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How Can I Start a Conversation with the Jehovah's Witnesses I See around Town?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to start up a conversation with Jehovah's Witnesses who are handing out information at temporary kiosks around town, witnessing to New Age siblings who misquote the Bible and Jesus, and non-Christians who are experiencing answered prayers or prophetic dreams.

- * Do you have any advice for starting up a conversation with Jehovah's Witnesses who are handing out Watchtower information at temporary kiosks around town?
- * How do I witness to and answer the questions of my three New Age siblings who are misquoting the Bible and Jesus?
- * How should I address non-Christians having experiences where God seemingly answers their prayers or their prophetic dreams come true?

Transcript

Welcome listeners. This is the hashtag SDRaskPodcast with Greg Hochl and Amy Hall. So Greg, today I have some questions about people with different beliefs.

So this first one comes from Jim. I see Jehovah's Witnesses, I see their temporary kiosks set up around town where they hand out Watchtower information. This seems like a good opportunity to engage them, but I don't know how to go about it.

Any advice on how to start up a conversation? Well, their kiosk is an invitation. They want to talk to people. Well, actually, I don't know if they individually really want to, but this is the reason they're there according to their religious obligation.

And they are there to answer questions or to explain about the kingdom of God. And so going up to them and asking them about their views would be well received by them. So this is a perfect environment for our basic Colombo questions.

What do you mean by that? How did you come to that conclusion? Now, these are, again, broad questions. They're not to be used wouldn't they? But you might come up to them and say, okay, why are you out here with your materials? Okay. What do you mean by that? That's kind of a variation.

Well, we're out here telling people about the kingdom of God. Oh, that's interesting. So what do you say to them? What do you want them to know about the kingdom of God? Now, I have a question that you might ask also when you're talking to them and I've asked this before, and it's given pause.

Here's what I asked. And again, this isn't a challenge at all on their views. That may come later, but here's the challenge.

I mean, here's the question. Do I have to become a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in order to be part of the kingdom of God in order to be saved? In other words, and when I asked that, he said, don't a chop of a Jehovah's Witness. He paused for a long, long time.

And then he said, well, technically, I guess, no, but it's going to be pretty hard to be saved without being a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Now, what's interesting to me about that is what they are making salvation dependent upon as being a member of an organization. And incidentally, if you leave the Jehovah's Witnesses, I mean, you're considered a condemned person.

If you don't join them, then you're not a saved person. So that question is a fair question. And for practical terms, the answer is you have to be a member of that organization, which is the faithful witness.

So they take this passage from Jesus about the faithful witness. Who is the faithful witness? And they say, we are. We're the faithful witnesses.

If you're not a part of our group, then you're not a faithful witness. So there's a way to start. I would ask lots and lots of questions about their views.

Now, my encouragement would be not to get into their kind of tertiary oddities of their theology, like blood transfusions and no birthdays and no saluting the flag or things like that. These are, these are inconsequential in the big picture. Okay.

The important thing is always these two things, or I should say maybe three things. One is the person of Christ. Two is the work of Christ.

Who is Jesus? And what did he come to do? What did he accomplish? The person in the work of Christ. Now, these are the only two things I focus in on when it comes to the Jesus section of the story of reality, because those are the most critical. All right.

The third one is authority. The third one is authority. Okay.

And that is who gets to say or who gets to speak for God. Now, if you're a Protestant, your view is the Bible is the authority properly translated. I offer that because the new world translation is the only translation that I know of that scholars universally reject as being a proper translation of scripture.

You can go to the Du'i Bible, to the Roman Catholics. You can go to the King James Version and all its versions, even the more updated one. You go to the SB, the NASB, RSV, you go to ESV, you go all these different versions.

They're all noble translations. But when you get to the new world translation, it has been purposefully corrupted to support odd and unusual and heterodox and even heretical understandings of Christianity. So the authority one is important, but it's not just the new world translation.

It is the Watchtower Society that gets to speak for God in their circumstances. And you might ask the question, why should I believe that your organization, whether it's Watchtower Society or LDS or Mary Beaker Ready, or the Roman Catholic Church, for that matter, why does the organization get to speak authoritatively for God? And by the way, I don't mean to be put the Roman Catholic Church on par with those other organizations. Theologically, they're not.

Their Christology is fabulous. It's their soteriology, I think, is flawed. And also their authority claim, which is on par in a sense.

It is their organization that gets to speak for God. And a lot of the other Orthodox religions speak the same way, whether it's the Coptic Church or the Russian Orthodox or the Eastern Orthodox, they all kind of make the same claim. We are God's organization.

Okay. Now, I don't think Jesus came to start an organization. I think he's came to start an organism, the church, but not an organization.

And if he didn't come to start an organization, I see no evidence of that in his teaching, then it doesn't make any sense to ask which organization is the right organization. So I think that whole thing gets off of the wrong foot right away. And that's where I think all of these organizations that I mentioned that within the pale of Christianity and outside of the pale of classical Christianity, I think falter.

And this is where they falter on their authority claim, too. So I think these are the kinds of questions that be fair to ask. Why should I believe that your organization speaks for God on these issues? And notice all of these things are just simply questions.

We're not advancing at this point in the conversation, our point of view. They're on the defensive regarding their views. Now, I hope they're not feeling defensive.

We're offering questions, genuine questions, understand what they have to say. And as they're responding, Jim, you can be listening. And then maybe thinking about, okay, what questions can I now ask in a street smarts fashion? That would be a columnal number three, using questions to make a point that would capitalize on the flaws or errors that you became aware of as they're answering the questions you've asked.

This to me is easy. This is an easy one. Well, this is such a great situation because, first of all, like you said, they're inviting you to come.

They're out there because they want to talk to you. And then all you have to do is ask questions and you can always say, oh, I have to go and leave and they're not going to follow you. You can get away.

There's no pressure. And just think about it in terms of, you know, if you see them all the time, you don't have to talk to them for hours at once. Just do it a little bit at a time until you get more comfortable.

Sure. Maybe you come friends with those people that are there on a regular basis. Yeah.

Or at the very least, you'll figure out what questions are helpful and what questions aren't helpful. Maybe you'll have more ideas. It's a matter of practice.

It's a matter of just getting out there and trying it. And conversing. What you mentioned just a moment ago, I call easy out, easy in.

And it's actually in the street smarts book that if you know that you can get out easily, then it's much easier for you to get out. You're much more inclined to get into a conversation. If you think that it's going to be very hard to rest yourself free of a conversation that starts getting uncomfortable or maybe difficult or you just don't want to talk with that person anymore, then you're probably not going to start.

But if it's easy out, it's easy in. And we have articles on our website. If you want to learn more about the Jehovah's Witnesses before you talk to them, Tim Barnett has a few different articles on there.

And Greg, you have the deity of Christ case closed. I think would also be really helpful for people to just have in their back pocket when they go into these conversations. Which by the way, along with other information is reproduced in the street smarts book when I talk about the person of Christ as being the Son of God.

You know, I use the Ichthus concept, Jesus Christ, God's Son's Savior as a motif in two chapters there to talk about orthodoxy with regards to Jesus and how to deal with challenges to it in a street smarts kind of fashion. Let's go on to bird watcher. How do I witness to and answer questions of my three hyper new age siblings? They use Satan's typical methods and misquote the Bible in Jesus.

For instance, my brother claims he is immortal since he was created in quote, my father's image. Of course, his father is not the God of the Bible. Well, I think that new ages are among the most difficult to work with partly because they are hard to even, and I don't say this disparagingly, I'm just saying from experience, it's hard to understand what they mean by the words they say.

And if you take probably the most famous new age or in the world, which is Deepak Chopra, and when he was on a Larry King and things like that, he would make his utterances and people would look at him. Other people on the panel would look at him silently for a moment and then just move on to other things because they really didn't know what to say. And I had a one hour TV debate, national TV debate with him a number of years ago, and people can check that out if they want to find out more about it.

But I raised issues with certain claims that he made. And so just thinking, if what Bird Watchers family members are doing, quoting the Bible out of context, then it may be helpful to go back, by the way, where is that? You know, back to the text. But what you said, my father said, where is that? Okay, okay, good.

Let's see. All right. And then look biblically just to clarify, well, how did you get that out of this particular passage? Let's look at the flow of thought, okay? And if people consistently take passages out of context to invest them with their own meaning, their personal meaning, I think a clever little response is to do the same thing with their statements when they're not aware of what you're doing.

You catch them by surprise. So let me talk about something. And you say, so I don't understand why you disparage homosexuals so much.

What do you mean disparage homosexuals? Well, the thing you just said, I didn't say any about homosexuals, but that's the way I understood your comment. That's my interpretation of it. Now, that's a, I've actually done this with audiences before people raised questions about interpretation and really stunned them.

Then when I give this thought, then they start laughing and they realize I'm just making the point that not any old interpretation is going to be adequate. And this is where we want to drive them back to the text. If we're quoting Jesus, then it's important that we understand what Jesus actually meant.

So why do you think that this is what he meant from this passage? I am. Okay. Jesus, no, this is the great I am.

New ages are capitalizing this. We're all the great I am. Well, wait a minute.

Jesus said he was the I am and they picked up stones to stone them. And then he didn't say, Oh, why are you stoning me? You're the I am too. And we're all I am.

He didn't say that. So anyway, I guess that's the thing that comes to mind when I think about talking with new age people is trying to hold their feet to the fire and then then calmly and graciously offering the alternative. And maybe this is something that I forget about that I need to do more often is that not only do we we push back on the error, but we have to offer the truth to we can do it graciously.

This isn't what Jesus meant. Jesus meant that he was God come down, Emmanuel God with us. He God came down to rescue you and me because we needed to be rescued.

Okay. And, you know, and maybe walk into a little presentation of the gospel or a little piece of it and doing that on a regular basis. That's, that's what I would suggest, I guess, at this point.

I think something else you could ask them is if they're quoting the Bible, you might just say, Oh, you're what do you think about the Bible? You're quoting the Bible. Do you do you consider that to be authoritative and get their view on that? Maybe they would be willing to read a book of the Bible. Maybe you could read one of their books and you could talk about, you know, what you believe.

New Ageers tend to be willing to talk about spiritual things and have these conversations, at least in my experience, although it's been a while since I've had a lot of contact with New Ageers. But I think, yeah, asking them about the Bible would be one direction you could go. Maybe another thing you can do is what I've seen are people who get farther into New Age things, they start to encounter bad spirits.

They start to encounter darkness. Maybe you could just ask them about that. Have you ever encountered anything dark? What do you think about that? Do you think there's danger in the spiritual world that we have to be careful of? And if there's danger, does that mean there's something true and good? And how do you tell the true and the good from the bad and the evil? And how would you go about finding out what the true and good is in the spiritual world? I mean, there's all sorts of directions you can take this in a very casual conversation.

In the streets, I record an anecdote there. Something happened to me a number of years ago in Seattle with a waitress. And when I conversed with her a little bit, I wasn't even into, I didn't want to even talk about her religion or God or Jesus or anything because it was early in the morning and I hadn't had my coffee yet.

That was a way out from the hotel in any event. But she made a comment like the universe takes care of me. And I asked her, is it a person? No.

How can the universe take care of you if it's not a person? Oh, OK. God takes care of me, she said. And then she said, God is the universe.

And I said, well, how does that work? And I was confused because, as I mentioned, a lot

of times these statements don't make a lot of sense. But what was interesting about this conversation, even though I wasn't trying to witness because I didn't want to, but I was still needed clarification because I couldn't make sense of what she was saying to me. She came back later and I didn't press much further.

I asked a few more questions and then I had no sense that she was in the least put influenced by the questions I was asking. She had been a Christian now. She's this and she just seemed supremely confident in this new idea.

She's embraced in exchange for Christianity and what she'd said when she brought the check back to me surprisingly was nobody's ever asked me questions about my view before. That's what she said. And then that's probably because people just flow with it.

Well, whatever, you know, and it got me thinking is what she said. So this is an example of just probing a little bit for clarification. Got her wondering about the coherence of the things that she was saying.

No, I don't know what ultimately happened. I did give her a copy of the story of reality. She was glad to receive it.

I signed it. She said she'd read it, but God knows. I don't know what happened.

But that's an example of the power of those simple clarification questions. Even when you don't want to pursue a conversation about spiritual things, she still was. She was she was encouraged to think more deeply about her view and and the God used that circumstance.

So that's something that can always be done. What's what does that mean? Help me understand how this works. And remember that our deepest need as human beings has to do with guilt and forgiveness.

We all know that deep down. And so however you can address that in terms of what they believe. How do you deal with that with your guilt? Do you think you're guilty? You know, these are the ideas.

That is our deepest need in Jesus is the answer to that because he paid for that guilt. So if you can touch on that and find out what they think about those things in terms of what they believe in and what they're pursuing, that would be something else to bring up. All right.

Here is a question from Mikayla. How do I address people who are blatantly non Christian having experiences that seem as though God answered prayers or they have prophetic dreams that come true? Well, there is no restriction of spiritual activity to Christians. I think it's pretty obvious that Joseph Smith had a, although people might take exception with this, it seems to me, he might have had a genuine spiritual experience with the

angel Moroni or what he thought was the angel Moroni.

A good angel. But Paul warns about deceptive spirits, doctrines of demons and things like that. And spirits, John says in 1 John, test the spirits.

And here he's speaking of Gnosticism because he says any spirit who does not affirm that Jesus, the Messiah, came in the flesh that has had a human body, had a physical body, is not of God. But it's the spirit of Antichrist. So notice that in each of these occasions, Matthew 24, Jesus talked about those producing signs and wonders that could mislead if possible, even the elect.

So they could be very, very persuasive. There are spiritual powers at work that have supernatural capabilities and can offer words, and I don't know about prophecies and all that. I mean, certainly they're false prophets.

And prayers can be answered. It is not my opinion that God never answers the prayers of non-believers. Cornelius was unregenerate.

God responded to him in Acts chapter 10. But characteristically, not the case. It isn't like they have the same access to the Father as his regenerate children, those who have received Christ to them.

And he gave the right to come children of God, even to those who believe in his name. So that's in John chapter 1. And the point there is that there is a unique and special covenantal love, new covenant love that God has for his children, and that puts them in a special position to request of their Heavenly Father particular things. But that doesn't mean that somebody on the outside wouldn't be able to pray a prayer that God out of mercy would listen to.

So it's certainly possible that non-Christians could have prayers answered, even if they have false ideas about God. I think that's going to be rare. Well, it doesn't necessarily have to be answered by God either.

As you were saying, there are other spiritual beings. They could be interacting in a way to look as if maybe God doesn't want them to have that thing. I mean, we don't know.

Right. And sometimes it just may be the natural course of events. These things just happen.

People pray for this girl and the girl falls for them and they think that God has answered it. And it's just the case that the girl fell for them and there's nothing supernatural involved at all. So this is where all of those things have to be informed by the truth.

Our feelings are how we interpret circumstances has to be informed by the truth. I have in teaching on decision-making the will of God and how people think that God is doing

this hint, hint, nudge, nudge to tell them to do certain things or whatever. I give an illustration of how I was praying as a single person right around Christmas time about my anguish about Christmas, that Christmas was really hard for me being alone and single.

And so the right when I kind of, I'm driving on the freeway and right when I kind of came to, if you will, my focus was regained. You know, you drive automatically. I saw a license plate that said X, M, A, S, the number four and the letter U, Christmas for you.

I mean, the car drove right by and it was the first thing I was really aware of right after I finished praying. And I thought, wow, could that be a sign from God? Well, it turned out I had a lousy Christmas. So nothing was different.

But I had another Christian who was so convinced that was a sign from God who actually said to me, maybe you had a great Christmas and you didn't know it. That's what they said. So, I mean, that's a chuckle moment, right? So, at any event, the point I'm making is sometimes just coincidence has happened that have no spiritual significance at all.

But we, because of the timing of the coincidence, we read significance into them. When there's no significance at all. So that might be the case in some of these situations.

Well, we're at a time. Thank you, Jim and bird watcher, Mikayla. Thank you for your questions.

You can send us your question on, on Twitter with the hashtag S T R ask or you can go through our website at S T R dot org and we will consider your question. So come on board. We'd love to hear from you.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.