



How to Get Apologetics in Your Church

Part 2

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Chapter

1

Why Apologetics Matters to Every Believer and Every Church

by Lenny Esposito

“Apologetics? What are you apologizing for?”

“Is that a class that husbands are supposed to take?”

“What is that?”

These are questions I hear frequently whenever I mention the study of apologetics. It probably comes as no surprise the word “apologetics” is foreign to most people, even who are a part of the Christian church. Evangelicals, who define themselves by their passion to follow Jesus’ command to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”(Matt. 28:17) will usually look quizzically at me whenever I begin discussing the need for apologetics, even though apologetics is an essential part of making disciples. Why would this be?

One of the problems is simply that the church doesn’t talk a lot about it. Apologetics is generally understood to be a specialty discipline—specifically engaging in defending the faith against skeptics, alternate religions, cults, and contrary worldviews. As such, many pastors feel that it can only play a very limited role in ministering to the needs of their congregation. How does apologetics help the man

trying to feed his family after losing his job or the newly widowed woman?

I've said before that in many churches, a person telling his or her pastor of their desire to start an apologetics ministry results in an experience similar to a young man telling his Jewish mother he wants to be a proctologist. "Well, I glad you're going to be a doctor," she would say, "But why did you have to choose that!" Pastors are happy to have people desiring to get into ministry opportunities, but they simply aren't sure where apologetics fits in their church. However, many times both church leadership and laity fail to understand the more holistic aspects of providing a strong apologetics ministry to the local congregation. In this article, I'd like to highlight two benefits of an apologetics ministry that applies directly to every member of the church, benefits that you may not have considered before.

A BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION TO PROVIDE ANSWERS

Every apologist has his or her favorite passages in the Bible that command the believer to practice apologetics. Many point to 1 Peter 3:15 or 2 Corinthians 10:5-6, but a passage that I've found inspiring is Proverbs 22:17-21. There, as Solomon is addressing his son he writes:

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,

And apply your mind to my knowledge;

For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,

That they may be ready on your lips.

So that your trust may be in the LORD,

I have taught you today, even you.

Have I not written to you excellent things

Of counsels and knowledge,

To make you know the certainty of the words of truth

That you may correctly answer him who sent you?

Just as Solomon was instructing his son, I believe our Father in Heaven is instructing us to apply our minds to His knowledge. He has written excellent things to us in His word, and we should be diligent to seek them out. Also, one of the outcomes of applying your mind to the wisdom and knowledge of God is found in verse 19: “so that your trust may be in the Lord.”

APOLOGETICS GUARDS BELIEVERS AGAINST HERESIES

The word apologetics literally means providing reasons and evidence for the Christian faith. Part of this means defending the Christian faith from imposters or detractors, but it also means protecting those in the church from the wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing. One can define apologetics as theology properly applied and there is no greater need to apply theology properly than with new believers. The Burned-Over district is a good example.

Historian John Martin notes that in what was then a formidable frontier, the area of upper western New York in the early 1820s was attracting people coming from the more established eastern seaboard cities. New immigrant populations also flooded the area seeking land and jobs. Many preachers would travel throughout the area holding tent revival meetings, the most prominent of which was Charles Finney. Finney called many to repentance, but as church congregations continued to grow and revivals spread, these were accompanied by the establishment of such unorthodox beliefs systems as the Mormons, the Spiritists, and the Millerites who spawned both the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists. Martin writes, “The traditional theology of Christianity was not of great interest to these seekers for answers, and they were susceptible to explanations which moved beyond the traditional Biblical basis of the various Christian faiths.”[i] Without a proper grounding

for what orthodox Christian beliefs were and why the church held those beliefs, aberrant beliefs were able to grow and flourish, leading to lost souls not only in that generation, but for generations to come.

Apologetics, though, encompasses the study of theology, especially as it relates to orthodoxy. If we are to defend our beliefs with reason and evidence, then it follows we need to know just what we believe and the reasons why we hold to those beliefs. Just as many of the modern cults we see today got their start from a lack of theological training, controversial teachings are even now creeping into the evangelical church. The Barna organization reports that although four out of five people classify themselves as Christian, “most people say Satan does not exist, that the Holy Spirit is merely a symbol, that eternal peace with God can be earned through good works, and that truth can only be understood through the lens of reason and experience.”^[ii] Clearly, the church is being infected with faulty beliefs today, and apologetics is one discipline that will help stem that tide.

APOLOGETICS PROTECTS THE CHRISTIAN IN TIMES OF CRISIS

In verse 19 of Proverbs 22, Solomon says that one of the benefits of studying apologetics is that “your trust will be in the Lord.” Apologetics is for the edification of every believer, regardless of one’s education, and this is nowhere more apparent than when Christians faces crises. It’s easy to hold to your beliefs when times are good. But when the storms of life present themselves—the loss of a job, the death of a spouse, the diagnosis of cancer—doubts inevitably arise. In those moments when you are praying and praying and it feels like your prayers are doing nothing more than bouncing off the ceiling, it’s natural to question your faith. “Is this real?” “Does God exist?” “How do I really know any of this is true?” are common questions people ask when facing difficult trials. However, this is exactly the wrong time to ask such questions! A person in this state is understandably highly emotional; he isn’t thinking clearly, given that worry, fear, and many other facets are tampering with his reasoning skills. He is at a terrible disadvantage to try and reason properly, espe-

cially about the biggest questions of life! It's no wonder that James Spiegel shows many atheists have had severe traumatic experiences in their pasts. [iii]

This is why apologetics can be ministerial to the Christian in times of trial. I know in my own life I've dealt with some very difficult situations, including my wife facing a life-threatening condition. At those times, when I was praying and wondering why God would allow such things, I could hear the question of "Is God real? Is He really listening to you or are you just believing all this because you want to believe it?" creeping into my head. But I immediately remembered my apologetics training and said to myself "I don't have to wonder about that. I know God exists; I know that Jesus really rose from the dead. I've already worked through those issues and I'm convinced of them. I may not know why God is doing this in our lives, but I can't doubt that God exists. That question has been answered." Apologetics was able to keep my trust in the Lord, even during the hard times. It is one reason why everyone needs to have an answer for their hope: everyone will face trials.

In his commentary on Proverbs 22, Matthew Henry writes: "The excellent things which God has written to us are not like the commands which the master gives his servant, which are all intended for the benefit of the master, but like those which the master gives his scholar, which are intended for the benefit of the scholar. These things must be kept by us, for they are written to us" We should strive to seek out these excellent things written for our learning and edification. Apologetics is a great way to do this. Although such study may seem difficult, it is necessary. Church leaders need to encourage apologetics to become more effective in their evangelism, but also to become more effective in their discipleship programs and more effective in their ministry to those in crisis. Believers should pursue a foundation in apologetics for personal edification, for assurance of belief, and to protect against the attacks of Satan through faulty doctrine or through doubt.

Lastly, everyone should be able to rightly handle the words of truth

so that, as verse 21 states “you may correctly answer him who sent you”. This verse isn’t saying that we must answer the unbeliever, but “him who sent you.” If we as Christians receive our calling from God, then it is the Lord who sends us and to the Lord we are accountable. So will you be able to answer Him correctly?

[i] Martin, John H. “Saints, Sinners and Reformers: The Burned-Over District Re-Visited” The Crooked Lake Review Issue No. 137. 2005 Accessed online at

http://www.crookedlakereview.com/books/saints_sinners/martin9.html 3/17/2012

[ii] “Barna Identifies Seven Paradoxes Regarding America’s Faith” The Barna Group, at

<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/87-barna-identifies-seven-paradoxes-regarding-americas-faith> 12/17/2002 Accessed 3/17/2012

[iii] See James S. Spiegel *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Chicago: Moody Pub. 2010) 64-67

Chapter

2

How I Got Apologetics Started In My Church

by William Coe

I heard Greg Koukl once say, “bloom where you're planted.” What good advice that is. Getting apologetics into your church is all about getting started. It's not about jumping on the band wagon of some larger ministry, but about doing what you can, right where you are now.

This short essay is about how I got started in getting apologetics into my church. I had been interested in apologetics for many years but didn't find many opportunities to learn more about it in the local church so, I started listening to podcasts and reading books. I listened to the Apologetics 315 series, “How to Get Apologetics In Your Church” and got some great ideas.

I first took action after I heard about the “Truth Project.” I was intrigued and decided to take my wife on a weekend get away at a “Truth Project” training weekend. It was a good time for us to do something valuable together and to get a weekend away from home. When we returned we had a chance to lead the “Truth Project” at our small group. We did this a couple times and had mixed results; some people liked it, other didn't. It wasn't the subject mat-

ter but more a lack of interest and the material was a little over the heads of some in our small group. About that time I decided to get involved with the high school youth group as an adult leader. Soon I developed a relationship with the youth pastor and led a youth team to a Mexico missions trip. This relationship would be critical in getting apologetics into our youth group.

It is well known that many young people are leaving the faith when they go off to university. The question was asked: what we could do about that problem?. In came TrueU. We decided to do this study in the fall with the high school group as a elective small group. It was pretty successful, we got anywhere from 9-26 kids each week. We continue to do TrueU each semester, alternating between “Does God Exist?” and “Is the Bible Reliable?” and we look forward to the new series when it is released. We are also considering doing the RZIM series “ASK.”

The newest project we have developed is the F.A.Q. monthly small group. Many parents were very happy we were doing TrueU but wondered about a group for adults. We have developed a monthly meeting open to all ages that we are calling F.A.Q. (frequently asked questions). This is a follow-up to a series our lead pastor did in the fall of 2011 that covered basic apologetic issues. We meet for two hours once a month. We do a lecture/video format, with open and guided discussion at the end. Topics covered ranged from “Archeology and the Bible” to the question of “Origins.”

WHAT HAS WORKED FOR ME

Here are a few things I would say have helped us get this apologetics ministry going at our church:

1. Don't do this alone. The first thing I would recommend is not doing this alone. If we try to bring a ministry into the church like this without the help and support of others it will have less impact and is less likely to be successful. The first person to involve is your spouse and/or family. If they understand your passion and get excited to support your calling, they will support your efforts in ways

you can't imagine.

I would also advise looking for people in your church or elsewhere that share your passion and enlist their help and support. One of the other youth leaders in our church is a High School science teacher. He was very interested in the fact that we were doing the TrueU series "Does God Exist?" I invited him to help lead the TrueU small group. He is now helping to teach and lead the FAQ group as well.

2. Use well known materials first. It doesn't work well to reinvent the wheel. There is so much excellent apologetic content out there right now that you don't have to come up with the training materials yourself. When you are just starting out, use materials that comes from ministries people know and trust. (Focus on the Family, RZIM, Ligonier, Reasonable Faith, RTB, STR, etc...)

3. If you're just starting this process, commit to a defined time frame. A six week study works very well and is manageable. People find it easier to commit to something new if it's for a shorter period of time. We do TrueU for ten weeks in the fall and spring. F.A.Q. is once a month.

HOW TO GET THE WORD OUT

How do you get the word out? Find an advocate on staff! The fact that I had been involved with the youth group for some time allowed me to built up some credibility with the pastoral staff. When the idea of doing TrueU came up, they encouraged me to do it. Our youth pastor is our advocate in the youth ministry. He is fully supportive of what we are doing with TrueU and makes announcements at youth group encouraging participation.

We wanted to see if there was much interest in an apologetics group for a wider audience. We came up with F.A.Q. Initially, I only had a chance to get word out about it in our church's small group menu. Eventually we got it into the announcements as well. The initial response was small—eight people showed up. Most of those heard about it through women's prayer group where my wife men-

tioned it.

Eventually the missions/outreach pastor became the advocate for our F.A.Q group. He has helped get the word out through the men's group newsletter, the church website and calendar, and pastoral staff meetings. That helped, as we had 14 in our last session.

To SUMMARIZE...

Get an advocate!

Have your spouse get the word out to other spouses

Get the Men's and Women's group leader's to support and advertise

Church Bulletins

Church Announcements

Church Email Lists

Word of mouth

HOW TO GET PEOPLE INVOLVED

It's important to get people involved in this effort, as I said earlier.

But it's crucial that your Head Pastor gets behind it. Two issues

about this: one is the staff of any church are extremely over worked,

adding another program to their plate will be hard to do. Speaking of

you, have you earned any credibility with your churches leadership?

What are you already involved with? Where do you already serve.

It's critical that you have some credibility. Have you led any bible

studies before, have you gone with them on missions trips? You

must remember that pastors are very protective of their flocks, they

are responsible for them. They need a reason to trust you.

The first step you could take might be taking one of your pastors to lunch or coffee and talk about your vision, and tell them your plan.

Afterwards, let them pray about and discuss it with the staff. Don't

be frustrated if the staff doesn't share your passion for apologetics

right away. Apologetics has had a poor reputation in many churches.

Many believe we who are interested in apologetics are simply out to

win arguments and don't care for souls. Work to change this percep-

tion.

GOOD TOPICS

There is an endless list of potential topics you can cover. Some of the topics we have covered are: What is Christianity?, What is the Gospel?, The Problem of Evil, Archeology and the Bible, Intelligent Design, Origins, Jesus among other gods, and Relativism. A good resource for topics is the topic section at [Apologetics315](http://Apologetics315.com). Look on the left side of the page and browse...

EASY WAYS TO START AN APOLOGETICS MINISTRY IN YOUR CHURCH

Here are some ideas of apologetics ministries you can start simply and easily at your church. Speak at Men's/ Women's breakfasts. Be a guest speaker for your friend's small group one evening. Start a small group series doing TrueU, Truth Project, Ask, On Guard, etc. Start an apologetic book club. Speak at the youth group meeting. Incorporate it into Men's Ministry.

CONCLUSION

You don't have to start a local Reasonable Faith Chapter or go to Biola, to get involved in apologetics. Start SMALL, but start! Recruit a team, don't do this alone. Get the support of your spouse and pastor. Say yes to any opportunity you can to speak or lead. Find out what questions people are really asking—not what you think they are—then answer those. Pray and read your Bible devotionally every day. Lastly, bloom where you're planted.

Chapter

3

Apologetics in the Church: A Pastor's Perspective

by Stephen J. Bedard

You have just read an inspiring book on apologetics. You have just returned from an exciting apologetics conference with some brilliant and engaging scholars. You just had a productive conversation with a skeptic and saw some real movement in their faith journey. You know that apologetics is vital for the local church. You make an appointment with your pastor to propose an apologetics ministry for the church, confident that the pastor will share your excitement for apologetics. You share your passion, you bare your soul to your pastor, pleading that he both approve the ministry and allow church resources to support it. Your pastor looks at you like you just suggested they start a Star Trek fan club at the church. What happened?

Many people have caught a vision for apologetics, have seen the potential impact on an unbelieving world, and have been deeply disappointed when their pastor and leadership have either rejected the notion or have given only half-hearted permission for you do something on your own. Why is this? Are pastors unspiritual? Unintellectual? Unevangelistic?

I come to this issue with a foot on both sides. I have been active in apologetics since I became a Christian. I have debated skeptics on the Internet and have had faith discussions with friends and family. At the same time, I am a pastor of a local church and have some idea of the pressures and limitations within that context. In this essay, I will examine some of the apparent apathy and provide some suggestions on how to bring your pastor on side with a proposed apologetics ministry.

So why are many pastors lacking in excitement when someone in their congregation suggests becoming involved in apologetics? You may live and breathe apologetics. You may immerse yourself in the books and conferences and podcasts. You are completely convinced of the power of apologetics to change lives. Your pastor is not coming at apologetics with such a focus. In addition to your plea for apologetics, there have been other people presenting worship ministry, men's ministry, women's ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry, senior's ministry, ministry to the poor, international missions and many more as the key to successful church ministry. The areas of ministry calling out to the pastor can be overwhelming, why should the pastor look at apologetics over any other area? Pastors are bombarded with "silver bullet" ideas that are going to transform everything and we sometimes seem apathetic when someone presents an exciting new idea.

There is another reason that pastors may be skeptical of apologetics in particular. Many pastors do not have much background in apologetics and are not completely sure what you are talking about. Most seminaries do not require a course in apologetics and few have them available even as electives. The pastor's understanding of apologetics may be based only on witnessing a heated online exchange between a Christian and an atheist that seemed to be a waste of everyone's time. It is obvious how helping the poor and visiting the sick fits with the church's mandate. It is much less clear for some pastors with regard to apologetics.

Does that mean that you should keep your passion for apologetics to yourself and resign yourself to a church that refuses to engage the mind? Not at all. These things are shared to help you see the obstacles and to encourage you to find ways to overcome those obstacles. It could be argued that the charge of 1 Peter 3:15 is for all Christians and not just for those who self-describe as apologists. There is a very real need for apologetics in the local church. But you have some work to do to make that happen.

The first thing that you need to do is check your motives. Why is it that you want to see an apologetics ministry in the church? Is it because you absolutely love apologetics and you want your church to validate your hobby? Or do you see a real benefit to the church and to the people being ministered to by the church? Take time to work these things through.

Secondly, how practical is the apologetics idea that you have? For example, you may feel deeply offended by the theological errors of Islam or Mormonism and may feel strongly that the church should put its' resources into exposing those errors. As a pastor, I would not be sure how that would fit with the purpose of the church, even if there is a place for Christians to participate in such activity. If you can tie your apologetic idea to your church's vision statement, you will have softened your pastor's heart.

Thirdly, be very clear as to what you are asking. If you just say that you think the church should start an apologetics ministry, you probably will not get very far. Be very specific. Is your goal to equip Christians to be able to articulate their faith and answer objections? Or are you planning on offering some events for skeptics, providing answers to their questions? You may want to do it all, but start with a very specific goal. You should be able to say in one sentence what you want to accomplish with your proposal. By the way, do not feel the pressure to include the word 'apologetics' in your request. If you want to work with Christians, describe it as discipleship. If you want to work with non-Christians, call it outreach or evangelism. It is not that you need to hide an apologetic motive but the word 'apologet-

ics' will not add value to your proposal unless your pastor already has an interest in that area.

Fourthly, start small. Do not approach your pastor with the goal of closing every Kingdom Hall in your city by the end of the year. Make a proposal for one short-term small group, workshop, or outreach event. This is important on a number of levels. It is not just your pastor that you need to win over, it is the rest of the congregation as well. If your congregation refuses to participate, it does not matter how much support you get from the pastor. Let people get a taste for apologetics slowly, and do not assume that they are as immersed in the apologetics culture as you are. Also, by achieving something small, you build the confidence for the bigger projects.

Fifthly, encourage your pastor to preach apologetically. But don't say it that way! Some pastors are open to requests for messages and others are not. It may not be natural for the pastor to preach a five part series on the ontological argument. However, a pastor may be very open to a request to preach a number of sermons on the problem of suffering, without realizing the connection to apologetics. There are many sermons that can be preached that are apologetics related but are far from a lecture on apologetics. Request a sermon on Paul's ministry in Athens from Acts 17 or on Peter's challenge in 1 Peter 3:15. While you are not free to plan out the pastor's entire preaching year, many pastors would be open to the occasional request.

Finally, if you want to foster an apologetic culture in your church, tell stories. You might get excited about a nice clear syllogism, but most people won't. Tell stories of conversations you have had with skeptics. Tell your testimony of how you became a follower of Jesus and how thinking through the hard questions played a role. Help people to see that apologetics is not about abstract theory, that it is not just a mental exercise for philosophers and theologians. Tell your stories so that people will know that apologetics is about helping real people understand the Jesus story by removing the obstacles to their faith.

As a pastor, I cannot promise that if you do all of these things, that your pastor will drop every other congregational priority and dive into apologetics. But if you take the time to understand where the pastor is coming from and if you express yourself clearly and present a concise and practical idea, you will have more success in getting pastoral support for an apologetics ministry in your church. As apologists, our job is not to be a distraction to other areas of ministry, but to encourage others in their called areas by increasing their confidence in the Gospel. The church is the front lines when it comes to the expansion of the Kingdom of God and apologists and pastors must work together for this cause.

Chapter

4

The Road to the Group

by Allen Lathrop

“How can I use my passion for apologetics within my own church?” It was a question I had regularly asked myself with growing concern. I had read and studied apologetics material on my own for years. I had experienced the effect apologetics could have, not just in my life, but also in the lives of those who did not yet know Christ. Yet, my deep desire was for those within my own congregation to experience the same effect and together have a greater impact on this world for the glory of God. Of course, all of that sounds wonderful in theory. Putting it into practice is another thing entirely. While it took a good deal of time, patience, and prayer, God has blessed me with an amazing apologetics group in my own church. I'd like to share that journey with you, and offer you some thoughts on starting your own group.

From the outset, I knew an apologetics group wasn't going to develop itself and just conveniently fall into my lap. Understandably, a little legwork on my part was going to be needed. At the time, my family and I were regularly attending our church, but we weren't plugged in to any of the groups or ministries. Since it was my goal to begin a group within our church, it seemed reasonable to get con-

nected with an already established group and see how it operated. So, my wife and I began regularly attending a weekly Sunday School class designed for couples in our age group. After a couple of months, the group leader informed us that she would need a volunteer to teach the class for a short period while she and her family were on vacation. I happily made myself available and was able to gain my first taste of leading a small group.

Not long after that, the group leader, who wanted to move into other areas of ministry, asked if I'd be willing to take over the group leadership permanently. I was thrilled! I accepted and began teaching the group on a regular basis. Granted, the subject matter had nothing to do with apologetics. Nevertheless, it was a step in the right direction. Plus, I was taking a more active roll in serving God and training Christians (two areas that tied squarely together with my goals in apologetics). So, I did my best to faithfully serve in this area. Occasionally, I was even afforded opportunities to throw in apologetics lessons as well. Needless to say, that really whetted my appetite!

Additionally, I began thinking of ways to connect to various other ministries within my church where I could use my passion for apologetics. Eventually, I was asked to be a part of the leadership group which offers support and direction for the small groups ministry. This opened up even more opportunities for me. Not only did I get more exposure on how small groups function within my church, I was able to work directly with the Small Groups Pastor. After a couple of months, and due to some changes within our church, the attendance of the Sunday School class I taught dropped off. I met with the Pastor, and it was ultimately decided that there was no longer a need for that group. Thus, I took advantage of the opportunity and asked the pastor about starting an apologetics based small group from my home. He asked that I submit a proposal for him to review. I did so, and within a couple of days he informed me that he thought it was a great idea. With a newly ignited drive, I began gathering material and contacting the church staff to advertise the group in the church's newsletter and Sunday morning bulletin. Within six weeks,

I found myself beginning the apologetics group I had desired.

It's been about a year since that time, and I'm happy to report that the group is stronger than ever. We've increased our membership and regular attendance into a great group of people who passionately discuss effective methods to defend the faith and reach this world for Christ. The conversations and debates are always gracious and stimulating. Even more pleasing to me, there is a growing interest within our members for the field of apologetics.

Of course, it hasn't been without its share of challenges. For instance, our church likes to engage in DVD-based bible studies. While there are a few apologetics studies out there that meet this criterion, they aren't as plentiful as I had hoped. Naturally, there's always the option of studying one of the many books published on apologetics. Nevertheless, this potentially presents an additional problem. Many churches (mine included) have a structured calendar for rotating between study periods and break periods. The study periods run about eight weeks in length, and the break periods are intended to provide an opportunity for advertising the groups. Yet, trying to find an apologetics book that can be effectively studied in eight weeks can be difficult. Finally, if you're reading this, you likely don't need someone to convince you that apologetics is an important and worthwhile endeavor. Unfortunately, not everyone is as passionate about apologetics as you and I. Thus, trying to build interest in those not especially taken with apologetics can sometimes be difficult.

Challenges and all, it's been very worthwhile. I've certainly learned a few things along the way. If you're reading this because you have the same desire as I do to reach your church with the tools to meet this hostile world head-on, then I hope I can share with you some of these things I've learned. Perhaps they will save you a few headaches later.

1. Get connected with a small group. Whether it's a home group, a Sunday school setting, or a discipleship class, if you're not already

plugged in to a small group at your church, get plugged in as soon as possible. It's surprising how much can be gleaned about small groups and small group leadership just by regularly attending a group. Plus, if you're interested in having your church back your group, it doesn't hurt to show the leadership of your church that you can commit to a group for the long haul.

2. Get to know the leadership of your church. Let's face it, apologetics isn't fluff. It's often a hardcore dissection and exhaustive presentation of some of the most core beliefs of the Christian worldview. Leading an apologetics group certainly doesn't require a Ph.D., but a solid understanding of the fundamental Christian beliefs doesn't hurt. Along that vein, it might be a good idea to show the small groups leadership that you're not going to come in with wild ideas like "truth is relative" and "all roads lead to God". If you are able, get to know the Small Groups Pastor and his supporting leadership team.

3. Results may vary. Your journey to a church-based apologetics group will likely have similarities with mine, and differences as well. You may achieve success faster than I did or it may take you longer. Either way, don't get discouraged. If your desire is to make a difference for God's kingdom with your passion, then it's certainly reasonable that God will bless your efforts.

4. Once you've started your group, remember to be gracious where grace is warranted. Try not to be overly dogmatic about issues that aren't core Christian doctrines. If you're a die-hard Old-Earth Creationist and everyone else in your group is a Young-Earther, be fair and open-minded with your fellow brothers and sisters. A little bit of friendly debate can be a good thing. Most of us have our favorite positions on controversial issues such as these, but don't be overly critical with opposing positions.

5. Pray. Little needs to be said here.

6. Start using your talents now. The light at the end of the tunnel can

often feel far away. If your passion is for apologetics, then you've probably spent some time developing your skills in that area. Don't let those skills atrophy while you await a church group. Use what you have where you are. Get engaged in ministries at your church where your skills can be put to good use. Also, intrinsically tied up with apologetics is evangelism. So start talking to people. Talk to your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Get online and discuss your convictions in forums and debate groups. Start a blog. Just do something.

I truly hope and pray that my story and these tips can be of some use to you as you develop your own apologetics group. There's no question that we need more defenders of the faith as we face increasing disdain and criticism from the challengers of Christianity. I applaud your efforts to get involved and am happy to be working along side you in planting seeds in the hearts and minds of non-believers and strengthening the convictions of our fellow believers. May God bless your progress.

Chapter

5

How to Start a Church Apologetics Ministry

by Steve Schrader, Mt. Airy Bible Church

While a student at Southern Evangelical Seminary in 2001 I had a dream that one day there would be an apologetics conference in the Washington DC area. A couple years later I had a dream that one day a well-known apologist would speak at my home church, Mt. Airy Bible Church (MABC). Today I can report that God has shown me how small my dreams were. As of February 2012, Mt. Airy Bible Church, in the small town of Mt. Airy, MD (pop. 9,000) has hosted the following world class apologists (some multiple times): Norman Geisler (6X); Craig Hazen (3X); Greg Koukl (3X); Frank Turek (2X); Brett Kunkle; Ergun Caner; Gary Habermas; Greg Ganssle; John Mark Reynolds; Joseph Holden; J. P. Moreland; Nabeel Qureshi; Ron Rhodes; Scott Klusendorf and Sean McDowell.

It all began during a couple difficult witnessing encounters in 1997. While working as a vice-president in a telecommunications business I learned the hard way that apologetics and evangelism go hand-in-hand. I had simultaneously run into a hard-core, angry, irrational atheist and a very polite, very rational agnostic and learned quickly that I either needed to get some answers or stop sharing my faith. I chose to get some answers.

In 1999, after completing a three year men's discipleship course called Men with a Mission taught by my senior pastor, Dr. Wally Webster, I enrolled in the Master of Arts in Apologetics program at Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES). In the fall of 2000, I was permitted to teach my first apologetics class in the MABC Adult Christian Education program (Sunday School). Over the next nine years, I taught on apologetic topics every chance I got.

On June 13, 2009 with the help and support of my ministry partner Pastor Marvin Patrick, I submitted a proposal to the elder board of MABC to start a formal apologetics ministry; on July 7th, 2009 they approved the formation of the Mt. Airy Bible Church Apologetics Ministry. The mission of the ministry is: to train the MABC congregation and surrounding believing community to defend and share their faith in a humble and respectful way; to provide the skeptic/seeker in the MABC community with positive evidence for the truthfulness of the Christian worldview; to increase the faith of believing Christians by training them on the evidence that exists for the Christian worldview, and to be engaged in the marketplace of ideas in the local community. This will be accomplished through research, teaching, writing, and facilitating world class apologetic teachers to speak in Mt. Airy.

Prior to the formal kick off of the apologetics ministry various apologetic activities had taken place at MABC including the planning of our first apologetics conference which took place in October 2009; teaching apologetics topics in Sunday School; and occasionally hosting a simulcast debate or seminar. The reasons for formalizing the ministry in 2009 include 1) to gain elder oversight, 2) to leverage the church's non-profit status, 3) to provide an approved ministry for members to serve, and 4) to leverage the administrative staff of the church as well as the facilities and all associated resources.

THE RESULTS:

Today the apologetics ministry is going strong. We have two seminary trained apologists on our team, a third who has completed the

certificate in apologetics program at Biola and a fourth who has begun work on the certificate program at Biola. On February 12, 2012 we kicked off our A Shot in the Mind program which is a monthly apologetic event with speakers (primarily members of the ministry with an occasional outside speaker) presenting on an apologetic related topic followed by a time of Q&A. We are planning our 5th apologetics conference for October 5-6, 2012.

LESSONS LEARNED:

While we attracted top names in the apologetics field and a couple hundred people attended each of our conferences, only 40 or so (about 20%) of the attendees were from our church and half of them were helping out as part of the apologetics ministry team. The fear of apologetics for the average lay person should not be underestimated. In an informal poll taken by a show of hands during a Wednesday night prayer service when asked the question: “how many of you think apologetics is for the intellectual elites among us and is too difficult for you?” approximately 75% of the hands went up. It should be noted that most of the attendees of this meeting comprise the core of the Mt. Airy Bible Church ministry – the committed. We asked them to fill out a card and tell us what topics they would like to have covered at our annual conference, our monthly Shot in the Mind presentations or some other venue. The top questions were related to: 1) Is the Bible reliable?, 2) how to respond to the same-sex marriage issue (note: this was being voted on in the Maryland senate the week of the survey), 3) does the age of the earth matter?, and 4) the abortion issue.

WHAT I WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY:

Although I am thrilled with where the ministry is and what God has accomplished through it, I believe we would have more of a following from our own church if we would have been more purposeful about targeting our own people sooner. I would have spent more time trying to spread the apologetics bug to our senior pastor who actually caught the bug reading an apologetics book while on a mission trip. He is now not only fully supporting the ministry but actively promoting it – this makes a huge difference!

ADVICE TO SOMEONE DESIRING TO START AN APOLOGETICS MINISTRY:

- Set apart Christ as Lord
- Get trained. Consider seminaries (SES, Biola, Veritas, Liberty, Columbia)
- Be accountable to someone like a local church or existing apologetics ministry
- Find a ministry partner to help share the load, bounce ideas off
- Get your senior pastor and/or elder board supportive of the ministry; until they are, be faithful to bring apologetics to whatever venue you can
- Understand what the major apologetic issues are in your locale and go after those hard
- Work with seminaries to put on conferences; some of them will coordinate the whole thing and even split the cost with you
- Try to get sponsors for conferences so you can keep the costs low. At \$40/head people will come. At \$20 or less per head, people will pay for their friends to come too!
- Find a way to get apologetics training to the young people; the need is great and they can handle the basic material as early as middle-school
- Be a training ministry. Train up apologists within your ministry to help share the load
- Team up with other local apologetic ministries as you can
- Have a big vision, we have a big God
- Do it all with gentleness and respect

May God bless you as you seek to honor him by evangelizing the world and defending the faith.

Chapter

6

The ‘Reasonable Faith?’ Course at Highfield Church, Southampton

by Peter S. Williams, Philosopher in Residence, Damaris Trust UK

For five years now Highfield Church Southampton has run a yearly ‘Reasonable Faith?’ apologetics course. We have a presence on our church website (cf. www.highfield.org.uk/reasonablefaith), including a recording archive of talks going back to 2010.

We try to pitch our material to be useful both to Christians looking for a more grounded faith and for the non-Christians who come along. However abstract some of the discussions might get, we always try to tie our subjects back to the gospel and the choice facing everyone as to how they respond to Jesus.

The course is organized by a core team of myself (Philosopher in Residence at the Southampton based Damaris Trust www.damaris.org), Dr Peter May (former UCCF chair and a retired local GP) and Keith Fox (Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Southampton and Chair of ‘Christians in Science’ www.cis.org.uk). Between us we have a good spread of life experience, subject knowledge and the occasional collegiate theological disagreement! This is actually quite useful in that it helps us to make

the distinction between Christianity and our own personal theology or way of being Christian. 'Reasonable Faith?' is an opportunity to explore the foundations and ramifications of the Christian 'way' (cf. John 14:6, Acts 11:26 & 22:4), not an opportunity for us to make Christian clones of ourselves!

In consultation with our church leadership we organize the course, invite guest speakers, give talks and take turns at chairing. In finding guest speakers we are aware of the fact that the vast majority of our speakers are male, but we do try to encourage female speakers to address apologetical issues through the course. Those attending are certainly a fairly even mix of male and female. We also try to provide younger Christians with a supported opportunity to give an apologetic talk. We have sometimes found it helpful to gather around us a small team of (younger!) helpers able to chair events and help with practicalities like setting out chairs and washing up.

In recent years we settled into meeting on a Sunday afternoon at 4:30pm for half an hour of tea and cakes before an hour's meeting consisting of two twenty minute talks each followed by ten minutes of Q&A. Twenty minutes is about the minimum time in which one can say anything useful on any subject, but having two talks in a meeting allows us to cover more topics and have a greater variety of speakers. We have a cake rota that many in the church have signed up for and we meet in our church hall, which has a kitchen facility and a screen with projector for power point presentations. We seat people around tables, café style, and have a very informal atmosphere. We often break for extra tea half way through as speakers change over their notes and power points (we don't always have power point, but we encourage it and try to set a good example in its use).

Since we end before the evening service some people come to both, while people from other churches in the area can come to 'Reasonable Faith?' but go on to their own meetings afterwards. We have also attracted some non-Christians, including (from time to time) members of the Southampton University atheist society! Num-

bers vary according to topic, the time of year, the weather and how much sport is showing on TV, but we get between 15 and 50 people each week for a ten-twelve week course.

The last few years have seen us alternating between a general apologetics course with a 'classical' topic structure (e.g. covering arguments for God, the historicity of the New Testament, the claims and resurrection of Jesus, etc) and a more thematic course such as 'Apologetic issues through the Bible' or 'Ethics: Reasonable Answers?'—looking at a range of contemporary ethical issues from the Christian viewpoint.

The meeting is advertised in church services, the church newssheet and on postcard-sized colour flyers we have made up each term with a programme on the reverse side. We leave these in local pubs, café's, etc.

Our main disappointment thus far has been the difficulty in attracting Christian students to attend, irrespective of when the course has been run or what topics we are covering. We also used to run a bookstall on sale or return from our local Christian bookshop, but the recession forced them to close and we lost our book-table. So, it hasn't been plain sailing, but worthwhile things rarely are! On the plus side we have built up many relationships, considered many apologetic issues and recorded many talks available to the broader public.

Chapter

7

Four Lessons for the Apologetics Small Group

by Randall Chase

When I speak on the topic of Apologetics and designing an apologetics program I always try to implement a few key foundations that the student can take away with them. The four keys that I have seen to be most successful are:

1. Relationship building
2. Don't speak beyond your knowledge base
3. Always be willing to learn
4. Listen first, respond second

Point One: Remember true relationship building is going to have the greatest lasting impact. This means that it's not about how well you argue a point if the person that you're speaking to doesn't respect you as an individual enough to receive what you're saying. While you may get the point across, chances are he will not develop a lasting, life-altering outcome. The old saying "they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" holds true even in the world of apologetics. This is the case too in the event of large debates, where two speakers are standing in front of an audience. The two speakers must have enough respect for one another

to remain calm and collected, otherwise it simply becomes an argument. Not much is usually gained through simple argument..

Point Two: Don't speak beyond your knowledge base. Nothing kills an argument or discussion quicker than when you throw out a piece of information that you simply looked up online or pulled from a blog and you can't verify it. And NEVER make something up. There is nothing wrong with saying "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you." This not only builds your credibility as a researcher but it also opens the door for follow-up conversations. Just remember that true research requires honest research. The following quote speaks volumes:

One of the most disastrous illusions of the internet age is that an amateur plus Google is equivalent to a scholar. A search engine offers information, more or less relevant according to the skill of the searcher. But it does not sift that information; it does not sort fact from fancy, wheat from chaff... A bright amateur armed with the internet may at best be better informed than he would otherwise have been, and he may occasionally catch a real scholar in a factual error. But it will not turn him into a scholar himself. There is no such thing as effortless erudition. —Dr. Timothy McGrew

Point Three: Always be willing to learn. There is a great need for learning and growing in the field of apologetics, before you ever get to the point that you can share what you have learned with others. You need to grow in your personal understanding of the truth claims in Scripture. Partly because at this point most aren't on the level of public debating, but rather we're just beginning to understand what it means to teach and how to organize an apologetics program. Everyone has to start somewhere, from C.S. Lewis, William Lane Craig, Ravi Zacharias, and even Thomas Aquinas. They all began learning and growing at some point in their relationship with God. Likewise, they all started attaining to be more educated and learned in apologetics. The goal isn't to be a better arguer, but rather the

goal is to first grow more in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Then with this we can share the truth.

We see clearly that Jesus calls us to Love him with our entire mind. When He was talking to an Expert in the Law in Luke, one can see that there is just as much importance placed on Loving God with his Heart, as there is with loving Him with his Mind.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:25-29

If your ultimate goal is simply to learn how to debate well and win an argument there's other classes for that. This class should be the edifying and building up of fellow believers with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit within our life, and eventually to share the truth of the gospel with those around us. Each person has a different reason for desiring to grow apologetically. My personal desire was to be able to build up and edify in the mission field. Now understand: mission fields are not always some far off overseas place but they may be your neighborhood, school, or place of business. Start in your own backyard this is where God calls us first; it is our Jerusalem as in referencing to Acts 1:8.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Point Four: Listen first, respond second. Understand that when you do learn about your faith and the faith of others that you are maintaining a solid grasp on truth. This type of training isn't done so you can dominate the debate. Remember the key is compassion. When you speak to someone of a different faith or lack thereof, you must

make sure they see first your compassion and then they are more likely to hear you. You must also learn the art of listening—this is one of the greatest lost art forms. So often if you watch debates with others or listen to conversations, people are so focused on getting their point out there that they neglect to listen and respond to the others concerns. This will immediately put you a leg up if you are willing to listen before you respond and then respond appropriately to the concerns laid out before you.

Sometimes its just takes a person verbalizing a concern or hurt they have to begin a healing process for them, or to help them to understand the truth. Along with this know that when you do present something that is different from what they have thought and believed it may come as a shock to them. Oftentimes when I am speaking on the subject of the historicity of Christ, I am met with disdain and repugnance; once I am able to clearly elucidate the truth of the historical claims to Christ I am met with positive questions rather than smart retorts. Remember above all else you are representing Christ in all things, therefore do not get sucked into the trap of the quips and snide comebacks. These will shut the open mind of the genuine seeker quicker than anything. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2

You can change the mind quickly, but changing the heart takes time.

Chapter

8

Five Tips for Starting an Apologetics Group

by Ron Pantalena

Our apologetics ministry has been in existence for 11 years. I was a seminary student studying for an MA in Apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary and felt that there needed to be application in the local church. So I approached the person who oversaw the ministries in our church with the idea of starting an apologetics ministry. After several meetings where other like-minded people were identified, we wrote an interim mission statement.

My first order of business was to train the members of the ministry. I chose to do this by leading a study of *The Case for Christ* followed by several other apologetics books. I finally chose the book *Unshakable Foundations* by Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino because it has an accompanying PowerPoint presentation on CD. After finishing our internal study we taught through the book to a class of students for six months utilizing the PowerPoint slides on the CD (we modified some of the lessons).

We teach the *Unshakable Foundations* course every two years. We have since developed a 3 month course that we teach to the high school students in our church every three years. We wrote a three

month course called Twisting Doctrine that examines how cults and other isms mishandle Scripture and use faulty arguments to deny essential tenants of the historic Christian faith. In addition to this we are now developing a new course that will teach believers how to engage unbelievers in a non-combative way and yet still point out their flawed thinking and point them to the truth.

Since our founding we have renamed ourselves E3 which stands for “Equip” (the church), “Engage” (the culture), and “Evangelize” (the lost).

We have intentionally kept the ministry small. We have primarily been a teaching ministry and it takes people who have done a fair amount of studying to teach and be able to address questions that arise. Unfortunately some of the questions are from believers who underestimate the value of apologetics. Some of the questions betray just how much the culture has infected the church rather than the church infecting the culture.

My recommendations for anyone wishing to start an apologetics ministry would be:

1. Approach your church leadership. Let them know that you are not asking them to do something, but rather that you are wanting to do something for the church and them.
2. Start by identifying others with an apologetics “bent.”
3. Study intensely together with good apologetics books by authors such as Norman Geisler, William Lane Craig, Lee Strobel, Ron Rhodes, and Gary Habermas. This is not to say that I agree with every position that these authors hold. For instance, I hold to a “young” earth while not all of the above authors do.
4. There are several good apologetics organizations that provide seminar type training. Consider organizing/hosting an event and volunteering to be the chairman overseeing the event. Events like

these are a good way to identify possible ministry members.

5. Once ready, consider teaching a class based on a good apologetics book. This is scary and takes LOTS of prep and work but it is more than worth the effort. It is also probably the best way to identify potential new ministry members. We now use this method almost exclusively. Student participation and interest is a great judge of a person's future ministry involvement. I actually require that anyone who wishes to teach in one of our courses to first take our Unshakable Foundations course and then be mentored as a member of the ministry for at least one year.

You do not need to be an expert but you do need to be willing to learn. Apologetics is not a goal; it is a life-long learning endeavor. You will be stumped at times by objections that are raised, but you should never be stumped by the same objection twice.

Expect resistance from within the church. Anticipate it and be ready with a defense of the need, and Biblical mandate, of apologetics.

The ultimate aim of apologetics is relationships: Your growing relationship with Christ, your relationship with those around you, and their entering into a relationship with the risen Savior.

Chapter

9

A Call to ACTION

by Chad A. Gross

I recently had the opportunity to meet with an atheist relative and share with him some of the reasons that I had decided to become a follower of Christ 10 years ago. [1] The conversation was enjoyable and thought-provoking. Upon reflection, one particularly interesting part of the conversation was when I shared my conviction that the Bible encourages and models critical thinking and defending one's beliefs with reason and argument. I shared the biblical directive for the Christian to "...always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you..." [1 Peter 3:15]. Moreover, the Bible models the Christian "destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" [2 Cor. 10:5] and instructs us to "...examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" [1 Thess. 5:21]. Further, throughout the Old and New Testament, we see apologetics used and modeled by various figures; most notably Jesus and His apostles. You the reader may not be surprised by these facts; however, my atheist friend surely was! He seemed to marvel at the idea that the Bible actually taught some of the things I mentioned. He seemed to have been under the false, but widely believed, impression that "faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the

need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence." [2] He said at one point, "Most of my friends who are Christians haven't even looked into what they believe as much as I have." He is not alone.

The above conversation adequately highlights a real problem in the Evangelical Church- we have failed to educate. We have failed to educate those who walk through our doors about what we believe and why we believe it and the consequences have been dire. Some of the consequences that I myself have witnessed or experienced are:

a) People who claim to be Christians don't really know if what they claim to believe is true. If they are not convinced that Christianity is true, beyond reasonable doubt, can they truly embrace and shape their lives around the risen Christ?

b) People seek experiences instead of truth and then are left disappointed when their experiences don't meet their expectations.

c) Believers are ill-equipped to defend their convictions and as a result don't share their faith. Or, when they are challenged with questions and don't have answers, they begin to doubt their faith. Doubt can be healthy, but it can also be cancerous to one's faith if not handled properly. [3]

d) People seek out answers to their many times heartfelt and sincere questions and are merely told, "You just need to have faith." Consequently, they seek answers elsewhere, concluding that Christianity is irrelevant and/or false.

e) The church as a whole is viewed by the culture as irrelevant and out of touch. It seems to them that we have nothing of value to say. For example, when a tragedy such as a school shooting occurs, who does the media seek answers from? Perhaps the psychologist or the scientist, but certainly not a pastor. The pastor is more often than not simply asked to go off in a corner and pray.

f) As the conversation I alluded to above suggests, nonbelievers see Christians as people who blindly hold to their convictions and have no rational grounds for believing as they do.

Many men and women more qualified than I have sought to explain why the church finds itself in its current anti-intellectual state [4] so I will not spend time here defending this assertion. I believe that in most churches this fact is evident and if you are currently attending a church that values and esteems the life of the mind, consider yourself blessed. [5] However, my observations and experiences lead me to conclude that this is a problem that must be addressed.

The local church needs apologetics. I started an apologetics ministry at my church approximately 5 years ago and have seen God use it in various ways. [6] During that short time, I have learned much from our successes and our failures. Perhaps you see the need for an apologetics ministry or small-group in your local church, but don't know where to start? Maybe you know that your church needs an apologetics ministry, but you don't feel adequate enough to start it yourself? It is with you in mind that I have written this essay.

I have put together 5 steps that I believe will sufficiently equip most anybody to start an apologetics ministry or small-group with confidence. I will present them using the acronym ACTION. Because really, who in the apologetics community doesn't love a good acronym?

Please keep in mind that prayer and Bible study are a pre-requisite to these 5 steps.

A—ADMIT

I believe it's important to admit from the onset that you will not have all the answers to everyone's questions. Just because you have decided to teach apologetics doesn't mean that you automatically

know all the answers. I know that this seems obvious; however, when I began leading apologetics classes at my local church, I remember being fearful that someone would ask me a question that I might not know the answer to and then be seen as ignorant on the subject matter being discussed. I would have thoughts like, “I don’t have a formal degree in this stuff. Perhaps I shouldn’t be teaching.” Or, “Maybe I should learn more before I actually teach?” Please do not misunderstand me. You should know your subject matter as well as possible and preparation and study is crucial; yet, you have to start somewhere and if you are going to wait until you have totally mastered the content before you teach it is my suspicion that you will never start!

I have learned through teaching that I gain more knowledge through interacting with my peers than I ever would simply sitting at my desk reading. When you are able to think along with others about topics such as the arguments for the existence of God or common objections against Christianity you gain “on the job” training that is invaluable. In short, when you teach, you learn.

Still, what does one do when they are asked a question they don’t know the answer to? Simple- Be honest. When I am asked a question that I’m not sure about I either let the person know that I will look into it and get back to them or recommend a great resource I’m familiar with that deals with the topic.

I let my class members know from the onset that I am a fellow learner and that we are all learning together. It is my hope that this approach also liberates them to ask the questions that they are struggling with.

C—CONNECT

It is critical for the apologetic minded person to connect with like-minded individuals within the body of Christ. If we are being transparent, sometimes when you are interested in apologetics it can seem like you are marooned on an island. I have found that finding

and connecting with like-minded believers and having intellectually challenging discussions and debates is an excellent way to keep the apologist focused on the task at hand and a great opportunity to learn from your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Further, it is many times encouraging to listen to others work through issues that you yourself have wrestled with.

T—TRAIN

As I look back on my beginnings in apologetics, I wish I would have spent more time training in the areas of logic and engaging in conversations purposefully and tactfully.

Logic is not only critical in understanding arguments, but also for recognizing the various fallacies that inevitably come up when discussing your Christian convictions. I highly recommend Robert J. Gula's *Nonsense*. This book offers an outstanding study in logic in a very readable and informal format. *Apologetics315* also offers an excellent Basic Logic Primer found here that I encourage you to checkout.

As well as becoming familiar with logic, I believe it vital that the aspiring apologist begins to tactfully think about how to maneuver through conversations and interactions with unbelievers of all stripes. Greg Koukl's book *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing your Christian Convictions* will equip you to do that very thing. In this short book, [7] you will learn to thoughtfully and effortlessly maneuver through conversations with unbelievers while challenging them to sustain each and every assertion they make. The result being that you will be more confident while sharing your Christian convictions.

I—INTERACT

Not only do you need to begin interacting with like-minded individuals, but you must also begin discussing the arguments for and against Christianity with unbelievers. Admittedly, this can sometimes

be a tough thing to do, but if you are to learn and grow in the areas we've been discussing, it is a must. I have learned many valuable lessons over the past 10 years interacting with those who disagree with my beliefs. There are many avenues in which one can accomplish this goal. Co-workers, neighbors or online communities such as Facebook are great places to begin corresponding with unbelievers and challenging them with the truth of the gospel.

O—OBTAIN

Once you are ready to start your apologetics small-group, ministry or Sunday school class, I encourage you to obtain some of the excellent resources that have been created just for these types of settings. I will recommend a few below, but the great thing about many of these resources is that they allow the person heading up the class or small group to simply facilitate the discussion. This is a great way to get familiar with the content while exposing others to it as well!

I RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

1. TrueU: Does God Exist? - This is a DVD led by Dr. Stephen Meyer that builds a scientific case for God's existence. Dr. Meyer presents the arguments in an easy-to-understand format and also covers a number of the main objections raised against these arguments. Although TrueU is geared toward high school and college aged students, I have found it to be helpful for people of all ages. It also comes with discussion questions for each session.
2. TrueU: Is the Bible Reliable? - This is the second DVD series in which Dr. Meyer builds a historical case for the reliability of the Bible. Meyer challenges the listener to examine the historical and archaeological evidence that sustain the veracity and accuracy of Scripture. This set includes a 96 page discussion guide.
3. William Lane Craig's On Guard Book and companion DVD - Through this book and DVD study you will learn how to defend your

faith. Over the weeks of study you will learn eight apologetics arguments and learn to apply them.

4. The Truth Project - As the website states, “The Truth Project is a DVD-based small group curriculum comprised of 13 one-hour lessons taught by Dr. Del Tackett. This home study is the starting point for looking at life from a biblical perspective. Each lesson discusses in great detail the relevance and importance of living the Christian worldview in daily life.”

This is just a small sampling of the vast array of resources available to the apologist. It has never been easier to get started!

N—NOTIFY

Finally, it is important to notify the leadership in your church that you are interested in starting an apologetics ministry. I am blessed to attend a church headed by a pastor who understands the need for apologetics and promotes our ministry. Whether you are starting a small group, a website or leading a Sunday school class, it's important to get your pastor's blessing and input.

What if you approach the leadership and they are not interested? Perhaps they don't see the need for an apologetics ministry? If that is the case, I strongly encourage you to leave that church and find one that does! I know that may seem bold, but there is a culture war going on and we are losing. We are losing our youth. We are losing our voice. We must rise up and the church that doesn't understand this isn't worth attending.

CONCLUSION

My goal in this essay has been to suggest 5 steps someone can take, no matter what their skill level, to begin getting apologetics into their church. I want to once again encourage you not to wait. Get started now! God will richly bless your efforts and your own faith will be strengthened and enriched.

Apologetics is a challenging discipline that is not for the faint at heart. However, we are called to it and, as philosopher J.P. Moreland has pointed out, it has been modeled for us by the one we love and follow:

“To my mind, Jesus was the greatest thinker who ever lived. And while he did not come to develop a theory about logic or to teach logic as a field of study, it is clear that he was adept at employing logical forms and laws in his thinking and reasoning. We who are his followers should go and do likewise.” [8]

1. I've written about some of these reasons briefly here.
2. This is of course an idea propagated by atheist celebrity Richard Dawkins. As I demonstrate here, it is also a completely false one.
3. Dr. Gary Habermas offers two free books on his website about how to deal with doubt. You can find them here and here.
4. J.P. Moreland, *Loving God with All Your Mind*, 1997.
5. I myself am encouraged when I hear philosophers such as William Lane Craig or John Mark Reynolds discuss the renaissance that is going on in upper level philosophy on the university level in regard to theism. Theism has once again been given a respectable place in the marketplace of ideas and these men contend that this will eventually trickle down to street.
6. I've written on this here.
7. We had the opportunity to review this wonderful book here.
8. J.P. Moreland, “How Did Jesus Argue,” 2007.

Chapter

10

Kicking Off The Truth Project

by Patrick Collins

The following is a summary of how I started an apologetics ministry at West Huntsville Baptist Church. Instead of including advice and lessons learned at the end, I included them as they fit in the story. I've also included extra details to show that things don't always go as planned and the need to be flexible.

I approached my pastor in the fall of 2010 about offering "The Truth Project" to small groups at the church. The Truth Project (TTP) is a systematic study of the Christian Worldview that shows the Bible applies to all areas of life. It helps Christians know why they believe what they believe, both for basic doctrine (who is God, inerrancy of Scripture, sin, the trinity, etc) and practical worldview (role of government, family structure, ethics, employer-employee relations, etc). It was developed by Focus on the Family and is a 13-week, DVD-based, small group curriculum.

I had taught The Truth Project twice before, so I knew how to lead a group through it. The two key elements to leading a TTP group is fostering discussion after the lesson, and having plenty of time together as a group. This can't be rushed. As I explained this to my

pastor, we both agreed it would be best to slowly introduce this to the congregation. We wanted to have one small group go through it first; then we could build up from there.

We started by putting inserts in the church bulletin on a Sunday morning in late October. At the end of the morning service, a short 3-minute promo video was shown. An announcement was made that we would have an interest meeting the next Sunday immediately after the morning service.

The next Sunday, I held the interest meeting to explain briefly what the Truth Project is. I also explained that we were looking for individuals who may be interested in going through the small group first in order to be trained to be small group leaders. My hope was that if our first group went through it in the spring, then we could have multiple groups go through it later in the summer or fall.

Out of a church of about 180 adults, about 30 attended the interest meeting. Of them about half said they'd be interested in only taking the class, and a handful said they would consider being trained to be leaders. I coordinated with the potential leaders what nights would be best for them and decided to have two classes. One would meet on Monday nights and the other on Wednesday nights. Because of this, two couples who really wanted to come couldn't. I wanted to be inclusive, but asking them to wait was one of the hard decisions I had to make. Thankfully, there would be other opportunities for them. I then opened up the two classes for anyone else interested in going through it in the spring. I capped each class at dozen people (TTP isn't as effective for larger groups - it is a small group curriculum after all).

Once January came and the classes started to meet, our numbers ended up being 11 and 9. We had a few drop out due to schedule conflicts. The Monday night group met at my home (home meetings are recommended by TTP) and the Wednesday night group met at the church (not as preferred by TTP; to do The Truth Project, you have to be trained by Focus on the Family either by going through a

small group and then watching a leader-training DVD or attending one of their training events. During the training, you are encouraged to hold TTP in your home because it's a more natural atmosphere and you can more easily bond with people). We agreed to meet from 6 to 7:30pm each week.

Both groups enjoyed the The Truth Project. I was able to bring up apologetics several times during the discussions. TTP contains some apologetics, so I intentionally developed those ideas further. My experience working with Ratio Christi (a student apologetics club) also gave me many examples to pull from to show why certain topics were so important and how they are often misunderstood. Also, being able to cite current events and how they related to defending the faith was especially useful.

By the end of the 13 weeks, I had about four people commit to leading a future TTP group. I had two or three who had originally said they wanted to become leaders, but had backed out.

During the summer of 2011 we had three Truth Project Groups. The church's summer schedule only allows for 10 weeks, so they started a week early and ended a week late. They had to skip the lesson on Biblical principals used in founding America. Those who were interested were allowed to borrow the disc to watch on their own after the small group ended.

In the fall of that year, one of the church's small groups that meets in a home went through it. That small group decided to meet from 6:15 to 8:30 so they could have dinner at the home they were meeting at. They had 15 regular attendees each week, which was almost too big, but it worked out very well. They also had a problem with the holidays cutting their meeting to twelve instead of thirteen. Instead of skipping a lesson, they decided to watch one and a half lessons for the last two meetings.

Then, in January of 2012 we held an all day seminar at the church. We met from 9am to 5pm on a Saturday. While we were only able to

show half of the videos, I was able to bridge the gaps between the lessons. There was no discussion, but I emphasized the need for people to come back this summer and go through the course the way it's meant to be done - with discussion.

We wanted to do the “seminar” because the Truth Project is thirteen weeks and some have been hesitant to commit to it. We thought this would be a great way to introduce people to the big picture of what the Truth Project teaches. It also worked as a great reinforcement for a few that wanted to go through it again. We even had several people from other churches attend. The seminar paid off, and many have signed up to go through the course this summer.

Now that it's been a year since the first Truth Project meeting at West Huntsville Baptist Church, we've had at least 70 church members be a part of a Truth Project small group, and we have plans to have at least one group go through it this summer. We've had nothing but good feedback on the content. It has also spurred many to realize that while they have had a Biblical worldview in many areas of life, there are some areas they need to re-evaluate. Several have told me that they are better able to articulate their beliefs and defend their faith. All in all, using The Truth Project has been a great tool for discipleship and introducing people to apologetics.

Church Website: WestHuntsville.com

Ratio Christi: RatioChristi.org/UAH

Personal Ministry: WhyApologetics.com

Chapter

11

Evangelism, Apologetics, and Cultural Impact

by Adrian Urias

There is a difficulty in implementing apologetics into our churches. This difficulty arises from the notion that apologetics has no real practical value; that apologetics is employed only by scholars in their ivory towers—who think themselves wise—which is warned against multiple times in the Bible (e.g., Proverbs 26:12). This attitude is a serious problem and it must be dealt with. The best way to debunk this myth is for Christians to get out (literally) and show that this is not true. Some may argue from the Bible the necessity of apologetics in our church, but as James says, “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (James 2:18b). Therefore, we must go out to the frontlines of this spiritual war and show that the proof is in the pudding.

I started an apologetics discussion group on my college campus to extinguish this problem. This was a weekly event where I took my group to evangelize for an hour or so, and then had everyone rendezvous, with visitors, at a specific place where I would give a brief ten to fifteen-minute lesson where we would get into the Word and talk about an issue such as the existence of an afterlife, the existence of God, the problem of evil, religious pluralism, a difficult pas-

sage in the Old Testament, and a variety of apologetically themed topics.

The discussion group proved to be effective for two reasons: evangelism and cultural impact. Let us examine the evangelism component. Christians will not see the need to a defense of their faith if there is no apparent need to actually defend their faith. If they do not feel the need to defend their faith, it is probably because they are not willing to present their faith in a challenging arena. The command to go and make disciples is explicit (Matthew 28:18-20). When we do come across non-Christians such as Muslims, Atheists, Wiccans, etc., I encourage my group to have discussions with them. Not arguments, but discussions. This puts their knowledge of apologetics to use.

Now, let us turn to the result of bestowing upon Christianity a good name in society. The stereotypical image of a Christian on a college campus is one of a Bible-thumping, Westboro Baptist ignoramus who is entirely out of touch with reality. The truth is, even if you bring no one to Christ with the campus discussion group, you are still making an impact with these visitors who will hear a good defense of Christianity and your lesson will eat away at their preconceived notions of Christianity. This plants a seed in their mind and, eventually, the culture as a whole. It is difficult to share our faith with people who, from the outset, believe Christianity is ridiculous. With these Bible talks, you are creating a Christian friendly atmosphere in the campus culture. You might not be able to bring someone to Christ because of your Bible talk, but it does give them the background belief that Christianity is intellectually tenable should another Christian approach them in the future.

As Christians, it is beneficial to go to conferences aimed at equipping and building up the Body of Christ. However, events that are distinguished in the minds and memories of my group were the anti-Christian events. I encourage other groups to fight at these spiritual frontlines. As Martin Luther realized:

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.”

One of the more memorable events my group attended was a panel discussion hosted by a LGBT group. During the Q&A, we asked questions about some of the intolerance aimed at Christians, which was a nice turning of the tables after hearing about the intolerance they claimed to face! This made for a very lively exchange between some of the students in my group and the panelists. Almost everyone in the audience did not sympathize with our cause, and started heckling us. While it was intimidating to be in a den of lions, how invigorating it was to see Christ represented and defended amidst such hostility! If there are no events in your area, there will surely be a Mormon temple nearby with a visitor center, where you can talk with a guide about their beliefs; or maybe there is an atheist club on campus that you can invite over for a barbeque.

Another upshot to attending events that are not friendly to the Christian worldview is the personal heart check that accompanies them. Christians have a justifiable reputation for being supercilious. This pride may often lead to fruitless quarrels and debates. In an event we attended hosted by the Center for Inquiry, a well-established secular organization purposed to erode religion, one of my members came up to me with tears in his eyes because he was surrounded by so many people who are lost, and he did not feel we had enough man power to really make an impact. This was a humbling experience for me because I entered the venue looking for a fight. Seeing my friend's strong emotion reminded me that many walking around me may have hell as their destination and it cut me to the heart. I had temporarily lost sight of the mission. Our mission, as ambassadors for Christ, is to save and love the lost as God has

saved and loved us. God does not look to fight with us, and nor should we look to fight with others. We are servants, and we serve non-believers by providing them the information they may require from apologetics. As Paul admonished us, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). You can have all the knowledge in the world and be the next William Lane Craig, but if you are not doing this because you love the lost, then you are failing your mission as an ambassador for Christ.

If you cannot attend events yourself, there is the alternative option of hosting smaller events in your own home. These can be very popular. You can have local Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses come give a talk to your group about their beliefs, and participate in these battlefronts in the comfort of your own home. I hosted an event where a gay minister came to give a talk arguing that the Bible does not in fact condemn homosexual relationships. In attendance were some visitors who traveled fifty miles just to come into my home and listen to this talk! This can all be for free unless you want to provide refreshments.

Hosting events like these have the benefit of testing and refining what you teach in your group. For example, when we had Mormon missionaries come to my home and talk, I prepped my group for about three weeks prior, teaching them about Mormon beliefs and giving them some talking points they could bring up (including their reputation of evangelism, which was a good point to bring up to reinforce why apologetics was needed), and then we brought in a real Mormon to test our knowledge. They are informative, and if you have the right spirit about it, they can be a lot of fun.

We must remember that apologetics is not for us. It is for God. I encourage other apologetic groups to not keep the glory of knowledge of God to themselves, alone in a room huddled with a book or on

Facebook. Rather, step outside with real human beings who need to be saved. College campuses are fertile grounds for such sharing and friendly engagements (Matthew 9:37). To keep the practicality alive, I challenge apologetic groups to attend conferences that are not Christian friendly. In the spirit of keeping things entertaining and interesting, I encourage you to host small events with guest speakers who are not Christians and give talks about their beliefs. Above all, beware of pride. Do not let pride seep into your heart and blind you to the great commission. Do not glorify yourself, but rather glorify God.

Chapter

12

Questions are a Good Thing

by Luke McKinnon

“Introducing a strong and aggressive apologetics program at our church was one of the single best decisions I have made in my ministry.”

That is a pretty strong statement for a pastor to make about any ministry or program his church has implemented, but I made the statement and I wholeheartedly stand by it. By creating an “atmosphere of apologetics,” we have challenged people within the church to dig deep into their faith and to question if what they believe is really true or not. One of the mottos that has become a mainstay in our church is “Questions are a good thing.” What we have found is there are many people that feel churches and/or pastors really do not like people to question the things they are teaching. We have created a culture in which people are comfortable knowing that questions can be asked and our faith will stand firm against any question.

Several years ago, I began to prepare myself for making apologetics a key part of our church by earning my Masters of Arts in Christian Apologetics from Biola University. While this is certainly not a

requirement for starting an apologetics program in your church, it didn't hurt. One thing I would suggest is to become familiar with a broad range of apologetical topics. Notice that I said familiar and not proficient. It is impossible to be proficient in every apologetical area, but when studying apologetics, one topic invariably leads to other areas of study. This brings me to what may be one of the most important rules I have learned in my experience of teaching apologetics. Be prepared to tell people that you do not know the answer, if you truly do not know the answer. This may sound a bit elementary; however, I have come across some people that might make-up an answer rather than admit that they do not know. The way that I have handled this situation is by simply stating that I do not know the answer, but I would like to dig into the matter more to find an answer.

I began by offering a weekly Bible study for our folks that focused on different apologetical issues. These topics varied greatly, as the apologetics field does, but there was a hunger in our people for this sort of Bible study that really surprised me. People want to know that there are reasons and arguments to support their beliefs. This study lasted for about six months and covered everything from Creation/Intelligent Design and Biblical Archaeology to Philosophy of Religion and Arguments for the Existence of God. In my experience, in this sort of setup, variety is a key aspect of keeping a wide range of people engaged in the study. There are some people that find the biology aspects of Intelligent Design to be the most interesting aspect they have ever studied, while others are bored to tears with it. But those same people that are bored with biology may be fascinated with the philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

The curriculum I use for my apologetics Bible studies is one that I wrote and researched myself. While I am sure there are many good apologetics books and studies that might have worked for this, I found that doing it myself had several advantages. The primary advantage of developing my own curriculum was that I had to study it in order to present it. I had a better grasp of the specific subjects because I had spent the time and effort to research and understand it myself. I have heard it said that the best way to learn something is

to teach it. That could not be any more true in my experience. The second advantage that I saw to creating my own study was that I could custom tailor it to my group. There were many times that I let the group pick some of the subjects that we were going to study. They seemed to be even more engaged when I would be teaching on something they specifically requested.

The question maybe asked: how do you approach developing your own lessons? The first item I would mention is to use some sort of presentation software in conjunction with your lesson like Keynote or PowerPoint. There are so many great charts, pictures, illustrations and video clips that you can incorporate. When people can see photos of archaeological digs in Israel or see an illustration of the flagellar motor, it really engages them and gives them something to associate with when studying challenging concepts. As far as finding the information that you need to develop the lessons, you should be able to find any number of books or reputable websites to help you dig into the subject. While this may go without saying, I did mention “reputable” websites. While it may be shocking, not everything that is on the web is true! That can be especially true when it comes to information on apologetics. Take just a little time to make sure you are using the best, most accurate information you possibly can. Resources like www.apologetics315.com can be a great clearing house for information and other helpful websites and books.

One major obstacle you are sure to encounter when dealing with any group of people and apologetics is that there will be some disagreements. Whether it is Young Earth vs. Old Earth Creationism or something like a philosophical difference, it can be something that is dangerous to a group. Here is how I deal with situations like this. The first study, and thereafter for new folks, I hand out what I call my Diagnostic Framework for Theological Differences. This one-page sheet basically says that there are going to be differences in opinion and I group these differences into Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Issues. Primary issues are ones that I believe your salvation is contingent on. Secondary issues may not be directly linked to your salvation but are necessary to have a cogent Christian worldview.

Tertiary issues are ones that, in the scheme of things, don't really matter and we can agree to disagree. There are some that will call me a heretic on both sides, but I teach both Young Earth and Old Earth Creation arguments in my class. Personally I feel that this is a tertiary subject and I will share my view with the class but also will share arguments from both sides.

One other project I would mention would be simply incorporating apologetics into current, more traditional Bible studies. While I have done the strictly apologetical studies a couple of times now, I am currently doing a study that dives into many of the well known, and not so well known stories throughout the Bible. In this study we use what I call the H.A.T. Methodology to look at the story. H.A.T. stands for Historical, Apologetical, and Theological. What we do is break-down the story into three parts. The historical part will deal with timing, culture, region, other events, etc. The purpose is to "set the stage" for the story itself. History and culture is an important apologetical tool. The apologetical section looks at evidence or proof we may or may not have for the story or events surrounding the story. Lastly, we examine the theological implications and lessons of the story. We do not want to fall into the trap of sterilizing Scripture with apologetics. The ultimate end must be the personal application to strengthen our faith, or perhaps bring us to faith.

Finally, let me say a quick word about apologetic seminars and conferences. We have hosted two seminars over the last couple of years. They are a great way to have an intensive, in-depth look into apologetics. Both seminars have been two-day seminars, but I taught the first one by myself and the second we brought in two additional speakers. Seminars are a lot of work but it can be a great way to engage people from even outside your church. Having done it both ways, I would highly encourage you to allow someone like the Apologetics Department at Biola University to assist in the planning and execution. It made all the difference in the world for us. I do not recommend teaching a two-day conference by yourself if you can help it. We actually have had the seminar at a hotel and at a museum. If you have any questions about seminars or how we did

ours, please feel free to contact me.

Churches in this day and age desperately need apologetics to remain real and relevant in this world. Do not be afraid but rather be “...prepared to make a defense...” (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

SOME LINKS:

Our Seminar Website: www.swatseminar.com

Our Church Website: www.realrelevant.com

Biola Apologetics Dept: www.biola.edu/apologetics

Chapter

13

Implementing Apologetics Ministry

by Max L. E. Andrews

Incorporating apologetics as a seminal role in the ministry of your church may not be the easiest task. I had a teaching pastor internship in the summer of 2008 with my hometown Independent Baptist church in Richmond, VA. I entered my internship during my junior year as an undergraduate with the support of the two pastors I was working with, the senior pastor and the youth pastor. I was given the task of starting a college ministry from scratch and doing what I could to ensure that the ministry would persevere when I left. Most of the students were coming out of the senior high youth group; so what better way to deepen and strengthen their faith than through apologetics?

Implementing an apologetics ministry takes much prayer, work, and patience. When praying for the ministry I ask God to send his Spirit upon us to illuminate our minds so that we may be critical and rational followed by a prayer of petition so that our hearts may be sensitive to the truth and the Spirit. The work involved in this kind of ministry is twofold: research and ministerial preparation. One cannot simply delve into apologetics without already having familiarity with the material. You must ensure your heart and mind has a firm foun-

dition lest you doubt your faith and ministry. Those whom you may be ministering to may be in perilous times of doubt and questioning or they may simply need supplementation to their faith with intellectual vigor. Either way the leader must be firm in faith. This yields the ministerial aspect of the work and preparation. Not only must you have the intellectual and academic knowhow of the material but ministerial logistics is important as well. This could be included in the category of any other church ministry, which includes the time and location for meeting, audio/visual aids, handouts or material, references, etc. To be honest, you may not be met with joyful enthusiasm by the church or some of those in your ministry. Whether this incongruity is an intellectual hurdle or disagreement or a rejection of the ministry itself depends on the church. You may face extreme fideists—those who think apologetics is morally wrong and against the nature of faith. If the ministry is going to be fruitful and persevere the leader must be patient and handle these situations gently with prayer and tact.

There are two main components to an apologetics ministry that I have discovered to be pertinent for the growth of the church: variety and particularity. Though this seems paradoxical it yields fruit when properly sown. When I say variety I'm referring to the range of topics discussed. For laypersons who cannot wade in the depths of theology and philosophy for too long the monotony of one dense topic becomes a dreadful bore. Spread out the range of topics but allow for thorough and sufficient examination and discussion. My ministry met twice a week. On Sundays I would lead a survey of different books in the Bible. During this survey we would explicate the themes, historical background, and the theological importance of the contents. This would allow everyone to have a general knowledge of the book while delving into the theology. On Wednesday evenings we would examine philosophy and history. This ensued the family of cosmological arguments, the fine-tuning argument, the moral argument, the resurrection of Christ, the hypostatic union, heretical doctrines, etc.

The second component to apologetics is particularity. When I refer

to this I am appealing to the depth of a topic. Whichever topic I would be discussing for the day I would get as deep as I could with the topic being covered. For instance, when I discussed the hypostatic union I would probe deeper with questions of Jesus' self-understanding and the notion of reduplicated predication. In essence, don't give surface level lessons and actually challenge the church on their beliefs. Probe as deep as you can while maintaining fruitful discussion.

I was given the opportunity to deliver a sermon to the congregation one Sunday. My sermon was an exposition of Acts 17, Paul's visit to Athens. I used this text to bring out the axioms for apologetics and the importance of it while supplementing each point with other passages of Scripture. After the sermon several congregants approached me saying they didn't really understand the depth of my exegesis but they still received the concept and purpose of apologetics. Too often the church seems to be looking for applications in their life, the question of, "How do I relate this to my life?" This was a way of slipping in an application of apologetics while stressing the need and importance for it in the church.

Apologetics has application in two respects. The first is evangelism. When evangelizing, Paul used reason to determine his method of evangelism. Reason consists of principles of logic and method; these principles consist of the formation of simple truths and axioms that may be used to overcome problematic thinking and doing. It is important for the Christian to be on their toes and ready to provide an answer for any question brought to them and be able to act appropriately when faced with any situation (I Pt. 3.15). A difficulty in evangelistic apologetics is when one encounters an intellectual debate or discussion; there is always the possibility of construing one another's thoughts and points. Rational and intellectually persuasive dialogue is much more effective than some Christians give it credit for. Biblical evangelism is more than sharing one's testimony. Not to discourage sharing the impact of the Trinity in one's life but many societies need intellectual engagement, especially the western world of Europe and North America.

The second role of apologetics is for the edification of the believer. We've all had our existential confrontations when we doubt our meaning, value, or purpose in life. Additionally, apologetics serves to provide reinforcement of the truth of one's faith when facing doubt. To be honest, I've doubted my faith several times. I went through a four month period of questions, depression, and doubt due to physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings of a disease I have. It wasn't religious experience of the presence of God that drew me back to him. What drew me back was my intellectual foundation. I used the truths I accepted as a foundation, i.e., objective meaning, value, and purpose, and allowed God to restore my trust in him. Doubt isn't a biblical virtue and it's not good. Critically thinking through your faith and challenging your thinking is virtuous. Sometimes apologetics is just as important for the unbeliever as it is for the Christian.

When one is doing apologetics correctly one will see the twofold effects of it: a rational reason for the truth of theism and Christianity for the unbeliever and the reinforcement of the truth of the faith for the Christian. If apologetics does not provide the Christian with the latter I would encourage him to allow the material to saturate his heart and mind prior to leading a ministry focused on such an endeavor.

Chapter

14

When Apologetics is Not Welcome in Your Church

by Anthony Horvath

I receive a handful of emails a year from people who are interested in apologetics, recognize its importance, but struggle to have it seen the same way in their local congregations. Many of these people find me through my ministry's online apologetics academy, which is specifically geared towards 'lay' apologists. It is very often the case that apologetics is a recent discovery of theirs that has profoundly helped them, and they are shocked that others do not have the same perspective. This is, of course, after they ponder why it took them this long to hear about apologetics in the first place.

Most of the time, the obstacle is simply a lack of enthusiasm. Occasionally, it is outright hostility. Sometimes a lack of enthusiasm, especially among the staff and clergy, is a mask for deeper opposition. It would be wise to have some deliberate conversations to determine what the real hindrance to apologetics within the congregation really is.

However, because of the nature of apologetics, there is no way to stop you from bringing your studies to bear, shy of locking the

church doors and keeping you out. Apologetics does call to mind arguments and evidence and certain time-worn approaches to philosophical and theological issues, but more than that, apologetics engenders an attitude and approach. Some hall marks of the apologetically-minded person is an unwillingness to answer questions with "It's just a matter of faith" or, "Don't ask questions, kid. Doubt kills." When the apologetically-minded person is presented with a thorny issue, he does not shrug his shoulders and act as though there is no way to sort it out. He does not resign himself to ignorance and does not commend that ignorance as 'faith.' He gets out his books, he does some research, he looks at the relevant Scripture verses, he invests some time in critical thinking and bounces his ideas off of others who have the same attitude. Many times, what begins as a 'thorny' issue turns out to be easily resolved, as soon as facts and information are brought to bear.

As a case in point, when the movie *The Da Vinci Code* came out, many Christians wandered around in a daze, wondering how to reconcile the claims of the movie with their Christian faith. Those are the ones who took the claims seriously. Others dismissed it along the lines of "Well, that's why we have faith." The real travesty and crying shame is that anyone at all was flummoxed by the insinuations of the book, because even a cursory understanding of the history of the Christian church and how the Bible came to us is enough to deal a death blow to such wild-eyed conspiracy-mongering. A little knowledge quickly dispels the challenge the movie is said to represent, like the fog disappears on its own as soon as the sun comes up, just a smidgen.

There will be things that even the apologist walks away from scratching his head, but it will be much later in the process than many people often suppose.

This raises the important point that there are a great many things that interest the apologist that might not be strictly construed as 'apologetics.' Simply knowing the facts can count as 'apologetics.' Merely being aware that Jericho existed as a real city, and has been

found, can be 'apologetics', if the person in front of you is insisting that the Scriptures are mythology, through and through. In short, any piece of information, evidence, or line of argument can count as 'apologetics' if the purpose of sharing it is to ground oneself or others in actual reality. For that is one of the core assumptions of apologetics: Christianity is real. Jesus was—and is—real. The events really happened, in history, not 'in faith.' Our faith is in a real God, in real promises made by Him that he really fulfilled in Christ... or really will fulfill.

This is an attitude, not a subject area.

Thus, there is no way to exclude 'apologetics' from the congregation unless you yourself are excluded from the congregation.

Hence, introducing 'apologetics' in your congregation need not necessarily be limited to such offerings as an 'apologetics series' during the adult Bible study hour for a month. If you teach a Sunday School class and you are apologetically minded, you will be doing 'apologetics' throughout the year, because your mindset and learning will be informing your lessons each and every Sunday.

Since more things count as 'apologetics' than one might normally think, you can also bring apologetics into the congregation without ever using the word. For example, instead of offering to do a four part series on apologetics, instead offer to do a study in the geography of Palestine. In the course of that four week study, you will ground the events described in the Scriptures in a real location that has a real history. You will orient people, so that they know that Jerusalem (for example) is a certain distance from Bethlehem which is a certain distance from the Sea of Galilee; in many minds, this is all 'old myth' and the cities just run together in their heads. The fact that people couldn't hop into their cars but had to walk these distances will add new perspective to the yearly trip to Jerusalem to attend the Passover- and since we mentioned it, let me tell you a word about the Passover and what that meant to the Jews at the time. You see how it works. Naturally, you'd also include some men-

tion of interesting archeological finds that corroborate, substantiate, or even conclusively show (to the reasonable man) certain claims of Christianity are true... (for example, the Pilate Inscription.)

We tend to think of the whole work of the congregation in terms of the service, Bible studies, and youth group activities. 'Breaking in' on these functions may be difficult, because they require some consent and/or approval from the pastor, or a committee or board, or something similar. It may not be opposition to apologetics, per se. There may be enough volunteers (ha!) or the schedule might be all filled up. But these sorts of things are not the whole work of the Church.

I would argue that every man and woman's chief ministry is to their own family. If you are 'apologetically minded,' you won't wait for the Sunday School teacher to get around to presenting some of the lines of evidence for the (real) resurrection of Christ. You'll be doing it yourself. It may not have occurred to you that this is 'doing apologetics in the church' but it certainly is.

More to the point, the spiritual leaders of every family in the Church are, biblically, the parents in those families. Not the pastor, not the DCE, or youth director, or even you, the 'official' apologist. In your desire to bring apologetics into your congregation, you may wish to consider that the perspective you bring in your conversations in the narthex, at the potluck, or whatever, counts equally as 'doing apologetics,' and indeed can have as much impact (or more, obviously) as a Sunday morning 'apologetics' presentation. You can of course mention in those conversations your belief that as parents we have an obligation to transmit the faith to our children in a robust manner, and hey, aren't you a parent? but you don't need to be as direct as that. You can convey the attitude and approach that apologetics study engenders by the comments you make, the books you recommend, and the points you emphasize.

To my knowledge, there is no church in America that requires committee approval for having conversations in the church foyer where

you just 'happen' to mention the newest book by Gary Habermas or the fact that William Lane Craig is speaking nearby that weekend ("Oh, you don't know who William Lane Craig is? Let's do lunch tomorrow and I'll bring you up to speed.")

In my years of apologetics experience, I have found that the little conversations turn out to have the biggest impacts, often without knowing about it. I recently had a phone call with someone who wanted to talk to me about something I said to him almost ten years earlier on the bleachers at a track meet.

Many people reading this may agree that what I have described sounds all well and good, but it doesn't quite seem satisfying. Doing really important work in apologetics surely means having your congregation view you as an authority on such things, or at least get you to speak on things on occasion, right? Surely it means snagging a debate with the local atheist at the community college? That is, don't we feel that if we're doing serious apologetics work, we'd be taken seriously? I admit, I have felt the same way. I cannot speak for everyone, but I suspect, if you are like me, this sentiment comes more from a certain kind of pride—and not the good kind. I suspect, when I feel this way, that it boils down to the simple sin of coveting, where I covet the apparent 'success' of other apologists.

But that just goes to show you why we need to distrust our feelings and 'take every thought captive for Christ' because I know intellectually that when the chips are down, what really counts and what really matters are the souls of our fellow man. That is the sort of thing that I wouldn't let a little congregational apathy on the subject of apologetics get in the way of. Nor should we let grandiose visions of ourselves, boldly contending for the faith, prevent us from seeing and acting on the multitude of small but important opportunities to strengthen the faith of our fellow Christians or whittle away at objections of non-Christians.

And for many of us, there will remain after everything else, our very own children.

Chapter

15

Lessons Along the Way

by Daniel Hannon

In the previous essay series “How to Get Apologetics in Your Church,” I talked about how there are many possibilities and paths to take to get an apologetics ministry started in your local congregation. There is no hard-and-fast formula or rule, but rather the process depends on a lot of factors, not the least of which are your own interests and how open and receptive your church is to the apologetic enterprise. My own experience began with formal training through Biola University’s MA in Christian Apologetics program, which helped prepare me for teaching opportunities in both a Sunday school class and small group setting in my local church. For this essay, I’d like to take a just a few moments to relate some lessons I have learned so far and to give some advice to those just starting out in their own endeavors.

In the time I have spent teaching apologetics at my local church, I have learned several valuable lessons in terms of presenting material to students.

The first lesson relates to teaching style. It can be a bit daunting to begin teaching a class on your own, especially if you have had limited prior experience leading a group. This was the case for me. However, I have found a little “secret” teaching style, which has been invaluable to me in leading discussions and presenting material. As you might be able to tell from my previous essay, I am a tireless promoter for the folks at Stand to Reason in general and for

their “Tactics” material in particular. It turns out that I have been able to utilize the tactics for conversations described in Greg Koukl’s book (*Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussion Your Christian Convictions*) as a methodology for teaching. Think of it as something like the Socratic Method. The primary tactic for conversation in Koukl’s book is called the “Columbo Tactic,” which is based on asking particular kinds of questions. These are intended to draw folks out, to bring clarity, and to stimulate conversations which will lead to an exchange of viewpoints and information. The principle behind Columbo is to find out what a person believes, why he believes it, and eventually to be able to lead him in a conversation (with questions) to consider some new information or a new point of view.

This works very well—at least it has for me—in almost the exact same way for teaching and leading discussions with students regarding topics in apologetics. I use the Columbo tactic all the time, not only with my students, but also with preparing course work and lessons. Asking questions of the text or the author does all of the same things for you as a teacher as it does for you as a conversationalist (i.e. helps to clarify, stimulates discussion, delves deeper into an issue, asks the “whats” and “whys” of a viewpoint, etc.). Of course, this teaching style could spill over into many other subjects as well—provided a person has some training so he knows where he is leading his students—but again, this is a book I highly recommend to anyone with a budding interest in apologetics. It is a great place to start for those who are a little bit timid in conversation and/or leading a group. Read the book, put the tactics into practice (especially “Columbo”), and I think you’ll begin to see exactly what I am talking about.

The second lesson I have learned relates to curriculum. It is important to evaluate your curriculum level as it relates to your students. Choose material with an appropriate level of difficulty. Starting off with something that is too hard—for you or your students—will be an impediment to learning and will frustrate both you and your class. I mentioned in my previous essay that I began the class with Ken Samples’ book *Without a Doubt: Answering the 20 Toughest Faith*

Questions as our initial foray into the realm of apologetics. While the written content is excellent, the topics timeless and relevant, and knowing the answers important for any Christian, I would caution you with this particular book. It may or may not be a good starting point for your group. For example, it is not too difficult for a person who has some familiarity with the subject matter already, but some of the language and philosophical terminology can be a problem for folks just being introduced to subjects such as logic, philosophy, proper argumentation, and the like. So with that said, I would recommend evaluating your group before selecting an appropriate curriculum, or if you are currently struggling with material that you are presenting, consider taking a step back. For my part, I am doing exactly that with the next book my class will be studying: Gregory Ganssle's *Thinking About God: First Steps in Philosophy*. It is my hope that the group will benefit from some more basic and foundational teaching while being stimulated to care and think more deeply about these important fundamental issues of philosophy and apologetics.

A third lesson I have learned regarding material is to use variety. While a book like *Samples' Without a Doubt* can provide endless paths for discussion for a long period of time (we took about 2 years to go through the book), it can become tedious to continue with the same format week-to-week without a break. This is true for any book or format. I suggest interspersing your content with timely videos as a change of pace for your students. This will not only provide some variety, it will spark great discussions, keep them abreast of current topics, and help prepare them to give answers from a Christian worldview regarding important issues in the news. As an example, in January our class celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Francis Schaeffer by watching a 3-part video series of his sermon on a "Christian Manifesto" from 1982. These videos served to introduce some in the class to Schaeffer and gave everyone a deeper appreciation for his uncanny ability to see the implications of different worldviews and where they can lead a culture. It was highly relevant to topics being discussed in the news today and a great "diversion" for the class.

So then, these are some simple lessons I have learned through starting an apologetics ministry in my church, and I hope the little bit of what I have related here will be of some aid to you as you continue with or begin your own. I would just like to close with some advice as you seek to extend God's kingdom in your own little corner of the world, and which actually might seem to contradict everything I have said in these last two essays.

Don't make apologetics the center of your ministry.

What do I mean by that? It's simple. Apologetics is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ nor is it the end goal of your ministry. That is not to say that apologetics is not important, obviously. Otherwise, I would not be writing this essay nor doing what I am doing in my own local church body. What I mean is that you should not neglect the study of Scripture or theology in favor of a single-minded focus on apologetics. Though there is clearly some overlap in these areas, in my view the Christian must be first a student of Scripture and then secondarily an apologist. Though they are not mutually exclusive, I think this is the proper order of emphasis. All that being said, my advice is: have a regular Bible reading plan, a devoted prayer life, get involved in a small group Bible study, and study systematic theology. Each day, strive to know better the God and the faith for which you seek to give an answer. And by making these main things the main things, you may just find that you'll end up being a better apologist for it. I pray the Lord will bless you and your ministry for His glory.

Chapter

16

How to Organize an Apologetics Conference

by Mikel Del Rosario

How do you pull off a big apologetics event? That's a question I get asked a lot by people who are looking to get their churches exposed to apologetics on a larger scale. It's one thing to get invited to speak alongside big names like J.P. Moreland and Greg Koukl, but it's another thing to actually put the event together. I know, 'cause I've done both.

In this guest post, I'll explain how I partnered with a large church, an apologetics organization and Biola University to bring the first-ever apologetics conference to Rocklin, California. I'll also share the results, what I learned, and the advice I'd give to anyone who's interested in doing something like this at their church.

HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED.

In the summer of 2010, I spoke at a conference being held on the campus of Biola University in La Mirada, down in southern California. While I was there, I had the opportunity to connect with Dr. Craig Hazen--the founder and director of the Master of Arts program in Christian Apologetics.

When he found out about the work I do, promoting accessible apologetics training around the Sacramento area, he became very interested in collaborating on events in this area. Why? Because there isn't a lot of this sort of thing in Nor Cal. The program has a great history of supporting the work of their graduates.

But even with the help of the department, we couldn't do this alone. The next step for me was to find a local church that shared the vision for the conference, to provide a venue and back the event financially.

A month later, I approached Bridgeway Christian Church where I had been attending services since 2006. I'd already been doing some teaching and training for them as a volunteer and the Associate Pastor was excited about the idea. It seemed to fit right into his long-term strategy of providing classes and further training for people at the church.

HERE'S HOW WE PUT THE EVENT TOGETHER:

Through a series of talks, e-mails, phone conversation, and working closely with the assistant director in the Apologetics department at Biola, we put together a budget and a proposal for the church.

HERE'S WHAT THE PLENARY PRESENTATIONS LOOKED LIKE:

Kickoff with J.P. Moreland and Craig Hazen

Clay Jones: "Why God Allows Evil"

Craig Hazen: "Evidence for the Resurrection"

Mikel Del Rosario: "Using Stories, Objects & Illustrations to Explain your Faith"

J.P. Moreland: "Christianity and the Nature of Science"

We nailed all of this down in January. Additionally, I'm also affiliated with a group called Apologetics.com based in So Cal. They have a radio show on KKLA, an L.A. radio station dubbed, "The Intersection of Faith and Reason." It seemed like a great fit, and we invited three of their staff to lead a few breakout sessions for the conference as

well. The associate Pastor at Bridgeway got the event approved by the rest of the leadership and we were all ready to go.

As far as logistics go, Biola University took care of online ticket sales. I tapped my network in Northern Cal to get promotions going at area churches, Christian schools, online, Nor Cal apologetics networks, homeschooling networks, etc... I ended up doing all the design work and created fliers, posters, and other conference graphics.

One of the cool things was my connection with William Jessup University. The former Vice President at WJU just took a position as the Provost at Biola. He's also been a regular guest speaker at Bridgeway for many years. We asked him to do a special promo video for the event, and I used that video along side our other marketing materials in connection with the event. Check out this video for the promo that was used.

We needed 600 people to attend in order to break even. At the end of the day, we basically did.

HERE ARE THE RESULTS:

About 600 were equipped with basic apologetics training in a few key areas: The Problem of Evil, the Resurrection, Science and Christianity. Believers were also trained to use this information in practical, everyday conversations through the use of stories and illustrations.

HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE SAID AFTER THE EVENT:

- I was SO blessed, encouraged, and intrigued by the Apologetics Conference.
- We were all stretched spiritually and intellectually, and this is what we need to grow in Him and to be better ambassadors.
- I brought my daughters and son and they were all encouraged in their walk.

- The conference was well worth the investment of time and money. Thanks for providing access to such excellent teachers.
- We learned more about our faith, in those days than we have learned in a few years.
- We learned that Christianity isn't at odds with science. Our kids got exposed to wonderful teachers!
- I was so encouraged by Mikel's talk and his calm approach. I was encouraged by his prompting to be good listeners!
- Here's what we learned.

Most people don't register for conferences early. I'm sure that's no surprise to you, and it's probably the same in almost every church. What this means, logistically, is that you've got to be prepared for a huge line out the door an hour before the event. How fast can you process registration?

I also learned that it takes a lot of coordination, networking and collaboration to pull off a successful event. I partnered with three major stakeholders to get this thing off the ground. I reached out to my local network and my friends online to help with promotions. The more groups you can get tapping their networks for you, the better.

MY ADVICE.

If you're looking at doing this in your own church, my advice is to plan early. Get a hold of a pastor and your church calendar and get a date nailed down a year in advance. That's what I did for the very next event: Reasonable Faith in an Uncertain World 2012. Start talking to people early. Find key leaders who are excited about apologetics and ask for help promoting the conference.

If you're working with Biola, let them handle ticket sales and online registration. It will save you a lot of headaches and it's just one less thing to worry about.

Chapter

17

So You Want to Organize an Apologetic Event?

by Matthew Burford of Tactical Faith

Excuse me for a moment my dear apologetic friends and let me quote one of my favorite sayings on leadership; “A leader is best when people barely know he exists.” Now before you guys go googling and find that I quoted from a Taoist philosopher and send me hate mail, let the proverb sink in. For those of you who want to see apologetic training in your local church or community, you must either lead, or pray for leadership. If you desire to lead, remember that first and foremost you are not in this for your own glory. I will reiterate what I just stated with a biblical proverb (this time for emphasis), “The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.” (NIV). See, that carries a bit more weight doesn’t it?

We in the apologetic third column (as Greg Koukl likes to describe it) know what it is like to be disappointed when it comes to local church training. We desire to see and show brothers and sisters in Christ what we discovered for ourselves: Christian Apologetics is incredibly empowering both evangelistically and devotionally. It is frustrating when you know you have good evidence for the Christian worldview yet the evangelical church almost refuses to take notice. Of course, my friends, we all see it coming. We see the tide turning one church and community at a time. We have at our fingertips remarkable materials and speakers that when utilized correctly can equip believers and make them effective ambassadors for the faith. One of the ways we can add to the movement in our local communi-

ties and churches is through apologetic events. I have personally organized five or six events to this point and I have more coming in the near future. These events range from small to large churches and from local community settings to state-wide events. I am starting to understand where these apologetic events are useful in terms of our goal of equipping saints to defend the Christian faith. Yet, before I go further, I want you all to remember my earlier announcement: if you must lead something, do so with a humble spirit and do it all for HIS glory!.

Now that my personal admonition against pride is over, I can now proceed to imparting my wisdom to you unsuspecting local apologetic leaders. I am talking to the ones that are doing the hard silent work of apologetics in the local church. You know those guys don't you? They are the ones who would listen to a podcast on 2000-year-old biblical manuscripts rather than Pandora or ESPN. They are the ones who make jokes that include Hilbert's hotel or the word "singularity" in the punch line. I can make fun of those types because I am one of you. In fact, up until recently, I was just minding my own and hiding in a corner reading my Reasonable Faith book (usually hidden behind a Left Behind novel so that I would avoid those inquisitive looks from fellow believers) until God changed the direction of my ministry. About three years ago, I had the opportunity to move to Montgomery, Alabama and intern with Jay Wolf at First Baptist Montgomery. He allowed me the chance to start an apologetic ministry within walls of that beautiful 200-year-old downtown church. Before long, I could see that the community around the church was also ripe for apologetic training, so I did what any logical apologetic nerd...umm...leader would do in my position. I asked permission to bring an apologetic speaker to the church and promote him community-wide. Little did I know at the time that Pastor Jay's decision to let me organize an apologetic event would change the scope and direction of my life's ministry. Below is my attempt to get the conversation started about a topic that is near and dear to my heart. Now, it is not a sexy subject by any means, but it is vital to our movement. We all need to get better at organizing events and we need to be constantly thinking about bringing apologetics to the

local church in ways that are accessible and clear. Now for a disclaimer before I go any further: This is by no means the final say, but the mere musings of a southern boy from Alabama who happens to find myself as the leader of an apologetic non-profit ministry. My opinions are from a perspective honed from my experiences in the state of Alabama and they are by no means universal. Yet, there are tips that can be gleaned from this article which could be useful for someone in Oklahoma or upstate New York.

LEADERSHIP

It might seem trite to mention, but leadership is key to any apologetic event organizing. Every event, no matter the size or scope, needs a point person to direct and protect the overall vision and help in the overall plan of action. Leadership comes in many different forms, but overall I think event organizing needs someone with the ability to organize and effectively motivate people towards a similar goal. Now, I do not consider myself the best organizer, but I am very skilled at keeping people connected to a shared goal. I lean on others in my group to help me with details. I start with organizing broad objectives to make them clear and easy to understand. Leaders should spend a good portion of time thinking about the overall purpose of the event and ask questions that will sharpen the focus of what is trying to be accomplished. Good pre-event questions are:

What is the overall goal of the event?

Whom are we trying to reach?

What are the estimated costs?

What kind of help will I need?

Should we host the event at a church or public community center?

What are the church's concerns in terms of this event?

It is important for the answers to be clear and easily communicated to others. A good rule of thumb is that if it is not clear in your own mind, it will be equally or more difficult for others to understand. Do your due diligence at this point to think of objective-type questions and get the answers to those issues before you do anything else.

Trust me, it will help in the long run!

Also, remember that if you are allowed to organize an event at a local church you are beholden to keep the lines of communication open to the church staff and be mindful of their hospitality. They are the ultimate leaders of their congregation and you are on their turf. I am very blessed since everyone I have dealt with has been gracious with their church calendars. These leaders have given me free reign of their facilities. Giving up church time and facilities is a great gift from those in church leadership. Do not abuse the gift and be mindful of their generosity.

Ultimately, the leader of an event needs to keep the vision and objectives clear. His primary purpose is to keep people on the right track and focused on the shared vision. Force yourself to keep these broad goals in mind. But, what are these broad goals? What do leaders need to keep in mind when working through the pre-event planning, the event itself, and post-event objectives? There are a myriad of important objectives that a leader needs to consider. Since this is not meant to be an exhaustive guide, I will consider five common, practical aspects of event planning including topic and speaker selection, marketing, calendar and date planning, event logistics, and post-event activities.

CHOOSING A TOPIC AND SPEAKER

There are two ways to go when dealing with apologetic events: either start with a topic in mind or choose a speaker before a topic is considered. When it came to my first event in Montgomery, I had Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason ministries in mind before I even began to think about subjects for him to teach. I, like many others in the apologetic world, have followed Greg and his massively successful radio show for over ten years. His style, manner and knowledge fit perfectly with my goals and objectives for the event. I spent weeks thinking about my target audience and I came to the conclusion that I wanted to reach believers who desired to think and communicate clearly the Christian truths both at home and in public. Of course, I had to assume that I was starting at square one when introducing apologetic training, so I wanted to keep things simple. In

the beginning, apologetics can be a complicated and very confusing topic for most believers. Through communication with Melinda Penner, the director of operations at Stand to Reason, we decided to let Greg teach a modified version of his Tactics training on Saturday, preach his sermon Credo on Sunday morning, and host a question and answer period on Sunday night. I tried to pair the church and community to a speaker who had an approachable personality and understood that the average Joe probably did not want to listen to a three-hour lecture on the ontological argument. In my opinion, failing to connect the right speaker and topic to the community is a common misstep within the apologetic community. Know your audience! I understand your desire for others to understand solid evidences for the faith. However, it takes time for people to assimilate ideas, especially if they are foreign to their usual Christian perceptions. You can take the apologetic movement in your area back a few years if you are not careful. Instead, go with speakers that can relate with your audience. If the setting is a university or college then go with someone who can relate to students and professors. If your audience is a rural church in Alabama, go with someone who can relate to those circumstances. The good news is that we live in a time where there are many professional apologists willing and ready to speak on a whole variety of topics.

MARKETING

Now I know marketing is not everyone's cup of tea, but I love communicating with people and giving them proper scope about what I am trying to accomplish. Now notice I said "proper scope". We are not in the business of selling products or events just to get people in the seats. However, we need to do a better job selling the benefits of apologetics. I do see some out there promoting the right way by using ingenious titles as well as being creative with advertising. In fact, I would say that other than coming up with the title most of the promotion portion of event organizing is easy. Now the title for your event is another matter. While I like titles with "reason" and "defend" in the marquee, it is becoming a bit tired in my opinion. I understand it's difficult, but try and come up with something that is not only cre-

ative and fun, but something that clearly identifies the purpose the event.

I think the most underutilized way to promote an event in a community is radio. I have a great relationship with Christian radio stations in the state of Alabama. Faith Radio in the Montgomery area is a not-for-profit radio station that has been more than willing to help me promote Tactical Faith's events. The amount of people that listen to radio is enormous, so do not be afraid to call local stations and see what they offer in terms of promotion. If it is for a church or community event, many stations will write off the amount for advertisement as community service, so again it is worth the effort to give your local radio station a call.

Nothing—and I mean nothing—beats word of mouth promotion when getting an event noticed. I enjoy going around and getting to know pastors from different churches, so this part is easy for me. My default practice is to start three months ahead calling local church pastors and denominational headquarters about an event. The time will vary according to the amount of territory you are trying to cover as far as communicating the event itself. I have a statewide event in the near future that needs at least 11 months, but for a regional event I think two to three months will suffice. I call local pastors and denominational leaders and tell them that I would like their help in getting the word out to their congregations. More often than not, they are happy to make their congregants aware (as long as the event is not on Sunday). This is also a great time to network with the community at large and promote apologetics as well. People are very receptive to it when you act cordially and humbly describe what it is your group is trying to do. Be open to the fact that this is a wonderful time to connect with your neighborhood, because you never know what helpful connections you will make. For example, my friend Mark Tucci and I just recently met a pastor while promoting an event whose son is attending Biola for apologetics training. You could see in his eyes how proud he was of his son and through him was very aware of the apologetic world. I have lived in Montgomery for three years and had no clue a pastor, literally one mile from my

home, had a connection like that to apologetics. This episode reflects the fun of promoting by word-of-mouth marketing strategies. Be prepared and open to make new friends and connections. These connections will probably serve you well during your next event.

CALENDAR AND DATE PLANNING

More than likely, most readers of this article will be working outside of a church staff and will lead apologetic groups/events in addition to their family and job duties, akin to Paul's tent-making. This juggling act can make the event planning process very difficult. One of the hardest hurdles to cross is choosing a date that coincides with both the church and the community's calendar. I wish everyone would just go along with my plans and visions! However, the reality is that I am nowhere near the master of my own calendar much less anyone else's. Despite these complications, choosing an optimal date for your event is crucial if you desire to reach the most in your church or community. Always remember, keep the local cultural calendar in mind when organizing any event, especially in smaller communities. For example, in the South, do not schedule anything during the fall unless it is a Monday or Tuesday night (Mondays are not optimal either). Why not, you ask? Down here, football is king and the turnout will be low. We have coordinated events in other parts of our state and even in Alabama; there are still variances when dealing with annual community calendar. Even with keeping in mind the cultural calendar, it is still difficult to find that perfect window for apologetic events. For our first event with Greg Koukl, we chose the third week in January because there was nothing going on in both the community and church calendars. High school and college football ended a few weeks earlier and other than the occasional avid hunter, most citizens around our area were in a post-football season lull, looking for something to do. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons we had over 450 people attend a Saturday Tactics training with Greg.

Also, think about the calendar and use it to your advantage. Are you doing an event where the topic is about the resurrection? Try to work with a church to offer a weekend training session near Easter.

We had Dr. Gary Habermas come to Montgomery two weeks after Easter in 2012. The resurrection is already on the hearts and mind of God's people, so it is a great time to introduce the minimal facts theory.

EVENT LOGISTICS

I know this title sounds like a bad UPS commercial, but in reality it is the heart of this whole article. What I am dealing with in this category is the event itself. There are multiple things about a region or statewide event that one has to factor, so don't be surprised if you miss something your first couple of events. However, allow me the opportunity to give you a little insight from my failures and maybe you can gain something from my mistakes. The actual event will clearly show the small or large weaknesses of your pre-event organization skills. What are the big glaring ones that you can avoid? For starters, watch your money and costs. I made the mistake of just "guesstimating" what things will cost outside the speaking fees, lodging, and airfare and forgot about all the small things that might come up. Decide beforehand what your meal allowances will be for the speaker(s) and put that money on a prepaid Visa card(s). Give it to the speaker when he first gets off the airplane. Explain that the card is for food money and any miscellaneous items they might need while in town. Also take out a few twenties and carry it around in your pocket just in case something comes up that needs immediate attention. I am serious about this part guys. Things come up and you might as well be prepared for it rather than spending time handing out your debit card or going to the ATM at a moment's notice.

Second, watch the speaker like a hawk. What I mean by that is the speaker is your guest, so make sure they are taken care of fully and do everything you can to make them feel at ease. Trust me, when they get off the plane or out of the car they are not there for vacation. They have to get themselves in a frame of mind in order to speak. Keep in mind, they are usually out of their comfort zone, so this is a stressful time for them (especially if this is their first time in your community). If you have multiple speakers then assign a per-

son to each speaker (their “handlers”, so-to-speak) for as long as they are in your town.

Keep a sheet with you of their speaking schedule and a daily or weekend schedule and be ready to keep them clued into where they are supposed to be. When the speaker feels like they have someone in their corner, it makes them feel at ease. I brought Brett Kunkle from Stand to Reason to Birmingham and Montgomery on a whirlwind youth apologetic tour last year and absolutely put him on a brutal speaking schedule. I think by the end of four days he had spoken to over 1400 people total over two cities and multiple locations in each city. He took it like a champ but was incredibly exhausted by the end. I knew I was asking a lot of him, so I tried everything I could do to keep him energized and clued in on his topics and locations. I would have the schedule always at hand with a backpack full of water always handy for him.

When it comes to the speaker try and make them comfortable in your community. On your way to an event clue them in on your cultural quirks. Believe me, I live in the south. I understand we southern folk can be a bit... oh how can I say it... unique. The first thing I try to do now for a speaker is to tell him the lay of the land in terms of what to do and not to do. Are you bringing a California reformed speaker to a Wesleyan church? Then do him a favor and tell him not to bring up soteriology. In some areas of the country it is fine to go out and order alcohol with a meal. In parts of the south that is a big negative, especially if you are in some denominations. But how is your speaker supposed to know these things if you do not tell him beforehand? Do him a favor and tell him these things so that he does not unknowingly offend someone.

Finally, go through the whole weekend in your mind right before the event starts. Try and think about everything you have organized at this point and preemptively try to tie up loose ends. Does the speaker have a table for his resources? Is there someone assigned to that table to sell his product? Who is taking the speaker out to eat after this event? Who is driving him from his hotel to the event?

Please ask yourself these questions and have an answer long before the speaker(s) arrive! Also, take the time to write down the whole weekend on a sheet, moment by moment, and have the event memorized so you can recall everything at a moment's notice.

POST-EVENT REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

When the event is finished, your job is not over. Take the time while the event is still fresh to reflect on the totality of the whole process from start to finish. Sit down in front of your computer or with paper and pen in hand and jot down your thoughts. Ask yourself questions on what you would or would not do again and turn these thoughts into a log to save. I go back constantly to my computer file that is devoted to my pre- and post-event notes. I take notes constantly before, during, and after an event. These thoughts remind me of what works and does not work for my community. I do this so that I can find better ways to get apologetics to my local church and state.

I am in this for the long haul and I want to help my brothers and sisters grow in the Christian faith. I love organizing apologetic events, big and small, because God has put the fire in me to help equip HIS people. I honestly find myself sitting around and thinking of new topics, new speakers, and new ways to get apologetics to the state of Alabama. Call me a nerd... heck, call me the worst of apologetic nerds. I will clear the air right now and confess, "Hi my name is Matthew Burford and I am addicted to apologetics. In fact I am addicted to organizing apologetic events." So go out there my friends and add gasoline to the apologetic movement by organizing an event. Just remember, do not do this for your glory. Go out there and make HIM proud of you.

Chapter

18

An Effective Model for a Youth Apologetics Home Group

By James Klopfenstein

I am an Electrical Engineer (avionics systems) with Rockwell Collins in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I've been married to Sue for 30 years and we have 2 daughters (Amy 23 and Heidi 21). For the past 6 years, my wife and I have been leading a Sunday night home group in apologetics to help high school age youth prepare for secular college.

I am proud to say that I have two daughters who majored in the sciences at secular state universities and both have kept their faith intact. I attribute this to 3 primary factors:

- 1 The grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and the wooing of the Holy Spirit
- 2 Both had a freewill bend to consider God and the truth of Christianity
- 3 A family commitment to Christian apologetics training
- 4

Although the first two points were very important, I want to discuss the third point, our story. In their late grade school years, I discovered my daughters had interests in the hard sciences and I soon re-

alized they would most likely attend secular colleges in just a few short years. Having taught junior and senior high Sunday school for many years, I detected an interesting pattern. Many Christian youth, even those charged up from weekend retreats and weeklong youth camps, would often give up church and their Christian beliefs after leaving the home. Through my own observation and other research that I read, I concluded that many left because of intellectual skepticism. They just began to doubt that Christianity was true. Knowing about the perceived conflict between science and religion, I decided to begin to prepare my children for what lay ahead. I first ordered the full set of Moody Science video classics. These videos were produced in the 1950s and 1960s with Dr. Irwin Moon to show how science points to the creator God. Although they are old, they are still timeless, God-honoring, entertaining, theologically sound, instructive, and family-friendly. So on Sunday nights instead of watching the Disney channel and Nickelodeon, we watched a Moody science video and discussed it. I then discovered Summit Ministries, "Understanding the Times" high school curriculum and we began to work through it on Sunday nights. As I saw how much these Sunday night studies were benefitting my daughters, I decided to talk with my youth pastor about opening up our home to my kid's friends. He loved the idea and for the past 6 years my wife and I have been leading a small apologetics youth group in our home to prepare high school students for secular college. Although my kids have long since graduated, we have been encouraged by parents and pastors to continue our group. Our model is simple but I believe it is effective. It has helped a number of young adults to stand firm in their faith when they leave home for college.

HERE IS THE MODEL

PRELIMINARY WORK AND PREPARATION:

We start the group in the fall right after school starts and end in the spring just before all the senior graduation parties. In August, we send out a parent letter describing the importance of apologetics and discuss the topics we will be studying. We print up invitation cards created from a PowerPoint slide and encourage the youth to

hand them out at school. Our youth pastor allows us to promote the group during the weekly youth services. We have also posted a notice and invitation cards on a public bulletin board at the local Christian bookstores with the owner's permission. An announcement is also made in our church bulletin. Initially we suggested that the youth come without their parents. However, we now see the value of allowing parents to come with their kids if they so choose. Additional wisdom from other adults can be very helpful. We do ask the parents to be sensitive to their kids because some kids don't want their parents to come. Even so, those kids typically don't mind if other parents show up, they just don't want theirs to be around.

MEETING FORMAT

Food: Starts at 5:45 pm. **FOOD IS KEY!** All teenagers love to come to a place with food. We decided to create a weekly food budget as one of our weekly offerings above and beyond our tithe. You can also get the kids and their parents to provide food as well. Frozen pizza, baked cookies, brownies, and chips work great. They love carbs at this age. We do have some carrots and veggie tray items for the health minded.

Humor: Between 6:00 and 6:15, I play about 10 minutes of Christian standup comedy. They love it. In fact, I think some come back every week just for the comedy. My kids love Tim Hawkins and Bananas Comedy entertainers like Jeff Allen, Mike Williams and Paul Aldrich. And for the Brits, we've even watched a couple of sketches from Bill Bailey, who I don't believe is a Christian. We were very selective with Bill though.

PowerPoint Game: Then we do a fun PowerPoint trivia game. They love the competition and silliness. Here are a couple of places to get good PowerPoint Trivia Games. (www.pointmangames.com, www.simplyyouthministry.com/resources-games.html —check out the Power Play volumes). We usually split into teams and the team that wins gets first choice from a big candy bowl.

Worship song: Live worship would be great but normally we get no takers to lead worship. So we typically select a good worship song from YouTube and display it on the HD TV.

Apologetics Lesson: We try to start the lesson by 6:30 pm and try to finish by 7:30 pm. I've found that video based teaching works the best. Trying to get a teenager to read a chapter in a book prior to group time is almost impossible. Besides there is a plethora of apologetic teaching curriculums and videos to choose from these days. I have attached an extensive list at the end of this paper. Thirty minutes of video time is best, however a few minutes more is OK if needed. If a lesson is an hour long, I will generally split it into two lessons. I've also discovered that I can hold the groups interest much better if I frequently pause the video. I then ask questions, re-explain difficult and key concepts and if applicable do some role playing between the group members. Role playing involves developing some pre-planned questions for a skeptic to ask the Christian. It allows them to practice real dialogue in a safe environment. They find it is much harder to be salt and light by answering with gentleness and respect than they think. As the group is watching the video, observe their faces. If you detect confusion, "PAUSE" for discussion. Many of the curriculums have questions and or discussion guides after the video. If they don't, sometimes I make summary PowerPoint slides with fill in word blanks to cover the key points. Be sure to add in appropriate scriptures as applicable. In addition, some curriculums have study guides that can be purchased. Encourage your kids to purchase these study guides so that the dedicated authors continue to publish excellent curriculums. Depending on the study, you may want to assign group leaders and break into smaller groups to do the questions and discussion.

Closing Prayer Time: After the lesson, we make a list of prayer requests and close in prayer.

That is it. After we close, we allow the youth to stick around for more fellowship and food. This is when some of the real important ministry takes place, especially one-on-one discussions. It is also a

good idea to have a “Question Box” box by the sign-in sheet. I learned this from AnchorsAway Ministries. Set out a decorated shoe box with an open slot cut out of the top. Set note cards by it and tell the youth that they can write out any “ad hoc” questions they want and insert them into the question box. Having the question box gives you a good week to research the answers.

APOLOGETICS CURRICULUMS AND VIDEOS THAT WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY USED

Note: Much of the content description below comes from the referenced web links, however, I have added some of my own personal comments.

Rooted—A film based apologetics resource created by young adults for young adults. This curriculum is the brain child of Peter Bocchino, who served as Director of Leadership Training for Ravi Zacharias Ministries for nine years and was co-author of “Unshakable Foundations” with Norman Geisler. This is one of my favorite curriculums because it is based on 1st principles. I got to know Peter quite well via email and he actually connected to our class via Skype a couple of times to answer questions and to role play with the group. Peter really challenges you to think and to do apologetics like Jesus. You can visit Peter’s website [here](#).

On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision - DVD Companion - by William Lane Craig - William Lane Craig's "On Guard" will help teach you how to defend your faith through this collection of 8 videos sessions on one disc. Over the weeks of study, you will learn eight apologetics arguments and gain insight, understanding, and application. <http://apps.biola.edu/apologetics-store/products/videos/item/on-guard-defending-your-faith-with-reason-and-precision-dvd-companion> We are doing this study now and it is excellent. William Lane Craig is very articulate and clearly teaches how to present incredibly powerful arguments. I do use the PAUSE button occasionally to explain his vocabulary, but I’ve convinced the kids that the words they are learning are excellent prepa-

ration for the vocabulary section on their college entrance exams. I would highly recommend this series.

Christianity and the Tooth Fairy - John Lennox at The Veritas Forum at UCLA, 2011 - Children believe in the tooth fairy until their reasoning capabilities mature and they recognize this belief is neither grounded nor relevant. Does belief in Jesus Christ require a suspension of logic? Can Christianity be proven to be true? UCLA law professor Daniel Lowenstein interviews Oxford mathematician John Lennox with honest questions about Christianity and the grounds for faith. This will be followed by audience Q&A. We showed this cordial exchange over a 3 to 4 week period. John Lennox is an outstanding communicator and defender of the faith. We really enjoyed this video. By the way www.veritas.org has hundreds of videos of top notch apologists giving talks on leading college campuses. You could use Veritas.org as an unending resource if desired.

TrueU 1 – Does God Exist? Produced by Focus on the Family and taught by Stephen Meyer, author of “Signature in the Cell”. This life-changing DVD provides facts and insights from philosophy, cosmology and biology to help you engage intellectually with professors and peers in ten 30-minute lessons. This is an outstanding series on the existence of God. His scientific reasoning on life’s origin is a must see for young adults studying the sciences. I especially appreciate his clear explanation about “inference to the best explanation”.

TrueU 2 – Is the Bible Reliable? Taught by Stephen Meyer. This DVD series provides a thorough overview of major archaeological and historical discoveries that demonstrate the historical reliability of the Bible. The material presented in the ten lessons (approximately 25 minutes each) will help you to respond to critical arguments against the historicity of the Bible with solid evidence, and gain a better understanding of the geography, culture, and history of events in the Bible. This is the sequel to Does God Exist. It is very good and thorough but quite technical in historical details. For some not excited about history, it may be a bit academically demanding.

I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist – DVD Complete Series by Frank Turek In an informative and entertaining way, Frank uses logic, science and hard historical evidence to show why the Bible is true, and why it takes a lot more faith to be an atheist than a Christian. Twelve shows on three DVDs. 25 - 40 minutes each. Includes Q&A. Designed to be a stand alone DVD set or a companion series with three other outstanding "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist" products: The Book, The Workbook, and the Curriculum (all available at <http://impactapologetics.com/>).

1. Does Truth Exist? The Road Runner Tactic
2. Does God Exist? In the Beginning...
3. Does God Exist? Divine Design
4. Does God Exist? The Origin of Life
5. Does God Exist? What About Evolution
6. Does God Exist? The Moral Law
7. Are Miracles Possible? Signs of God or Gullibility
8. Is the NT True? Do We Have an Accurate Copy?
9. Did the NT Writers Tell the Truth? (Part 1)
10. Did the NT Writers Tell the Truth? (Part 2)
11. What Books Should Be in the Bible?
12. So What If It's True?

You can also get his PowerPoint presentation here. Frank is a great communicator with a bit of an "in your face style" New Jersey flair. If you have a strong interest in apologetics and a desire to know how to present this material on college campuses, I would recommend that you look into attending Frank's CrossExamined Instructors Academy held every August. I've been to it twice and I learned a lot. Not only are there great instructors, I also got just as much out of being around like minded Christians and I still keep in touch and trade ideas with many of the other students that I met.

Craig vs. Hitchens: Does God Exist? DVD - Dr. Craig takes on one of the "four horsemen" of the New Atheism in this celebrated encounter moderated by radio personality Hugh Hewitt. Nearly 10,000 people attended this debate in person, while countless more watched it live at sites in 35 states and four foreign countries. Mod-

erated by Hugh Hewitt and hosted by Craig Hazen at Biola University. One atheist blogger's summary of the debate: "Frankly, Craig spanked Hitchens like a foolish child." Actually this was a live webcast event on April 4, 2009 which was videotaped. We used the webcast as an outreach to invite friends and watched this live debate as it was steamed from the Biola campus. Both youth and adults invited friends. I invited some of my co-workers. My seeker boss still talks about the debate. He really enjoyed it. Occasionally Biola does webcasts of some of their apologetics events. You can find out more about them and contact Biola at this web link.

Illustra Media video documentaries - Illustra Media produces video documentaries that examine the scientific case for intelligent design. Working with Discovery Institute and an international team of scientists and scholars (including Michael Behe, Guillermo Gonzalez, Stephen Meyer, and Lee Strobel), Illustra has helped define both the scientific case for design and the limitations of materialistic processes like Darwinian evolution. These documentaries include *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*, *The Privileged Planet*, *Darwin's Dilemma* and *Metamorphosis*. These are a bit long to use in just one lesson but they are excellent. They could be used for "bring a friend" movie night and just shown. After showing *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*, one of the skeptic students commented, "Is this stuff really true? I feel cheated, we've never heard about this stuff from our science teachers".

Thinking Like a Christian – Summit Ministries - Thinking Like a Christian is an engaging 12-week study of the Christian worldview. The complete package comes with creative lesson plans for teaching youth through adults, including weekly projects, resources, video clips from noted Christian thinkers, and reproducible handouts, providing all the information needed to successfully teach worldviews to your group. Another quick note about Summit Ministries. Summit offers outstanding worldview conferences for students in the summer. I sent both of my daughters to a Summit Conference the summer before they started college. Neither of them really wanted to go. Both had the same excuse, "I only have limited time to spend with

my friends. Why do I have to go, I won't know anybody?" However, they both loved Summit and have highly recommended it to their friends. My youngest said, "Thanks for making me go Dad. Of all the Christian camps, conferences, and big events that I've attended over the years, Summit was by far the best and made the biggest impact on my Christian faith. It wasn't just about feeding my emotions; they really taught me how to think and live as a Christian. I also found some great new friends." We now encourage the parents of our group members to consider sending their teenagers to Summit. Here is the link to the student conferences.

Countering Culture – Summit Ministries - Countering Culture is an engaging 12-week study in worldview analysis. The complete package comes with creative lesson plans for teaching youth through adults, including weekly projects, resources, video clips from noted Christian thinkers, and reproducible handouts, providing all the information needed to successfully teach worldviews to your group.

The Reason for God: A DVD Study: Conversations on Faith and Life – Timothy J. Keller - The Reason for God curriculum can be used individually, in groups, or by any believer who is engaging with friends who don't share his or her beliefs. Christians will be challenged to wrestle with their friends and neighbors' hardest questions, and to engage those questions in ways that will spark an honest, enriching, and humbling dialogue. The Reason for God curriculum contains a DVD which captures a live and unscripted conversation between Timothy Keller and six panelists discussing their objections to Christianity. This one may be a bit advanced for high school students. However, I did use it in an adult Sunday school class and received many positive comments. Timothy Keller truly demonstrates the scriptural command of 1 Peter 3:15 "... But do this with gentleness and respect."

AnchorsAway Ministries - Anchorsaway is a college-level Christian worldview educational experience targeting high school seniors and college students. The purpose is to encourage student's biblical and spiritual growth and to equip him/her to confidently live out their faith

in every area of life. We expect our students to become a powerful influence for Christ, wherever God might take them. This was one of the first curriculums that we used and I chose it because it was endorsed by Chuck Colson as a great worldview curriculum. When we taught it, we had to attend an AnchorsAway training conference before being allowed to use it.

The Case For A Creator, Small Group Edition DVD By: Lee Strobel, Garry Poole - In this compelling 6-session DVD curriculum, Lee Strobel and Garry Poole explore cosmology, cellular biology, astronomy, evolution, physics, and DNA research to reveal the incredible complexity of the universe---which is best explained by the existence of a Creator <http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/Product/ProductDetail.htm?ProdID=com.zondervan.9780310282839&QueryStringSite=Zondervan>

The Case for Faith, DVD ROM: A Six-Session Investigation of The Toughest Objections to Christianity By: Lee Strobel, Mark Mittelberg - Why is there so much pain and suffering in our world? What should we do with our nagging doubts? Is Jesus the only way to God? Former skeptic Lee Strobel brings his tough-minded and engaging approach to these pressing questions. Based on the book The Case for Faith, this six-session, video-driven study addresses the most common obstacles to faith in Christ.

The Case for Christ DVD ROM: A Six-Session Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus-Lee Strobel - Is there credible evidence that Jesus of Nazareth really is the Son of God? Retracing his own spiritual journey from atheism to faith, Lee Strobel, former legal editor of the Chicago Tribune, cross-examines several experts with doctorates from schools like Cambridge, Princeton, and Brandeis who are recognized authorities in their own fields. Strobel's tough, point-blank questions make this six-session video study a captivating, fast-paced experience. But it's not fiction. It's a riveting quest for the truth about history's most compelling figure. 6 sessions; 1 DVD with leader's guide

Tactics in Defending the Faith: Interactive DVD by Gregory Koukl - Are you tired of finding yourself flat-footed and intimidated in conversations about your faith and values? Do you want to increase your confidence and skill in discussions, no matter whom you're talking to? Then Tactics is for you. Included are six one-hour interactive sessions on DVD with discussion, role-playing, self-assessment quizzes, recall exercises, memory tools, games, and competition. Comprehensive leader and student manuals are included in PDF for printing and copying. And when you learn the material well enough to teach this course without the DVD, use the PowerPoint slides included on the data CD.

Faith Under Fire - Four-session DVD small group curriculums based on Lee Strobel's popular PAX-TV program. Using video clips from the popular PAX-TV program Faith Under Fire, this cutting-edge curriculum features spirited discussions between well-respected Christians, people of other faiths, or people with no faith at all on important spiritual and social issues. Host Lee Strobel, best-selling author of *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Faith*, provides additional comments to guide small group discussion.

With No Apology by Joe Boot - In a series of five intriguing taxi journeys, J. John asks his friend and colleague, Joe Boot, how to answer life's hardest questions. *With No Apology* is ideal to watch in groups or on your own. It raises tough issues, and provides the tools to help you develop your own response. It offers a helpful summary of the sessions -- plus questions for further discussion, a glossary of definitions and suggestions for further reading. This is one cab ride we're sure you won't forget in a hurry...J. John is a motivational speaker who helps people see the spiritual dimension and purpose of everyday life. You can get the study guide [here](#).

CURRICULUMS THAT WE MAY USE IN THE FUTURE

Notes From the Tilt-A-Whirl by N. D. Wilson An Idea Film. A Bookumentary. A cinematic treatment of a worldview. A poet live in concert. A motion picture sermon. VH1 Storytellers meets Planet Earth. In

this unusual but fascinating film sequence, best-selling author N.D. Wilson gives an emotional and intellectual tour of life in this world and the final chapter that is death. Everything before and after and in between is a series of miracles--some of which are encouraging, others disturbing and uncomfortable.

God and Evolution presented by Biola University and Center for Science and Culture – At this web link you can find video clips created to be used in conjunction with the God and Evolution book edited by Jay Richards. The clips highlight various chapters and themes in the book and are appropriate for use in small groups and adult Sunday School classes that are discussing the books. For suggestions on how to incorporate these clips into a class, download the free discussion guide for God and Evolution.

3 Views on Creation. YOU DECIDE. In the Beginning: a conference & debate on the days of creation by Fixed Point Foundation - The question of origins is as controversial inside the church as it is outside of it. How should Christians explain the Genesis account to skeptics, who think it doesn't agree with modern science? How can Christian parents help their children navigate through this controversy without compromising their core beliefs or appearing intellectually naïve? This truly unique conference allows you to listen as top proponents argue their own views on creation. Decide for yourself which view is the most Biblically and scientifically accurate.

If God Made the Universe (Small Group Study): Hugh Ross - A small group study has never tackled a bigger subject! Drawing from his popular book Why the Universe Is the Way It Is, Dr. Hugh Ross shares Scripture, stunning satellite photos, and the most recent scientific findings to explain the great love story that is our universe. This DVD series invites you to be a part of Dr. Ross' small group. Each session includes a brief presentation (about 20 minutes), followed by Q&A. The eight sessions address these cosmic questions: Why Is the Universe So Vast? Why Is It So Old? Why Is It So Dark? Why Is There an Earth? Why So Much for So Little? Why Is It Decaying? Why Isn't It Perfect Now? What Will God Make Next?

ASK Curriculum by Ravi Zacharias International Ministries - the ASK curriculum aims to empower students with the critical tools necessary for understanding their own faith and for investigating and evaluating differing worldviews. Hosted by Nathan Zacharias, interactive ASK curriculum is comprised of:

- A two DVD set containing 16 sessions in 4 modules—origin, meaning, morality, and destiny
- Exclusive web access for your class on the ASK website containing facilitator and student content
- An SMS text messaging tool for interactive in-class questions
- A digital facilitator's guide (downloadable from ASK website)

Test of Faith - Course DVD by Faraday Institute for Science and Religion - Science and Christianity Unpacked. Explore issues at the interface of science and Christianity using the award-winning 'Test of Faith' documentary series. Designed to enable non-specialists to join the discussion. The relationship between science and faith is often represented as a battleground. The claim is that science has pushed God into the margins. But is the truth more complex? Talking to leading scientist-believers, we probe the issues at the heart of this debate. Has science really murdered God? Or is the God question being redefined in new ways by science? Does the possibility of a Creator remain an ineradicable challenge?

Chapter

19

How Churches Can Respond to Doubt

By Carson Weitnauer, director Telos Ministries

For many churches, it can seem rather counter-productive, if not outright foolish, to be deliberately setting up environments where people openly and boldly share their doubts about God and church. After all, what if the local atheists come more prepared - and are more persuasive - than the already busy and overworked church staff? Rather than growing the church, an ‘apologetics ministry’ could easily destabilize and threaten the very existence of the community. There are a variety of powerful motivations to not deal with doubt at your church. This article is written to directly address those concerns and recommend a wise course forward.

In particular, I want to convince you of two primary points: The church faces a very real problem in dealing with doubt – but it is a problem that must be boldly resolved for both pragmatic and Biblical reasons.

The Bible offers every church a solid guide for responding to doubt with love and wisdom – a strategy that leads people to faith, strengthens disciples, creates an enduring passion for evangelism, and honors God.

To arrive at these conclusions we will look at, and answer, five key questions:

“What is doubt?”

“What are the effects of doubt?”

“Is it okay to have doubts at church?”

“Does the Bible recommend we respond to doubt at church?”

“What guidance does the Bible give for how we respond to doubt?”

Finally, at the end of this article, you will find resources to make it incredibly easy for you to share this material with others:

A developed, fully written out talk that contains similar material to this article, that you have permission to modify for your own purposes and church setting,

Discussion questions for small group breakout sessions after the talk, and

A handout with further resources for your church community.

Let's start with the most obvious question – what is doubt?

Doubt is a denial, in one form or another, that God is really God.

As a very rough guide, there are two basic kinds of doubt: intellectual doubts and emotional doubts. Often these are blended together in complex ways; at other times, people very clearly have either a set of intellectual or emotional doubts.

Intellectual doubts might come after reading a popular book like Richard Dawkins' work *The God Delusion* or as a result of an intense dialogue with some atheist friends. These are doubts like, “What evidence is there for God's existence?” or “Didn't God command genocide in the Old Testament?”

Emotional doubts often come during or after an experience of suffering. “How can there be a good God when we've experienced so much hardship?” or “How can I believe that ‘God provides’ when I don't have a job?” Sometimes emotional doubts come from a numbness or dullness to life, expressed in feelings like, “What meaning could God add to my empty life?”

Because people's doubts get expressed in such a variety of ways, one of the essential relational skills we must develop is the ability to discern what kind of doubt we are responding to. This requires us to ask sincere questions, listen empathetically, be prayerfully attentive to the Holy Spirit, and seek to gain a deep understanding of where the other person is coming from.

Either way, both kinds of doubt have to do with thinking or feeling that God is not really God. We deny that God is really there, or that God is good, or that God cares about us. One way or another, doubts are denying that God is really God.

EVERYONE HAS DOUBTS

I believe that everyone has some kind of doubts. I run a blog called Reasons for God – and I have doubts.

One of the main reasons that I tend to doubt God is the problem of my unanswered prayers. There have been a number of occasions where I have really poured my heart out to God about some problem. Whether it is an illness that a good friend is struggling with or a financial challenge or an unresolved conflict or a problem in ministry, it can be really hard for me when my prayers – for good, God-honoring requests - aren't answered.

It feels personal. I can feel rejected or ignored by God. I feel confused. It leads to more questions.

FOR ME, UNANSWERED PRAYER GIVES RISE TO INTELLECTUAL DOUBTS:

Does prayer work?

Is God there?

Is God good?

and emotional doubts:

What's wrong with me?

WHY DON'T I FEEL GOD'S PRESENCE?

This is really discouraging.

I imagine that, if you reflect on the question honestly, you will realize that you have some doubts as well, some places where your life shows a lack of confidence that “God is really God.”

It will be to your benefit to pause, take a moment to think, and write your own doubts down. Then, reflect on what difference it would make if your doubts were fully, totally, and satisfyingly resolved.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF DOUBT?

Doubt can affect us in many different ways. Sometimes doubt can be positive. Sometimes it can be a painful and hard experience.

A POSITIVE EXAMPLE OF DOUBT

Doubt can be positive when it leads us to growth. For instance, I’ve had serious doubts about whether or not God commanded genocide in the Old Testament. But when I looked into the question more deeply, I learned a great deal about God’s compassion and love. You have to understand that, when I was looking into the charge that God is a bloodthirsty sky god who commands genocide, I wasn’t expecting to understand more about God’s love. But I did.

So, in this case, my doubts became an opportunity for me to gain a greater trust in God’s goodness. What a remarkable experience!

NEGATIVE EXAMPLES OF DOUBT

At other times, doubt can be really painful. Many saints have reported that their doubts about God have been “a dark night of the soul,” challenging them with an intense spiritual loneliness and hunger for God, sometimes for long periods of time.

Sometimes our doubts can lead us to disobey God, to give into various temptations, to stop being evangelistic, and to miss out on a wholehearted commitment to spending time with God each day.

You can probably think of or remember other experiences where

doubt has sidetracked someone's walk with Christ or prevented someone from entering into fellowship with God.

IS IT OKAY TO HAVE DOUBTS AT CHURCH?

If everyone who had doubts experienced supercharged growth as a Christian, there wouldn't be much of a debate about this. But because doubt so often leads to negative, unwanted effects, we become hesitant to welcome open conversations about doubt at our churches.

Why is this? Let's look at three reasons why doubt seems inappropriate at church.

DOUBTS SEEM OPPOSED TO THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH

The main reason is that church is a place for affirming that God really is God.

At church we remember who God is through the liturgy, the music, the sermon, the fellowship, the reading of the Bible, and everything else that we do. Everything about coming to church is connected to remembering and acknowledging who God really is.

So it can feel somewhat inappropriate to come to church with doubts. Does it make sense to say, in one form or another, "I don't think that God is really God" at a place designed to affirm the reality of God?

For this reason, there are some Christians who are dogmatically opposed to the idea of doubt. They would say, "if you have doubts, you are sinning against God. Shape up!" To doubt is to offend God – and must be rebuked.

Raising doubts at church seems like going to a Democratic Party Convention and saying, "I'm not so sure about Barack Obama. Maybe Ron Paul would be a better president. Can we talk about

that?” That is a fine conversation to have, but it is an example of wrong place, wrong time. (You may need to substitute other examples for your cultural context – just imagine supporting a candidate from one political viewpoint at a political gathering on the other side of the ideological spectrum).

Right or wrong, good or bad, it can just be uncomfortable to have doubts at church. Everyone else seems so excited about God, but you’re not so sure. How do you bring that up? Its like your sister calls you up, “I’m getting married! Will you be in the wedding!?” and you’re like, “You’re getting married to your drug addicted, unemployed, smelly boyfriend...?”

DOUBTS LEAD PEOPLE TO LOSE THEIR FAITH AND LEAVE THE CHURCH

Let’s think for a moment about an experience many people have had: friends who have lost their faith in God.

We need to think about this: why does that happen? Why do people give up on being Christians? If the church is going to grow, this is a crucial issue for us to think about.

It turns out there is actually research into this question.

Dr. Brad Wright is a professional sociologist at the University of Connecticut. He interviewed 50 people who had recently left the church.

One of his most surprising findings is that 42 of the 50 people who left the church said they left the church because they had a particular kind of frustration with other church members. It turns out this was a very particular kind of frustration. It wasn’t frustration at bad music. It wasn’t because the food was terrible.

What the study found is that they were frustrated by getting lame responses to their doubts and questions. When they shared their doubts, they were given pat phrases like “just have faith” or “God

works in mysterious ways.” One person reported being told, as we noted above, that the doubting itself was sinful.
(<http://bit.ly/NSC6kA>)

This is a major problem: 42 out of 50 people who left the church did so because their doubts were not handled well!

Think about this: If Christians are leaving the churches where they get lame answers to their questions... do you think that nonChristians, with their doubts about God, will be eager to join those same churches?

DOUBT FITS OUR CULTURAL MOOD

What is very common in my city, Boston, is a postmodern set of assumptions that truth is basically unknowable, that arguments are really about gaining and keeping power, and the idea that we can know something is objectively true, outside of what we can prove with science, is an old-fashioned and implausible assumption.

Sometimes these ideas get expressed in more religious language too. For instance, I've heard people say,

“Faith is believing without evidence”

“If you could prove that God exists, there wouldn't be any room left for faith”

“Ultimately, believing in God is a matter of faith, and not proving that it is all rational.”

“Faith is faith because you can't prove it.”

Now, there's a lot to acknowledge and value about these statements. I think there is a desire to not be coercive or pushy. I think there can be a humility and modesty to admitting that we don't know everything. And it speaks to the power of personal experience.

After all, let's say you tell me, “Tom is one of my best friends. We have lunch together every week.” And then I say, “I want proof! What does Tom order? Show me some receipts!” Well, it would feel kind of silly to argue with me, right? You would just say, “look, I know

who my friends are. You can believe me or not... that's your choice."

I think for most of us, the most powerful reason we believe in God is that we have experiences of God. We experience God at church, when we read the Bible and pray, and when we get out into nature and see the beauty of everything around us. With such compelling evidence that God is real, arguments just seem kind of unnecessary. However, this often means that we aren't particularly ready or motivated to carefully reason when our friends express having doubts.

So doubt seems to be inappropriate at church: it is antagonistic to the very purpose of church, it leads people to leave the church, and it fits a cultural mood that doesn't particularly value the pursuit of objective truth, or even of logic and reason very highly, especially when it comes to religious questions.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ANSWERING PEOPLE'S DOUBTS?

The first and most important place to look for answers in the Bible on this question is Jesus' words in Matthew 22, where he gives the Two Great Commandments:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Notice that Jesus commands us to love God with our minds. Now, maybe that means providing reasons that God exists, maybe not. But it does indicate that Jesus had a very high respect for intellectual activity. The use of our minds is part of the #1 Most Important Commandment.

Can we find any examples of people in the Bible arguing that their

beliefs are true?

The answer is actually a resounding 'yes!' We can find dozens of examples from the Old and New Testament, but for the sake of space, let's look at just one example: the early church.

Imagine with me their problem after the crucifixion of Jesus.

The eleven remaining disciples are a marginalized, tiny, oppressed Jewish sect. One of their closest friends, Judas, has just sold them out. You have to wonder - Who might be the next to betray the others for a little bit of cash?

The Roman and Jewish elite, traditionally at odds, have just plotted together to publicly humiliate and crucify Jesus.

The Romans see Jesus as a crucified, defeated, treasonous criminal.

The Jews see Jesus as a crucified, discredited, heretical blasphemer.

However, the early Christians believe that Jesus is actually alive. And, not only was His body raised from the dead by the power of God, but Jesus is God, and you should repent of your sin and worship Him as Lord.

These are radically different perspectives on Jesus.

Can you imagine arguing with your siblings about something like this?

"Our brother is dead."

"No, actually, our brother is alive."

"No, he's dead. The doctors said so."

"Yes, but then he came back to life. I saw it with my own eyes."

That is the kind of disagreement that leads to fights.

For the early church, this disagreement often led to persecution and martyrdom.

So, obviously, given the stakes, people are going to be skeptical and hostile of the early church.

In other words, they are going to have lots and lots of questions and doubts.

HOW DID THE EARLY CHURCH RESPOND TO PEOPLE'S DOUBTS AND QUESTIONS?

Let's look at how the Apostle Paul did his ministry in different cities: In Damascus, we're told that Paul, "increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ."

In Corinth, we're told that Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."

In Thessalonica, "Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women."

In Ephesus, Paul "entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

In Athens, "Paul's spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him."

What we see is this: Paul was good—very good—at reasoning for the resurrection of Jesus and the claims of the Christian faith. This was his standard practice. He did it everywhere he went, year after year, to Jews and to Greeks. Wherever Paul goes, a core part of his ministry is the use of reasons and argument to convince people that his message about Jesus is true. And because they were convinced – because the arguments were good and persuasive arguments, people came to faith in Christ.

What this means is, whether we have doubts or not, as a matter of Christian love, we need to be prepared to respond well to the doubts of other Christians. Superficial answers - and sometimes even the dismissal of their questions - is actively pushing people away from God and the church.

The answer is clear: when the local church answers doubt well, there is a huge response of people coming to faith, growing in faith, and becoming excited to tell others about Jesus.

WHAT GUIDANCE DOES THE BIBLE GIVE FOR HOW WE RESPOND TO DOUBT?

So how do people argue for God's existence in the Bible? Are they mean, arrogant know-it-alls?

No – not at all. The bad examples of pushy, aggressive, one-up-manship that are all too prominent in our churches is not at all what the Bible commends. The Bible requires followers of Jesus to be marked by kindness, gentleness, humility, and love. These are essential character traits for this entire process.

With that in mind, let's look at three key points for how to respond to doubt.

FIRST, WE RESPOND TO PEOPLE'S DOUBTS BY DEPENDING ON GOD.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Paul – who reasoned for the truth of God everywhere he went – ultimately depended on the power of God’s Spirit.

So we have to recognize that nothing works if God is not in it. Not loving people, not praying for them, not even reading the Bible together.

But, on the other hand, any approach can work if God’s power is behind it.

We need to distinguish between the specific methods we use and the universal need for God to be at work.

So, whatever we do to help people grow as Christians or come to know Jesus, we are to do it in dependence upon God, relying entirely upon His power and His Holy Spirit to bring the transformation.

SECOND, WE ARE TO BE WELL PREPARED.

The Bible clearly teaches that it is right to respond to people’s doubts with reason. Perhaps the most classic explanation of this responsibility is in 1 Peter 3:

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

The Bible teaches us that we will need to put in the time to read,

study, and think hard about people's questions in order to give them thoughtful, insightful responses

We need to identify the top questions people are asking in our context.

We need to know good answers to their honest questions.

We need to understand how people prefer to discuss these issues.

For your church to respond well to doubt, it must be intellectually prepared to do it well.

When Paul went to Jewish synagogues, he explained how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. But he didn't call it the Old Testament. He would say things like, "as our own prophets have said."

When Paul went to Athens, he quoted Greek poets and looked for common ground with that audience.

In 1 Corinthians 15, after Paul provides a historical argument for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, he tells the Corinthians, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."

Because Paul was filled with a great love for God, and a great love for those he wanted to reach, he invested time and energy to understand their perspective so he could better persuade them that Jesus is truly Lord.

So Paul worked hard. He knew the stakes. He wanted to bring others to faith.

WE HAVE TO ASK: WHERE'S THE PAIN POINT FOR US?

Does it grieve us more that we have to read and study to be intellectually prepared – or are we more concerned that our friends and neighbors are struggling with challenging doubts and questions?

Because he knew the vastness of God's love and grace, and because he loved his neighbors, Paul was prepared. We should be too.

THIRD, WE RESPOND TO PEOPLE'S DOUBTS IN A COMPREHENSIVE WAY.

Like we see in the book of Acts, all of the reasoning and debating activity goes hand-in-hand with God doing miracles, with exceptional stories of generosity, with the church loving the poor, the development of cross-cultural friendships, and inspiring acts of sacrifice and service for the glory of God.

The example of Paul's life is a whole one. In every matter he was dedicated to honoring God.

So the point is this: these priorities aren't meant to compete with each other but to complement one another.

We're to love God with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Not heart or mind. Not neighbor or God. Both-and. All together.

The Biblical perspective is for an integrated, restored, fully human life and community.

When people have emotional doubts, about whether God loves them, or Christians care about them, we should respond in kind – by listening well, praying together, being present, and meeting their needs with a joyful and self-forgetful spirit.

But when people have intellectual doubts – is the Bible true, did

Jesus rise from the dead, etc. – then, again, we should respond in kind – loving them by providing reasoned answers in a friendly and genuine manner.

Whatever their doubts, your church is guided by Scripture to depend on God, to be well prepared, and to offer a comprehensive response to their questions.

CONCLUSION: JESUS AND DOUBT

Ok, I've saved the best for last. How does Jesus respond to doubt?

Let's look at a great story on this – we could also look at how Jesus provided a rational response to John the Baptist, who had some serious doubts about his belief that Jesus was the Messiah when he was in prison. After all, John was about to be beheaded for this, and he didn't want to die for a fraud!

There are so many stories of Jesus responding well to doubt, but my favorite story is how Jesus responded to his disciple Thomas after the resurrection.

This account is recorded for us in John 20. Let's look at it together: Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Now that's doubt! Every single one of his closest companions is testifying that they have seen Jesus alive. But Thomas absolutely refuses to buckle under peer pressure.

Imagine what a week that was. "Thomas, man, I'm telling you, we saw Jesus!" "Peter, I've said it before and I'll say it again: I have to see it for myself. I saw the guy die. If he's alive, then he should set up a meeting with me. It's that simple!"

So back to the text:

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said to Thomas, “HOW DARE YOU DOUBT ME, SINNER.” Then Jesus sent Thomas straight to hell and had a good laugh with all the other disciples.

Ok, it doesn't say that, does it? Here's what it says:

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said to Thomas, “Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Here's the point: Jesus responds to Thomas' doubt with evidence. With answers. With reason to believe. By satisfying his intellectual curiosity.

And, according to some early church traditions, Thomas ended up going to India to share the good news about Jesus, and after a very fruitful ministry, was martyred for his faith in Christ.

Here's the point: if Thomas' doubts were never resolved, he wouldn't have given his life for the gospel. It didn't matter what experiences his closest friends had. He wanted proof for himself.

But because his doubts were resolved – and in a dramatic way – Thomas became a very loyal disciple of Jesus.

That's what's at stake for your church – and for every church.

If your church is a community where doubts go unresolved, where you don't make space for people's questions about God, this will hinder the formation of strong disciples. It will undermine your evangelism. It will lead people to leave your church altogether.

But by contrast, if your church depends on God in everything, if you are well prepared to respond to doubts, and if, by God's grace, you maintain an integrated witness for God, then people will be far less likely to leave the church, far more confident to live for Christ, and far more prepared to bring their friends to faith.

My prayers is that you will look to God for the courage and the wisdom to begin immediately.

Chapter

20

Challenge: Start a Church Apologetics Group

By Brian Auten

I want to write this blog post to challenge you. Don't continue reading if you prefer not to be challenged.

WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING

If you're reading this post, I've got a suspicion about what you've been up to. So I'm writing this blog post for a specific audience in mind. Here's the audience:

First, you've been studying apologetics in some way. You're interested in defending the faith probably more than others because you've found your way here, willing to be challenged on a blog post about getting apologetics in your church.

Second, if you're like many others who have 'found apologetics' or gotten into this area of study, you're passionate about it. This passion has made you ask yourself a question like, "why aren't others interested in apologetics?" or, "how can I get apologetics into my church?" So you're looking for strategies or tips on how to equip others in this area—or at least get others interested.

Third, you're aware of this blog series: How to Get Apologetics in Your Church. In case you aren't aware, this is series 2 of 2. Series one index can be found [here](#), and series two index can be found [here](#). If you've been reading these posts, you've been getting some ideas.

But have you taken any action? If the answer is not a solid yes, then keep reading.

WHAT YOU COULD BE DOING

I'm going to give away the goal of this post right now, before I actually get to my closing "challenge." My goal is to put a spark under you and ask you to think about whether or not you're willing to take action. If you haven't taken action in some way, then I'd like to suggest that there are some very simple things that you could be doing:

First, you could be making a plan based on what you know. Don't let the unknowns prevent you from moving forward with the things that you do know. If you need ideas, you've got series one and two at your disposal—perhaps the best resource for starting a church apologetics group on the web at this time. So why not just make a plan?

Second, you could be presenting this plan to your church leadership. When I started Reasonable Faith Belfast I didn't have all the knowledge or answers. I just had a real desire and prompting that I should "take the challenge" and do something. To not do something felt quite wrong. As a matter of fact, looking back on things now, I'm so glad I just decided to start. Taking the step to communicate my plan/idea to my church leadership was one of the crucial first steps to get things off the ground. So why not present your plan?

Third, you could actually be taking the first step. You could be the person who reads through all these "how to get apologetics in your church" posts and did nothing. Or, you could be one of the people who reads them and actually takes the information and runs with it. Why not just take the first step?

WHAT I'M CHALLENGING YOU TO DO

Here's my challenge: Start a church apologetics group. Yes—you. And here are a few short bits of advice.

First, just do it. If you are the sort of person who knows more apologetics "stuff" than others and you really have a passion for this and you study it all the time... then do something with it. Get out there—out of the books—and start some sort of something: a book study, an apologetics movie night, a once-a-month apologetics talk, a youth seminar, a dialogue, a coffee shop talk, a small group topic, a DVD series, a read-along, an event... or just take your group to an apologetics conference. Just do something.

Second, adapt along the way. Things won't be perfect. The journey will require course corrections. Don't worry about that now. Just adapt along the way. Resources you need will appear as you look for them, God will give you insight and wisdom as you seek Him, and you'll get feedback from others. Take action and adjust when things need adjusting.

Third, get some coaching and advice from others. If you have specific questions you can email Apologetics315. Additionally, I can point you to groups and people who can provide support if you need it. Support from those who have been down the road already can be invaluable when you are starting out.

Finally, let us all know if you're going to accept this challenge. Leave a comment below—you've got support from others as you step out to get apologetics in your church.