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How Do I Begin My Journey to Become an Apologist?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to begin one's journey to become an apologist and whether, in light of Jesus driving people who were buying and selling out of the temple in Matthew 21:12, it's okay for speakers to sell their books in churches.

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Transcript

[music] I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Kolkel and you're listening to Stand to Reasons #STRAskPodcast. Yes you are.

All right Greg, here's a question that I think we get pretty regularly. It's a slightly different twist on a question we get a lot. So refer to podcast #357.

I'm not sure how many times we've talked about it on this podcast. So here it is. This one comes from Cindy Taylor.

I am 65 and have studied the Bible since I became a Christ follower at 31 but I want to become an apologist. How do I begin my journey to become an apologist? Well good Cindy. I tip my hat to you and I think it's great that you have meaningful goals and horizons that you're shooting for even at the stage of life that you're in.

Well I always give two pieces of advice regarding this kind of question but I'm thinking if I want to expand on it. I got into apologetics because I was interested in it and I had questions to answer by people how I was talking to on the street during the Jesus movement and then when I joined this Christian community in Westwood and moved into the community there were about 60 some people that lived there in that facility there about 100 plus in the community lived outside of campus so to speak. It was called the Jesus Christ light powerhouse.

I got a chance to be exposed to people who actually trafficked in apologetics and could recommend books and stuff. Back then there wasn't very many. There was Francis Schafer who I benefited greatly from.

The most really. There was John Warwick Montgomery. There was Norm Geisler, there was Josh McDowell, Walter Martin and Walter Martin focused on cults and I actually had exposure to Walter Martin before I was a Christian but that really didn't play a role in my own conversion.

So how did I do it? I followed my interest and I saw a book it looked interesting so I read it and I reflected on it. I didn't have any aspirations of becoming an apologist. I don't know what an apologist was.

These were just areas of interest to me and so the evolution, well here's a book, okay I read that, you know, a critique of evolution, a scientific critique from somebody capable in the field. I, you know, there are problems with the challenges to the Bible so I had evidence that demands a verdict on the resurrection and there I could read that and I just followed my interests. I didn't try to become an apologist.

I just was interested in this particular issue and as time went on I realized that it gave me more capability to respond to other people and it also encouraged my own convictions as well. So I guess my recommendation to Cindy is to follow your interests in apologetics, okay. There are lots of areas of defense for Christianity.

They tend to be more of a generalist myself just because I'm interested in a lot of areas. Some people focus more in on say ethical issues like abortion or same-sex marriage and whatever and this is a specialty for example of Alan Schleeman and he also was very interested in Islam and so he's specialized in that too. That guy knows a lot of stuff in those areas that he has specialized in and Tim Barnett, science teacher, he leans towards that but he does a lot of other stuff as well.

John Nois used to be an atheist and he likes talking about the issues of atheism. So Cindy I think you should just follow your interests to build your understanding. All right now the more you build your understanding and what I have characterized this as in the past as be a student of your craft.

If you want to develop apologetics as a craft be a student of apologetics read. Read whatever interests you read carefully. Reflect on it you know but by the way if you're really interested in you're going to read it carefully.

I read all my stuff like that really carefully because I it was fun. It wasn't an assignment. Then I decided since now I'm developing this understanding of apologetics things in particular and there's a need to convey that understanding to others either non-Christians in engagement or to train other Christians in it.

I have a spiritual gift of teaching. I just want to tell people what I know and so it was that could speed of trouble sometimes but I it was just natural for me to start talking and when I had an occasion doing a little study or something with people about the thing that I was interested in. That's how I became an apologist.

I didn't decide to be an apologist and then figure out what's the right route to get there. It just developed and I became more serious over time about developing my craft and then I signed up at Simon Greenleaf University in the late 80s to get a master's degree in apologetics. I actually honestly wasn't really shooting so much for the degree as I was taking classes that interested me and that's the first time I had a class from JP Moreland for example that's where I met JP and then I took a bunch of classes over and over.

I John Montgomery taught one of the classes. Craig Hawkins was in that class. He's an apologist in Southern California.

Here's some people recognize him. We did a lot of radio work together later and that's how I met Craig Hawkins and one of the classes was taught by Kim Riddlebarger and he was reformed and I got introduced to logic and stuff like that and he used to hang out with Kim and Kim was a good buddy of Mike Horton and so I ended up going to Mike Horton's house a lot back before he even had a PhD and that's how I learned reformed theology and famously as I say in his jacuzzi which is true. So notice how just one thing led to another is what I'm saying.

I'm just pursuing my interest and I wasn't even think about it as a stewardship but I was able to refine my pursuit by working on my master's degree and then they sent me a letter and said you're ready to graduate. Really? I'm all done? Yep. One more course and then you graduate.

Oh okay so it just kind of happened. Now at that point when I was ready to graduate with one more course I knew about JP Morland's MA Phil course program. They were just starting.

This is 1993. I think the program started in 92 and Melinda had already enrolled I think in that program and so what I did is I bridged over into it so I took the first course in the MA Phil program and it transferred over to complete my program as an MA apologetics. They accepted that course so I got my MA apologetics.

Now I'm working at my MA Phil. Now I'm very intentional about developing my craft. I had a lot of stuff about apologetics on my own and then through this MA program which was headed up as it turns out by Craig Hazen who eventually went to Biola and started the program there and so that's how I got to know Craig actually initially and then and then intentionally now I need another I need a step up and that's why I went into a much more challenging program on philosophy which has been it's just I can't even begin to explain how helpful that has been given the kinds of challenges that I've faced since

then as a communicator and as somebody out in the marketplace of ideas but notice the progression so my recommended recommendation to Cindy is if you want to be an apologist it's because you like apologetics so just keep reading keep studying or take courses or do things online or if you want get a degree you can go to Biola or you can go to you know SES and there's a lot of programs that have distance learning capabilities or opportunities and then continue to do that and then keep your eye open for opportunities where you can use what you've learned and what you're learning in the lives of other people now this is bloomer you're planted which is the other aphorism that has made a big difference to me and and then start doing that and the more that you do that that you have the capability probably the more opportunities will be presented to you and also the more you're going to learn your craft because you're communicating it to others in an organized way which is part of learning your craft it's not just the content it's the delivery so that's what I would recommend I don't know about your own journey Amy I'd like to hear that because this might help mine was pretty similar I was just really interested in it and I was working in the film industry and I was talking to a lot of people and having discussions about spiritual things and so I wanted to get the the bastards at Biola and I did that on nights and weekends never dreaming I would be doing this for a career I was just doing it because I loved it and I love talking to people and I was using it in real life so I think kind of goes along with everything that you said there Greg but I what I would say to Cindy is as soon as you start helping others understand as soon as you start using what you're learning you you're an apologist so start using it and one of the things that I did right the beginning is you gather like-minded people you find some people who are interested in what you're thinking about and you get together and you start reading books I call that dry tinder in the last chapter of the of the tactics book and this is a point that JP Morland makes in his book loving your God with all your mind that's great so all so that's something really simple you can do get people together start reading through these books start talking about them and then maybe you can plan some sort of a quote mission trip you can all go to a campus you can go to any sort of a public place and just start talking to people and see what happens and from that you'll learn things and you come back and that will fuel what you're doing anytime you put it into practice it's gonna fuel learning more right and was it the February mentoring letter I can't recall I think it was the February mentoring letter for this year I actually sketched out a way of doing a questionnaire on campus or in the mall or with people a series of questions in different directions you go depending on their answer to the first question which is do you think there is a God not do you believe in God but do you think there is a God yes that takes you in one direction no that takes you another and you're just gathering information so there's a there's we have a help or an aid for that yeah you can just tell them hey we're we're out here talking to people about what they believe and we just have some questions for you we just like to have a conversation with you you'd be surprised how many people are open to that I've been on Brett's mission trips I've I've been in Utah I've been in Utah I've been yes Brett Conkel sorry six years ago he takes nice yes he takes high school and I think college students out on these trips immersive

experience yeah so to the Berkeley campus and we had great conversations so the point is there are all sorts of opportunities to learn with others and to take what you're learning and use it in the real world and then come back and learn more and I think you can start anywhere with that there you and you have to start anyway that's how you get your practice so then a couple of things down the road would be like the the Biola program there's there's a certificate program which is a lot less intense than the master's program so that's a possibility there's cross-examined instructor Academy and that's with Frank Turrigan then Greg teaches there to you will be doing the end of July and there's still openings last I heard but they're getting fewer and fewer yeah cross-instructor cross-examined instructor with the Ed instructor Academy.com yes and that is a place where you can practice speaking and and then the instructors will help you through that and give you advice but you don't have to be a speaker to be an apologist I mean maybe that's what you want to do but maybe you just want to be interacting with real people and so that's always open to you even if you're not a speaker and I just want to help you see that you are an apologist if you're using what you learned with with real people and finally there's a post on our website at str.org that I wrote called for the student who wants to be a Christian apologist.

Oh look at you and it's actually it's geared towards high school students because I recommend things like impact 360 and summit but I have a bunch of different articles here for things that you've written like bloom where you're planted and a strength in the basics another post I wrote called a plan to begin a year of learning and has a whole list of books there that I recommend so go to check out that post and you'll find a bunch of things that I also have some links at the end that are more about how we think about kind of more the emotional side and the spiritual side a warning to apologists about sin be a parable of God's grace and that's more like on the character side so I recommend that post and I link to a bunch of Greg stuff and the advice he's given in the past on this that reminds me of something else too to be an apologist is to defend the truth of Christianity to be a Christian apologist so when I took my MA Phil this was a very very demanding master's degree I think there were like 90 credits or something like that that's a lot for an MA in fact it's very difficult to do in two years to 13 but that's partly because close to half of our classes were theology classes we were at Talbot school of theology so we had the philosophers and the theologians and so we were getting as grounded in the truth biblical truth the true story of reality as we were getting grounded in in philosophy of religion and ethics which is that's what that program is so that's really important too do not give good theology the short shift on this I'm really glad you said that Greg's I think that is a danger with a lot of people who are into apologetics they forget about that they forget about knowing the Bible and knowing theology and I think you're right those are and I think they're especially important now because so many objections have to do with the goodness of God and so if you're not familiar with the Bible you don't know it well those things are gonna be difficult to answer all right let's go on to a question from Derek Smith whenever I see speakers or others selling their books

in churches I question whether it's okay Jesus drove people out of the temple in Matthew 21 12 what do you think well churches in the temple first off okay and the Jesus said do not muzzle the oxwalee's threshing that's in the Old Testament I think Jesus said maybe Paul quotes but the other quotation from the the epistles is a quote of Jesus the workers worthy of his wages one of those two and so both Paul and Jesus are making the point that when people gain that people serve the body of Christ they are it's appropriate for them to make a living off of it in fact I'm right at the end of 2 Corinthians or maybe I just finished it that and especially at the end Paul is making a huge defense for his own apostleship and the legitimacy of that sort of thing now he ended up getting a gift from different people to help him but he's telling the Corinthians look when I was with you guys I I it was it was appropriate for me to to take to be supported by you while I was serving you now I didn't do that somebody else supported me so I could serve you okay but I could have and that was appropriate and this is another form of that okay the church isn't the temple okay and keep in mind too there was a very peculiar thing that was that that was happening there and it could it there are innocent optics there are a couple of references to the cleansing of the temple and the the different ones give different information and in one case Jesus said you are you are making this a dent of thieves basically the implication there and there's more that was said about that in the court of the Gentiles this was the place where Gentiles were allowed to come and and honor and and worship the God of Israel okay my understanding is that the money changers that's like Cambio you go to the airport you see Cambio that's money changers you're gonna go into a different culture you need to have the currency for that culture and so that's what people are coming from around the world they have different currencies you have to have money changers that will change the money for you and there was extortion going on exorbitant rates that were being demanded of the people in order to change money to be able to buy what was necessary to appropriately sacrifice okay and so basically people come from other countries even Gentiles and they encounter a bunch of swindlers involved with the religious enterprise it wasn't merely the it wasn't merely that there was that there was commerce of some sort going on because that kind of commerce had to go on people had to make make a sacrifice wherever they're gonna buy the the thing the critters necessary for the sacrifice that a purchase is somewhere I don't think that was the complaint at all in that circumstance I think there was an additional you your robbers and that kind of thing and so someone could study up more on this I'm just going from memory on this right now but I think that's important and so that that even qualifies the complaint in the temple but we're not we don't have a temple anymore the church is in God's house there's no shit kind of glory there people talk about it like oh we're in the Lord's house today it's not his house it's it's a building where Christians gather to worship so there is no sanctity about the building itself that needs to be honored you know your feet are on holy ground here so don't get your wallet out of kind of thing and another thing too is the the books and the kinds of things that we sell I mean this is not this isn't a bunch of Christian junk now we do sell t-shirts okay and some merch so to speak at the conferences because these are

kids and they want it and they wear the t-shirts and it helps identify them with the body of Christ and it helps have a witness to others that they're Christians and we don't make any money on this anyway so it is just really there to serve the body of Christ in both cases now I make obviously I make an honorarium on on the books that I sell wherever they're sold and when standard reason is a retail outlet for that I get a portion of modest portion through the publisher for that standard reason has an upcharge but it's paid to make cost of goods and overhead it's not really a you know profit-making enterprise for us either what we're trying to do is get useful products out into the hands of people that need them and will benefit from them and they get to choose they're not forced by anything they're not making sacrifices they'd have to don't have to buy they don't have to change money so there's no opportunity for that and we're not a den of thieves well I think that's the key thing that he calls them a den of robbers so there was something going on there that was not right and I think if they went there and these were things that they actually needed in order to do what they needed to do at the temple they needed sacrifices or they needed to change their money so they could buy sacrifices or whatever it was well now you're in a position where you can extort them because they have to have it but as you mentioned Greg just bringing a book to offer that as a service as something that can help them is not it's not us saying hey you have to buy this and now we're gonna extort money out of view for this so this it's it's not the same situation of kind of the extortion I think that was going on in the other instance and I do I appreciate what you said about it not being the temple too there were all sorts of rules about holiness and who could be where and at what time and what had to happen before they could go in there that it just doesn't really apply to a church even if we think of it as a sanctified place where we all meet together to worship God and we protect that it's not it's not the same thing as what they had to go through except for when we're doing an event we have the green room that's kind of the holy of holies and no this can't go only the sanctified I don't even like making jokes all right well we're out of time thank you Cindy and Derek we appreciate hearing from you send us your question on Twitter with the hashtag str ask or go through our website at str.org we look forward to hearing from you this is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stan to reason (rock music) (rock music)

(upbeat music)

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