mean, conversations like this, this specific one is in the book. There's no evidence for God.

Okay. Let me ask you a question. If you saw a shoe print in the sand on the beach, what would you conclude? Well, somebody been walking there.

Yeah, a person wearing shoes. Right. Would you be tempted to think that it was a freak accident of nature, a seashell, sand, surf, all rolling around together and that created the impression that looked like a shoe print, but was it? No, of course not.

Why not? Well, because nature can't create that kind of thing, first of all. And secondly, there's a better answer. I say, what's the better answer? Somebody walking on the beach.

Okay. By the way, notice all common sense responses. All right.

Let me ask you another question. All right. Let's say you found a blueprint of some sort on a desk or in the trash, wherever you here's a blueprint.

Would you be tempted to think that it's a good thing? I think that it was a crazy accident of inks built in paper and tossed around by natural forces that produce what looked like a blueprint, but wasn't? No, of course not for the same reason. So, okay, great. Same reasons being what? Well, nature isn't going to do that by accident, obviously, and there's a better explanation.

Somebody made the blueprint. Great. Okay.

No, just pause for a moment. Notice I've asked a whole bunch of questions. That relate to a design intuition, which in this concept, I got from Doug Axe, but it's a very obvious one.

Everybody has it. We have the ability to recognize things that are designed that take that are not the product of chance. And so I just give a bunch of examples.

Now I'm lowering the boom with the final question. Notice all these pieces are in place and they've put them in place in response to the question. Okay.

All right. So what do you make my next question? What do you make of the human body? Oh, that involved by chance. Do you see how silly that sounds in light of the affirmations they've already made? You know, and then I might add.

And the DNA blueprint for the human body eats inside of each one of ourselves, the DNA. Double helix in that blueprint. Oh, that involved by chance to.

And so my final question is, why would you believe a human body involved by chance when you can't believe a simple shoe print in the sand. Happened by chance. Okay.

Well, it's possible. Well, let's let's just agree that it's possible. Is it the odds on favorite? This is what I'm after, Amy.

Is it the odds on favorite? And so what I'm trying to show here in this case with the design is a design argument. There's other kinds of arguments I could use, but and execute the same way in conversation. It's just trying to show them that God is the best explanation for this.

I could grant maybe evolution. Did it? Chance over time. Even if I were to grant that, is it the best explanation? Is it the odds on favorite? That's the stone in the shoe.

And I want to just leave it there and get let them to think think that about that. I'm not again not trying to close the deal. So this is an example of what I talk about actually briefly in in the tactics book, even the 10th anniversary.

I have in the first one, I have just a paragraph. Second, when I have like two or three paragraphs in the introductory material to the second edition, the 10th anniversary edition. But here in Street Smart, I have a whole chapter just on gardening because the concept of gardening versus harvesting is so important.

So let's talk about that in a second. But before we go on to that, I just want to say just to emphasize again. So what you're doing here with each chapter is first you're explaining the topic so that people can understand it because that's key to people asking questions.

Right. That's the apologetics proper side of it. Yeah.

And then you're giving them questions that they can memorize or you know, little vignettes that they can have in mind as they go into these conversations. Yeah, having mind is better, right? Because conversations go a different way. That's exactly what I was going to say.

You don't know where they're going to go. But as you, this is how you learn. This is how we learn how to do it.

We learn it by watching how it works. And then you practice and you see how it goes in different directions and you learn how to maneuver in that. But you have these starting questions that can at least get you going.

Exactly. Exactly. So I do want to talk a little bit about the gardening versus harvesting.

But before we get there, I just want to say, because I know you've been talking about this. You've been speaking on this topic. How are people responding to what you're saying? Oh, they love it.

They love it. And the response is great. It's really satisfying for me as a public speaker to be able to talk about tactics in general.

And then especially the street smarts material, which are the tactics, tactical game plan applied to very precise and easy to understand way regarding specific challenges that

Christians are facing now. And there's not only are there dialogues in there, there are illustrations of anecdotes, things that really happened to me where these things were in play. Or that happened to other people.

We got a call once a gal said, you know, I use tactics for the very first time. And I just use the first question in tactics. You know, what do you mean by that? And here's what happened.

Well, I we had a recording of that and we got permission to use it and we put it in the book here. Just to encourage people about the usefulness of it. It's just utterly transforms.

And I'm just saying this, not not trying to sell a book, but because this is what people have told me. It is utterly transformed their ability to make a difference and their comfort with having conversations with other people and very controversial issues. So now let's talk briefly about the gardening concept because I think that plays into this idea that people are encouraged by this and they're kind of set free to get into the game.

Yes. And you know that phrase set free is exactly the phrase I hear people tell me after a session when I explain the difference between gardening and harvesting. I think one of the reasons that Christians stumbled, they don't get out in the street as it were, is that they're not a street smart.

And one thing about being street smart is understanding the New Testament pattern of evangelism. Now, what I'm going to say for a lot of people is going to be really bizarre because they never thought of it this way. But there are no altar calls in the New Testament, not in the Bgasps, not in the book of X, nothing like that.

People come forward to get baptized, but it's after they become believers. And there's no people inviting others to receive Christ as Lord and Savior and pray and we'll pray this in his prayer. Now, this is a cultural adaptation that's rather recent in the last 150 years.

That's it. Second Great Awakening mid 19th century. Now, I'm not against those things, but what happens, Amy, is a lot of people think that's the only way you can do it.

That's the way it's supposed to be done. And in fact, if you read in John chapter 4, Jesus tells the disciples after he has talked with a woman at the well there and cited it. He says, I car that they are about to reap where they did not sow.

And he says, once so is another reaps. And so he's making a distinction there between a what I call a gardening season and a harvesting season. And the simple truth is if you don't have gardening, you're not going to have a harvest.

But if you do have good gardening, the harvest largely takes care of itself. When the fruit is ripe, it falls into the basket. In a couple of weeks, I'll have my and maybe by the time

this is aired, it will have been my 50th anniversary as a Christian.

The day I became a Christian. But that day I act, I did pray with my brother to receive Christ, but he challenged me. I told him I already want to become a Christian.

I harvested myself. What happened? The fruit was ripe. It just fell in a basket.

The harvest is easy when the fruit is ripe. Okay. So in the New Testament, what we have is gardening, gardening, gardening, gardening, gardening.

And then there's some kind of pre-tron of some sort and people respond. No invitation. In fact, I was with Tim last weekend, Tim Barnett, Mr. B. And he was teaching on Acts chapter 17, the Ariapagos and the Athenians hearing Paul.

Paul went in very, very clever approach to preaching there. It's very interesting. He never mentions the good news of the gospel.

Yet people respond and follow him. Some said I'll hear more. Some thought he was an idiot and others followed.

All he talked about was judgment. There's a man who's going to judge the world, repent because there's a man who's going to judge the world, having presented proof by raising from the dead. Okay.

God appointed this man. And, and, and, and people believe. So here's the deal.

If we do the gardening well and communicate the truth of the gospel, we communicate in the broadest sense God's word. And that's what was going on in the, in the, in the book of Acts. They weren't quoting Bible verses because there weren't any New Testament Bible verses to quote.

They were preaching God's word, which was the message of truth in its various forms. There's different pieces to it. Okay.

And Paul emphasized some aspects there on Mars Hill. So here's the kick. Here's this shocker for me.

I decided to start asking my audiences. How many people who are now Christians did not become a Christian through an altar call or someone praying with them to receive Christ, just a show of hands. The first two audiences over, and these are large audiences, over one third of the people raise their hands.

The next three audiences, almost 90% of the people raised their hands and said, no one led me to Christ. In other words, they harvested themselves if you want to put it that way, but we know that it was a Holy Spirit that harvested them. John noise on our team.

He was an atheist. Then he became a Christian. But he didn't remember when he became a Christian.

He didn't know when he became Christian. He just began believing in Jesus and following Jesus based on the accurate information that he'd heard. Okay.

So here's the application. My encouragement then, and this is what Street Smarts is meant to do, is to get people thinking, put the information before them, challenge their false beliefs, tell them in different ways appropriate to the circumstances, what the truth is, and let God worry about the harvest. You don't have to close the deal.

You don't have to challenge people to receive Christ. I mean, for that, when people think of that, them's fighting words in today's culture, right? And they just want to, you know, stay on the bench and not get involved at all. But remember, if there's no gardening, there's not going to be a harvest.

What Street Smarts does, and the whole tactical approach is to get more gardeners into the field in a low key, relaxed kind of way. I teach them how to have these conversations that are really relaxed to ask the right kind of questions, help them figure out where or what direction that the conversations might go. Other questions that will help them.

And this is having a powerful impact on people's lives. And just to clarify, because there could be people out there who aren't familiar with your approach, I mean, I would think most of the people listening have either red tactics or they've heard you talk about tactics, so they have an idea of what's going on. But just to clarify, you're not saying that we don't tell them what they need to know about the gospel.

I think I don't want people to hear that you're saying they can be saved apart from the gospel. That's not what you're saying. No, not at all.

Yeah. But the gospel, the gospel comes out. There's lots of pieces to the gospel.

Right. And if we just say, well, Jesus died for your sins, we are not communicating to 99% of the people we discuss. Do we have critics or skeptics that we have conversations with? They don't know what those words mean.

Right. So what you're talking about is you are finding a way to explain the gospel in a way that gives all of the pieces in a way people can understand by asking questions and helping them examine their assumptions and leading them to follow the evidence to the end, which is Christianity. To appeal to them.

And, you know, who was it? Not Festus, but one of the other guys there in the book of Acts, there are three of them kind of close together. And one of them says, well, if you keep talking, you're persuade me to become a Christian. That's right.

Paul was just talking, talking, talking. Look at Jesus and Matthew five, six, seven. Okay.

There it is the sermon in the Mount. He's got a whole bunch of bad news there in the beginning of the sermon in the Mount, chapter five, you know, you've got to have the righteousness better than the scribes and Pharisees. Even if you don't commit murder, but even if you call your brother a fool, you're going to go to hell.

Even if you think about adultery, you're going to go to hell. That's what Jesus said. This is not good news, bad news.

And you keep reading and you're waiting. Okay. Where's that? But if you put your faith in me and receive me as Lord and Savior, then you'll be saved for you.

That's not in there. Now it is in the corpus of the things that Jesus teaches, but he's focusing on one aspect there, the bad news because he's got to let the bad news do its work among the people. Right.

So there are a lot of pieces you have to put into place. And this is how you reveal the truth of each of those pieces. And they obviously have to know that Jesus died for their sins before they could be saved.

So you're not denying that. I just want to make sure people hear what you're saying. But sometimes we run to the end of the game and look at it.

Is it Matthew 13, I think, where Jesus is giving the parable of the sower, maybe 12 and 13 right in there somewhere. And when he gives the parable of the sower, you know, you put the seeds on the hard ground and the birds eat it away. Right.

He says, here's what's going on. The sower sows the seed, which is the word. And they do not understand it.

So then the enemy, the devil can snatch the word that has been sown in their hearts, snatch it away. So I think, and then the fruit, the land that are ground that bore fruit 30, 60, 100 fold, he said, those are here the word and understand it. So my appeal is that we slow down and we deal with people where they're at, as Paul says in Colossians 4, so you know how to respond to each person.

And then give them a little here, a little there, something to chew on. And I bet you people listening to this, Christians listening to this podcast who had become a Christian later in life. That in which what I'm called calling gardening was happening, a little here, a little there, something to chew on.

And that happened in my life too. Until their fruit was ripe and then God did a work. Maybe somebody invited them to receive Christ.

Maybe there was an altar call. My experience from just taking a poll of Christians in the

audience is that is not the average way. That is not the standard way.

Something else was going on and the Holy Spirit drew them into the kingdom. And that was that. So I just want to say one more thing about tactics because this is where people can misunderstand what's going on here.

Tactics are not meant to hide things or manipulate people or anything like that. And sometimes with people hear the word, they immediately think, oh, you're trying to manipulate people. And that couldn't be farther from the truth.

The goal of tactics is clarity and truth. That is the goal. We want people to see how we got to the conclusion that we got to.

We want them to think about what their views are and evaluate them. And we want them to do that clearly. And we want them to see the truth.

That is the goal of tactics. And in light of what they think. So we're like you said, we're responding to them as human beings, as individual human beings and treating them with a dignity of recognizing where they are and what they think and responding to what they actually think.

And that's what tactics help people do. And what we're doing with tactics is exactly what Jesus did. And it's exactly what the Apostles did.

We can see it in the book of Acts, Paul's actions, Peter's actions and the rest of the disciples. We see it all through the Gospels. Jesus maneuvering in sly ways.

Be gentle as does, but sly as serpents. So we're being sly here. There's no manipulation.

There is a little bit of like, if you get to the end of reasoning, you might call it a mic drop moment. But we're not trying to draw blood. This is not a gladiator event.

We are just trying to help them to see that the conclusion that they're faced with is the one that follows the facts and then let that sink in and let the Holy Spirit do his work. All right. Thank you, Greg.

And congratulations. Thank you, Amos. It's a great book.

And if you haven't read tactics or street smarts, I recommend you read both. Actually, I also recommend store reality. I love all your books, Greg.

All right. Well, thank you for listening. And if you'd like to send us a question, you can always send that on Twitter or X or whatever they're calling it these days with hashtag SDRask.

Or you can send it through our website. Just go to our hashtag SDRask podcast page and

you can send us a short two sentence question and we will consider it for the show. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.