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What Should I Do if I Don't Know How to Respond to Someone's Answer to My Question?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what to do when you don't know how to respond to someone's answer to your question and you feel unsafe in the conversation and how to go about witnessing to and discipling a transsexual who is open to following Christ but has practical concerns.

* How do I gracefully move from a position in a conversation in which I've asked a question but then get stuck after hearing the answer and don't feel safe?

* How would you go about witnessing to and discipling a transsexual who is open to repenting and following Christ but who has concerns like how to practically live out his new faith and whether it's too late to inherit the kingdom due to past decisions?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Gray Cogle and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag, S-T-R-Ask podcast. All right, Gray, are you ready for a tactics question? No. Too bad.

Okay. Why do you ask? This one comes from Steve from Indianapolis. Okay.

I read tags. And I'm wondering how to navigate conversations in which you're asked a question, but then feel stuck after hearing the answer and don't feel safe. How do you gracefully move from this position? Do you have any examples you could share? Actually, I need an example from Steve to be clear on what he has in mind.

In other words, he asks the question, he gets an answer, and he doesn't know what to do, where to go next, and in fact feels vulnerable in light of the answer that's given or vulnerable because he started a conversation that he can't pursue. That's what it sounds like to me. It doesn't have a response.

Well, okay, I'll kind of start with simple to more complex. You could simply say, thank you, okay, that clears it up for me. Just curious about that, you know, and incidentally, there's nothing at all wrong with that.

And I encourage, in a sense, newbies who were just starting out, gave a talk on this last weekend in Anchorage, Alaska. And my point to them was, look at, you know, very little here, but you know enough to just test it out, but your ankle deep in the shallow end of the pool, it's easy. You just ask these questions and consider yourself a student of the other person's view.

Don't think about what's happening down the line. In fact, I make a big point about this. In your very first step of the game plan, you're going to just think about gathering information.

You're not going to think about where you're going to go next. And maybe this is the way Steve has been doing. He said, okay, I'm going to ask this question, and then I'm going to get to this.

Don't worry about that. Just think about gathering this information, and because you're not sure, it's not going to be clear at all where you're going to go in the next step until you get an answer to your question. And it might be what happens is the answer turns out to be a dead end for you.

It doesn't take you anywhere. Now, if it's a question about somebody else's view, and usually it's one of two things, it's a question about someone else's view contrary to Christianity, or it's going to be a question about a challenge offered by somebody else. And this is really what Street Smart focuses in on for the most part.

You want clarity about these issues before you can move forward. You're setting the stage if you're going to answer a challenge or deflect a challenge to your own view. And so you're going to have to ask the questions that isn't going to set the stage, but people don't always cooperate.

And when I say that, I don't mean they're not cooperative. What I'm saying is they don't always give you the answer that you're thinking they're going to give you that will lead to the next question you already have on your mind. This actually happened in the first interview I do with Street Sparts and Sean McDowell wanted to jump right into a back and forth and back and forth and back and forth.

I said, all right, but it's not going to go like the book because you've got your own unique stuff, you know? And so that's what happened. And he started firing this stuff off to me. And then I went following his lead, and he said, I don't think you're going to ask me that question.

So it was like, yeah, this is the nature of these kinds of conversations. So and that's the way they often go. Sometimes you expect they're going to go one direction.

You ask a question in your your your your Stonewald. You don't know what to do next. Okay.

Well, I'd just say thank you. Let it ride learning experience of some sort. Generally though, when people answer the question, it was going to be some other feature factor detail ambiguity that you can trade on with another question to get more clarity and draw them out more and more.

And the more you can do that, the more you're going to find out about their view and not just will you find out more about their view, they will find out more about their view. And this seems a little odd to put it that way, but the fact is, and I had somebody just this last week and tell me after I gave a presentation, then you see your tactics material. He said, I've been amazed to find out people don't know how to defend their own views.

When you ask them, how'd you come to that conclusion or something of that sort, they got nothing to say. They don't know how. And this is going to be the case a lot.

And so what that person learns in that little conversation is that they don't have the goods they thought they had. And whether even if the Christian doesn't, in a certain sense, disarm them or parry them with some solid piece of information, just the fact that they are asked questions about their own view that they're incapable of answering can be a stone in their shoe. All right, get them thinking.

And as a famous case of the Seattle, and I'm sorry, the Waitress in Seattle a few years back at it's in the Street Smarts book, where that happened. I was early in the morning, and I didn't want to talk to anybody about certainly not God or Jesus or anything actually, because it was too early, I was trying to wake up. And she starts carrying on with all this stuff, my Waitress, and I got to ask you these questions because I can't make sense out of what she's saying.

I'm just trying to be polite. And it turns out, even though I'm not advocating for my view, and I'm just asking for clarification, she tells me later, nobody has ever asked me any questions about my own view before and it got me thinking, wow, I wouldn't even try it. So the first step of the game plan is to gather information, don't think of anything beyond that.

If you're asking questions to get some information and you don't know where to go next, then don't go anywhere next. Chances are, there are more questions you could ask based on the answer that's been given. So more, what do you mean by that? Yes, of course.

And how did you come to that conclusion? Yes, that's right. But maybe not. Sometimes you just have a sense when you're asking a question to get a response and your sense is, this person doesn't want to talk about anything like this and you let the conversation die a natural death.

That's happened to me before. That's no problem. There's no pressure in this.

So that's what my recommendation to Steve would be. If you don't know where to go, then you don't go anywhere else. You say, thank you.

But chances are there's going to be something in the response that you could ask more questions about. And I think there's, if it's somebody you're going to see again, you could certainly say, wow, I really want to think about this. Can we talk about this again later? And then you can think about it and maybe you'll come up with a question over the next week or whatever it is.

But there's nothing wrong with just saying, oh, that's really interesting. Thanks. If it is interesting, maybe it's not interesting, they say, okay, thanks to commit yourself.

You could even say, I don't know how to respond to that. There's nothing wrong with being honest about this. In fact, the more you are, the more likely they're going to be willing to talk to you because if they feel like you will never acknowledge when they have a good point, they're not going to want to talk to you for very long.

So don't be afraid to do that. I think that's totally fine to do. Me too.

Okay, let's go into a question from Maggie Bond. How would you go about witnessing to and discipling a transsexual who wants to slash would be open to repenting and following Christ? Concerns are how to practically live out new faith, whether it's too late to inherit the kingdom due to past decisions, et cetera. Well, this is a kind of a hard question for me to answer, though I understand it's the kind of thing people are going to run into more and more frequently.

It's like when you're in a culture where there's polygamy practiced and then somebody who has married a number of women becomes a Christian, now what do you do? I don't know that I'm the best one to answer this, but let me offer some general thoughts. One of them is that there's a question about witnessing for the sake of salvation and discipleship and those are two entirely distinct things. And I don't think you should worry about the second until the first one's resolved.

I've always said that you, and it's not just me, others have offered the same thought, that sin, so we don't expect Christians, I'm sorry, non-Christians to live like Christians, then, and the issue with any non-Christian isn't any particular sin. Though sometimes in a person's life a particular sin may be the thing that drives them to their knees. In terms of our witnessing, we are not going to look at some sin in their life and just keep pounding on them, so finding a gay person then rail against homosexuality or something like that or transsexual individuals reigning against that.

The point isn't that particular sin, the point is in sins of different sorts, the point is sin. It's the native rebellion against God. And so even if a person was not sitting in that particular way, they're sitting in other ways.

And my view is, and there's a different point of view on this, but my view is, and I wrote this in the story of reality, that God catches his fish first and then he cleans them. And this is why the kind of the commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord approach sometimes, I think is not exactly sound. Now Jesus is the Lord, but we can't expect any person to surrender everything before they become a Christian because we've just added a big work now to qualify them for Christianity.

No, it's kind of just as I am, and what ends up happening is when you become a Christian, then you have a transformation on the inside, you have renewed mind, you have new training and teaching in a new community of people that are helping you to see the world the way it really is and the things that you had been doing as a matter of practice are things that are not consistent with following Jesus. And you don't even have to throw following as Lord. It's the same thing following Jesus.

He is who he is, he is the Lord. And so we are to follow him. That's what it means to be a disciple of Christ, to be a disciplined follower.

So and it's by the way, the disciples who are first called Christians in Antioch. So a Christian is a follower of Jesus, most strictly speaking. So we want to encourage people to do that after they put their faith in Christ and have this transformation on the inside, now you've got something else to work with, all right? So I would focus in on sin writ large, not on any particular sins in a person's life.

No, you had to stop that before you become a, you had to stop that. No, you can't do that. Okay.

If you want to come to Christ, you got to stop all those things. No, this is controversial. There are a lot of good people that are going to disagree with me on this, but I just, I don't see it.

There is repent, repent, repent in the Bible, but you got to look at the rest of the language because in common parlance nowadays, repent means to turn from sin, but that isn't what repent means. Repent means to have a change of mind. And so that, and that includes a change of behavior, but you have to look in the very particular instances in scripture where this word is actually being used and how it's modified.

Repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ, for example, that's a, that's a passage. So I'm just saying when, when we bring the gospel, we just bring the gospel to sinners and then let, and when sinners see their guilt, which isn't any particular sin, some may stand out for them. God may convict them about particular things or it may be, you know, it's just a host of things.

It was, I was living in gross sin. I was just a gross sinner when I became a Christian. And I needed to have a bunch of things taken care of that didn't get resolved for sometimes a

year or two, even in pretty intense discipleship.

And so that's the process of sanctification. Now, once a transsexual becomes a Christian in the process of discipleship, this is where I think the God's way is communicated. And this is where I'm not so, it isn't like I have the best of a lot of background or history here.

You have to deal with people as individuals and work with them to move them towards a more godly lifestyle. So what does that look like for a transsexual? Well, eventually it means that a man has to quit living like a woman because that isn't what God wants or a woman has to quit living like a man. Now, sometimes a surgery involved in a surgery can't be redone reversed, I should say.

But that doesn't mean a man or a woman who is a Christian can't live as the man or a woman that God was created them to be, even though because of past sin, now they have liabilities. They have other problems to overcome. But the actual nuts and bolts of day to day working in discipleship with that person, in one way, it's like everybody else.

You're just going to move them towards increased godliness and sanctification. Yet at the same time, with every person, there are peculiar things in their life that are besetting sins that over time in the discipleship relationship needs to be addressed. But this is where I think it's really important to follow the kind of the, what's the word I'm looking for, the spirit of Galatians 6, where it says, if any man is caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourselves, lest you also be tempted.

And I really love the general spirit that's characterized it. There's a gentleness and a softness, even though there's a direction towards sanctification that the older Christians are encouraging the other Christian to move into. And I think especially when you're dealing with something like LGBT and transgender and stuff like that, especially when there's these really, really heavy duty cultural elements that are encouraging the behavior and discouraging changing, we have to kind of pace ourselves a little bit.

Now I know, and you know people, we both know people who have had a radical transformation almost overnight, Beckett Cook, for example, a homosexual walks into a church, gets magnificently transformed in one service, and walks out a different person. And this guy was deeply enmeshed in Hollywood and knew everybody, all the elisters, he trafficked with all of them, and yet he realized that his lifestyle was not right before God, and so that changed everything for him. But others, it's a struggle, and it may be a struggle all their lives, because God works with different people in different ways.

Well, I want to start by addressing the very end of this question where one of the concerns was, is it too late to inherit the kingdom due to past decisions? I think what you need to do, obviously, when you're presenting the gospel, it's clear that Jesus pays for all of our sins, and there's nothing excluded from that. But there is a verse that I think could

be very helpful in this case, and that's 1 Corinthians 6, 9 through 12, and here's what it says, or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor feminine, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God? Now that's what most people have in mind. That's why he might be concerned.

But the very next verse says this, such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God. And right there you see, it was not too late for them. Jesus can wash and sanctify any past sin.

And there's nothing about it's too late, or you've gone too far, and now you've done too much for Jesus to cover. And if they need another example, look at Paul. He says in 1 Timothy, all right, go ahead, Greg.

He says, starting verse 12, 1 Timothy 1, I think Christ Jesus is our Lord, who has strengthened me because he considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor, yet I was shown mercy. And then we'll further down. It's a trustworthy statement that's right, deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost of all yet.

For this reason, I found mercy, said it might, that in me as the foremost Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in him for eternal life. So this is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God can save the greatest sinner, he can save the lesser sinner.

That's the point there. Right. So those two passages, I think, could be very comforting to someone who thinks maybe Jesus will reject me.

He also said, I will not turn aside anyone who comes to me. If you come to Jesus, you will be accepted. That's the bottom line.

Now, what makes this a little bit more complicated, I think, than somebody who maybe has a less obvious sin to themselves or to others, is that this person is probably very aware that his lifestyle will have to change. I mean, we don't even have to point that out. They're probably nervous about that already.

And you know, Jesus says, I mean, maybe Jesus says, you know, count the cost. So it's, I don't think it's wrong to make that person aware of it if it comes up. But if you, if you can present these examples of, you know, Jesus will cover anything.

When it comes to discipling, I think there are, there are two things you have to establish right at the beginning. And maybe this is even before they become a Christian, if they're

going to count the cost. And I don't know if you would disagree with that, Greg.

But the first thing is, do you, you know, when you come to Jesus, do you desire to put him above everything else? That doesn't mean you're capable of doing it right now. But do you desire to submit to whatever you find that he wants for you? Is that, is that your, is that what you're turning towards? And again, Greg, maybe this is, you would disagree with this. But I think if you can establish, you know, the idea that I trust God, I love God, I see what Jesus has done, I want, I want to follow him.

And that involves putting him above everything else in your life, which will be a struggle forever. But, but it just in principle, are you, is that what you want? Because that you have to establish, we all have to submit our sin to Jesus. We all have to say, Jesus says, this is wrong.

So we have to give up certain things that that we want to do. That's just how it works. It's not any different for, for this person, though it might be more obvious to him and it might feel very scary for him.

So are you willing to put Jesus above all your other desires? Secondly, are you willing to submit to the inspired Word of God? Because you might say, yes, I want to submit to Jesus, but I'm going to decide what I think Jesus would want. And then you're not really submitting to him. So these two aspects, God has revealed what's good.

Are you willing to submit to that? Are you willing to submit to Jesus? This is painful for everyone. This is a process for everyone. It takes our whole lives to work on.

But it's just in principle, then I think you're on a good path and you can work on things as they come. But those are, I think, the two biggest things. And finally, one more thing about that before I go on, you may be afraid to say that because you think, oh, no, I could scare him away.

But the truth is our salvation is a miracle, no matter what. And you, to honor God in this way by presenting what the cost will be, I think that's fine. The Holy Spirit will open his eyes or he won't.

But I don't think you have to worry about scaring someone away just by presenting the truth. I mean, obviously do it lovingly. And from a position, as you said, with gentleness and recognizing your own sin, that we all have to go through this process.

And then finally, I would say there is a website called sexchangeregret.com and it was created by Walt Heyer. And he was a man who lived as a woman for a long time and I went through surgeries and everything. And then he became a Christian and now he's living as a man again.

So if you would like some support in that area, I would go to that website and hear about

their stories because he will know things that I don't know about what will be involved with following Jesus as somebody who I assume if it says transsexual, there's been some sort of surgery involved here, which will make this difficult. But there are other people who have gone through this and this person will not be alone if he decides to follow Jesus. So I am in agreement with all the things you said.

Sometimes this is, remember, this is the process of discipleship. So these things get worked out in different ways over time, depending on the individual. But these are foundational notions that you've just described.

I'm just thinking when I do the close at reality, we're all done after the weekend. We're going to be doing one here in a couple of days, we're heading out to Philly. But I basically, when I offer the gospel, I'm not trying to get people to decide to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

I mean, that's not the way I'm thinking. But I am telling them what's at risk and they're going to have to stand before Jesus and he's given a count for their lives. And the calculus is simply this, either Jesus pays or you pay.

And I recommend that you get down on your knee, beat your breast and say, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner like in Jesus' parable, and then get up and follow Jesus and never stop. So this is kind of the way I put it. And then they will learn what is entailed in following Jesus.

Of course, they're all part of a community of believers already at these events. But it's just a way of kind of communicating that your whole life now is given to this enterprise following Jesus. But as it works out in these different particulars, I'm just thinking in my own life, at different times, different issues were addressed that I needed to deal with.

And frankly, most of them, as I think back on them, were things that I was actually under conviction of by the spirit. I knew these things had to be resolved. Well, thank you for the question, Maggie.

I hope that helps. And if you have a question, just send it to us on X with the hashtag STRAsk or you can go to our website at STR.org. We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.