

# OpenTheo

## What Should I Read to Take My Apologetics Knowledge up a Notch?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about what to read to take your apologetics knowledge up a notch, how to reconcile friends' experiences encountering ghosts with what the Bible teaches, whether you should give charitably without taking a deduction on your taxes, and whether God has moods.

\* For those who have a good grasp of the basics of apologetics, what would you recommend reading to take things up a notch?

\* How can I reconcile friends' experiences encountering ghosts in a house that was used in the Underground Railroad with the Bible's teaching that dead people can't come back to haunt the living?

\* Should I give charitably without taking a deduction on my taxes so "my left hand doesn't know what my right hand is doing"?

\* What do you think of the idea that God has moods?

## Transcript

Welcome listeners to the #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and Greg Koukl is here with me. Hey Amy.

Hello Greg. We're here to answer the questions you send on Twitter with the hashtag #STRask or you can go through our website at [str.org](http://str.org). Just go to our podcast page. Look for #STRask and you'll find a link there to send us a question.

In fact, I think we're getting most of our questions that way now because not everybody has Twitter. You always have that option. Just keep it short.

The Twitter size is about 280 characters. That's like two sentences. I think people sometimes don't realize how short that is.

Just keep it two, maybe two sentences, maybe three if it's super short and we'll consider your question. Okay, Greg, I almost called you the name of the person who's asking the first question. This first question comes from Chris Brooks.

For those who've got a good grasp of the basics, for example, textual criticism, canon, resurrection, basic arguments for God, what would you recommend reading to take things up a notch? Well, it's not clear the area or category they're asking about. If they have already read the story of reality, which gives the big picture, sometimes we have these surgical strikes, so to speak theologically on these particular issues, but we really haven't grasped the bigger picture. And what the story of reality does is it's meant to give that larger foundation that these other pieces fit together within.

Okay, big picture is really, really important. And I think about a lot of the questions we answer here on #strask. And a lot of them require an understanding of the bigger picture to be able to solve problems that people ask about regarding particulars and parts of the story.

Once you see the bigger picture, you realize, oh, well, that's how it all fits together. Now, the story of reality is a fairly simple characterization of the big picture. God, man, Jesus, cross, resurrection, beginning to end, and everything important that happens in between, basically.

We have another product, though. It's called the Bible Fast Forward. And that takes a deep dive, because when we go from God to man in the fall, and the next step in the story of reality is Jesus, well, that leaves out about 40 books of the Bible.

And that's where a lot of the theology is developed that represents the foundation of what Jesus ends up coming to do when he arrives. And in fact, we know this because the heralds of Jesus' arrival, we're in Christmastime here now when we're recording. And so we're thinking about a lot of these things that were said on Christmas morning or soon after, or before, like by Gabriel to Mary, all those particular details in these statements, in the prophecy, in the words from Gabriel, the prophecy in Zechariah, the comments that Jesus' circumcision at the temple, the things that are said by the angel to the shepherds, all of these details have a rich history.

And they all go back to the development of the story, the foundation for the Christological part of the story that we read about in the Gospels. So my recommendation is get ahold of those DVDs. And they're called, it's eight sessions, 50 minutes each.

And there's a workbook PDF that's about 150 pages long. So you can print out one session at a time, but it's a very thorough syllabus of all the material. When you go through that, you are going to have a tremendous foundation for everything that follows in the New Testament.

And you're going to see about how so many things tie together that will help. So that would be, I mean, that would be my recommendation. Don't go narrower, go broader, get a big picture, because the apologetic stuff is not helpful very much if you don't have the theology right.

Okay, apologetics are defending our faith and giving an answer for the hope. But if we don't understand how the hope works, okay, then it's going, that's going to be a, that's going to be a big lacuna, you know, in our theology, a big hole in our theology. So that would be my recommendation.

I mean, I can think of books and stuff, but these books are more surgical strikes in different areas. And I think that having something like this big picture that is more theologically refined than the story of reality will help tremendously with all the rest of it. Well, Greg, we think too much alike, because this was exactly what I was going to say.

The Bible and theology, I sometimes, I see a lot of people who are into apologetics and they let these things go by the wayside. And this is just a recipe to go off the rails because when you're reading a lot of philosophy and you're reading a lot of different people's ideas, you're reading a lot of people who aren't even Christians, you're reading their ideas, it's easy to, if you, if you're not familiar with the Bible enough, it's easy to be led astray on certain things. So what you need is a very solid knowledge of the Bible and that and theology, both.

So I recommend working on reading through the Bible over and over, concentrating more on that memorization and reading theology, because like you said, everything you said, Greg, I don't even really have much to add. I just think that it's so important to know what it is that we're talking about. And it's also important just for our own spiritual health, because the whole purpose of all of this is to be with God, to think about God, to know who He is, to be close to Him.

And so when you're reading all these other things, they're interesting, but it's not quite the same thing. And we, I think in this whole community, I think we would all do well to focus more on theology in our own lives, even in our own presentations of apologetics. And that's why I love your book so much, Greg, because it brings those two things together in the story of reality.

It brings together apologetics and theology. And so I appreciate that. So that was exactly my recommendation.

Well, in that light, there is a little classical, a classic work that was sitting on your desk that I tried to purloin last week. By Paul Little, it's called Know What You Believe, really, really good in this regard. It's fairly simple.

It's to the point, but it lays out a good theological foundation in the basic doctrines.

There's another one that I liked a lot and I benefited from tremendously when I was a younger Christian. It's written by Bruce Milne, M-I-L-N-E, and it's simply titled Know the Truth.

Know the Truth. In fact, I mailed a copy to my sister a couple of weeks ago just to build up her foundation. Both of those would be good.

Probably Paul Little is a little bit of an easier read and Bruce Milne, it goes into a little bit more detail. So Know What You Believe and by Milne Know the Truth. And I think very handy little sources.

I think Paul Little also wrote Know Why you remember? Yes, that's right. That was one of the very first things I ever read. Yes.

So right after, I think Mayor Christianity was the first apologetics book I ever read, but that was the very next one. It's an early one I have fond memories about, yes. Know Why You Believe and Know Why You Believe.

It's two different volumes that are very simple. But Know Why You Believe, it sounds like Chris has some foundation in that, but getting the foundation in the broad issues, those are really important and those references will help. And so beyond that, if there's anything you want to take up a notch, I think it's too much of a general question for specific topics because there are so many specific topics.

I'd say whatever you're interested in, if you want to get deeper on that, there are certainly books out there and I would just look for something specific to whatever topic you're most interested in. And sometimes it depends on what you're dealing with. So maybe you're dealing with somebody who has a specific question about, I don't know, physics or maybe it could be another religion or whatever it is, whatever you're dealing with and you're interested in, then just go deeper on that.

But I think the Bible and theology, I think, is the way to go first. Okay, Greg, here is a really unusual question. This one comes from Justin.

My father owns a house with tunnels under it used in the Underground Railroad. Oh my goodness. And it's haunted.

He and it does not or so others claim to have encountered ghosts in the house. How can I reconcile their experiences with scripture given the Bible teaches that dead people can't come back to haunt the living? And before you even answer, I just, I don't understand these stories about people who say they're in this house and it's haunted and they're still there. They just stay there.

I don't get that, but go ahead, Greg. Well, I think Justin, it's Justin, right? Yeah, Justin's correct what the biblical record shows, but it also shows that spiritual beings are real.

And so I think it's certainly possible to encounter spiritual beings who essentially are masquerading as ghosts because this fits in to a way of thinking a lot of secular folks have without kind of aggressively showing their hand regarding what's really going on.

So if somebody is a materialist and doesn't believe a ghost and a ghost shows up, then that's going to shake their materialistic world, but isn't going to necessarily send them to Christ. It just means, okay, people survive the death of their body, but who knows what that looks like. We know from Revelation that these aren't dead people coming back, which is what generally we mean by a ghost, but there certainly can be very profound spiritual manifestations.

Now Walter Martin was a fellow who worked a lot with the cults and well-known. He died in the 80s, so just amazing Christian warrior, but he used to have paranormal experiences. This is what I heard at least, and I know quite a number of people that were disciplined by him.

And he'd have paranormal experiences there because he's always fighting the devil, so to speak, with dealing with cults. He wrote the book, *The Kingdom of the Cult*. And he would just take it and strive.

The way the story was told me is that one of his kids said, "Hey, we've got this poltergeist or whatever doing this stuff." And the other, "Oh, right, we'll wait till the commercial. I'll take care of it," you know, kind of thing. So he wasn't spooked out by it.

He wasn't terrified by it, whatever. Now, this may be apocryphal. I don't know if it really happened or not, but I wouldn't be surprised.

What's interesting is what the anecdote does is it characterizes two things, one that there are spiritual forces that are real, that can manifest themselves in physical ways. Secondly, we don't need to be afraid of those. We have to be mindful of that, but we have authority in Christ.

Peter says, 1 Peter 5, that the devil prowls her mouth like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Now, there's lots of ways he can do that, and he is dangerous. He's not just growling.

He has teeth, right? And so we're supposed to resist him from in our faith is what Peter says in 1 Peter 5. So there is a reality there of spiritual beings that we need to be mindful of. And we don't go poking around and stuff, stirring things up, lightly. In fact, even when Paul in the book of Acts encountered a girl who was told fortunes for money, who was demon possessed, he didn't deal with it right away.

He ignored it for a while until it just bugged him so much that he dealt with the demon. Of course, that created another problem. But the point is, he wasn't going after this stuff.

So I think that we should not be playing around with this kind of stuff, but it certainly is real. So I don't think there's any problem reconciling the, we'll just take the reports at face value, the reality of manifestation of spirits of some sword and the Bible, because that's perfectly consistent with the biblical worldview. It's also clear to me that their interpretation of the spirits is false.

These aren't dead people coming back. They're harassing demons, essentially. Okay, now it doesn't mean it's not a problem.

The question was about reconciliation of these testimonies with the biblical record. I don't think there's anything to reconcile. Okay, let's go to a question from Sam.

Should I give charitably without taking a deduction on my taxes so my left hand doesn't see what my right is doing or the government for that matter, why don't I give to Caesar his taxes and to my organization without letting anyone else know besides me and God? I think that's taking Jesus exhortation to an inappropriate extreme. Okay, keep in mind what Jesus was dealing with. He's dealing with people who paraded their giving out in order to be seen by men.

Okay, and he said, well, you got your reward in full. In other words, okay, people are giving you all the accolades, all the praise, aren't you great? Great, you're going to get that from people. You're not going to get that from the father.

You've made a trade. All right. And that's what he means by you have your reward in full.

He says, rather, don't parade those things out. Just give. The government doesn't care.

They're not going to think, Oh, Sam is so generous. Look at how righteous he is. He's given this much money to.

They don't care about that. It's just a figure to them. And so you're not violating the principle that Jesus lays down there in the passage.

You're giving quietly. You're giving appropriately and generously and not for the sake of impressing other people. And that's what Jesus has in mind.

Okay, sometimes other people may find out your CPAs going to know, but you're not doing it to impress your CPA. I mean, if you are, then that's wasted effort. But I know that's not the case here as you described it to me, Sam.

So I don't think you have to worry about that's getting kind of overly punctilious. Is that the right word? Overly particular that went up. Overly careful about the details here.

And that's that's actually a kind of legalism. You know, you kind of strain at the gnats here to get the thing fully accurate or fully comply when in fact you're actually probably already complying with the point Jesus was making. And that's the difference with the

legalism part.

You can be complying with the point that Jesus is making, but you haven't dotted every eye and crossed everything. Well, you don't need to do that if you're keeping the point. You don't have to get all refined in the details.

Don't even let the government know that you're now that's actually that's bad stewardship because the government's going to give you a cut back which you could use for yourself or you can give more. So that is more substantive and more material than not letting Uncle Sam know how much money you gave to five one C three's or something like that. It's taken too far.

That was actually the point I was going to make Greg that by getting the deduction, you're actually being wise with what you have and then you have more that you could give or you could provide for other people. It's just it's a wise way of using your money. Now, that's not to say if you're not comfortable letting them know you don't have to let them know.

But I think if you're if you're going to be wise, I think I think you I think you should take advantage of what you're able to take advantage of. All right, let's squeeze one last one in there. All right, one quickie.

This one comes from Wendy. I just heard the song God is in a good mood. You shouldn't just read a verse.

You probably shouldn't just read one line of a song. But what do you think of the idea that God has moods? Well, it's certainly not classical Christianity. Okay.

In James chapter one, it says with God, there is no variation and no shifting of shadows. So he doesn't have a bad hair day. All right.

Thank goodness. Yeah. So it would be if what we're doing now is we're dialing down for precision.

Okay. Now, some some would hold that this is a classic view of God that God doesn't actually participate in emotions in the same way that we do. And that when we see things in the scripture that talks about that, well, these are these are analogical.

They are not they're not meant to be taken literally and directly. This the concept here is that the impassibility of God, you know, he's not like he said, doesn't have a bad heart hair day. Doesn't wake up some days and say, Oh man, it was like, it's a great day.

And then other time, man, I'm really ticked off. Look out. Don't cross me today.

No, God isn't like that. God is not a man that he should change. It says in numbers or that he a son of men that he should repent, you know, so he's he's not like that.

That's like the gods of mythology. They're these capricious gods that are, you know, carrying on and part of humans responsibility is to try to manipulate them because of their moods. But that isn't the God of the Bible.

So I don't know where that line came from or that song came from, but it's not good. Okay, there's there's I can't imagine any way that the broader context is going to redeem that line. And I don't even know if it's a Christian song or some other song.

I'm not familiar with it. So I couldn't say. But yeah, Greg, Greg, God doesn't change who he is.

Right. When we think about our moves, our moods affect what we do. God doesn't have moods that affect what he does.

God's character expresses itself appropriately in every situation according to justice and goodness and and grace and all everything that describes who he is. So he doesn't just, he's because you know, we could be irritated one day and that affects everything that we do that colors everything that we do. So the idea is completely foreign to who God is.

Think of one other thing too. Why would we be irritated about something because we learn something new that bothers us and that changes our mood. Our moods are based on the information flow that comes to us.

We discover bad news. We have a bad day. We discover good news.

We have a better day. But see, nothing like that ever happens with God because he never discovers anything. He's never learning anything new.

He doesn't even know your prayers because you pray them. When you pray them, he already knew that you were going to pray them. Okay.

And now that doesn't mean the prayers are inconsequential. He knows that you're going to pray them. He doesn't gain knowledge.

But what he what what is happening is you're making a request that God could then respond to one way or another. But the key thing is he's not learning anything new there. He's not learning anything that would change his mood.

He has a how does Alistair Begg put it. He has a settled disposition regarding particular things. He has a settled disposition regarding sin.

He's got a settled disposition regarding the things that Jesus did on our behalf. You know, he has a settled disposition regarding the forgiveness that we fall under in Christ. So these are not these are not like changing moods.

These are settled dispositions. We change and fall underneath these different



dispositions at our circumstance change. But God isn't the one who's changing.

I like the way you put that, Greg. Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that.

All right. Well, thank you for your questions. We look forward to hearing from you on Twitter with the hashtag #strask or through our website at [str.org](http://str.org). This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.