

OpenTheo

How Do I Know if I'm a Gardener or a Harvester?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to know if we're a "gardener" or a "harvester," how to engage an apathetic person who says "I don't know" to everything, and whether Christians are making an unfalsifiable claim and fruitlessly discussing something that can't be proven or disproven.

- * How do I know if I'm a "gardener" or a "harvester"?
- * How do you engage an apathetic person who says "I don't know" to everything?
- * Are Christians committing a fallacy by making an unfalsifiable claim? What value is there in discussing something that can be neither proven nor disproven?

Transcript

Welcome to the hashtag, S-C-R-S podcast from Stand to Reason with Amy Hall and Greg Kockel. Welcome, baby. Welcome, Greg.

Now, Greg, our last episode, we talked about a couple tactics questions, but I have some more, so we're just going to continue with the tactics questions. So this first one comes from Christopher Hayes. How do you guys know that we're going to be talking about a couple tactics questions? How do I know if I am a Gardener or a Harvester? I am tempted by pride in causing strife, yet I also have a heart for people since I want to be a counselor slash psychologist? Well, the qualities that he just described to me seem to be unrelated to the question.

And the way I usually characterize it, and people have to think about this a little bit in an audience because they've never considered the distinction before, even though Jesus talks about sowing and reaping, you are going to reap what you did not sew to the disciples in John chapter 4 after Jesus had talked to the woman at the well. Even so, most people, basically, we've inherited a tradition of a harvesting tool, evangelism, the booklets that have the prayer at the end, and the goal is to try to get people to pray to receive Christ, and so that's all they know. And when I say, wait a minute, you can't have

a harvest unless you have done some gardening, or there has to have been gardening in that person's life or in that field, however you characterize it, individual or community, whatever.

And so they've never thought about it in those terms, and I think most people are gardeners because gardening is what is required. Harvesting is easy when the fruit is ripe. You bump into the fruit, and it falls into the basket.

Now, our last reality, I taught two sessions on the tactical game plan, and I emphasized gardening at the beginning, and I asked people to raise their hands if they were Christians, but had not become Christian by walking down the aisle in an altar call, or by having someone pray with them to receive Christ's Lord and Savior. And in one class, it was 50% of the people raised their hand. In the other class, it was like 70% of the people who raised their hand.

So, in the bulk of those people were never harvested by an individual. I kind of joke and say they harvested themselves, but it was really the Holy Spirit who did the harvesting, which goes to show that even with our emphasis on decision evangelism, most people don't become Christians that way. A lot of kids are raised Christian, the Christian family, and so they don't have that kind of thing going on.

And so consequently, I think the biggest task is in the gardening, and the harvesting pretty much takes care of itself. I tell people, don't worry about harvesting. It's going to happen when it's ready.

That's the Holy Spirit does that. Now, I'm not against people encouraging others to pray to receive Christ or whatever, but what I'm trying to do is free people up from that requirement, because if they feel that that's a requirement, they're not going to get into the garden at all. They're going to sit in the bench.

I'm mixing my metaphors here, but at any event, you get the point. And so what I tell the audience then, when I address this question, how do you know if you're a harvester or you're a gardener? And here's the way you know, if you've just heard what I've explained and you're bugged at me and you're thinking, hey, man, Coco, get with the program here. You're letting these people off too easy.

They're not going to evangelize, man. We got to go out there and hit the road and give them the gospel and challenge them to receive Christ. And if that's your feeling right now, then that's probably because you're a harvester.

And frankly, I have been dressed down by some rather well-known harvesters on this particular issue because they're harvesters. That's the way they think. But I don't think most people are like that.

Instead, I offer if you're feeling a sense of relief, a sense of freedom, not from the task of

evangelism, but from the requirement to try to close the deal. And you're thinking to yourself, man, I never heard this. I can do this.

You're probably a gardener, like me. That's what I do. I garden, garden, garden.

I don't even worry about how a person comes to Christ when they come to Christ. And then I tell him, hey, Jay Warner Wallace was in my garden before I became a Christian. John Noise on our team.

He was in my garden. Both atheists that ended up becoming Christian. And I wasn't there to lead him to Christ.

Somebody went into my garden and harvested my crop. I joke around like that. But of course, Jesus says the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together.

So the point I'm making here is just a simple reflective one. Not on the characteristics that were just described by Christopher, but rather, where do you feel most comfortable? Do you feel, in a sense, a drive to get people to pray to receive Christ and you get deep profound satisfaction of closing the deal, so to speak? Or does that kind of scare you away from the whole evangelistic enterprise? And instead, you feel much more comfortable doing a little here, doing a little there. I sowed Apollo's water.

God caused the increase. That's what Paul says in Corinthians. So that's the distinction.

And most people have a pretty clear understanding. I think most of them are gardeners because that's where the real heavy lifting is. Well, I know they've, I've heard before that somebody has to hear the gospel a certain number of times before they, I mean, I shouldn't say they have to.

Because the Holy Spirit can obviously change anyone's heart the first time they hear it. But as it tends to go, they will hear at a certain number of times before they actually become a Christian, which means there is more time spent gardening than there is harvesting, which would make sense if more people are gardeners than harvesters. But I would also add, I don't think you have to know which one you are.

You don't have to decide because it, these aren't like distinct categories. If you're a harvester, you, you have to lead up in there somehow. So you can use these, these tactics for starting conversations and getting conversations going and, and leading up to that.

And if you are mostly a gardener and you, and somebody is actually, you can tell that they're ready to become a Christian, you can certainly take that step. So there's, you don't have to divide yourself into one of these categories and stay like hermetically sealed in your, in your gardener category. Well, I have had people say, well, if you're a gardener, but if you had an opportunity to lead someone to Christ, wouldn't you do that?

And the question is such an odd one to me.

Like, as if I'm somehow theologically opposed to the notion. But the answer is, of course, I could pray with somebody that's, that's not an issue. I haven't done it a long time, you know, 30 years, probably.

But it's, it's, and, and you don't see that happening in the book of Acts or the Gospels. Nevertheless, I, you know, sure, you can take that step and you can harvest even though you're a gardener. If your main ideal is gardening, where the harvest is available, you can do it.

I mean, as far as, as far as, for all I know, there was a harvest that happened when I spoke to almost 3000 students in, uh, where we, in North, North Dallas last weekend. And I gave this gospel appeal. I explained the gospel.

I don't know how many people did what I suggested that they do to bend their knee and beat their breasts and say, God have mercy on me, a sinner. But, um, that would have been a harvest point. Even though I'm a gardener, I'm giving, it's not exactly an altar call because I'm not calling them to the altar or asking them to raise their hand with every, I close and every head bowed, which I think is not a good idea.

But nevertheless, I was giving them the truth in a concise fashion and giving them, inviting them to respond to it. So, I mean, I, I, I'm sure with that many students there, there were people who responded. So there was a harvest moment there, even though I don't know who it was that responded.

Let's go on to a question from Christina. How do you engage with someone who is apathetic, saying, I don't know to everything? Well, pardon me. This is one of the hardest types of people to deal with apathy.

I get this question quite a bit. And I guess the way that I would approach apathy, as opposed to somebody just saying, you know what I'm, or indicating, I'm not interested. I don't want to talk about this.

Go away. Let's talk about something else. So you get a vibe on that sometime and I am certainly not going to push the river.

I'm not going to try to make this happen. That's not my style. Some people are going to be more aggressive, whatever.

Okay. But that's not my style. But if you have somebody that's just apathetic, whatever, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

And because they don't care, they don't want to even think about it. All right. So I think the question could be asked, and I didn't think of this.

I got it from Jim who got it from somebody else, Dave Warner, who got it from somewhere else. But the question is, what do you think happens when you die? Now, the person in this case for Christina could say, I don't know. And I don't care.

Well, it's okay. I'm for myself, and I think I wrote this in the first chapter of the tactics book. I'm looking for the person who's looking for me.

I met with my life insurance guy yesterday for a long time. He's Russian, came to the United States, Jewish. And, you know, I've probed him a number of times about the Lord, but in mild ways, he's never shown any interest at all.

And even last night I was driving away saying, Lord, you know, maybe he can open a door here or something, but he just doesn't seem to have any interest. Now, if somebody has no interest, it's just, there's no magic. There's no silver bullet.

They may show interest down the line. When I first found out that my younger brother Mark had become a Christian, I thought, Oh, that's good for him. He needs that kind of thing.

I'm too smart for that. And I was impenetrable. Nothing that he said to me made any difference to me during that time.

It wasn't until I moved out to California. And he was out here in LA area at the same time that then we started getting together and he pressed further. And then things were happening in my life that just made me more open.

So I think there's an issue of timing here, but sometimes you're going to be interacting with people that just are not, they're impenetrable at that moment. Could change down the line, especially when circumstances change. I had a wake up call in my life that made me more, in a certain sense, open to hearing alternate views.

But when a person is not interested, then they're just not interested. And sometimes, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know as constant responses to the questions is an indicator of total lack of interest. I think in this case, pretty much all you can do is to just be open about your life and make it clear how you're living, who you're living for, what you're doing.

Oh, I went to church on Sunday. I'm so grateful that I don't have to worry about my guilt because, man, I really messed up this week or whatever it is. You're just making them aware.

Living out before you're a Christian. And that's very, what's the word I'm looking for? That's not upsetting to people. It just kind of familiarizes them with who you are.

And so then when something comes up for them and they have a question, they'll think,

oh, I know who would know the answers to this. And so you're just laying the groundwork for laying the groundwork. I mean, this is like just pre pre evangelism where you're just living openly as a Christian in front of them.

So that when something comes up, then they come to you. I was having physical therapy yesterday and having a conversation with my physical therapist and then just talking about, you know, getting older and, you know, the bucket list is never going to be, the bucket's never going to be empty, right? And not when I got my age and it's a realization. But of course, this isn't the end of my life.

I got eternity ahead of me. Okay. Now, and I mentioned it to her.

So I'm just talking matter of factly about these things, but it's the matter of fact part that's important. So I wasn't saying, but I have faith. I have faith that my life is going to go on.

You know, so that's relativizing it. That's what that's what amounts to the language amounts to relativizing your view in the years of those who are listening. And so, so that's an example.

I'm just living that out. You know, look at this. This, this, this.

Our four score in 10 is not the whole story. I got more. It's just the beginning.

Okay. But it's still important. And so, you know, this is the nature of the conversation.

It isn't like here's my religious view is or I have faith that only use that language at all. I just talk about it matter of factly. Okay.

Let's go to a question from Kaylee. I have heard Greg talk about fallacies to avoid. Are we committing the worst fallacy by making an unfalsifiable claim? What is the value in discussing something that can neither be proven nor disproven? Well, I'm not sure what claim she's talking about.

And it certainly is not the case that Christianity is not falsifiable. In fact, I, there's a number of times where I started a talk by saying when you think about it, there's lots of ways to prove Christianity is false, which nobody is expecting me to say. And so it kind of gets their attention.

But as our story starts in the beginning, God. And if there's no God, there's no story. Okay.

So that's when way to falsify it. We believe that in a soul that survives the death of the body, but if there's no soul, then there's no nothing to go to heaven or hell. So that's the crimps our program.

We follow Jesus and we believe in Jesus. And if there is no Jesus or there was no Jesus and not the one that was in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, well, then we're up the creek again. Paul said that if Jesus hasn't been raised in the dead, if we're believing in a resurrection contrary to fact, then people should feel sorry for us.

So there's lots of ways in principle to demonstrate that Christianity is false. It is falsifiable, but that means it's verifiable. In fact, in the first chapter of street smarts, I talk about this very thing.

That's not bad news. It's good news because the thing that is falsifiable is verifiable. So I'm not exactly sure what Katie is referring here to when we're promoting something that's not falsifiable.

That's not a fallacy. It just is a limitation. Okay.

There are a number of things though that are that we believe to be true that are not falsifiable. And I'm trying to, I heard a list once. Like I just can't remember.

Other people exist. Yeah, that other people exist. You know, how would you, yeah, or there's this idea that maybe we're just our own mind.

And we are the only ones that exist. What's that called now? Solipsism. Solipsism.

Thank you. Yeah, so, so solipsism is not falsifiable, you know, or that other people exist are not falsifiable. We, we, it's hard to understand a way that would we could falsify.

Or the nature of what we how we perceive existence and solipsism be true. Okay. But that doesn't mean we're not justified in believing what what our senses delivered to us as information.

Richard Swinburn has the British philosopher concept of the principle of credulity. And basically he says, you know, you're justified in believing that things are the way you perceive them to be unless you have some good reason to believe otherwise. So we're not lost in this complete abyss of doubt.

And we can believe things that we didn't prove through deductive logic. Right? I mean, so this idea that I'm wondering if she's referring to something that can either be proven or disproven, maybe like a hundred percent absolute certainty. I mean, there are, there are very few things we can, I mean, I can, I can prove two plus two is four.

But what would actually prove that it's a matter of reflection. You reflect on it and you can see it. But I mean, I believe that I'm talking with you right now.

So, but that's not a matter of rational deduction. That's a matter of of personal experience. Okay.

Now, could I be mistaken? I guess I could be mistaken as possible, but there's no reason to think that I am. Okay. So I just don't see how this liability of falsifiability is part of the Christian issue here at all.

Hey, look at how you, how you choose to read the Bible, whether you choose to read it in the linguistic sense or you choose to read it in some kind of spiritualized sense. Okay. Well, that's not falsifiable either, or I should say there's no non-circular way to resolve that because you have to assume one or the other to even engage the text.

Now, the way we engage the Bible is also the way we engage any other writing to figure out what the author had in mind. And so we are using that same means to, to, to understand the Bible. So there is a justification for it.

But I don't think this is helpful and what I would like Kayleigh's concern. I don't think it is a concern. And I guess I wonder what is it that she thinks that we are seizing upon that's native to Christianity that is not at all falsifiable and therefore is a liability to our view.

Mm-hmm. Well, Greg, we're out of time. Thank you, Christopher and Christina and Kayleigh.

We appreciate hearing from you. And that's where you'll find a link. Just click on the link and send us your question and keep it short.

Sometimes I have to cut out a little bit of the question because they're too long. We generally try to keep them the size of a tweet and that's what, 280 characters or so. So it's just a couple of sentences and we'll consider your question.

We'd love to answer it for you. So thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

Thanks for listening.