

LIVING SENT

Week Eight: Conversational Apologetics

INTRODUCTION

This week, we consider the topic “Apologetics.” Wait, are we supposed to apologize for believing? No! The word apologetics comes from the idea of a lawyer presenting their case. In this lesson, we aren't going to dig into the deeply philosophical side of apologetics, we want this to be practical and helpful in guiding your conversations. There are times when we share our faith with another person and, as Peter said, we must give a defense of our faith. While confident that it's God Himself who leads another person to faith, we should also be prepared to partner with God in communicating the good news.

LET'S DIVE IN!

You might say that there are three components of sharing Jesus with another person. First, we may choose to share from our own personal experience of how God has changed our life through faith in Jesus. I think about Josh Baldwin's song, “Evidence:”

*“I see the evidence of Your goodness all over my life, all over my life.
I see Your promises in fulfillment all over my life, all over my life.”*

The testimony of our experience is a solid starting point for sharing Jesus with another person. We should then support that personal evidence with the truth of God's Word. We may quote memorized Scripture or read to our listener from passages in our Bible that make God's promises, actions, and truths clear. Scripture is vital in leading a person to salvation.

There are times when we may need another tool from our tool belt: apologetic reasoning. This often comes into play when a person asks questions like: “Sure, but how do you know that it is true?” Or “How can you even know that there is a god?” Our response shouldn't become argumentative. But we should certainly engage them in conversation, particularly when the question comes from the heart of a person who really wants to know if she or he can embrace a faith that seems “too good to be true”.

Now, let's look at three objections to the Christian message that might be raised:

OBJECTION #1 -- Can there really be a God?

Let's turn that question on its head and show our friend how the reality of our God answers four questions that gnaw on the human soul.

- Where do we come from? The reality of God enables us to explain a first cause for the existence of our universe. There is always a need for an explainable source of matter and energy, no matter what theory a person holds for the source of life and the universe. God provides not only the resources but also the intelligent, guiding force that leads to the universe. He also designed a human mind that can contemplate its own existence.

- What is the meaning of life? The reality of God enables us to comprehend a reason and purpose in life that is otherwise absent. We exist because we were created by a loving God who desires for us to know Him and find purpose in a loving relationship with the Creator.
- Is there some kind of moral law in life? The reality of God provides a source for absolute morality: God Himself. Virtually every society, and most individuals, have a God-given sense of right and wrong. This sense of right and wrong condemns us when we fail, but through Jesus' death of the cross we have a means of full forgiveness when we fail to live up to any degree of moral standards.
- Where are we headed? (Does life exist after death?) People wonder if there is something beyond life here on earth and often speculate that there must be. The reality of God gives us the promise of eternity. We're also warned that we need a genuine relationship with God to experience the joyous fulfillment of that promise.

OBJECTION #2 -- How can we know that the story of Jesus is true? Isn't it just made up by people years later that want to provide support for their religion?

This gets to the reliability of the Bible. The various writings of the New Testament weren't written hundreds of years later; instead, they were penned within 15 to 45 years of the resurrection. There is factual evidence showing that the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life have significantly stronger evidence to their historical accuracy than any other writing from history. Compared to other ancient writings such as Caesar, Tacitus, or Homer, the Bible has massively more copies from antiquity (5,000 original-language manuscript portions for the NT compared to between 20 and 600 copies for other writings), significantly less gap time between the existing copies and the original writing (100 to 200 years for the NT to 1,000 years for others), and a significantly higher degree of accuracy measured by the consistency of the copies (99.5% consistency between NT manuscripts and 90% or less certainty for others).

OBJECTION #3 -- Okay, there's historical support, but how do we KNOW IT'S TRUE?

In other words, can we rely on the writers to tell the truth? People through the centuries have died for causes that they believed in, but do people die for something they know to be a lie? The answer is "No!" When people have colluded to create a story, they tend to split when the going gets tough. However, the history of the apostles is that they willingly gave their lives rather than deny their faith in Jesus as God's Son. Further, Paul references over 500 people who saw the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15). Afterward, Paul said to the readers that most of the witnesses were still alive. If the readers wanted to challenge, Paul they could go ask the witnesses themselves. No record exists of any of eye-witnesses recanting their testimony. Some people may ask if the variations to the gospel accounts are contradictions. No, they are not. The differences are essentially reconcilable. More than that, they point to the fact that various witnesses each spoke from their individual experience and did not concoct an identical story.

MISSIONARY TASK RELEVANCY

Apologetics can help us to encourage the person we are engaging in gospel conversations. We can help them understand that accepting Christianity is a viable option by viewing both our witness and the Bible as evidence to the truth of Christianity. Another helpful attribute of apologetics is its ability to encourage us as believers to see that our faith in Jesus is just too true to not believe.



LIFE APPLICATION

Christianity -- better yet, Jesus -- is life-changing. We believe that to be true. But some don't believe and haven't experienced positive life change brought about by Jesus. To them, He may just be an obscure, traveling preacher that had a bunch of crazy followers. We know that this Jesus has massively affected humanity and their eternal destinies for the last two thousand years.

- Discuss how could you share this with someone in disbelief.

Think about the disciples - the people who walked with Jesus and followed Him. What resources did they possess to develop a religious program which could change the world? (none) What motivation did they have to collude to start a movement that would be a threat to their life and would, in fact, eventually cost them their lives? (none) That said...

- How can their life choices be a testimony for people today?

People sometimes say that Jesus was a wonderful teacher, but nothing more. Is that argument sustainable? Is that supported in Scripture? Does Jesus being just a wonderful teacher add any real, lasting value to a person's life today? (again, we'd reply "no" to each of those questions)

- How can you help a non-believer see that Jesus claimed to be God undercuts any argument that He was just a good teacher?

While there are many good life lessons found in the Bible, the essential value of the Bible is found in Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

- How can you help a non-believer see that the essence of Christianity is the eternal salvation Jesus brings and not simply teachings on morality?

We all know the saying, "Nobody's perfect." Still, imperfect people try to deal with their imperfections. In India, people bathe in the Ganges River to wash away sins. Americans spend millions on self-help books and counseling to deal with their failures. Jesus offers healing, hope, and the forgiveness of sins. This is what the world is truly longing for.

- What can you do this week to prepare yourself to have life-changing, apologetic conversations?