

# Teaching Apologetics to Young People

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## I. WHY TEACH APOLOGETICS TO YOUTH? ([“Five Reasons We Must Teach Apologetics to Students”](#))

- a. The Bible commands all disciples to be apologists (1 Peter 3:15)
- b. Apologetics gives students confidence.
- c. Apologetics helps students hold on to their faith.
- d. Students have genuine apologetics-related questions.
- e. Students need to see that Christianity is *objectively* true.

## II. HOW TO APPROACH APOLOGETICS WITH STUDENTS

- a. Teach with humility
  - i. 1 Peter 5:5 – “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6)
  - ii. Don't deride others (atheists, gays, Mormons, etc.)
- b. Don't give bad answers if you haven't studied. Don't be afraid to say you don't know.
- c. Show both sides (no straw men!)
- d. Teach students *how* to think (e.g. Greg Koukl)
  - i. Teach wisdom
  - ii. Students have endless information but not meaning or wisdom.
- e. Focus on the main issues
- f. Be relational
  - i. Have them over for dinner
  - ii. Bring your family around

- iii. Share *appropriate* stories about your family
- g. Connect apologetics to real life
- h. Don't teach a fear-based apologetic

### III. WHY DO KIDS LEAVE THE FAITH?

- a. What are the reasons you've heard about why young people are leaving the faith?
- b. *You Lost Me* – 6 reasons
  - i. Overprotective
    - 1. Helicopter culture
    - 2. Culture of heightened expectations
  - ii. Shallow
  - iii. Antiscience
  - iv. Repressive
  - v. Exclusive
  - vi. Doubtless
- c. Review: Article, [“Are Young People Really Leaving the Faith?”](#) (J. Warner Wallace)
- d. *Sticky Faith*, by Kara Powell
  - i. Doubts students expressed during high school:
    - 1. Does God exist?
    - 2. Does God love me?
    - 3. Am I living the life God wants?
    - 4. Is Christianity true or the only way to God?
  - ii. *Sticky Faith* Suggestions:
    - 1. Talk about doubts (conversations)

2. Ask questions, don't lecture
  3. Intergenerational relationships
  4. Personal experience of grace
- e. *Faith and Families* (Vern Bengston, Oxford 2013)
- i. Warm relationship with the father
  - ii. Grandparents
  - iii. Divorce rocks faith
- f. *Atlantic Monthly*: ["Listening to Young Atheists"](#) (June 6, 2013)
- i. Most of our participants had not chosen their worldview from ideologically neutral positions at all, but *in reaction* to Christianity.
  - ii. Mission and message of the church was vague
  - iii. They felt their churches offered superficial answers to life's difficult questions
  - iv. They expressed their respect for those ministers who took the Bible seriously
  - v. Ages 14-17 were decisive
  - vi. The decision to embrace unbelief was often an emotional one
  - vii. The internet factored heavily into their conversion to atheism

#### **IV. HOW DO WE MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO CARE ABOUT APOLOGETICS?**

- a. Blog: ["How Do I Motivate Students Who Don't Seem to Care?"](#)
- i. Build relationships with students
    1. Go on their turf (games, plays, etc.)
    2. Give yourself time

- 3. Be yourself
- 4. Let students into your world
- ii. Take students out of their normal environment
- iii. Use pop culture illustrations in your teaching
- iv. Challenge students
  - 1. To serve
  - 2. To have spiritual conversations (visits to religious sites; spiritual surveys)
  - 3. To defend their faith (role-play)
  - 4. Apologetics mission trips
  - 5. Guest speaker (or YouTube video)
- v. Ask questions rather than give simple answers
- vi. Bring back graduates to share their experience
- vii. Have a long-term perspective

## **V. ENGAGING THE LOCAL CHURCH**

\*See Mark Mittelberg, "Motivating for Apologetics" in *A New Kind of Apologist* (Harvest House, McDowell, 2016)

- a. Be respectful of leadership
- b. Build relationships, especially with the pastor
  - i. Share stories (and emails)
  - ii. Give updates
  - iii. Provide resources (summaries of key books)
- c. Make yourself available
  - i. Counsel
  - ii. Teach a class

- iii. Research for a sermon
- d. Host an apologetics event
- e. Invite an apologetics speaker

## VI. ENGAGING PARENTS WITH APOLOGETICS

- a. Train parents
  - i. Parents influence students more than you do
  - ii. What needs do parents have?
- b. Take-home tasks
- c. Invite parents along on events
- d. Parent update
  - i. Ron Hunter, “Including Parents can be simple. Our youth pastor sends a weekly email to all students’ parents. He includes a short paragraph about his message and gives the parents a couple key talking points or questions to keep that message in the front of the minds of the students” (*Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, 160).
  - ii. Greg Stier, “One of the simple ways to do this is to email three or four open-ended questions to parents every week based on the lesson content, questions that are designed to engage in real conversation.” (*Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, 13).
- e. Teach a class for parents
- f. Build trust with parents
- g. Be a resource for parents (elementary principal at CVCS)
  - i. Books, websites, presentations, etc.

## VII. SPEAKING TO YOUTH ([“Nine Tips for Public Speaking”](#))

- a. Speaking principles:
  - i. Make one key point per talk (e.g. Pastor Tommy Barnett)
  - ii. Use stories (stories, stories, stories; people remember 10% - the stories – *The God Conversation*, JP Moreland)
  - iii. KNOW thyself and *BE* thyself (authenticity)
  - iv. Be interactive
    - 1. Role play
    - 2. Ice-cream/insulin
    - 3. Questions
    - 4. Talk to your neighbor, etc.
    - 5. Have students read quotes or verses
    - 6. Ask question: *Is this active or passive learning?*
  - v. Start strong (quote, story, statistic, question)
  - vi. Love the audience (1 John 4:18: “there is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear”).
  - vii. Be prepared:
    - 1. Check stage
      - a. Lighting (where will audience be)
      - b. Podium
      - c. Distance you can walk around stage
      - d. Speak on stage or the floor?
      - e. Check zipper
    - 2. Is there a clock you can see? (Get an alarm app)
    - 3. Are there lights? Will they be on you? Audience?
    - 4. Be sure technology works (PowerPoint)
    - 5. Check microphone

- a. Get medical tape
  - 6. Figure out transitions before and after you speak
  - 7. Know the audience and host
  - 8. Meet people beforehand
- viii. Ask for advice
- ix. Don't overstate the evidence
- x. Voice fluctuation
- xi. Use humor
  - 1. Why important?
    - a. Dissolves tension
    - b. Holds attention
    - c. Provides relief
  - 2. Principles:
    - a. Laugh at yourself
    - b. Stories
    - c. Quotes: "When a boy is 12, put him in a barrel, nail down the lid, and feed him through the hold. When he reaches the age of 16, plug up the hole." (Twain)
    - d. One-liners: "Baseball is 90% mental. The other half is physical (Berra)"
    - e. Borrow from others! (DNA, lawyer jokes)
  - 3. What happens when you bomb?
    - a. Go with it!
    - b. Say, "Note to self: don't use cat joke."
- xii. Dress sharply (1 Samuel 16:7)

b. Preparing a Talk:

- i. [“Three Important Lessons for Public Speaking”](#)
- ii. Process of preparing a talk
  1. Ask questions:
    - a. What is the goal? (Persuade, motivate, or inform?)
    - b. Who is the audience?
    - c. How much time do I have?
    - d. Have I spoken at this event before?
  2. Write down everything that comes to my mind (stories, experiences, stats, quotes, Scripture) \*Start ahead of time.
  3. Research the topic sufficiently (both sides).
    - a. *How do you find good sources?*
    - b. Journal articles, books, Amazon “also recommend,” blogs, Google scholars, library.
  4. Outline (frame the talk)
    - a. Format:
      - i. Introduction:
        1. Grab attention
        2. State thesis
      - ii. Why does it matter?
        1. Define terms (“evolution”)
        2. Anticipate reservations in your audience’s mind (disarm).
        3. Make a genuine need felt.
      - iii. Body (3-5 points)
      - iv. Objections
        1. Sometimes answer collectively at the end

2. Other times work through talk

v. Conclusion

1. Sum up your conclusions

5. Use of technology:

a. Use minimal text and slides (not distracting)

b. Legible (color, size, and font)

c. Don't be controlled by the technology

d. Hire someone, if necessary

e. Sometimes don't use technology!

## VIII. TEACHING METHODS

a. Lectures

i. My talks are at SeanMcDowell.org

b. Teach parents

c. Apologetics videos

i. Illustra Media

ii. Case for Christ, Faith, Creator

iii. Undaunted (Josh McDowell)

iv. Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus

v. Jericho Unearthed by Joel Kramer

d. Panel of experts (Abortion: PRC director, woman who has had an abortion, doctor, parents who have adopted, etc.).

e. Small group discussion

i. *The End of Our Exploring* – Matthew Anderson

ii. "[What's a Good Question?](#)" Fred Sanders (April 18, 2014)

f. Case studies

- i. Examples: hostile professor, bake a case for a same-sex wedding, girl considering an abortion, problem of evil, etc.
- g. Question box
- h. Role playing
  - i. See “Atheist Challenge”: <http://bit.ly/1L9nc3Y>
- i. Research projects
- j. Surveys
- k. Guest speaker
  - i. Don’t assume people will come!
  - ii. Have students take ownership
- l. Weekend retreat on an apologetics theme
  - i. Have enough sessions
  - ii. Have a follow-up study
- m. Host an apologetics conference (Get Biola!)
- n. Host a debate or conversation
  - i. Student debate
  - ii. Professional debate
- o. Analyze a movie
  - i. *Hollywood Worldviews*, Brian Godawa
  - ii. *Faith, Film, & Philosophy*, Doug Geivett
  - iii. *Movies are Prayers*
- p. Ask good questions
  - i. Teaching practices:
    - 1. In person
    - 2. Lead discussion in class

## IX. SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

- a. Process of forming a scope and sequence
  - i. Committee
  - ii. Visit other schools/churches
  - iii. Adapt my own
- b. All students get *Apologetics Study Bible for Students*
- c. Scope and sequence
  - i. 9<sup>th</sup> grade:
    1. More Than A Carpenter
    2. Old Testament (Projects)
    3. Logical fallacies (*Fallacy Detective*)
    4. Sexual purity
  - ii. 10<sup>th</sup> grade:
    1. New Testament
    2. NT Apologetics (*The Case for Christ*)
  - iii. 11<sup>th</sup> grade:
    1. Systematic Theology (*Knowing What You Believe*)
      - a. Depth over breadth
    2. World Religions and Cults
    3. Tactics
  - iv. 12<sup>th</sup> grade:
    1. Worldviews
      - a. What is a worldview? What are the components of a worldview?
      - b. Faith and reason
      - c. Doubt

- d. What is true freedom?
- e. What is happiness?
- f. Existentialism, nihilism, new age, postmodernism, Marxism.
- g. Film (*Hollywood Worldviews*)
- 2. Understanding Intelligent Design (*UID*)
  - a. Relationship between faith and science
  - b. Age of the earth
- 3. *Mere Christianity* (Lewis)
- 4. *Welcome to College* (Morrow)
- d. Honors Class Option:
  - i. Class requirements:
    - 1. Application
    - 2. Maintain a B
    - 3. Limited to 12 students
    - 4. Texts
  - e. Broader Issues to be Covered with Youth (and sequence):
    - i. **Truth**
      - 1. Exercise - Blog: "Who Cares about Truth?"
      - 2. RESOURCES:
        - a. *Ethix* (chapters 2, 3)
        - b. My talk at SeanMcDowell.org
      - 3. Activity: If relativism were true?
    - ii. **Existence of God**
      - 1. Cosmological argument (*UID*)
      - 2. Fine-tuning (*UID*)

3. DNA (*UID*)
  4. Morality (*Mere Christianity*)
  5. Ontological argument
- iii. **Historical Jesus**
1. Deity of Christ (*MTAC, CFC*)
  2. Resurrection (*CFC, CFR*)
- iv. **Is the Bible reliable?**
1. Reliability vs. Inerrancy
  2. OT
  3. NT
- v. **If God, Why Evil? (Hell)**
1. Distinguish between logical and emotional problems of evil.
- vi. **Ethics**
1. Various ethical issues, not just “hot” topics
  2. Resources:
    - a. *Ethix*
    - b. *Love Your Neighbor* (Ryan Snuffer)

## X. MENTORING

- a. **Mentor** = someone who is a protégé that you help reach his or her God-given potential.
- b. Who are some mentors you have had?
- c. My hero (woman who mentored two girls)
- d. How important is it to you to find or become a mentor?
  - i. Gender warning

- ii. Make a list of potential protégés
  - 1. You don't have to pick the most talented young person, but someone who may not make it otherwise.
- iii. Make a list of potential mentors
- e. Initiate
- f. How do you mentor?
  - i. Not a new program, but a new way of doing what you are already doing.

## XI. CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES

- a. **Bible:** *Apologetics Study Bible for Students* (updated 2017)
  - i. Use it in your talks!
  - ii. Equip parents with how to use it.
- b. **Youth Groups:**
  - i. *Advocates*: Yearlong, top-quality, systematic apologetics curriculum for students (partnership with Awana).
  - ii. *GodQuest* (GodQuestOutreach.com)
  - iii. *True U*
  - iv. *Big Questions*: A 6-part apologetics series to help students think about the big questions of life. Includes interviews with leading apologists.
  - v. *Live Apologetics* – SimplyYouthMinistry.com
  - vi. *The Defense Never Rests* – William Lane Craig (10-16)
    - \*Teacher's Guide and Student Manual
  - vii. *Unshakable Truth* - McDowell
  - viii. **ADVANCED:**

1. *TACTICS* DVD by Greg Koukl
2. *REASON FOR GOD* DVD by Tim Keller

c. **Small-Group**

- i. Any good apologetics book (*Cold Case Christianity, Mere Christianity, More Than a Carpenter*, etc.)
- ii. *Can I Ask That?* By Kara Powell

d. **Classroom:**

- i. *Understanding the Times, Understanding Faith, Understanding Culture*, by Jeff Myers ([Understandingthetimes.com](http://Understandingthetimes.com))
- ii. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, Turek ([impactapologetics.com](http://impactapologetics.com))

e. **Conferences:**

- i. Summit Ministries
- ii. Re-Think
- iii. Fearless Faith
- iv. Wheatstone Academy