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What Should I Do When People I'm Teaching Don't find Apologetics Interesting or Relevant?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what to do when the people you're teaching don't find apologetics interesting or relevant, resting one's faith on experience vs. objective evidence, and an elevator speech answer to the question "What do you believe, and why do you believe it?"

* What should I do when the people I'm teaching don't find apologetics interesting or relevant?

* My faith rests on a dramatic experience I had rather than objective evidence for Christianity, and I'm scared to throw out my "blind faith" for fear of falling away. How should I navigate this?

* What's your elevator speech answer to the question "What do you believe, and why do you believe it?"

Transcript

You're listening to the hashtag S-H-R-S-Podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. Welcome. Hi, Amy.

Hi, Craig. Hey, guess what I have here? What do you have? I have the first copy of Street Smarts in my hand. This is not an ARC, it's not an advanced review copy.

We just got the boxes of the books themselves. Now, they won't be officially released for about 10 or 12 days from this broadcast's array. I'm not sure if you're listening, that would be September 12.

But it's pretty cool to have this in my hands after all the blood, sweat, and tears. I shed to complete it. And you did too, because you had such a magnificent hand in the word smithing in the organization, stuff like that.

So isn't it great to see that? Street Smarts. Using questions to answer Christianity's toughest challenges available for purchase on September 12. At Amazon, we'll have that too.

And we've got a couple of strategies in place that will allow our community to get them from us under special circumstances and stuff like that. So my suggestion, in fact, there might have been already, at the time I'm saying this, this is going out in August. So I think September 1, there will be a missive or a solid ground that comes here or something that gives people an opportunity to receive Street Smarts as a premium for standard reasons.

So, hold tight, you'll see, and that'll be a lot easier for you. Just saying those Street Smarts using questions to answer Christianity's toughest challenges here is finally good. Well, congratulations, Greg.

It's nice to see the actual real coffee. Yeah, the real recording. Okay, we have some questions about apologetics today.

The first one is, what should I do? This one comes from John Phillips. What should I do when people don't find apologetics interesting or relevant? Should I just pray and keep teaching? I'm not sure the people he means though. By the way, and this is what do you mean by that? Notice that in even questions coming from Christians in a thing like this, there are ambiguities.

So if he says, should I just pray and keep teaching, does he mean he's a pastor and people in his audience don't find apologetics interesting? Or does he mean he is talking to people who don't care about reasons or evidences? Frankly, it's hard for me to imagine either circumstance because if a person doesn't care about reasons or evidence, that isn't because they don't care about that. It's because they don't care about what you're talking about. And so if you're sharing with somebody, they don't want to talk about it.

They care about reasons and evidence in every other circumstance of their life that they care about. And this is why when they object to some Christian thing or some Christian moral principle or whatever, they always give a reason why they object. That's not fair.

That's not kind. That's bigoted. I don't want to be bigoted.

I want to be good and moral. You know, that's the subtext there. So they care about reasoning.

You know why they care about reasoning? They're human beings that are made the image of God. What they may not care about is reasoning regarding this topic. And so they're just going to be dismissive of it.

That's the non-Christian. Now it might be since he said, should I just pray and keep going, keep on teaching? Maybe he's a pastor and his audience doesn't seem to care about that. That's actually hard for me to believe too.

And part of the reason is I've been teaching on this to audiences in churches for, well, 30 years was standard reason, and even before that, before we started standard reason. And I never had a sense at all that the audiences were not interested. In fact, they seem very interested.

And it's because they have never heard these kinds of things in many cases before. And there, I can see in their eyes, there are a lot of aha moments. Like, I never thought of that.

And then they're writing it down. So I'm not sure how to answer here because I don't really understand the circumstances. Now, if he's talking about a congregation and they don't seem to be interested in it, that doesn't matter.

And the reason I'm, what if they, if he said, we're not interested in doctrine and pastor. Okay, well, what are you interested in? I'll follow. No, I'm sure that's not his attitude.

Because doctrine's really important. Now, you can communicate doctrine in boring ways and more interesting ways. So we, as given the craft of a speaker, we want to try to communicate it more effectively in a more interesting way.

But the same thing is true about, about apologetics. And that is that right in the scripture, you see lots of apologetics. You can't teach through the scripture very long and be faithful to the text without emphasizing or seeing the emphasis on apologetics.

Jesus says in John 5, I know you don't want to believe me because I'm just one guy. You need two witnesses. Okay.

Then believe because of the works that I do. What works, miracles. This is evidence.

This is another testimony to Jesus. And, or believe because of what Moses said, or believe because of what John the Baptist said. So what is Jesus doing right there in the text? He's making appeals to other lines of support, verifying his messianic calling.

Okay. That's apologetics. He's giving reasons.

And you read an Acts 17, 18 in their bouts. And Paul, as was his custom, reasoned with them. Now, sometimes he reasoned from the scriptures.

Sometimes he reasoned from general observation and Epicurean philosophers, you know, that's in Mars Hill talk. And the text then says, and some were persuaded. So if, if anybody, not just John, is in a position of spiritual authority and they're, they're a pastor or they're, you know, teaching Bible studies or whatever.

We teach the truth as reflected in scripture. And one of the things that it's reflected in scripture is apologetics. And when I have talked to pastors in the past, the reasons why apologetics are important.

I give them four points in summary here. First, the scripture commands us to defend the truth. This is in 1 Peter chapter 3. Secondly, Jesus and the apostles did it.

We have lots of examples of that. Third, it works. J. Warner Wallace is just one of many examples where the evidences drove him, of course, with the hope of the Holy Spirit to a conclusion that the New Testament was accurate.

The resurrection happened. Christianity was true. And he believed it.

And the last thing is what apologetics will do will help a pastor with the toughest critic that any of his people are ever going to face. And that's themselves for good reasons why apologetics ought to be taught, even if it doesn't seem like the people are interested in it, which hasn't been my experience. So there could be creative ways of working it into your material, or you just follow the text.

And when it pops up, you point it out. And there are lots and lots of examples like that. I mean, obviously, Greg, since you have a whole thing prepared and you have these four points, this comes up a lot.

What's interesting to me is I usually hear this from the perspective of someone in the congregation rather than from someone who's teaching. So that seems to be unusual to me. Although I will say we do get questions that teachers will have about people being apathetic about it.

And so I'm just going to answer this, assuming he's talking about teaching Christians here since he's talking about teaching rather than talking to people. I think one problem that might be happening here is something that's widespread in our culture, and we've talked about this many times. Just a misunderstanding about what religion is and what kind of claim you're making as the pastor.

And what you mean when you're talking about Christianity and you're reading the Bible, are you just saying, we like this and this works for us and this makes me feel happy and I like having a community and this is my club and I enjoy this and it's fine for me. And whatever is good for you is good for you. Is that what they're thinking? Well, if that's the case, they don't care about apologetics.

It doesn't matter to them because they're not looking at it in terms of something true and something false. So what I would do is I would really hit hard Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15 about how if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, your faith is useless. You might as well just leave.

We might as well not be having church if this isn't true. So this is a crucial thing for us to think about and be ready to explain to people. Because if it's true, this is the way to salvation for everyone.

If it's false, you are wasting your life on this. And kind of put it in those terms because this is something we need to care about. Paul cared about it enough to say that and we need to care about that too.

So that's the first thing I would do. The second thing I would do and this is something that Brett Kunkle relies on. When he worked for us, when you are teaching people apologetics, the way to get them interested is to bring in someone who's not a Christian to talk to them.

And now sometimes Brett brought in actual atheists and sometimes he would role play an atheist. So either one's possible. When the students didn't know he was an atheist, that was the most interesting.

The youth leader did, but the students didn't know that. But you could also do it in terms of if you want to take it a step down, you could pretend to be an atheist and challenge them and see how they do. But there's something special that happens when they're actually face to face with someone who disagrees with them and they're being challenged and they don't know how to answer.

So if you couple that with the question of is this true and if it's not true, we should be having church and then have them face actual challenges. I think people start to get interested pretty quickly. Yeah, if you want to beat apathy the way I put it, especially in students, just beat them up.

Just beat them up like that within an atheist role play and then they're going to see they don't know as much as they think they know. It's true with adults too. Although characteristically, I was talking with Brett about this last week, characteristically, when he does it for students and for adults, it's the adults that get nastier.

If they don't know that he's a Christian role playing, they get really nasty with him. Interesting. Yeah, very curious, more threatened.

Well, and this is also an opportunity to help them learn how to do this in a way that's gracious and Christ like and that's where the tactics can come in and help you. But that will reveal to them where they are and all of this and where their weaknesses are. So it's a good way to get people interested.

Alright, here's a question from Adam. I came to faith through a dramatic experience about 20 years ago. My faith has rested on this experience rather than objective claims of Christianity.

I want to rest my faith on objective reality, but it's scary to throw out my quote blind faith for fear falling away. Any tips for navigating this? Well, yeah, his faith, as he described it, is not blind. It's based on a religious experience.

Paul became a believer based on religious experience. You read the account there in Acts, what, seven, eight, nine, somewhere in there. And you see what happened to Paul.

He is a persecutor of Christians. He has not convinced in any way, shape, or form that there's any legitimacy to the claim that Jesus is actually the Messiah. And he has stopped in his tracks, as it were, on the road to Damascus.

And Jesus speaks to him and strikes him blind. It gets his attention. Saul Saul, why are you persecuting me? Who are you, Lord? This is Jesus, okay? And then he got sent that he went to Damascus and he's there kind of praying and fasting, whatever, three days.

It's a really strange thing. And then Jesus sends another disciple, Ananias, not the one who died earlier, obviously, but there's a different disciple and says he's got a mission for Paul. And then he was healed.

The scales fell from his eyes and he could see. So he had a dramatic experience on the road to Damascus, no, on Damascus road, rather. He had a dramatic experience.

There was a healing that was entailed in part of the experience and he became a believer. Now, did he understand when he became a believer why the Old Testament pointed to Jesus as the Messiah? No, he didn't. He had to learn that.

And of course, he was a quick study. And in fact, he was in Damascus. I don't know how long he was there.

But when he left, he left under persecution. He fled because he was being persecuted by the Jews just as he had persecuted other Christians. And it says that his disciples lowered him over the wall in a basket, his disciples.

So he's already got a following of people based on his substantive teaching, which comes out later, you know, arguing forcibly from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. This is this you see later in the text. But there's nothing wrong with grounding, especially initially, your convictions in a religious experience.

Now, I think there are limitations to that. Mormons have a religious experience. Okay.

And it convinces them of a falsehood. All right. But what's interesting about Mormons is Mormons, they are seeking the religious experience in a very narrow way based on a false text of the use of a false use of a text in James.

They are asking, give me an experience to show me, convince me that the Book of Mormon is from God. That's their approach. And as they seek and seek and seek, then

they get a burning in the bosom.

And I've had some tell me, they tried really hard. I took a long time for them to get the burning in the bosom. And there's a lot of social pressure going on.

This is very different from the Damascus road. And in fact, in the Damascus road situation, there were third person witnesses to the Bible. They were not to the event itself, not just that it happened, but they heard the sound of a voice, but they didn't understand it.

Just all to say, there are lots of ways that God penetrates our life with the truth. And frankly, when I became a Christian, I had no understanding of evidences in favor of Christianity. September 28, 1973, I just knew that Christianity was true.

I mean, that's the best way I could say to little by little, I just had the sense this is the real deal. And then I committed my life to Christ. And it wasn't until after that that I got involved in apologetics because I needed to answer other people's questions and my own.

And so that came afterwards. So nothing illicit or illegitimate about grounding your convictions in a religious experience. All right, that's a standard way that God works.

It's nice to broaden the base just as Paul did and just as I did and others as well. But that is not blind faith or a leap of faith. Yeah, so I just to add to that, Greg, obviously, you know, even if you have a powerful experience or some sort of experience where you feel like you go from being asleep to waking up or whatever anyone would describe it, your feelings will go up and down.

And as you get away from that experience, you will encounter difficulties and suffering and all sorts of things. And that's the point where you want to have the the reasons to back you up, the intellectual reasons to counteract your feelings if because feelings go up and down. Yeah, now you're having a different kind of experience.

Right. Exactly. Now, that's not to say that your first experience was just feelings.

Right. But your feelings will come in where you'll be afraid that it's false or whatever and that your confidence in that will go up and down. So that's why you add more confidence and you try to understand Christianity better.

That's the toughest critic kind of line I offered earlier, category. Yeah, right. So what's interesting to me is that he says he's afraid to look at apologetics for fear of falling away.

Oh, I didn't do that. Well, I'm not sure. Maybe that's not what he's saying.

He says, but it's scary to throw out my blind faith for fear falling away. So it sounds almost like he's afraid there's not anything there to catch him objectively. And maybe

that's not what he means here, but I'm just going to address that right now and say, you don't have to have any fear at all about that.

If it's true, then objective reality will indicate that it's true. If it's false, then you don't want to believe it anyway. So why are you hanging on to it? So we don't have to fear truth at all.

So you can go ahead knowing that you've had this experience and remembering it and remembering how you came to know God and what happened. And you can also look into why it's true and add that on there. That doesn't mean you have to forget everything that happened before.

You're just adding another aspect of reality beyond your own experience to explain it. That's right. It isn't one or the other.

And maybe he got the impression from someone that religious experience is not valid. Actually Bill Craig talks a lot about this as, and sort of say, I think, Ellen Planting us. So if you want philosophers who give reasons why religious experience is properly basic.

In other words, it's a legitimate way of knowing something. Read those guys if you want. But we're just here to say that religious experience has its place.

Paul gave his testimony twice, actually, in the book of Acts to explain to the rest what happened to him. So his experience, he felt, was veritcal. It was truthful.

And it had evidential value, which is why he was offering it to the others. Now, like I said, you're going to have competitors with experience like LDS. But the kind of experience Christians have and what LDS conjure up, and I'm just going to use that characterization because I think that's exactly what happens.

It's very, very different. It's very different. Paul wasn't on the road to Damascus wondering whether Jesus was the Messiah and praying about having a feeling that God would give him a burden in the bosom that he really was.

Nothing like that was going on. Rather, something very profound took place. And this is a character of a lot of questions who are not seeking this and not tying to conjure it up in order to validate and verify some doubt.

And the doctrinal view LDS in this case, which scripture itself has already spoken regarding. You know, there's another source of information. You don't need to seek the burning of the bosom.

Anyway, I got it. And we can be aware of our own transformation. We can know how we were before where we had no interest in God and no love for God.

And then all of a sudden we're transformed and our eyes are opened and everything in

our life is different. We see everything differently. We love God.

That's something that we, that's a kind of transformation that's not necessarily what somebody else might have or they had to just have a feeling that this is true. And I would also say, sometimes people think that apologists discount all feelings. And I think that's because of a misunderstanding.

We're not saying that your feelings are worthless. We're just saying you can't really use your experience to necessarily convince somebody else because they can have a different experience and you can't really explain your experience in a way that they would experience. Yeah, Bill Craig has a phrase for that.

I can't remember. It's something like what's convincing to us isn't convincing to other people. It's a clever, does this sound familiar to you? It does sound familiar, but I don't remember the exact words.

But we use apologetics to show others the truth. Right. Even though the experience may play into how we came to know the truth.

Right. All right, we're over time. But Greg, I'm going to ask this last question anyway because it's related to these other two.

And this one comes from Damon Hawkins. I'm overwhelmed by all the arguments and the challenge to properly balance apologetics and personal testimony. What is your elevator speech answer to the question? What do you believe and why do you believe it? Well, well, the first question is how tall is this building, by the way? Good question.

The first question is very well, it's very, very broad. Okay. And I guess I'd want to say.

That there is a God, I mean, again, the elevator speech, okay, first, first three stories here, there is a God who is there. He has not been silent. Francis Shaeffer's title.

He has visited this planet in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He gave evidence of who he was and that did something to rescue us from ourselves. That will determine what happens to everybody in the final resurrection.

Okay, that's maybe the content. At the end of history, maybe I'll put it that way for a non-Christian. All right.

Why do I believe it? Well, this one in a certain sense is I'll give the general point that I've given many times because that answer about the nature of reality, okay, I'm not talking about my faith, my beliefs as such. Of course, they're my faith and belief, but what I believe about those things is that this is the way the world is. Okay.

And I think that this is an accurate take on the world. It's the accurate picture of reality taken as a whole because it turns out to be the best explanation for the way things are.

And so when you look at the way the world is, that the world came into existence, that the world has conscious beings, that one set of the conscious beings, human beings, have a moral nature, okay, and that concepts like mercy and goodness and justice and wickedness and evil, all of these are real parts of the universe.

The world view, the picture of reality that makes the most sense out of all of these things turns out to be the Christian view of reality. And I can go into details about that. And this is the way the motif that I use, for example, in the book we were just talking about street smarts.

I have two chapters in atheism, followed by one chapter on the problem of evil. And the chapter on the problem of evil is called evil atheism's fatal flaw. So I position the problem of evil not in a defensive way like, well, let's see if I can find out how I can convince you that it makes sense in our world.

I did that in the story of reality more. No, I'm trying to show there is a problem of evil and that's not bad for us. It's bad for atheists.

And here's why, because it is simply put the problem of evil fits into our world. Our story is about the problem of evil from the beginning to the end. Starts in chapter three at N 66 books later.

So it fits in our story and our story is not over yet. It's just part of it. There's no real problem there in a certain sense.

There are questions that come up that we can speculate on and try to answer. But the key thing is the problem of evil makes sense in our story. It does not make sense in the atheist's story.

Okay. So there's one example of our view of reality being a much better explanation. In fact, the best explanation for evil or for the origin of the universe or for the existence of consciousness or the reality of human freedom or a whole host of other things.

So that in a nutshell, what do we have about 79? It's a really tall building. It's a really tall building. Yes, my answer.

Well, let me ask you, since he asked about this specifically, if you were to give a short elevator speech, would you include any testimony in that or would you stick to kind of more of what you would just describe? No, I don't think I would put testimony in it partly because nothing in my testimony is evidential. It isn't like I heard a voice. I went blind and then I got healed the blindness through these later.

So there's nothing that's third person public that I can offer. Secondly, I really want to work to avoid relativizing my own views. This is why I don't like when people say, well, the Christian view is.

I mean, there's a place for that, but we have to be very careful that we're not just saying this is kind of, as you put it earlier, our club. I don't like, well, we believe this or we have faith that. My faith tells me thus and so.

No, I'd rather put this in terms of my understanding of the nature of reality. These are my convictions about the way the world is. And I have particular reasons for believing that my or thinking, there's that word again, of thinking that my convictions match the world.

Watch this. And then I can talk about that. So I'm going to try to stay away from the subject of element in my case for those reasons.

And I especially don't want people to be tempted to relativize my view. They could say it's inaccurate, fine. But if it's, if my view is relative, it can't be inaccurate.

It's true for me. That's all you can say. I really appreciated that you started with God in your short little speech at the beginning because that's exactly where I would start to.

And there were two things I think I would emphasize about him just very quickly. And I would say he's perfectly good and he's also perfectly righteous and holy and just. And that's that's bad news for us.

Right. But, but if you can get some sense of the beauty of God because we want them to want to be reconciled to him. However, I will say that the apostles emphasized the judgment more than they did the beauty of God.

But I would include both, especially since people aren't aware that there's any reason why we would want to be with God except that we don't want to be in hell. And so I would, I would encourage you to say something about that. Something about him as the judge.

Gosh, I was thinking of all these other things that I would want people to say because I don't, I don't want to give the idea that he's only a judge. I mean, he, he, God is, is Trinitarian. There's a loving father, a loving son.

There's the Holy Spirit. There, that whole, that whole aspect of God and the beauty of his love and all those things is so important. But I don't know how you fit that into.

No, I don't know. I actually closed the story of reality with this concept, which it's not only something I'm aware of strongly aware of my own life. I think many people are, but it's something that CS Lewis really developed a lot.

And, and the point is God is the one we've been looking for all of our lives. He's the one that is made to satisfy our deepest needs. And the line that I close with pretty much on the story of reality is from Lewis himself.

And what he says is the door that we've been knocking on all of our lives will finally open. So maybe you could even start with the question, do you ever long for something better than this? Yeah. I really think they answered that who we're looking for is God.

Right. Is this perfect, beautiful God, but he's also a judge and we have broken his law and we're guilty. And that's a problem for us because we deserve judgment.

But even, even though we didn't deserve it, not because we earned it, but because he actually loved us, his creation. He sent Jesus to die for us. He died for us on the cross.

He paid the penalty for our sins. And now we can be reconciled to God. And then at the end, if you want to include some testimony, what you could say is, and this is what he's done for me.

He has forgiven me. And I'm reconciled. And I've found what it was that my heart was longing for.

And then you could finally get off of the top floor of the tall building in the world. It used to be at a seer center at Chicago, which I don't know what it is now. You could just hit the stop button and just wait for the paramedics for the firemen or whoever it is who comes to get you out.

All right. Well, that is all the time we have for. But I love answering these questions about apologetics when they come in because obviously this is what we love to do.

And we want to help you to be able to do that also. So thank you for your questions. If you have a question for us, send it on Twitter with the hashtag STRSK or you can go through our website.

Just look for our hashtag STRSK podcast page. This is Amy Hall and great cocoa for Stand to Reason.